Millian Externalism

Arthur Sullivan, July/07 draft, updated June/08 in response to editor's comments

Introduction

The primary goal of this paper is to critically evaluate the notion that the rejection of an

individualist or internalist approach to reference[1] entails a weak sufficient condition for singular

thought—for example, that hearing someone use the name 'Feynman' is sufficient to enable one

to entertain a singular thought about Feynman, regardless how little one knows about Feynman.

This notion is espoused, implicitly or explicitly, by at least Bach (1987, 2004), Boer and Lycan

(1986), Devitt (1981, 2001), Jeshion (2002), Rozemond (1993), Salmon (1989, 2004), Soames

(1989, 2002), Thau (2002), and Wettstein (1986, 2003). I will call the notion 'Millian

externalism' (though there clearly are, otherwise, significant differences amongst this list of

proponents). A striking recent example is Salmon's (2004: 254) claim that "looking at a new

class-enrolment list" suffices to enable singular thoughts about previously unfamiliar enrollees.

In §1, I situate Millian externalism within its historical and conceptual context. In §§ 2-3,

I investigate some arguments for and against Millian externalism, and discuss some related

general theoretical questions.

1. the externalist challenge and Millian externalism

I will use the term 'traditional orthodoxy' to designate a vaguely defined set of prevalent

presumptions about language, which went virtually unchallenged until well into the 20th century.

Canonical sources which state clear allegiance to these presumptions include Plato (1928: 324A-

343A) and Locke (1690: Bk 3, I-III). These presumptions are guiding principles in seminal work

in the philosophy of language by Mill (1843), Frege (1892), and Russell (1918).[2] Some central

pillars of the traditional orthodoxy are explicitly defended as recently as Strawson (1959) and Searle (1969).

For present purposes, one key aspect of the traditional orthodoxy concerns an individual agent's access to the criteria for the correct application of a term. Details differ, but the general picture is this: every term is semantically associated with an *intension* which specifies the conditions for membership in the term's *extension*. Competence with a term is a matter of associating it with the appropriate intension, which is made manifest by the agent's ability to distinguish the extension from the anti-extension (in normal contexts). On the traditional view, the criteria for the correct application of a term are introspectively available to competent agents.[3] Content is completely transparent to individual agents—there is nothing hidden from view, no reason why we would have to invoke something external to an agent in order to individuate the contents expressed or entertained. Individual agents are autonomous as to the conditions that determine the reference of their terms.

One influential critic of the traditional orthodoxy is Wittgenstein (1953). He points out that while most of us are rather good at distinguishing the extension from the anti-extension of the term 'game', for example, we are rather horrible at articulating any intension that specifies what all and only games have in common. Wittgenstein is also thoroughly critical of the presumption of first-person authority about content, insisting rather that the criteria for the correct application of terms crucially depends on the practices of a community. Strawson (1959) and Searle (1969) both attempt to accommodate some of Wittgenstein's insights, within the general confines of the traditional orthodoxy.

Another forceful challenge to the traditional orthodoxy comes in the 1970s (though it was certainly influenced by Wittgenstein, among others).[4] Consider, for example, an agent who

associates with the name 'Columbus' the inaccurate intension 'the first European to sail to North America', or who associates with the name 'Einstein' the vague intension 'a famous physicist'. First, Kripke points out that these sorts of cases are fairly common, much more representative than the small handful of tendentious examples discussed within the traditional orthodox literature (e.g., 'Bismarck' means 'the first Chancellor of the German empire'). Second, Kripke motivates the claim that such speakers nonetheless count as competent with these terms—they are able to participate in the interchange of information about Columbus and Einstein—despite not having any introspective grasp of the conditions for the term's correct application. (The agent knows nothing to distinguish Einstein from Heisenberg or Feynman, and the intension associated with 'Columbus' probably picks out some ninth-century Viking.) Third, Kripke argues that this shows that whatever it is that determines the extension of a use of a term, it must be distinct from the often vague and shoddy information that constitutes the speaker's intension. In general, intension (i.e., the information which the speaker associates with a term) need not determine extension. The conditions for the correct application of a term need not be accessible to competent speakers.

I will call this point (i.e., that there seem to be counterexamples to the tenet that intension determines extension) 'the **externalist challenge** to the traditional orthodoxy'. It is externalist in that the upshot seems to be that (at least in some cases) something external to the agent must be invoked in order to determine the reference of the terms they entertain and express. In addition to proper names, the externalist challenge also forcefully applies to natural kind terms. Competence with such terms does not depend on a grasp of the precise criteria for their correct application— even if I couldn't tell whether some non-typical specimen is or is not a tiger, still I count as competent with the term 'tiger'.[5]

I will use the term '**content-externalism**' to designate a related position, which is the denial of a certain supervenience thesis. Content externalists hold that intrinsic duplicates who associate the same intensions with all of the constituents bits of a given (unambiguous, non-indexical) sentence—e.g., 'Water is a liquid'—might nonetheless entertain or express distinct contents with tokens of the sentence, because of differences in the histories of how the words reached them, or of differences in the environments to which they are causally connected. The distinctive step from the externalist challenge (i.e., intension need not determine extension) to content-externalism (i.e., intrinsic duplicates who are entertaining exactly the same intensions might nonetheless be entertaining distinct contents) is associated with the thought-experiments of Putnam (1975) and Burge (1979).

Millian externalism is a further step along this path. At the root, Millian externalism is the position that there is serious tension between the externalist challenge and Frege's constraint – i.e., the axiom that a difference in cognitive significance is sufficient proof of a difference in content.[6] For proponents of Frege's constraint, while to deny *that Holland is Holland* is a logical error (akin to believing that Holland is south of Holland), to deny *that Holland is the Netherlands* is a significantly less serious factual error (akin to mistakenly believing that Holland is south of Belgium).[7] Millian externalists, in contrast, take it that another enlightened consequence of the externalist challenge is that Frege's constraint, as stated above, is naïve and overly crude. On the Millian externalist view, *that Holland is Holland* and *that Holland is the Netherlands* are semantically equivalent. Frege thought he had shown that sameness of extension is not sufficient for synonymy; but Millian externalists take the moral of Frege's data to be that otherwise competent speakers are often in no position to recognize synonymy when they

encounter it. Substantive demands for competence with a term should go the way of the discredited tenet that intension determines extension.[8]

To sum up, I have distinguished three related doctrines:

[1] The **externalist challenge** to the traditional orthodoxy is the recognition of *prima facie* counterexamples to the tenet that intension determines extension.

[2] **Content-externalism** is the view that intrinsic duplicates who associate the same intensions with the constituent parts of a given (non-indexical) sentence could nonetheless be entertaining or expressing distinct contents.

 [3] **Millian externalism** is the view that there is serious tension between the externalist challenge and Frege's constraint.

Along with the majority, I think that the externalist challenge must be accommodated: an adequate theory of reference has to give due weight to the extrinsic relations in which speakers stand to other speakers and to their environments.[9] As for [2], the externalist challenge certainly seems to entail some degree of content-externalism; though it would take a complete study in its own right to define the maximally strong supervenience relation whose falsity is well-supported by externalists' arguments.[10] The primary aim of this paper, though, is to investigate some arguments for and against Millian externalism.

2. the question of singular thought

I begin this section with a general overview of some general questions about singular thought, to help to orient the subsequent discussion.

Humans are gatherers, users, and sharers of information; these phenomena underlie many of our higher capacities, and constitute much of our conscious lives. Philosophy of language is a

part of the piecemeal interdisciplinary task of coming up with a comprehensive theoretical description of this phenomenon. One central sub-task within the philosophy of language concerns the individuation of information—e.g., What criteria determine whether two expressions express different information (as do [1] and [2]), or just express the same information differently (as do [1] and [3])?

1. John loves Mary.
2. Mary loves John.
3. Mary is loved by John.

And one central thread within that sub-task, which occupies a considerable amount of the attention and energy of twentieth-century philosophy of language, concerns distinguishing singular from general information.[11]

Approaching down this avenue, we can see the theoretical import of such questions as: What determines whether or not an agent is able to entertain a singular thought about a specific object? Can we specify necessary or sufficient conditions which ground the ability to entertain, or to express, singular information? These questions are prone to seem exceedingly abstract and wispy; but their constituent concepts are cogs at the core of the general project of attaining a comprehensive theoretical understanding of linguistic communication. In attempting to make theoretical sense of such questions, it is important to respect these constitutive connections between information content and the needs, interests, and attitudes of human agents.[12] A philosophy of language which loses sight of these core connections has little promise to attain integration with adjacent fields of study (such as cognitive psychology and lexical semantics).

Let us call a theory of singular thought 'conservative' to the extent that it is stingy in attributing singular thoughts to agents, and 'liberal' to the extent that it is free and easy with such attributions. The traditional orthodoxy was quite conservative when it came to singular thoughts.

The idea was that (unless singular thought is a *sui generis* occult phenomenon) one must have discriminating beliefs about an object in order to have singular thoughts about it.[13] In contrast, Millian externalism stands at the opposite, extremely liberal pole. On that view, one need not be able to single out Columbus or Einstein in order to entertain singular thoughts about those individuals.

In general, everyone agrees that to concede the externalist challenge is to reject any strong version of the traditional discriminative requirement. The issue which divides Millian externalists from their opponents concerns the relation between that commonly conceded point and Frege's constraint.

Despite the prevalence of the Millian externalist view (cf. p.1), explicit arguments for the view are relatively scarce. What one is more likely to encounter is the presumption that the externalist challenge is one and the same as, or entails, Millian externalism.[14] This presumption is of a piece with, say, the programmatic picture sketched by Wettstein (1986, 2003), in which many traditional ideas about language are unwanted vestiges of Cartesianism that have been exorcised by Wittgenstein and Kripke (among others). Against this backdrop, Salmon (1986, 1989, 2004) and Soames (1989, 2002, 2005) evidently feel that the rejection of many specific traditional tenets simply does not require substantive supporting arguments[15]—and necessary conditions for singular thought are a case in point. The presumption seems to be that the externalist challenge has proven them obsolete.

However, this presumption that the externalist challenge entails Millian externalism will not withstand scrutiny. Note first that even though Millian externalists take themselves to be drawing conclusions that are implicit in the work of their predecessors, this is contentious. Not one of the authors cited in note 4 ever endorses Millian externalism, even though some of them

tentatively explore the view.[16] Donnellan's (1970) and Kripke's (1972) groundbreaking proper-name arguments are confined to what a speaker is able to use the intersubjective medium of language to express. Another seminal line of externalist argument—running through Kripke (1972), Putnam (1975), and Burge (1979)—solely concerns the criteria for the correct application of certain general terms (e.g., 'water', 'arthritis'). So, neither of these lines of argument yet suffice to support any conclusions about singular thoughts. Clearly, it is consistent to take seriously the externalist challenge while rejecting Millian externalism.[17] Even further, some of the principle proponents of the externalist challenge are explicitly skeptical about Millian externalism—cf. Kripke (1972: 95-6; 1980: 20-1), Kaplan (1989: 604-7).

Thus, Millian externalism clearly goes beyond the externalist challenge. Next, I will briefly survey three lines of argument which are intended to bridge up the gap between them.

2(i) The causal chain metaphors

The most detailed working out of the move from the externalist challenge to Millian externalism of which I am aware occurs in Bach (1987: Ch's 1-2).[18] On Bach's view, when one refers to something by name, one not only *expresses* but *displays* the way in which the referent of the name is present to mind (1987: 25). The speaker can thereby transmit to a hearer who lacks discriminating beliefs about the referent not only the ability to refer to it, but also the ability to think of it in the same way that the speaker did. In lieu of explanation as to how this can occur, Bach relies on the metaphor of 'inheritance'—the hearer's mental token *inherits* the same object as the speaker's (1987: 32). He claims that:

> … if someone refers you to something by name, you can think of it simply by name. Of course, if you know several individuals by that name, you may not know which one he is talking about, if any, but that does not prevent you from thinking of it. (1987: 44)

So, on Bach's view, to use an expression as a name is to display a certain unmediated way of thinking about its referent. Exposure to such a display allows a hearer to inherit this way of thinking about the referent; which, in turn, enables the hearer to entertain singular thoughts about that object—regardless of how ignorant or mistaken the hearer is about the referent.

Kaplan paints a similar picture (albeit in broader strokes):

> The notion that a referent can be carried by a name from early past to present suggests that *the language itself* carries meanings, and thus that we can acquire meanings through the instrument of language. … Our connection with a linguistic community in which names and other meaning-bearing elements are passed down to us enables us to entertain thoughts *through the language* that would not otherwise be accessible to us. (1989: 603)

While (as mentioned above) Kaplan himself shies away from Millian externalism, my sense is that what he here articulates is a main motivation for the view. Once we recognize the role played by causal-historical chains in intersubjective communication, we see that the language itself carries meanings to speakers via causal-historical chains of transmission. From here, it is natural to say that encountering a token of a referring expression puts one in sufficient contact with its referent to be able to entertain singular thoughts.

These causal-historical chain arguments for Millian externalism rely heavily on vague, impressionistic metaphors, such as 'inheriting' referents or 'carrying' meanings. However, strictly speaking, words just carry with them, from speaker to hearer, their intrinsic, formal features; it is commonplace that all manner of other features (e.g., implicature, color, sense, reference) can fail to get across. On virtually any contemporary approach to reference, reference is (at least partly) a relational feature of (a use of) an expression, not a purely intrinsic one (cf. note 9, and §3 below). So, there are plenty of reasons to think that reference is not the sort of thing that is so easily or reliably carried, or inherited.[19] Even further, flat-out counterexamples to this line of thought have been developed (cf. note 19). The most seminal is Evans' (1973)

'Madagascar' example, in which the criteria specified by Bach (1987)—or Devitt (1981), or Kaplan (1989), etc.—are satisfied, and yet successful transmission of reference does not occur. Mercier (1999) thoroughly draws out the problematic consequences of this kind of case, and I know of no reply from any Millian externalist (nor of any promising grounds for a reply which is consistent with Millianism).[20]

Let me stress the important point here. It is not difficult to find cases which satisfy the causal-historical chain criteria, and yet in which something goes awry with the transmission of reference. Early links in a causal-historical chain involve using the name 'a' to think and talk about an individual x; while some later links, which seem to involve deference to the above chain of 'a'- users, end up instead using 'a' to think and talk about a distinct individual y. This shows that what the metaphors in question (of 'inheriting' referents or 'carrying' meanings) give us is simply a vague description of what happens when reference transmission succeeds, not a theoretical account of how or why reference transmission succeeds. There is nothing in this picture to predict or explain this kind of unintended failure of reference transmission, which shows that these metaphors are toothless, devoid of explanatory power. So, the evidence suggests that contact with a causal-historical chain of communication is not sufficient to underwrite the ability to entertain singular thoughts. Therefore, insofar as Millian externalists owe an account of exactly how singular thoughts are passed on from speaker to listener, vague optimistic gestures at causal-historical chains will not suffice.

As mentioned above, other than this detailed work of Bach's (1987), it is difficult to find arguments in support of Millian externalism. A search of the literature yields only a handful of scattered remarks on the issue.[21] So the next two lines of thought are largely my constructions—things I speculate that Millian externalists might want to say at this point.

2(ii) As for language, so for thought

If one is able to express a singular proposition about an individual, then one should be credited with the ability to entertain a singular thought. What else determines the identity of the proposition expressed, other that the speaker's object-dependent referential intentions? And are not object-dependent referential intentions sufficient to underwrite a singular thought? Besides, to deny this point is to hopelessly complicate semantic theory, as it would entail a problematic severing of thought from language.

The first thing to say in response to this line of thought is that there are plenty of grounds on which to distinguish entertaining singular thoughts from expressing singular propositions. There is a compelling story about how public utterances of 'Columbus', say, are able to express information about a specific individual, even despite the lack of discriminating information on the part of the speaker. (To answer the above rhetorical question, external factors—i.e., the division of linguistic labor, causal-historical chains of transmission, etc.—are precisely *what else, in addition to the speaker's intentions,* which *play a role in determining the identity of the proposition expressed*.) It is fairly clear that such external factors can affect the communicative powers of the expressions which speakers put out for public consumption; but it is considerably less clear exactly what effect they have on what is going on inside speakers' heads. In any case, to assume that these factors have exactly the same effects on thoughts entertained as on propositions expressed is to beg the very question at issue. It is to presume, rather than justify, Millian externalism.[22]

Second, this idea that we must distinguish sufficient conditions for expressing singular propositions from sufficient conditions for entertaining singular thoughts has a wide array of

defenders. Not surprisingly, conservatives about singular thought who take seriously the externalist challenge insist on this point.[23] However, such a view is far from unique to conservatives. For example, not only do Donnellan (1977) and Kaplan (1989: 603-7) rely on this distinction, but the extreme libertines Salmon (1986, 2004) and Soames (1989) do so as well.[24] So, given that the leading proponents of Millian externalism reject this line of thought, it does not hold much promise to bridge the gap from the externalist challenge to Millian externalism.

Lastly, to take this point seriously is not to categorically sever thought from language. It does not entail that the relation between propositions expressed and thoughts entertained is so disjoint that one can never really express one's thoughts, or ever be justified in believing that one's attempt to communicate has been successful. Rather, the central point is quite minimal— i.e., all things considered, the desiderata to be accommodated in theorizing about singular thought might differ from the desiderata to be accommodated in theorizing about expressing singular propositions. This minimal point is consistent with all manner of close, strong, constitutive relations between thought and language.

2(iii) Intensions are creatures of darkness[25]

What the externalist challenge shows is that, not only do intensions not determine extensions, but, further, semantic theory has no need for intensions. Intensions record personal idiosyncracies that have no semantic relevance. Communication using such terms as 'Einstein' or 'tiger' can succeed even despite nontrivial differences among the intensions that interlocutors associate with the terms.[26] If intensions are not needed to determine extensions, why keep them around? If sameness of intension is not necessary for identity of content, then why not just hold that sameness of truth-condition is sufficient for sameness of

content? If you have identified the truth-condition, then you have gotten the message; there will of course be some aspects of the speaker's mental state that do not get communicated, but those should not be counted as part of the semantic content of the message. Thus, the proper moral of the externalist challenge is that Frege's constraint is either obsolete, or at least needs extensive refinement.

This line of thought is hard to conclusively evaluate. While I feel the pull of these considerations, there are notorious considerations which cut the other way (i.e., reasons to think that cognitive significance is semantically relevant—cf. note 7, and §2(iv) below). While there were vibrant debates on these issues from the 1970s to the 90s, they have either stalemated or else turned into disputes about how to draw the boundary between semantics and pragmatics. This issue turns on the question: What, exactly, do we want from a semantic theory? Without a working consensus on this latter boardroom-level question, many such shop-floor debates are ever-entrenched.

2(iv) A counter-consideration

Next I will briefly develop an example from Evans (1973) which cuts against Millian externalism. Suppose Alf joins a group who are in the middle of a conversation about a certain Louis. No one gives Alf the background about who they are talking about, but Alf quickly gets enthralled by the conversation. Soon Alf starts contributing—e.g., 'What did Louis do then?', 'Louis was quite right to do that!'.

The causal-historical chain approach to reference seems appropriate to these utterances. If the group were discussing the French King Louis XIII, say, then it seems appropriate to say that Alf is here expressing propositions about Louis XIII, despite the lack of discriminating beliefs.

But now suppose that Alf comes away with the belief that Louis was a professional basketball player. (I will not attempt to supply details, but surely even such massive errors are fairly mundane.) Millian externalists, then, are committed to attributing to Alf the singular thought that Louis XIII was a professional basketball player. Now consider Evans (1973: 274):

> Now there is no knock-down argument to show this consequence unacceptable; with pliant enough intuitions you can swallow anything in philosophy. But notice how little *point* there is in saying that he [entertains a singular thought about] one French king rather than another, or any other person named by the name. There is now nothing the speaker is prepared to say or do which relates him differentially to the one King. This is why it is so outrageous to say that he believes that Louis XIII is a basketball player. The notion of [singular thought] has simply been severed from all the connections that made it of interest.

As mentioned in §1, Millian externalists have attained some level of comfort with such cases. (Evans or Schiffer might think that this is virtually a *reductio* of Millian externalism, but Salmon and Soames, among others, do not.) Still, for the disinterested inquirer, this is not without serious weight. The charge is that Millian externalism is simply unable to accommodate the constitutive connections between information content and the needs, interests, and attitudes of human agents. Such cases suggest that the Millian externalism has little promise to respect the general reasons why philosophers are interested in the individuation of information in the first place.[27] This is a considerable problem.

To sum up, up to §2(ii) I have urged that the Millian externalist position is in need of justification by argument, and that the arguments on offer fall short of the target. §2(iii) describes the way in which this issue hangs in the general, theoretical, all-things-considered balance. It turns on what we are entitled to expect from a semantic theory. §2(iv) then urges that there are grounds to want more from a semantic theory than Millian externalism is able to afford.

3. the tenability of Millian externalism

Two central goals of this final section are: first, to further expose the lack of motivation for the presumption that Millian externalism follows inevitably on the heels of the externalist challenge; and second, to urge the virtues of a certain anti-Millian way forward from the stalemated debates described above in §2(iii). I begin by underlining three important distinctions, and then I turn to the relations between them. (Lest it seem that I am needlessly belaboring familiar distinctions, my allegation will be that Millian externalism seems to be better-motivated than it actually is, due to conflations between these distinctions.)

[1] **Intensional vs. extensional approaches to content:** The classic debate on this first matter takes place in correspondence between Frege and Russell in 1902 (collected in Frege (1980)), concerning the content expressed by 'Mont Blanc is over 4000 meters high'.[28] Fundamentally, the question is: What constitutes the content of our thoughts and utterances— abstract intensions, as Frege would have it, or real-world extensions, as on Russell's view? One central derivative question is whether identity of truth-conditions entails identity of content— e.g., if a=b, do 'a is F' and 'b is F' express the same content? One who holds that content is extensional has to answer this derivative question in the affirmative; one of the main motivations for an intensional approach to content is the tenet that this derivative question should obviously receive a negative answer (on the grounds that 'a is F' and 'b is F' can differ in cognitive significance). This first distinction is deeply relevant to our central issue here: A purely extensionalist approach to content must transgress Frege's constraint; and so a theory of content which respects Frege's constraint holds that content is (at least in part) intensional.

[2] **Individualism vs. anti-individualism about reference:** Do individual agents have first-person authority over exactly what their utterances single out, or, rather, do other (social,

environmental, etc.) factors also play a role in determining reference? Consider again the speaker whose only belief associated with the name 'Columbus' is that it designates the first European to reach North America. Individualists about reference are committed to this person's utterances of 'Columbus' picking out whoever satisfies that belief—presumably, some ninth- or tenth-century Viking. On an anti-individualist approach, given the requisite element of deference, such an undiscriminating speaker can nonetheless refer to our familiar late-fifteenth-century Italian.

[3] **Internalism vs. externalism about reference:** Internalists about reference hold that reference is determined by satisfaction or fit with the content of the relevant referential intentions. (Individualist-internalists hold that the individual speaker's intentions have absolute priority; whereas anti-individualist-internalists hold that reference is determined via some weighted sum of the intentions of some specific community.) Externalists deny that, and hold that, rather, reference is (at least partly) determined by some other, more extrinsic (typically, causal-historical) relation. Kripke (1986) has an example which brings this internalist/externalist contrast into staggeringly clear focus. Suppose that, of the set of people who use the name 'Peano', almost all just think of him as 'the founder of the Peano axioms'. A small subset of experts knows that that description denotes Dedekind, and have various other ways of singling out Peano. Suppose now that all those experts are at a conference, and the venue gets bombed, and all the experts perish. Internalists about reference are committed to the view that the semantics of 'Peano' in our community changes at that instant—before the bombing it may have referred to Peano, but after the bombing it can only refer to Dedekind. (The reason is that, after the bombing, Dedekind suddenly comes to satisfy 100% of speakers' 'Peano'-associated referential intentions, across the entire community.) Externalists about reference hold that the name would still refer to Peano, not Dedekind, because it is possible that, and no threat to

reference if, the entire community is mistaken about the referent. Rather, what matters for an externalist is that the right sort of extrinsic relation obtain between the speaker and the referent.[29]

Now to comments on the relations between distinctions [1]-[3]. Some subtleties concerning relations between distinctions [2] and [3] have already come up. While the traditional orthodoxy tends toward both individualism and internalism, and the causal-historical theory of reference is both anti-individualist and externalist, nonetheless all four positions on this grid are coherent options. Anti-individualist internalist theories have already come up (cf. notes 1 and 3)—i.e., almost every post-Wittgensteinian theory of reference rejects individualism, but some of them are internalist. As for an individualist-externalist theory of reference (i.e., reference is an extrinsic relation, not simply a matter of satisfaction or fit, but still the speaker has a certain kind of authority or autonomy), it is somewhat disjointed, but still a *prima facie* coherent option.[30]

What about distinction [1], in the wake of the externalist challenge? In my view, while the externalist challenge constitutes a strong case against both individualism and internalism about reference (cf. note 9), it is *almost entirely irrelevant* to the issue of intensional vs. extensional approaches to content. (I explain this claim below.) The simple point that intensionalism is compatible with anti-individualism and externalism is worth underlining—even though it is more or less explicitly made by the authors cited in note 17. For, in general, this simple point has not been thoroughly digested; and, in particular, digesting this very point will negatively impact the tenability of Millian externalism. To a large extent, much recent work on reference and content occurs within the confines of the following **false dilemma**:

   [FD] We must *either* choose a well-motivated causal-historical theory of reference, and so learn to live without Frege's constraint; *or else* we can dig in our heels and preserve Frege's constraint, but the price is a problematic individualist and/or internalist theory of reference.

If those are the options, then Millian externalism is not such a bad idea. However, if rejecting both individualism and internalism does not commit one to extensionalism, then those are not the only options. This is why the precise relations between distinctions [1]-[3] are deeply relevant to the question of how solidly grounded the Millian externalist view is.

Why do I say that distinctions [2] and [3] are *almost entirely irrelevant* to distinction [1]? Well, first, *irrelevant* in that the issue of intensional vs. extensional approaches to content is orthogonal to the other two—i.e., given the above proposition that individualism/anti-individualism is orthogonal to internalism/externalism, each of those four options is compatible with either intensional or extensional approaches to content, and so we now have a decision space of eight approaches to reference and content. (See the table below.) Second, *almost entirely* in that, nonetheless, there are some intrinsic connections between distinctions [1]-[3], making some of these eight candidates better motivated, and so more serious contenders, than others. For example (as is illustrated by the intensions-are-creatures-of-darkness line of argument described in §2(iii)), rejecting internalism about reference does eliminate one strong reason to be an intensionalist about content, for there is an argument from internalism to intensionalism. (That is: internalists endorse some variant of the claim that intensions determine extensions, and if one is already committed to intensions for this job, then why not avail of the other benefits which intensions accrue? Thus, the characteristic intensionalist claim that 'a is F' and 'b is F' differ in semantic content, even if a=b, costs an internalist absolutely nothing extra.)

Since there is a natural and compelling argument from internalism about reference to intensionalism about content, and since one of the most monumental developments in recent philosophy is a battery of arguments against internalism, then it is hardly surprising that a line of thought from externalism about reference to extensionalism about content is a major force

shaping the contemporary terrain—and, in particular, reinforcing [FD]. This line of thought, from externalism to extensionalism, is most explicitly evident in the neo-Russellian wave inspired by Kaplan (1977); and, in general, Millian externalism is naturally seen as a faction within this movement.

To the contrary, though, since it is consistent to reject both internalism about reference and extensionalism about content, this (characteristically neo-Russellian) inference is far from inevitable. At this point, it may be useful to map out this space of possibilities:

Combination of Options	Proponent
[I] Individualism-Internalism-Intensionalism	Locke (1690) (see note 30 for a possible qualification); Frege (1892)?[31]
[II] Anti-individualism-Internalism-Intensionalism	Strawson (1959); Searle (1969, 1983); Dummett (1981)
[III] Individualism-Externalism-Intensionalism	Locke (1690) on natural kind terms? (See note 30)
[IV] Anti-individualism-Externalism-Intensionalism	Neo-Fregeans[32]
[V] Individualism-Internalism-Extensionalism	Russell (1911, 1918)[33]
[VI] Anti-individualism-Internalism-Extensionalism	?[34]
[VII] Individualism-Externalism-Extensionalism	Fodor (1987)? (See note 30)
[VIII] Anti-individualism-Externalism-Extensionalism	Millian externalists

The traditional orthodoxy encompasses options [I] and [V]. [II] was an initially popular refuge, for those raised in the orthodox tradition, in the wake of Wittgenstein's anti-individualism; but, as I see it, Kripke (1986) blew that refuge to smithereens with the Peano-Dedekind thought experiment described above. I assume without argument that [III], [VI], and [VII] are not serious contenders for general theories of reference and content.

My view is that the externalist challenge must be accommodated, and to concede it is to face a choice between options [IV] and [VIII]. Further, I hold that the above distinctions do

much to tip the balance of reasons in favor of neo-Fregeanism, and against Millian externalism. If the above survey of the landscape is not widely off target, then a broadly neo-Fregean approach to reference and content, which accommodates both the externalist challenge and Frege's constraint, deserves serious attention.

I make no claim that all questions have as yet been answered, all contours finely honed, by any proponents of option [IV]; and, clearly, there are some significant differences between the theories cited in note 17. Rather, I take these above considerations and arguments to define an open neo-Fregean research program in the philosophy of language. Among the most important challenges here is to come up with a principled way of individuating content. (After all, one of the central reasons why terms like 'content' get introduced is to group various utterances and attitudes into equivalence classes; and extensionalism about content has a decided advantage when it comes to specifying criteria of identity for these classes.[35]) Under what conditions are two agents who token the same sentence (e.g., 'Madagascar is an island') entertaining the same thought, and under what conditions do the contents of their thoughts differ? Given that neo-Fregeans reject the discriminative requirement for singular thought, how exactly should we understand the effects of deference on content? Getting back to the central strand of the present essay: Clearly neo-Fregeans have resources to impose a more strict necessary condition on singular thought than Millian externalists, but how exactly is this condition to be specified? These (and other) questions need principled, well-developed answers.[36]

<center>conclusion</center>

One primary aim of this paper is to expose the lack of grounds for the prevalent presumption that Millian externalism follows inevitably on the heels of the externalist challenge.

A related, programmatic aim is to urge the virtues of pursing a distinct view which retains both Kripke's insights about reference and Frege's insights about content. Perhaps the strongest consideration in favor of further developing this neo-Fregean research program is the proposition that the powerful insights behind the externalist challenge are ultimately compatible with accommodating the constitutive connections between information content and the interests and attitudes of human agents.[37]

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[1] Individualism and internalism are commonly lumped together; for the traditional orthodoxy was both individualist and internalist, and the causal-historical theory of reference is opposed to both of these aspects. However, they are not exactly the same thing, as the non-individualist but internalist theories of Strawson (1959), Dummett (1981), or Searle (1983) suffice to show. More on this distinction *passim*—cf. especially note 3 and §3.

[2] Mill and Russell both reject certain aspects of the picture that pertain to referring expressions, for which they are chastised by Strawson (1950) and Searle (1969) as propagating 'the myth of the logically proper name'. This is an in-house dispute between traditional theorists. Both Russell and Mill provide clear articulations of the traditional orthodoxy, but they disagree with the others about a limited class of terms.

[3] This has to be qualified in order to apply to Strawson (1959), and to any other traditional view which attempts to accommodate reference-borrowing. However, Strawson still belongs within the traditional camp, since on his view reference-borrowing just passes the buck to some other agent. That is, Strawson's view is that the traditional constraints need not apply to every single utterance; whereas (as we will see) Kripke's view is that the traditional constraints are deeply misguided. (Cf. Kripke (1972: 90-2) for discussion of Strawson's view, and Kripke (1986) for related discussion.)

[4] Kripke (1972) is the most thorough and influential source here. Other important contributions include Donnellan (1970), Putnam (1975), Kaplan (1977), Burge (1979), and Perry (2000).

[5] Cf. especially Donnellan (1970) and Kripke (1972) for the externalist challenge in the case of proper names, and Kripke (1972) and Putnam (1975) for the case of natural kind terms.

[6] Two sentences differ in cognitive significance if a semantically competent rational agent can have distinct attitudes toward them (e.g., can assent to one while failing to assent to a second). The classic Frege cases are true statements of the form 'a=b', which differ in cognitive significance from trivialities of the form 'a=a'. However, the phenomenon is fully general, as it extends both beyond identity statements, and beyond singular terms.

Schiffer (1987, 2006) has long argued that Millian externalism entails a transgression of Frege's constraint, but Salmon (2006) insists that Millian externalism merely suggests valuable qualifications to it. I will not wade into that debate. As I understand them, neither Schiffer nor Salmon would deny the claim that there is "serious tension" between Millian externalism and Frege's constraint.

[7] Cf. Evans (1982), Schiffer (1987, 2003), and Loar (1988, 2003) for statements of the view that Frege's constraint must be respected, if a theory of content is to have relevance to the thought and talk of we limited, fallible agents.

[8] Cf., e.g., Soames (2002: 70-1): "…we ought to give up the assumption that individual speakers have internalized semantic theories that provide them with the means of identifying the propositions semantically expressed by sentences and distinguishing them from other propositions the sentence may be used to convey. Having done this, we see no reason to expect that whenever two sentences semantically express the same proposition, competent speakers who understand the sentences will recognize that they express the same proposition, and thus mean the same thing. … [I]t is quite possible for a competent speaker to understand a pair of sentences that mean the same thing without realizing that they do". Similar themes run throughout the works cited on p.1.

[9] Cf., e.g., Stalnaker (1989: 288): "In retrospect, it seems that we should not have been surprised by [the externalist challenge]. Isn't it obvious that semantic properties … are *relational* properties: properties defined in terms of relations between … an agent and what he or she thinks or talks about? And isn't it obvious that relations depend … on more than the intrinsic properties of one of the things related? [The externalist challenge] is not just a consequence of some new and controversial theory … but should follow from any account of representation that holds that we can talk and think … about things and properties outside ourselves."

[10] Burge's corpus contains some of the deepest work on these questions; cf. Hahn & Ramberg, eds., (2003) for discussion. Hard issues to be addressed here include: (a) getting a firm grip on the extent of the externalist challenge—i.e., how far beyond the cases of proper names and natural kind terms do these arguments apply?; (b) getting a better handle on the mechanisms that externalists hold to play a role in determining reference—and in

particular on the notion of deference, which plays a critical role in virtually any post-Wittgensteinian theory of reference. (Sullivan (2003a) contains a preliminary investigation into the role of deference in the theory of reference, and the question of the extent of the externalist challenge is discussed in both Sullivan (2003a) and (2003b).)

[11] A short-list of classics that are fundamentally concerned with the distinction between singular and general information includes Frege (1879), Russell (1918), Kripke (1972), Kaplan (1977), and Evans (1982).

[12] Perry (2000) urges and motivates this point several times. Cf., e.g., Perry (2000: 192) for a clear statement.

[13] Cf. Russell (1911: *passim*), Strawson (1959: 181), Searle (1969: 87). Agreement with this vague dictum is consistent with significant differences. For example, proponents of this discriminative requirement can disagree as to whether these discriminating features have to be purely general or qualitative. Thus, Strawson (1959) and Searle (1983) would disagree as to whether I can have a singular thought about a Bic pen I lost last week. (I stand in a uniquely identifying relation to it, which seems to suffice for Searle; on the other hand, to me it is indistinguishable from countless others, and so I seem to fall short of Strawson's re-identification requirement.)

[14] Cf., e.g., Rozemond (1993: 278): "[Kripke] points out that many people who use the name 'Feynman' only know that Feynman is an important physicist. Yet they manage to refer to him by using that name. … It seems clear … that they can have *de re* [or singular] thoughts about Feynman by virtue of a causal chain going from their use of a name to a famous physicist."

[15] Cf. note 8. I press this allegation in reviews of two of Soames' recent books, Sullivan (2003b) and (2006).

[16] Cf., e.g., Kripke (1979).

[17] At least Schiffer (1978, 1987, 2003), Evans (1982), McDowell (1986), Loar (1988, 2003), and Recanati (1993) are examples of theorists who accommodate the externalist challenge while rejecting Millian externalism.

[18] Other examples include Devitt (1981: 37-40) and Jeshion (2002: 67-9). Devitt uses different terms, but his account does not differ significantly from Bach's. Jeshion explicitly relies on Bach's view; her aim is to apply the view to certain difficult cases. I agree with Jeshion's (2002: 68) assessment that "…something very much like [Bach's view] must be correct if there is to be a tenable Millian account of how to have *de re* beliefs [or singular thoughts] by communication-chains."

[19] Cf., e.g., Evans (1973), Searle (1983), Kaplan (1990), Mercier (1999).

[20] Soames (2003: 366) is one rare case in which a Millian externalist even mentions 'Madagascar'. The extent of the discussion is to concede that such cases pose "a substantive, nontrivial question", but to insist that they "do not discredit Kripke's [causal-historical picture]". (To be fair, in this particular passage Soames is not defending or presupposing Millian externalism.)

[21] To cite one illustrative example, Berger (2002: 81) cautions against the Millian-externalist liberalization of the criteria for singular thought; however, the arguments are limited to "Nathan Salmon in personal communication has taken and defends such a position" and "I find this implausible". For another example, the question of sufficient conditions for singular thought comes up in the literature generated by some of Kripke's (1972) cases of the contingent *a priori*—classic discussions include Donnellan (1977) and Salmon (1987). However, although the contrasting positions in this debate presuppose different criteria for what it takes to entertain a singular thought, on the whole, these criteria are left vague. (One might object that this is unfair to at least Donnellan (1977), who employs the classic Quinean (1956) criteria of substitutivity and exportation, and argues that Kripke's contingent *a priori* cases are not singular thoughts because they fail these criteria. However, Millian externalists muddy these waters by biting the bullet and rejecting Donnellan's intuitions about substitutivity and exportation.) See Jeshion (2004) and Reimer (2004) for current discussion of these sorts of case.

[22] Note that on an individualist approach to reference, such as that of Russell (1911, 1918), the ability to express a singular proposition does entail the ability to entertain a singular thought. However, once we reject individualism about reference, this putative entailment becomes more complicated.

[23] Cf., e.g., Evans (1982: 92): "I hold that it is in general a necessary condition for understanding an utterance of a sentence … 'a is F', that one have a thought … about the referent, to the effect that it is being said to be F. This is not a necessary condition for making an utterance in such a way as to say of the referent that it is F. The divergence arises because of the possibility that a speaker may exploit a linguistic device which he himself does not properly understand." (Cf. Recanati (1993: 108).)

[24] Cf. e.g., Salmon (2004: 247): "*De re* connectedness is required for *de re* belief, not for *de re* assertion. We must guard against deciding, before considering the evidence, that all of the propositional attitudes behave as one—especially if something that makes as little cognitive demand on the subject as mere assertion is to be counted as one of the attitudes. Perhaps one must apprehend propositions in order to believe them. … But it is doubtful that one must apprehend what one is asserting in order to assert it." (Cf. Salmon (1986: 180), Soames (1989: 411).) I should point out that Soames (2003: vol.2, ch.16) has come to disavow this Donnellan-Salmon line. His more recent view is much more stringent on what it takes to significantly use a name.

[25] Quine (1956: 332): "Intensions are creatures of darkness, and I shall rejoice with the reader when they are exorcised …".

[26] Of course there are limits—if you associate with 'Einstein' the intension I associate with 'tiger', then there will be failure to communicate. The key point is that a wide range of differences are possible, without undermining communication.

[27] Cf. note 12. The Millian externalists' conception of singular thought is ill-suited to one of the central reasons why philosophers are interested in thought in the first place, which is the constitutive, causal-explanatory links between thoughts and intentional actions. Millian externalists identify the content of thoughts with different conceptual roles (e.g., 'There is Hesperus' vs. 'There is Phosphorus'), and distinguish the content of thoughts with the same conceptual roles (e.g., thoughts expressed by 'Water is a liquid' in the heads of undiscriminating speakers who happen to be in slightly different causal-historical environments).

[28] Cf. Sullivan (1998) for a more thorough update on this debate.

[29] I take one moral suggested by §2(i) to be that no extrinsic relation can be the whole story. Still, §1 rehearses considerable reason to hold that an extrinsic relation is an ineliminable component of a satisfactory account.

[30] Locke (1690) might be read as espousing an individualist-externalist approach to natural kind terms—i.e., the '… I know not what …' qualification adds an element of externalism into his otherwise individualist picture. Loar's (1991, 2003) investigations into perceptual demonstratives (e.g., 'that lemon there') could be classified as individualist-externalism; but this work is explicitly limited to this specific case, and is, evidently, not intended as general theory of reference. Perhaps the best candidate for espousing a general individualist-externalist theory of reference is Fodor (1987), but Fodor (1994) has since recanted his individualism.

[31] At least Kripke (1972) and Kaplan (1989: Part IV) read Frege this way. Cf. Sullivan (2003a) for an overview of discussions concerning whether is it fair to categorize Frege as an individualist.

[32] I hereby stipulate that 'neo-Fregean', in this paper, refers to any anti-individualist-externalist-intensionalist approach to reference and content. Alternatively, a neo-Fregean is one who holds that Kripke's insights about reference are compatible with Frege's insights about content, and so flatly rejects [FD]. Again, at least those cited in note 17 provide precedent for this approach.

[33] Insofar as the above-discussed argument from internalism to intensionalism is natural and compelling, then there is something disjointed about the internalist-extensionalist options [V] and [VI]. However, one point of Russell

scholarship that is unanimously conceded is that there are some deep tensions between various aspects of Russell's philosophy of language.

[34] I can think of no clear proponent of this combination, perhaps due the point raised in note 33. This option involves combining, say, Dummett (1981) or Searle (1983) on reference with a Russellian conception of propositional content. This strikes me as a disjointed but coherent option.

[35] Though, Evans (1973) and Loar (1988) have paved some of the way for an intensionalist-friendly response to this point.

[36] Cf. Schiffer (2003) for a thorough recent attempt to work out answers to some of these questions. While I am relatively confident that this work fits the stipulated definition of "neo-Fregean" in note 32, Schiffer explicitly rejects Fregeanism, and so would have issues with my label. This again illustrates the point that I am using the terms "Millian externalist" and "neo-Fregean" to illuminate a certain, specific divide; both camps so-distinguished will be heterongenous along lots of other dimensions.