

The Reference Book, by John Hawthorne and David Manley. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2012, 280 pages. ISBN 9780199693672

John Hawthorne and David Manley wrote an excellent book on the many issues surrounding the twin notions of reference and singular thought. The book is divided into two parts corresponding to two main objectives. In Part I, which is titled “Against Acquaintance” and includes Chapters 1-3, they present a first case in favour of what they call *liberalism* — the view according to which neither reference nor singular thought are constrained by a special relation of acquaintance — and they consider and reject various arguments against it. In Part II, which is titled “Beyond Acquaintance” and includes Chapters 4-6, they challenge the current semantic rift between definite descriptions, indefinite descriptions, demonstratives and names. The hypothesis they defend is that specific indefinites, definite descriptions and demonstratives make the same contribution to truth-conditions while they differ in their presuppositional profile. Names, on the other hand, should be treated somewhat differently but their predicative uses and their referential uses would be strictly related. In the “Afterword” at the end of the book the authors recapitulate the main line of argument and expose some doubts on the very notion of reference and on the existence of linguistic expressions from natural language that are really referential.

Chapter 1 offers an introductory critical review of the central notions of reference, singular thought and acquaintance as they have been characterised in the contemporary debate. The authors survey the themes that are standardly associated with the notion of reference, including object-dependence, exhaustiveness, rigidity and the similarities between the semantic behaviour of referential terms and that of variables whose meaning is fixed relative to an assignment function. They further introduce the existent characterizations of singular thought in terms of singular content, mental files, and relational object-representations as opposed to satisfactional representations. And they distinguish two main notions of acquaintance in terms of discriminating knowledge, which they call *epistemic acquaintance*, and in terms of a causal relation to the object, which they call *causal acquaintance*. In section 1.6, titled “Should auld acquaintance be forgot?”, Hawthorne and Manley present a series of examples

of apparent singular thought without acquaintance, some of which have been originally put forward by anti-acquaintance champions such as Robin Jeshion (e.g. 'Ways of Taking a Meter', *Philosophical Studies* 99, 2000, 297-318). Liberalism emerges as an appealing view.

Chapter 2 challenges the causal notion of acquaintance by focusing on a principle the authors call *CONSTRAINT*: "To have a singular thought about an object, one must be acquainted with it" (37). They present and discharge two arguments in favour of this principle, i.e. what they call *the spy argument* and *the Neptune argument*. The spy argument, which deploys an example originally presented by David Kaplan ('Quantifying In', *Synthese* 19, 1968, 178-214), begins with the intuitive distinction between (1) and (2):

- (1) Ralph believes that at least one person is a spy.
- (2) There is one person whom Ralph believes to be a spy.

The explicit premise is that Ralph has only the general belief that there are spies, without suspecting anyone in particular. So, while (1) seems to be a correct report of Ralph's belief, (2) does not. Hawthorne and Manley explain this difference by introducing two further principles. The first, which they call *HARMONY*, says that: "Any belief report whose complement clause contains either a singular term or a variable bound from outside by an existential quantifier requires for its truth that the subject believe a singular proposition" (38). The second, which they call *SUFFICIENCY*, says that: "Believing a singular proposition about an object is sufficient for having a singular thought about it" (38). Acquaintance theorists can certainly accept both *HARMONY* and *SUFFICIENCY*, but they would explain the unacceptability of (2) by appealing to *CONSTRAINT*: since Ralph is not acquainted with any particular spy he could not believe of any specific person that she is a spy. But Hawthorne and Manley argue that *CONSTRAINT* is actually irrelevant. One only needs to observe that (2) attributes a singular belief to Ralph while the original premise was that Ralph only has a general belief that there are spies, which is in fact correctly reported by (1). This solution is really straightforward.

The Neptune argument involves Kripke's controversial notion of the contingent a priori. In the early 19th-century Urbain Le Verrier

postulated the existence of an unknown planet to explain the perturbations in the orbit of Uranus using only mathematics and astronomical observations. Kripke suggests that Le Verrier might have introduced the name ‘Neptune’ through an act of descriptive stipulative reference fixing as *the planet responsible for the observed perturbations in Uranus’ orbit*. It follows that Le Verrier could know that (3) was true,

- (3) If a unique planet is the perturber, it is Neptune.

and on the assumption that ‘Neptune’ is a genuine name contributing its referent to the proposition expressed by (3), Le Verrier would thereby have a piece of singular knowledge. Hawthorne and Manley agree with most defendants of CONSTRAINT that this outcome should be rejected, but again they do not believe that CONSTRAINT has any role to play in an explanation of why the outcome should be rejected. They consider four alternative replies to upholders of CONSTRAINT that they deem insufficient and then claim that even if CONSTRAINT was satisfied in some way (including magic!) this would not eliminate the impression that Le Verrier should not be able to achieve some piece of contingent knowledge by linguistic stipulation. The discussion of this case (and of similar ones) is very rich and it even includes a section on the possible sources of confusion that might generate the notion of the contingent a priori. However, eventually the authors do not offer any explanation of why such a notion is puzzling. What they find puzzling is that the Neptune case and those similar to it “involve epistemic advance due to a kind of semantic good fortune that might seem like it should be irrelevant to one’s stock of knowledge” (64). This is the criticism that upholders of CONSTRAINT make against theories that do not impose any acquaintance constraint on reference and singular thought (see, e.g. Scott Soames, *Philosophical Analysis in the Twentieth Century*, Vol. 2, Princeton 2003, 397-422). However, once we reject CONSTRAINT, what would be really puzzling about the contingent a priori? Why could one not gain a new piece of knowledge by linguistic stipulation? The Neptune argument is not complete unless such an explanation is offered. And one might suspect that since knowledge of contingent truths typically involves some kind of empirical (and so possibly causal) relation to the world, some notion of acquaintance

will be needed to explain what is really puzzling about acquiring a priori knowledge of contingent truths.

Chapter 3 challenges the two paradigmatic versions of the epistemic notion of acquaintance according to which being acquainted with an object means possessing discriminating knowledge of it or knowing that the object exists. The first version has been originally put forward by Gareth Evans (*The Varieties of Reference*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982) and is inspired by Russell's principle: "To have a singular thought about an object, one must know which object one is thinking about" (71). Hawthorne and Manley distinguish between the ordinary notion of discriminating knowledge and the theory-laden notion put forward by Evans. They focus on the latter and belabour on six reasons why one should be sceptical of it. They then move to discuss two versions of epistemic acquaintance as knowledge of existence and discharge them on the basis of considerations about the safety-theoretic consequences of knowledge and the connection between understanding and knowledge. This chapter offers an excellent critical discussion of the options available to proponents of an epistemic acquaintance constraint on singular thought and of the specific reasons why one should reject it.

Chapter 4 analyses the linguistic phenomenon of specific indefinites. For example, someone might utter (4) to talk about a specific individual, say Maria, in a context in which some friends are present and some other friends are absent:

(4) A friend of mine is absent.

Intuitively, the truth of (4) depends only on whether Maria is present or absent. An even clearer case would involve the modifier 'certain' as when, say, David utters (5) about his daughter Mary:

(5) A certain person is unhappy.

Hawthorne and Manley belabour on three alternative analyses of specific indefinites. According to the *bifurcated view*, indefinite descriptions are ambiguous between a quantifier interpretation and a referential interpretation corresponding to a non-specific use and to a specific use respectively. A non-specific use of an indefinite descrip-

tion ‘an F ’ contributes an existential phrase and the property F to the proposition expressed by a sentence containing it. A specific use of the same indefinite description contributes the individual the speaker intends to talk about, but if there is no individual satisfying the description then the indefinite will contribute nothing. According to the *simple view*, there is no difference in truth-conditional content between specific and non-specific uses of indefinites but different contents can be conveyed through pragmatic mechanisms. According to the *domain restriction* view inspired by Roger Schwarzschild (‘Singleton Indefinites’, *Journal of Semantics* 19, 2002, 289-314), specific uses and non-specific uses of indefinites are given a quantificational analysis but a specific use involves the semantic mechanisms of quantifier domain restriction. This is the option preferred by Hawthorne and Manley. A quantifier domain restrictor is a property determined by an overt noun, e.g. ‘person’ in (5), in combination with some covert material. The combination of the overt predicate and the covert material is called the *restrictor* and the property they combine to express is called the *restrictor property*. The extension of the restrictor at a world is given by the intersection of the extension of the property expressed by the overt predicate and the property expressed by the implicit material. A restrictor with a singleton extension is called a *singleton restrictor*. Hawthorne and Manley claim that specific indefinites involve a specific class of covert quantifier domain restrictors that they call *specific restrictors*. These can be *non-rigid*, i.e. they determine a different individual at each different world, or they can be *rigid*, i.e. they determine the same individual at all possible worlds where that object exists. A non-rigid restrictor might contribute a qualitative property such as *being David’s oldest daughter*. A rigid restrictor might contribute a property such as *being identical to Mary*, which is the authors’ preferred solution, or a rigidified property such as *being David’s actual oldest daughter*, which the authors reject because it might generate the wrong truth conditions. In the latter case the speaker might intend to talk about a specific individual but the covert material would pick out somebody else entirely or, possibly, nobody. The authors further distinguish between *candid restrictions*, which are accessible to an audience, and *coy restrictions*, which are often private and not immediately accessible to the audience. Specific indefinites usually involve coy restrictions.

Hawthorne and Manley criticise the bifurcated view and the simple view on different grounds, but ultimately they do not give (and do not intend to give) any knock down argument against them. One problem that they mention for the domain restrictor view concerns the notion of understanding that they put forward. So, for example, since covert restrictors are part of the semantic content of (4) and (5) but they are not immediately accessible to the audience it remains to be explained how one can fully understand what they express. The explanation of understanding that they offer in section 4.8, which is titled “Acquaintance again”, is merely sketched, but it involves a modified version of Kripke’s notion of communication chain through which the referent of a name is transmitted from speaker to speaker. As they write: “It is indeed quite true that our ability to think and talk about a particular object often proceeds thanks to engagement with other members of a linguistic community who in turn have that ability thanks to further engagements of that sort, and so on; and where ultimately the chain of inheritance is anchored by some individual who thinks and talks about an object via direct encounter with that object (or its traces).” (138). The authors modify Kripke’s original proposal in claiming that this picture can work independently from whether we use a name or, say, a specific indefinite (which is certainly correct) and that it can be stated independently of the notion of acquaintance. The main problem of this explanation of understanding is that ultimately Hawthorne and Manley seem to fall back into deploying the notion of acquaintance when they appeal to the *direct encounter* with the object that is at the origin of the chain of reference transmission. A direct encounter is nothing less than the direct perception of an object, which is a paradigmatic case of causal acquaintance. Furthermore, according to Kripke’s original account, the transmission of this original causal relation to the object at the origin of the practice is what guarantees that speakers participate in the same communication chain, and hence that they think and talk about the same object. Hawthorne and Manley should articulate this idea in a way that does not (even implicitly) appeal to the notion of acquaintance, but unless they do this they cannot claim to have offered an account of how we understand specific indefinites.

In Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 the authors extend their proposal to definite descriptions, demonstratives, nouns and proper names.

In particular, they suggest that while specific indefinites imply coy restrictors definite descriptions typically (although not always) imply candid restrictors. Developing on previous work done especially by Jeffrey King (*Complex Demonstratives*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), Hawthorne and Manley extend the domain restriction view to complex and simple demonstratives. In section 6.3, titled “Salience”, they argue that the use of a demonstrative is different from that of a definite description in that the former relies on supplemental salient information helping the audience in identifying the object. The authors focus on the view that proper names are predicates, and consider two further views, what they call the *bifurcated view* and the *minimal view*. According to the predicate view, a proper name contributes a property to truth-conditional content. According to the bifurcated view, it contributes a predicate to the presupposition set and an individual to truth-conditional content. According to the minimal view, the truth conditional contribution involves a covert existential and a singular restrictor. In the end the authors tend to reject the predicate view and favour the other two, although they do not decide on either. This last chapter is as rich in details as the others, but its argumentation is mostly explorative and its conclusions are merely tentative.

The book is very well written, its style is engaging and the discussion extends to cover some of the most central issues surrounding the notion of reference and singular thought in an innovative and original way. The authors offer an excellent critical discussion of the options available to proponents of an acquaintance constraint on singular thought and reference and of the specific reasons why one should reject it. But some aspects of their original proposal are still open to further improvement and in the end one might suspect that the authors have not really emancipated themselves from even the weakest notion of causal acquaintance. The linguistic analysis of indefinites, definite descriptions, demonstratives and names is extremely rich and almost complete. On a conclusive remark though, one might wonder about the special case of non-referring names (such as fictional names, mythical names and names of false scientific posits) and how they should be treated within this framework. Hawthorne and Manley’s account is still open to further interesting developments.

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