THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SCHIFFER'S MEANING-INTENTION PROBLEM

Mark LOVAS

Schiffer's 'meaning-intention' problem is aimed at 'hidden-indexical' theories of belief ascription. Without defending such theories the author raises several questions about the assumptions behind Schiffer's objection. Perhaps hidden-indexical theories don't tell us enough about how we can refer to modes of presentation, but Schiffer's skepticism about our ability to know modes of presentation is unwarranted. The author sketches an account of the role of modes of presentation in ordinary psychological talk which is designed to answer Schiffer's skeptical worries.

> The . . . most serious . . . problem is one I call the *meaning-intention problem.*
>
> (Schiffer, [19], 286)

I.   Introduction[1]

According to hidden-indexical theories of belief ascription, when someone attributes a belief he or she also makes a tacit reference to a contextually determined type of mode of presentation. Schiffer ([17], [18], [19], [20]) has argued that speakers who attribute beliefs have no such intention. If probed by an audience upon the occasion when the speaker attributes a belief, the speaker need not be able to specify any mode of presentation, and a given audience who has understood a belief attribution need not understand the claim to involve a mode of presentation. And, even if we present a speaker with a formulation which makes the tacit mode of presentation explicit, the speaker need not accept that formulation as corresponding to what she meant. Moreover, in cases where we can find a mode of presentation acceptable to the speaker, there need not be a unique one which is exactly what she had in mind. These are, in brief, the problems Schiffer raises for the hidden-indexical theory of belief ascription.

Schiffer's attack upon hidden-indexical theories seems to assume several principles. I have taken the liberty of labeling the principles as follows:

(1) Transparency: A speaker knows what she is saying.
    (Cf. Schiffer [17], 101)

(2) Communicability: If a competent audience understands a belief attribution, but cannot expand upon what was said by articulating a mode of presentation, then no mode of presentation was part of what was said.

But, (2) seems to rest upon a more basic principle:

(2a) What is said cannot exceed what is communicated.

One might dub this principle 'the availability of what is said'. Schiffer's actual practice suggests that he holds a rather specific version of the principle:

(2b) What is communicated must be understood within a relatively brief time, say, the time during which an initial belief attribution is expressed.

In responding to Schiffer, I shall raise doubts about the Transparency Principle. In Section Two I shall argue that in the strong form needed by Schiffer's argument it is not a reasonable principle. For purposes of this paper I shall accept (2) and (2a), but I shall doubt (2b). In Sections Three and Four I argue that Schiffer has placed unnecessary restrictions upon the means by which one might expand upon an initial saying. Section Five focuses upon the transparency principle. I suggest that modes of presentation, as classically understood, fail to be transparent. In Section Six I address Schiffer's worries about loss of some reasonable amount of knowledge of meaning. Section Seven offers a modest solution to the worries about our ability to pick out a unique mode of presentation. Before turning to these points, it might be appropriate to say something about the more general philosophical morals of the discussion.

Schiffer's attack seems to be guided by an underlying epistemology of understanding and meaning. It is not clear whether Schiffer himself need hold the view in question, or whether he simply finds it natural to suppose that any theorist making use of modes of presentation must use such an epistemology. Roughly, the epistemology in question sees modes of presentation as items which are fully present to consciousness and able to be fully expressed and grasped at a given time. Their meaning is wholly present at any instant of a speech exchange. But, there is an alternative picture. We might see meanings as rather more like constructed entities, entities which emerge through time. Once we take such a perspective, they shall not seem so inscrutable as Schiffer's argument makes them seem. Perhaps, that episte-

mology is Schiffer's true target. Perhaps Schiffer wants us to see that meaning can't be grasped in that way.[2] In any case, my point is that we can divide a theoretical commitment to modes of presentation in the analysis of belief attributions from commitment to that view of how modes of presentation are known. And that means that Schiffer's meaning-intention argument is much weaker than it would seem.

I should add at the outset the reminder that I have no desire to defend hidden-indexical theories. Schiffer has pointed to an inadequacy in the theory of Perry and Crimmins. I take it to be well established that they do not say enough about how modes of presentations (which they call notions and ideas) come to be expressed.[3] However, it is not clear that this problem need extend to every theory which makes room for modes of presentation.

II. What is the Meaning-Intention Problem?

"What is obvious in context we do not belabor in syntax - we do not articulate it."

(Perry and Crimmins [6], 700)

Schiffer illustrates the meaning-intention problem with an example. Suppose that Flora makes the following belief attribution:

(1) Harold believes that TWA is offering a New York-Paris return fare for $318.

According to the hidden-indexical theory, what Flora meant can be better represented by the following (where 'φ' is a place-holder for the name of the contextually determined type of mode of presentation):

(1*) that there is something that both has φ and is such that Harold believes the proposition *that TWA is offering a New York-Paris return fare for $318 under it.*

Here is one summary description of the problem which Schiffer sees:

. . . it is doubtful . . . that belief ascribers are in a position to mean what the hidden-indexical theory requires them to mean ([19] 286).

Schiffer's mention of what ascribers are 'in a position to mean' suggests an epistemic problem. As Schiffer puts it elsewhere, ascribers just *cannot* mean what the theory says they do mean. (See, e.g., Schiffer [18], 108-111) Thus, we may doubt whether Flora means (1*) by (1). This problem may be divided into two parts, which for ease of reference I have labeled, 'The Access Problem', and 'The Uniqueness Problem'.

> **THE ACCESS PROBLEM:**   (A)   The problem of ascriber access: Flora need not be able to offer any characterization of the mode of presentation under which Harold believes this proposition other than the formulation which she has just offered ((1) above). (See Schiffer [19], 513-514) (This is just to say that she need have no idea how to replace or unpack the 'φ' in (1*) above.)
> (B) The problem of audience access: An audience (such as the reader) who understands this proposition cannot say which mode of presentation is involved. ([20], 513-514; Cf. [19], 287)
> **THE UNIQUENESS PROBLEM:** Speakers who correctly attribute beliefs cannot manage to make a *single* type of mode of presentation salient. The believer holds the belief, typically, under many modes of presentation, many of which may be salient in a given context. ([20], 515-516; [19], 287)

Schiffer believes that a speaker must be able to express any modes of presentation which are part of what she means because meaning something is an intentional act which involves a quite specific sort of conscious audience-directed intention. For a mode of presentation to be part of what a person means it is not enough that a speaker believe that her utterance will cause an audience to think of an object under that mode of presentation; it must also be true that the speaker consciously intends that result. (Schiffer [18], 127) Here is Schiffer making the general point:

> Meaning entails audience-directed intentions, and one cannot mean something without intending to be understood. Part of meaning that such and such is intending one's audience to recognize that is what one meant, anda corollarypart of referring to a thing is intending one's audience to recognize that reference. ([19], 515-516; Cf. 517-518)

The meaning-intention problem, then, raises a doubt about the role of modes of presentation in belief attributions. Schiffer ([18], 110) does not,

however, deny that modes of presentation (understood as functional roles) play a psychological role. Nor does he doubt the epistemic claim that we always think of things under manners of presentation or via concepts. (Cf. Recanati [15],169-170; Schiffer [22], 202]) Rather, Schiffer doubts whether such things are part of the meaning of belief ascriptions. (Cf. Bach [2], 441])

III. The Access Problem and The 'and-that's-*all*-I-mean!" Strategy

Schiffer considers the possibility that there may be occasions where a speaker might be saying, e.g., 'that Ralph believes the proposition that Fido is a dog *under some mode of presentation or other*." (added emphasis [20], 504) Schiffer objects that such an account of what is meant need not match a speaker's intentions. Faced with a re-description of what she has said, Flora may say:

> Look, what I am saying and all that I am saying is that Harold believes that TWA is offering a New York-Paris return fare for $318.
> [20], 515; Cf. [19], 287; [18], 127.

For ease of reference, let us refer to Flora's strategy here as the 'and-that's-*all*-I-mean' strategy. Are we to suppose that, as a general policy, speakers will not allow their beliefs (whether or not those beliefs are themselves belief attributions) to be re-expressed using words at all different from those which the speaker herself had first used to express the belief? Plainly, some allowance must be made for indexicals, but even if we do so, the principle seems too strong. It is also noteworthy that in the story Schiffer tells us, Flora is reacting to a proposed philosophical account of what she means, and she wants to come down hard on the point that she does not mean such a thing. In such a context, it would not be surprising if Flora were inclined to overstate her case. Insofar as her goal would be to squash any suggestion that she had in mind a particular utterance, it would be an optimal way to express her intention by focusing upon that one aspect of the speech situation.

I don't mean to say that Schiffer himself is exaggerating, but he has imagined a situation in which it would be natural for a speaker to exaggerate. In the context Schiffer imagines it would not be surprising if Flora were inclined to overstate her case. Whether or not that is so, the key issue is whether the implicit principle is a reasonable one. Granted that there are

occasions where a speaker might insist upon no tinkering with the words used to attribute her belief, is it true in general that believers will accept no later expansions of an initial utterance as capturing what she said? This question leads us to what must be the first natural response to Schiffer's attack by a proponent of the hidden-indexical theory. Has Schiffer shown any more than the possibility that in some situations speakers do not have in mind modes of presentation, while leaving open the possibility that in other situations they do have in mind modes of presentation? This suggests that Schiffer's example relies upon a specific choice of context. But one would have thought that this would be predicted by a proponent of the hidden-indexical theory: we will not know which mode of presentation is in question if the context is not adequately specified. Schiffer does not adequately examine the possibility that in the examples he describes, we are unable to focus upon a single relevant mode of presentation because the context has not been adequately specified. But, can we give a principled reason for supposing that, in general, a more detailed specification of what someone means should be available? I think we can, but I shall postpone that task until Section Four below.

The Complexity of a Speaker's Intentions

. . .one cannot mean something without intending to be understood. Part of meaning that such and such is intending one's audience to recognize that is what one meant . . . (Schiffer [19],515-516)

My second response to Schiffer focuses upon his appeal to a speaker's intentions. How definite do a speaker's intentions need to be? Schiffer [19] has claimed that a speaker need not have a transparent grasp of what she *believes*, but that she must have a transparent grasp of what she *means* or *intends*. (Cf. Schiffer [17]) And one might think that a speaker's intentions can't be definite unless what she means is relatively definite. Moreover, to the extent that there is some indefiniteness in what she means, any claim of transparency will be weakened. I intend to endorse this chain of reasoning, but first I need to present reasons why we should take seriously the notion that the objects of intention and meaning are complex.

At this point, it will help to briefly consider the work of Sperber and Wilson ([23], [24]; Cf. Recanati [15], Chapter 3) Sperber and Wilson provide an account both of the speaker's choices and of the speaker's relationship to an audience. In reporting a belief (even one's own) one does not simply provide the *exact content* which is believed. Rather, one supplies

a summary or partial account or characterization of one's belief, one which will in the context be combinable with information already available to derive an accurate picture of what is believed. The speaker need only provide a description which, in the context, is sufficiently relevant (sufficiently revealing of the nature of the belief) to be worth the processing effort it costs the audience. Thus any notion of saying exactly what one thinks is replaced with the notion of saying enough to help satisfy the current conversational goals.

The key point is that a speaker will generally anticipate that his words will have a range of effects upon her audience, and the effects in question will not be limited to the grasping of a single atomic proposition. An audience may be led to accept or entertain several propositions, and if some of these propositions are comments upon an intended object of reference, then such propositions will represent a complex sense. But, where there is such complexity in what is communicated, the 'and-that's-all-I-mean' strategy cannot be appealed to.

There is also complexity on the speaker's side of the communication situation. A speaker need not intend to communicate all of what she has in mind. She may focus upon some parts of what she means, and some aspect of what she means might not be fully conscious to her, or might be less fully conscious than other elements. What is meant may have a foreground - background quality. Not all elements of meaning will be equally salient for a thinker. In such a case, consciousness of one's intentions or meaning cannot be an all-or-none phenomenon, and a speaker (again) will be unable to employ the 'and-that's-all-I-mean' strategy.

If we follow Sperber and Wilson in saying that a speaker expresses less than her complete thought, this invites the possibility of *explication* or *exegesis*, occurring through time, in an expanding conversational setting. One cannot suppose that Schiffer is pointing to the need for such explication or exegesis because the 'and-that's-all-I-mean' strategy functions precisely to restrict a context in such a way that no expansion or exegesis occurs. In the next section I shall sketch a positive account which is consistent with the critical remarks which I have been making.

IV. An Alternative Account

Here is an alternative characterization of our domain: Quite often, a speaker realizes that the subject of a belief attribution has thoughts of a certain complexity, thoughts which are under-described by a particular

belief attribution, but the speaker either lacks any reason to specify those modes of presentation, or lacks the detailed knowledge which would be needed to do so. In my own case, when I express my own beliefs, I may recognize a certain complexity in what I believe about a certain object, the subject of a proposition which I express, but neither do I know how much of that complexity a particular audience will grasp nor are all of those elements equally conscious to me.

The weight of practical daily activities forces us to carry on as though we were in agreement with our fellows, and that means that we do not always take the time to articulate differing conceptions which others may have, or, even our own conceptions. Such articulation would simply take more time and effort than is practical.

It is not merely a philosopher's thesis to say that thinkers conceive of objects in specific ways, or that one and the same object may be thought of in different ways, and that, as a consequence, a belief attribution may need to be expanded upon in ways which make modes of presentation explicit. Such expansion is not unusual. It is part of our ordinary psychological understanding of other people. (I shall be offering an example of what I have in mind shortly.)

Plainly, my proposal differs from that of the hidden-indexical theorist. I have not claimed that every belief attribution carries a tacit reference to a mode of presentation. Nor am I saying that speakers make an indefinite reference to some mode of presentation or other. When we attribute beliefs we need not intend to refer to a mode of presentation, but we must be willing to expand our utterance in a way which brings out a mode of presentation, should the discussion require it. This is why Flora's saying 'and-that's-all-I-mean!' is problematic. On my account, it is a sort of standing policy that a speaker is willing to expand upon an initial belief ascription when it is needed, or at least to engage in such inquiry as would allow a sufficiently fuller description of what is believed to emerge. (I say something about what counts as a *sufficiently fuller* description below.) To borrow a term of Geirsson's, ordinary speakers who are in good faith must be willing to *probe* for representations.

Consider the following story which a (non-philosopher, non-academic) friend once told me:

> I used to see NN every day, and I knew that Pyramus and Thisbee had a daughter, but it never occurred to me that NN was their daughter, that is, not until the day when I suddenly saw that she looks like both of them.

Here we have not only the informative identity, "NN is the daughter of Pyramus and Thisbee", but a kind of decomposition or analysis of a perceptual experience which was previously unanalyzed: this person I've been seeing every day actually resembles both Pyramus and Thisbee. If she had been burdened with a philosophical education, she might even have said, "My visual representation had this content which I had never explicitly recognized or put into wordsuntil now."

Even philosophers who grant the epistemic or psychological claim that thinking occurs under a mode of presentation do not automatically grant the relevance of modes of presentation to belief attributions. (See Bach [2], Clapp [4]) The standard version of this claim is along the following lines: *"Every case of thinking may be under some concept or manner of presentation, but that doesn't mean that whenever we attribute a belief we refer to a manner of presentation."* I am actually accepting this claim, however, I am suggesting a way that we can still assign a role to modes of presentation in ordinary psychological discourse. I wish to suggest that it is a sort of axiom of ordinary psychology that attributions of belief can be expanded, and that our communicative intentions are influenced by this knowledge. We don't simply reject out of hand every paraphrase of what is said. Below I shall say more about why and when we engage in expansion.

How to Make Modes of Presentation Salient

François Recanati [14], [15] has defended the claim that modes of presentation are part of what a competent audience needs to grasp to understand the use of a singular term. Recanati illustrates the claim with an example due to Brian Loar. The example is designed to show that speakers have the intention that an audience think of an object in a particular way:

Suppose that Smith and Jones are unaware that the man being interviewed on television is someone they see on the train every morning and about whom, in that latter role, they have just been talking. Smith says, "He is a stockbroker", intending to refer to the man on the television; Jones takes Smith to be referring to the man on the train. Now Jones, as it happens, has correctly identified Smith's referent, since the man on television is the man on the train, but he has failed to understand Smith's utterance. It would seem that, as Frege held, some 'manner of presentation' of the referent is, even on referential uses, essential to what is being communicated. (Loar [11], 357; cited by Recanati [15].)

The speaker's intention determines whether the audience has under-stood. and an audience who grasps the right referent might yet fail to under-stand the speaker. The speaker is thinking of the person in a particular way. and audience who fails to realize this will not understand the utterance. However. for our purposes the really important move is made by Recanati in commenting upon this passage:

The fact that such misunderstanding is always possible entails that there is *al-ways* a mode of presentation as part of semantic content. (Original emphasis; [13], 184)

If Recanati is correct. there must be a mode of presentation present in Schiffer's example. Our task then becomes one of imagining a situation where Flora's responses are guided by that mode of presentation. This will mean that even Schiffer's Flora will accept some but not other paraphrases of what she had said. However, it seems unlikely that we should ask Flora in the relatively direct way in which Schiffer imagines. The following is a parody of Schiffer's probing of Flora:

Look at this [ostending a fancy philosopher's paraphrase of what's she's just said] :
- Is that what you mean, Flora?
- Why. heavens no!

If we think about how we introduce modes of presentation in a more natural setting. their introduction does not occur with anything like such abruptness. It is more usual to have something like a personal version of a psychologist's experiment. Allow me to explain. One thing which may happen in a psychology experiment is that by studying how a subject be-haves. seeing, e.g.. that there is different behavior in different situations. in situations. say, where a subject is not. and then is presented with novel stimuli the experimenter works backward to a hypothesis about what the subject thinks or believes. Obviously, actual psychological experiments are more complicated than I've thus far allowed. but the basic description is apt. And if we think about the example I described above involving Pyramus and Thisbee. we saw something analogous, but at the first-person level. My friend experienced a change in the way she saw things, and this led her to engage in some reasoning about her own states. She came to believe that she had previously not organized her experiences or perceptual information in

the most accurate way. She had been thinking of NN as resembling neither Pyramus nor Thisbee, but now she has come to see that NN resembles both, and has changed the way she thinks about NN. In other words, she had been thinking of NN under a mode of presentation, a mode of presentation which was complex, but she had not previously perceived it to be complex. (My language may seem to introduce a certain indirection which is not true to her experience. She simply sees NN differently. However, she has gained a genuine power of articulation with respect to her own past way of seeing things, and that articulation requires her to introduce some such expression as 'the way I used to see things', and that means she must introduce a mode of presentation. And, in this respect she resembles the experimenter who describes the experience of an infant or animal subject. One may speculate that for the infant or animal subject, the world is simply perceived to be a certain way, as it were, without joints or seams, but in the context of a psychological experiment the seams become visible.) Taking these remarks to heart, our task now is to find a way to generate a more natural setting in which any modes of presentation which Flora has will come to light.

Let us introduce Fred, who works at Northwest Airlines, and let us suppose that every time Fred thinks about the fact that TWA is offering such a low New York-Paris fare, he thinks it is unfair price slashing, and his blood just boils. So, it would be true to say, of Schiffer's Harold

(2) Harold believes the proposition that makes Fred's blood boil.

But it would not be true to say:

(2*) Harold believes the proposition that makes Fred's blood boil and
      he thinks of it as the proposition that makes Fred's blood boil.

(2*) does not capture Harold's communicative intentions because Harold has never described the proposition in this way and (we may suppose) would not recognize this as something he had said. Furthermore, Flora does not asset (2), and it would be wrong to suppose that she has said any such thing, so far as anything we've said thus far sheds light on her ways of thinking. We might, however, change the situation a bit. If the earlier conversation has provided enough by way of background cues, Flora might simply say:

(1) Harold believes that TWA is offering a New York-Paris return fare for $318

and intend to be understood as saying

(3) Harold believes the proposition that makes Fred's blood boil.

If the conversation has prepared us to think of the proposition that TWA is offering a New York-Paris return fare for $318 in that way then she need not explicitly describe it in that way in order for us to take her words in that way. So, for example, let us suppose that Flora recently had the following conversation with Fred:

Fred: Every time I hear that TWA is offering a New York-Paris return fare for $318 my blood just boils. I can't believe it.
Flora: Harold believes it.

In this context, where there is a shared assumption that the proposition in question makes Fred's blood boil, it would be very natural to take Flora to be saying that that proposition is in question. She was saying that while Fred cannot believe that proposition, Harold can. Of course, one might say we haven't 'fully' specified the proposition. We've hardly given an exhaustive account of how Harold thinks of that proposition. But we have at least seen how in some contexts modes of presentation may come to be salient.

V. Are Modes of Presentation Transparent?

We have developed Loar's insight to obtain indirect evidence about modes of presentation in Schiffer's example, however, the reader may wonder whether we have really met Schiffer's challenge. Schiffer seems to want a rather more direct characterization of the mode of presentation. In particular, he seemed to want something which a speaker might offer at the time of the original assertion. Schiffer's reason for wanting that is his belief that a speaker's meaning is transparent to the speaker. (See, for example, [20], 514-5) But there are reasons which grow out of the very motivation for introducing modes of presentation which should lead us to doubt whether speakers are in a position to form explicit intentions which discriminate between modes of presentation. And, since on Schiffer's account meaning requires that one's intentions be explicit, this will mean that modes of

presentation are not part of semantic content. It is, however, equally possible to draw a different conclusion, that modes of presentation are a component of meaning not fully transparent to a speaker. This may seem to be an odd position, but as I explain what I have in mind below, it will emerge that the entities introduced within the familiar set-up going back to Frege, may actually be less transparently available to a thinker than one might have antecedently expected. In particular, there are cases where a speaker might express a mode of presentation despite him- or herself. That is, an audience could be fully aware that a mode of presentation was part of the thought which led to the production of an utterance, even though the speaker had no such awareness. Exactly what I have in mind will become clearer below.

Why We Need Modes of Presentation At All

It is not news to say that modes of presentation are introduced to help us understand a believer's rationality in the face of problematic assertions. (See Recanati [15] or Taschek [25].) Thus, Crimmins [5] suggests that an utterance of

(27) Tom believes that Tully denounced Cataline

will be about Tom's notion of Tully and *not* his notion of Cicero "only because it is either common knowledge or 'common suspicion' that Tom is confused about Cicero . . . not knowing that Cicero is Tully." ([5], 167)

To continue in the same vein, imagine asking Sophocles' Oedipus, "How can you say that you wish to marry Jocasta but don't wish to marry your mother?". Plainly this question is not - at least, not initially - problematic for Oedipus. For Oedipus it is simply a fact that he has one desire but lacks the other. For us, by contrast (supposing that we know the identity of Jocasta), it is a problem. Perhaps, we are inclined to think that we have an incomplete description of what Oedipus thinks if we merely say that he wants to marry Jocasta but doesn't want to marry his mother. Or, more probably, we shall take 'his mother' and 'Jocasta' to correspond to different concepts of Oedipus, concepts which Oedipus himself doesn't take to apply to the same person. To the extent that we take the latter interpretation, we shall be parsing belief reports with modes of presentation in order to preserve Oedipus' rationality.

One way to think about this problem would be to say that in reality (or for us insofar as we are well-informed) there is no difference between

wanting to marry Jocasta and wanting to marry Oedipus' mother, but Oedipus thinks there is a difference. The disadvantage of that way of putting things is that it credits Oedipus with rather too active and articulated a view of these matters. Oedipus need never have thought about the question of how these two desires are connected. He need have no explicit thoughts about the matter. He merely assumes they are different.

One might also say that if Oedipus happens to assert, "I want to marry Jocasta, not my mother", this sentence carries information for us which it does not carry for Oedipus. By saying that he tells us that he doesn't realize that Jocasta is his mother. In fact he can utter that sentence only so long as he doesn't realize the key identity. Precisely because Oedipus' thoughts are governed by two distinct modes of presentation of his mother (and no bridge between them), he won't form the intention to explicitly distinguish between those two modes of presentation. He may never have formulated the question whether Jocasta and 'Mom' are one and the same. He can say 'Mom' and thereby suppose he is not referring to Jocasta, but he will not say 'I mean Jocasta, not my Mother', unless we press him on the question. And, that means that the difference in sense is not sufficiently conscious to be a component of meaning by Schiffer's standards.

The problem I have just described may arise whenever a person is in a state of less than complete information and attempts to express his or her beliefs. Moreover, to get Recanati's conclusion, that a mode of presentation is always present, it is not enough to add that we are always in a state of incomplete information about objects of reference because that doesn't get the mode of presentation into the content of what is said. We need something more to get modes of presentation into our conversations. We need some crisis of rationality, an incident which forces us to recognize our limited information.

VI. A Loss of Knowledge?

Schiffer ([20], 514-517) suggests that a proponent of the hidden indexical theory might respond to the meaning-intention problem by claiming that a belief ascriber has tacit knowledge of the relevant mode of presentation. I hope it is clear that I am not saying that speakers who attribute beliefs need possess such tacit knowledge. Rather, my view is that a speaker has the capacity (if motivated by exchanges with an audience, or new knowledge from some other source) to make modes of presentation explicit. In his discussion Schiffer has in mind the sort of tacit knowledge structures appealed to in

cognitive science. To the extent that they cannot be made conscious, we lack such a capacity with respect to them.

Schiffer complains that a move to tacit knowledge (which he believes to be the best move open to hidden-indexical theorists) would rob speakers of their privileged knowledge of what they mean. Is my account open to such a charge? At this point, I suspect that there is a substantial disagreement between Schiffer and myself. I am suggesting an account of a speaker's knowledge of her own intentions or meaning which is different from that which Schiffer employs. One might say that on my account a speaker may under-specify her intentions, and, as a consequence, she might not have a complete grasp of what she means.

There is the possibility of a certain sort of instability here. Oedipus may say he meant *Jocasta* not *Mom,* but once he becomes aware of the crucial identity, the very nature of what he then thought will seem different to him. More importantly, there may be a certain incoherence in his original intention which will make it difficult for him to say at any length just what he did mean, beyond saying that he failed to grasp the identity, and meant Jocasta, and not 'Mom'. At this point important metaphysical issues arise.

There is a temptation to insist that the added explanation ('I didn't realize Jocasta is my mother.') should not affect our view of the rationality of the original thought. But that supposition depends upon a view of the nature of thought which one might doubt. The view in question might be further developed by distinguishing between different sorts of mistakes, mistakes about matters of fact (the identity of Jocasta) and mistakes about content (whether by 'Jocasta' one meant 'Mom'); but, again, that distinction itself might be doubted, if, for example one held an 'externalist' account of thought. Millikan, for example, has recently proposed that the very identities of thought contents are influenced by the actual way things are in the world, in such a way that a speaker's thoughts will be less clear if she fails to distinguish two objects (see, e.g., Millikan [12]).[4] These are important issues, and are not likely to be settled by consulting our practice of belief ascription. We need a fuller philosophical and psychological account of belief. It may be that much of our practice assumes that a speaker has priority in describing her own thoughts, but it may also be that this practice is not fully in tune with the fact of incomplete information. One novelty of the sketch I have offered above is that even if we allow an audience to influence our later expansions of what we originally met, it is, in one way, an elaboration of what we did mean. In another way, it is not, since the original thought was unclear. Schiffer likes to emphasize the former way of viewing things, and regard

re-descriptions as undermining, but his whole position requires a dubious starting point which sees the original thoughts as fully grasped by a thinker, and, in effect, simples entities. On my account, there is a non-trivial sense in which we may say that knowing what I myself mean may require the help of another person.

I have suggested a different account of the epistemology of meaning than that which Schiffer holds. Above I suggested that my thoughts about an object of reference may be complex, with a foreground and background feature, so that I might sincerely hope to communicate both the foreground and the background, at the same time I recognize that my audience might not attend to every element. And, it may be that I have not explicitly worked out all of the relationships among the parts of my thoughts about a given object. That is how it may happen that I may prove to have been thinking about an object under a mode of presentation, despite the fact that I was not fully aware of this at the time when I spoke.

With the sort of picture I am proposing (*pace* what Schiffer suggests) it should, however, be possible to bring a thinker to see that she did, at a time in the past, think of an object in a particular way, e.g., as the pretty queen of Thebes and *not* as good old Mom. One might say that there is, then, a sense in which it is still true that the thinker has authority about the nature of her modes of presentation, insofar as it is a requirement that she acknowledge she had thought of things in that way. It would be wrong, however, to suppose that the original awareness was complete and not to be improved upon. Schiffer's willingness to complain of the loss of a thinker's knowledge of her own thoughts seems to result from an implicit supposition that thoughts are simple entities which one either does or does not grasp. Thus, at one point he warns of the danger of saying that speakers implicitly refer to modes of presentation:

> . . . not only do ordinary belief ascribers have no conscious knowledge of what they are asserting, they also turn out not to have the conscious thoughts they think they have. ([18], 515-516)

Once we begin introducing modes of presentation and allow for foreground/background phenomena, the complexity of the original intention will be such that re-descriptions of what was meant will be inevitable with improved knowledge. It is not so much that speakers prove to be wholly wrong (as Schiffer seems to suggest above) as that they prove to have only partial knowledge of what they think and mean. A plausible view of action-guiding

intentions has it that they begin by being general (possibly due to innate mechanisms) and come to be directed upon particular objects with growing knowledge. An analogous view of communication situations would credit speakers with an initial desire to say what is true and relevant, and allow that sometimes the process of particularizing this desire will involve the articulation of modes of presentation.

VII. A Modest Solution to the Uniqueness Problem

It always seems possible to describe a person's modes of presentation in many different ways. (See Schiffer [21], [20], 516, [19], 287) One might elaborate upon a belief ascription one has made by providing an explicit description of a mode of presentation, but we have the impression that any particular choice of description is arbitrary. Even if one aims primarily at finding a description the audience will understand, there may simply not be a uniquely best description. To a great extent a speaker's choices are influenced by earlier stages of the conversation. Which properties of an object seem salient may well depend upon what has been said thus far. One way of looking at this situation is to say it is yet more evidence of the problematic status of modes of presentation: we can't even specify a particular one.

The proposal that modes of presentation are files of information about an object (see, e.g., Forbes [9] or Recanati[15]) seems to be a way of dealing with this fact. A person may have a collection of information about a person corresponding to a proper name, but there is no reason to think that we can express that information via some unique description. There is, nevertheless, some temptation to search for *the* mode of presentation under which someone thinks of an object. But that desire needs to be properly understood: it can be true both that our thoughts about particulars involve many modes of presentation (files) and that in some contexts we are interested in a unique concept or mode of presentation. The basic idea is this: When we wish to preserve a person's rationality, we search until we find the first concept (or feature of a concept) which serves to make sense of the behavior. ("Oh, the reason you say you want to marry Jocasta, but not your mother is that your concept of your mother presupposes that she is not Jocasta.") No extensive description and singling out of a mode of presentation is in question.[5]

The search for a satisfactory description of a mode of presentation is influenced by the sort of situation in which we need to talk about modes of presentation. In looking for a unique description of a mode of presentation, we should not forget the purpose for which we introduce modes of

presentation and we should not expect the sort of exhaustively specifying description which we cannot even provide for physical objects. To the extent that a single description satisfies us, it is because we have an established situation or context in which we have an explicit need to make sense of what a person is saying and doing. In cases where we are not able to provide a satisfying description it is due to a failure to provide such a context.

VIII. Conclusion

I have examined Schiffer's meaning-intention problem. I have by no means presented a defense of the hidden indexical theorist who is Schiffer's target, but I have attempted to answer Schiffer's skepticism about our ability to know modes of presentation. That skepticism is due to limiting assumptions about how an audience can discover a thinker's thoughts and also depends upon an unrealistic simplified view of a speaker's thoughts (intentions). A key premise in Schiffer's argument is that one's meanings are transparent to consciousness. I have suggested that such a thesis is seen to be, at best, simply too crude once we recognize that one's intentions and thoughts are complex, and have a foreground/background quality. The issues raised at this point are deep ones which I have not fully examined, but I hope to have said enough to raise the prospect of answering Schiffer's skepticism. But there is one important question left unanswered.

What is the significance of Schiffer's meaning-intention problem?

It is possible for a philosopher to assert a proposition which is quite literally correct, yet to hold a position which misses something recognized by his defeated opponent. I believe that this is the case with Schiffer's criticism of hidden indexical theories. It is correct to deny that speakers who attribute beliefs need refer (even tacitly) to modes of presentation. It is, however, misleading to suggest that a case such as that of Schiffer's Flora show that, in the usual cases, speakers are simply clueless on the question of which modes of presentation might be relevant in psychological explanations. On the contrary, speakers are able to engage in inquiry aimed at finding out which modes of presentations are relevant for understanding action. Talking about modes of presentation is an important part of ordinary psychology; life would be unthinkable without it. I have sketched a preliminary account of how we do it.

Finally, I would like to comment on what may be merely a rhetorical strand in Schiffer's writings about modes of presentations. Sometimes (see,

e.g., [18], 110-111) Schiffer makes rather heavy weather of the point that the introduction of modes of presentation is a peculiar business which would never occur without philosophers. I hope to have suggested otherwise. For, the truth is more nearly captured in the following words of Hume (although Hume had another subject in mind),

Nor is this merely a metaphysical subtlety; but enters into all our reasonings in common life, tho' perhaps we may not be able to place it in such distinct philosophical terms.

We may accept this as a claim about modes of presentation if we simply amend the expression 'all reasonings' to read 'all reasonings about creatures possessing a mind'.

Filozofická Fakulta Univerzity Komenského,
Gondova ul.2, 818 01 Bratislava
lovas@fphil.uniba.sk

FOOTNOTES

[1] Thanks are owed to Rafal Lagowski for technical support. Thanks are also due to José María Fons Guardiola for the loan of a computer at a crucial moment. This project grew out of work done in Richard L. Mendelsohn's NEH Summer Seminar in the Philosophy of Language.

[2] It seems much more likely, however, that Schiffer's ultimate point is skeptical, and his skepticism about the knowability of particular entities is in danger of becoming a sort of skepticism about ordinary psychological knowledge.

[3] See, for example Clapp [4].

[4] Oedipus is a case of thinking one person is two; whereas Millikan is mainly interested in cases where a person confuses two people (thinks two people are one); but her general point should be equally applicable.

[5] This remark is intended to be in the spirit of Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory. [23]

REFERENCES

[1] BACH, K. (1997): A Puzzle About Belief Reports.
     http://userwww.sfsu.edu/~kbach/puzzle.html.
[2] BACH, K. (1993): Sometimes a Great Notion: A Critical Notice of Mark Crimmins' *Talk About Beliefs*. **Mind and Language**, 8, 431-441.
[3] BROACKES, J. (1986): Belief *De Re* and *De Dicto*. **Philosophical Quarterly**.
[4] CLAPP, L. (1995): How To Be Direct and Innocent: A Criticism of Crimmins and Perry's Theory of Attitude Ascriptions. **Linguistics and Philosophy**, 18, 529-565.
[5] CRIMMINS, M. (1992): **Talk About Beliefs.** Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.
[6] CRIMMINS, M. and PERRY, J. (1989): The Prince and the Phone Booth: Reporting Puzzling Beliefs. **Journal of Philosophy**, 86, 685-711.

[7] DUMMETT. M. (1981): **Frege: Philosophy of Language**. Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

[8] FODOR. J., (1990): Substitution Arguments and Individuation of Beliefs. A **Theory of Content**. Cambridge, Massachusetts. MIT Press.

[9] FORBES. G. (1990): The Indispensability of *Sinn*. **Philosophical Review**, 99, 535-63.

[10] GEIRSSON. H. (forthcoming): True Belief Reports and Sharing of Beliefs. **Journal of Philosophical Research**.

[11] LOAR, B. (1976): The Semantics of Singular Terms. **Philosophical Studies** 30, 353-377.

[12] MILLIKAN, R. (1994): On Unclear and Indistinct Ideas. **Philosophical Perspectives, 8, Logic and Language**, Ridgeview Publishing: Atascadero, California.

[13] OWENS. J. (1995): Pierre and the Fundamental Assumption. **Mind and Language**, 10, 250-273.

[14] RECANATI, F. (1995): Quasi-Singular Propositions. **Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society**, 175-193.

[15] RECANATI, F. (1993): **Direct Reference**. Blackwell: New York.

[16] RICHARD. M. (1990): **Propositional Attitudes**. New York: Cambridge University Press.

[17] SCHIFFER. S. (1996): Francois Recanati, *Direct Reference*. (Book Review) **Linguistics and Philosophy**, 19, 91-102.

[18] SCHIFFER. S. (1995): Descriptions, Indexicals and Belief Reports: Some Dilemmas (But Not the Ones You Expect). **Mind**, 104, 107-131.

[19] SCHIFFER. S. (1994): A Paradox of Meaning. **Nous**, 28, 279-324.

[20] SCHIFFER. S. (1992): Belief Ascription. **Journal of Philosophy**, 89, p. 492-521.

[21] SCHIFFER. S. (1981): Indexicals and the Theory of Reference. **Synthese**, 49, 43-100.

[22] SCHIFFER. S. (1978): The Basis of Reference. **Erkenntnis** 13, 171-206.

[23] SPERBER and WILSON. D. (1995): **Relevance: Communication and Cognition**. (Second Edition) Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

[24] SPERBER and WILSON, D. (1986): Loose Talk. **Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society**, 87, 153-171.

[25] TASCHEK. W. (1992): Frege's Puzzle, Sense and Information Content. **Mind**, 767-791.