Referring to the World, by Kenneth A. Taylor. New York: NY: Oxford University Press, 2021. Pp. x + 297.

The foreword to Ken Taylor's, *Referring to the World*, contains the text of a Facebook post from the day he completed a draft of the book—also the day of his death. Taylor writes that the book began its life 'years and years and years ago' as a short, opinionated introduction to the theory of reference, but became more an introduction to his own views than anything else. He also wrote:

> The opinions and the supporting arguments have been developed over way too many years, in a series of articles, some of which were written with the book in mind others of which were not. But now they are all gathered together in a single if somewhat sprawling argumentative thread. Maybe some will find them more convincing that way. (Taylor 2021, p. x)

Even for those who already admired Taylor's work, seeing his views gathered together into a broader framework will be illuminating and worthwhile. Those for whom the book is an introduction to Taylor's views will find here an outlook on foundational questions in the philosophy of mind and language which is at once sensible and approachable, and also ambitious and insightful. Taylor will continue to be missed and admired by the philosophical community, both as a thinker, and member of the profession. We are lucky to have some of his views gathered together as they are in this book.

1. Two factor referentialism

In *Referring to the World,* Taylor proposes a theory of reference called, *two-factor referentialism.*

The view is built around a key distinction between *merely objectual representations* and *fully objective representations. Objectual* representations exist whenever certain factors 'lying entirely on the side of the cognizing, thinking subject' are in place, such that a representational vehicle 'is "fit" or "ready" for the job of standing for a real existent or expressing a real property' (p. 18). *Fully objective* representations only exist when this internal readiness is combined with the right causal/informational connection between a representational vehicle and worldly objects, events and/or properties, such that the vehicle also actually stands for a real existent or expresses a real property.

Two ideas drive this distinction.

The first is that two distinct and independent, but cooperative, factors contribute to making objective representational content possible—to making it possible that our thought and talk are semantically answerable to worldly objects, events, properties, and so forth (p. 25). One factor is external, or, as Taylor sometimes puts it, 'extra-representational' (p. 19): it consists in a rush of energy from the world 'upon the portals of sensation' (p. 26). The other is internal, and contributes by allowing the mind to form or extract representations, in response to the inward rush (p. 27). Taylor is guided by what he sees as a Kantian insight: in order to refer, the mind, in addition to being appropriately causally connected to its subject matter, must also already be internally and antecedently 'poised' to refer.

A motivating theme of the book is that, within the theory of reference, too little attention has been paid to the question of what the mind's internal readiness to refer consist in—to 'the representational innards of the referring mind' and their role in making contentful thought possible. This is connected to the second idea that drives Taylor to make a distinction between objectual and objective *representations.* To remedy what he sees as neglect of the nature of internal referential readiness, Taylor focuses on questions about the *form* of thought: Why does thought have the *form* of

thought about objects? In what does this objectual form consist? (p. 18). Thus, the distinction between kinds of *representations* is bound up with Taylor's desire to 'shine the klieg lights on the form/content distinction'. He believes that doing so reveals that the inner factors that render our minds 'fit to refer' are *syntactic* and *role-oriented*. That is, the objectuality of thought is a syntactic, role-oriented affair.

Taylor argues that two-factor referentialism can provide answers to canonical questions in the theory of reference. For example, the view is used to give a syntactic solution to Frege's puzzle (Ch. 4) and substitution puzzles concerning attitude ascriptions (Ch. 6), and to account for the meaningful use of empty names (Ch. 7). He introduces these canonical questions, and lays out historically important solutions, with characteristic clarity and insight. However, the real interest and promise of Taylor's syntactically oriented two-factor referentialism can be seen by focusing on the larger, foundational question it is addressed to: Not just, 'how is it possible for mind and language to make contact with, and be semantically answerable to, an *apparently* mind-independent reality?', but also, 'what is the role of distinctively referential (or *singular*, though Taylor himself tends not to use this terminology) thought in making objective representational content possible?'.

For this reason, I'll focus on the way that Taylor's story about the form of thought is meant to give us a story about the role of reference in a larger theory of intentionality. The book covers a lot of ground, and there is much I'll leave out (e.g., I'll focus on Taylor's account of mental reference, thought the book is also about linguistic reference). I'll allow myself a little license—though I hope not too much—in order to present what I take to be one of the more ambitious and interesting aspects of Taylor's book.

2. Referentialist semantics

As mentioned, the book's aims are not historical, but Taylor presents his views by locating them with respect to positions that have dominated the literature. This often involves carving up that literature in characteristic and illuminating ways.

For example, in presenting his own view of the nature of semantic content, Taylor introduces two central and opposing families of view: *semantic presentationalism* and *semantic referentialism*.

The semantic presentationalist holds that the semantic content of thoughts or linguistic expressions is determined by their presentational properties (p. 31). *Presentational properties* are not defined, but are said clusters of properties that are manifested and directly available in *presentations*, or 'ways' of having worldly things presented. And, the *way* an object or property is presented is something distinct from that object or property itself. The guiding idea, on Taylor's telling, is that it is the properties that are manifested in presentations as of objects, which make those objects available. They are what is primarily or immediately grasped by the mind and so they are the constituents of content (p. 31). Frege, for example, is introduced as a semantic presentationalist since, for him, senses were the basic constituents of thoughts (p. 33).

Taylor claims that semantic presentationalists give 'center stage' to *how* worldly objects and properties are presented rather than to what is thereby presented (p. 32). And they are motivated to this by what he calls, *the epistemic one-sidedness of reference*: roughly, that referring to worldly entities, involves a limited or perspectival (one-sided) epistemic relation to them. For example, for a presentationalist like Frege, grasp of *sense* supports a one-sided recognitional ability: an ability that allows one to recognize a thing only insofar as it is presented in the same way again. Grasp of sense involves 'a cognitive hold only on one facet or face of the object without thereby giving us hold on alternative faces of the very same object' (p. 34).

The opposing view is *semantic referentialism*: a view giving center stage not to presentations and presentational properties, but to what they present. The semantic referentialist holds that what is

presented in perception, thought and talk—worldly objects and (presumably, non-presentational) properties—constitutes semantic content.

Taylor is a semantic referentialist. He outright rejects the presentationalist claim that presentational properties are constituents of content. Semantic content is worldly representational content. Worldly objects, properties, relations, etc. are its constituents. His aim is to hold onto semantic referentialism in the face of challenges that have caused others (in his view, e.g., Russell) to at least partially abandon it.

A central challenge is that semantic referentialism must account for *the epistemic one-sidedness of reference* without adopting presentational content. The semantic presentationalist's claim that our primary access is to something that is *itself* perspectival—presentations or presentational properties—seems to capture the limited, perspectival nature of our referential relation to worldly things. Recall the one-sided recognitional abilities associated with grasp of *presentational* content (e.g., *senses*). They are recognitional abilities to be sure—they allow one to recognize when one has encountered the same object again—but are bound to some particular perspective. The epistemic one-sidedness of reference is a challenge for semantic referentialists, I take it, because they hold that worldly objects, properties, events, etc. constitute semantic content, and this might *seem* to suggest that grasp of content should come with recognitional abilities that are not limited and perspectival (p. 43-4). Russell can be understood as assuming this: he held that grasp of content containing some object would thus involve an unlimited recognitional capacity with respect to it. On Taylor's telling, Russell is thereby driven to embrace presentational (descriptive or indirect) content, for the case of thought and talk about ordinary worldly objects: he holds 'that ordinary middle sized objects, like Socrates, are thinkable only via one-sided presentations.' (p. 36). He thinks this is necessary, in order to account for our epistemically one-sided relationship to them.

Russell placed strict, epistemic constraints on referential semantic content: grasping a referential content that contains a given thing requires that one be 'cognitively equipped to recognize that she has encountered the same object again' in a way that is not epistemically one-sided (p. 36). This means we can only grasp referential semantic contents containing a privileged class of objects: not ordinary, worldly ones. For Russell, this was also what allowed that directly referential content could play the role of securing the semantic answerability of thought and talk in general. His view is one on which singular or object-dependent representations are *epistemically* foundational, but also one on which presentational (descriptive or object-independent) content is needed to account for the (derivative) sense in which our thought and talk are semantically answerable to ordinary, worldly objects.

On my understanding, Taylor wants to hold on to the idea that direct reference has a special role to play with respect to the possibility of objective representational content: it is the capacity to directly refer that grounds the semantic answerability of thought to the world. But, for him, direct reference comes without Russell's strict epistemic constraints, so presentational content need not enter the picture. For Taylor, direct reference has special properties and a special status, but this should not be construed in *epistemic* terms. The epistemic one-sidedness of reference is consistent with wholesale rather than restricted semantic referentialism, and with the possibility of direct reference to ordinary objects, because direct reference to ordinary objects is *epistemically* one-sided, but distinctive in another sense: it has distinctively singular form.

It is partially in this light that we should understand some of Taylor's remarks concerning so-called 'problems of *de re* belief' (e.g., p. 220-1). Taylor claims there is no special *problem* concerning probity or possibility of *de re* attitudes. However, the idea here is not that we should abandon a special explanatory role for direct (as opposed to descriptive) reference. On what I hope is a fair reading, his aim is rather to take up and give some flesh to a picture of representation according to which direct reference is explanatorily central. The question for proponents of this idea has always

been: in what sense? On Taylor's view, direct reference to external objects is both *ordinary* and also *central to explaining representation*. It gets to be *ordinary* in virtue of carrying no unrealistically stringent epistemic constraints according to which it would somehow defy perspectival limitations. It gets to be *explanatorily primary* in virtue, not of its epistemology, but its singular *form*.

3. Singular form

Taylor combines the explanatory primacy and epistemic one-sidedness of direct reference, by giving a syntactic view of its distinctiveness. What is distinctive about direct reference, and what allows us to see its role in a larger account of objective representation, is its possession of singular form. Furthermore, the nature and role of singular form have a special relationship to famous 'coreference puzzles', most centrally Frege's puzzle.

We are asked to understand singularity of form by thinking about the distinctiveness of *proper names* and their mental analog, *name-like representations in thought* (p. 99-100). These are distinctive, on Taylor's view, partly in virtue of being 'devices of *explicit coreference*', where this is a claim about them as vehicles, not about their content. *Explicit coreference* is a relation holding between two tokens, *n* and *m* when something in their internal linguistic character (or, presumably, their cognitive character, for name-like representations in thought) guarantees that if *m* refers to *o* then *n* refers to *o* as well (p. 101). The contrast is *referential independence*, which holds between tokens when nothing in their internal linguistic or cognitive character guarantees this. *Mental names* are vehicle types such that tokens of that type are explicitly coreferential with one another, and referentially independent from tokens of other types (p. 100-1). This means that tokens of the same mental name 'stand or fall together with respect to referential purport, success and failure' (p. 100): they form a *chain of explicit coreference*.

On Taylor's view, names are also distinctive in virtue of additional features of their syntactic, functional role. Specifically, they are the kind of expression that 1) can occupy the argument places of verbs, 2) can well-formedly flank the identity sign, and 3) can anchor anaphoric chains both within and across sentence boundaries (but are never anaphorically dependent) (p. 97 & 107). This distinguishes them from, for example, predicates, or demonstratives and indexicals.

Taylor stresses that this account of a distinctive kind of form requires a capacious conception of syntax. Syntax is not merely construed in terms of the shape-like 'intrinsic' properties of representations (p. 95), but in terms of a broader class of properties including those 'that accrue to representations at least partly in virtue of their (non-semantic) relations to one another' (p. 96)—that is, their combinatorial or structural properties.

But, what does this have to do with the role of names and name-like representations in making objective representation possible?

The idea is that the ability to deploy representations with this syntactic profile is central to the *objectuality*, or referential fitness, of language and thought. In thought, the ability to deploy name-like representations grounds our capacity to think in a way that carries intrinsic purport as of the same object again (p. 108). Without representations playing this syntactic role, it would, according to Taylor, always be an open question for the thinker whether she were thinking of the same object again, or a different object. And this, in turn, would result in a mind whose cognitive hold on objects were fleeting at best (p. 108-9). However, thought as of worldly objects *is* thought as of 'enduring particulars that can be encountered and cognized again from different perspectives while being the same again and while being at least on occasion cognized as the same again.' (p. 109). The 'job description' of names is to make *manifest preservation of subject matter* possible, and a mind without manifest preservation of subject matter would be one without the capacity for thought as of objects at all.

Notice that, for Taylor, that which makes directly referential singular representations explanatorily central—not their epistemology but their syntactic role—is also that which provides a solution to Frege's puzzle and an explanation of the epistemic one-sidedness of reference. Presentationalists account for the epistemic one-sidedness of reference, and solve Frege's puzzle, by introducing presentational content. Taylor's view is that 'such notions as coreference profiles, relations of same-purport, and the distinction between explicitly and merely coincidental coreference' allow us to account for epistemic one-sidedness and to see why some true identity statements are informative (p. 126). A thought involving two explicitly coreferential representations flanking the identity sign 'is guaranteed to express a truth… so long as the designators are not empty', and this is so in virtue of the syntactic nature of the relevant expressions (p. 126). There will be a 'felt cognitive difference' between a thought like this, and ones that involve referentially independent representations flanking the identity sign (p. 126). This difference accounts for triviality and informativity. One-sidedness and informativity are not features of contents, but of vehicles (p. 127).

By locating the answer to Frege's puzzle and the explanation of the epistemic one-sidedness of reference in syntax, Taylor sees his view as a 'corrective' to the Fregean tradition, which locates the source of cognitive significance phenomena in semantic content (p. 126 & 136), and the Russellian one, which spells out the distinctive role of direct reference in epistemological terms.

4. The psychology of singular form

Taylor thinks semantic referentialists have neglected the task of giving a psychology of reference by placing too much emphasis on the external conditions on reference and too little on internal fitness-making factors. He also thinks giving an account of the psychological organization of the referring mind goes beyond specifying the distinctive formal features of singular referring devices.

One way to more clearly view Taylor's overall picture is to locate it with respect to recent trends in the theory of mental reference. For example, he can be placed alongside many so-called 'mental file' theorists in offering a vehicular account of singular representation in thought, and a connected syntactic solution to Frege's puzzle. But he takes himself to provide an alternative account of the psychology of direct reference to the mental files theory.

Like file theorists, Taylor views the mind as 'rightly and informatively characterized as a field of inner representations' (p. 10). However, file-theorists think of concepts as object representations with file structure: they 'contain' information the subject takes to apply to the file's referent. And, they understand the occurrence of *explicit coreference* between token thoughts to involve deployment of the same file, and referential independence and informativity to involve deployment of distinct files. Taylor rejects this, instead proposing a distinction between *concepts* and *conceptions* (neither of which are identified with object representations), and claiming that file-theories conflate the two.

For Taylor, *concepts* are shareable, and are that which make their extensions available to be thought about (p. 156). They are cognitive and social tools, and are 'the common possessions of the psychologically diverse members of a single community' (p. 148 & 156). That said, they are also 'building blocks of thoughts' (p. 156) in the sense that my thought that Nikola is a dog will involve a deployments of the concept <Nikola>, and a deployment of the concept <dog>. Concepts are not vehicles of thought, but deploying a concept will involve tokening a vehicle that 'expresses' that concept (p. 165).

Conceptions are that wherein thinkers who share a concept might differ (149). They can be thought of as labeled, highly structured mental particulars—a bit like data bases of information (and misinformation), which are associated (in a particular thinker's mind) with concepts (p. 157). Unlike mental files, they are not building blocks of thought, but are rather built *out* of thoughts. Their job is

to mediate reasoning about the worldly objects, properties, etc., which concepts make available to thought, and so to mediate the deployment of concepts. E.g., if it's part of my conception of coffee that it is part aqueous solution and part emulsion, this will influence the conclusions I draw about which other substances are similar and different to coffee, etc..

Taylor also calls conceptions 'ways of having concepts' (p. 164) and they are part of Taylor's story about coreference puzzles. An individual in a Frege case is described as one whose deployments of the same concept, e.g., <Venus>, are independently mediated by distinct conceptions, which are maintained and updated separately and may contain quite different information (p. 165-6). Thus, Taylor's solution to Frege's puzzle can be distinguished from both the mental-file theorist's solution (in that a Frege case is not said to involve possession of two distinct but coreferential *concepts*) and from standard syntactic solutions (in that Frege cases are theorized *both* in terms of difference of syntactic type *and* difference of conception).

5. Questions

Taylor's account of the nature of direct reference and its role in making objective representational content possible contains much insight. Both the ambitious reach of the work and the fact that it is, sadly, unfinished, mean it leaves us with questions. Some of these may have been answered in a finished version of the book, but all point to the fact that even this unfinished version is worthy of our careful engagement.

Taylor's account of the role of direct reference in a theory of intentionality centers on the idea that *name-like representations* have distinctive syntactic, role-oriented properties, and are thereby central for the possibility of objective representation. The discussion here is rich, but it's not clear Taylor has done enough to distinguish name-like representations from other representation types in order to award them their distinctive central role.

Taylor makes some strong claims about name-like representations: e.g., that 'a mind that lacked the capacity to deploy name-like representations in thought would hardly be recognizable as a *human* mind' (p. 109). This is because name-like representations, as devices of explicit coreference, are given the role of accounting for same-purporting thought. Without this, representation as of an objective world would not be possible. However, one could *agree* that an enduring rather than fleeting hold of worldly things is a condition on objective representation but balk at the suggestion that *name-like* representations are unique in allowing this. Notice, for example, that predicates or property representations may also be devices of explicit coreference, for they allow us to manifestly pick out the same property again. As with mental names, *property-representations* are vehicle types such that tokens of that type are explicitly coreferential with one another, and referentially independent from tokens of other types. If the idea is that manifest preservation of subject-matter is necessary for genuine representation, then name-like representations are merely one kind of device that allows for this.

Another way to put the point is this. Name-like representations are distinguished, by Taylor, by their syntactic role: they can occupy the argument places of verbs, well-formedly flank the identity sign, and anchor anaphoric chains without being anaphorically dependent. Property representations fulfill the last condition too, and the first two conditions seem unnecessary for a representation to play the role of making manifest preservation of subject matter possible.

The strength of Taylor's claims about name-like representation seem to vary (perhaps a final version of the book would have resolved this). On one hand, he singles out name-like representations to play the role of accounting for same-purporting talk and thought. On the other, he allows that a language that lacked devices of explicit coreference (names) would be merely pragmatically impoverished, but possible (p. 110). The fact that a language without *names* seems

pragmatically impoverished though possible, points back to the first point above: names are but one of a larger class of expressions that make manifest preservation of subject matter possible. Take away the names, but leave in place the property representations, apparatus of denotation and some indexical representations, and you are perhaps left without a subclass of representations that purport to refer non-descriptively to particular worldly individuals, but you are still left with genuine objective representation *as* of a world of enduring particulars and properties. This language would require the description of particulars, and so might involve *limitations* on our ability to keep track of them across change, or coordinate concerning them. This is a kind of 'pragmatic' impoverishment, I suppose.

So, why would Taylor not have claimed that devices of explicit coreference (construed as a broader class) were necessary for objective representation, but that name-like representations (a narrower class) were useful though not necessary? Though it's not discussed, perhaps the assumption is that predicates don't refer. Perhaps this is right but, if the view envisaged is one on which they would not thereby allow for anything that could count as manifest preservation of subject matter, then it would have been helpful to see this discussed

Taylor motivates his psychological story about reference with the idea that referentialists and externalists have paid too little attention to the inner workings of the referring mind. However, he also presents his view as an alternative to recently popular 'mental files' accounts, which also focus on this. His distinction between *concepts* and *conceptions* is meant to avoid difficulties with the file theory, whilst exploiting some of its resources. We might wonder whether Taylor manages, in the end, to have his cake and eat it.

For file theorists, concepts are object representations with file structure. One may fairly ask what this claim comes to. But the file view does seem to be simpler than Taylor's, which posits *concepts* (not referents but that which makes them available for thought), *conceptions* (a bit like files) and *mental representations*, which are not identified with either (see p. 165).

Taylor gives two reasons for rejecting the file-theorist's identification of concepts and conceptions. The first is that concepts and conceptions relate differently to their extensions. The concept <horse> applies to all and only horses, whereas my conception of horses (the database of information I believe to apply to horses) may fail to be true of any horses and be true of non-horses (p. 159). The second is that concepts compose, whereas conceptions don't. The complex concept <gray cat> is composed from the concepts <gray> and <cat>. This is required because of the so-called 'systematicity' of thought (Taylor cites Fodor here) (p. 160). However, because conceptions are determined by the nature of one's beliefs, not building blocks *of* them, the conception that mediates one's deployment of the concept <gray cat> could contain entirely different information from the conceptions that mediate one's deployments of the concepts <gray> and <cat>.

The mental file theorist deals with these issues by distinguishing mental files from the information contained in them. Taylor may be rightly skeptical of this. However, one might ask 1) whether his alternative (a threefold distinction between concepts, conceptions and representations) is substantively different, 2) how its proposed explanations are meant to go, and 3) whether it gives up on some explanations that more streamlined theories seem to offer.

Perhaps Taylor thinks it's important to claim that deployments of concepts are mediated by conceptions but don't contain them, because of well-known reciprocal containment puzzles for the file-theory. Though he doesn't discuss them at length, some remarks suggest a concern with this and related worries about the explanatory priority of concepts with respect to beliefs (p. 157, n.3). These are fair worries, but one is left wondering what the claim that conceptions 'mediate' the deployment of concepts comes to. If it is that concepts are associated with bodies of information, determined by the agent's commitments concerning that concept's extension and consequential for her reasoning

about it, then the view looks less like an alternative to the file theory than a variant, which (perhaps rightly) side-steps the metaphor of containment. Much discussion of the file theory centers on how to cash it out and how seriously to take its metaphors, but it seems to me that Taylor's view leaves us in a similar place.

Secondly, unlike the file-theory, Taylor's view has three kinds of entities over which to distribute its explanatory burdens. This is sold as a benefit. Concepts explain the publicity and shared nature of thought (p. 145). However, when it comes to conceptions (which mediate deployment of concepts) and object representations (tokenings of which count as deployment of concepts), the division of explanatory labor becomes less clear. Early on, it is claimed that the use of explicitly coreferential, or referentially independent, token *representations* are all that is needed to explain the triviality or informativity of identities, respectively (p. 126). However, once the concept/conception distinction is introduced, the existence of a Frege case is explained in terms of the idea that two deployments of the same concept are 'independently mediated by distinct conceptions' (p. 165). Taylor says that *this* occurs when a single mind has 'two syntactically distinct referentially independent inner representations'. Since conceptions cannot simply be object representations (after all, they're structured databases) it becomes unclear exactly what kind of explanatory work is bestowed on the two notions, or how they are connected.

Finally, it is a perhaps unsatisfying implication of Taylor's view that a certain unity of explanation found in other syntactic pictures is lost. The reasons given by Taylor that *concepts* must compose are Fodor's, and are well-known. Basically, we understand both the rationality of inferences, and the systematicity of our thinking abilities by positing combinatorial, compositional structure. But, on *that* picture, it is that which composes systematically to form whole thoughts— concepts—whose identity across different token thoughts explains manifest preservation of subject matter, and whose difference explains informative identities. On Taylor's view, there is no single kind of entity that composes and takes part in systematic relations, explains manifest preservation of subject matter, and explains the possibility of Frege cases. Rather, *concepts* are systematic, but are not mental vehicles or abilities. *Conceptions* are used to explain the possibility of Frege cases, but are not building blocks of thought. And, *syntax* is said to explain manifest preservation of subject matter. Even setting aside the possibility that conceptions and representations explain manifest preservation of subject matter and the possibility of Frege cases jointly (so that both are explained in terms of the same pair of things), this would seem to rob Taylor's claim that concepts *must* compose and be systematic of its force, and might leave us wondering whether he has made one too many distinctions.

Some of these questions would no doubt have been answered in a final version of the book. All of them, I hope, indicate how much there is to engage with in the version Taylor left us with.

References
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