“Weeks later,” Greg said, “when I returned from the wilderness trip, I walked into a house and saw a man approaching me. This is a shabby looking fellow, I thought to myself. But then I realized that I was looking at my own reflection in a mirror. I was the shabby looking fellow.”

And thus we have the setup for one of the most persistent problems in contemporary philosophy.

Imagine Greg having made, not two, but three statements:

1) This is a shabby looking fellow.

2) I am a shabby looking fellow.

3) Greg is a shabby looking fellow.

According to the direct designation view as understood by contemporary Russellians demonstratives, indexicals, and proper names contribute only their referents to the propositions expressed by simple statements containing them.¹ On that view (1), (2), and (3) express the same proposition. But considerations raised by Frege show that there are serious problems for that view. One of the main points in “On Sense and Meaning” was to demonstrate a need to individuate propositions by the mode of presentations associated with the terms in the statements expressing them. The cognitive significance of (1), (2), and (3) is different, which Frege accounts for by arguing that the three statements express different propositions.
Recently there has been a surge of new Fregeans. The new Fregeans claim that the direct designation theorists do not, and cannot, account for the different truth values of belief reports. Instead, they say we must use a finer grained account of the propositions expressed by the embedded sentences in belief reports; one which builds modes of presentations into the propositions. Thus we have Mark Richard, John Perry, and Mark Crimmins championing theories that build modes of presentations into embedded propositions, making the modes of presentations relevant to the truth conditions of belief reports. What is interesting, though, is that all three accept the direct designationalists claim that proper names, indexicals, and demonstratives are directly referential, as well as semantic innocence, which states that the embedded propositions express the same proposition when not embedded.

The first section of this paper will present four problems for the direct designation theory, one of which motivates the new Fregeans to include modes of presentations in propositions. The second section will present a serious problem for the approach taken by the new Fregeans. The third section will present a sketch of an account of modes of presentations which is not Fregean and which answers the objections presented in section one. The upshot of the paper is that the new Fregeans are not attacking the most basic problems facing the direct designation theory and that the approach they take does not address the most basic problems. The solution I provide will, on the other hand, solve all four problems facing the direct designation theory.

I. Problems for the direct designation theory.

The direct designation theorist allegedly cannot solve several problems which focus on the connection between cognitive content and propositions. The first set of these problems focuses on the relationship between beliefs of singular propositions and other beliefs.
At the moment Greg sees himself in the mirror he entertains a belief he expresses by uttering (1). He would never have expressed the belief by uttering (2) even though (1) and (2) express the same singular proposition. It is reasonable to explain this by assuming that different beliefs correspond to (1) and (2), so the direct designation theorist has to explain how different beliefs can correspond to one and the same singular proposition. Let us call this the multiple belief problem.4

When Greg sees himself in the mirror he thinks to himself that this fellow needs a good bath. When Greg realized that he himself is the shabby looking fellow he thinks to himself that he himself needs a good bath. We thus have beliefs of one and the same singular proposition expressed in different ways cause different beliefs (and different responses) in the same situation. We also have situations in which different ways of expressing the same singular proposition causes different beliefs in other people. Suppose that at the moment Greg walks into the house he overhears someone say that she cannot wait to meet this Greg. If Greg were to say to her “Greg is here,” it would elicit different beliefs and different responses in the woman than if he said “I am here.” Assuming that in otherwise identical situations different actions are caused by different beliefs, the direct designation theorist has to explain how one and the same singular proposition can elicit many different responses. Let us call this the multiple impact problem.

The former of a second set of problems is a version of Frege’s puzzle. Consider the following sentences:

4) This is I.

5) I am Greg.

6) That man is Greg.
The direct designation view is committed to saying that (4), (5), and (6) express one and the same singular proposition. In spite of that, accepting what these sentences express seems to have significantly different cognitive implications in Greg’s situation. At the moment (as well as before) Greg saw his reflection in the mirror he knew what (5) expresses. Moments later he discovered that he was watching his own reflection. So, what (4) expresses is informative although what (5) expresses is not informative. We are tempted to say that Greg came to believe what (4) and (6) express, but we seem unable to do so since (4) and (6) express what (5) expresses and Greg already knew what (5) expresses. So the direct designation theorist has to explain (a) how what (4) and (6) express can be informative while what (5) expresses is not informative, and (b) how Greg can know what (5) expresses while seemingly being ignorant as to what (4) and (6) express.

The final problem has to do with belief reports. Ted, Greg’s friend, might say the following about Greg:

7) I believe that that man is a shabby looking fellow.
8) I believe that you are a shabby looking fellow.
9) I believe that Greg is a shabby looking fellow.

On the direct designation view the embedded sentences in (7), (8), and (9) express the same singular proposition, so one would expect that all three report the same belief. In spite of that Ted might sincerely assent to (7) while claiming that what (9) expresses is false. That might for instance happen if Ted sees a man he thinks is shabby looking while not recognizing him as being Greg. Ted might, in spite of this, be unable without further empirical investigation to detect an inconsistency among his beliefs. Let us call this the consistency problem.
There is a simple reason why I have grouped the problems into two sets. The second set of problems, Frege’s puzzle and the consistency problem, both involve one singular proposition expressed in several ways and they both focus on how one can seemingly know what proposition one of the sentences expresses while being ignorant as of what proposition the other sentences express. The first one points out how one and the same proposition both may and may not be informative (at the same time and for the same person) and how one can seemingly know what one proposition expresses while not knowing what the other proposition expresses, while the second one points out how one apparently can consistently both believe and disbelieve the same proposition. Since the consistency problem involves embedded singular propositions, an account of how Greg can know what (5) expresses while being ignorant of what (4) and (6) express should provide a key to an explanation of how Ted can sincerely assent to (7) while sincerely claiming that what (9) expresses is false. So, of the two problems, Frege’s puzzle seems to be more basic. If we solve Frege’s puzzle we have a solution for the consistency problem.

The first set of problems, the multiple belief problem and the multiple impact problem, is less concerned with informativeness of singular propositions and consistency among beliefs and more with actions or responses to believing something. (Why does Greg express himself in this way rather than in some other way? Why does saying something in this way rather than that way cause that reaction?) The first set of problems seems even more fundamental than the second set of problems. The problems cut to the core of the issue by pointing in a general direction for a possible solution of all four problems. The solution will involve cutting the close ties, the one to one correspondence, between propositions and beliefs in favor of an account of belief which permits that one can believe the same singular proposition in several different ways at the same time. A solution along these lines would not only solve the first two problems in a fairly obvious
way, it would also provide a solution for the second set of problems. Different beliefs might be associated with (4), (5), and (6) which explains how Greg can discover the truth of (4) while all the time believing what (5) expresses. In a similar way Ted might sincerely assent to (7) without accepting what (9) expresses.

We now see how the Richard, Crimmins and Perry approach falls short. The approach they choose focuses on solving the consistency problem; the least basic problem. No indication is given as to how we should deal with, say, the multiple belief problem. The next section will show that their approach faces a serious difficulty when combined with semantic innocence.

II. An Innocent Dilemma?

Suppose we attempt to solve the problems by first attacking belief reports. The approach Crimmins, Perry, and Richard take to solve the problem is to add to the propositional content of the embedded sentence. The singular proposition becomes a part of what is believed while a full account of the content of belief involves, in addition to the singular proposition, a talk about notions in the case of Crimmins and Perry, and RAMs (Russellian Annotated Matrixes) involving sentence structures or representations in Richard’s case. The truth of belief reports becomes partly dependent on the ingredients Richard, Crimmins and Perry add to the proposition expressed by the embedded sentence. When trying to satisfy our intuitions about the truth values of belief reports they build semantic constituents into the propositions. As is to be expected, the semantic constituents affect the truth values of the belief reports. At this point we have two choices:

A) We attach the semantic constituents to the names which are relevant to identifying these constituents, but nevertheless claim that the names cannot have these constituents as a part of their semantic values.
As a result we can claim that

10) Al believes that Hesperus rises in the morning

and

11) Al believes that Phosphorus rises in the morning

have different truth values, while also maintaining that Al’s belief that Hesperus rises in the morning is true iff Hesperus in fact rises in the morning. That is, the truth of the belief reports depends partly on the added ingredients while the truth of Al’s belief is determined by the truth of the singular proposition believed. Since the new Fregeans have not explained why the semantic constituents in question are not a part of the semantic value of the names, choice A has all the earmarks of being ad hoc.

B) The semantic constituents are actually parts of the semantic values of the names which appear in the belief reports.

Since all the parties involved seem to accept semantic innocence, namely that the embedded sentences in belief reports express the propositions they would if not embedded, and these propositions are the contents of the ascribed beliefs, it would appear that the truth of beliefs should covary with the truth of belief reports. Since that involves accepting that the truth of, e.g., “Phosphorus rises in the morning” depends on information the speaker associates with ‘Phosphorus’, this is tantamount to giving up one of the main tenets of the direct designation theory, namely that the semantic value of a name is its referent.

The new Fregean’s have to respond to the dilemma. But they have not done so and I see no easy way of doing so. If the new Fregean’s accept choice (A), then they will have to explain why it is that names only have additional semantic components in belief reports. If they accept
choice (B), then they have to give up one of the main tenets of the direct designation theory; something they will not do.

In the face of this difficulty it seems apparent that the new Fregeans have started with the wrong problem and that a more fruitful way of approaching the problems is to attack the most basic problem first. Hopefully, the solution of the most basic problem will provide us with a solution for the other three problems as well.

III. A Partial Proposition Account

The key to solving the four problems presented in section one is to solve the multiple belief problem. The key to solving the multiple belief problem is to cut the close ties between singular propositions and cognitive content.

Tyler Burge and Hilary Putnam have presented well-known examples to the effect that knowing someone’s mental state does not provide knowledge of what proposition the person believes. Ed and Twin-Ed might be molecular duplicates of each other living in identical worlds except for the fact that water on earth is replaced with an identically looking substance, twater, on twin earth (the home of Twin-Ed). Ed might be in the internal state someone is in when entertaining the thought expressed with “water is quenching.” Twin-Ed, being a molecular duplicate of Ed, is of course in an identical internal state, but his thought has to be expressed with “twater is quenching.” Given that water and twater are different substances, “water is quenching” and “twater is quenching” express different propositions. Considerations like these have made it clear that even though we know a person’s mental state we might not know what proposition the person believes. In other words, believing any number of propositions can result in the same (narrow) cognitive content. So, we cannot determine what proposition is believed on the basis of
knowing a person’s cognitive content. We are already loosening the ties between cognitive content and propositional content.

Consider the converse of the results of the twin earth thought experiments, namely, that we can know what proposition is believed while not knowing the person’s cognitive content (with respect to the proposition). The twin earth thought experiments do not support this kind of indeterminacy, which says that any number of cognitive contents can result from believing the same proposition, and which further loosens the ties between propositional content and cognitive content. The problem of how the latter type of indeterminacy is possible is the multiple belief problem.

The partial proposition account is deceptively simple. We do not fully believe singular propositions. Instead, we believe aspects of singular propositions. An example might explain the direction in which I am headed. Suppose that Sam and Sue are looking attentively at a statue and that Sam is looking at its front while Sue is looking at its back. There is a sense in which Sam and Sue are seeing the same thing, for they are looking at the same object. In spite of that their experiences of the statue viewing are not at all the same. If we want to specify the manner in which Sam and Sue mentally represent the statue it is not sufficient to say that since they are viewing the same object their mental representations of it are identical. We have to take into account that they are appeared to differently and that their mental representations have to be specified relative to how they are appeared to.

Suppose the statue Sam and Sue were looking at was David and that they form a belief expressed by

12) David is huge.
Given their limited and different exposure to David they will in all likelihood think differently of it. When Sam entertains his belief he pictures David as he saw it; the front side. Sue, on the other hand, pictures David as seen from the back. Their different experiences of David will thus result in different mental representations of it, and though Sam and Sue believe the same proposition they do not believe it in the same way. Sam associates a different mental representation with David than does Sue.

One attempt to account for the difference in mental representations is to claim that Sam and Sue attach different descriptive contents to ‘David’. The description(s) are supposed to account for the difference in mental representation without affecting the singular proposition believed, since, after all, the descriptive content attached to the name does not determine the reference of the name. The descriptive content is supposed to account for the difference in Sam’s and Sue’s beliefs without contributing to the semantic value of the proposition believed. However, this attempt to solve the issue at hand is doomed to fail. We cannot allow the mode of presentation of the object in the proposition to be descriptive. Once we do that we are saddled with either a version of the description theory or a view which forces us to introduce a distinction between the singular proposition assented to and the associated proposition which is believed.

If we want to keep singular propositions, then there must be a relation between the object in the proposition and the description involved in the belief attribution. The relation seems to be as follows: When I assent to a sentence expressing a singular proposition I attach a description to the name in the sentence, thus forming a general proposition. Consequently, it is the general proposition that characterizes my cognitive state. Consequently, we have two propositions; the singular proposition and the associated general proposition. If we call the singular proposition ‘\(P\)’ and the general, or the fully conceptualized proposition, ‘\(P^*\)’, then \(P\) and \(P^*\) are two different
propositions. What we can say is that, for me, the two propositions are closely associated. When I assent to $P$, I believe $P^*$ and when I utter $P$, I use it to express my belief that $P^*$. But association is not identity.

Note that this option does not collapse into the description theory since the description in the associated proposition does not determine the reference of the name in the original (singular) proposition. What the option does is cognitively isolate singular propositions, putting them beyond the reach of belief. Singular propositions exist and we may assent to them, but the objects of belief are not singular propositions. Instead, what we believe when we assent to sentences expressing singular propositions are the associated, or general propositions. Since we are looking for an account of beliefs of singular propositions this option fails.

Since thoughts about objects seem invariably to be either descriptive or perspectival, the latter consisting of our ability to produce an image of the object thought about, and since modes of presentations of objects in singular propositions cannot be descriptive, the alternative to introducing descriptive modes of presentation is to introduce perspectival or nonlinguistic modes of presentation (NMP for short). This has the advantage that while we can be said to believe a singular proposition in different ways (depending on our NMP of the object in the proposition) we do not have to associate descriptions with names nor do we need to introduce additional elements into propositions (such as notions, or linguistic items or representations, if we accept the accounts of belief reports given by Crimmins/Perry or Richard) in order to account for the different ways in which we can believe singular propositions.

Note that I am not giving up the view that propositional content expresses cognitive content. However, since my belief only captures an aspect of the proposition believed, the propositional content will be richer than the respective cognitive content.
The partial proposition account can be supported in two ways; by using it to solve the problems facing the direct designation view, and by showing that it is in step with developments in cognitive science.

Consider the following questions: Do frogs have lips? What is the shape of an elephants ear? How many windows are on the south side of your house? Studies conducted by S. Kosslyn have shown that people use images when required to answer questions about properties of objects that are “poorly associated with the objects,” that is, parts people usually have not thought about before in connection with an object. What is more, sometimes the detail asked about is not a part of the image the person produces. I might be able to produce an image of a frog, but in spite of that the detail about the frogs lips might be missing. Finally, an image is produced “from a point of view,” that is, an image is typically “seen” from one of the perspectives from which one observed the object the image is of.  

These basic facts revealed by image theory in cognitive science fit nicely with the partial proposition account. Recall that the object referred to by the name, indexical, or demonstrative in a simple declarative sentence is a part of the singular proposition expressed by that sentence. Consequently, it is reasonable to assume that when one believes a singular proposition one has had some experiences of the object in the proposition. I submit that the experiences in question enable one to produce an image of the object and that how one images the object is the key to how one believes the proposition involving the object. Just as we cannot produce an image with all the details of the object the image is of, we cannot fully believe a singular proposition, in the sense that we cannot apprehend all of its aspects. Just as my image of an object is different from your image of the same object because I might focus on a different aspect of the object or I might
have seen it from a different point of view or under different lighting conditions, the way I believe a singular proposition might be different from the way you believe the same proposition.⁹

It seems evident that an image is not of an object in virtue of its resemblance of the object. My image of Greg may represent him as a two year old while Greg might be in his forties; nevertheless my image is of Greg. Michael Tye has attempted to provide a solution to the problem of how images might lack resemblance with an object while still being an image of that object.¹⁰ He suggests that we associate interpretations with images. The interpretation “This represents Greg” would, for instance, be associated with the image of Greg. Different interpretations also distinguish among images that look alike but nevertheless represent different objects. But this approach does not work. According to Tye an interpretation is a belief involving a reference to an object. But since I have no way of representing the object independently of the image I have of it, the interpretation cannot establish the content of any proposition I believe about the object.

It is perhaps more promising to approach the problem by arguing that an image is of an object in virtue of being caused, in an appropriate way, by the object. Even though Greg is in his forties I might still represent him as a two year old. The image is of Greg because it is, appropriately, caused by Greg. This approach entails that it is not sufficient for believing a singular proposition to sincerely assent to a sentence expressing the singular proposition. An additional condition is needed, namely that the mental representation of the object in the proposition be formed in an appropriate causal way. While this causal approach to representations places some restrictions on what counts as a belief of a singular proposition, it is certainly less restrictive than what is required by Russell’s theory of acquaintance. In fact, it is an attempt to find a happy medium between Russell’s strict requirements and today’s more lax requirements,
where one is often said to believe a singular proposition on the basis of the structure of the sentence assented to.

So far we have a sketch of an account of belief which agrees with empirical research and even defers to empirical research. The details of how we believe singular propositions might ultimately be revealed in a laboratory. However, the ultimate test for the partial proposition account is whether it is able to deal successfully with the problems raised in the first section of the paper.

The multiple belief problem has already been solved. One and the same proposition can be believed in a number of ways depending on how the object in the proposition is represented in one’s belief. How the object in the proposition is represented in one’s belief depends on how one has perceived the object in question and what features of the object have caught one’s attention.

When Greg saw himself in the mirror he thought to himself that this fellow needs a good bath. When Greg realized that he himself was the shabby looking fellow, he thought to himself that he himself needed a good bath. On the plausible assumption that in otherwise identical situations different actions are caused by different beliefs and in Greg’s case believing the same proposition resulted in different actions, the direct designation view was faced with the multiple impact problem. We now know that the problem arose on the erroneous assumption that singular propositions accurately report our beliefs. Greg might believe the same proposition when he believes that this fellow needs a bath as he does when he believes that he himself needs a bath, but the resulting beliefs are different. On the partial proposition account the image Greg produces when asked to image himself is different from the image Greg produces of the figure in the mirror. Consequently, there is a significant difference between the two relevant mental representations Greg has of himself, and there is therefore a significant difference between the
beliefs. Since the two beliefs are different it is to be expected that they cause different beliefs and different actions. Situations in which the same proposition causes different beliefs in other people are solved in a similar way. Consequently, the multiple impact problem is solved.

Since one can believe the same proposition in different ways the version of Frege’s puzzle presented in section two is no longer problematic. Even though (4) and (5) express the same proposition, that proposition may be believed in different ways. Consequently, even though Greg believes what (5) expresses he can come to believe the same proposition again but in a different way.

It is true that Greg cannot believe what (5) expresses without at the same time believe what (4) expresses since (4) and (5) express the same proposition. Furthermore, if what (5) expresses is true, so is what (4) expresses. The truth of the proposition believed determines the truth of the belief resulting from believing that proposition. So, regardless of how Greg believes (4) and (5), if either of those beliefs is true, so is the other. But Greg might know what (5) expresses without knowing what (4) expresses because he might be justified in believing what (5) expresses without being justified in believing what (4) expresses given how he believes it. While Greg is obviously justified in believing what (5) expresses, it might take some investigation for him to be justified in believing what (4) expresses given how he believes it. He associates different representations with ‘this’ and ‘I’, and we usually take different representations to represent different objects. Consequently, Greg’s belief of (4), as he believes it, is not justified until he is reasonably certain that the fellow he sees is he. So one is not justified in believing singular proposition simpliciter, only singular propositions as believed. Thus, Greg can know what (5) expresses while being ignorant as to what (4) and (6) express.
The consistency problem arose when Ted sincerely assented to (7) while claiming (9) to be false without detecting an inconsistency among his beliefs. The problem only arises if we assume that propositions fully determine a person’s cognitive content with respect to that proposition. Since that is not the case on the partial proposition account, we can easily solve the problem. While “That man is a shabby looking fellow” expresses the same proposition as does “Greg is a shabby looking fellow” Ted believes it in two different ways. Since beliefs necessarily bear the same truth-values as the propositions they represent, and Ted assents to (7) while claiming that what (9) expresses is false, it follows that Ted does have inconsistent beliefs. The problem is explaining why Ted does not recognize that his beliefs are inconsistent. The answer to that question has to rest on the fact that Ted has, without realizing it, two representations of Greg. So the solution to the inconsistency problem depends on the solution to the multiple belief problem.

The partial proposition account thus solves all four problems in a straightforward way and it does so without making modes of presentations relevant to the truth conditions of either beliefs or belief reports. Finally, the partial proposition account is in step with empirical research on imagery; research that philosophers working in this area cannot afford to ignore any longer.¹¹
The direct designation view was championed by H. Putnam, S. Kripke, and K. Donnellan. The main proponents of contemporary Russelianism are N. Salmon and S. Soames.


This problem is a version of Kaplan’s example, where a person sees someone whose pants are on fire only to realize that he is the one whose pants are on fire.

This, of course, is a variation of Kripke’s puzzle about Pierre who apparently both believed and did not believe that London is pretty without detecting any inconsistency among his beliefs.

For more on Richard’s view, see the third chapter of *Propositional Attitudes*, esp. pp. 179-188 where he discusses the Paderewski example. For more on Crimmins’ development of the view presented in “The Prince and the Phone Booth,” see esp. pp. 152ff of *Talk About Beliefs* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1992).


9 In “Necessity, Apriority, and True Identity Statements,” Erkenntnis 40 (1994): 227-242, I argue that this view commits one to relativizing a priori knowledge to how a given proposition is believed.

10 For more on this see Michael Tye, The Imagery Debate, esp. chapter 5.

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