Singular Beliefs and their Ascriptions

1. Preliminaries

This essay defends three interlocking claims about singular beliefs and their ascriptions. The first is a claim about the nature of such beliefs; the second is a claim about the semantic contents of ascriptions of such beliefs; the third is a claim about the pragmatic significance of such ascriptions. With respect to the nature of singular belief, I claim that the contents of our singular beliefs are a joint product of mind and world, with neither mind nor world enjoying any peculiar priority over the other in the constitution of content. This view amounts to a rejection of the priority of so-called narrow or notional content over wide or referential content for singular beliefs. About the semantics of ascriptions of singular belief, I claim that such ascriptions ascribe what I call predicative doxastic commitments and nothing more. In particular, I will argue that to ascribe a predicative commitment is merely to say what property is being predicated by she who undertakes the relevant commitment to what object. My view has the consequence that ascriptions of singular beliefs typically do not either semantically specify or pragmatically implicate the modes of presentations, notions, or conceptions via which the ascribee cognizes the objects and properties relative to which she undertakes predicative commitments. To be sure, many maintain that at least one class of belief ascriptions -- so called de dicto ascriptions -- do specify either directly or indirectly both what the ascribee believes and how she believes it by putting at semantic issue, via the mechanism of embedding, the notions, conceptions, modes of presentation or the like, via which the ascribee cognizes doxastically relevant objects and properties. I argue, to the contrary, that in the general case, embedding functions neither directly nor indirectly to put notions and their ilk at semantic issue. Indeed, I shall argue that the primary mechanism for putting notions and their ilk at semantic issue is a certain variety of de re ascriptions -- what I call fulsomely de re ascriptions.

2. Belief Content as the Joint Product of Mind and World

I take singular believing to be the undertaking of singular predicative commitments. A cognizer undertakes a singular predicative commitment by taking an object to have a certain property or to stand in
certain relations. To believe that George W. Bush is the current U.S. President, on this approach, is to undertake a commitment to the effect that George Bush has the property of being the current U.S. President. Now the undertaking of a predicative commitment is an inner occurrence, involving a play of inner mental representations, of such a nature as to ultimately constitute the deployment of a structure of concepts in an episode of (singular) believing. But to characterize a state of mind as the undertaking of a predicative commitment is to speak in quasi-normative terms and is not yet to speak in brutally causal cum psychological terms. One who undertakes a predicative commitment thereby becomes liable to normative evaluation as, for example, rational or irrational, correct or incorrect. Of course, if naturalism is true then the normative story we tell about belief qua undertaking of a commitment and the consequent liability to normative assessment must ultimately mesh with a causal cum psychological story about the inner play of representations. But only confusion and error results if we move prematurely from the normative story about content and commitment to the causal cum psychological story about the play of inner representations. Both the functionalist and the psychologized Fregean from Essay IV exhibit such hastiness. In effect, each attempts to reconstruct similarities and differences of content as similarities and differences of causal role or power. The functionalist about content quite explicitly appeals to fine-grained differences in syndromes of typical causes and effects. The psychologized Fregean, on the other hand, appeals to of fine-grained sameness and difference of modes of presentation and the role of these in the cognitive dynamics of rational mental life. The psychologized Fregean approach ends up positing an intractable plethora of belief contents while functionalism about content leads, almost inevitably, to an unsustainable holism.

But sameness and difference of commitment undertaken do not map neatly onto sameness and differences of causal role or power. One who undertakes a commitment may fail to live up to the consequences of that undertaking. A cognizer who undertakes a predicative commitment to George Bush’s being the current U.S. President may, for example, commit herself to certain further inferences and beliefs without ever actually drawing the relevant inferences or adopting the relevant beliefs. If one undertakes a predicative commitment to George W. Bush’s being the current President and one also undertakes a commitment to George W. Bush’s being the eldest child of George H.W. and Barbara Bush one is arguably committed to believing that the eldest child of George H. W. and Barbara Bush is the current U.S.
president. One may, however, be rationally committed to such a belief and yet fail to adopt that belief. The failure to adopt what one is rationally committed to believing is surely plausibly seen as a form of less than perfect rationality, if not outright irrationality. Since, however, imperfect rationality is an ever present psychological reality for creatures like ourselves, we cannot straight-forwardly map sameness and difference of commitments undertaken to sameness and difference of causal role.

A second and arguably more fundamental reason why sameness and difference of commitment undertaken does not map neatly onto sameness and difference of causal role rests on the fact that even a fully rational cognizer may undertake what I call metaphysically conflicting or incompatible commitments. Smith may, for example, simultaneously believe that Hesperus is rising and that Phosphorus is not rising. In so believing, Smith has undertaken simultaneous commitments to one and the same object both having and lacking one and the same property. Since there is no metaphysically possible world in which one and the same object can both have and lack the same property, there is no metaphysically possible world in which Smith’s commitments can be made good simultaneously.

Now there are those who take the very possibility that a rational cognizer can simultaneously believe that Hesperus is rising and disbelieve that Phosphorus is rising as sufficient reason to distinguish the potential thought content that Hesperus is rising from the potential thought content that Phosphorus is rising. In making such a distinction, even while conceding that it is metaphysically necessary that the rising of Hesperus is the rising of Phosphorus again, such thinkers are at least tacitly endorsing a distinction between what we might call worldly, metaphysical, referential or wide content, on the one hand, and what we might call rational, epistemic, notional, or narrow content, on the other. To a first approximation, the worldly or referential content of a belief is supposed to be a matter of what predicative commitments are undertaken with respect to which actual existents in the world. Rational or notional content, on the other hand, is supposed to be a matter only of how things are by the cognizing subject’s own inner lights. It is widely assumed that rational or notional content does, but metaphysical or referential content need not satisfy the following difference principle:

If a rational cognizer simultaneously believes thought content C and either disbelieves C’ or believes not C’, then C and C’ are distinct thought contents.
Many thinkers, especially those who have been deeply influenced by Frege, take something akin to rational or notional content to be prior to or more fundamental than metaphysical or referential content in a number of different ways. Rational or notional contents have been claimed, for example, to be intrinsic and causally relevant, where metaphysical contents have been said to be extrinsic and epiphenomenal. Moreover, rational belief contents are sometimes thought to stand between the believer, on the one side, and the objects which the believer somehow cognizes via them, on the other. It as if the believer manages to have de re beliefs about the objects only by having de dicto beliefs not intrinsically and directly bound up with the objects. On this way of looking at matters, rational contents are not directly constituted out of the objects, but at best out of the cognizing subject’s means of apprehending the objects.1 Though this Frege-inspired approach to belief content is as venerable as it is ancient, it could not, I think, be more mistaken. At least in the case of singular beliefs, the Fregean tradition has gotten its priorities mostly wrong. For singular beliefs, if not for beliefs in general, referential or worldly content is in no sense posterior to rational content. Indeed, there are good, though perhaps not conclusive reasons for doubting the very existence of an inner realm of intrinsic rational contents which somehow intervene between the cognizer and the objects with respect to which she undertakes predicative commitments. Belief content is a joint product of mind and world, with neither that which lies on the side of the subject nor that which lies on the side of the objects enjoying any peculiar priority over the other.

To deny that there is an inner realm of intrinsic rational content which is somehow prior to an extrinsic realm of metaphysical or referential content is not to deny that there is a significant story to tell about the inner psychology of believing. Nor is it to deny that that story is best told in the idiom of inner representations. An analogy with seeing may help. Objects seen are mostly objects in the world. Nonetheless, there is a rich computational cum psychological story to tell about how we accomplish that feat. That inner computational cum psychological story is well told in representational and not in merely brutally causal terms. But for all that, it does not follow that every episode of successful seeing has an intrinsic “narrow” content and an extrinsic “wide” content such that the narrow content somehow intervenes between the seer and the thing seen.

1 To be sure, this Frege inspired tradition has been warped and stretched at the hands of many able philosophers.
There are such things as hallucinations in which we seem to see what we are not actually seeing. The standing (epistemic) possibility that we are always hallucinating lends a certain lure to a kind of open question argument for the primacy of narrow content. If we never can be certain that we actually see what we seem to see, it would seem to follow that we can never know by mere introspection whether an apparent episode of seeing is a mere hallucination or a successful act of seeing. If we add the premise that we can know the contents of our perceptions by mere introspection, then it may seem to follow that such contents as we do know by mere introspection must leave it an open question whether we are seeing or merely seeming to see. But it is precisely narrow contents which would leave the question open. If some form of perceptual content is knowable through introspection alone, it must be narrow contents that are so knowable. By parity of reasoning, it might be thought, the same must hold for the contents of our beliefs. Presumably, introspective awareness gives us access to the contents of our beliefs. Since introspective awareness alone is powerless to reveal whether our thoughts make contact with any actual existents, introspective awareness must leave it an open question whether those contents are object-involving. But that question can remain open only if the thought contents that are introspectively accessible to us are narrow rather than wide.

I am prepared to bite a bullet here because I do not think it is a very explosive one. I need only deny that we are aware of the contents of our thoughts merely through introspective awareness, at least if by introspection one means a direct inward gaze that yields immediate and incorrigible access to the contents of our thought. There is, I think, no good reason to suppose that there is any such cognitive faculty or that either awareness of thought content or awareness of the self in general is the achievement of such a faculty.\(^2\) Knowledge of self, and knowledge of the contents of our thoughts along with it, are mostly mediate and corrigible rather than immediate and incorrigible. At least from a phenomenological perspective, awareness of oneself is evidently simultaneous with and not prior to awareness of oneself as a being in the world, as one being among others. Similarly, awareness of the contents of one’s inner representings is simultaneous with awareness of one’s inner representings as bound down to external existents. To be sure, mere phenomenology does not settle the issue. So there is a substantive story to tell.

\(^2\) Indeed, there are very good reasons to suppose that awareness of the self is neither immediate nor incorrigible.
about the conditions of the very possibility of the simultaneous awareness of self and world. I do not pretend to offer the details of such a story here. My present point is only that we should not be moved by open question arguments like the one gestured at above to deny the coherence and plausibility of a story along the suggested lines. If such a story is coherent and plausible, open question arguments are insufficient to support the bifurcation of content into intrinsic rational or notional content and extrinsic referential or metaphysical content.

Though I do not pretend to tell the full story here of the joint constitution of content by mind and world, I hasten to stress that I do not side with anti-representationalists of various stripes, who afford no role to the supposed subconscious and subdoxastic representational innards of the cognitive and conscious mind in explaining the achievement of thought content. Indeed, crucial to the psychological story I endorse about believing is a commitment to a version of the language of thought hypothesis about the nature of the inner play of representation that makes singular believing possible. Here I follow Jerry Fodor, as well as a host of others -- including, arguably, Frege himself -- in holding that the language of thought hypothesis best explains the productivity and systematicity of our thought. Thought episodes are constituted by tokenings of inner mental representations with sentence-like structures and roles. In particular, episodes of singular believing involve the deployment of name-like, indexical-like, or demonstrative-like mental representations in syntactic construction with predicate and verb-like inner representations. When I say that an inner mental representation is “name-like” I mean that it has, in the realm of thinking, syntactic and semantic roles similar in kind to the semantic and syntactic roles which are definitive of the public language category NAME. For example, I argued in Essay I that at the lexical-syntactic level the linguistic category NAME is partially defined by the twin properties of referential independence of type-distinct name tokens and explicit co-referentiality of co-typical names tokens. Correlatively, I claim, there must be a class of mental representations which function in thought as devices of explicit co-reference in the de facto private language of thought. Without such devices, another kind of question would always be open. In particular, it would always be an open question for the individual cognizer whether, in thinking of now a particular $o$ and now a particular $o'$, she has thought of two distinct objects or has thought of the same object twice. Though it may sometimes, perhaps even often, be an open question for a cognizer whether two of her thought episodes share a (putative) subject matter, it is
surely not always an open question. I can think of Kiyoshi today and think of Kiyoshi again tomorrow with a kind of inner assurance that I at least purport to think of the same person twice. Indeed, the ability to think token distinct thoughts which bear what I will call the same-purport relation to each other is arguably fundamental to the objective character of our thought. If no two thoughts purported to be about the same object, then in thinking any new thought, it would be as if one were thinking about an object never previously cognized. The cognizing subject would have, at best, a fleeting cognitive hold on the objects. She could not, for example, remember today what she believed yesterday. She could not anticipate in thought future encounters with a currently perceptually salient object, as least not as encounters with that very object again. Indeed, it is arguable that a mind in which no two thoughts same-purport altogether lacks any cognitive hold on objects.

I claim that our ability to deploy in thought various devices of explicit co-reference, devices such that to think with them again is to purport to think of the same object again, is a central source of our capacity for same-purporting thought. Name-like mental representations are but one such device. There are no doubt others -- including an internal correlate of linguistic anaphora and dedicated representations of the self such that to think with them again is ipso facto to purport to think of oneself again.

Kant was perhaps the first to maintain that there is a constitutive connection between the objective character of our thought and our capacity for thinking with purport of sameness. He famously held that our cognitive hold on objects rests on two fundamental powers of mind: what he called receptivity and what he called spontaneity. Receptivity he took to be a merely passive power to be “affected” -- presumably causally (though Kant’s official doctrine makes this something of a mystery) -- both by that which is “external” to the mind and by the mind’s own operations. Spontaneity, on the other hand, he took to be an active mental power for “combining” lower (sensible) representations under “higher” conceptual representations. Now Kant took the given of sensation to be a punctate manifold of disunited qualities. That is, he held that in the mere succession of sensible qualities there are no intrinsic marks of same-purport. No element of the manifold is given, for example, as belonging together with any other element of the manifold in any cognition of any object. In particular, there are no intrinsic marks that relates any given sensible contents together as representations of co-existent states of a single underlying substance, nothing that marks any two qualities as being connected as cause and effect. The given stream
is, rather, an ever-evolving and inexhaustible array of disunited qualities, rushing in upon sensibility one after another, without intrinsically demanding to be combined, conceptualized and categorized in this way rather than that. As he put it:

“...the combination of a manifold [of qualities] in general can never come to us through the senses...” (Kant, 1968, p. 151).

Now Kant denied that the mere inward rush of sensation upon the shores of receptivity already amounts to cognition of an objective order. On his view, only by conceptualizing the world, that is, by taking the deliverances of sensibility up into a unified consciousness -- and that by “running through” and “synthesizing” them in accordance with the categories of the understanding -- do we achieve cognition of an objective order. Kant’s dark, but suggestive notion of synthesis is central to his views about same-purport. Synthesis is precisely, for Kant, that combinatorial power of the understanding by which it gives rise to representations which same-purport with one another. On this picture, the understanding takes as input disconnected elements of a punctate sensory stream and “unites” them via synthesis under categorically grounded conceptual representations in such a way that they are marked as belonging together. It is precisely by deploying synthetically unified conceptual representations that we are able to think in same-purporting ways about substances and their properties. As he puts it:

…insofar as they are to relate to an object our cognitions must … have that unity that constitutes the concept of an object.

About “that unity which constitutes the concept of any object” he says:

….we cognize the object if we have effected synthetic unity in the manifold of intuition. But this is impossible if the intuition could not have been produced through a function of synthesis in accordance which a rule that makes the reproduction of the manifold necessary a priori and a concept in which this manifold is united possible.

Kant is surely correct to maintain that the capacity to think in same-purporting ways is partly determinative of the objective character of our thought. But to accept this claim is not to accept Kant’s peculiar account of the source and nature of that capacity. Indeed, Kant’s dark doctrine of synthesis seems to me to introduce nearly as many problems as it purports to solve. Kant plausibly believed, for example, that same-purporting is inextricably tied up with the deployment of concepts. But he held that concepts are
always general and never singular. While this bundle of views promises to deliver an explanation of the possibility of judgments to the effect that one is presented with an instance of horse again, say, it does not obviously promise an explanation of our capacity to think with same-purport about individuals. Indeed, since singular representations are one and all sensible and/or intuitive and, therefore, by his lights, non-conceptual and non-discursive, it would seem to follow that singularity is the business of perception and experience not of judgment and thought. But if that is right, it is at least puzzling how singular thoughts are even possible on Kant’s view.

Moreover, Kant seemed to believe that thoughts that same-purport are guaranteed to actually be about the same object. Indeed, such a view seems a nearly inevitable outgrowth of Kant’s misguided transcendental idealism, according to which the objects of our (empirical) cognition lack any mind-independent existence. In fact, it would not, I think, be too far a stretch to say that transcendental idealism just is or at least strongly entails the view that objects as such are nothing but either constructions out of or projections from relations of same-purport among some epistemically privileged class of judgments -- roughly those judgements we would arrive at upon the completion, were it possible, of the system of nature.

But as long as we have not attained omniscience, the view that thoughts which same-purport with one another are guaranteed to be about the same object cannot be entirely and unambiguously correct. For one thing, same-purporting thoughts need not be about any object at all. Santa Claus-thoughts, as we might call them, one and all same-purport with one another, but they are about no object. More fundamentally, a cognizer may encounter a particular object but mistake it for another. I may, for example, encounter Joelle but mistake her for her twin sister Marie. In such a context, I may deploy an inner token of ‘Marie’ in thinking about the girl I encounter. In that case, my thought will same-purport with many earlier thoughts about Marie. But there is also an intuitively clear sense in which my thought can be said to be

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3 In complete fairness, I should say Kant can plausibly be credited with some recognition of this fact. Witness in this connection his distinction between merely thinking an object and cognizing an object. In full blown cognition of an object, there must be both a given intuitive element and a formal conceptual element. In bare thought, devoid of intuitive content, we have, he claims, merely “empty concepts of objects, through which we cannot even judge whether the latter are possible or not -- mere forms of thought without objective validity.” Here Kant anticipate the possibility of same-purport in the absence of reference to any object at all. Same purport in the absence of reference amounts to what I have called objectuality without objectivity, referential fitness without referential success.
about Joelle -- even if it is and purports to be about Marie as well. Clearly, however, despite the fact that there is a sense in which my thought is about Joelle, it does not same-purport with my earlier thoughts about Joelle. I am in a divided mental state. I am confusedly thinking, via a tokening of an inner ‘Marie,’ with respect to that very person now in front of me, who happens to be Joelle, that she is a promising young tennis player. I am, in effect, thinking of Joelle as Marie, thinking of Joelle with what we might call Marie-purport. If my confused thought has at least as much claim to be about Joelle as it does to be about Marie, it follows that it is not necessarily and unambiguously the case that same-purporting thoughts succeed in being purely and simply about one and the same external object.

The very fact that an internal assurance of same-purport does not yet constitute an external guarantee of actual co-reference lends, I think, additional credence to the view that the contents of our singular thoughts are joint products of mind and world. Though the inner purport of our thoughts is arguably an entirely one-sided affair, lying entirely on the side of the cognizing subject, the mind cannot, on its own, guarantee that its representations are coherently bound down to outer objects. All that can be guaranteed on the side of the subject alone is that the subject’s inner representations be the objectual or referentially fit, as I called in Essay VI, not that those representations be what I call objective or referentially successful. Recall that a representation is objectual or referentially fit if it is (syntactically) fit for the job of standing for an object. To a first approximation, expressions which are fit for the job of standing for an object, are those that can well-formedly flank the identity sign, that can well-formedly occupy the argument places of verbs, and that can well-formedly serve as links of various sorts in anaphoric chains of various sorts. Names, demonstratives, indexicals, variables, and pronouns are the paradigmatic examples. Referential fitness must be sharply distinguished from referential success. A representation can be referentially fit without actually standing for an object, without, that is, being referentially successful. Representations which are referentially fit, but not referentially successful, are objectual without being objective.

I grant, again, that an adequate theory of referential content must show how that gap between the merely objectual or referentially fit and the fully objective or referentially successful is bridged. Elsewhere, I defend at some length a two-factor theory of the constitution of referential content. According to that theory, on the side of the representations themselves, there are the quasi-syntactic factors that make for
referential fitness. But there is also a contribution to be made by extra-representational causal factors. A fully successful theory will explain just how and why referential fitness and causation jointly suffice to constitute referential content.

Like Kant, Frege too believed that the capacity to think in same-purporting ways is central to our capacity to make cognitive contact with objects. He offered two different theories of same-purport. In the *Foundations of Arithmetic* in the course of trying to spell out what the epistemic givenness of number consists in he claims that:

> If we are to use the sign $a$ to signify an object, we must have a criterion for deciding in all cases whether $b$ is the same as $a$, even if it is not always in our power to apply this criterion.

The central thought seems to be that an identity statement expresses what is contained in a recognition judgment -- a judgment to the effect that one has been given the same object again. Frege’s further thought is apparently that we have succeeded in using a sign to designate a determinate object just in case we have fixed a significance for each identity statement in which a given singular term may occur. We thereby specify, according to Frege, what it is for any two terms to (correctly) purport to stand for the same object. This approach promises to allow for the epistemic givenness of numbers, despite the fact that we have, as Frege says, neither “ideas” nor (sensory) “intuitions” of them. Numbers are given to us through the use of singular terms. Indeed, Frege seems to endorse the perfectly general claim that the concept of an object in general, as Kant might have put it, is nothing but the concept of that which is given through the use of a singular term. Just as Kant believed that objects are nothing but constructions out of or projections from relations of same-purport among our thoughts, so Frege seems to believe that objects are nothing but the shadows cast by the uses of singular terms, paradigmatically in identity statements.

In its mere recognition that distinctively singular representations have a central role in our cognition of objects, even Frege’s early views already represent a distinctive advance over Kant.\(^4\) Strikingly, though, the early Frege evidently failed to grasp the need to distinguish the mere purport of sameness from success at referring to the same again. Indeed, he denied even the possibility of same-

\(^4\) It is fair to point out, however, that in apparently elevating the singular to a distinctive category, Frege may merely be harkening back to philosophical wisdom of an earlier day.
purporting singular representations which entirely lack any reference. Though he explicitly admits that there are concepts under which no object falls and admits that there are perfectly meaningful general or concept terms and phrases which express such empty concept, he claims that a (complex) singular term formed from an “empty” phrase by adjoining the definite article -- as in, ‘the largest proper fraction’ -- is “without content” and “senseless.” But terms which are “senseless” and “without content” would seem to be entirely devoid of referential purport.

To be sure, with the eventual emergence of the distinction between sense and reference, Frege does acquire the resources to make something like the distinction I am after. Armed with that distinction, he can allow that there are fully “contentful” singular terms which, nonetheless, stand for no objects. He can allow, that is to say, that expressions which fail to refer can have, nonetheless, fully determinate referential purport. More importantly, Frege can now say both that expressions which share a sense, share referential purport, even if they entirely lack a reference, and that expressions which differ in sense differ in referential purport, even if they do share a reference. Sharing referential purport is not yet sharing a reference -- because of the possibility of sense-having, non-referring names. Sharing reference is not yet sharing referential purport -- because of the possibility of co-referring names which differ in sense.

Frege’s doctrine of sense is not without its problems. One particularly unfortunate ingredient of Frege’s view was his apparent commitment to the view that there is an interesting and robust sense in which sense “determines” reference. Because of that commitment, Frege lacks a straight-forward way to accommodate the fact that thoughts which same-purport need not necessarily and unambiguously succeed in being about one and the same object. Frege was no transcendental idealist. Indeed, his view that the same object can be thought and cognized again in independent ways -- that is, in ways that do not purport to present the same object again -- is deeply at odds with the spirit of transcendental idealism. Still, on at least one way of reading Frege’s views about the relation between sense and reference, there remains a faint whiff of an idealism of a more modest sort. Suppose that sense determines reference by determining what something has to be in order to count as a certain thing. Suppose for example that there is a sense or mode of presentation <HES> such that as a matter of a priori necessity that all and only that which “satisfies” or answers to <HES> is Hesperus. To say that it is matter of a priori necessity that all and only
that which answers to <HES> is Hesperus is just to say that <HES> determines what we might call a constitutive nature or essence.

Frege is no idealist about the existence of objects. Nor is he an idealist about the actual having of determinate constitutive natures by existent objects. Nothing in Frege’s views prevents these from being entirely mind-independent matters, at least not in the general case. What is arguably not an entirely mind-independent matter from Frege’s perspective is the standing of constitutive natures as constitutive natures. If we are asked in virtue of what the alleged a priori necessities obtain, there seem to be two options -- both unattractive -- available to the Fregean. On the one hand, he can say that the standing of a constitutive nature as a constitutive nature depends on mind-independent facts about a realm of Platonic ideas or the like. But this option just leaves our ability to know which are the constitutive natures an utter and irreducible mystery. Alternatively, he can attempt to tie standing as a constitutive nature to facts about the cognitive role of modes of presentation in a rational mental life. Though Frege did explicitly locate senses in a third quasi-Platonic realm, he also ties senses directly to our cognitive cum rational powers. Indeed given his endorsement of a Cognitive Criterion of Difference for senses, there can, I think, be little doubt that at least the individuation of senses is tied up, in Frege’s mind, with sameness and difference of role in the cognitive dynamics of the rational mind. This makes it a short and not entirely implausible step to the conclusion that the standing of senses as determiners of constitutive natures must itself ultimately rests on facts about the role senses play as cognitive instruments in the minds of rational cognizers.

Now it is not my aim to conclusively established that Frege was an idealist about the standing of constitutive natures as constitutive natures. He is silent on too many important questions to permit a conclusive argument on this score. For example, he never spells out in detail just what the “determining” relation between sense and reference could be. Indeed, he seems hardly to be troubled by the question of just how possibly something that lies, as it were, entirely on the side of the cognizing subject (as, on one construal a mode of presentation must) determines that which lies on the side of the world. So teasing out of his writings a determinate doctrine of just what it is for sense to determine reference is, to say the least, a challenge. Fortunately, however, since I appeal to the views herein tentatively attributed to Frege mainly as a foil with which to compare and contrast my own views, it doesn’t much matter for my purposes if I have gotten Frege entirely right. Though I do take my reading of Frege to have a high degree of
plausibility, nothing much turns on the exact degree. The crucial point is that the approach to singular beliefs and their ascriptions on offer in this essay is radically at odds with the approach which I discern -- rightly or wrongly -- in Frege. My approach affords no role to anything like Fregean modes of presentations of particulars as either constituents of singular beliefs, reference determiners, or the referents of embedded singular terms. Where Frege takes thought content to be, in a sense, a one-sided affair, determined entirely on the side of the thinking subject and the modes of presentation via which the thinker makes cognitive contact with the world, I take thought content to be a joint product of mind and world. It is only by being already related to objects in the world that the minds inner representations come to be contentful at all.

Despite the thoroughly anti-Fregean cast of my central claims, I hasten to acknowledge that I follow Frege, and Kant before him, in taking the capacity to think in same-purporting ways to be central to the objective character of our thoughts, especially of our singular thoughts. Though neither Kantian synthesis nor Fregean senses play any role in explaining the ultimate source of that capacity, I share Frege’s view that any adequate theory of the objective representational content of our thought must explain the difference between merely thinking of the same object again, without any inner purport of sameness, and thinking of the same object again with an inner purport of sameness. But what Frege sought to explain by appeal to semantic notions, like the distinction between sense and reference, I explain by appeal to the logical-syntax of the language of thought. It is not, as Frege imagined, that each name is associated with a determinate and independent mode of presentation of its referent such that names which co-refer may, nonetheless, present that referent to the thinking subject in two different ways such that it cannot be determined a priori that they share a reference. Rather, it is just that distinct names are ipso facto referentially independent, even if they are coincidentally co-referential. For names are quite distinctive linguistic devices. To repeat a name is ipso facto to purport to repeat a reference. To refer again to the same object, but using a different name is, in effect, to refer de novo to the relevant object, that is, in a way not “anaphorically” linked with the previous act of reference.

3. On the Incredibility of Merely Notional Contents
I have argued that singular belief content is worldly or referential rather than merely notional or rational and as such is the joint product of mind and world. But it must be admitted that we do at least seem to have beliefs with singular purport even in the absence of cognitive commerce with any actual existent. It may seem to follow that at least some singular beliefs – those which we may have in the absence of cognitive commerce with any actual existent -- have merely notional or rational content. In this section, I take issue with that conclusion. In particular, though I allow that there are attitudes whose contents are merely notional, I shall argue that strictly speaking full-fledge belief is not one among such attitudes. My argument for this claim turns on the intuition that beliefs are essentially individuated by their truth conditions. Where there are not yet truth conditions, there is not yet belief. Now the truth conditions of a singular belief derive from the singular predicative commitments undertaken in the having of that belief. An episode of singular believing is thus essentially a matter of taking a particular -- an actual existent -- to have a certain property. It is of the very essence of singular believing, that is, that the believer takes some actual existent to have some property or other. In the absence of an actual existent with respect to which the believer undertakes a predicative commitment there is no yet anything that can be properly characterized as a belief at all.

Now I concede up front that just as there are apparent acts of seeing which are not actual acts of seeing so there are apparent episodes of believing, which enjoy a certain illusory feel of successful believing, but which fail to stake out any claim about any actual existent. Consider, for example, the apparent belief that Pegasus can fly. It has a certain felt singularity. One who apparently believes that Pegasus can fly undertakes a commitment, it may appear, not merely to the existence of some flying horse or other. Rather, in apparently believing that Pegasus can fly it is as if one has staked out a claim about a particular horse and its capacities. If Secretariat could fly that would not suffice to make it true that Pegasus can fly. This fact shows that in apparently believing that Pegasus can fly one is not merely believing that some horse or other can fly. There is, of course, no such horse as Pegasus. Arguably, there could be no such horse. That is, if one enumerates all the horses that actually exist and, perhaps, all the horses there could be, one will not find Pegasus among them. So in apparently believing that Pegasus can fly, there is no actual horse and perhaps not even any possible horse about which the believer stakes out a claim. Precisely because no real existent need be doxastically implicated in apparent beliefs to the effect
that Pegasus can fly, I shall argue that strictly literally speaking there really is no such belief. That
Pegasus can fly is strictly speaking incredible.

To deny the credibility of that Pegasus can fly is not to say that ‘Pegasus can fly’ expresses no
content at all. Indeed, we might say that it expresses a merely notional content, a content which is not yet
fully truth-evaluable, because of the emptiness of ‘Pegasus.’ Nor is it to deny that such notional contents
may be used to characterize certain attitudes and states of mind. Fantasy and imagination are two such
attitudes. One can engage in what we might call Pegasus-imaginings merely by ordering one’s Pegasus-
notions or conceptions in certain ways. But if singular representations are not yet bound down to worldly
existents, then the inner deployment of those representations does not yet amount to an undertaking of
worldly commitments at all and hence does not yet give rise to truth-evaluability. Even if those singular
representations are connected to a rich network of notions and conceptions via mythic and/or fictive
practices, we still do not yet have full-blown truth-evaluability. And it is precisely this, I claim, which
separates genuine believing from mere imaginings and the like. I am claiming, in effect, that believing is
essentially an attitude toward the world. I take the worldly character of believing to rest ultimately on facts
about the functional character of believing as opposed to imagining or fantasizing. It is because believing
has the functional character that it has that in believing we stake out a claim on how things are in the world.
Because this is so, inner representations deployed in episodes of believing are never deployed, as it were,
merely notionally. Nor can any inner representation whose content is merely notional be straightforwardly
deployed in an episode of believing.

To be sure, I have appealed at various points in these essays to what I call notional truth as a way
of granting that even with empty representations there can, in certain context, be a right and wrong of the
matter. Notional truth governs play in what I call non-veridical language games. For example, when we
engage in the construction, consumption, and criticism of fiction, we play dialogic language games
governed by a concern for getting things right, as things go in appropriate stories. But getting things right
as things go in a story is not a matter of getting at a peculiar species of truth -- truth in a fiction. Granted,
we use such expressions as “It is true in the Holmes stories that…” or “It is true according to the Santa
myth that…..” But truth in a story and truth in a myth are species of merely notional truth, not species of
literal truth. To be sure, such expressions may play a dialogic role similar to the dialogic role of genuine truth talk. The predicate ‘…is true’ functions in discourse as a device for claiming entitlement to make assertoric moves in dialogic games of inquiry, argument, and deliberation. One who asserts that $p$ is true, for example, thereby claims an entitlement to put forth $p$ as a candidate for mutual acceptance in a dialogic game of inquiry, argument or deliberation. Expressions like “true in the story” may also function as entitlement claiming devices in dialogic games played among producers and consumers of fiction. But entitlements to make moves in non-veridical games arise from sources rather different from the sources from which arise entitlements to make moves in veridical games.

Someone disposed to defend the credibility of *that Pegasus can fly* while accepting my claim that beliefs are essentially truth evaluable may insist that there is, after all, at least one real existent about which one who apparently believes that Pegasus can fly stakes out a claim – the universe itself. One who apparently believes that Pegasus can fly stakes out a claim about the universe at large that it contains a horse of a certain description which can fly. It is false that Pegasus can fly, on this view, just because the universe at large contains no flying horse of the relevant description. But this line ignores the singular purport of *that Pegasus can fly*. To adopt this line is to repeat Russell’s mistake of thinking that empty singular terms are really quantificational expressions terms in disguise.

While it is true that any genuine belief, general or singular, stakes out a claim ultimately about the universe at large, a singular belief is special in that it stakes out a claim about the universe at large by staking out a claim about a particular inhabitant of the universe. There is, however, no particular $x$ such that one who apparently believes that Pegasus can fly thereby stakes out a claim about that very $x$. We might say that despite the attempted singularity of *that Pegasus can fly* it doesn’t succeed in being singular. Still, the singular purport of *that Pegasus can fly* needs explaining, not eliminating. To deny that *that Pegasus can fly* succeeds in its attempt at singular is not to claim that it is really, after all, existentially general. This is shown by the fact that even if some horse or other could fly, that would not suffice for the truth of *that Pegasus can fly*. Similarly, if more controversially, even though no horse can fly, that does not, I think, suffice for the falsity of *that Pegasus can fly*. It is more apt to say that *that Pegasus can fly* is neither strictly literally true nor strictly literally false. *that Pegasus can fly* is not, in

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5 See Essay VI for a further argument to this effect.
short, the sort of thing for which the question of literal truth or falsity even arises. Just because that Pegasus can fly doesn’t rise at all to the level of truth evaluable it is strictly speaking incredible.\(^6\)

It bears stressing that there are many strictly believable contents in what we might call the doxastic neighborhood of that Pegasus can fly. One can strictly and falsely believe that there exists some winged horse or other who can fly. One can strictly and falsely believe that there once was a winged horse named ‘Pegasus’. And one can strictly and truly believe that the sentence ‘Pegasus can fly’ fails to express anything fully truth-evaluable. In effect, an incomplete, merely notional content such as that Pegasus can fly may be, as it were, surrounded by a neighborhood of fully-truth conditional, and therefore credible contents. Though it would be a worthy enterprise to characterize precisely how doxastic neighborhoods of merely notional contents are “generated,” I will not undertake that task in detail here. The principles of generation are likely to be various and largely pragmatic. John Perry’s approach to what he calls reflexive content quickly comes to mind as one model for generating doxastic neighborhoods. One can also imagine less “metarepresentational” approaches to the generation of doxastic neighborhoods based on my own distinction between concepts and conceptions. In essay VI, I argued, for example, that it is a fundamental fact about the role of names -- empty and non-empty alike -- in our psychological organization that they serve as labels for and access points to conceptions of individuals. Cognizers like us are such that she who acquires a name opens a file, a file ready for writing in, which is labeled with the relevant name and sometimes accessed via the relevant name. Name-linked conceptions are storehouse of information, and misinformation, potentially about the referent of the relevant name. Via the one and half stage pragmatic mechanism of pseudo-saturation outlined in Essay VI, conceptions provide another means for generating a doxastic neighborhood for a not fully propositional content. For pseudo-saturation happens where saturation fails to come off. When saturation fails to come off, no object is contextually provided to serve

\(^6\) Consider the following remark by Burge, op. cit:

If A gullibly believes that Pegasus was a (real) horse, the demonstrative implicit in the name occurs anaphorically, perhaps without A’s realizing it, taking as antecedent some description, definite or not, in the repertoire of A or someone else. The name thus has the flavor of ‘that Pegasus (whichever one they are talking about)’.

Though I reject Burge’s claim that names are indexicals which can be anaphorically dominated by some antecedent, Burge has, I think, grasped part of the truth about names. A name which occurs within a purely notional frame will have a purely notional significance. It is tempting to say that such a name is used as if it refers to a particular object, without actually so doing. But again, I do not find saying this deeply linguistically illuminating.
as the referent of an inner representation with singular referential purport. But where no object has been provided, we have the purport of singularity without the reality of singularity. Where saturation misfires, mind and world have, in effect, failed to constitute a believable content. Still, where saturation falters, pseudo-saturation may step in to provide one or more “alternative” contents, sometimes vague and indeterminate, sometimes quite precise. Often, but not necessarily those alternative contents will themselves be believable, though they will not in general be singular.

The central point here, however, is not so much to define how doxastic neighborhoods are generated, but merely to distinguish the often merely notional, and therefore incredible contents, that may lie at the center of such a neighborhood and the possibly fully truth-conditional contents that occupy such a neighborhood. It should not be thought that in believing some such content under, as it were, the banner of a sentence like ‘Pegasus can fly’ one thereby strictly, literally believes the content that Pegasus can fly. For strictly speaking, that “content” is not a possible content of any belief. Nonetheless it is important to acknowledge that the temptation to misidentify the truth-conditionally incomplete and therefore at least partially notional that Pegasus can fly with some fully truth conditional content or other in its neighborhood has afflicted many a philosopher. That temptation is a major source of something like what Perry has come to call subject matter fallacies. One commits a subject matter fallacy, according to Perry, when one supposes that:

…the content of a statement or belief is wholly constituted by the conditions its truth puts on the subject matter of the statement or belief; that is, the conditions it puts on the objects the words designate or the ideas are of.

Now since I do think that all there is to the content of a (singular) statement or belief are “the conditions it puts on the objects the words designate or that its inner representations are of,” I wouldn’t put matters in quite the way the Perry does. But I do insist in the same general spirit that one should always be careful not to misidentify belief in that which lies in a mere doxastic neighborhood of a failed content with belief in that failed content itself. Failed contents are not strictly speaking believable, but we can get “close” to believing them by believing their doxastic neighbors instead. From our perspective Perry’s subject matter fallacies amount to mistaking belief in a doxastic neighbor for belief in the real thing. That mistake is, I
suspect, widespread. It begins with the descriptivism explicit in Russell and plausibly implicit in Frege, and continues to the present day with those who take narrow content to be the prior and fundamental form of belief content.

4. On the Notional Primacy of Fulsomely De Re Ascriptions.

In this section, I offer an indirect argument for the central claim of this essay, an argument which turns on certain under-appreciated facts about belief ascriptions. It is widely supposed that at least some attitude ascriptions specify either directly or indirectly both what the ascribee believes and how she believes it by putting at semantic issue the notions, conceptions, modes of presentation or the like, via which the ascribee cognizes doxastically relevant objects and properties. And it is widely assumed that the more or less standard form for specifying the how of a belief is the apparatus of embedding. This is supposed to be the distinguishing feature of so-called de dicto ascriptions. In this section, I shall take issue with this more or less widely endorsed conventional wisdom. In the general case, I shall argue, embedding functions neither directly nor indirectly to put notions and their ilk at semantic issue. The primary form of belief attribution, at least for singular beliefs, turns out not to be the de dicto at all, but the de re. Indeed, even in conversational contexts in which a de dicto ascription is permissible, it typically merely partially characterize a reality which can be more fully and informatively characterized by a certain variety of de re ascription -- what I call a fulsomely de re ascription. A fulsomely de re ascription specifies what objects are thought about, what is thought about those objects, and, at least indirectly, the notions or modes of presentation via which those objects are thought about. Such ascriptions specify the “how” of belief, not via an embedded clause, but via unembedded modifying clauses of a sort explained more fully below. The claim that it takes a de re ascription of a certain sort to make explicit the how of a belief runs against the grain of the conventional wisdom. De re ascriptions are widely taken to be those which do not put the

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7 Brandom (1994) has endorsed something like the thesis I defend in this essay, but in the context of defending inferentialism in semantics. Defending Inferentialism is no part of my design. See also Burge (77). Burge suggests that de re belief “is in important ways more fundamental than the de dicto variety.” Though I do not think the distinction between de re and de dicto beliefs as contrasted with de re and de dicto ascriptions of beliefs makes any sense, I endorse the spirit of Burge’s remark if it is taken to be a remark about ascriptions rather than about beliefs. Indeed, I shall be arguing that at least as far as beliefs
ascribee’s notions and conceptions at semantic issue. But this bit of conventional wisdom correctly characterizes only what I call truncated de re ascriptions and it does so precisely because truncated de re description lack modifying clauses of the sort I have in mind.

8 Consider Crimmins (1995). There Crimmins claims that one way to understand the “muddled” concept of a de re belief report is as a report which is “notionally open” to use his phrase and he argues that such notionally open reports are rare indeed. In Crimmins (92), we find the following: …We very rarely say merely what someone thinks or believes; almost always we add tacit provisos about how they think about the alleged objects of thought or belief. And the rules for adding and discerning these tacit provisos are driven by all the subtleties of conversational pragmatics. Reimer (95), by contrast, argues that notionally neutral or open -- and therefore de re -- reports are prevalent. Crimmins and Reimer both talk as if the class of de re reports included only notionally neutral or open reports -- though neither need be logically committed to this claim. Since my fulsomely de re reports are both notionally sensitive and de re, I reject the identification of the de re and the notionally neutral. Brandom op. cit. seems explicitly to recognize that going fulsomely de re is, in fact, a way of being simultaneously de re and notionally sensitive.

9 I am not the first to reject some or all ingredients of what I am calling the conventional wisdom. Soames (1985, 1987a, 1987b), Salmon (1986) and Braun (1998) are clear cases. See also Bach (1997a, 1997b). Bach denies that that clauses (or their ingredients) semantically specify, refer to, or in any other way invoke notions, conceptions or modes of presentation. Unlike those thinkers, however, Bach holds that ascriptions which differ only by the occurrence of embedded co-referring expressions in what Quineans would call “opaque” position, may differ in truth value. Strikingly Bach thinks that there can be differences of truth value in such cases even where no syntactic/pragmatic/semantic mechanism serves to put notions at semantic issue. That itself represents a large departure from the conventional wisdom since those who endorse the conventional wisdom tend, by and large, to maintain that substitution failures are traceable to notional differences somehow due to the presence of the distinct, but co-referring embedded referring expressions.

It is important to acknowledge that many counted here as accepting the core commitments of the conventional wisdom have taken important steps away from the prevailing wisdom of an earlier day. Those like Crimmins (1992, 1998), Crimmins and Perry (1989), Recanati (1993), Richard (1990) who appeal to pragmatic mechanisms of one sort or another to explain how notions and their ilk are put at semantic issue in the ascription of beliefs generally agree that there is little, if anything, in either the logical syntax of the sentences with which we typically make belief ascriptions or in the lexical semantics of the verb ‘believes’ to distinguish the notionally sensitive from the notionally neutral. These thinkers might reasonably be interpreted not so much as offering alternative analyses of the de re/de dicto distinction but as replacing it with something else. For example, Richard (1990), who appeals to contextually variable correlation functions between RAMS to explain what we might call the notional variability of attitude ascriptions, is quite explicit in denying that there is anything about the sentences with which we make de re/de dicto ascription which supports the existence of either a logical-syntactic or lexical-semantic de re/de dicto distinction.

On the purely negative point that nothing in either logical syntax or lexical semantics distinguishes the de re from the de dicto, the notionally sensitive from the notionally neutral, these thinkers are, I think, entirely right. I advocate going one step further. Not only is there nothing in either logical syntax or lexical semantics on which to found a semantic distinction between notionally neutral and notionally sensitive belief ascriptions, there is also nothing in the pragmatics of communication to found such a distinction. So with Soames, Salmon, and Braun my rejection of the conventional wisdom is quite thoroughgoing. To be sure, Soames and Salmon believe that we do somehow pragmatically convey, without semantically specifying information about notions and their ilk. For a recent and intriguing account see Soames (2001).
My argument focuses on cases involving ascriptions across what I call a doxastic divide between ascriber and ascribee. In such cases, the ascriber neither shares nor endorses the ascribee’s ways of cognizing doxastically relevant objects. Now if the truth value of a (de dicto) ascription is supposed to depend on the ascribee’s and not the ascriber’s notions, conceptions, or modes, it follows that de dicto ascriptions should be possible even when there is a certain notional or doxastic distance between potential ascribers and potential ascribees. But this prediction is not supported by the facts. At least for beliefs about particulars, the preferred device for putting the ascribee’s notions and conceptions at semantic issue turns out not to be anything like the diverse machinery widely on offer as accounts of the workings of de dicto/notional/notionally sensitive ascriptions. When an ascriber intends to ascribe to another a belief about a particular in a notionally sensitive, ascribee-centered way, where the ascriber neither shares nor endorses the ascribee’s notions of the relevant particular or particulars, the ascriber must a fulsomely de re ascription.10

Consider what I call the case of the inebriated reveler. Suppose that Smith, Jones, and Black are working a party as bartenders. They are instructed not to serve anyone who has had too much to drink. There is a man in the corner drinking martinis who has clearly had a great deal to drink. Jones, however, takes the man to be a woman and she takes him to be drinking gimlets rather than martinis. With evident intent of alerting Smith to the man’s state, Jones utters:

(1) The woman in the corner drinking gimlets has had too much to drink.

Smith recognizes who Jones has in mind, but she does not realize that Jones has made a mistake until she is about to report Jones’s belief to Black. Because Jones thinks of the man in the corner drinking martinis under the description ‘the woman in the corner drinking gimlets,’ this description may be reasonably thought to partially characterize Jones’s notions of the person in the corner. So the conventional wisdom

Braun (1998) has defended an error-theoretic account of our intuitions about notional sensitivity. These fellow travelers may for all I know wish to part company with my claim that by going fulsomely de re we can, after all, achieve semantically relevant notional sensitivity. It may also be that once the notion of a fulsomely de re ascription is on the table, the likes of Crimmins, Perry, and Recanati will find themselves in agreement with me. That would not be deeply troubling. Indeed, one can read my arguments as defending the claim that what Recanati (1993), following Schiffer (1977), would call a “complete thought content” is, in fact, ascribable, but not via the use of a simple belief sentence. If we want to ascribe a complete content explicitly, there is no alternative to the use of a either a more fulsome sentence or an extended chunk of discourse that will, admittedly, have the feel of circumlocution.
would seem to entail that Smith can put Jones’s notions of the man in the corner at semantic issue by embedding the description ‘the woman in the corner drinking gimlets.’ But this prediction is not borne out by the facts.

Suppose that it is common ground between Smith and Black that there is no woman in the corner drinking gimlets. Now consider:

(2) Jones believes that the woman in the corner drinking gimlets has had too much to drink.

as potentially uttered by Smith to Black. Smith would naturally be taken not merely to ascribe to Jones a commitment to the existence of a gimlet drinking woman in the corner, but also thereby to impute that she herself accepts or endorses the ascribed commitment. Because the existential commitment which she would thereby impute to herself conflicts with what is already common ground between Smith and Black, uttering (2) is a conversationally inappropriate way for Smith to report Jones’s belief to Black.

Despite the widely endorsed view that descriptions are the paradigm of the embeddable, embedding a description within a that clause appears not to render its use “wholly notional.” That is, embedding a description does not free the speaker from the existential commitments normally conveyed by the use of that description.¹¹ If not, then the mechanism of embedding does not, after all, provide an

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¹⁰ For a more detailed version of the current argument see Taylor (2002).

¹¹ I suspect, but will not argue in detail here that the reason that an ascriber who uses an embedded description thereby expresses a certain existential commitment has partly to do with the semantics of ‘believes that’ and partly to do with the phenomenon of presupposition. Partly as a consequence of the semantics of ‘believes,’ the use of a description within belief contexts presupposes the existence of a unique satisfier of the relevant description. A number of writers have examined the presuppositional character of attitude contexts. Kartunnen (1974), for example, claims that propositional attitude verbs exhibit the following projection profile for presuppositions:

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 x ATT that \* presupposes x believes the presupposition of \*.
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from which it follows that

(a) x believes the king of France is bald

presupposes

(b) x believes there is a king of France.

Heim (92) and Chierchia (1995) offer discourse-theoretic accounts of the semantics of ‘believes’ which have this generalization as a consequence. Though this generalization may seem, at first glance, exactly correct for de dicto belief ascriptions, the examples considered in this section tend to undermine its correctness. For an account somewhat sensitive to the data like those on which my arguments turn, see Guerts (1998). Guerts distinguishes what he calls the e-principle from what he calls the I-principle:

(e-principle):

If \* is a propositional attitude and S{[]} is a simple sentence n which the presupposition is triggered that [], then (a speaker who utters) a \*’s that S{[]} presupposes that [].
ascribe the wherewithal to use a description to ascribe to another an existential commitment that she herself does not accept.

Consider an alternative scenario. Suppose that there is a woman in the corner drinking gimlets. And suppose that Smith and Black both accept, and mutually know that they both accept the existential commitment normally expressed by the use of the description ‘the woman in the corner drinking gimlets’. Moreover suppose, as above, that the person Jones intends to pick out by her use of ‘the woman in the corner drinking gimlets’ is not a gimlet drinking woman, but a martini drinking man – though she does not, again, recognize that he is a man. If Smith realizes that Jones intends to pick out the martini drinking man rather than the gimlet drinking woman by her use of ‘the woman in the corner drinking gimlets,’ (2) will again be an inappropriate way of reporting what Jones believes about the relevant man. For in the currently imagined setting, an utterance of (2) would invite the inference that it is the woman in the corner drinking gimlets who is believed by Jones to have had too much to drink. Smith intends to invite no such inference.

Once again, embedding does not enable Smith to put the description ‘the woman in the corner drinking gimlets’ on display as a representation or specification of Jones’s way of thinking about the man in the corner drinking martinis. That description does capture an ingredient of Jones’s notion of the man in the corner drinking martinis. By Smith’s lights, however, Jones thinks of the man in the corner in an illegitimate manner. The manifest illegitimacy, from Smith’s point of view, of thinking of the martini drinking man in the corner under the description ‘the woman in the corner drinking gimlets’ appears to undercut the permissibility of deploying that description in an embedded position as either referring, describing or tacitly specifying the notional contents of Jones’s belief.

There are settings in which it would be permissible for Smith to report Jones’s belief via an utterance of (2). Suppose, for example, that Black and Smith are in doxastic agreement with Jones.

\[ \text{(i-principle)} \]
If \( V \) is a propositional attitude and \( S\{[]\} \) is a simple sentence in which the presupposition is triggered that [], then (a speaker who utters) \( a V's \) that \( S\{[]\} \) presupposes that \( a \) believes that []

Guerts argues, contra Heim, that the e-principle rather than the I-principle is correct. But in an attempt to explain what he calls the two-sided character of attitude contexts, Guerts defends an account which allows, in certain context, for the inference from \( a \) believes that \( S\{[]\} \) to \( a \) believes that [], where \( S\{[]\} \) presupposes []. See also Zeevat (1992) in which it is argued, in effect, the e-principle and the I-principle apply simultaneously. It is hard to see how we could ever make ascriptions across notional divides, however, if Zeevat’s proposal was true.
Suppose that, like Jones, Black and Smith mistakenly take the man in the corner drinking martinis to be a woman drinking gimlets. If Smith and Black mutually know that they, like Jones, take the person in the corner to be a gimlet drinking woman, then an utterance of (2) would seem to be fully permissible. In such a conversational setting, an utterance of (2) by Smith would serve to convey to Black, partly as a consequence of the doxastic agreement between Smith and Black, information to the effect that Jones believes of the man in the corner, whom Jones, Smith and Black all take -- they think rightly -- to be a woman drinking gimlets, that he has had too much to drink.

It would be wrong to conclude that by uttering (2) in the setting just imagined, Smith imputes to Jones a commitment to the existence of a gimlet drinking woman. Varying the case ever so slightly shows decisively that Smith has imputed no such commitment to Jones at all. Imagine a scenario in which the person Jones has in mind and to whom she intends to refer via the description ‘the woman in the corner drinking gimlets’ is, in fact, a woman drinking gimlets. Now suppose that although it is mutually manifest to Smith and Black who Jones has in mind, they, nonetheless, mistakenly take Jones to be mistaken. Though Smith and Black mutually recognize that Jones takes the person in the corner to be a gimlet drinking woman, they take that person to be a martini drinking man. Jones is right; they are wrong; but they are unaware of these facts. Now suppose that Jones utters (1) intending to alert Smith to the drunken reveler. From our better informed perspective, it seems evident that Smith would speak truly if she were to report Jones’s belief to Black via an utterance of (2). That, in fact, is just how we, who are in the know, would report Jones’s belief. (2) is, however, unavailable to Smith as way of reporting Jones’s belief. An utterance of (2) by Smith would quite clearly impute to Smith an existential commitment that she manifestly does not have. The preferred way for Smith to report to Black what Jones believes in the imagined setting is the false (3) rather than the true (2):

(3) Jones believes that the man in the corner drinking martinis has had too much to drink.

By Smith’s use of the description ‘the man in the corner drinking martinis’ in the utterance of (3), Smith commits herself to the existence of a martini drinking man, she does not thereby ascribe such a commitment to Jones. Indeed, it is common ground between Smith and Black in the imagined setting that Jones mistakenly takes the relevant person not to be a martini drinking man but a gimlet drinking woman.
We can even stipulate that it is part of the common ground that Jones takes there to be no martini drinking man in the room at all. Now Smith does, to be sure, ascribe to Jones a predicative commitment to the effect that a certain person -- the person whom Smith and Black take to be a gimlet drinking woman -- has had too much to drink. But in so ascribing, Smith appears neither to refer to nor to specify nor describe Jones’s notions of the relevant person.

By parity of reasoning, it follows that even where there is doxastic agreement between ascriber and ascribee, the ascribee’s notions of those objects are often simply not at semantic issue and cannot be put at semantic issue merely by the mechanism of embedding. When Smith utters (2) as a way of reporting Jones’s belief to Black in a context in which Smith, Black, and Jones one and all take the martini drinking man to be a gimlet drinking woman, Smith expresses her own commitment to the existence of a gimlet drinking woman, but she does not thereby succeed in ascribing such a commitment to Jones by that utterance. If the proposition that Jones is committed to the existence of a gimlet drinking woman were not already part of the common ground in the imagined context of doxastic agreement, the mere utterance of (2) by Smith would not increment the common ground to include such a proposition. What Smith ascribes to Jones by an utterance of (2) is singular predicative commitment to the effect that a certain person has had too much to drink. She does not thereby purport to specify how Jones thinks of the relevant person. By using the embedded description, Smith presents only herself to Black as cognizing the relevant object under the description ‘the woman in the corner drinking gimlets.’ In addition, she offers up that description to Black as a vehicle for Black and Smith to achieve mutual recognition of the object that Jones’s belief is about. But she does not thereby use the embedded description to either represent, indirectly specify or refer to Jones’s notion of the relevant person. It is not Jones’s notions which are at semantic issue in Smith’s ascription but only Jones’s predicative commitments.

I want now to show that the machinery of fulsomely de re ascriptions enables us to ascribe existential commitments across such divides. A fulsomely de re ascription is one which specifies what objects are thought about, what is thought about those objects, and, at least indirectly, the notions or modes
of presentation via which those objects are thought about. Fulsomely de re ascriptions take many forms. The following is one such form:

(4) a believes of \( n_1 \ldots n_n \), of which/whom he thinks \( \ell' \ldots \ell' \) that \( \ell'(x_1 \ldots x_n) \).

where each \( n_i \) is a name and each \( \ell \) (partially) characterizes, either directly or indirectly, some conception or notion of an object, and each \( x_j \) is anaphorically linked to \( n_j \). We get fulsomely de ascriptions from truncated de re ascriptions by adding certain modifying clauses. These modifying clauses are adjuncts rather than arguments, however. The claim is not that the sentences with which we make garden variety de re ascriptions are in any way syntactically or semantically incomplete or that such sentences are in some way syntactically or semantically ambiguous.

Consider again the case of the drunken reveler. Suppose, as above, that Smith intends to report Jones’s belief about the martini drinking man in the corner to Black. Suppose that Smith intends via her report to, as it were, arm Black for interaction with Jones by making it explicit just how Jones thinks of the martini drinking man. It is, of course, commonly thought that it is via a so-called de dicto ascriptions that we arm one another for interaction with the ascribee. But recall that Jones mistakenly takes the martini drinking man to be a gimlet drinking woman. Smith is aware that Jones is confused, but Black is not aware of Jones’s confusion. If Smith were to report Jones belief by an utterance of (3), she would correctly and successfully ascribe to Jones a commitment to the effect that a certain person has had too much to drink, but her utterance would convey no information about Jones’s confused notions of the relevant person. She would not thereby arm Black for interacting with Jones. Smith needs a way both to ascribe the commitment just mentioned and to convey information about Jones’s confused notions, without thereby committing herself to Jones’s confusions. She can do no better, I suggest, than to go fulsomely de re. She might, for example, utter something like the following:

(5) Jones believes of the martini drinking man in the corner, whom she mistakes for a gimlet drinking woman, that he has had too much to drink.

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12 It is not quite right to say that the specified notions will in general be the notions “via” which the ascribee cognizes doxastically relevant objects. For it will often be the case that the relevant notions will be “illegitimate” in various ways and will not serve to connect the cognizer to the relevant objects. In such cases, we can view the ascribed notions as further cognitively relevant material somehow involved in the cognizing of the relevant objects, but not as the vehicles by which the relevant objects are cognized.
In uttering (5), Smith undertakes, and manifestly so, a commitment of her own to the existence of a martini drinking man; she ascribes to Jones a commitment to the existence of a gimlet drinking woman, without herself thereby undertaking any such commitment; and she ascribes to Jones, also without herself undertaking, a predicative commitment to the effect that a certain person has had too much to drink. In so doing, Smith not only informs Black of Jones’s doxastic commitments, but she does so in a manner that arms Black for interaction with Jones by explicitly conveying information about Jones’s notions of doxastically relevant objects.

To mount a fulsomely de re ascription, an ascriber offers up certain doxastically relevant actual existents for the cognizing to her interlocutors via descriptions such that it is mutually manifest that doxastically relevant existents satisfy the relevant descriptions. Once doxastically relevant existents are made salient in this way, the ascriber can then go on to specify, however indirectly, the ascribee’s ways of cognizing those existents. And she can do so without thereby owning the ascribed predicative commitments and notional contents as her own. But what happens when no actual existents are apparently implicated in the apparent belief. Can no ascription be made at all? Or is it simply that the inoculating circumlocution cannot be deployed? If so, does this not give the lie to claims of the priority of the de re?

To answer such questions, consider a case of a different kind. Suppose that Jones utters the following:

(6) The man in the doorway has a frightening look on his face.

Suppose, however, that there is no man with a frightening look and that there is no actual doorway implicated in Jones’s apparent belief. Suppose that Smith realizes that there is no man $x$ and no doorway $y$ such that Jones takes $x$ to be in $y$, that Smith intends to inform Black of the belief that Jones apparently expresses in uttering (6), and that she intends to do so while explicitly distancing herself from Jones’s bizarre existential commitments. Since no man and no doorway are implicated in what appears to be Jones’s belief, it is not open to Smith to offer up such a man and such a doorway to Black for the cognizing preparatory to mounting a fulsomely de re ascription. Nor will a straight-forward embedding of the relevant description achieve the intended communicative effect as the following shows:

(7) Jones believes that the man in the doorway has a frightening look on his face.
A strict literal utterance of (7) would express a commitment on Smith’s part to the existence of a man in a doorway, contrary to her own communicative intentions.

It is worth pointing out that if Smith uses indefinites rather than definites to characterize the belief apparently expressed by Jones in uttering (6), she would not thereby express a commitment to the existence of a doorway containing a man. Consider:

(8) Jones believes that there is a man in a doorway who has a frightening look on his face.

Indefinites give rise to puzzles of their own. Although an indefinite like ‘a man’ is not itself a referring expression, it can nonetheless serve to introduce novel subjects into a discourse. Moreover, in keeping with its subject introducing role, an indefinite can anchor an anaphoric chain all of whose links make reference to the newly introduced subject as in:

(9) A man just came into the room. He is tall and handsome. His name is John.

A speaker who produces a discourse like (9) would normally thereby express a commitment to the existence of a tall, handsome man named John. But no such existential commitment is expressed by the ascriber who uses an embedded indefinite in the manner of (8). Moreover, an unembedded pronoun cannot have an embedded indefinite as its antecedent. And this fact suggests that an embedded indefinite does not serve a subject introducing role. Consider:

(10) Jones believes that a man in a blue hat is at her door. He has a frightening look on his face.

There is no reading of (10) in which the pronoun ‘he’ has the embedded indefinite ‘a man in a blue hat’ as its antecedent. Interpreted anaphorically rather than deictically, the unembedded ‘he’ must inherit its reference and/or existential import from elsewhere. But here the would be antecedent -- the embedded indefinite -- has neither reference nor existential import to pass on.

There is a charitable reading of (10) roughly equivalent to:

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13 See Chierchia, op. cit. for a discussion.
(11) Jones believes that a man in a blue hat is at her door and she believes that he has a frightening look on his face.\textsuperscript{14}

So construed, the indefinite ‘a man in a blue hat’ does appear to function as the antecedent of the embedded ‘he’. The ability of an indefinite in one that clause to function as the antecedent of a pronoun in a distinct that clause is a mystery worthy of serious theorizing. I suspect, but will not argue, that this ability is the notional correlate, as we might call it, of the subject introducing role played by unembedded indefinites. That is to say, an indefinite which anchors an anaphoric chain within or across that clauses serves, in effect, to introduce a purely notional discourse subject. Each link in such an anaphoric chain will itself have a merely notional significance -- a notional significance which it shares with every other member of the relevant anaphoric chain. Thus in:

(12) Jones believes that a man in a blue hat is at her door. Smith thinks that he has a frightening look on his face.

the notional significance of the embedded ‘he’ is evidently determined by the notional significance of its antecedent ‘a man in a blue hat.’

Call a linguistic context within which indefinites serve to introduce merely notional subjects a notional frame. That clauses appear at least sometimes to function as notional frames. But they are not the only sorts of notional frames. Fictional narratives are another and paradigmatic sort. Consider:

(13) Once upon a time in a land far away, there lived a King. He was wise and benevolent. His name was Philo. King Philo had a beautiful daughter. Her name was Jasmine.

One who produces such a narrative characterizes a merely notional world in which a benevolent king named Philo has a beautiful daughter named Jasmine. In characterizing this merely notional world, one has not undertaken a commitment to the existence of a such a king and such a princess. It is tempting to talk here of pretend existential commitments and pretend reference to particulars. Such talk is unobjectionable, but it does not add anything deeply illuminating to our understanding of the peculiar linguistic character and function of notional frames. Indeed, the direction of illumination is more likely to be the reverse. It is

\textsuperscript{14} Compare this to so-called Hob-Nob cases first discussed in Geach (67). See also Chierchia op. cit, Guerts, op. cit.
only by achieving an antecedent understanding of the peculiar linguistic character and function of notional frames that we are likely to achieve an understanding of what we are doing when we deploy the apparatus of singular reference in episodes of pretense.

Though the use of the apparatus of singular reference within notional frames to characterize merely notional worlds is a subject worthy much further inquiry, it will suffice for current purposes to note that one who ascribes a belief to Jones using (11) does not thereby commit herself to the existence of a man in a blue hat with a frightening look. Both the embedded indefinite and its embedded anaphoric dependent function wholly notional, solely to specify how things are in the notional world defined by Jones’s beliefs. They do so without thereby expressing existential commitments of the ascriber’s own. It is worth contrasting (11) with (14):

(14) Jones believes that the man in the blue hat is at her door. He has a frightening look on his face.

There is no reading of (14) in which either the definite description ‘the man in the blue hat’ or the pronoun anaphorically linked to it function wholly notionally. An ascriber who ascribed a belief to Jones via an utterance of (14) would thereby express only her own commitment to the existence of a man in a blue hat with a frightening look on her face.

These last examples show that even when an ascribee uses a definite description attributively with reference to no particular object, a would be ascriber cannot, via mere embedding of the relevant description, escape expressing as her own the existential commitments normally conveyed by the use of that description. Though it may so far appear that where no actual existent is doxastically implicated in the ascribee’s belief, the would be ascriber also cannot resort to the circumlocution of a fulsomely de re ascription to inoculate herself from the ascribee’s commitments, there is another sort of inoculation available to the ascriber. She can inoculate herself from the ascribed commitments by deploying embedded indefinites, thereby going wholly notional in her ascriptions. By doing so, however, she, in effect, represent the ascribed belief as entirely lacking in singular purport. It is as if the cost of representing the relevant mental state as a genuine and not merely apparent belief is that it must be represented as altogether lacking in singular purport.
A qualification is in order, however. It turns out that when an embedded definite is anaphorically linked to an embedded indefinite with wholly notional significance, the definite may indeed have wholly notional significance. Consider, for example, (15):

(15) Jones believes that a man in a blue hat is at her door and she believes that the man in the blue hat has a frightening look on her face.

With the definite anaphorically linked to the indefinite, (15) is awkward. (11), in which the definite is replaced by a pronoun, is the preferred way of expressing what (15) struggles to expresses. But the awkwardness of (15) results entirely from a “nearness” effect. Consider a discourse in which the indefinite that serves to introduce a notional subject is more distant from the anaphorically dependent definite as in:

(16) Smith: Jones believes that a man in a blue hat is at her door.

Black: Is that why she looks so afraid?

Smith: Yes. She believes that the man in the blue hat is about to beat her up.

The embedded definite is perfectly acceptable here. Smith does not commit herself to the existence of a man in a blue by her use of the embedded definite. Her use of the embedded definite is, rather, wholly notional.

Such examples suggest that when a definite occupies the right sort of place in a chunk of discourse, it may enjoy inherited, as opposed to original notional significance. It may even be that a standard way to make a so-called de dicto ascription is by employing an embedded definite whose notional significance is wholly inherited from some explicit or implied embedded indefinite antecedent. If so, perhaps the de re/de dicto distinction should really be viewed not as a distinction at the level of individual sentences, but as a distinction at the level of ordered chunks of discourse. Though there is much to be said for this thought, it does not, I shall argue, undercut the notional primacy of fulsomely de ascriptions. The use of an anaphorically dominated embedded definite description with wholly notional significance turns out to be permissible in only a limited range of conversational settings. Moreover, even when a construction is permissible, the relevant ascription will typically only partially characterizes a reality more fully and informatively characterized via a fulsomely de re ascription.

Suppose that we call the move of going wholly notional by deploying embedded indefinites, possibly together with anaphorically linked definites, within a (sequence of) belief ascription(s)
indefinitization. Now recall our earlier scenario in which Jones mistakes the martini drinking man for a gimlet drinking woman. Suppose that Smith intends to inform Black of Jones’s beliefs. Consider the following:

(17) Jones believes that a woman in a corner drinking gimlets has had too much to drink.

With the indefinite noun phrase read as having narrow scope, (17) is arguably true. An utterance of (17) would clearly correctly partially specify the notional world defined by Jones’s belief. The ascriber also avoids committing herself to the existence of a gimlet drinking woman by indefinitizing in this manner. But notice that one who characterizes Jones’s belief by an utterance of (17) and leaves it at that in the imagined conversational setting has clearly violate something like the Gricean maxim of informativeness. (17) omits the crucial information that Jones believes what she believes on the basis of (mis)taking a certain man to be a woman. This information is not ancillary or irrelevant but is of the very essence of Jones’s state of mind, a state of mind better and more informatively represented by the fulsomely de re ascription (5) than the indefinitized ascription (17). To see this, imagine that Smith utters (17) as a way of characterizing Jones’s belief and that Black attempts to act on the information conveyed by Smith’s utterance. We can imagine, for example, that as a consequence of Smith’s utterance Black is on the look-out for an inebriated woman ordering gimlets. Clearly, were Black to learn more about the facts of the matter -- that there is no woman drinking gimlets, that Jones has mistaken a martini drinking man for a gimlet drinking woman, and that Smith is herself entirely aware of these facts -- she could, with some justice, accuse Smith of misleading her.

It is fair to say, therefore, that (17) is misleading in the imagined setting. It is misleading because an indefinitized ascription is a merely partially characterization of Jones’s episode of singular believing, a characterization which leaves out the crucial thing, viz., the truth-relevant aspects of that episode of believing. The truth of Jones’s episode of singular believing depends on how things are by a certain man in a certain corner and not on whether there is some gimlet drinking woman or other in some corner or other. (17) is simply silent on these aspects of Jones’s belief episode. In effect, Smith has represented Jones’s episode of believing as a mere array of notions, conceptions or modes, not as such bound down to any actual existent. And because she has left out the actual existent to which those notions are bound down, she has not fully represented the worldly content of Jones’s belief.
Finally, consider again the belief Jones expresses in uttering (6) above. Since there would appear to be no real existents implicated in Jones’s belief, it may appear that an indefinitized ascription is really our only option. But even here, I want to insist that despite appearances there is a real existent implicated in Jones’s belief. Moreover, I claim that it is only in virtue of the fact that some real existent is so-implicated that Jones’s state of mind counts as an episode of believing rather than an episode of fantasizing or imagining. For although there is no man and no doorway implicated in Jones’s belief, there is, I submit, a more or less determinate region of space which is so implicated. And it is virtue of this fact that Jones’s episode of believing has precisely the truth conditions that it does. For consider just what the truth or falsity of Jones’s belief hangs on. First, notice that it is not the case that any old man and any old doorway are even relevant to the truth or falsity of Jones’s belief. Even if there does exists a doorway containing a man with a frightening look in some region of space or other, that would not suffice for the truth of Jones’s belief unless that very doorway and that very man are implicated in Jones’s belief in the peculiar way that renders them truth-conditionally relevant to Jones’s belief. On the other hand, unless there is some region or other of space which is truth-conditionally implicated in Jones’s belief, even the fact that no region of space contains a man in a doorway would seem utterly powerless to render Jones’s belief false. Jones’s belief will be determinately true or false - and true or false of the world -- just in case there is some more or less determinate region of space which Jones takes to contain a doorway with a frightening looking man in it. Her belief is true just in case that very region does contain such a doorway and such a man and is false otherwise. Moreover, just as in our earlier example, it appears that if we wish to display Jones’s belief under its truth-evaluable aspect, we cannot rest with the ascription of merely notional contents. We must ascribe referential content, that is, content which is already bound down to doxastically implicated existents. We must, in effect, “de-indefinitize” our indefinitized ascription by going fulsomely de re. In the present case, if there is a region of space with respect to which Jones does have a de re belief the following fulsomely de re ascription adequately captures both the referential and notional contents of Jones’s belief:

(18) Jones believes of region R, which she takes to contain a doorway, that it contains a man with a frightening look on his face.
V. Conclusion

In this essay, I have argued for a number of interlocking claims. Though these claims do not logically stand or fall together as a single piece, they are mutually supporting and reinforcing. For example, if I am right about the nature of singular beliefs, then it is, I think, unsurprising that belief ascriptions work as they do. That is, if singular beliefs are essentially undertakings of singular predicative commitments toward real existents, then neither the primacy of fulsomely de re ascriptions nor the incredibility of merely notional contents with singular purport should be unexpected. Correlatively, if, as I have argued, there are independent reasons for endorsing primacy of the fulsomely de and the incredibility of the strict incredibility of the merely notional to be important clues to the nature of singular beliefs.

The deeper point is that from whatever perspective we look at singular belief we see the same phenomenon – the centrality of the objects. In having a singular belief a cognizer takes an object to be a certain way. In ascribing such an attitude we specify what object and what property or properties the ascribee takes the object to have. To say this is not to deny that the cognition of an object requires the mediation of something inner. Indeed, I have taken pains in this essay to specify in some detail the nature of that inner something. But it does not follow that that inner something, whatever it is, is the focus of either belief ascriptions. Nor does it follow that we have fully characterized the nature of belief when we have specified that inner something without reference to the objects. Singular belief is a janus faced thing, with both an internal psychological nature and an outer significance.

Notice too, that although I have conceded that notions and their ilk may indeed be put at semantic issue in fulsomely de re ascriptions, it is not quite right to say that fulsomely de re ascriptions indirectly specify or characterize supposed notions or modes of presentation “via” which doxastically implicated existents are doxastically implicated. Often, the relevant notions will be “illegitimate” in various ways and, therefore, will not serve to connect the cognizer to the relevant objects at all. The specified notions are, rather, simply further cognitively significant material somehow involved in the cognizing of the relevant objects. I suspect, but have not argued here, that this fact reflects a quite general phenomenon. Whenever notions and their ilk are explicitly put at semantic issue via a fulsomely de re ascription the specified notions and conceptions are not thereby not represented as the vehicles via which the relevant objects are first rendered doxastically relevant. The mechanism, whatever it is, which serves to first render
an actual existent doxastically relevant, that which, as it were, fixes the reference of our inner singular representations is never, I suspect, separately in view as the subject matter of any singular belief ascription, not even of a fulsomely de re ascription and certainly not in so-called de dicto ascriptions of such beliefs. Just as the focus of a singular belief is the object itself, so the focus of a singular belief ascription is the object itself and the predicative commitments the ascribee undertakes with respect to that object. What has blinded philosophers to this fact is the inordinate focus on situations of doxastic agreement between ascriber and ascribee. By feeding ourselves a richer diet of examples, we see that what we took to be the general case is really nothing of the sort.