Piotr Stalmaszczyk / Martin Hinton (eds.)

Philosophical Approaches to Language and Communication

Volume 2

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Tomasz Zyglewicz

Associative Exportation

Abstract: According to latitudinarianism, *S*'s belief that *x* is *F* is about *x* solely in virtue of *S*'s believing a proposition that ascribes *F*-ness to *x*. Saul Kripke (2011b) has recently objected to this view by arguing that it entails that *S* believes of arbitrary objects that they are *F*. In this paper I revisit Ernest Sosa's (1995a, 1995b) notion of associative aboutness to put forward a novel account of mental reference, called 'associative exportation,' that evades the troublesome consequence pointed out by Kripke, while preserving the spirit of latitudinarianism. In particular, the proposed view: (1) does not invoke any form of acquaintance with the object of belief; (2) validates a weak reducibility thesis of *de re* belief to *de dicto*; (3) is compatible with the observation that our unreflective aboutness judgments are latitudinarian; (4) offers new insights about the notorious tallest-spy objection.

Keywords: belief reports, propositional attitudes, de re/de dicto, mental reference, latitudinarianism, exportation, aboutness

1. Introduction

A distinctive feature of our thoughts is that they are *intentional*, that is they have the property of being *about* particular objects.[1] But what does it take for a thought to refer to a particular object? 'What makes my idea of him an idea of *him*?' (Wittgenstein 2001).

An attractively simple answer to these questions, called 'latitudinarianism,' states that to have a belief about an existing object *x* is to be in possession of a mental description, which denotes, or uniquely picks out, *x*. To put it more crisply, proponents of latitudinarianism believe that the following inference is valid:

Unrestricted exportation

(1) *S* believes that α is *F*.
(2) α denotes *x*.

Therefore,

    (3) S believes about x that it is F.

where S is a subject, α is a mental description possessed by S, x is an object and F is a property. For instance, suppose that the following is true of Susan:

    (4)   Susan believes that China's top rated chess player is very smart.

According to latitudinarianism, Susan's belief reported in (4) is about Ding Liren just in virtue of Susan's possessing the description 'China's top rated chess player' and Ding's uniquely satisfying this description. The view owes its name to the fact that it claims that mental reference is relatively easy. In particular, it is possible for Susan to have a belief about Ding without her having ever met, seen, or read about him, or even having heard his name.

    Many have argued that latitudinarianism renders mental reference too easy. Suppose that, like most of us, Susan knows next to nothing about the world of espionage. Nonetheless, in virtue of her basic conceptual competence we may truly report her as having the following belief:

    (5)   Susan believes that the tallest spy is a spy.

If we further suppose that spies exist and that one of them is uniquely the tallest, then 'the tallest spy' denotes them. Then, by unrestricted exportation it follows that:

    (6)   Susan believes about the tallest spy that they are a spy.

Now, by applying existential instantiation to (6), we get:

    (7)   Someone is believed by Susan to be a spy.

Intuitively, Susan's belief reported in (5) is an innocuous one; not much of practical importance follows from her possession thereof. By contrast, if (7) is true, then Susan has the makings of a CIA informant. What the tallest spy example makes vivid, critics of latitudinarianism argue, is that the view collapses a theoretically meaningful distinction between:

    (8)   **Belief *de dicto* about *x*:** believing a proposition of the form ⌜α is F,⌝ where α denotes x; and
    (9)   **Belief *de re* about *x*:** believing about x that it is F.

Furthermore, they insist that it is the latter notion that is a proper target of the discussions of mental reference.

    The idea that there is a difference in kind between (easy) *de dicto* aboutness and (demanding) *de re* aboutness traces back at least to Russell, who argued

that we can only mentally refer to objects with which we are acquainted (Russell 1918). However, as Russell was well aware, the ordinary notion of acquaintance is too vague to help us illuminate our initial question of what it takes for a thought to refer to a particular object. Thus, to give an interesting answer to the question 'what determines the reference of thought?', we need to stipulate a more precise, technical sense of acquaintance. The attempts to do that fall into two groups. One of them construes acquaintance as an epistemically rewarding relation between the subject and the object of their thought (Hintikka 1962: 144–50; Evans 1982; Pryor 2004), while the other emphasizes the importance of causal relations between them (Kaplan 1968; Boër and Lycan 1986). However, each of these accounts have been shown to be prone to counterexamples (for recent overviews, see Hawthorne and Manley 2012: chs. 2–3; Goodman 2018).

The continued failure to provide a satisfactory explication of acquaintance constitutes a strong reason for preferring latitudinarian analysis of *de re* belief in terms of the well-understood notions of *de dicto* belief and denotation (Pryor 2004: 4).[2] In an influential paper 'Propositional attitudes *de dicto* and *de re*,' Ernest Sosa (1970) urges us to learn to live with the counterintuitive consequence that Susan believes about Philby that he is the tallest spy.[3] He suggests that the problem with (7) is not so much that it is false, but rather that it is misleading to

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2   Of course, there are other considerations that speak in favor of latitudinarianism. First, the view is simple. Second, it explains the connection between *de dicto* and *de re* belief, thus avoiding the counterintuitive consequence that there are two entirely unrelated kinds of belief. Indeed, some latitudinarians go so far as to claim that the distinction is non-existent (Quine 1977: 10; Dennett 1989: 174–202). Finally, latitudinarianism meshes particularly well with descriptivism, i.e. the view that one can only have a thought about an object under some mode of presentation or other. Thank-you to an anonymous referee for pressing me to expand on this point.

3   In fact, from a latitudinarian perspective this is not so much biting the bullet but rather a trade-off. As Nathan Salmon aptly points out, this permissibility concerning *de re* beliefs comes in package with an important theoretical benefit: latitudinarians can tell a clean and simple story about the apparent felicity of the so-called *pseudo de re* belief reports, such as 'John believes that the lying S.O.B. who took my car is honest' (Salmon 2007b: 303 fn. 12; 2007a: 323–24; the example is due to Kaplan 1989: 555–56 fn. 71). David Kaplan famously denied that 'the existence of the pseudo *de re* form of reports poses any issues of sufficient theoretical interest to make it worth pursuing' (Kaplan 1989: 555–56 fn. 71). Howard Wettstein, in turn, cited the existence of the *pseudo de re* (without using the term) as a reason to give up systematic theorizing about attitude reports (Wettstein 1986: 204–9). Salmon conceives of his view as a middle ground between Kaplan and Wettstein (Salmon 2007a: 322).

utter in most contexts (cf. Quine 1977; Burdick 1982: 192–99; Laurier 1986: 43 fn. 5; Dennett 1989). As Howard Burdick puts it, 'If a man claimed that he knew something *about* the oldest spy and when questioned answered that he is a spy, I believe we would conclude that he is a buffoon. However, it is not clear to me that he is an ungrammatical buffoon.' (Burdick 1982, 192).

In a recent contribution to the debate, Saul Kripke sets out to show that latitudinarianism has consequences much more devastating than those brought out by the tallest spy objection (Kripke 2011b). He argues that, under certain minimal assumption, the view entails that Susan (and you, and I) believe of arbitrary objects, including the Eiffel Tower, Pope Francis, or the number 2, that they are spies (smart, blonde, etc.). If his argument is correct – as I think it is – then it provides a serious reason to abandon the doctrine. It is my goal in this paper to present a novel account of mental reference, based on Ernest Sosa's notion of *associative aboutness* (Sosa 1995b; 1995c; 1995a), that meets Kripke's objection, while preserving the central commitment of latitudinarianism, namely that mental reference is ultimately a matter of possessing appropriate mental descriptions.

In the second part of this paper, I introduce Kripke's 'Eiffel Tower objection' and identify two problems it poses for latitudinarianism, namely that: (i) it makes incorrect aboutness predictions and (ii) it overgenerates *de re* beliefs. In the third section, I discuss the more sophisticated version of latitudinarianism put forward in Sosa (1995b). In the fourth section, I argue that Sosa's preferred response to Kripke's objection – simply enriching latitudinarianism by embracing an additional notion of aboutness – does justice only to the first challenge. In the fifth section, I propose a new account of mental reference, dubbed 'associative exportation,' and argue that embracing it is a better response to the Eiffel Tower objection better than Sosa's sophisticated latitudinarianism. In the sixth section, I analyze two further tricky cases, in order to further elaborate on my theory and contrast it with its close competitor.

2. The Eiffel Tower Objection

Kripke's primary target is Sosa's analysis of *de re* beliefs in terms of *de dicto* beliefs:

(10) *S* believes about *x* that it is *F* (or believes *x* to be *F*) if and only if there is a singular term α such that *S* believes ⌜α is F,⌝ where α denotes x[4] (Sosa 1970: 887).

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4   It has been argued that third-personal belief reports are not a particularly good guide to *de re* beliefs (Burge 2007; Recanati 2012: 153). One reason is that our intuitions concerning their felicity seem to depend on the information shared by the reporters

Now, Kripke believes that this formulation, coupled with some uncontroversial assumptions, entails that a subject has beliefs about any object identifiable by them. He argues as follows (Kripke 2011b, 328–29):

(11) *p* is false. [assumption]
(12) Ralph believes that *p*. [assumption]
(13) Ralph believes that Philby is a spy. [assumption]
(14) Ralph believes that the *y* that is Philby if *p*, and is the Eiffel Tower if not *p*, is a spy. [from (12) and (13)]

Therefore,

(15) Ralph believes about *the Eiffel Tower* that it is a spy. [(11), (14), exportation]

This argument poses two difficulties for latitudinarianism:

Incorrect aboutness predictions. First, it exposes the fact that the view does not have the resources to capture an intuitive sense in which Ralph's belief reported in (14) is about Philby (rather than about the Eiffel Tower; Kripke 2011b: 329 fn. 22; cf. Schiffer 1978: 203–4).

Overgeneration. Second, and perhaps more importantly, Kripke's argument is supposed to show that latitudinarianism predicts subjects to have many more *de re* beliefs than we are willing to ascribe to them by any reasonable standards. This is so because any object identifiable by Ralph can be substituted for the Eiffel Tower in (14). In his paper Kripke bolsters this conclusion by showing that any thinker that fulfills certain minimal criteria can be shown to be able to identify arbitrary spatiotemporal points, material objects, and numbers. Of course, this gloss is inessential to the force of the argument, for it would be sufficiently counterintuitive if unrestricted exportation entailed that thinkers have beliefs about arbitrary people they can identify.[5]

and their audiences (Goodman 2018; Openshaw 2018; Taylor 2002; 2019; Blumberg and Lederman 2021). In fact, in his later work on the topic, Sosa abandoned the indirect linguistic characterization of *de re* beliefs in favor of a more direct one (García-Carpintero 2013: 74–75): 'A subject *S* hat at time *t* a thought (belief, intention, etc.) about *x* (of *x*) if *S* thinks (believes, intends, etc.) *de dicto* a proposition that predicates some property ϕ with respect to some individuating concept (or individuator) α of *x* for *S* at that time' (Sosa 1995b: 91–92). Nonetheless, since Kripke posed his objection in terms of attitude reports, I will stick to his preferred formulation.

5   It is worth noting that essentially the same objection was raised by Quine against Wilfrid Sellars' account of quantification into belief contexts (Quine 1969: 338). A somewhat similar objection was also raised by Gilbert Harman (Harman 1977: 176) against Roderick Chisholm's (Chisholm 1977) condition for exportability.

Kripke's argument may attract some incredulous stares. Admittedly it is natural to question (14) by pointing out that hardly anyone has such exotic beliefs (Kripke 2011b: 330–31 fn. 25; Blumberg and Holguín 2018: 2050 fn. 9). However, this observation does not have the makings of a strong objection to the Eiffel Tower argument. This is so because Kripke is working with a dispositional conception of belief, on which a sentence of the form 'Ralph believes that p' is true if and only if had Ralph been invited to entertain a sentence p, he would have assented to it, provided that he is being sincere and reflective (Kripke 2011a: 137–39 esp. fn. 22). Thus, on Kripke's account, (14) can be true without Ralph's consciously entertaining a belief with the content 'The y that is Philby if p, and is the Eiffel Tower if not p, is a spy.' Rather, for (14) to be true, it suffices that Ralph believes that Philby is a spy and that he is inclined to agree that the singular term 'Philby' refers to the same individual as the description 'the y that is Philby if p, and is the Eiffel Tower if not p. '

Indeed, Kripke's objection rests on rather minimal assumptions. It merely exploits the fact that, according to Sosa and other latitudinarians, the description involved in a thought is the sole factor about the thought itself that determines what it is about. Thus if (14) is true, then one has to either bite the bullet of (15) or ditch unrestricted exportation.[6]

Sosa grabs the first horn of the dilemma (p. c.). He enriches the simple latitudinarian picture in which individuating concepts are about objects that uniquely satisfy them ('individual aboutness'), with another, 'deeper' sense of aboutness that is had by concepts in virtue of their standing in appropriate relations to other individuating concepts ('associative aboutness'). In the following two sections I discuss the notion of associative aboutness in more detail and show how introducing it into the latitudinarian picture enables Sosa to overcome the problem of incorrect aboutness predictions.

However, the resulting picture does not deal effectively with the overgeneration problem. Thus, in the sixth section I argue that motivations for latitudinarianism are better preserved by weakening unrestricted exportation in a way that deems only associative (but not individual) aboutness to be relevant for exportation.

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6   Sajed Tayebi claims that the argument is invalid, due to an equivocation of attributive and referential uses of definite descriptions (Tayebi 2019)**.** However, I don't find his critique of the Eiffel Tower Objection successful, if only because it rests on the assumption that no one considers Donnellan's martini-drinker type cases counterexamples to unrestricted exportation (Tayebi 2019: 4). As we will see in the fourth section, Sosa himself recognized the need to defend his account of mental reference precisely from such cases (Sosa 1995b).

3. Associative Aboutness

The core idea of Ernest Sosa's latitudinarian theory of mental reference is that one's thought can be about a certain object solely in virtue of that object's being picked out by an individuating concept involved in that thought.[7] The view is commonly believed to face difficulties in accommodating the so-called near-miss cases, like the following one, originally put forward by Keith Donnellan (Donnellan 1966: 287; Sosa 1995b: 93).

Suppose that Ralph, unaware of the fact that the transparent liquid in the glass of a person he is looking at is water, is thinking 'the martini drinker in the corner is getting tipsy.' Also unbeknownst to Ralph, at the very same party there is a 14-year-old standing in a corner of another room sipping on a martini. Now, on Sosa's account Ralph's thought is about the 14-year-old, since he is the unique person picked out by the individuating concept involved in Ralph's thought. This clashes with a forceful intuition that Ralph's thought is about the person he's looking at.

In his paper 'Fregean reference defended,' Sosa concedes that his simple Fregean picture is incapable of accommodating this intuition (Sosa 1995b; cf. Sosa 1995a, 1995c).[8] Consequently, he introduces some additional theoretical apparatus which enables him to capture the sense in which Ralph's thought is about the water drinker in front of him. His central idea is that, in addition to referring individually ('individual aboutness'), individuating concepts can also refer to objects in virtue of being appropriately related to other thoughts ('associative aboutness'). Two individuating concepts are appropriately related if and only if the thinker takes them to be co-designative, i.e. she believes that they pick out the same unique individual.[9] Let us call the set of appropriately related individuating concepts *a referential conception* (Sosa 1995b: 94).

Consider again the martini drinker case. Individuating concepts, like 'the person in front of me,' 'the person with a clear liquid in their glass,' and 'the person drinking martini' belong to the same referential conception in Ralph's

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7   An important aspect of Sosa's account is that he allows individuating concepts to be perspectival (e.g. 'the person I am looking at;' Sosa 1995a: 245–47; Sosa 1995b: 90 fn. 1). For criticism of this move, see Burge (1977: 200–201).

8   Even though Sosa calls his theory Fregean, it is not clear whether Frege's own position counts as Fregean by Sosa's lights (Brewer 2004: 215 fn. 1).

9   Actually, Sosa only requires that they are connected by 'a chain of individuators, adjoining links of which are always believed by the thinker to be codesignative' (Sosa 1995b: 94). In what follows I will ignore this complication.

mind. Even though the individuating concept 'the person drinking martini,' involved in Ralph's thought 'the person drinking martini is getting tipsy,' *individually refers* to the 14-year-old martini drinker, it nonetheless belongs to a referential conception Ω, the majority of members of which individually refer to the person standing in front of Ralph. We may say that this referential conception *collectively refers to* (Sosa 1995b: 95) the person in front of Ralph. Thus, in virtue of belonging to Ω, 'the person drinking martini' *associatively refers to* (Sosa 1995b: 95) the person in front of Ralph.

This rough sketch of Sosa's solution faces the following objection. If we concede Kripke's point that S need not consciously entertain a proposition p in order for the ascription 'S believes that p' to come out true, then – under certain minimal assumptions – it turns out that any referential conception has an infinite number of members. For instance, provided that Ralph, the partygoer, has the individuating concept 'the person in front of me' and believes that $1+1=2$, then the relevant referential conception would include also individuating concepts, like 'the y such that y=the person in front of me if $1+1=2$, y=Magnus Carlsen otherwise,' 'the y such that y=the person in front of me if $1+1=2$, y=Fabiano Caruana otherwise' and so on, *ad infinitum*. Yet, if this is so, then the notion of associative aboutness, as presented above, is useless. For, if Ralph's referential conception contains an individuating concept x that refers to an individual X and an individuating concept $y \neq x$ that refers to an individual $Y \neq X$, then this referential conception contains an infinite number of individuating concepts referring to X and an infinite number of individuating concepts referring to Y. If this is the case, then we are unable to determine which individual is picked out by the majority of members of the referential conception under discussion.[10]

However, on Sosa's account, not all individuating concepts are created equal. Some owe their existence to others. For instance, it presumably took Ralph an additional cognitive step – as it were – to get from 'the person with the transparent liquid in their glass' to 'the person drinking martini.' Had he not believed

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10 Notice that this problem does not arise if the referential conception in question is *homogenous* in the sense that all of its members refer to the same individual. This observation can be set aside for two reasons. First, the notion of associative aboutness does not do any important philosophical work in homogenous cases. For in those cases, no divergence between individual aboutness and associative aboutness arises. Second, if we are ready to concede the assumptions Kripke makes in formulating the Eiffel Tower Objection, then it is questionable whether there exist any homogenous referential conceptions. It is all too easy to construct a recalcitrant individuating concept that can be plausibly attributed to a subject.

that the person with the transparent liquid in their glass is getting tipsy, he would not believe that the person drinking martini is getting tipsy. Thus, in Sosa's terms, the individuating concept 'the person drinking martini' *epistemically derives* (Sosa 1995b: 94) from 'the person with the transparent liquid in their glass.'[11] Individuating concepts that do not derive from any others form an *epistemic basis* (Sosa 1995b: 94–95) of a given referential conception. Now, on Sosa's account, it is only the members of the epistemic basis that get to 'vote' on what the referential conception is collectively about. As long as there is no recipe for generating members of the epistemic basis, analogous to the one discussed in the previous paragraph, it is not the case that every vote among its members necessarily ends in a draw.[12]

It is worth emphasizing that the discussed solution to the near-miss cases does not compromise the latitudinarian spirit of Sosa's account of mental reference. In particular, it does not essentially depend on any kind of mind-world relation of the kind postulated by the acquaintance theorists (Sosa 1995b: 96–97). Granted, inasmuch as most of the epistemically basic individuating concepts originate in perception, causation plays an important role in the formation of our referential conceptions. However, since it is possible on Sosa's account to have a referential conception that consists exclusively of individuating concepts acquired through description (e.g. 'the tallest spy'), causation enters his picture only in a 'by the way' fashion' (Sosa 1995b: 96).

Sosa believes that the notion of associative aboutness is quite flexible. Indeed, he expresses conviction that it is capable of accommodating any case that might be adduced against his theory of mental reference (Sosa 1995b, 99). Taking this

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11 The metaphor of cognitive steps invoked in the second sentence of the present paragraph may be taken to suggest that the relation of epistemic derivation is psychologically real. Even though I don't want to preclude this possibility, I'd like to distance myself from this implication. All that is relevant for the argument to be presented in the next section is that there is a fairly natural sense in which 'Ralph believes that the martini drinker is getting tipsy because he believes the person with the transparent liquid in their glass is getting tipsy' sounds ok, while 'Ralph believes that the person with the transparent liquid in their glass is getting tipsy because he believes that the martini drinker is getting tipsy' does not (Sosa 1995b: 94; Sosa 1995a: 238).

12 Of course, this is not to say that there will be no draws. In fact, Sosa defines collective aboutness, and thereby indirectly associative aboutness, in terms of 'great preponderance' of members, rather than in terms of a simple majority. I will ignore this complication. See also fn. 15.

as a good sign, I will now turn to showing how it may be invoked to address the challenge of incorrect aboutness predictions.

4. Addressing the Problem of Incorrect Aboutness Predictions

Kripke's objection to unrestricted exportation rests on the observation that if we know that Ralph believes that Philby is a spy and believes that p, then a plethora of belief reports like the one below are true.

>   (14)   Ralph believes that the y that is Philby if p, and is the Eiffel Tower if not p, is a spy.

Yet, since not p, the individuating concept 'the y that is Philby if p, and is the Eiffel Tower if not p' picks out the Eiffel Tower. Thus, on the simple latitudinarian picture, the sentence turns out – contrary to our intuitions – to be about the Eiffel Tower. To put it in terms of Sosa's more sophisticated account discussed in the previous section, the sentence is *individually about* the Eiffel Tower.

What about *associative aboutness*? In order to answer this question, we first need to say more about Ralph's referential conception at play. Since Kripke constructs his scenario in a rather frugal way, I am going to assume that the only individuating concepts possessed by Ralph that may be relevant to assessing (14) are:

   (i) 'Philby,'
  (ii) 'the y that is Philby if p, and is the Eiffel Tower if not p,' and
 (iii) any other concept that can be derived from (i) or (ii) in the manner described in the previous section of this paper.

We can immediately set aside the set of individuating concepts that fall under (iii), since by definition they would not belong to the epistemic basis of Ralph's referential conception in question. Furthermore, arguably, (ii) epistemically derives from (i). Even though Kripke is not explicit about the relation between (i) and (ii), he does say that we know that (14) is true because Ralph believes that p and believes that Philby is a spy (Kripke 2011b: 329). Moreover, if we were challenged to give our reasons for uttering (14), the following would be a plausible answer: 'because Ralph believes that Philby is a spy and he believes that (i) and (ii) pick out the same object.' If this is correct, then the epistemic basis of Ralph's referential conception consists of a single member, namely the individuating concept 'Philby.' And since 'Philby' is individually about Philby, the epistemic conception is collectively about Philby. This includes the individuating concept 'the y that is Philby if p, and is the Eiffel Tower if not p. 'Thus, according to the

sophisticated version of Sosa's theory of mental reference, (14) is individually about the Eiffel Tower but associatively about Philby.

This takes care of the problem of incorrect aboutness predictions. However, if anything, it only makes worse the problem of overgeneration. While Sosa believes that the bullet should be bitten,[13] many latitudinarians may consider this too radical a move, especially if they conceive of the current project as one of modelling the semantics of the ordinary English notion of aboutness. Thus, in the remainder of this paper, I put forward an alternative reaction to the Eiffel Tower objection, one that satisfyingly addresses the problem of overgeneration of *de re* beliefs.

5. Addressing the Overgeneration Problem

My claim is that a better reply to the Eiffel Tower Objection is to relinquish unrestricted exportation in favor of a closely related principle that avoids the overgeneration problem. In particular, I suggest that the object that is exportable from a *de dicto* belief report into a *de re* belief report is not the one that the *de dicto* report is individually about but rather the one that it is associatively about. The new condition for exportation can be put thus:

> (**Associative Exportation**) S believes about x that it is F (or believes x to be F) if and only if there is a singular term α such that S believes $\ulcorner \alpha$ is $F,\urcorner$ where α is associatively about x for S.

Why think that associative exportation marks an improvement over unrestricted exportation? Most importantly, it does better on the score of extensional

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13 He finds appealing two strategies of doing the damage control after the Eiffel Tower objection. The first one, originally deployed in (Sosa 1970), consists in adducing multiple examples in an attempt to make plausible the claim that sometimes a true conclusion, such as Kripke's (15), can be very misleading to affirm. Kripke (2011b) rejects this maneuver as an instance of the 'pragmatic wastebasket fallacy.' The second strategy is to emphasize the technical nature of Sosa's proposal and the fact that its primary aim is to supply a definition of aboutness for a simple theory of belief that presupposes the technical notions of belief, individual concept, proposition, and satisfaction. Even though this notion of aboutness may not capture the notion of aboutness present in the vernacular, it is still to be commended for its simplicity (See also: García-Carpintero 1995: 106–8; Sosa 1995c: 119–21). In fact, in the next section I claim it to be an advantage of my own proposal that it makes theoretical space for the claim that latitudinarianism is a false, yet useful, approximation of our ordinary notion of aboutness. Thanks to Ernest Sosa for a helpful discussion of this point.

adequacy. In cases where an individuating concept is individually and associatively about the same object, the two principles yield identical aboutness predictions. By contrast, in cases such as Donnellan's martini drinker scenario or Kripke's Eiffel Tower scenario, when an individuating concept's associative and individual aboutnesses diverge, it is associative exportation that yields the intuitive results.

Furthermore, I submit that the proposed view preserves central motivations for being a latitudinarian. First, on the proposed view mental reference is analyzed in terms of satisfaction of individuating concepts and how the individuating concepts are related to one another in the reportee's mind. In particular, there is thus no need to invoke acquaintance to account for alleged failures of exportation.

Second, the proposed view preserves an intimate connection between *de dicto* and *de re* beliefs. Despite invalidating unrestricted exportation, associative exportation vindicates a closely related claim that having an appropriate *de dicto* belief is sufficient for having a *de re* belief about an object *x*, provided that *x* exists.[14] More precisely, on the proposed picture the following inference is valid:

(16) α is a member of S's referential conception of *x*.

(17) *S* believes that ⌜α is *F*⌝.

_____

(18) *S* believes about *x* that it is *F*.[15]

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14 For a helpful discussion of different versions of the claim that *de re* belief is reducible to *de dicto* see (Salmon 1997).

15 Actually, whether the implication always holds depends on how we go about 'draws,' i.e. situations where two or more distinct objects are individually referred to by the same number of members of the epistemic basis of a referential conception.

  Suppose that Bob's referential conception consists of two individuating concepts: α, which denotes an object *x*, and β, which denotes an object *y* such that *y*≠*x*. Suppose further that neither α epistemically derives from β, nor β epistemically derives from α for Bob. There seem to be three principled ways of evaluating the exportability of α from the claim: 'Bob believes that ⌜ α is *F* ⌝.' First, following the letter of associative exportation, we may say that it follows that Bob has two *de re* beliefs: one about *x*, and another about *y*. Second, if one dislikes the idea that a singular term can export to two different objects, one can stipulate that Bob only has belief about *x* because it was *x*'s individuating concept that figures in the *de dicto* belief report. Finally, if one finds both of these options too arbitrary, one can say that if there is a draw, α is not exportable. It is only the third option that threatens the validity of the inference at hand. However, I do not think this is a problem for my view. First, presumably, draws occur very rarely. Second, and more significantly, when they do occur, they occur in cases of serious

Third, associative exportation is compatible with the claim that unrestricted exportation, despite being strictly speaking false, captures something important about how we think about mental reference: except for a handful of recalcitrant cases, its predictions align closely with our unreflective aboutness judgments.[16] Indeed, if associative exportation is the correct account of mental reference, then unrestricted exportation can be seen as a useful approximation of it.

This idea can be illustrated by an analogy. We may think of individuating concepts falling under a single referential conception as members of a corporate body trying to elect their ambassador. In the best-case scenario, they manage to reach a consensus. This corresponds to the case when all the members of the referential conception indeed are co-designative. Most of the time, however, opinions of the members will diverge. Perhaps the most familiar way of dealing with such a situation is to take votes and declare the person who got the most votes the new ambassador. In fact, if X gets the majority of votes, they become the ambassador of every member of the referential conception, irrespective of whether they voted for them, Y, or yet another candidate. This is, roughly, how associative aboutness operates.

However, the majority vote is not the only method of collective decision making. For instance, one can instead pick a member at random and declare their opinion decisive. Clearly, there is something to be said for this method: at the very least, it is less time consuming than the majority vote. Moreover, its results are a quite reliable indicator of what the outcome of the majority vote would have been, had it been conducted. This is exactly why in standard cases of mental reference we get the impression that there is no need to determine what the individuating concept in question is associatively about. Yet, from time to time it so happens that a member gets selected at random that does not share the majority opinion. It is in those situations that the voters wish that they had stuck to the more traditional method of majority vote.[17]

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identity confusion, which – as opposed to the tallest spy, the martini drinker, or the Eiffel Tower cases – pose a challenge for any theory of mental reference.

16 I find plausible John McDowell's speculation that '[u]ncontaminated by philosophy we are quite casual about 'exportation' in cases of the 'shortest spy' sort.' (McDowell 1984: 291, fn. 22).

17 An additional problem with statements like (14) can be seen if we appreciate the similarity between an epistemic basis of a conception and a board of directors of a corporate body. Individuating concepts like 'y that is Philby if p, and is the Eiffel Tower if not p' are not only unrepresentantive but also – to extend the analogy – ineligible to vote in the first place.

What I hope to have shown is that the proposed account is compatible with a suggestion that when making *de re* ascriptions in everyday situations we typically do not holistically examine the subject's notional world, which seems to be required for correct application of associative exportation. Rather, it seems more plausible that for practical purposes we rely on the handy heuristic of unrestricted exportation. After all, it only fails us in a small number of aberrant cases, such as the martini drinker case or the Eiffel Tower scenario.

Finally, associative exportation admits of a refinement that helps us shed new light on the reservations some people have about exportation in the 'tallest spy' case. The underlying idea is to construe aboutness as a gradable notion. Call a referential conception *thick* if its epistemic basis contains many individuating concepts; call a referential conception *thin*, if its epistemic basis contains few individuating concepts (cf. Dennett 1989: 180; Sosa 1995c: 115).

Consider again the *de dicto* belief report 'Susan believes that $\ulcorner \alpha$ is $F \urcorner$.' According to associative exportation, it follows that Susan has a *de re* belief about the object x that α is associatively about. Now, the thicker Susan's relevant referential conception, the more robustly her belief is about x. Conversely, the thinner Susan's referential conception, the less robustly her belief is about x.

On this refinement, the belief reported in 'Susan believes that the tallest spy is a spy' is only very weakly about the tallest spy. This judgement, in turn, affords an appealing middle ground between two conflicting intuitions. On the one hand, it accommodates the intuition there is *a sense* in which this belief is about the tallest spy. On the other hand, it does justice to the opposite intuition that there's an important difference between this case and her *de re* belief about her partner that they are a philosopher. Furthermore, this is done without conceding too much to acquaintance theorists: the difference is one of degree, not of kind.

6. Tricky Cases

Before I conclude, I would like to discuss two further tricky cases. They will provide me with an opportunity to further elaborate on my view, as well as contrast it with a close competitor.

6.1. Gödel/Schmidt

Consider a hypothetical scenario in which the person who proved the incompleteness of arithmetic was not really Kurt Gödel but rather a man named 'Schmidt.' After Schmidt was found dead under mysterious circumstances, Gödel managed to lay his hands on the manuscript of the proof and publish it

under his own name. No one has managed to find out about his fraud (Kripke 1980: 83–92).

We are now faced with the task of explaining how it is that a single individuating concept 'Gödel' gives rise to varying aboutness judgments across different contexts (Kripke 1980: 85 fn. 36):

(19) When Susan thinks ⌜Gödel proved the incompleteness of arithmetic,⌝ her thought is about Gödel.

(20) When thinking ⌜Gödel relied on a diagonal argument in this step of the proof,⌝ Susan's thought is about Schmidt.

In order to accommodate these intuitions, it will be helpful to invoke Sosa's notion of a *source correlate*, which was introduced to handle similar worries:

(21) σα, the source correlate of α, is the concept: [the one that my source refers to as α] (Sosa 1995c: 114).

Armed with this concept, I can account for (19) by saying that the epistemic basis of Susan's referential conception is dominated by the individuating concepts like σ[the one who proved the incompleteness of arithmetic] or σ[the one who proved Gödel's theorem]. By contrast, (20) can be explained by pointing out that when reading Gödel's proof, the epistemic basis of Susan's relevant referential conception consists exclusively of the individuating concept 'whoever proved the theorem.'

What the preceding discussion brings into focus is that the internal structure of a referential conception can interact in interesting ways with various mental predicates. In particular, an individuating concept may be epistemically basic with respect to one predicate, and merely derivative with respect to another. The following principle is a natural extension of Sosa's definition of epistemic derivation (Sosa 1995b: 94):

(22) Given two distinct individuating concepts, α and β, belonging to *S*'s referential conception Ω, and a predicate *F*, β epistemically derives from α with respect to *F* iff:

(23) Had *S* not believed ⌜α is *F*,⌝ they would not believe that ⌜β is *F*.⌝

and

(24) It is not the case that had *S* not believed ⌜β is *F*,⌝ they would not believe that ⌜α is *F*.⌝

6.2. Prism

A similarity has been pointed out between associative exportation and the cluster theory of reference fixing (Searle 1958), as applied to the realm of thought.

According to the latter, concepts are associated with sets of features. Whichever object possesses most of these features is the referent of the concept. While I agree that the two theories give convergent verdicts in many cases discussed in this paper so far, there are cases when their predictions come apart.

Suppose that Susan is looking at her friend Jeremy. Unbeknownst to her, she is viewing him through a prism, which distorts all of his visual qualities in such a way that he appears to her to be a lump of clay. Despite Susan's getting most of Jeremy's properties wrong, some would still insist that (Burge 2009: 290–91):

(25) Susan believes about Jeremy that he is made of clay.

The cluster theory fails to predict this judgment, for Susan gets most of Jeremy's properties wrong. By contrast, a proponent of associative exportation can explain (26) by pointing out that the epistemic basis of Susan's referential conception in this context, just like in most other perceptual contexts, is 'the object that I am looking at.'

7. Conclusion

Latitudinarianism holds that our thoughts are about particular objects in virtue of our possession of mental descriptions that are uniquely satisfied by these objects. Due to its simplicity and elegance, the view enjoys a good deal of intuitive plausibility. However, Kripke's Eiffel Tower objection poses two serious challenges for a simple version of the view, associated with the doctrine of unrestricted exportation, namely: (i) incorrect aboutness predictions and (ii) overgeneration.

In this paper I proposed to replace unrestricted exportation with a more sophisticated doctrine of associative exportation, inspired by Sosa's notion of associative aboutness. I argued that my proposal is an attractive option for latitudinarians for five reasons. First, it addresses both challenges raised by Kripke's objection. Second, it does not invoke any kind of acquaintance relations. Third, it vindicates the claim that to have a *de re* belief about an object *x*, it suffices to have a relevant *de dicto* belief about *x*. Fourth, it is compatible with the model in which unrestricted exportation serves as a heuristic for making *de re* belief ascriptions in everyday situations. Finally, it offers a new angle on the tallest spy objection.

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