# Self-Knowledge and Self-Reference

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*Self-Knowledge and Self-Reference* is a defense and reconciliation of the two apparently conflicting theses that the self is peculiarly elusive and that our basic, cogito-judgments are certain. On the one hand, Descartes seems to be correct that nothing is more certain than basic statements of self-knowledge, such as "I am thinking." On the other hand, there is the compelling Humean observation that when we introspect, nothing is found except for various "impressions." The problem, then, is that the Humean and Cartesian insights are both initially appealing, yet they appear to be in tension with one another. In this paper I attempt to satisfy both intuitions by developing a roughly descriptivist account of self-reference according to which our certainty in basic beliefs stems precisely from our needing to know so little in order to have them.

## The Puzzle

Basic self-knowledge, as epitomized by Descartes' cogito, is as secure and certain as any knowledge we can possess. This is not simply because the cogito is, as Descartes says, "necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind."[1] That status belongs to my belief that Robert J. Howell is thinking as well, and yet the latter belief seems far less certain —I could, after all, fail to believe that I am Robert J. Howell and thereby fail to assent to "Robert J. Howell is thinking" when I am in fact thinking. Nor, on the other hand, is the cogito on par with "2+2=4" or "Triangles have three sides," in part because it does not express a necessary truth—it is not necessary that I exist, so it cannot be a necessary truth that I am thinking. On the face of it, the cogito ascribes an accidental property to a contingent subject, yet it can be believed with the highest degree of certainty and justification.

It is natural to expect that when a thinker has a highly justified, contingently true belief about an object, that the object and its properties are particularly salient to him. The problem is that upon introspection, and upon performing the cogito, there does not appear to be anything salient corresponding to a self—the I of "I exist". As Hume famously remarked: "For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble

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[1] Descartes (1984), Vol. II, 17.

on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception."[2] Far from being a particularly salient object of acquaintance, the self is peculiarly elusive.

Notoriously, matters are even worse for an attempt to explain basic self-knowledge, because not only are we not acquainted with a self, there also seems to be no help forthcoming from descriptive knowledge. Such knowledge seems neither necessary nor sufficient for having basic "I" thoughts—indeed, it is this characteristic of "I" thoughts that seems to exempt the cogito from radical doubt. To make the problem more perspicuous, consider the following familiar puzzles.

*Puzzle 1: Description possession is not necessary for self-reference*

> An amnesiac is placed in a sensory deprivation tank. He remembers no information about himself, and all sensory means to find out any information is eliminated. It appears he is still able to self-refer and perform the cogito.[3]

*Puzzle 2: Description possession does not provide basic self-reference*

> An amnesiac, Rudolf Lingens, is lost in the Stanford library. He reads a number of things in the library, including a biography of himself, and a detailed account of the library in which he is lost. He believes any Fregean thought you think might help him. He still won't know who he is, and where he is, no matter how much knowledge he piles up, until that moment when he is ready to say,
> This place is aisle five, floor six, of Main Library, Stanford.
> I am Rudolf Lingens.[4]

The upshot of these puzzles is that basic I-thoughts, which can generate knowledge with a Cartesian level of security, seem not to require knowledge of their object, and what's more, knowledge of their object is not sufficient for those basic I-thoughts. This is, on the face of it, paradoxical. One option is to take self-reference and self-knowledge as primitive, maintaining that our ability to think about ourselves is just the ephemeral fulcrum at the basis of thought.[5] For many reasons, this is unsatisfying—if another analysis is available, we should avoid premature turnings of the spade. In an attempt to resolve the tension between the Humean and Cartesian insights and to explain away the paradoxical nature of the self-reference puzzles, I wish to develop a

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2    Hume (1978), p. 252.
3    A modification of Anscombe (1994), p. 152.
4    Perry (1997), p. 710.
5    I have in mind here the views in Lewis (1983a) and Chisholm (1981).

psycho-semantics, or a semantics of thought, which analyses the concepts involved in basic self-knowledge so that the notable epistemic features of the cogito are explained by the mechanisms through which we most fundamentally refer to ourselves.[6] Ultimately, I will maintain that self-reference is underpinned by descriptive knowledge about the self, enabled by one's consciousness of one's own sensations. This view can take two forms, however. First, I propose a descriptivism that is a modification of a view of Russell's. This descriptivism is very attractive, but it is very likely to come under fire due to Kripkean concerns about descriptivist views of reference and their ability to capture modal properties adequately. For those who are impressed with such criticisms, I propose a further modification of the descriptivist view, embedding it in a two-tier framework (*ala* Kaplan). The result is that the basic intuitions behind my view should be capturable regardless of one's stance on the debates surrounding direct reference and rigidification.

## Ten Theoretical Criteria

Since there are no doubt many ideas of what would constitute a successful account of basic self-reference and self-knowledge, I will begin by setting forth what I consider to be strong desiderata for such an account. Some might balk at the suggestion that an account of the indexical "I" needs to satisfy such a diverse set of criteria. In the context of this project, however, such a complaint is misguided: to the extent that an account of basic self-reference does not satisfy these criteria, it does not adequately explain some of the most important features of basic thought about the self. One might object that the goals here need not concern "pure-semantics", against which I must urge that this only shows that there is an important project of accounting for self-thought that relates to, but extends beyond, a pure semantics of the first-person indexical.

### 1. The Humean Phenomenological Criterion

There is no acquaintance with the self or with any sort of conceptual/ representational stand-in for the self. There are many ways to finesse the notion of self-acquaintance, but the basic phenomenological data adduced by Hume must be respected.[7]

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[6]  I call this a psycho-semantics because my main concern here is not with public language, but with the way in which we understand such thoughts and are able to have certainty of self-reference even in Cartesian meditative circumstances.

[7]  For such a finessing maneuver I have in mind seeChisholm (1976a).

## 2. The Cartesian Criterion

The cogito constitutes a contingent, referential proposition that is certain for the one entertaining it, even amid radical Cartesian doubt.[8]

## 3. Privacy

No one can express anyone else's cogito thought. This intuition is fleshed out in the following anecdote:

> Heimson is crazy and believes that he is David Hume. When he thinks "I wrote the Treatise", however, he entertains a different thought than that Hume would think in the same words. (His thought is, after all, false while Hume's is true.) Knowing this, and being a fan of Frege, Heimson tries to think the same thought via a descriptive sense. To ensure he can do this, he discovers all descriptive information about Hume. But he can never secure a description with the same cognitive value as <I> has for Hume, since Hume could fail to be aware of his satisfying that description while still being able to self-refer.[9]

## 4. Cognitive Significance

A psycho-semantics of "I" must capture the cognitive significance of 'I' thoughts. That is, at the very least it must explain the informativeness of certain identity statements, such as "I am RJH" just as it must explain why certain false beliefs, such as "I am not RJH" are not out and out contradictions.[10] In particular, there should be a proposition that is learned when one learns informative identity statements. (One learns *that* such and such—cognitive significance is not explained by noting that one is in a different brain state, for example.)

## 5. Action

I-beliefs have a close connection to action. I can believe that RJH's pants are on fire without reacting. I need to know I am RJH in order to link that belief to anything that motivates me to douse myself with water. An account of I-beliefs should provide for this special connection to actions and motivations.[11]

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[8] Anscombe among others has denied that "I" refers, but such a position should be taken only if there is no way to accommodate all the data by another theory. That will be done here. The view that radical doubt undermines the conditions for self-reference is promoted by Strawson (1959) and Evans (1982).

[9] Perry (1997), p. 705-6.

[10] Certain philosophers, such as Nathan Salmon, would hold that such psychologistic concerns have no place in semantics proper. This is one reason why I prefer to call my project a project in psycho-semantics.

[11] For an explanation and defense of this condition, see John Perry (1979).

## 6. Non-relativism

The contents of our beliefs are true or false *simpliciter*. They are not true or false only in a perspective, or relative to a believer. [12]

## 7. Logic of Indexicals[13]

Indexical expressions bear important relations to one another. "I am here now" has a ring of logical truth to it. The system of indexical expressions could be likened to a context dependent compass, with the self of the utterer as a moving magnetic north: The relations among the points stays the same, while their designations differ. An analysis of "I" should yield an explanation of its relationship to other indexicals.

## 8. Constancy of Meaning

Although you and I designate different people by our utterances of "I", there is an important sense in which the expressions we use have the same meaning. [14]

## 9. Communication

An account of "I" should make clear how I-thoughts are communicated interpersonally. The privacy condition must be balanced with a condition that explains how such thoughts have content for third person hearers.

## 10. The Relationship between indexicals and demonstratives

Indexicals are a heterogeneous class, not merely grammatically but semantically as well. In particular, they divide into two importantly distinct classes: demonstratives and pure indexicals.[15] Kaplan can help us focus on the distinction.

> All this by way of contrasting true demonstratives with pure indexicals. For the latter, *no associated demonstration is required, and any demonstration supplied is either for emphasis or irrelevant.* Among the pure indexicals are 'I', 'now', 'here' (in one sense), 'tomorrow', and others. The linguistic rules which given *their* use fully determine the referent for each context.[16]

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[12] There are attractive solutions to the puzzles of self reference according to which "I" has an indexical sense, and that there is a proposition <I am sitting> that you and I both believe, but that is false in my context and true in yours. Such a view is expounded by Ernest Sosa in (1983a). If we are forced to such a view, perhaps we can tinker with logic to make it acceptable. I take it as a desiderata, however, that if we can avoid this kind of truth-relativism, we should.

[13] This criterion, as well as the linguistic constancy criterion, is borrowed from McGinn who argues for it persuasively in McGinn (1983).

[14] McGinn (1983), pp. 64-5.

[15] This division and the names for them are from Kaplan (1989a).

[16] Kaplan (1989a), pp. 490-1.

Kaplan focuses upon public demonstrations and performances, but inner performances, such as acts of attending, are important as well. Some thoughts require such acts, others don't. A complete logic of indexicals will explain the relationship between these two classes, perhaps showing one to have semantic priority over the other.

## Descriptivist Accounts of Self-Reference

The puzzles concerning indexicals seem to spell doom for attempts to explain the sense of "I" in terms of a description. It might be thought that the problem is that the wrong sorts of descriptions are being considered. Two views, type and token descriptivism, try to revive descriptivism by formulating the descriptions in terms of mental states.

### Type Descriptivism

Type descriptivism attempts to take the puzzle cases by the horns, flatly denying their verdict. The reason the self appears to go unspecified by descriptions is that the wrong descriptions are being employed. Descartes concludes that he exists because of information he has about himself, after all: he knows that he is thinking. It is by his mental states that he knows himself, and as such it should be to them we look for descriptions by which we can self-refer.

This appears to be a very promising route, if only because it seems so completely overlooked by the puzzle cases. Consider the amnesiac in the sensory-deprivation tank. Because he has no sensory means to discover information about himself, we are inclined to say he has no such information. But this is false: his very wondering as to who he is provides him with knowledge of his mental states. Self-reference through a description involving one's own mental states may seem to be the way out of the puzzles.

How would such a description go? If we are going to construct a definite description using mental properties, then the description will specify mental properties that something, me in the case of self-reference, possesses uniquely. So suppose I am performing the cogito. I think to myself, "I am thinking." According to one version of type descriptivism, I refer to myself in that very statement as that which is thinking the proposition <I am thinking>. But where is the guarantee of uniqueness here? Chances are, there are many philosophers performing the same operation, in which case the definite description fails to pick out an individual. Even if I am the only one who happens to be performing the cogito at that instant, the mere possibility that someone else is doing so introduces the possibility of reference failure and thus the falsity of the cogito. This is an unacceptable result, conflicting directly with the Cartesian criterion.

The problem with type descriptivism is that the properties in the definite descriptions are types. As such, they can prima facie be had by anyone. One

might try to avoid this duplication problem by making the description of one's own mental economy more exhaustive.[17] As unlikely as exact mental replicas may seem, the problem of duplication is still fatal. Imagine that in an experiment, a hundred different people are placed in sensory deprivation tanks and then put to sleep. When they awake, they will have a temporary amnesia. It seems incredibly likely that for more than one of them, their first thought will be something along the lines of "Where in the world am I?" But if this is the case, the question will be as empty as "Where is the American?" since the definite description, "the person thinking <where in the world am I>", does not hook on to a unique referent.

## Token Descriptivism

What dooms type descriptivism appears to be precisely its formulation of descriptions in terms of types. The natural move, then, is to allow property instantiations or tokens to be part of the descriptions. Which tokens become part of the description? I follow Russell in suggesting that objects of acquaintance, and in particular those objects that are objects of conscious attention, can become imported into the description.[18] When something is known by acquaintance, the thing is directly known without intermediaries, and descriptions can then be built using those things as part of their constituents. Conscious mental states or experiences are paradigm objects of acquaintance, and they are imported into the content of a proposition by the mental act of attention associated with the demonstrative <this>.[19] I can refer to myself as that which is having this sensation where the object of attention itself is a part of the proposition.[20]

Token descriptivism provides, I think, palatable and explanatory solutions to the semantical puzzles as well. With respect to the amnesiac in the sensory deprivation tank, we have located information that is present whenever the cogito is possible. Performance of the cogito may not require much, but it does require that one be conscious and have occurrent mental activity, and this is all that token descriptivism requires for self-reference. Furthermore, the description appears to be of the right sort to solve the second puzzle and Perry's exposition of it. When Rudolph Lingens is lost in the Stanford

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[17]  Martens (1989).

[18]  I am not claiming that other individuals cannot figure in Millian propositions. It is just that for our purposes anything other that conscious sensations known by acquaintance would generate cognitive significance problems. See Ackermann (1987) which defends the classic Russellian view using cognitive significance considerations.

[19]  For an account of introspective knowledge that jibes well with this account of importing sensations into propositions, see Gertler (2001).

[20]  I will have a tendency to formulate my view in terms of sensations, but this need not be the case. Any private object of conscious attention will serve, including thoughts, desires, etc. The initial view here bears significant resemblance to the view developed by Russell in Russell (1914).

library, it seems that once he adds to his expansive knowledge the descriptive information formulated in terms of his current sensations, he has sufficiently located himself.

## Token Descriptivism: Objections and Replies

### Objection One: Shifting Primitives

It might be said that I have merely shifted the problem of "I" to the problem of "that." Is this such an improvement? I have to say that I think it is. All of us have an understanding of this notion of attending to something, and <that> seems intimately related to it. <I> on the other hand finds no association with an act, or anything we understand in the same way. <That> has a "performative" role. It is intimately connected with a performance in a way no other indexical or semantic entity seems to be. There is an effort or focusing that accompanies it that is not present in the case of "here" or "I" which seem to do their job all by themselves. Because of this difference, I call <that> the performative indexical.[21]

Not only is the act involved with <that> more salient, but the object of the act, which is imported into content, is more salient as well. There is nothing like the Humean problem for that-reference. Because of its relation to attention, the objects of that-reference are perhaps the most salient of all. <That> acts as a tie between thought and salient portions of the world. As such, it seems especially apt to be a semantic primitive. I am inclined to see the reduction of the "essential indexical" to the "performative indexical" as improvement indeed.

### Objection Two: The Publicity Objection

For all that has been said, it seems entirely plausible that someone else can express my token descriptive proposition. This is the *publicity objection*. Suppose, in a somewhat contrived baptism, you tell me that you are about to stomp on my foot, and that you hereby name the sensation that will be caused by that stomping "Bobby". You then stomp my foot and think <The person having **Bobby** is thinking.> If names are rigid designators then it seems you are thinking my cogito thought, according to token-descriptivism. If this were true, the privacy criterion would be violated. But clearly, you are not performing my cogito when you think this: it carries neither the certainty nor the cognitive significance of the cogito. (This can be made explicit by supposing that I use the Bobby-description without realizing that I satisfy it.) So the token-descriptivist cannot be telling the whole story about the "I".

This objection is a potent one, and it forces us into a modification of the token-descriptivist view. To handle it, the view must admit that entertaining

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[21]  I do not mean for this to be connected with the sense in which speech acts are performative.

the token-descriptivist proposition is not sufficient for entertaining a cogito-thought. In other words, on this view, specifying the propositional contents of I-thoughts will not be sufficient for providing the psycho-semantics of basic self-knowledge. To entertain a genuine cogito-thought one must entertain the token-descriptivist thought in a particular way—namely by having a <this> thought where the token is imported into the proposition by way of acquaintance and the performative indexical.[22]

*Objection Three: The Sharing Possibility*

An objection to this account stems from the worry that it is possible that two individuals share the same token sensation.[23] Call this the sharing possibility. This would threaten our account since the definite description would not be uniquely satisfied, and thus "I" would not succeed in referring.

In the end, I simply deny the possibility of sharing, and I embrace the privacy of thoughts and sensations: for every subject, the mental states of that subject are had only by her. Most intuitions to the contrary stem from conflating type-identity with numerical identity, perhaps supplemented by a tendency to identify type identical sensations when they have a common cause. (We might say "I am feeling your pain" if my brain is wired to your nerve endings. If we are meaning the token sensation, this is clearly false since yours could have existed without mine existing.) I am inclined to think that there is no counterexample to privacy that does not rely upon a similar confusion.

It is worth mentioning an independent argument against the sharing possibility, however. Sensations seem holistic in nature, insofar as they are susceptible to gestalt changes depending upon their background. A red swatch actually looks different when next to a grey one than when next to a pink one. Similarly, extreme pain juxtaposed with extreme pleasure is different than either one taken alone. This fact suggests that the sharing possibility is false. Suppose S1 and S2 allegedly have the same sensation. It seems that there cannot be any gestalt difference here, since then there would not even be type identical sensations. But there need not be any actual gestalt difference to establish numerical diversity—the mere fact that S1 could have had sensations that invoked a gestalt change is enough, for it presents a case in which S2's sensation remains the same while S1's does not. A token sensation can be shared only if there is no such possibility, but anything that would guar-

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22    Thus, I need not deny that the sensations are "in" the proposition in anything but the traditional Millian sense. They are simply imported into these Millian propositions in a different way.

23    Anscombe (1994), p. 153, has this worry and feels that it confutes the descriptivist account of 'I'.

antee that would seem to be evidence that S1 and S2 are actually the same person.[24]

Ultimately the best argument against the sharing possibility comes from simply reflecting upon a current thought or sensation. Can you really conceive of someone having this token thought, and not just a thought qualitatively identical (perhaps causally connected to your thought)? I cannot, and I think this is part of the inclination to view sensations as individuated by their bearers. Even if I am wrong about privacy and the sharing possibility, however, the descriptivist account is not necessarily confuted. It must be the case only that the sensations or thoughts by which we identify ourselves are not shared. This seems hard to deny.

*Objection Four: Reference and Individuation Conditions*

In answer to the sharing possibility, it was mentioned that many philosophers feel that sensations are individuated by the subjects that have them. When combined with certain strictures on singular reference, this might seem to put our account in jeopardy. Some philosophers hold that to refer to something one must know individuating criteria for the thing one is referring to. Otherwise, it is held, one might be misled about the object one is referring to, which is just to say that one doesn't know what object one is thinking about.[25] Call this the *strong Russellian principle*. If this principle is true, however, and sensations are individuated by the persons who have them, the token descriptivism is circular: self-reference is via sensations, but in order to know one's sensations one must already know the self that has them. Reference thus doesn't get off the ground.

This application of the Russellian principle is particularly problematic since it seems to have the result that thoughts about individuals can never get started.[26] Either we can sometimes individuate things "in themselves" without relation to other things, or in some cases we can have thoughts about particular things without knowing the individuation conditions of those things. Otherwise, we are in a situation where we must always individuate things in terms of other things. But how can we think of those things? It seems pretty clear that a regress looms. The strong Russellian principle must be rejected.[27]

Acquaintance with sensations or mental states seems an excellent candidate for knowing what we are talking about without knowing individuation crite-

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[24] Perhaps S1 and S2 are the same person, they merely have a disassociated mental economy, such as the commissurotomy patients undergoing selective stimulation experiments.

[25] Authors who have held something like this involve Evans (1982), Chisholm (1981), and Schaffer (1966).

[26] It should of course be noted, that even Russell did not subscribe to such a strong principle, and that his exception is precisely the case of sensations.

[27] This is a version of an argument presented by Chisholm (1976a), p. 32.

ria. It is, in fact, Russell's own choice to ground reference in this way, and it seems we should follow him in this. Any stronger application of the alleged Russellian principle is unreasonable.

## Objection Five: The Reidentification Objection and the Cartesian Self-Conception

Two related objections stem from the thin, momentary grasp of ourselves by events in our "inner lives." The first maintains that since we identify ourselves by mental tokens which do not endure for long, we lose any ground for reidentifying ourselves, thus losing any grounds for asserting our personal endurance through time.[28] Relatedly, one might claim that this view of basic self reference in terms of mental events is too Cartesian, and it encourages a view of oneself that is wholly mental and disconnected from the physical realm. We are more than merely thinking things, and a view of self-reference should acknowledge that.

My answer to both objections is rather straightforward: the conditions under which we self-refer in basic cogito-like instances are not the only cases of self reference, nor is knowledge of ourselves as thinking beings the only case of self-knowledge. There are undoubtedly other cases of self-knowledge that do not aspire to the cogito level of certainty (and that do not survive radical Cartesian doubt) but that still constitute knowledge, and it is these cases that would provide security in reidentification. This would seem to be exactly the result we desire. Cogito-type knowledge doesn't seem to provide us with reidentification criteria for ourselves. Such criteria surely come posterior to basic Cartesian reflection. Similarly, nothing follows about our more robust self-conception from the fact that in the first instance we self-identify via our mental lives. We are physical beings and a full conception of ourselves as subjects must acknowledge that fact. It is only that our physical grasp of ourselves is not what secures self-reference and self-knowledge in cogito-like scenarios.

## Objection Six: The Anti-Russellian Objection

The way I have stated the problem of self-knowledge and self-reference may seem to presuppose what some might find an outdated, staunchly Russellian framework for analyzing the contents of thoughts. While token descriptivism revises this framework somewhat, it might be objected that it is an undefended assumption that this is the direction in which an account of self-thought should proceed.

Though it is beyond the scope of this paper to defend its vaguely Russellian background against all of the possible alternatives that have gained currency, it is worth noting some reasons why a solution within this framework

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[28]    I owe this objection to Ernest Sosa.

is both desirable and constitutes an independently valuable asset even given alternative ways of construing mental contents.

In general, the account I am trying to provide presupposes that contingently existing things are either known directly, by acquaintance, or indirectly, by description.[29] This suggests a theory of content according to which things either figure directly in the content of thoughts, or indirectly in virtue of a description-like content. Either supposition can be questioned (and neither, it seems to me, follows from the other), yet the pair together have been historically influential. The reason is that they provide an elegant mapping of the intuitive way that objects are known onto the apparently sentential nature of thoughts. The puzzle of self-reference is then generated because 'I' thoughts do not seem to conform to this model.

One option, of course, is to say so much the worse for the model. Several alternatives do not face the puzzle so clearly. Three possibilities stand out. It could be that the best method is to characterize I-thoughts by their distinct *functional roles,* or by their distinct *conceptual roles,* or by their *informational* role—the way in which they are particularly sensitive to the instantiation of properties in a particular individual.[30] It might seem that any of these models has the option of skirting the problem by construing I-thoughts in non-Russellian terms.

One of the important things to note is that these models of mental content are not necessarily in tension with the framework I am presupposing. It could be that certain functional, conceptual or informational properties of I-thoughts are present only because the objects in those thoughts are known by acquaintance or description. Or, as seems more likely, whether something is thought of by description or acquaintance might supervene on the presence of these other properties. It seems natural to think that the Russellian propositional model does not describe the basic mechanisms underlying thought, but that it describes a higher level that makes explicit certain elements of thought, such as the apparent compositionality of mental contents and the apparently seamless way thought meshes with language. If this picture of "layers of content" is appealing, then there does not seem to be any reason to jettison the more Russellian picture while there remain strong reasons to keep it.

Perhaps the suggestion, however, is that in the case of I-thoughts, or indexicals in general, there simply is no "top-layer" of propositional meaning that submits to the acquaintance/description framework. While this is an option that deserves to be taken seriously, it would be unmotivated if there is

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[29] Following Russell (1911).

[30] The philosophers who might be construed as among the main proponents of these alternative models include D.H. Mellor for the functional model, Christopher Peacocke for the conceptual role model, and Jerry Fodor (and perhaps the unlikely ally Gareth Evans) for the informational role model

a story to be told in the more Russellian framework. Even if the layers of meaning picture is rejected, and the three alternative frameworks are inconsistent with the Russellian framework, pursuing a Russellian solution seems worthwhile. Its strongest virtue is that the framework provides a non-circular answer in propositional form to the question of what is learned when true identity statements involving "I" are known, and in terms that capture the cognitive significance to the knower himself. Regardless of one's theory of content, such a project seems worthwhile.

*Objection Seven: The Modal Objection*

The most daunting objection to token descriptivism is an analogue of one of Kripke's criticisms of descriptivist theories of names. This modal objection is provided clearly by David Kaplan.[31] The problem is that even if <I am the person having **this sensation**> is a priori, it does not provide a synonym for "I".[32] Call this the modal objection:

If "I" is synonymous with "the person having **this sensation**" then the following would seem to be true:

A: If no one were to have **this sensation**, I would not exist.

A comes out true because A simply means:

AA: If no one were to have **this sensation**, the person who has **this sensation** would not exist.

But A is clearly false: I could have failed to have any particular sensation without failing to exist.

At first it looks as though the modal objection trades off a crucial scope ambiguity. The reading of AA that makes A true requires the definite description to take a narrow scope. It should, however, take wide scope, such that the reading is:

WAA: There is a person who has **this sensation**, and were no one to have **this sensation**, that person would not exist.

WAA is false, so it would seem that as long as we avoid scope ambiguities, there is no difficulty from the modal objection.

The scope-ambiguity solution does not end the debate with the anti-descriptivist however, because the problem remains even when "I" is not

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31 Kaplan (1989a), pp. 519-520.
32 I am using bold type to indicate that what is present in the proposition indicated is the sensation itself, not a description of the sensation or some conceptual proxy.

embedded in modal contexts.[33] The following is a good test for proposition identity:

*Modal Equivalence*: If propositions p and q are identical, they have the same truth values across all possible worlds.

Now let's take a non-modal sentence involving "I", and then the same sentence substituting a token description in the place of "I".

(p) I am a hirsute yeoman.

(q) The person experiencing **this sensation** is a hirsute yeoman.

Now in a world in which I am not experiencing this sensation and I am in fact a hirsute yeoman, p is true and q is false.[34] By the principle of modal equivalence, then, they do not express the same proposition. Token-descriptivism looks like it renders the wrong proposition for 'I'-thoughts because of modal properties of the proposition.[35]

Many philosophers have found these sorts of considerations conclusive against descriptivist views of reference, whether concerning names or indexicals. The descriptivist has more in the arsenal, however. When one "takes propositions to another world" in order to evaluate their truth value in that world, one is illicitly placing them in a modal context which invokes another scope ambiguity. "In world w" is an intensional operator and when one checks a proposition p's truth in world w one is really just determining whether "In world w, p" is true. If this is the case, then the insistence on wide scope in modal contexts for indexicals would avoid the modal objection.[36]

The debate between the descriptivist and the Kripkean is a complicated one, and it will not be resolved here whether the spirit of rigidity can be captured by insisting on wide-scope interpretations for names and indexicals. (There is, however, further discussion of another strategy—rigidifying with an actuality operator—in the appendix). The pervasiveness of disagreement on this issue should not prevent us from attempting to capture the essence of token descriptivism in another way, however. For this reason, I will leave

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[33] This revision of the modal argument is following the path set by Kripke in the introduction to *Naming and Necessity*, pp. 6-7

[34] Perhaps q just lacks a truth value—either way, the modal equivalence principle is violated.

[35] For an excellent interchange on the descriptivist/Kripkean debate see the debate between Scott Soames and David Sosa in Sosa (2001) and Soames (2002).

[36] What is really at issue here is whether the modal profile of a sentence is merely a matter of what modal sentences would be true in a meta-language. That is, does p's truth value in w simply consist in the truth value of "In w, p" or does the proposition bear its transworld truth values independent of its behavior in a meta-language?

this debate without further comment and suggest a second descriptivist view which captures the spirit of the first while avoiding the modal objection.[37]

## Two-Tiered Theories

If one is persuaded by the modal objection to token descriptivism, it is natural to hold that indexicals are directly referential: that is, the indexical serves to import the individual to which it refers into the proposition expressed by the sentence containing the indexical. Intuitively, however, this radically fails to accommodate the cognitive significance criterion. The thought <I am Robert J. Howell> is informative, but if both the name and the indexical simply import me into the proposition, it looks like the content of the thought is no more informative than <Robert J. Howell is Robert J. Howell>. Two tiered theories attempt to resolve this difficulty by adding another facet of meaning on top of the directly referential content. It is this "second tier" of meaning that provides for the cognitive significance of the thought. I wish to consider the two most famous versions of the two-tiered account, Kaplan's and Perry's.

### Kaplan

The undisputed pioneer of two-tiered theories when it comes to indexicals is David Kaplan.[38] In his "Demonstratives" manuscript, he distinguishes between the *content* and the *character* of indexical expressions and sentences/beliefs containing them. Indexicals are directly referential in that the content of the sentences including them involves the individuals designated by the indexicals. They express, in other words, singular propositions. This does not, however, mean that the meaning of these indexicals is simply the objects they designate. The meaning of indexicals, "I" for example, remains constant from speaker to speaker, and the meaning is what provides the cognitive significance for the thinker. According to Kaplan:

> Meanings tell us how the content of a word or phrase is determined by the context of use. Thus the meaning of a word or phrase is what I have called its *character*. (Words and phrases with no indexical element express the same content in every context: they have a fixed character.) To supply a synonym for a word or phrase is to find another with the same *character*; finding another with the same *content* in a particular context certainly won't do. The content of 'I' used by me may be identical with the content of 'you' used by you. This doesn't make 'I' and 'you' synonyms. ...For two words or phrases to be synonyms, they must have the same content in every context. In general, for indexicals, it is not possible to find synonyms. This is because indexicals are directly referential, and the com-

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[37] Several other moves have been made to evade the Kripkean critique, for example Jason Stanley argues that the difference in the modal profile of a sentence does not imply a difference in assertoric content. I am sceptical about this move's ability to capture the intuitions behind the compositionality of meaning, which is an intuition I am loathe to flout. But again, this is best discussed in another context.

[38] This also seems to be the same view as Perry (1997).

pound phrases which can be used to give their reference ('the person who is speaking', 'the individual being demonstrated', etc.) are not.[39]

Thus the duties of traditional propositions are split. The *propositional content* is the bearer of truth values, and it is "what is said" in that important sense. The cognitive significance and linguistic meaning are parceled out to the *propositional character*. As Kaplan says, "character is a way of presenting content." [40] Nevertheless, as it stands the view will not do. Most importantly, the character of an indexical is a rule of language or a function from contexts to contents,[41] and it seems clear that it is not the case that in thinking I-thoughts that we have either a rule of language or a function as the object of our belief in any sense. This just means that the character cannot serve the traditional purpose of being the mode of presentation of its content—at best it is a rule that determines what that mode of presentation is. Even this cannot be, however, for characters are not even fine-grained enough to satisfy the cognitive significance criterion. A case could arise where there is the same content, character, but there are conflicting attitudes towards two beliefs. A good example of this is provided by John Perry:

> Suppose I am viewing the harbor from downtown Oakland; the bow and stern of the aircraft carrier Enterprise are visible, though its middle is obscured by a large building. The name "Enterprise" is clearly visible on the bow, so when I tell a visitor, "This is the Enterprise," pointing towards the bow, this is readily accepted. When I say, pointing to the stern clearly several city blocks from the bow, "That is the Enterprise," however, she refuses to believe me. By the criterion of difference, a different sense was expressed the first time than the second.[42]

Since the same indexical, "that", could have been used in both cases, the fact that there are different ones used is merely an artifact of Perry's example. According to Kaplan's view, it should be the case in this example that the same proposition is being entertained under the same mode of presentation (by the same character). But since a rational person can assent to one and not the other, Kaplan's proposal fails to satisfy the cognitive significance criterion.

*Perry*

Since Kaplan, John Perry has been the most dogged advocate of a two-tiered theory of indexicals. Over the years, his view has changed subtly, but I wish

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[39] Kaplan (1989a), p. 521.
[40] Kaplan (1989a), p. 524.
[41] Kaplan (1989a), pp. 523-4.
[42] Perry (1997), p. 702.

to focus upon what seems to have been the common core of his views.[43] In general, Perry is reluctant to acknowledge anything like characters as actual semantic entities. There are instead belief states, particular mental states of particular people, that can be characterized by something like characters or indexical propositions. The propositions believed, though, include nothing indexical. They are the true belief contents. Perry could be considered a deflationist about characters in that he relegates any semantic role they may have to belief contents. The belief states themselves, the substitute for characters, are not themselves semantic.

Belief states are thus subjective: they have no truth-value but are only truth evaluable in terms of the propositions they have as content; they are particulars; they explain actions and they presumably explain the modes of presentation of states of affairs. Belief contents are non-relativized, non-indexical propositions. They can include things, properties, and descriptive senses—they are simply singular propositions. The two are related in that a person thinks a type of content by having particular belief states.

By avoiding characters, Perry avoids the need to identify them with rules, functions or anything of the sort. Belief states are not exhaustively defined by either the contents they determine or the sentences used to express them. He can thus avoid the problem of the ship Enterprise. The person who sees me point out the ship by its bow and then by its stern does not have the same belief state in the two instances. The rules that were associated with characters are now just explanations of the systematic relations between belief states and belief contents. They are not themselves objects of belief. Belief states are (one suspects) functionally specified, thus if they play a different roles in one's cognitive economy they are different. There is nothing semantic about that: so much is psychological.[44]

While Perry's view is elegant, problems remain. First of all, what one believes in many cases turns out to be incoherent. When the Enterprise is pointed out to the person who doubts a ship can be that long, what she believes when she says "That is not the same ship as that" is a proposition which can also be expressed by "The ship Enterprise is not the same ship as the ship Enterprise." The proposition has the enterprise itself as a constituent, related to itself by the relation of difference. Surely this is an absurd thing for a rational, intellectually scrupulous person to believe. If I am an amnesiac, and names are directly referential, then when I say "I am not

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[43]   The development of his views can be found in Perry (2000). His most recent view is also the one that would be friendliest to the Two-Tiered token descriptivism I ultimately adopt. It can be found in Perry (2001).

[44]   I am putting words in Perry's mouth here. So much seems to be implied, however, by his and Mark Crimmins' proposal to solve Kripke's new puzzle in Crimmons and Perry (1997).

Robert J. Howell" I am believing that I am not myself. Literally. Surely this is a bad result.[45]

The problem is essentially that there is no content in Perry's view that explains the cognitive significance of informative identity beliefs.[46] When an amnesiac learns his identity by saying "I am Rudolf Lingens" there is something that he learns. But on Perry's view the only fact he apprehends is equivalent to "Rudolf Lingens is Rudolf Lingens" which he presumably could have guessed. One can suppose Lingens is informed of his identity by Ortcutt—it seems there should be some sort of propositional content to represent what exactly Ortcutt has told him. Perry's view thus is confronted with a dilemma, according to Robert Stalnaker.

> Belief states are too subjective to represent informational content, since the relevant belief state Ortcutt is in is a different one from the one Lingens comes to be in when he receives Ortcutt's information. But belief objects or contents, in Perry's sense, are (at least in the problem cases) too extensional to represent information conveyed in an act of communication.[47]

The problem Perry has is essentially Kaplan's: there is nothing with content fine-grained enough to explain the informational content of beliefs.[48]

## Two-Tiered Token Descriptivism

Token Descriptivism is troubled by the same sorts of arguments that plague a descriptivist theory of names. As such, it allegedly fails to capture the modal profile of the content expressed by I thoughts. It does, however, succeed in capturing the cognitive significance of such thoughts. The two-tiered theories we have considered succeed in capturing the modal profile of I-thoughts because of the directly referential nature of those thoughts. Those theories came up short, however, in that they did not provide the cognitive significance of I-thoughts. The natural move at this step is to combine the token descriptivist view with a two-tiered framework, allowing the strengths of each view to eliminate the weaknesses of the other.

According to this account, which I call Two-Tiered Token Descriptivism, when one has I-thoughts, one expresses a structured set of two propositions: what I shall call a public content is expressed by thinking a private content. The private content consists in the very proposition posited by the token

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[45]   Crimmins and Perry (1997) attempt to reconcile these results with our intuitions by noting some conditions of adequacy on belief reports. Still, their position on beliefs is strictly speaking the one here.

[46]   This criticism as well as the Ortcutt/Lingens example is from Stalnaker (1981).

[47]   Stalnaker (1981).

[48]   It might be suggested that a Perry-like semantics can provide characters that are fine grained enough to explain all the informational contents of beliefs. In fact, I am basically proposing a way to do that—in fact, I would maintain that any Perry-like view which was successful in this regard would essentially be my view. See also note 49 below.

descriptivist view, while the public content is a directly referential, singular proposition in which the person who satisfies the private proposition is a constituent. Thus, for example, the following two propositions are expressed by my thought "I am thinking."

Private: <The person who has **this sensation** is thinking>

Public: <**Robert J. Howell** is thinking.>

Neither proposition is formulated in completely descriptive terms: there is a directly referential element in both. A sensation is a constituent of the private content, while I myself am a constituent of the public content.[49]

What really is the relationship between these propositions? The private content acts as a sort of mode of presentation of the public content. We arrive at public contents in a particular way, and it is not appropriate to relegate the way we do arrive at them to the realms of non-semantical psychology. Private propositions constitute part of what we mean, because they constitute a large part of what we understand when we have "I"-thoughts. Public propositions, on the other hand, play a more significant role in communication. They account for the sense in which we say the same thing when you say "You are speaking" and I say "I am speaking."

The nature of the structured pair of propositions can be seen in terms of the two "content slots." The nature of the slots is not simply exhausted by the propositions that enter into them. The private slot will contain a proposition whose individual components are known by the act of conscious attention associated with the indexical <this>. Individuals known in any other way cannot enter as constituents into the private proposition. Individuals can enter into the public proposition, but only insofar as they are presented by the private proposition. These constraints are not *ad hoc*. They fall directly out of the goal of providing a content that accounts for the cognitive significance of beliefs. If something other than <this> could import elements into the private content, the problem of accounting for the nature of belief (or disbelief)

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[49] This account bears some resemblance to an account offered by Christopher Peacocke (1983), chapter 5. It is distinct, however, in several ways. First, I remain agnostic about "constitutive roles" and the relationship between "canonical evidence" for a judgment and the concepts that make up the judgment's content. Second, it is not clear, on Peacocke's view, what exactly enters into the proposition judged. He is disinclined to make the constitutive role of "I"—which is not unlike my private proposition—enter into the proposition because it demands too much conceptual sophistication. I don't find this reasoning sufficient since it would seem to problematize any attempt to analyze the content of complicated concepts—that is, it would seem to concede the paradox of analysis. In the end, the Peacocke view does not adequately provide an account of the semantic content of I-thoughts—his view is Fregean while mine is Russellian, and it is not clear what mode of presentation figures in the thought for either the self or for token sensations. In my case, the things themselves are part of the thought.

in some informative identities would re-emerge. By restricting private propositions, this does not occur.

The nature of the structured pair of propositions can perhaps be best illustrated by considering how two-tiered token descriptivism deals with the publicity objection that proved fatal to simple token descriptivism. The renewed objection would insist "Anyone can entertain anyone else's pair of propositions. If the problem arose for the token descriptivist view, which posits your 'private content' as the object of belief, adding a 'public content' will not help. That content can certainly be viewed by anyone else. So what is it, on your view, that cannot be expressed by the third person perspective?" The answer is that while someone else could, quite plausibly, express the propositions that constitute both my private and public content, they would not thereby be expressing my cogito. They would be unable to express these propositions in the right way. The proposition that occupies my private content slot in my cogito would not be a private content for them: they would be unable to know its constituents using the performative indexical.[50]

Some people will balk at the idea that we express two propositions with indexical utterances. I think this concern is misguided. First, while the relationship between mental states and propositions is difficult to articulate, I am inclined to view propositions as types, and in particular as types of thoughts. One thinks a proposition by having a thought of a certain type. If this is the case, then there is no problem in saying that a thought exemplifies two types, even when both are propositional types, especially when one type is a determinate of the other determinable type. This is one, natural way to view the ontology of "S expresses a public proposition by expressing a private proposition": the private proposition is a determinate of the determinable public proposition. This is analogous to "S has a red sensation by having a scarlet sensation". If this exemplification model of propositional content is correct, then there is nothing ontologically peculiar about expressing one proposition by expressing another.

Secondly, this two-proposition view falls directly out of the desire to account for the modal profile of I-thoughts while still acknowledging that they have a special cognitive significance which can be expressed propositionally. (That is, we can express what is learned when someone discovers "I am Robert J. Howell" in a proposition—I have learned that the person having this sensation is Robert J. Howell.) The two propositions will share the same truth value in the actual world, but they will diverge in truth values at possible worlds—that's what makes them different. But it is another feature

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[50] I am strongly attracted to a view that would extend this structured proposition view across the board, so that a private proposition would provide a content for names that accounted for their private significance, thus avoiding puzzles like those introduced in Kripke (1997). If this is the case, your private proposition for the "Bobby" thought would be something entirely unlike my private position when I entertain my cogito thought.

of the structured pair that the public content provides the modal truth conditions for the thought. Ultimately one expresses the public proposition by expressing the private proposition, and it is part of this that one ultimately has a thought that has the modal profile of the public proposition.[51] In expressing the private proposition, on disavows, as it were, its modal profile, treating the description is a way of getting at an object which will itself be part of the modally evaluable proposition. Reference is thus direct in one sense—the sense involved in the modally evaluable public proposition—but it is not direct in that the public proposition is only expressed by expressing a descriptive content that provides the cognitive significance of the thought.[52]

## Conclusion: Satisfying the Criteria

Both Token Descriptivism and Two-Tiered Token descriptivism satisfy our theoretical desiderata. As such—prior to resolution of the Kripkean/descriptivist debate in semantics—they both are attractive theories of self reference.

*The Humean Criterion*: In both views, the cognitive significance of the cogito is accounted for by a proposition that refers to the self only by way of the present sensations of that self. As such, there need be no acquaintance with the self. What's more, given the indirect nature of the self-reference, our theory does not force us into any particular view of the self—bundle, ego, or otherwise. We can preserve the Humean phenomenological picture without making any premature metaphysical commitments.

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[51]  As such, this view bears some resemblance to the two-dimensional semantics advanced by David Chalmers for natural kind terms. See Chalmers (1996), pp. 56-71. Ultimately, however, Chalmers does not explicitly deal with indexicals, and his view can, at best, be said to provide an incomplete schema for such a semantics. His primary intentions, which are functions from centered possible worlds to possible worlds, take centered possible worlds as primitive. There are therefore two questions: how finely are world-centers individuated, and once they are properly individuated, what precisely is the mode of presentation—the primary intension—of "I"? Without answering these questions, there is no real solution to the indexical puzzles, and it is my proposal that the appropriate answers to these questions generates my view. I have no objection, therefore, to seeing my account as a fleshed out version of a Chalmers-like two-dimensionalism. (See note 47 above). There is also some resemblance to my claim that the thinker has an "implicit disavowal" of the modal implications of the private content to Francois Recanati's explanation of his REF operator. See Recanati (1997).

[52]  My claim that one "disavows" the modal profile of the descriptive thought should be no more obscure than the process of rigidifying a description, or using Recanati's REF operator in Recanati (1997) or in expressing a proposition for which the assertoric content and the ingredient content diverge, as Stanley (2002) maintains. It is essentially a matter of someone simply meaning one thing (the public proposition) as opposed to another. How this happens is difficult on any account, but every account must presuppose that it happens.

*The Cartesian Criterion*: Again, in both views the certainty of the cogito is explained by the proposition entertained by acquaintance with the subject's sensations. These propositions are true in every world in which their constituents (sensations) are realized, thus the subject has the same access to their truth as he does to the existence of his own sensations. Since there is the strong suspicion that the security of the cogito is closely tied to the security of one's access to one's own mental life, our account provides Descartes' foundation with precisely the degree of certainty that it deserves.

*Privacy*: The publicity objection has shown us that specifying the propositions entertained in cogito thought is not sufficient to explain it. The privacy of the cogito consists in the way in which the component propositions are entertained. For token descriptivism, the sensation that is a constituent of the proposition must be imported by the "performative indexical" <that>, and for the two-tiered view, the token descriptive proposition must be in the private-slot in the structured pair of propositions.

*Cognitive Significance*: Both views explain the informativeness of identity statements such as "I am Robert J. Howell", and consequently explain why false beliefs—"I am not Robert J. Howell" are not completely irrational. Furthermore, <I am not the one having **this sensation**> where the sensation is imported by the performative indexical is not a thought to which one can assent: it is as unbelievable as the cogito is indubitable.

*Action*: Content that contains sensations with which the subject is acquainted is well positioned to explain the way in which basic I-beliefs impact a subject's cognitive economy, and it is ideally situated to explain the peculiar connections between first-person beliefs and motivation of action. The beliefs that have private contents make explicit an orientation of the agent in terms that the agent cannot fail to grasp since the private proposition provides the cognitive significance of the belief of which it is a part.

*The Logic of Indexicals and the Relationship between Indexicals and Demonstratives*: This view also provides a logic of indexicals, because all indexicals can be given senses with the performative indexical as a basis. While work should be done in each case, the following are sample candidates for the components of the respective private propositions:

Now (instantaneous): <the time at which **this sensation** began>

Now (extended): <the span of time at which **this sensation** is had>

Here: <the place where the person who has **this sensation** is located>

You: <the person whom the person who has **this sensation** is talking to>

That (public): <the thing in such and such a spatial relation to the person having **this sensation**>

Further analyses can be generated on this model, and the "logic of indexicals" will be generated by the logical relations between the private propositions. The result is that contrary to Kaplan's supposition, pure indexicals are cashed out in terms of demonstratives instead of the other way around. This, in my opinion, is a more intuitive basic structure of the logic of indexicals because it seems much more phenomenologically accurate. Things demonstrated, especially sensations, are much more salient than places, times, or selves—things signified by pure indexicals. The former are the types of things that impinge upon our cognitive structure, and as such are more likely to get the semantical ball rolling.[53]

*Constancy of Meaning and Communication:* Neither view generates the result that you and I are thinking the same exact thought when we say "I am thinking" and this might seem to flout McGinn's constancy criterion. To think this is to individuate concepts too finely, however. Despite the fact that different sensations enter into the contents of different I-thoughts (even for an individual person) this is no hindrance to the acknowledgement of semantic consistency urged by McGinn. We are both thinking the same *type* of thought—our thoughts have identical structures, the only difference is in one of the key ingredients: the imported sensation. This would seem to be all the intersubjective constancy we would desire. Any view of concepts will have to prescind away from some features of thought tokens, and it is treating thoughts as types that provides for semantic consistency. This sort of consistency is present in both of the token descriptivist proposals.

The privacy component assures that one's cogito thought not be expressible by others. Does it follow that it is not understandable by others? In some sense these token descriptivist views seem to embrace that result, since others

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[53]  A further advantage of this view is that it provides content for the rare occasions in which indexical beliefs do not secure a referent. One might, for example, have a thought such as "That man is remaining still for an awfully long time," when the object of ostention is really a peculiarly shaped stump. In such a case there is no public proposition expressed, because there is no man to play the role in the proposition. On Perry's view, there would be no content to one's belief. This is counterintuitive, however, and our view explains that. There is something wrong with the belief: there is no public content. There is, however, the proposition that is the private content. This proposition could vary, but one possibility is

> (P3)  [The thing in such and such a location in relation to the person having this sensation is a man and has been remaining still for an awfully long time.]

(P3) is false, but it is a thought, and it explains why what is thought or said is not nonsense.

cannot be acquainted with one's own sensations, and at least part of the cogito proposition consists in such sensations. This obviously doesn't hinder communication, however. In the two-tiered view, the public proposition is completely intersubjectively available, and from the fact that "I" is being used to express it, the hearer understands the way in which it is being thought—by a private proposition of the sort that everyone has. The hearer need not have the relevant sensations to understand all that needs to be understood. Similarly for the token descriptivist view—to the extent that the hearer can have the same type of thought, and knows what type of thought is being had, communication is achieved.

## Token-Descriptivism vs.Two-Tiered Token Descriptivism

Since both of the views developed in this paper satisfy the important theoretical desiderata for theories of basic self-reference and self-knowledge, how might one choose between them? My contention is that in some sense, one need not choose between them: they are basically the same theory, simply tooled in two different fashions in order to agree with two divergent views of the semantics of thought. Which view one prefers will depend on whether one ultimately sides with Kripke and Kaplan in the critique of descriptivism, or whether one feels that these attacks fall short, leaving room for the more traditional Russellian picture.

That the value of token descriptivism should be independent of recent debates about direct reference is unsurprising. The philosophical bounty of the views presented here transcends those debates and concerns the intuitions at the very beginning of modern philosophy. While remaining metaphysically neutral, we can agree with Descartes that the cogito is among the most secure pieces of knowledge we can have, and that it is enabled solely by our mental lives. With Hume we can agree that there is no self, soul or ego salient to introspection, all the while leaving it open that such substances might exist. All of this is captured by the relatively simple notion that in basic cases of self-reference we refer to ourselves by way of our thoughts and sensations.

## Appendix: Actuality Operators and Token Descriptivism

There is another suggestion that might seem to confute the modal objection to token descriptivism, thus generating a third type of token descriptivism. It might be thought that the inclusion of an actuality operator within the definite description will rigidify the description in such a way that the problem is avoided. The goal in rigidifying the description will be to pick out the person who satisfies it in this world, and fix on him as the relevant individual for the assessment of the proposition's truth value, no matter what world the propo-

sition is evaluated in. Thus the proposition to be compared with that expressed by (p) is in fact that expressed by:

(r) The person actually thinking **this sensation** is a hirsute yeoman.

The problem with this suggestion is that if this proposal is to work, "actually" itself must be an indexical.[54] There are excellent reasons for resisting this analysis of "actually" which are well rehearsed elsewhere.[55] I wish to draw attention to a few independent reasons why such an analysis would not be helpful in the present context.

First, there is the question of providing a non-circular analysis of "actually." The suggestion favored by David Lewis, that the actual world is <the world in which I exist" is of no help here, since "I" itself is analyzed in terms of actuality (on this proposal). To avoid circularity, "the actual world" must mean something like "this world." Then, of course, the problem of finding an analysis for <this> arises. It cannot be the same <this> I take as a primitive, since we are not acquainted with the world in the same way we are acquainted with our present thoughts and sensations. Instead it must be a public <this>, and once again, the most obvious analysis generates circles, at least if one desires to analyze indexicals in terms of one another, as has been a goal of my project.[56]

Supposing such an analysis were available, however, the Millian proposition which contains the world as a constituent is ill suited for the purposes of explaining the cognitive significance of the cogito. That proposition must be certain to the person entertaining it. But, if the analysis of

(d) I am thinking

is

(e) The person thinking <**this sensation**> in <w1> is thinking,

then it would seem that to know (d) one must know which world one is in. If (d) is to capture the cognitive significance and the certainty of the cogito, it seems one must know all of the true propositions true in that world.[57] No one knows this, yet we give everyone credit for knowing (d). To put this

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[54] This is the most natural way in which "actually" could save a descriptivist analysis, according to Stanley (1997).

[55] See the reasons offered by Peter Van Inwagen in (2001b).

[56] Another suggestion, that on individuates the actual world as the one containing this sensation does not work, because I assume that sensations can occur in more than one world—that is, I am disinclined to by counterpart theory, even for sensations.

[57] I am not saying that in order to know (d) one must know all the propositions true in this world. I am merely saying that one must know them all if one is to capture the cognitive significance of the cogito.

problem another way, one could certainly believe (d) and not believe (e) because one didn't believe one was in w1 in virtue of having a false belief about w1. Thus, (d) and (e) fail the cognitive equivalence test for propositions. Using "actually" as a rigidifier is no help in the current context.[58]

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