

Acquaintance, Singular Thought and Propositional Constituency¹

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1. Introduction

On a Russellian view of propositions, a version of which I accept, propositions are structured entities that have as constituents objects, properties and relations. I'll call anyone who accepts such an account of propositions a *Russellian*. Propositions containing objects as constituents are often called *singular propositions*. If a singular proposition P contains object o as a constituent, I'll say that P is *singular with respect to o*.²

I'll simply assume that names, indexicals and demonstrative pronouns are devices of *direct reference*: their semantic values relative to contexts, and hence what they contribute to the propositions expressed by sentences they occur in relative to those contexts, are objects. Thus, sentences containing such devices express singular propositions relative to contexts.

De re or singular thought is supposed to be thought in some sense directly about an object. A person who holds a Russellian view of propositions and a few other theses looks well placed to explain what that sense is. I am going to stipulatively use the term 'standard Russellian' in this paper for a person of this sort. Standard Russellians hold that to grasp a proposition, one must bear a special epistemic relation—*acquaintance*—to its constituents.³ So to grasp a proposition that is singular with respect to o requires being acquainted with o. Further, standard Russellians hold that to have a *de re* thought

¹ Thanks to Josh Armstrong, Annie Papreck King and an anonymous referee for helpful comments.

² So a proposition can be singular with respect to multiple objects.

³ Of course standard Russellians can disagree about what is required to be acquainted with an object. I'll ignore that here. I'll try to be as neutral as possible on the question of what is required to be acquainted with an object, though I will make a few assumptions about it below.

about *o* is just to entertain a proposition that is singular with respect to *o*.⁴ In entertaining the proposition, the proposition and its constituents are in some sense before one's mind. The standard Russellian can claim that it is because one is acquainted with the constituents that one is able to have them before one's mind. So a singular thought is directly about *o* because in having such a thought one is entertaining a proposition that is singular with respect to *o*; having such a thought requires acquaintance with *o*, which in turn allows me to have *o* itself before my mind.⁵

In the previous paragraph I used the term 'singular thought' as a term that applied to an episode of thinking. A singular thought is an episode of thinking directly about an object. But there is a tradition of using 'singular thought' as a term that applies to a kind of proposition: a proposition directly about an object that is entertained in an episode of singular thought.⁶ Here again the standard Russellian will say that a singular thought about *o* *in this sense* is a singular proposition with respect to *o*. To avoid confusion, I'll use 'singular thought_e' for the episode-of-thinking sense and 'singular thought_p' for the kind-of-proposition sense. I'll use 'singular thought_{e,p}' when I want to say something about both singular thought_e and singular thought_p. We can sum up the standard Russellian story by saying that a singular thought_e is an episode of entertaining a singular thought_p, where the latter is a singular proposition. One thing to

⁴ Thus Kaplan [1989] is not a standard Russellian in my stipulative sense. He writes 'On my view, acquisition of a name does not, in general, put us *en rapport*...with the referent. But this is not required for us to use the name in the standard way as a device of direct reference. Nor is it required for us to apprehend, to believe, to doubt, to assert, or to hold other *de dicto* attitudes toward the propositions we express using the name.' Here Kaplan says that we can apprehend (entertain) a singular proposition in such a way that our so doing constitutes having a *de dicto* attitude, whereas my (stipulative) standard Russellian claims that entertaining a singular proposition is *ipso facto* having a *de re* attitude.

⁵ More needs to be said about what it is to have a thing before one's mind, but this is not the place and time to do that. See Hawthorne and Manley [2012] for a challenge to the view that having a singular thought about an object requires acquaintance with that object.

⁶ This tradition arises out of the work of Gareth Evans and John McDowell.

notice about the standard Russellian account here is that the explanation of what it is for a singular thought_e to be *directly about* an object o appeals to the nature of the thing that is the content of the singular thought_e. Because it is a proposition that is singular with respect to o, an episode of entertaining it amounts to thinking directly about o. What this brings out is that for the standard Russellian, singular thoughts_p are first and foremost the kind of propositions entertained in having singular thoughts_e. By claiming that in fact singular thoughts_p are singular propositions, the standard Russellian can claim to explain why this is so. Entertaining a proposition that is singular with respect to o *just is* thinking directly about o and so having a singular thought_e.

The standard Russellian account of singular thought_{e,p} is elegant and compelling. But in a recent paper, Jason Stanley and Joshua Armstrong [2011], henceforth J&J, claim that despite these initial positive appearances, the above standard Russellian account of singular thought_{e,p} is incorrect. They write:

In short, there are propositions that are singular thoughts, because they are directly about objects in the relevant senses, yet are not Russellian singular propositions, even on the Russellian view of content.⁷

Note that the sense of ‘singular thought’ in the quotation here is that of singular thought_p. So J&J are claiming that there are singular thoughts_p that are not singular propositions. More tentatively, they also claim that there are singular propositions with respect to o that can be grasped without having to be acquainted with o, again contrary to the standard Russellian picture. I’ll be arguing that J&J are wrong on the first count for both standard Russellian views about singular thought_{e,p} and the Russellian view of Scott Soames, which they discuss. I’ll also argue that J&J are wrong on the second count for a version of standard Russellianism that endorses my view of propositions.

The structure of J&J’s argument that there are singular thoughts_p that are not

⁷ J&J p. 207

singular propositions is very simple. They begin by specifying two properties the possession of which they claim makes a proposition a singular thought_p. They then argue some Russellian propositions that aren't singular propositions possess these properties. Thus, some non-singular Russellian propositions are singular thoughts_p.

2. J&J on singular thought_p, their first case and a response

Here are the properties the possession of which makes something a singular thought_p according to J&J:

First, some propositions have the property that grasp of those propositions requires standing in a special epistemic relation to some object. Secondly, some propositions have the property of being metaphysically dependent upon the existence of some object. We take these two properties to characterize the notion of a singular thought.⁸

The first property is the property of being a proposition the grasp of which requires one to be acquainted with a certain object, say *o*. The second property is the property of being a proposition that either doesn't exist or can't be entertained in worlds where *o* doesn't exist.⁹

Next, J&J consider the sentence 'John is a philosopher'. They suppose that English sentences express Russellian propositions. But then they imagine following Montague and treating names as generalized quantifiers of type $\langle\langle e, t \rangle, t \rangle$ (denoting/expressing functions from sets of things of type *e* (or the characteristic functions of such sets) to truth values—J&J in their informal exposition call these functions from properties to truth values, as many people do).¹⁰ In that case, the

⁸ J&J p. 208

⁹ J&J pp. 209-210. In discussing the possession of the second property J&J also talk about something they call individuation dependence, which they characterize as follows: "if *P* is a singular thought about *a*, and *Q* is a singular thought about *b*, and *a* is not identical to *b*, then *P* and *Q* are distinct singular thoughts." (p. 209). As stated this is incorrect since nothing said rules out *P* and *Q* both being singular with respect to *both a and b*, in which case even though *a* is not identical to *b*, it could be that *P* is identical to *Q*. What needs to be added here is that *P* is singular with respect to *only a* and *Q* is singular with respect to *only b*. But since the principle plays no role in J&J's argument so far as I can see, I ignore it.

¹⁰ *e* is the type of individuals, *t* is the type of truth values, and so an expression of type $\langle e, t \rangle$ will denote or express a function from individuals to truth values (or a set of individuals). Intuitively, an expression of this type functions as a (one-place) predicate. A quantifier like 'Some woman' is type $\langle\langle e, t \rangle, t \rangle$ and so denotes/expresses a function from sets of things of type *e* (or functions from things of type *e* to truth

Russellian proposition expressed by ‘John is a philosopher’ will contain the function expressed by ‘John’ and the property expressed by the predicate.

J&J then want to argue that this proposition would have the two properties the possession of which make a proposition a singular thought_p but would not itself be a singular proposition (with respect to John). Before turning to that, though, we need to discuss a matter J&J are unclear about. Even if they did show that the proposition in question possessed the relevant properties, it would not show that *there are* singular thoughts_p that are not singular propositions, which is what J&J claim to be arguing.¹¹ Since J&J don’t argue or even claim that Montague is *right* about names (they say he may be), their argument (if sound) would show at most that *if* Montague is right about names (and Russellians are right about propositions), *then* there are singular thoughts_p that are not singular propositions. For the sake of argument and in the interest of simplifying our discussion, I’ll just assume that Montague is right about the semantics of names.¹²

Now J&J want to argue that this proposition containing the relevant $\langle\langle e,t\rangle,t\rangle$ semantic value and the property of being a philosopher, call it *J*, has the two properties the possession of which they claim makes a proposition a singular thought_p but is not a singular proposition. Let’s just grant that *J* is not a singular proposition, which seems clearly right. What argument do J&J give that grasping *J* requires being acquainted with John? There really is no argument. They simply assert that “intuitively” grasping *J* requires acquaintance with John¹³; and that it is an “obvious fact” that grasping *J* requires acquaintance with John.¹⁴ Below I’ll argue that grasping *J* does not require

values) to truth values. Hence, such a quantifier combines with an expression of type $\langle e,t\rangle$ (e.g. ‘laughs’) to yield a sentence, which is of type *t* (‘Some woman laughs.’)

¹¹ See e.g. p. 207

¹² It could also be that J&J think that the proposition containing the relevant $\langle\langle e,t\rangle,t\rangle$ semantic value and the property of being a philosopher exists even if Montague was wrong about names (though it would not in this case be expressed by the sentence ‘John is a philosopher.’).

¹³ J&J p. 212-213

¹⁴ J&J p. 214. They actually switch to a different proposition here, but I don’t since it doesn’t affect any point I am making.

acquaintance with John.

Similarly for the property of not existing or not being entertainable at worlds where John doesn't exist: J&J simply assert that J has this property.¹⁵ I'll discuss this below as well.

Turning now to an evaluation of J&J's argument that J is a singular thought_p but not a singular proposition, the first difficulty with it is their claim that possession of the following two properties makes something a singular thought_p: 1) grasp of the proposition requires acquaintance with an object, say o; and 2) were o not to exist the proposition wouldn't exist or wouldn't be entertainable. These *may* be properties had by singular thoughts_p, but at least for the standard Russellian I don't think they are properties the possession of which *makes* a proposition a singular thought_p. For the standard Russellian, the role played by singular thoughts_p in her theory is that they are the propositions the grasp of which constitutes having a singular thought_e. As I indicated above in discussing the standard Russellian view, the standard Russellian wants to *explain* singular thinking_e in terms of the entertaining of a certain kind of thought: singular thoughts_p. Hence, for the standard Russellian, the property the possession of which makes a proposition a singular thought_p is *being a proposition the grasping of which constitutes having a singular thought_e*.

Let's ask whether by this standard J is a singular thought_p. J's constituents are a function from properties to truth values, call it f_j , and the property of being a philosopher. Does grasping J constitute having a singular thought_e about John by the lights of the standard Russellian? To see why I think not, we must begin by discussing what it takes to grasp J according to standard Russellians.

Standard Russellians hold that to grasp J, one must be acquainted with f_j and the property of being a philosopher and one must bring the proposition whose two constituents are f_j and the property of being a philosopher before one's mind. Let's

¹⁵ J&J p. 213

suppose Glenn is acquainted with the property of being a philosopher. I am trying to remain as neutral as possible with respect to what it takes to be acquainted with an entity, but it seems quite plausible that one can become acquainted with a function by being told enough about it by someone already acquainted with it. Suppose, for example, I produce a complicated definition of a recursive function f . I assume I thereby am acquainted with it and so can think about it. Glenn doesn't understand my definition but he knows what a recursive function is. I tell him about the function I have defined and some of its properties. I also tell him the value the function takes for a bunch of arguments. It seems to me at this point Glenn is acquainted with the function as well and so can think about it. He can wonder about its values for other arguments, wonder whether it is *primitive* recursive, believe that with enough time he could grasp its definition and so on. The case seems very similar to one in which I am acquainted with someone you are not acquainted with and I begin to tell you about this person. At some point, when you have acquired sufficient information about the person, it seems quite plausible that you are acquainted with the person as well, and so can think about her. At any rate, I will understand standard Russellianism in such a way that that one can become acquainted with other people this way. But then, as I've suggested, it seems that the standard Russellian should allow that Glenn can become acquainted with the function f in the manner just described. The claim that we can become acquainted with functions in this way, by being given various sorts of information about them (without being able to actually define them or know their values for all arguments) is bolstered by how we ordinarily think and talk about functions and the expressions that designate them. Think of young children learning addition. They are grilled every day as to what $1+1$, $1+2$, $1+3$, ..., $1+10$, $2+1$, $2+1$, ..., $2+10$, $3+1$, etc are. Imagine that they are now pretty good at getting the right answer for $n+m$, $10 \geq n, m$. Surely we would want to say that they now grasp the propositions expressed by sentences like 'One plus one equals two'. But by the

standard Russellian's lights, this means they are acquainted with the function designated by 'plus'. So it seems that the standard Russellian will want to say that one can become acquainted with a function by being given a not very overwhelming amount of information about it.

Turning back to f_j , the function from properties to truth-values, and Glenn, who recall is acquainted with the property of being a philosopher, it seems that Glenn can become acquainted with f_j in a way similar to the way he became acquainted with the recursive function f above and the way school children become acquainted with the plus function: by acquiring information about it. Suppose that Glenn has never heard of or met John. I know John well and know the correct Montague semantics for John's name 'John' (i.e. that it expresses f_j). Presumably, I am acquainted with the function f_j . Suppose I silently consider John, his name and its semantic value f_j . I now say to you, who has no knowledge of Montague semantics but is adept formally, intending to be describing f_j , 'Let me tell you about a function, f_j , from properties to truth values. It can form propositions by being combined with properties. Such propositions are true or false depending on whether f_j maps the relevant properties to true or false. f_j maps the property of being a professor to true, the property of being a friend of Ted's to true, the property of buying and selling rare books to true, the property of enjoying opera to true, the property of currently teaching at a west coast university to true, etc.¹⁶ Now consider the proposition consisting of f_j and the property of being a philosopher. It's true too.' Now it seems to me in this scenario, Glenn has come to be acquainted with f_j and has come to grasp J , the proposition J & J claim is expressed by 'John is a philosopher.' (again, on the assumption that Montague is right about the semantics of names). But ask yourself: in grasping J , is Glenn *thereby* having a singular thought_c about John? Surely not! But then J is not a singular thought_p according to the standard Russellian,

¹⁶ I am imagining that all these things I am saying about f_j are true. Have the information about f_j here go on as long as you'd like.

since singular thoughts_p are those entertained in having singular thoughts_c.

The same considerations show that, contrary to what J&J claim, J can be grasped without one being acquainted with John. Surely, in the scenario above, Glenn grasps J and is not acquainted with John. So even by J&J's criteria for singular thought_p, which I argued above are incorrect, J isn't a singular thought_p. Interestingly, J does seem to possess the second property possession of which J&J claims makes a proposition a singular thought_p. Presumably f_j maps the property of being identical to John to true. So the pair of that property and T is a member of the set that is f_j . Assuming that the property of being identical to John doesn't exist at worlds where John fails to exist, f_j won't exist either for lack of the pair of this property and T. But then neither will J. Of course even by J&J's lights, possession of just this property doesn't make J a singular thought_p. Thus, J&J's first purported example of a singular thought_p that is not a singular proposition fails.

3. J&J's second case and a response

J&J have a second case in which they claim that there is a singular thought_p that is not a singular proposition. Because it will become crucial to our discussion, let me begin with some ideas about modality that J&J endorse (at least for this paper).

Soames [2007] is the Russellian J&J discuss here, and they adopt many of his ideas. First, according to Soames possible worlds are possible states of the world: properties the world might have had. The actual world qua possible world is the actual world state @: the (maximal) property the world in fact has. This should not be confused with the actual *concrete* world. The actual world qua possible world, @, is a thing like all the other possible worlds. The concrete actual world is not.¹⁷

J&J argue that 'Actually' should be given what they call "an operator type semantics", as opposed to a semantics of the sort Soames accepts on which 'Actually'

¹⁷ At least most people think not.

directly refers to the world of the context of utterance. I accept J&J's argument here. However, J&J don't formulate an operator type semantics for 'Actually' (or at any rate they don't specify the propositional contribution of 'Actually' relative to a context). I'll sketch one here. Following Kaplan [1977], the *extension* of an intensional sentence operator at a context and world is a function from sentence intensions to truth-values.¹⁸ Hence, the *intension/content* of such an operator at a context is a function from worlds to a function from intensions to truth-values. In turn, this means the *character* of such an operator is a function from contexts to a function from worlds to a function from intensions to truth-values. So 'Actually S' taken relative to a context c expresses a proposition $\langle A_c, P_{S,c} \rangle$ where A_c is the intension of 'Actually' with respect to c and $P_{S,c}$ is the proposition expressed by the sentence 'S' relative to c . A_c is the result of applying the character level semantic value of 'Actually' to c , yielding an intension that maps a world to a function from sentence intensions to truth-values. Specifically, for any w , $A_c(w)$ is the function $f_{A_c,w}$ such that for any function from worlds to truth values I , $f_{A_c,w}(I)=T$ iff $I(w_c)=T$, where w_c is the world of c .¹⁹ Hence, $\langle A_c, P_{S,c} \rangle$ is true at w iff $A_c(w)(I_{P_{S,c}})=T$, (where $I_{P_{S,c}}$ is the intension of the *proposition* $P_{S,c}$: the function that maps a world w to T just in case $P_{S,c}$ is true at w —call such things proposition intensions)²⁰ iff $I_{P_{S,c}}(w_c)=T$. On this way of doing the semantics for 'Actually', A_c above is J&J's operator type meaning and is what 'Actually' contributes to propositions when taken relative to contexts.

Consider propositions of the form $\langle A_c, P_{S,c} \rangle$ expressed by sentences fronted by 'Actually' relative to context c whose world is $@$. J&J want to argue that such a proposition is a singular thought_p. As before, J&J want to do this by arguing that

¹⁸ Kaplan [1977] p. 504. Kaplan relativizes extensions to contexts, assignment functions, times and worlds. For various reasons I am suppressing times and assignment functions here.

¹⁹ Note that for all w, w' , $A_c(w)=A_c(w')$. Hence, the intension/content of 'Actually' at a context is *stable* in Kaplan's [1977] terminology. See Kaplan [1977] p. 548.

²⁰ I don't want to assume that $P_{S,c}$ is a proposition intension.

grasping $\langle A_c, P_{S,c} \rangle$ requires having acquaintance with @ and that $\langle A_c, P_{S,c} \rangle$ would not be graspable had the actual world not existed. From this they conclude that $\langle A_c, P_{S,c} \rangle$ is a singular thought_p (about @). However, $\langle A_c, P_{S,c} \rangle$ is not a singular proposition with @ as a constituent (since $A_c \neq @$).

I've already mentioned that I don't think J&J are looking at the right properties in considering what properties make a proposition a singular thought_p. I'll return to the properties they consider below. I've argued that what we should ask is: does grasp of $\langle A_c, P_{S,c} \rangle$ constitute the having of a singular thought_e about @?²¹

The question is much more delicate than it might first appear to be, since @ is the maximal *property* that the actual world instantiates and not the concrete world that actually exists. As I argued above, the actual world considered as one among many possible worlds must be construed this way. Further, since we want to evaluate 'Actually' at other possible worlds and we want a uniform treatment of it, we must be asking whether people at other possible worlds in grasping propositions expressed by their utterances of sentences containing 'Actually' thereby have singular thoughts_e about their worlds. In such cases, given the assumptions we have made, we must be asking about singular thoughts_e about possible world states qua properties.

The problem is that for the standard Russellian, the topic of singular thought is the topic of thoughts that are directly about *objects* or that are about *objects* without being mediated by certain conceptions of them.²² Given this, J&J's example involving 'Actually' could not show that there is a problem with the standard Russellian's identification of singular thoughts_p with singular propositions. For the standard Russellian the notion of a singular thought_{e,p} is in the first instance a notion of thought about *objects*. Propositions expressed by sentences containing 'Actually' (relative to a

²¹ In saying this, I continue to assume that w_c , the world of context c , is @.

²² E.g. see the opening of the Introduction to Jeshion [2010].

context) on the views J&J are considering are not thoughts about (the relevant) objects at all; they are (in some sense) about the *property* @.²³ Thus, for the standard Russellian, such propositions are just irrelevant to debates about singular thought_{e,p}. Hence J&J's propositions expressed by sentences containing 'Actually' do not constitute a counterexample to the standard Russellian's identification of singular thoughts_p with singular propositions.

In fairness to J&J, however, they are responding to some remarks of a Russellian, as I indicated, Scott Soames, in which he *does* talk of knowing singular propositions about complex properties like possible world states (i.e. possible worlds qua properties). So it is worth enquiring as to whether J&J's example constitutes an example of a singular thought_p that is not a singular proposition for a (non standard) Russellian with Soames' views on singular thought_{e,p} about properties.

First, a bit of background. As I suggested above, Soames takes 'Actually' to be an indexical whose content at a context is the world (maximal property) of the context.²⁴ As a result of this, he takes 'Actually S' relative to a context whose world is @ to express a singular proposition about @.²⁵ Hence to grasp such a thought is to have a *de re* thought about *the property* @.

Soames uses a propositional analogue of Carnap's notion of a state description to characterize possible worlds qua properties. Suppose we have a first order language L and we consider the propositions expressed by formulae of this language relative to an assignment of objects to variables.²⁶ Let D be the domain of objects talked about, and B be the set of properties/relations expressed by simple predicates of L, including an existence predicate. A *world description* S_w is a set each of whose members is either an atomic proposition, consisting an n-place relation drawn from B and an n-tuple of

²³ That is, they are not about an *object* the standard Russellian allegedly takes to be designated by 'Actually'; they are about a *property* the standard Russellian allegedly takes to be so designated.

²⁴ Soames [2007] pp. 3-5

²⁵ Soames [2007] p. 6

²⁶ Where D is the domain of objects the language is used to talk about (see next sentence in the text), such a function maps each variable of the language to a member of D.

elements of D , or the negation of such a proposition. S_w is *complete* iff every atomic proposition or its negation belongs to it; and *consistent* iff its members cannot be known a priori not to be jointly true. For each S_w , there is a corresponding world state qua property: *the property of making every member of S_w true*.²⁷

Soames has a notion of the *propositional content* of a world state. If world state w is *the property of making the members of S_w true*, its propositional content just is S_w . Soames thinks that one way to be acquainted with a possible world is to grasp its propositional content. Soames imagines a very simple world he calls *Tiny* consisting of 3 blocks, with block 3 on top of 1 and 2, which sit side by side. This world is *the property of containing blocks 1 and 2 side by side with block 3 on top*.²⁸ Because in this case S_w is so small, Soames thinks we can be acquainted with *Tiny* by grasping its propositional content. Call this the *propositional means* of being acquainted with a complex property qua possible world. According to Soames, for a given proposition P that we can grasp and that is true at *Tiny*, say that block 3 is on top of blocks 1 and 2, we can not only grasp the singular proposition (about *Tiny*) that P is true at *Tiny*, since we can grasp P and the propositional content of *Tiny*; we can also know it *a priori*.

For worlds like @ that are much more complex than *Tiny*, it is beyond *our* cognitive ability to be acquainted them by the propositional means. However, Soames thinks that possible agents similar to us except for lacking our cognitive limitations *could* be acquainted with @ by grasping its propositional content.²⁹ Such agents could grasp e.g. the proposition that actually hundreds of thousands died in the U.S. Civil War and could know it *a priori* by deriving the proposition that hundreds of thousands died in the U.S. civil war from the propositional content of @.

Further, Soames holds that despite our ignorance of many of the members of

²⁷ Two notes on this. First, propositions other than atomic ones and their negations are made true by world states. Their truth is determined from S_w by recursive clauses for truth functional connectives, quantifiers etc. Second, this makes what world states there are relative to the language L .

²⁸ Soames [2007] p. 11

²⁹ Soames [2007] p. 21

$S_{@}$, and so despite our failing to grasp the propositional content of $@$, we are acquainted with $@$ and are able to directly refer to it in much the way we are acquainted with and are able to directly refer to complex physical objects many of whose aspects we are ignorant of.³⁰ Call this the *demonstrative means* of acquaintance with a possible world qua property. So for Soames, there are two ways to be acquainted with a possible world: the demonstrative means and the propositional means. Obviously, we are only acquainted with one world by demonstrative means.

Now turning back to J&J, suppose we grant that they have successfully argued that Soames needs to drop his directly referential semantics for ‘Actually’ and adopt the operator type semantics I sketched above. We want to know whether grasping propositions expressed by sentences containing ‘Actually’ relative to a context whose world is $@$, say $c_{@}$, constitutes having a singular thought_c (about $@$). If so, I’ve argued, such propositions are singular thoughts_p (about $@$), as J&J claim they are; and if not, not.

Recall that a sentence containing ‘Actually’ relative to $c_{@}$ expresses a proposition of the form proposition $\langle A_{c_{@}}, P_{c_{@}} \rangle$ where $A_{c_{@}}$ is the intension of ‘Actually’ with respect to $c_{@}$ and $P_{c_{@}}$ is the proposition expressed by the sentence ‘Actually’ embeds relative to $c_{@}$. $A_{c_{@}}$ is the result of applying the character level semantic value of ‘Actually’ to $c_{@}$, yielding an intension that maps a world to a function from intensions to truth values. Specifically, for any w , $A_{c_{@}}(w)$ is the function $f_{A_{c_{@}},w}$ such that for any function from worlds to truth values I , $f_{A_{c_{@}},w}(I)=T$ iff $I(@)=T$.

Now consider a particular proposition of this form $\langle A_{c_{@}}, \Phi \rangle$, for some proposition Φ that I grasp. Does grasp of this proposition constitute having a singular thought_c about $@$? It seems not.³¹ For here is how I grasp this proposition without

³⁰ Soames [2007] p. 19

³¹ Note that the question is not whether I can have singular thoughts_c about $@$. Since I am in $@$, I am assuming I can. The question is whether in grasping $\langle A_{c_{@}}, \Phi \rangle$ I am *thereby* having a singular thought_c about $@$.

having a singular thought_c about @. I imagine a function that when applied to any world *w*, yields a function that maps proposition intensions that are true (not true at *w*; true!) to true and the others to false. This is just the function $A_{c@}$. So far I haven't had a singular thought_c about @.³² But surely having imagined this function in this way, I am now in a position to grasp propositions that have it as a constituent. I told you what the function was after all! But this means I am in a position to grasp $\langle A_{c@}, \Phi \rangle$, since I grasp Φ . So, I can grasp $\langle A_{c@}, \Phi \rangle$ without thereby having a singular thought_c about @. Hence $\langle A_{c@}, \Phi \rangle$ is not a singular thought_p.

Of course J&J think that showing that $\langle A_{c@}, \Phi \rangle$ is a singular thought_p requires not determining whether grasping it constitutes having a singular thought_c about @, but rather determining whether it meets the following two conditions: (i) grasping it requires being acquainted with @; and (ii) it is not entertainable (and perhaps doesn't exist) at worlds other than @.³³ It is hard to know what to say about condition (i) on Soames' view. If I were not acquainted with @ by demonstrative or propositional means, could I nonetheless grasp $\langle A_{c@}, \Phi \rangle$? It doesn't seem to me that I could in the way I just described, for that required me to appeal to truths and in order that these be the propositions that are true at @, I need to be in the concrete world that instantiates @. And it is hard to see how I could be in the concrete world that instantiates @ for any period of time and not be demonstratively acquainted with @. So perhaps it is right that I couldn't grasp $\langle A_{c@}, \Phi \rangle$ without being acquainted with @.

³² Is thinking about true proposition intensions having a singular thought_c about @? I don't see why it would be unless you thought being true was being true at @. But no one should think that. That grass is green is true is contingent; but that grass is green is true at @ isn't.

³³ Originally this second condition claimed that a proposition wouldn't exist or be entertainable if a certain object didn't exist. Here J&J shift to the question of whether the proposition I express with 'Actually snow is white' would exist or be entertainable had things been different. Presumably their idea is that in such a case, in some sense the actual world wouldn't exist and my proposition is "about" the actual world. This actually raises delicate issues I will side step here. In particular, what wouldn't exist if things had been different is the actual concrete world. @--the maximal property the actual world has and the thing we are concerned with here since it is what sentences containing 'actually' are "about"—is a different matter. If we think other possible worlds qua properties exist, then we should think that had things been different, @ would have existed.

But J&J's condition (ii) is clearly not met on a view like Soames'. Recall that agents like us in other worlds except that they don't have our cognitive limitations can be acquainted with @ by propositional means. Say w is a world containing such agents. Being acquainted with @ by propositional means would easily enable agents at w to get a very firm grasp on $A_{c@}$ and so grasp the proposition $\langle A_{c@}, \Phi \rangle$. Indeed, according to Soames, they would know *a priori* whether this proposition is true. So it is false that if things had been different (i.e. had @ not been instantiated), $\langle A_{c@}, \Phi \rangle$ would not have been graspable. Hence, even by J&J's own lights, $\langle A_{c@}, \Phi \rangle$ is not a singular thought_p on a view like Soames'.

So I conclude that J&J's alleged example of a singular thought_p expressed by a sentence containing 'Actually' that is not a singular proposition fails even on Soames' version of a Russellian view where there are singular propositions about properties.

To summarize the points made so far: I've argued that J&J's first alleged example of a singular thought_p that is not a singular proposition fails on both my characterization of singular thoughts_p and theirs, which I argued is incorrect by standard Russellian lights. The proposition in question simply fails to be a singular thought_p on both characterizations of singular thought_p. I argued that the second alleged example of a singular thought_p that is not a singular proposition fails against the standard Russellian because the standard Russellian would take the propositions J&J consider not to be about objects at all (and hence not to be singular thoughts_p). Thus the standard Russellian would take those propositions to be irrelevant to debates about singular thought_{e,p}. Further, I argued that J&J's second alleged example of a singular thought_p that is not a singular proposition also fails against a Russellian like Soames, who, unlike the standard Russellian, endorses the claim that there is singular thought about *properties*. Again, the relevant proposition fails to be a singular thought_p (about @) on both their and my characterizations of singular thought_p.

4. J&J on propositional constituency and grasping singular propositions

Let's now turn to J&J's argument that there are singular propositions with respect to *o* that can be grasped without having to be acquainted with *o*, again contrary to the standard Russellian picture. I'll argue that J&J's argument does not succeed against a standard Russellian who endorses my view of propositions. As we'll see, a lot will hinge on a proper understanding of the notion of *propositional constituency*. J&J claim that the notion of constituency is taken as primitive by Russellians.³⁴ By contrast, I'll show that my account of propositions allows for a rigorous characterization of the notion of propositional constituency that is independently motivated and has many attractive features. I consider this a significant virtue of my account of propositions.

J&J also claim that there is pressure on the Russellian to hold that constituency is transitive: if *x* is a constituent of proposition *P* and *P* is a constituent of proposition *Q*, then *x* is a constituent of *Q*. The pressure for endorsing this, J&J claim, comes from the fact that if the proposition that John runs contains John as a constituent, so do the propositions that it is not the case that John runs and that John runs or Sue walks. In other words, if *o* is a constituent of proposition *P* and *P* is a constituent of a complex proposition *Q* built up of *P*, truth functions and other propositions, then *o* is a constituent of *Q*.

Assuming that constituency is transitive in this way, J&J argue as follows:

Let "Harry" name the proposition that Hannah is a philosopher. Harry contains Hannah as a constituent. Suppose that John tells Bill that he is happy that Harry is true. John knows that "Harry" refers to a proposition, but is not himself acquainted with Hannah. If Bill trusts John, it seems that he can come to know by testimony that John is happy that Harry is true, and a fortiori grasps that proposition. But Harry contains Hannah as a constituent, and by transitivity, so does the proposition that John is happy that Harry is true. So Bill's thought that John is happy that Harry is true is

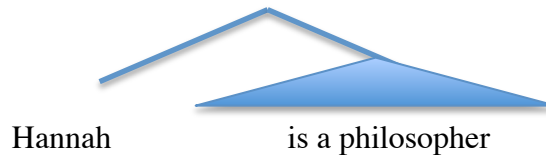
³⁴ J&J p. 220

not a singular thought about Hannah, though it has as its content a Russellian singular proposition containing Hannah as a constituent. Bill can therefore grasp a proposition containing an object as a constituent, without having acquaintance with that constituent.³⁵

In order to show that this argument does not work against my version of standard Russellianism, standard Russellianism plus my theory of structured propositions, let me briefly state the relevant features of the latter. I will not be defending my view, which I have done elsewhere.³⁶

Consider the sentence ‘Hannah is a philosopher’ represented in tree form and suppressing some syntactic structure for simplicity:

1.



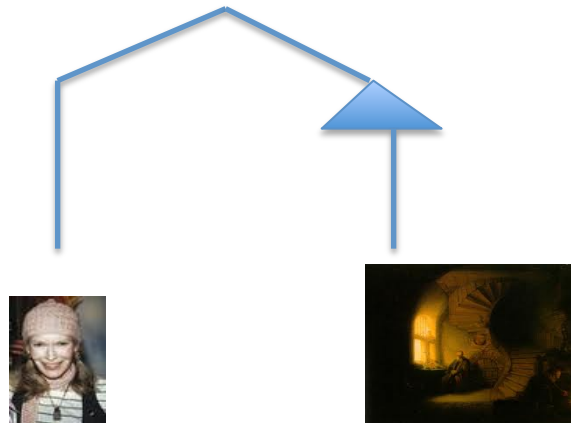
Call the syntactic relation between subject and predicate here R . R has a certain semantic significance. English speakers take it to *ascribe* the property that is the semantic value of the predicate to the semantic value of the name. This is in part why the sentence is true iff Hannah *possesses* the property of being a philosopher. Let's put this by saying that R encodes ascription in English. Now in virtue of the existence of the English sentence 1, Hannah is related to the property of being a philosopher as follows: there is a language L , assignment of values to variables f , context c and expressions a, b of L such a and b occur at the terminal nodes of the syntactic relation R that in L encodes ascription and Hannah is the semantic value of a relative to f and c and the property of being a philosopher is the semantic value of b relative to f and c . Hannah standing in this relation to the property of being a philosopher, what I call the *fact* consisting of Hannah bearing this two-place relation to the property of being a philosopher, is, I claim, the proposition that Hannah is a philosopher. I call this two-

³⁵ J&J p. 220

³⁶ King [2007, 2009]

place relation that Hannah stands in to the property of being a philosopher in the proposition that Hannah is a philosopher the *propositional relation* of that proposition. We can represent this proposition as follows:

1P.

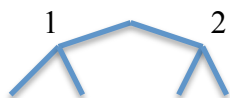


where Hannah is at the left terminal node of the propositional relation and the property of being a philosopher is at the right terminal node. Note that the syntactic relation R provides all of the significant structure to the proposition. The vertical lines here represent the semantic relation *being the semantic value of ___ relative to f and c*. Since the syntactic relation provides all the significant structure to the proposition, it will have the same structure as the sentence expressing it.

As indicated above, with this theory in hand, we don't have to take *constituency* as primitive as J&J claim Russellians must do. We can characterize rigorously what it is to be a constituent of a proposition. Let's begin with what I call the *simple constituents* of a proposition: all entities at terminal nodes of the propositional relation of the proposition P are *simple constituents* of P. Thus, 1P's simple constituents are Hannah and the property of being a philosopher.³⁷ For more complex propositions, it is probably useful to have a notion of *complex constituents* of propositions. In order to

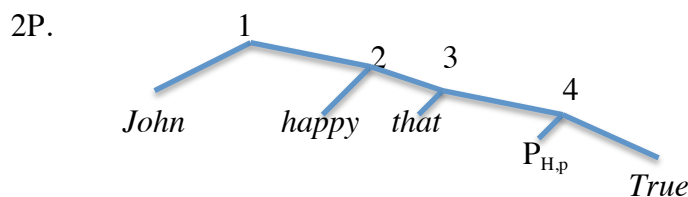
³⁷ Because of suppressing syntactic structure, tense, etc., things are likely a bit more complex than indicated, but not in ways relevant to the issues at hand.

characterize these, we need a bit of terminology. Propositional relations, like the syntactic relations that give them their structure, have *nodes*. A node *dominates* its daughter nodes. A node dominates the daughters of every node it dominates. We can now characterize *complex constituents* of a proposition as follows: for every non-terminal node *n* in the tree of the propositional relation of the proposition P, the subtree rooted in *n* that includes all simple constituents at terminal nodes of the propositional relation of P that are dominated by *n* is a *complex constituent* of P. Given a proposition P whose propositional relation looked like this:



the subtrees rooted in nodes 1 and 2 are complex constituents of P. There would be four simple constituents of P occupying the terminal nodes of the propositional relation.

Let's return to J&J's example. 'Harry' is the name of the proposition that Hannah is a philosopher. On the present account, Harry has Hannah as a simple constituent. Where $P_{H,p}$ is the proposition that Hannah is a philosopher, the proposition that John is happy that Harry is true, expressed by the sentence 'John is happy that Harry is true.', looks roughly as follows (some detail suppressed, nodes numbered and italicized expressions representing the semantic values of those expressions (relative to parameters)):



As you would expect, given that the name 'Harry' has the proposition that Hannah is a philosopher as its semantic value, the sentence 'John is happy that Harry is true' expresses a proposition that has the proposition that Hannah is a philosopher as a

simple constituent, along with *John*, *happy*, *that*, and *true*. But *Hannah* is not a simple constituent of 2P, since she does not occur at a terminal node of the propositional relation of 2P. Nor of course is she a complex constituent: those are the subtrees of 2P rooted in nodes 2, 3 and 4 (and 1, if we don't rule out a proposition being a complex constituent of itself). So if, in J&J's example, Bill knows that John is happy that Harry is true without being acquainted with Hannah, it just doesn't follow that Bill grasps a proposition (2P) that has an object as a constituent (Hannah) that Bill is not acquainted with. Thus, J&J's argument that one can grasp singular propositions with respect to *o* without being acquainted with *o* fails on the present view of propositions and constituency.

On the present view, in cases like 2P, a proposition, $P_{H,p}$, is a constituent of another proposition, 2P, where the former's constituents aren't constituents of the latter. (So constituency is not transitive on the present view. I'll return to this below.) As a result, the following sentences express different propositions:

3a. John is happy that Harry is true.

3b. John is happy that the proposition that Hannah is a philosopher is true.

And there is a *point* to the distinction. To grasp a proposition, one must be acquainted with its constituents (according to standard Russellians). That means in J&J's story, Bill does not grasp nor know the proposition expressed by 3b, which *does* have Hannah as a simple constituent on the present view. But he *may* grasp and know the proposition expressed by 3b (it depends on the details of the story and the particular account of acquaintance one adopts).

Consider a related example discussed in Richard [1993]:

4a. Russell defended logicism.

4b. Russell defended the claim that arithmetic reduces to logic.

Suppose Glenn knows that logicism is a doctrine to the effect that there is some intimate relationship, he isn't sure what, between arithmetic and logic. Suppose he

would have no idea what it means to say that arithmetic reduces to logic. Finally suppose he has heard that Russell was a defender of logicism. Then it seems to me quite plausible that Glenn knows the proposition expressed by 4a but not that expressed by 4b. If we were to say this (and hold standard Russellianism), we would have to say that in knowing the proposition expressed by 4a, Glenn is acquainted with the proposition that arithmetic reduces to logic but not with at least some of its constituents (e.g. the *reduction* relation). But that strikes me as a quite plausible thing to say.

That one can grasp the proposition expressed by 4a and not grasp the proposition expressed by 4b is an instance of the more general phenomenon whereby in order to grasp a proposition one is required to have a robust cognitive connection to its constituents, but not to things that are in some sense parts of those constituents.³⁸ To take the simplest case, to grasp 3a I must be acquainted with John but I need have no acquaintance whatsoever with the metal screws in his ankle. A more interesting case, given certain assumptions, concerns properties and relations. Suppose that some properties and relations are complex and have other properties as components. Suppose, for example, that the property of being an instance of knowledge is the property of being a belief that is true and justified. On this way of thinking the property of being justified is a *component* of the property of being an instance of knowledge. Of course, the property of being justified may itself be complex and have components. Now suppose that e.g. Michael Smith [1997] is right in claiming that the relation *x has a reason to Ψ* is the complex relation of *x being such that in nearby possible worlds in which she has a maximally informed, consistent and unified set of desires, she desires to Ψ* . This complex relation has as components the (complex) property of *being a maximally informed, consistent and unified set of desires*, that of *being a possible world* and so on. Now the proposition expressed by:

³⁸ See King [2002] and King [2007] Chapter 7 for discussion.

5. Glenn has a reason to ski.

has as a constituent the relation x *has a reason to* Ψ , but it does not have the properties of being a maximally informed, consistent and unified set of desires or of being a possible world as constituents, even though the latter are components/parts of the relation x *has a reason to* Ψ . Thus it is that John can grasp the proposition expressed by 5 while having no notion of a maximally informed, consistent and unified set of desires nor of a possible world. He simply has a much more robust epistemic connection to the complex relation x *has a reason to* Ψ than he does to some of its components.

Further, the account of constituency being discussed resolves at least some of the issues involved in the paradox of analysis, as is argued in King [1998, 2007]. One issue is how, if knowledge is justified true belief, the following can express different propositions:

6a. Knowledge is knowledge.

6b. Knowledge is justified true belief.

On the present account it is easy to see how this is so. The proposition expressed by 6a does not contain the property of being justified as a constituent (it is rather a component of a constituent of that proposition, but it is itself neither a simple nor complex constituent of the proposition); that expressed by 6b does. They thereby are different propositions and have different requirements on being grasped. Of course, this does not resolve all the issues surrounding the paradox of analysis, but it is a good start. See King [2007] Chapter 7 and King [1998] for a fuller discussion of those additional issues.

One final point. I mentioned that the on the present account, propositional constituency isn't transitive (see the discussion of 2P above). But what about the motivation J&J offered for it being transitive? Consider the proposition that Rebecca swims. On the present view, Rebecca is a simple constituent of it. But it is easy to see that on the present view, Rebecca is a simple constituent of both the proposition that it is not the case that Rebecca swims and the proposition that Rebecca swims and Shane skis. In both cases she will be at a terminal node of the relevant propositional relations. In general, if P is any proposition and Q is a proposition built up of P, other propositions and truth functions, all simple constituents of P will be simple constituents of Q. Further, P will be a *complex* constituent of Q. Now we can see the difference between this case and 2P above. Hannah is a simple constituent of a *simple* constituent of 2P: the proposition $P_{H,p}$. Thereby Hannah can't be a simple constituent of 2P: she can't occur at a terminal node since she is a proper part of something that occurs at one. Nor can she be a complex constituent. However, in the present case not only is Rebecca a simple constituent of P, but in virtue of P being a *complex* constituent of Q, Rebecca is a simple constituent of Q. So we both eat our cake with Rebecca and have it with 2P! Thereby, we deny the transitivity of propositional constituency, while capturing the motivation J&J gave for it.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, J&J argue that though the Russellian account of singular thought_{e,p} initially looks attractive and this appears to be a reason for accepting a version of that view, on closer scrutiny the Russellian account is flawed. In particular, they claim to show that there are singular thoughts_p that have no (relevant) objects as

constituents, contrary to what the Russellian claims. As against this, I've argued that their first purported example of this shows no such thing; and that their second example doesn't apply to standard Russellian views of singular thought_{e,p} on which such thought is always *object* directed. I then argued that even assuming a somewhat less standard Russellian view of the sort held by Scott Soames on which there *are* singular thoughts_p about properties, their purported example of a singular thought_p about a property that didn't contain the property as constituent fails, again, both on their characterization of singular thought_p and mine. Finally, J&J argue that there are cases in which grasping a singular proposition with respect to *o* does not require acquaintance with *o*, contrary to what standard Russellians claim. I showed that the theory of propositions in King [2007, 2009] blocks J&J's argument here. More importantly, I then explained how the crucial notion of *propositional constituency* that falls out of this theory is independently motivated and has a variety of very desirable consequences. As I indicated above, I take this to be a significant benefit of my account of propositions.

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