

# Introduction

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Singular thought, mental reference, reference determination, co-reference, informative identities, propositional attitudes, attitude ascriptions, *de se* thought, indexical thought, perceptual concepts, identification, recognition and misrecognition. These notions and phenomena, so central to philosophical inquiry in mind and language, have been often articulated and explained by deploying the increasingly popular idea of a mental file. A mental file is a structure for the storage of information that a subject takes to be, internally, about one and the same external object. Its notion is deeply rooted in our folk psychology and it is akin to the idea of a concept, a cognitive particular or a mental representation standing for an individual object. A mental file is a philosopher's construct originally introduced by Grice (1969: 141-2) under the label 'dossier' in his discussion of vacuous names and referentially used descriptions. Strawson (1974: 54-6) uses a similar idea in his discussion of identity statements. Evans (1973: 199, ff.) talks of a speaker's 'body of information associated with a name' within his information-based account of reference determination and borrows Grice's notion of a dossier of information within his (1982: Chapter 8, spec. 276-7) account of recognition-based identification. Perry (1980) introduces the label 'mental file' for the first time to account for the phenomenon of continued belief. He (2001: 128-46) appeals to the same notion to account for the phenomenon of co-reference and in his (2002) introduces the Self file to provide the sense of the indexical 'I'. Bach (1987: Chapter 3, spec. 34-9, 44) deploys mental files in his discussion of *de re* thought. Devitt (1989: 227-8, 231) does it in his account of informative identity statements. Forbes (1989; 1990: 538-45) uses the notion of a dossier associated to a name to specify the content of belief ascriptions. Jeshion (2010: 129, ff.) presents a new theory of singular

thought as thought from mental files. Friend (2011: spec. 194, 198, 200; forthcoming) appeals to mental files to explain the phenomenon of intersubjective identification of fictional characters within an ontologically irrealist framework. More authors have deployed the same metaphor more often than one might initially think.

It is remarkable, however, that while philosophers of mind and language have been very keen on deploying mental files they have never engaged in a serious investigation of their nature. This is until Oxford University Press published two books in 2012 that will establish the agenda for future research in this area. The first is François Recanati's *Mental Files*, which offers a rich and sophisticated theory of singular reference in language and thought focusing on mental files as the constituents of individual thinking. The second is Mark Sainsbury's and Michael Tye's *Seven Puzzles of Thought. And How to Solve Them: An Originalist Theory of Concepts*, which is an elegant, simple and quite natural theory of public and intersubjective concepts (one with which I am very sympathetic). There are three aspects of Recanati's theory that make it the perfect subject for a book symposium though. First, it is innovative in that it puts forward an original Neo-Fregean theory of singular reference in terms of mental files. Second, it is partially controversial, as it will become clear by reading the critical articles of this symposium. And third, as a consequence, it is in urgent need of clarification, which has been provided here by the author.

Recanati is one of the leading figures in contemporary philosophy of language. His contributions span from the theory of meaning, semantic content and truth conditions to the theory of pragmatic processes, from direct reference, empty singular terms and definite descriptions to speech act theory, from the theory of perspectival thought, relativism and contextualism to indirect discourse and quotation. The topic of his new book falls squarely within the philosophy of mind. But Recanati explicitly introduces his theory as a sequel to the one he elaborated in his *Direct Reference. From Language to Thought*, thus contributing to both the philosophy of mind and the philosophy of language. According to him, a mental file is like a singular term in the language of thought. It is a cognitive structure for the storage of information (or misinformation) that a subject takes to be about an external object. More specifically, it is a mode of presentation — a

Fregean *Sinn* — associated to a linguistic singular term and it is non-descriptive because its reference is determined relationally rather than satisfactionally. Modes of presentation determine the referent of the singular term to which they are associated, they account for its cognitive significance and for the clustering of information about the referent of the term. Furthermore, Recanati suggests that mental files (types) are individuated not through the information they contain, but through the type of epistemically rewarding relations that originate them. An epistemically rewarding relation is a relation of acquaintance (either past, present or, possibly, future) that a subject entertains with a certain object in a certain context and that allows to gain information from the object.

The book is divided into nine parts. In the first part Recanati argues against several varieties of Descriptivism and in favor of the mental file approach as an original Neo-Fregean version of Singularism — the view according to which we can think about individual objects directly (through some relation of acquaintance) or indirectly (via knowledge of some properties and relations that they might exemplify). The second part is dedicated to the introduction of the notion of mental files as non-descriptive modes of presentation and to the articulation of an account of identity judgments in terms of Perry's notion of linking as an operation on distinct files. Further discussion is dedicated to presumptions of identity, which are explained in terms of operations within a single file. The third part is dedicated to the full articulation of Recanati's original model of mental files as mental indexicals, i.e. cognitive particulars whose reference is determined through a contextually relevant relation of acquaintance and existing only as long as that relation holds. Further attention is dedicated to the introduction of more stable files with a longer life span such as the Self file based on the identity relation to oneself, the recognitional files based on a familiarity relation and the encyclopaedic files based on a purpose-tracking relation. In the fourth part Recanati introduces the notion of co-reference *de jure* — defined as a relation between two singular terms to the effect that anybody who understands a piece of discourse involving the two terms thereby knows that they co-refer — and he addresses several versions of different traditional objections. The fifth part consists in a critical discussion of the controversial aspects of *de jure* co-ref-

erence regarding factivity and epistemic transparency. In the sixth part Recanati claims that the traditional acquaintance constraint on singular thought should be theorized as a normative claim rather than as a factual claim, and this would allow him to countenance acquaintanceless singular thoughts. The seventh part focuses on attitude ascriptions and the meta-representational function of mental files as representations of how other speakers think about objects in the world. In the eighth part Recanati elaborates on the communication of singular thought and in particular on *de se* thoughts, indexical thoughts and cases of referentially used descriptions. The ninth part is dedicated to the articulation of the advantages of the mental files framework against its main competitors, including Perry's token reflexive account and Lewis's centered world framework.

The symposium includes seven critical discussions and Recanati's replies. In the first contribution Annalisa Coliva and Delia Belleri lead an organic discussion of what they see as some obscurities concerning the nature of mental files, the acquaintance constraint on singular thought and the origination of a file with no actual acquaintance to its referent, the notion of epistemic transparency and that of *de se* thought.

In the second contribution Keith Hall focuses on the nature and coherence of Recanati's acquaintance constraint on singular thought interpreted as a normative claim rather than a factual claim. Hall criticizes Recanati's replies to upholders of the idea that we have acquaintanceless singular thought and discusses the consequences of a loophole he individuates in Recanati's thesis according to which we can entertain a singular thought about an object with which we are not yet acquainted by introducing a descriptive name into public language.

In the third contribution Peter Pagin articulates a critical discussion of the connection between semantics and cognitive significance and individuates a few problems with Recanati's account. He recommends that we should distinguish between a linguistic expression and its semantic properties and criticizes Recanati's idea according to which mental files correspond both to the linguistic expression and to the cognitive significance of that expression.

In the fourth contribution Krista Lawlor critically assesses two objections that Recanati makes against Descriptivism, concerning

the communication of singular thought and the internalization of acquaintance relations promoted by certain sophisticated versions such as token reflexive accounts. She expresses the doubt that Recanati's own theory might fall prey to his own criticisms of the alternative descriptivist views.

In the fifth contribution David Papineau focuses on Recanati's indexical model of mental files and defends two theses. The first is that there is less indexicality in the mind than there is in language. The second is that mental files are more like names than like indexicals.

In the sixth contribution Thea Goodsell criticizes the way in which Recanati individuates mental files as typed by epistemically rewarding relations.

In the seventh and last critical contribution Manuel García-Carpintero surveys Perry's and Lewis's contrasting proposals about the interpretation of *de se* thoughts, Stalnaker's argument for an original version of the latter view and Recanati's take on it in *Mental Files*. He further argues that Recanati's (2007, 2009) Lewisian account of *de se* contents is in tension with the mental files approach to content-ingredients he has been developing in his work, including its full articulation in *Mental Files*.

The latter contribution to this symposium consists of Recanati's replies to his critics. In this occasion Recanati not only clarifies and better articulates many of the ideas he presented in the book, but further develops new and more radical hypotheses about the correct interpretation of the acquaintance constraint on singular thought, about the notion of singular reference and singular thought involved in discourse about fictional characters and in the use of descriptive names, about the indexical model of files and more.

I would like to thank the authors who accepted my invitation and elaborated their criticisms in a genuinely deep and rigorous way. And I would like to thank Recanati who immediately expressed his genuine enthusiasm for this symposium and who contributed a long piece containing some important clarification on his present proposal and on its possible future developments.

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