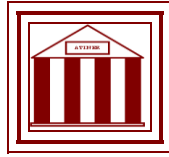


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**Demonstrative Thoughts, Object Dependency
and Redundancy**

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Demonstrative Thoughts, Object Dependency and Redundancy

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Abstract

According to *The Object Dependency of Demonstrative Thought* (ODT), if the object of a demonstrative thought does not exist then the thought is not available to be entertained or expressed. There is a powerful argument which is used to show that any attempt to defend ODT will fail. This argument is called the *psychological redundancy argument*. If it is a good argument, then not only ODT, but all the distinct and incompatible theories of singular thought that imply ODT would be false. The main objective of this paper is to show that the *redundancy argument* is not a good argument. First, I will argue that the conventional attacks on the redundancy argument are not successful. Later, I will present my own criticism of the argument. Finally, I will defend some of the consequences that follow from the reply given here to the redundancy argument.

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Introduction

According to a theory about the nature of demonstrative thought, if the object of a demonstrative thought does not exist then the thought is not available to be entertained or expressed. This theory, that I will call *The Object Dependency of Demonstrative Thought* (ODT), is known to be a form of semantic externalism insofar as it implies that demonstrative content does not depend (exclusively) on intrinsic properties of a subject.

ODT is a consequence of distinct and incompatible theories about the nature and structure of singular thought. Neo-Russellian theories as well as their eternal rivals, neo-Fregean theories of singular thought, are committed to ODT. On the one hand, neo-Russellians hold that the object the thought is about is itself a constituent of the thought. As a result if the object does not exist, the thought will not be complete and will not be available to be entertained or expressed. On the other hand, neo-Fregean theorists (notably Evans and McDowell) maintain that, even though the object is not a thought constituent, demonstrative content is such that it cannot be expressed or entertained if its object does not exist¹. This means that a defense of ODT is not as such a defense of either a neo-Russellian theory or a neo-Fregean theory.

There is an argument, called the *psychological redundancy argument*, which is employed to show that any attempt to defend ODT will fail². If it is a good argument, then not only ODT, but all the distinct and incompatible theories that imply ODT would be false. The main objective of this paper is to show that the psychological redundancy argument is not a good argument. First, I will argue that the conventional attacks on the redundancy argument are not successful. Later, I will show that one of the central premises of the argument is not sustainable.

The Psychological Redundancy Argument

Demonstrative thoughts are thoughts that can be expressed by sentences containing *genuine demonstrative terms*. Simple expressions like ‘he’, ‘she’, ‘this’, ‘that’ and more complex expressions like ‘this house’ or ‘that woman’ are usually mentioned as examples of demonstrative terms. But these terms are *genuine demonstrative terms* only if their content is irreducibly *singular*; that is to say, only if the contribution that these terms make to the content of the whole sentence cannot be explained in terms of the content of quantifiers, predicates, (attributively interpreted) definite descriptions or any other expression whose content is general.

Note that if it turns out that genuine demonstratives express an object-dependent content, ODT would be true. In fact, a linguistically expressible thought is constituted, partly, by the content of the subsentential expressions. If the content of a subsentential expression *e* is not available (because this content is object-dependent and the object does not exist), then the thoughts expressed by sentences that contain *e* will not be available either. For example, if ‘that mole’ functions as a genuine demonstrative when it occurs in sentences of the form ‘that mole is F’, and ‘that mole’ does not express any content when it is empty, then the thoughts expressible by sentences of

¹ For examples of both neo-Russellian and neo-Fregean theories, see Russell (1914-1919), Kaplan (1977), Evans (1982), Peacocke (1981), McDowell (1984), Perry (1993a), Campbell (2002) and Boër (2007).

² Different versions of the redundancy argument can be found in Carruthers (1987), Noonan (1991, 1995) and Segal (1989).

the form 'that mole is F' will not be available to be expressed or entertained and, therefore, they will be object-dependent thoughts.

It is usual to expound the redundancy argument using dramatic props that include hallucinations. I will follow the custom. On a dark night Ana heard a sound that seemed to come from a little animal. She went to what she thought was the source of the sound and found a kitten. '*That Kitten is injured*', Ana said, expressing a demonstrative thought about the kitten. She had the intention to pick up the kitten, so she picked it up. Clearly, Ana has acted intentionally on the kitten. On Twin Earth, Nina (Ana's exact duplicate) was in a similar situation. Nina heard a sound and went to what she thought was the source of the sound. Nina thought that there was an injured kitten in front of her. Like Ana, Nina said '*That kitten is injured*' and then she tried to pick up the alleged animal, but there was no animal in the place where she thought there was one. Nina suffered a hallucination.

Under a description, Nina and Ana have done the same kind of action because they have done the same *bodily movement* and both, Nina and Ana, have the capacity to describe their actions employing similar or identical expressions. The difference between Nina's action and Ana's is, apparently, that the second action, but not the first, can be described in relational terms: Ana picked up a cat, so there is a link between Ana and a particular cat, but there is not such a link in Nina's case. However, Nina is an exact duplicate of Ana and the circumstances that surround them are identical except for the cat's presence. Ana's thoughts, beliefs and desires, about the kitten explain psychologically her action on the kitten. Given that Nina cannot entertain object-dependent demonstrative thoughts about the kitten, since there is no kitten in her surroundings, how can a defender of ODT explain Nina's action?

To psychologically explain Nina's action we have to ascribe thoughts to her that cause and rationalize her action. Given that Nina has no object-dependent demonstrative thoughts about the alleged kitten, it seems that we face a dilemma: *either* Nina's action is not psychologically explainable *or* Nina's action can be explained in terms of the thoughts that she and Ana have in common. As we will see, it is unacceptable that Nina's action is not psychologically explainable, so it seems that we have to conclude that Nina's action can be explained in terms of the thoughts that both Nina and Ana share.

There are cases in which the behavior of a subject is not psychologically explainable. A certain man has an action project. He says 'I am going to chase *that tuarton*'. But, there is no such thing as a *tuarton*. The man does not express any demonstrative thought; in fact, he has no (properly obtained) perceptual information about any object of his surroundings that corresponds to a *tuarton*. He does not have available any memory or testimony about an object like that either. Nobody has any idea of what it would be for his project to succeed. Nobody knows what kind of object he is looking for, or where he has to search for it. Besides, the expression '*tuarton*' has no meaning. Thus, it is difficult even to ascribe to the man thoughts with general content which make sense of his action project. It would be inappropriate to attribute to the man beliefs and desires that rationalize and cause his behavior. The man is just irrational: if his behavior has an explanation, the explanation is not a psychological one.

By contrast, Nina's action does not seem an irrational behavior because we know, in some sense, what it would be for her action project to succeed and what kind of object Nina is looking for. Besides, the sentences Nina utters seem meaningful and she has perceptual information available. Of course, Nina's perceptual information is erroneous, but that does not mean that her behavior is irrational. Nina is at most

confused and this is not sufficient to render someone irrational. So it is not true that Nina's action is not psychologically explainable. As a result, the dilemma presented above can be resolved: we have to conclude that Nina's action can be explained in terms of the set P of thoughts (beliefs and desires) that she and Ana have in common¹.

If the set P of thoughts that both, Ana and Nina, share is sufficient to explain Nina's action, then the same set will be sufficient to explain Ana's action (non-relationally described), since both, as we saw above, perform the same kind of action. Given that P does not have object-dependent demonstrative thoughts (about the kitten) as members, it follows that neither the explanation of Nina's action, nor the explanation of Ana's involve the attribution of object-dependent demonstrative thoughts (about the kitten). Since this argument can be equally well applied to any subject who acts on an object, it seems that we have to conclude that the attribution of *object-dependent* demonstrative thoughts is unnecessary to explain action. That is the conclusion of the redundancy argument.

Classic Replies to the Redundancy Argument

The redundancy argument says that the attribution of object-dependent demonstrative thoughts is unnecessary for the explanation of action due, in part, to the presumed symmetry between a subject that acts on an object in the middle of a hallucination (Nina) and a subject that acts on an object in normal perceptual conditions (Ana). The most usual strategy employed by the defenders of ODT to block the redundancy argument consists in arguing against the existence of a symmetry in virtue of which the redundancy of object-dependent thoughts in Nina's case would entail the redundancy of object-dependent thoughts in Ana's case. This strategy, as we will see, can be executed in various ways.

One of the ways to execute the strategy is to maintain that there is a remarkable difference between Ana and Nina because Ana's action is not an action of the same kind as Nina's²: Ana's action is an action *on* an object, while Nina's is just an action *at* a place, not *on* an object. Apparently, the redundancy argument requires the premise that Ana's action is of the same kind as Nina's, otherwise it is not easy to see how what is sufficient to explain Nina's action is also sufficient to explain Ana's.

Unfortunately, this reply to the redundancy argument does not work. The critic of ODT can answer: yes, it is true that when Ana's action is relationally described ('she picks up that kitten') it is not an action of the same kind as Nina's. However, when both Ana's action and Nina's are non-relationally described ('she moves her arms in such-and-such way'), both actions are of the same kind and, therefore, can be explained under their non-relational descriptions. Explaining Ana's action when it is *relationally* described is just adding a description of Ana's surroundings to the explanation of Ana's action *non-relationally* described. In this case, the description of

¹ McDowell (1977, 1984) maintains that in a case like Nina's, action cannot be explained in terms of thoughts, but in terms of other kind of mental content. It is not clear enough what kind of mental content McDowell has in mind, what is clear is that his approach implies that Nina's action is not psychologically explainable. Moreover, if McDowell approach were correct, object-dependent thoughts as well as general object-independent thoughts would be redundant: if Nina's action can be explained in terms of that mental content that is not thought content, Ana's action also can be explained in terms of that content. McDowell, one the most tenacious defenders of ODT, would have to abandon his cause.

² See Peacocke (1981) and Boër (1989).

the surroundings includes a mention of the kitten's presence, the attribution of object dependent thoughts remains unnecessary¹.

A common response to this reply says that a description of Ana's surroundings together with an explanation of her action, *non-relationally* described, is not enough to explain Ana's action when *relationally* described: let's suppose that Nina* is a twin of Ana on Twin Earth. Nina* is victim of a hallucination similar to that suffered by Nina. However, at the place where Nina* thinks she sees a kitten, really there is a kitten (this is possible if the kitten is not causally involved in the production of her visual experience). Nina*, like Ana, acts on a kitten, but unlike Ana, Nina* does not have perceptual information about the kitten on which she acts. So, although Nina* acts on a kitten, this is just a coincidence. By contrast, Ana's action on the kitten is not a coincidence; the kitten causes the veridical perceptual information she has about it. Thus, there is an asymmetry between Ana and Nina*. Explaining Ana's action, when relationally described, in terms of the explanation of her action, non-relationally described, plus a description of her surroundings does not account for the mentioned asymmetry. The only way to account for this asymmetry is to attribute object-dependent demonstrative thoughts about the kitten to Ana².

The above defense of ODT is appealing, but I cannot see how it can work. To account for the non-accidentality of Ana's action it is not necessary to ascend to the level of object-dependent thoughts, because the non-accidentality can be accounted for in terms of the perceptual information involved in Ana's action: in Ana's case, but not in Nina*'s, the perceptual information is caused by the kitten on which she acts. So, Ana's action is non-accidental due to the fact that there is a causal connection between the information that guides her action and the object on which she acts. There is no such a causal connection in Nina*'s case.

Maybe there is no need to go so far to find an asymmetry between Ana's case and Nina's. The asymmetry, it could be said, is obvious: Ana's action is *singular*, whereas Nina's action is not singular, and to explain the singularity of Ana's action it is indispensable to attribute object dependent demonstrative thoughts to Ana.

Although this response seems obvious, it is not evident that it works. Singularity of action has to do with the intentional content of action. So, Ana's action would be singular insofar as the intentional content of her action is singular, that is, non-reducible to a descriptive or any other general content. Even if we accept that Ana's action is singular in that sense, this does not provide a reason to sustain that there is an asymmetry between Ana and Nina that blocks the redundancy argument because there is no reason to deny that Nina's action is also singular. Nina is victim of a hallucination, but she is not aware of this fact. She can also be ignorant of a description that would identify the kitten, if the kitten existed. Besides, it seems possible that she is not able to paraphrase, using general sentences, the thoughts she expresses by sentences of the form 'that kitten is F'. Given that Nina uses the expression 'that kitten' to announce her intentions, there is no reason to think that the content of her intentions is (reducible to) a general content and, therefore, there is no reason to suppose that the content of her intentions is not singular.

The redundancy argument depends heavily on an alleged symmetry between Ana and Nina, but the argument also depends on the premise that Nina has no object-dependent thoughts that explain her actions. As we have seen, the strategy employed

¹ Noonan (1991, 1995) usually counterattacks this way.

² This reply can be found in Peacocke (1981); more recent versions of the same reply are found in Crawford (1998) and Boër (2007).

by the defenders of ODT consists in attacking the alleged symmetry. The execution of this strategy has failed, but this does not mean that the redundancy argument is sound. I think that the premise that Nina does not entertain object-dependent thoughts that explain her action has no support. If this is true, as I want to argue, the thesis that object-independent demonstrative thoughts are possible cannot be defended satisfactorily based on the redundancy argument.

Redundancy and Complex Demonstratives

Redundancy argument says that: R1) *the thoughts that Nina expresses using sentences of the form ‘that kitten is F’ are thoughts that Ana also entertains.* Moreover, R2) *the thoughts that Nina expresses using sentences of the form ‘that kitten is F’ are not object-dependent thoughts.* Both, R1) and R2) are central premises of the argument: we know that Nina does not express object-dependent thoughts *about the kitten* using sentences of the form ‘that kitten is F’, but we also know that she expresses demonstrative thoughts using those sentences; otherwise her action cannot be psychologically explained¹. By R2), the demonstrative thoughts that Nina expresses using the sentences in question are not object-dependent and, by R1), these thoughts are also entertained by Ana. Given that these thoughts explain Nina’s action and that Nina’s action is the same as Ana’s action (non-relationally described), it is concluded that Ana’s action (non-relationally described) can be explained without the attribution of object-dependent demonstrative thoughts. If it is added the premise R3) *An explanation of Ana’s action, relationally described, is just an explanation of Ana’s action, non-relationally described, plus a description of Ana’s surroundings*² is added, the redundancy of object-dependent demonstrative thoughts is obtained. In what follows, I want to show why premise R2) of the redundancy argument is questionable.

A reason to believe that R2) is true is based on the assumption that ‘that kitten’, when used by Nina, does not refer if there is no kitten in Nina’s surroundings. From this assumption, together with the idea that by using sentences of the form ‘that kitten is F’ Nina expresses (demonstrative) thoughts, it follows R2). I will show that the mentioned assumption is false.

The assumption that ‘that kitten’, when used by Nina, does not refer if there is no kitten in Nina’s surroundings is a consequence of a general thesis about the function of complex demonstratives. According to this thesis, the nominal ‘G’ in ‘that G’ has an essential role in reference determination: ‘that G’ does not refer to an object unless that object is G. In other words, the nominal ‘G’ in ‘that G’ imposes a descriptive condition that has to be satisfied by an object if this object is the referent of ‘that G’. Once this general thesis about the function of complex demonstratives is admitted, it is easy to see why ‘that kitten’ is supposed to be empty when used by Nina: there is no object in Nina’s surroundings that satisfies the descriptive condition imposed by the nominal ‘kitten’. However, a moment of reflection *à la* Donnellan is enough to realize that the nominal ‘G’ that occurs in a complex demonstrative, like ‘that G’,

¹ If there are any thoughts that explain Nina’s action, these thoughts have to be, at least in part, those expressed by sentences of the form ‘that kitten is F’.

² R3) has to include that a correct explanation of Ana’s action, non-relationally described, must imply that there is a causal link between the information that guides Ana and the object on which she acts to account for the *non-accidentality* of Ana’s action.

does not have the role of imposing a descriptive condition to determine the reference of the demonstrative. A complex demonstrative of the form ‘that G’ can refer to an object that is not G. To see why, consider the next situation: a certain man was in a bar with his friends and saw, in the distance, a person that seemed interesting to him. The man said to his friends: ‘That woman has an exotic beauty’. One of the man’s friends, a little bit surprised, replied: ‘Maybe you are right about the exotic beauty, but that is a man’. In a situation like the one described, it seems right to say that the speaker refers to an object using a demonstrative of the form ‘that G’, although the object is not G.

However, in the situation described it seems wrong to affirm that the man has said something true when he said ‘that woman has an exotic beauty’, even the man has an exotic beauty. This means that the nominal ‘woman’ not only has an extralinguistic function; the nominal also has a semantic function since it makes a contribution to the truth conditions associated with the sentences in which it occurs: if the referent of the demonstrative is not a woman, then the sentence ‘that woman has an exotic beauty’ is not true.

There is a tension between, on the one hand, the intuition that the nominal in a complex demonstrative makes a contribution to the truth conditions associated with the sentences in which the demonstrative occurs and, on the other hand, the insight that complex demonstratives of the form ‘that G’ can refer to an object even though that object does not satisfy the nominal ‘G’. To account for both intuitions it is sufficient to treat the sentences in which complex demonstratives occur as sentences in which simple demonstratives occur. Specifically, the idea is to analyze sentences in which complex demonstratives occur in terms of sentences in which the only demonstrative expressions that occur are simple. Thus, a sentence of the form ‘That G is F’ would express the same thought as a sentence of the form ‘That is a G which is F’¹. According to this analysis, the nominal ‘G’, although a predicative element, does not restrict the reference of the demonstrative expression. So, the demonstrative term can refer to an object which does not satisfy the nominal and, at the same time, the nominal can make a contribution to the truth conditions of the sentences in which it occurs, since a sentence of the form ‘That is a G which is F’ cannot be true unless the referent of ‘That’ is F and G. In particular, the man who utters the sentence ‘That woman has an exotic beauty’ can refer to an individual that is not a woman and, at the same time, he can say something false when he utters the sentence, due to the fact that the referent of the demonstrative is not a woman but a man.

Let’s return to the story of Ana and Nina. Premise R2) (*the thoughts that Nina expresses using sentences of the form ‘that kitten is F’ are not object-dependent thoughts*) is based on the assumption that ‘that kitten’, when used by Nina, does not refer because there is no object in her surroundings that satisfy the nominal ‘kitten’. The assumption is false since, as we have seen, a complex demonstrative like ‘that G’ can refer to an object even though the object is not G. In particular, ‘that kitten’ can refer to an object even though the object is not a kitten. Perhaps, the defender of the redundancy argument can reply that in Nina’s case not only there is no object that satisfies the nominal ‘kitten’, but there is no object at all, kitten or not, that can be the referent of the demonstrative ‘that kitten’, when used by Nina. I think this is also wrong; in fact, there is a candidate to be the referent of the demonstrative in sentences

¹ A similar proposal is presented in Strawson (1950). More recent proposals about the semantics of complex demonstratives that try to make compatible the two insights mentioned above are defended by Lepore & Ludwig (2000) and Campbell (2002: 75-78).

of the form ‘that kitten is F’, when used by Nina, namely the spatial region or place that, in normal conditions, would have been occupied by a kitten.

There is a reason to think that the spatial region or place in question is the referent of the demonstrative that occurs in sentences of the form ‘that kitten is F’, when employed by Nina. A relational description of an action specifies the object (or objects) toward which an action is directed. For example, the relational description of Ana’s action, ‘she picks up *that kitten*’, contains a demonstrative that specifies the object toward which the action is directed, namely, the kitten. An appropriate psychological explanation of an action toward an object, relationally described, has to account for the *directionality* of the action; that is to say, the explanation has to account for why the action is directed toward that object and not any other. The only way to account for the directionality of an action is through the thoughts that causally explain the action. That means that to account for why Ana’s action is directed toward that kitten and not any other (object), the thoughts that causally explain her action have to be about that kitten.

Well now, Nina’s action, in opposition to what the defender of the redundancy argument thinks, satisfies a relational description: Nina stretches out her arms toward *that place* (which, in normal conditions, would have been occupied by a kitten). Given that Nina’s action is psychologically explainable (her action is not an action of the same kind as *hunting tuartons*), the thoughts that causally explain her action have to explain the directionality of the action; that is to say, the thoughts have to explain why her action is directed toward that place and not another. Therefore, the thoughts that causally explain Nina’s action have to be about the place in question. But these thoughts are the ones that Nina expresses using sentences of the form ‘that kitten is F’; thus, these thoughts are about the place in question. This means that the demonstrative in ‘that kitten is F’, when used by Nina, is not empty, but refers to a place. The reason to maintain R2) is based on the assumption that ‘that kitten’, when used by Nina, is empty; however, this assumption is false, so there is no good reason to maintain R2)¹.

Places, Objects and Confusion of Kinds

One could be dubious about the thoughts that, I say, Nina expresses using sentences of the form ‘that kitten is F’. Granted that these thoughts are true if a certain place is a kitten and is F, it seems that Nina employs semantically anomalous sentences since it is weird to say that a place is a kitten. If those sentences are anomalous, it seems that Nina does not express any thought when she uses them. A semantic anomaly always involves an improper employment of concepts in predication (Larson & Segal 1995: 47). If there is an anomaly in Nina’s case, then it is due to the improper employment of the concept of kitten and the concept of place in predication. However, Nina does not employ the concept of *place* and the concept of kitten in predication. Instead she

¹ Noonan, one of the principal critics of ODT, accepts that in cases of hallucination some set of thoughts have to be about the place which, in normal conditions, would be occupied by an object. For instance, in discussing a case of hallucination involving an apparent pill, he affirms that the set of thoughts that explain his actions based on the erroneous perceptual information ‘must include beliefs of the form ‘that pill...’ which, though not now beliefs about any pill, must nonetheless still be beliefs about the place to which my action is directed (for if my reaching out to that place is to be rationally explicable I must have some belief about that place).’ (Noonan 1991: 6-7).

makes use of a *demonstrative* concept and the concept of kitten in predication, and this is far from being anomalous.

The reply given here to the redundancy argument has an important consequence: we are not immune to error through the misidentification of the kind to which the objects of our demonstrative thoughts belong. In other words, we can believe that one of our demonstrative thoughts is about an object of the kind X although the object is, really, of a kind Y, different from X. This consequence is not implausible; after all, confusion of kinds is a very common phenomenon: it is not improbable to confuse a woman with a man, or a person with a dummy. What I have been arguing is that it is also possible to confuse a place with an object.

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