

## Chapter Thirteen Knowing What I'm Thinking Of<sup>1</sup>

...for it is scarcely conceivable that we can make a judgment or entertain a supposition without knowing what it is we are judging or supposing about...the meaning we attach to our words must be something with which we are acquainted...[but] Julius Caesar is not himself before our minds.  
(Russell, The problems of Philosophy, p. 58.)

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The difficulty with Russell's Principle has always been to explain what it means. (Gareth Evans, The Varieties of Reference, p.89)

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### ' 13.1 Introduction

In Chapter 7, I offered an answer to the question: How do we know when we are thinking of a substance, and thinking of it unequivocally and nonredundantly? But I did not answer the question, equally urgent: What, on an externalist account, could possibly constitute that one knows what substance one is thinking about? In this chapter I will try to answer that question.

I will agree with Evans that grasping the identity of the object of one's thought requires having a concept of that object. I have already agreed with him, throughout this book, that a (substance) concept is, in part, an ability to reidentify its object. But abilities, I have said, can be better or worse (' 4.3). Especially, one can know how to do a thing only under very restricted conditions or under a great variety of conditions. Knowing what one is judging about is thus a matter of degree. One can come to know better what one is judging about.

Also, as I have emphasized (Chapter 4), one can know how to do a thing but still fail. The conditions required for successful exercise of one's ability may be absent, nor need one be aware of this absence. Russell and Evans to the contrary, it is not uncommon to be mistaken about the object of one's thought on particular occasions. That is, even though you do have an ability to identify the object of your thought, hence do know what you are thinking of, you can still make mistakes about the object of your thought. Similarly, having the ability to walk will not prevent you from sometimes tripping.

If not soon corrected, however, mistaking the identity of an object of thought produces equivocation in thought, hence the beginning, at least, of change in the object of thought.

In chapter 14 I will examine "Russell's principle" in another light, asking whether there are other kinds of mental representation the identities of whose intentional objects remain unknown to the thinker. This will turn out to be the same as the question whether there are nonconceptual mental representations.

### ' 13.2 Isolating the Problem

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1 Parts of this chapter are revised from "On unclear and indistinct ideas" (Millikan 1994) in Philosophical Perspectives, 8, Logic and Language with the kind permission of Ridgeview Publishing Company and from "Knowing What I'm Thinking of" (Millikan 1993c) by courtesy of the Editor of the Aristotelian Society.

To inquire whether it is possible to make a judgment or think about something without knowing what one is thinking of we first need to understand what it would be to know what one is thinking of. Externalism concerning mental content clearly implies that we cannot "know what we are thinking about" in the strictest Russellian way. On Russell's view, what can be "thought about," in the strictest sense, is only what is within or directly before the conscious mind. On a representationalist view, on the other hand, what is within the mind when one thinks of an object is a representation of the object, not the object itself. Or if the object should happen to be "in" the mind, for example, if it is itself a mental representation, still it is not by being in the mind that it becomes an object of thought. Thinking of one's thoughts cannot be supposed to be thinking of or knowing in some completely different sense than thinking about the empirical world. *What thinking of something consists in cannot be supposed to change with the object of thought.* If one thinks about one's representations, this must be by means of other representations. Representations do not represent themselves. Similarly, on a representationalist view, what the mind is "aware of" when it successfully represents an object is the object represented, not the vehicle in the mind that represents the object. But if that is so, against Russell, Julius Caesar may indeed be "before our minds" in the only sense that anything can be "before our minds." What is in our minds and what is before our minds must be sharply distinguished. We must not confuse the vehicle of thought with its content (Chapter 8).

Nor can we interpret Russell's dictum to mean, say, that I cannot make a judgment about Alice unless I also judge that my judgment is about Alice. Knowing that I am thinking of Alice is surely posterior rather than prior to thinking of Alice. I cannot know that I am thinking of Alice unless I first think of Alice, any more than I can know that I am hungry unless I am first hungry. Nor is knowing that I am thinking of Alice necessitated by my thinking of Alice. Knowing that requires judging that, and judging that I am thinking of Alice requires the capacity to think about thoughts. But this is a capacity there is no reason to suppose every thinker must have. There is evidence, for example, that children don't have this capacity until well after they acquire fluent speech.

Again, consider what it would be to know that I was thinking of Alice. Barring Russell's view of thought as direct confrontation of mind with object, this knowing could not involve directly comparing my thought with Alice. Rather, I would have to think of my thinking and I would have to think of Alice and perhaps also of the relation that made the one a thought of the other. In any event, I would surely have to think of Alice. But if thinking of Alice involves knowing that I am thinking of Alice, and this requires thinking of Alice again, we have a regress. It is not regressive (though I believe it is surely false) to claim that it is necessary to have the capacity or the disposition, whenever my thought turns to Alice, to think that I am thinking about Alice. But it is not possible that actualizing this capacity should be constitutive of having thoughts about Alice.

### ' 13.3 Evans' on Knowing What One Is Thinking of

Gareth Evans was an externalist and he believed, none the less, that there was a way of explaining "what Russell's Principle means" that makes it come out not only sensible but true (Evans 1982). A central move in Evans' analysis was interpreting

"knowing what one is judging about," at crucial junctures, not as a kind of knowing that (as we have so far been interpreting it) but as a kind of knowing how. As Evans understood it, knowing what one is thinking of is having some sort of "ability" or "capacity" or "disposition" or "knowing how." Che conflated all theseC "capacity" or "disposition" or "knowing how."

Evans held that knowing what one is judging about is "a capacity to distinguish the object of [one's] judgment from all other things" (1982, p.89). Using our example, thinking of Alice, he would have claimed, involves the capacity to distinguish Alice from all other things. Having this capacity, Evans said, is what makes the difference between being capable only of judging, say, that a person has such and such attributes and being capable of judging that Alice has them (pp.127-8).

Evans was clear that this ability to discriminate Alice could not be merely the ability to call to mind an idea that was, in some manner inaccessible to the thinker, externally (e.g., causally) hooked to Alice and Alice only. Rather, Evans thought, its being hooked to Alice must, at least in part, "reside in facts about what the [thinking] subject can or cannot do at that time" (p. 116), facts determining that the thinker has a "concept" or, in the case of objects as distinguished from properties, an "adequate Idea" of the target of his thought. A concept or Idea, for Evans, is a general ability that (1) "makes it possible for a subject to think of an object in a series of indefinitely many thoughts, [(2)] in each of which he will be thinking of it in the same way" (p.104).

Consider (2) first. A concept or Idea, for Evans, corresponds to a single (neo)-Fregean mode of presentation of its referent. But recall also that for Evans, there are such things as "dynamic modes of presentation" (' 11.4). The ability to keep track of an object currently perceived, along (as we will see) with one's ability to locate the egocentric space within which one perceives it within one's representation of objective or public space, constitutes one sort of concept of that object.

Now consider (1). (1) says that to have an Idea of Alice, I must be able to think of Alice not only, say, in the context of the thought that she is slim, but also in the context of the thought that she is trim, that she is walking, that she is city mayor, and so forth for all attributes any arbitrary person might have, given only that I possess the relevant predicate concepts. More precisely, I must understand what it would be for Alice, as distinguished from all others, to have any arbitrary one of these various attributes. Evans calls this constraint on concepts "the generality constraint" (1982 section 4.3). Evans' "generality constraint" is not just the familiar contemporary view that thought must be compositional. The verificationist background from which Evans' thought emerged lends it quite another flavor and use. It implies, rather, a general capacity to understand what it would be to reiterate the thought Alice in other evidenced or grounded judgments about her. The generality constraint, as Evans understands it, is an epistemological constraint. It concerns one's capacities to come to know things of certain very general kinds.

"[I]n order for a subject to be credited with the thought that p, he must know what it is for it to be the case that p" (p.105), a kind of knowing that it "is hard to give any substance to...when this is not to be equated with an ability to determine whether or not [p] is true" (1982, p.106). But Evans wishes to avoid the anti-realist conclusion that empirical truth can only be verificationist truth. He wants to be a realist about truth. He

attempts to accomplish this, as I understand it, in part by analyzing capacities to understand whole propositions as composed of more generally applicable component capacities to recognize objects, properties, and so forth, corresponding to the concepts these propositions involve. He applies the principle of compositionality in order, for example, to avoid problems about whether verification of propositions about inaccessible things such as those in the past is possible. He supports his realism, second, by understanding the capacities of which concepts are composed to concern interactions with the external world, and by recognizing that whether or not such capacities have been exercised properly cannot always be guaranteed by the character of a thinker's subjective experience. Concepts are not described in a verificationist way, by their relations only to sensory evidence.

Evans begins his analysis by unpacking "know what it is for it to be the case that" (say) it is Alice who has this or that property, by referring to possession of a "fundamental Idea" of Alice. The fundamental Idea of Alice is based, first, on grasp of the fundamental "ground of difference" for entities of her defining category, presumably, in this case, the category person. "For there is no thought about objects of a certain kind which does not presuppose the idea of one object of that kind, and the idea of one object of that kind must employ a general conception of the ways in which objects of that kind are differentiated from one another and from all other things" (p. 108). In the case of persons, for example, the fundamental ground of difference will be being in its own unique place at each given time. A "fundamental Idea" of Alice will require a grasp of her as being at some particular place at some particular time. And in the case of individual objects, a fundamental idea must consist, also, in grasp of the criteria of identity for that kind of object over time. For Alice, presumably, this must involve at least that the place-times she occupies are contiguous.

Evans now unpacks what it is to "know what it is to be the case that" Alice has properties not attributed to her under her "fundamental Idea,  $\underline{a}$ ". This requires that one understand "what it is for it to be the case that..  $\underline{a}=a$  " for various other kinds of ideas,  $\underline{a}$ , of Alice, such as definite descriptions and "demonstrative thoughts" (thoughts of Alice via current perceptions of her). Thus the problem is reduced, in part, to the question what it is to "know what it is for it to be the case that" various identity equations hold. For example, one concept that I have of Alice may be my ability to recognize her on sight ("recognition based identification," Evans 1982, Chapter 8). That is, I will know that the object of certain "demonstrative" thoughts, "that woman," equal the object of my fundamental Idea,  $\underline{a}$ , of Alice. Similarly, where  $\underline{N}$  is a demonstratively indicated position in egocentric space and  $\underline{p}$  a position in public space, "[that] in which knowledge of what it is for identity propositions of the form  $\underline{P}=\underline{p}$  to be true consists" is "the capacity to discover...where in the world one is" (p.162), that is, "[the] ability to locate [one's] egocentric space in the framework of a cognitive map" (p.163).

That I have the ability to think of Alice thus implies that I would know how to reidentify her, either directly, or as mediated by a series of intermediate identity judgments, for purposes of applying each substantive predicate I grasp as possibly true

of a person. That is, I take it, for each of these substantive judgments, I would know to make it were occasions to arise on which the relevant linking propositions were evidenced to me in the right way. And for each such possible substantive judgment there must exist ways by which I could grasp the relevant linking propositions. Ignoring worries about whether there are such things as identity judgments (Chapter 12), and tentatively identifying Evans' "capacities" and "abilities" with abilities as we have defined them (Chapter 4), this would surely entail my having a concept of Alice exactly in the sense I have described in previous chapters. That is, it would entail (1) my having a capacity to reidentify Alice, roughly in the sense of "reidentify" I have explicated, and (2) my understanding, for certain predicates, that they could apply to her. But the converse entailment does not hold. I have required very much less than Evans for having a substance concept.

#### ' 13.4 Differing with Evans on Knowing What One Is Thinking Of.

It is central to my thesis that the ontological ground of a substance, the principle that accounts for the invariance of certain of its properties over encounters, need not be grasped in order to have a concept of it. Similarly, no criteria of identity or difference need be grasped for members of its class. The tiny infant (or the dog) who identifies Mama by smell so as to learn how to respond in her presence surely has no idea of an objective four dimensional frame through which Mama-the-space-time-worm crawls on her way. Neither is the infant's (or the dog's) ability to identify Mama dependent on there being, necessarily, no one else in the world who smells exactly like Mama. The infant knows in practice when Mama is present again, which is all she needs for collecting knowledge about Mama. There is no need to know how to distinguish Mama from all other things in principle so long as she manages, for the most part, to do so in practice.

Evans holds that all concepts of objects of the same kind, all "modes of presentation" of these objects, are linked together in the following way. I must know for each such mode what it would be for it to present the same object as that presented by a certain fundamental idea of this kind of object, hence I must know for each such mode what it would be for it to present the same object as each other mode. No concept or set of concepts of the same thing form an island, isolated in principle from other concepts of the same thing. For this reason, Evans holds, watching an object on TV does not, simply as such, afford me a concept of that object, for it does not afford my knowing how to locate the space it is in within my conception of objective space. Merely by seeing the object on TV, I cannot, in principle, identify it with any fundamental idea that I could have of that kind of object. Only if I were also to think of the object seen by a description such as "the object of such and such kind that is causing this TV image" could I understand what would be involved in reidentifying it, hence know what it was I was thinking of. Similarly, Strawson spoke of "story-relative identifications" that one might make, (co-)identifying various references to the same person in a true story that one hears. But unless one knows independently who this person is outside the story, Strawson held, such "identifications" do not really identify any particular person (Strawson 1959, p. 18). Evans agrees (p. 151). I do not agree.

What seems to be yearned for in the notion of knowing which object my thought is

about is a sort of confrontation of thought, on the one side, with the object bare, on the other, taking place, per impossible, within thought itself. (Of course Russell's view was that exactly this sort of confrontation is possible--the object bare is, roughly speaking, part of the thought.) Barring that, the next best thing, apparently, is having the essence or nature of the object's particular identity before the mind, that which makes it different from all other things. And how does one get an individual nature before one's mind? Suppose, for example, that the nature involves being a member of a certain kind or category and being at a certain place at a certain time. What is it for me to think of this particular kind and this particular place and this particular time, as differentiated from all other kinds, places and times? Do these things have individual natures too? Must I have fundamental ideas of each of them too?

I diagnose Evans' position as follows. Interpreting the aboutness of a thought as needing to involve grasp of a "fundamental idea" of its object is merely a hankering left over from the Fregean/ internalist/ verificationist position that something internal to me must somehow determine a distinct object for my thought. The thought must somehow be hooked onto its object in my mind. Similarly, Evans' constantly reiterated phrase that we must somehow "know what it is for it to be the case that" p in order to understand the proposition p strikes me as a transparent rehearsal of the sort of verificationist/ internalist suggestion he should be anxious to avoid. This phrase strongly suggests that something like my ability to imagine p being directly evidenced is what constitutes my meaning something in thinking that p.

The closest thing that actually makes some sense, I suggest, to the yearned-for ideal of comparison of a thought with its object bare within thought itself, is a confrontation of one thought of an object with another thought concerning that same object, this taking place within thought itself, and constituting a recognition of the sameness of the object (as described in Chapter 10). Putting this picturesquely, if you imagine the various thoughts that you have about, say, Noam Chomsky, as a sort of story that you tell yourself using various thought tokens that concern him, then knowing who you are thinking of in this story corresponds to your ability to make what Strawson called "story-relative identifications" of the person in your story. There is no way that you can cut through the stories that you tell yourself about Noam Chomsky in order to tack them inside your mind directly onto Noam, or onto his individual nature, in order to know in any more direct way than that who you are thinking of. Knowing what I am thinking of is being capable of coidentifying (' 10.2) various of my thoughts with other thoughts of the same. It is being able to distinguish thinking of a thing again from thinking of a different thing.

### 13.5 Having an Ability versus Knowing how to Acquire it

Now I have argued that abilities are not the same as any kind of dispositions, nor does having an ability entail that one is necessarily able, in one's actual circumstances, to exercise that ability (Chapter 4). Similarly, knowing what one is thinking of obviously cannot be a simple disposition always, under every possible condition, correctly to

identify incoming natural information concerning a thing.<sup>2,3</sup> No one has that kind of ability with regard to the identity of anything. If that were required it would follow, for example, that the ancients did not know what they were thinking of when they thought of Hesperus and when they thought of Phosphorus, since they did not grasp that these were the same heavenly body. And it would follow that if I could ever, even momentarily, mistake someone else for my spouse, then I do not know who I am thinking of when I think of him. Rather, to have an ability to identify the object of my thought, I need only to have a disposition to do so correctly under certain definite kinds of historically determined conditions, namely those under which this ability, or the various more general components of which it is composed, were successful in the past, hence were acquired (' 4.6). It only needs to be true that incoming natural information about this object, arriving in certain kinds of packages, piped through certain definite kinds of information channels, will be marked with identity markers as being about the same.

Nor does Evans require that one actually identify every source of incoming information. He requires only that no concept or set of concepts of the same thing form an island, wholly isolated in principle from other concepts of the same thing. One must possess conceptual abilities that could in principle bridge the gap between. This is because each nonfundamental Idea must be tied firmly by some capacity to the fundamental idea of its object, hence each idea of an object to every other idea of the same object. If we, in contrast to Evans, dispense with fundamental ideas of objects, will this leave us with the possibility of unbridgeable gaps between coreferential conceptual islands?

The question needs to be posed more carefully. I have argued (Chapters 10-12) that there cannot be modes of presentation of objects that are ways of thinking of them and that are also individuated according to ways of identifying them. Ways of identifying objects are not ways of thinking of them but ways of being guided by experience in marking identity for incoming information. They are ways of knowing how correctly to bind various packets of incoming information together. Moreover, it is not possible to individuate ways of identifying in a way needed for the traditional uses of the notion of modes of presentation (' 11.5). We might make sense of the question about conceptual

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2 Evans himself is very unclear about what abilities or capacities are, and especially, on how they can be fallible. For example, in discussing recognition based concepts he tells us "It is essential for him to have an adequate Idea of a particular object that there be one, and only one, object which he is disposed to pick out in this way" (p. 271). In other places he makes passing reference to the necessity of information systems, perceptual systems, and so forth operating properly. An information system can "malfunction" (p.128). But there is no attempt to give a general characterization of conditions under which the disposition to pick out the object corresponding to a recognitional capacity must be realized.

3 "Natural information" in this passage is "informationC," defined in Appendix B.

islands, however, by reference to naive Strawson-model modes of presentation (' 11.2).

Must I have an ability, if granted enabling conditions, to coidentify any two naive Strawson modes that present the same object, and an ability to separate any that present different objects (thus eliminating equivocation in thought)?

One problem is that having an ability and having the ability easily to acquire or develop an ability are not sharply distinguishable. If I have the ability instantly and unhesitatingly to compound numerous more general abilities to yield, on demand, a specific complex ability then, we might suppose, I already have the more complex ability.

If I would have to practice before I could do a thing then, reasonably, I don't already have the ability. But what if I would have to think for a while in order to figure out how to put more general abilities of mine together to obtain a certain complex result, such as in figuring out how to hang curtains over these bulky indoor shutters? I might need, for example, to do some calculations. How long will I be allowed to think and still be said to know how already? Suppose that instead of just figuring it out, I will need to acquire some information. I will need, for example, to make some measurements. Do I know how to hang these curtains already?

What kinds of information may I still need to acquire while knowing how already? I know how to get from home to school by following the Gurleyville road, but as I follow it, I have to take in the information how far each next curve is by sight. I know how to get to Boston by following I-84 East and then I-90 East, but I do so by following the I-84E and I-90E signposts, which inform me where to make various turns along the way. Suppose, instead, that I manage to get there just by following all the signs that say "Boston"? Or suppose that I know how to get there, not just by reading signposts, but in part by consulting a map. Similarly, suppose that I know how to make a cake by following a recipe. And I know which cookbook to open to find the recipe. Or suppose that I know how by knowing exactly who to ask for directions, for example, I know that Grandma knows? Can I know how to get to Boston merely by knowing how, in general, to ask for directions, assuming circumstances will afford someone to ask who happens to know? Can I know how to do something if applying my ability would require just the right information-bearing circumstances to come along serendipitously?

Evans returns several times to an example of a man who retains the memory of a steel ball he once saw, but retains no information as to when or where he saw it, nor concerning any other characteristic that would distinguish it from an identical ball he also once saw but forgot. Evans claims that this man has no idea of the remembered ball. This is because "our subject's supposed idea of that ball is completely independent not only from any possible [distinguishing] experience, but also from everything else in his conceptual repertoire. There is no question of his recognizing the ball; and there is nothing else he can do which will show that his thought is really about one of the two balls (about that ball), rather than about the other" (1982 p.115). Evans takes it, that is, that this man is debarred in principle from ever making another grounded judgment about that ball Cfrom ever reasonably coidentifying his supposed thought of it with any other thought of it. According to Evans' story, however, the man fails to remember the second ball he saw because of a blow on the head. Now imagine Evans' story as truly

describing the realization of a perverse philosopher's thought experiment. The philosopher purposefully showed the man one ball, then hit him on the head, then showed him the other. Years later the philosopher returns, pulls the actually remembered ball out of his pocket, and explains the whole episode to his victim, who then correctly coidentifies the ball of his memory with the ball he sees. So he was not debarred in principle from ever making another grounded judgment about that ball after all. True, Evans does stipulate that the man does not think of his remembered ball as the one that caused his memory. But if he already has the capacity to come to think of it that way on momentary reflection, this stipulation seems quite beside the point.

With examples such as these in mind, how should we answer the question, for example, whether the ancients did or did not know how to coidentify Hesperus with Phosphorus? Presumably in principle something could have lead them to this, even without additional conceptual training. Perhaps the ancients already knew how to separate weight from mass but hadn't happened yet on the experience that would enable them actually to do it? I don't think that principled answers to questions of this sort are possible. In practice, undoubtedly many coreferential islands do remain separate in various people's thoughts, and some naive Strawson modes do remain equivocal.

#### ' 13.6 the Ability to Reidentify, or Being Able to Reidentify?

Earlier I mentioned Strawson's notion of "story-relative identification". Strawson explains this notion with an example. A speaker is telling a factual story which begins "A man and a boy were standing by a fountain...The man had a drink..". The hearer identifies the references of the two tokens of "man" as being to the same man, but does not identify this man with anyone outside the story. Strawson says of this kind of identification that it is "identification within [the] story; but not identification within history," hence that it is not "full identification" (1959 p. 18). Yet given that the story is factual, the hearer surely knows means of further tracking. He can, for example, ask the speaker who the man was. Thus identification of people in stories is not necessarily isolated from "history". But perhaps the speaker himself does not know who the story is really about, or the hearer does not ask and later forgets who told him the story. On the other hand, perhaps these links can be reestablished. The hearer knows a way to find out who told him the story, and a way to find out who told the story to the hearer, hence who the man was. But now suppose this method is chancy. He will be lucky if it works, but he can try. Does he still "have an ability" to identify the man in the story with someone outside the story?

Notice that there are cases that Strawson would consider to involve "full identifications" that are more tenuously connected than many stories to any practical capacity actually to mark sameness in grounded judgments. Consider my thought, the person who wove this part, as I inspect a particularly intricate tiny section of a mediaeval wall hanging of unknown origin. This thought contains a perfectly clear definite description based (as Strawson prefers identifying descriptions to be) on an unambiguous demonstrative. But undoubtedly there is no way at all of my ever marking sameness between the thought of this wonderful weaver and any thoughts in new grounded judgments. Certainly having knowledge of the ontological structures in the world that relate that weaver to me, say, understanding the "criteria of identity" for

pieces of tapestry and for persons over time, is insufficient when it comes to the practical business of actually tracking information about this weaver.

Having an ability to reidentify something is obviously a pretty vague sort of affair. Earlier (' 4.2) I drew a distinction between knowing how to do a thing and actually being able to do it. Actually being able generally requires the presence of supporting conditions that merely knowing how does not. Actually being able to do A might be defined, for example, as having a disposition, right now, to do A if I try. Or a disposition, right now, if I try, to proceed to get into a position to do A if I try...and so forth. Clearly the edges are not sharp here either. But the distinction between knowing how and actually being able may cast some light on how we should understand what knowing what one is judging about entails. Perhaps we should draw a similarly vague distinction between having a concept of an object and being able to reidentify it in practice. Then we would note that there are degrees of knowing how to reidentify. I may command myriad ways or only a few. Also there are degrees of being able to identify in practice. I may get thousands of opportunities I can utilize or none. But however we divide things up, it is clear that knowing what I am thinking of is always a matter of degree. No one is in principle infallible at reidentifying anything, even should they happen always to succeed in practice. Nor, unlike the case of many more ordinary abilities, need they always know, either immediately or at all, whether they have succeeded.

Not only are substance concepts always imperfect abilities, the means used for many of them may be in our command only temporarily. Sometimes this is because our memories are short. For example, although I can usually remember C sharp for five minutes so as to reidentify it when I hear it again, I always forget it overnight. I don't have "absolute pitch". Luckily my concept of C sharp has other conceptual means. I know how to reidentify it by going to the piano, or the flute, or by asking my friend Brian who has completely infallible pitch. Because I know C sharp's name, I also know how to mark sameness for the thought of C sharp in new grounded judgments as I hear or read about C sharp. I may read what its frequency is, or about the difficulty of playing this or that instrument in its key.

New faces can be, for me, a bit like C sharp. I can identify them over the next hour, but not always over the next week. If I have forgotten both the new face and the name, I may have to act very fast to pick up the scent. Descriptions are sometimes useful, but their usefulness may be short lived. I may need to call on the memories of others quite soon, before they forget who fits the description, before they forget, say, who all was present on the occasion. Sometimes there may be no way to pick up the scent, and I will never "know who that was" that I met, never "know who it is I am remembering." But as a limiting case, of course, I do know who I'm remembering. I would know how to pick up the scent were I to come across certain kinds of information.

I have relevant abilities. It's just that I haven't had, and perhaps won't get, a chance to apply them.

### ' 13.7 Mistaking What I'm Thinking of

To lack the ability always to identify correctly C to be disposed sometimes to error C is part of the human condition. Merely to be disposed to error, however, is not yet to have

made an error. And it is only in so far as one actually makes errors in identification that one's thoughts become equivocal.

One result of mistaken sameness markings may be invalid inference. For example, suppose that I see that something in the tree is a squirrel and then I see that "it" takes off and flies. I may conclude that some squirrels can fly. But the inference will be invalid if I unknowingly had lost track of the squirrel and some other "it" did the flying. Since invalid inferences can lead from true premises to false conclusions, misidentifications can of course give rise to false beliefs. More interesting however, is when misidentifications give rise to confused or equivocal thoughts.

A person who has very basic misinformation about a thing may be said to be "confused" about it, but that sort of confusion is not equivocation. "Do you see that woman?" Jane says, pointing to Ann, and then she tells you a whole kettle of lies about Ann, all of which you believe. Perhaps you never learn anything else much about Ann, but once in a while you do see her again on the street, and then you review in your mind all those dreadful lies. You are woefully confused about Ann, but your thought of her is not equivocal. For it is definitely about Ann that you are confused, and not about something ambiguous. Perhaps you even believe a lot of wrong individuating descriptions of Ann, but that is not equivocation either. As long as you don't actually use any of these descriptions in such a way as to result in actual misidentifications of Ann, you will not yet have an equivocal thought.

Suppose, on the other hand, that you mistake Carol whom you see on the street for the city mayor. Having heard that the mayor was in Washington just this morning, you conclude that she must have taken a plane home. That WHO must have taken a plane home? Carol, or the mayor? That is what I mean by an equivocal thought. It isn't a thought of the one woman any more or less than it is of the other, but hovers between.

On a descriptionist theory ('3.5), an equivocal thought might, I suppose, be one that was governed equally by two or more definite descriptions that were not coreferential. Or on a conceptionist theory ('3.5), an equivocal thought or concept might correspond to a disposition to recognize incompatible things as part of the same extension. I'm not sure that either of these suggestions is entirely coherent, but the point I would make is that where the conception is taken to determine the extension of a concept, equivocation, should it exist, would be found in mere dispositions of the concept user. My claim, on the contrary, is that equivocation is found only where actual information, derived from distinct sources, is marked as being about the same. One always has dispositions to misidentify things, given sufficiently awkward conditions.

Suppose that I think John is the president of the local chapter of the AAUP, but he's not. Bill is instead. Do I have an equivocal concept, or just a false belief about John? That depends on whether or not I have gathered information about the president of the local chapter of the AAUP and applied it to John. Nor need this mean that I have applied information derived from Bill to John. More likely, I have gathered general information about the presidency of the AAUP. I know what the president's duties, privileges, and some of his probable locations are (e.g., at the meeting in Manny Hall on Friday). The president (timeless) of the local chapter of the AAUP is a rough sort of

substance. It is something I can learn about and the information will remain valid over time. If I have falsely identified John with the current presidency, I have probably mixed information about two things together. I have probably made wrong mediate inferences, inferring, for example, that John will be in Mannly Hall on Friday. On the other hand, if I merely take John to be the tallest man in the room and he's not, granted I have no information about the tallest man in the room, as such, there is not as yet, and likely there won't be, any hint of equivocation in my idea of John. False information is not, as such, equivocation.

To have two things or more confused in one's mind is surely a common condition. For example, much of the history of science might be told in these terms. What is astonishing is not that it happens, but that in dealing with common objects, properties and kinds it doesn't happen more often. What is astonishing is how good we usually are at keeping track of those ordinary things in our world that (unlike which glass is which in the cupboard C' 5.5) matter to usC at not mixing them all up together. What is astonishing is how good our concepts tend to be, despite the fact that they must operate, as must our other abilities, on principles resting not just on the character of our minds, but on the structure of the world outside.