

# Guide to Chapter Five of Gareth Evans' *The Varieties of Reference*

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## 5.0 What Happens in Chapter Five

*Evans first points out that some of our thoughts about objects are information-based, in that they are governed by information we have about the object of thought which is derived from causal contact with that object. Thinking of objects that I can see would be an example. An example of thoughts which are not information based would be purely descriptive thoughts of the form **the  $\phi$  is F**. Evans claims that with information-based thoughts, thinkers have the following high-level goal: that the object identified by their means of distinguishing objects of thought is the objects that is the source of the information. When this goal is achieved the thought is well-grounded. When it is not, the thought is ill-grounded, and the thought attempt is not successful. But even in such cases it can seem natural to say that the subject is thinking of the object that is the causal source, because we have a tendency to attribute to subjects intentional relations to objects that satisfy their high-level goals even when they really don't bear any such intentional relation to the object. An example Evans provides is when I go to register a complaint, I might be told that "I want to see Mr. X", even if I have no idea that there is a Mr. X, because seeing Mr. X is what will satisfy my high-level goal of registering a complaint. This is supposed to account for the intuition that proponents of the PM have to the effect that an object's being the causal source of information is sufficient for it being the object of thought. Evans also argues that the well-groundedness constraint renders expressions which depend on information-based thoughts Russellian, since for those thoughts, if there is no object, then no object is the causal source of the information, and hence the thought cannot be well-grounded.*

## 5.1 Information-based thoughts: Introductory

*In this section, Evans introduces terminology for two notions. The first is 'controlling conception', which is the information, including misinformation, we have about an object we are thinking about.*

*They are like dossiers, which can be sparse for objects we have just encountered for the first time, or quite extensive for objects that we have seen or heard a lot about. The second is that of being an 'information-based thought'. These are thoughts about objects whose controlling conception includes information (including inaccurate information) whose causal source is the object itself.*

This section is relatively clear and straight-forward. It involves mostly introducing some terminology for some uncontroversial observations. The two main notions are that of a controlling conception, and of an information-based thought.

The way to understand a controlling conception is that it is like a dossier of content assigned to an object of thought. To take as an example a minimal case, I might begin to speculate about *the world's tallest spy*, and in such a case I would create a new mental file for this person. Initially the file's content would be limited to the content of the stipulation: this person is a spy, is the tallest current spy. Other content might get into the file as a result of inference (this person is probably older than 5) or prejudice (this person is probably a man). I might also start a file for an object that I encounter perceptually. In that case, the information will initially be limited to what I get from my perceptual contact, including its various perceivable properties (it is blue and bird-shaped), particulars of my encounter with it (I first saw it down by the river).

These files — controlling conceptions — can become quite extensive, even encyclopedic, in scope. The file associated with each of your family members for example will contain information, including misinformation, from thousands of extended encounters, and other content inferred, misremembered, resulting from rumor, or whatever.

Files are not individuated by the objects they concern. Rather they are individuated on psychological grounds. Suppose I return to the parking lot after grocery shopping and see a dent in my car, marked with grey paint scrapes. In this case I might have a file for *the person who dented my car* (they drive a grey vehicle, they were in the vicinity of location L on date D); and I might have a distinct file for my friend's mother (she has red hair, she makes ridiculous cinnamon rolls). And these will be distinct files in my cognitive system even if the person who dented my car is my friend's mother. Of course, if I learn about the identity, I can merge the content of the files.

This leads to the second of the two concepts introduced in this section, which is that of *information*. Evans' use of 'information' is not the same as that used in the mathematical field of information theory. For Evans, information is content whose causal source is the object it putatively concerns. A few examples might help. When I begin to think of the world's tallest spy, the specifications in the file to the effect that this person is a spy, that they are older than 5, and so forth, were not derived from any causal link to the object. They were the result of stipulation and inference. On the other hand, if I am currently looking at an object, my file for it might include its color, shape and other content that are derived from my perceptual contact with it. Note that regardless of source — stipulation, inference,

perceptual contact, testimony, memory — the content might be accurate or it might not. For example, if I am watching the propeller on a small aircraft, it might look like it is spinning slowly clockwise even though I thought it is spinning very quickly counter-clockwise. So even though the content 'spinning slowly clockwise' is inaccurate, that content was the causal result of looking at the propeller, so it is information.

Evans introduces a final bit of terminology, which is what he calls a 'pure case'. This will be a situation in which a controlling conception (file) is newly minted, and contains only the content that triggered its creation. This could be a file opened when I first encounter an object perceptually, when someone I am conversing with begins talking about someone they saw on a bus, or when I start to speculate about 'the tallest spy'. It rules out situations in which a file contains information from multiple information-gathering episodes.

## 5.2 The informational system

*In this section Evans has two main topics. The first concerns the nature of the information that is gathered through perception and testimony. Evans argues that this information is predicative, in the sense that it can be captured by sentences with open variables such as  $Red(x)$  and  $Ball(x)$ , or via existential statements. The important point is that a specification of this content need not mention the specific objects that were the causal source. It is not singular content. This sort of representation which concerns specific objects is more sophisticated, according to Evans.*

*The second is what he calls the information system, which is basically a set of mechanisms – both intra-personal and inter-personal – by which content is collected into and transmitted between controlling conceptions (files) belonging to one or more subjects. For example, I might collect information through perception and put it in a file, and then tell someone about this encounter, which will allow them to put this information in a file of their own. Or I might collect information in a file, and then realize that it is from the same object for which I have a pre-existing file, and merge the two.*

The over-arching reason that Evans wants to clarify the nature of information that is collected and used by the information system is this. Evans agrees that Kripke and the proponents of PM are right about something, namely that causal contact with objects is important for understanding various elements of reference and thought. But unlike Kripke, Evans' current topic is thought (not expressions in natural language), and unlike the PM adherents, Evans takes causal links to be necessary but not sufficient for a thought to concern a specific object. The latter presents a challenge, for it will require him to say what it is that these causal links provide, but in such a way that illustrates why they are not *sufficient* for a state being a thought that  $a$  is  $F$ .

The proposal is that the basic way to characterize the content of information states is in terms of what Evans calls *seemings*. One characterization Evans gives is an open sentence in  $n$  variables with relevant predicative information. So if I am looking at a scene with a red ball resting on a yellow cube, the content of the information could be specified as:

1.  $\text{Red}(x) \ \& \ \text{Ball}(x) \ \& \ \text{Yellow}(y) \ \& \ \text{Cube}(y) \ \& \ \text{On}(x, y)$

The first point about this is that it has what Evans calls *apparent objective significance*. This visual information is not captured in terms of a patterns of colors and brightnesses, or whatever the low-level sensory input might be, or whatever the classical empiricists thought were the initial inputs provided through experience.

The second point is that these informational states are not to be understood primarily as *belief states*. Of course one might form beliefs on their basis, including beliefs whose content is very similar to that carried by the state. But at the ground level, they are not belief states.

The third point is that the content does not concern any particular objects, in the sense that a complete specification of the content, while it would have to mention the properties *red* and *yellow*, and sortals such as *ball* etc., it would not mention any specific objects, including whatever objects (if any) were the causal source of the information. This is what the open sentence conveys (it might also be existential, see discussion below). It could also be conveyed by a drawing of a red sphere and yellow cube. It depicts a ball and cube, but a) not any particular ball and cube, nor even b) the presumption there exists, in fact, a ball or cube at all. (The example of a drawing is a bit complicated, for reasons I'll mention below.)

Evans claims that this is the right way to understand the content of photographs. So suppose that there is a table, and on it is a particular sphere ( $Sphere_1$ , which was given to me as a gift for my ninth birthday) and a particular cube ( $Cube_1$ , which I made in metal shop in high school). The sphere is red and the cube yellow, and the sphere is on the cube. If I take a photo<sub>1</sub> of the scene, it will, according to Evans, have the content specified by the open sentence (1).

Here is the important bit. Suppose in another room in my house I have an identical sphere ( $Sphere_2$ ) resting on an identical cube ( $Cube_2$ ), and I take another photo<sub>2</sub> of them. The two photos are visually indistinguishable. On Evans account, the two photos have the same *informational content* — the content specified in (1) above. So even though the information carried by photo<sub>1</sub> is information *from* Sphere<sub>1</sub> and Cube<sub>1</sub>, and the information carried by photo<sub>2</sub> is information from Sphere<sub>2</sub> and Cube<sub>2</sub>. These locutions — *representation of Cube<sub>1</sub>*; *information from Cube<sub>1</sub>*; *photograph of Cube<sub>1</sub>* — are ways of recognizing the fact that certain specific objects were in fact the causal source of the information or representation. But it does not follow that the informational content concerns those specific objects. Evans says

... we can say that the product of such a mechanism is *of* the objects that were the input to the mechanism when the product was produced. Correspondingly, the output is *of* those objects with which we have to compare it in order to judge the accuracy of the mechanism at the time the output was produced. Notice that I have explained the sense in which a photograph is of an object, or objects, without presupposing that a specification of its content must make reference to that object, or those objects. (p. 125)

It is worth emphasizing that while Evans uses the word “accuracy” here, it is clearly referring to the accuracy *of the mechanism*, not the accuracy *of the content produced*. Failure to see this difference is behind a recent criticism of Evans' position in Burge (2010, p. 184-5). But if this difference is kept in mind, Burge's criticism evaporates. (For a fuller discussion, see Grush 2016, ‘Understanding Evans.’)

Having specified the sort of informational content he is concerned with, Evans turns to a description of what he calls the “social informational system”. This includes mechanisms for collecting, storing, and communicating information between agents. Though it might be helpful to point out that there are elements of the information system that are not social. Individuals have the ability to gather information through their senses and retain information in memory. This information will be organized in files.

Recall from Section 5.1 that Evans describes as “pure cases” situations in which the content of a file (controlling conception) is exhausted by the current content-producing episode. This contrasts with what he is now describing (the middle of p. 126) as controlling conceptions that are *mixed*. These are cases in which the content of the file is the result of distinct information-gathering episodes, and the files have been merged. For example, one has a file for an object that comes into view, and after collecting a certain amount of information, one re-identifies it as an object that was encountered on a previous occasion. In this case, the new file that was created when the current encounter began will be merged with the file that was created in the previous encounter. Of course, if the subject fails to re-identify the object, then she will maintain two separate files despite the fact that they contain information from what is in fact one object. Note also that files can be split, if the subject learns that what she took to be one object is in fact two.

Moving on to the “social informational system”, Evans discusses a few ways that information can be passed from person to person, some cases of which involve re-identification. This is mostly very clear.

Evans goes on to argue that in the cases of social information passing, the distinction discussed earlier between information being from *a*, and information having content whose specification requires mention of *a* specifically, still holds. Note that Evans is not here suggesting that it always holds — of course, especially for people who employ singular terms, information whose contents concern particulars can be shared as such. The point is just that even in cases where it is a particular that is the source of the information, the content of passed information can fail to be particular-involving in that way. In the cases Evans discusses here, the content is existential. Evans sums up the argument nicely:

Consider my belief that swans are to be found in Uganda: is this about some particular birds, long since deceased, that occasioned the report in the travel book from which I derived the belief? [p. 128]

Evans closes with some remarks on identity conditions for bits of information. He claims that match of content is neither necessary nor sufficient for identity of information. Rather, Evans seems to be suggesting that the informational states' "resulting from the same initial informational event" is both necessary and sufficient. The two sides of the biconditional are given in these two quotes:

We want to be able to say that two informational states (states of different persons) embody the same information, provided that they result from the same initial informational event... (p. 128-129)

When two states embody the same information, they are necessarily such that if the one is of an object  $x$ , then so is the other. (p. 129)

Footnote 10 contains some useful terminology. Evans terminologically distinguishes representations with *singular content* concerning object  $a$  from representations whose content is of the sort discussed in this section, resulting from causal contact with  $a$ , but capturable via open sentences or existential statements, by saying the former are *a-representations*, and the latter are *representations of a*. As an example of an *a-representation* Evans mentions a painting of "Christ on the cross." The idea here is that the content of such a painting does concern a specific individual. Part of the explanation for this is no doubt the artist's intention. (This is why I mentioned above that the example of a drawing of a sphere on a cube is not a great example. Depending on the intention of the person who drew it, it might have as its content a specific sphere and cube, or it might not.)

### 5.3 Interpretation and psychological attributions

*This section is very straight-forward. Evans here wants to explain why in many cases, including the putative counter-examples to RP (the second steel ball, the polish grocer), we feel inclined to ascribe a thought about the object to the subject even though the subject has no discriminating knowledge of the object — an ascription that would constitute a violation of RP — even when such an ascription should not strictly speaking be made. The short version is that we find it natural to make reference to  $X$  when interpreting people's thought and speech if we know that they have an overriding project which would be best satisfied by reference to  $X$ , even if the subject is not in a position to think about or refer to  $X$ . A key illustration is a student of auto mechanics who says that "A spark is produced in the carburetor", and another student corrects him by saying "He means the cylinder," which is true even if*

*the first student has no idea what a cylinder is. His overriding goal — to say true things about car engines — would be best served if he had said 'cylinder', and so it is natural to say something like 'he means the cylinder' even when strictly speaking the speaker had no specific intention to say 'cylinder'. Given that people have an overarching goal of thinking of the objects from which their information derives, it is natural to attribute to them thoughts that concern those objects even when, strictly speaking, their thoughts do not concern those objects.*

The second example of the steel balls was one in which the subject did not have individuating knowledge of the balls — he could not distinguish the two balls in any way. Yet there is an inclination to say that he was thinking of the first ball, say, if it was the first ball from which his information derives. This appears to be in conflict with RP, because it attributes a thought about one of the balls to a subject when that subject does not have the ability to distinguish that ball from all others. Evans has to address this.

First he points out that our use of psychological idioms, such as “S is thinking about x”, or “S means x”, is driven by our concern to make sense of the utterances of others by fitting them into what we take to be S's larger projects. Second, Evans points out that it is possible for people to have purposes such that they can think about the objects that are implicated in those purposes. In such cases we might say attribute to the subject

...the thought 'I shall say that p' for the attribution of the purpose of saying that p, and correspondingly the thought 'I shall refer to x' for the attribution of the purpose of referring to x.  
(p. 130)

But crucially, Evans argues that this is not necessary. That is, it is possible to attribute to someone the purpose of saying that *P*, or referring to *x*, even if that person cannot think that *P*, or cannot refer to *x*.

Evans gives two examples. The first is the auto mechanics student who says, when questioned by the teacher, that the spark is produced in the carburettor. There is a clear sense in which the student's overall project and goals involve saying true things about the operation of the combustion engine, and given our knowledge of these goals, we find it natural to attribute to him the intention to say that the spark is produced in the *cylinder*. Saying this is what would satisfy his overarching intention. And we can attribute this to him even if he has no idea what a cylinder is. The other example is of the person who wants to register a complaint, and is told that he wants to see Mr. X. The person did not (in any strong *de dicto* sense) have an intention to see Mr. X. He did not know of Mr. X, and may not even have known that one needed to see anyone to register a complaint — perhaps he thought that a form needed to be filled out. But it turns out that his intention to register a complaint requires him to see Mr. X. So our interpretive project of making sense of people's thoughts and utterances involves a

sensitivity to their high-level goals, and these can often license an intentional relationship between the subject and objects that would satisfy those goals.

Next, Evans points out that people have, as one of their high-level goals, the aim of speaking or thinking about that object which is in fact the causal source of the information in the relevant controlling conception. With these two pieces in place, Evans' response to the counter-examples is clear. It is that yes, we do in fact find it very natural to say that the subject (in the example of 4.1) is thinking of the first ball when in fact the subject has no discriminating knowledge of this ball. But that is because the subject has, we can safely assume, the higher-level goal of thinking about whatever is in fact the causal source of his information. However, the subject is not in fact entertaining a thought that is genuinely about first ball, any more than the student had an explicit intention to say 'cylinder' or the complainer actually had an intention *to see Mr. X*.

In connection with these points, Evans introduces the notion of well-groundedness: a thought-attempt is well-grounded if the means of object identification employed by the thought-attempt manages to identify the object that is the source of the information in the subject's controlling conception.

Here is another way to put it. In attempting to think about  $x$ , I have to employ some means of identification of  $x$ . This will be whatever it is that allows me to satisfy RP, the resources I bring to bear that allow me to distinguish  $x$  from all other objects. So let us suppose that I my means of identification singles out what is in fact  $a$ . I also have, as an overarching goal that the object I identify in this way is the one that is the causal source of the information in my controlling conception. It is crucial to note that on Evans view I can have this overarching goal even if I do not (and maybe I cannot) articulate this goal as a description of the form "the object that is the causal source of the information I have about  $x$ ."

Of course, I *could* do this, but in such a case the thought would become a descriptive thought. The supposition here is that my thought-attempt is not descriptive.

#### 4.4 The Risk of Ill-Groundedness

*Following the discussion of last section, Evans claims that it is an overarching goal thinkers have that their thoughts be well-grounded — that is, that the means used to distinguish the object of thought identifies the object which is in fact the causal source of the information on which the thought is based. For example, I might hear of a person who has dark hair and painted graffiti on the bridge. Suppose though that the source of the information was a person, seen by my informant, who was wearing a dark wig, and was in fact trying to erase graffiti from the bridge. In this case, my means of*



*identifying the object I want to think about would as the object that fits the description. There might be no object that fits the description, or there might (coincidentally) be one which does – a dark-haired graffiti artist who my informant never encountered. But my goal in thinking about “that dark-haired person who painted graffiti on the bridge” would be to think about the person that was the causal source of the information.*

The topic is information-based thoughts. There are many types, including demonstrative thoughts, recognition-based thoughts, and others. One kind is what we might call an *information-base descriptive thought*. Standard definite descriptions are of the form *the  $\varphi$* . For example, I might entertain the speculation that there is a big blue bird down by the river, and think thoughts about *the big blue bird down by the river*. An information-based descriptive thought would be one where the description is built from information from the object. For example, if I visit the river and see a big blue bird, I might think about *that big blue bird down by the river*, where the components of the description — *big, blue, bird, near the river* — are the result of information I received from the object. In this case from perceptual contact with it. Evans will mark the difference linguistically as

- (i) The  $\varphi$  is F
- (ii) That  $\varphi$  is F

(i) is a descriptive thought. For example, I might think *The big blue bird down by the river is building a nest*. Two things are happening here. First, my thought employs the definite description ‘The big blue bird down by the river’ to isolate its object, to distinguish the object of my thought from all others. It is important that in this case my use of this description is not based on me having seen or heard first-hand reports about any such bird — if either of these were the case the thought would be information-based. The second element is that my thought is that this bird is building a nest. Again, we are supposing that my thought is not information-based, and so my entertaining the proposition that the bird is building a nest would be a matter of speculation, or perhaps an inference of some sort. But it would not be based on any information I have received from the object itself, such as seeing it building a nest. This thought would be true iff there is one big blue bird down by the river, and that bird is currently building a nest.

(ii) is an information-based thought, and this is marked by the ‘that’ as opposed to the ‘the’. Evans is not suggesting that this is an invariable technique of English to mark the difference. Nor is it to be assumed in these examples that in all cases of information-based thoughts object is being identified demonstratively (which might be a natural way to interpret ‘that’). He is just using this convention to mark the difference between information-based and non-information-based in the examples.

There is a crucial part of this that Evans is not as clear about as one might have liked. Information might play a role either in the descriptive/identifying component of the thought (the  $\varphi$  part of *that  $\varphi$* ), or the predicative component ( $F$ ). That is, the information to the effect that something is big, blue, a bird, and located near the river could be what qualifies it as information-based. Or, the predicative component about building a nest could be the result of information putatively from the object. Or both. In the examples Evans discuss it is the identifying component that is important. And generally speaking, the well-groundedness goal concerns the harmony between the information source and the object identified by that information. That the identified object be the source of the information concerning the predicative component is not a factor.

So the setup is that a neighbor tells me about a big blue bird they saw down by a local river. He says 'That big blue bird down by the river is building a nest.' I then essay a thought that *That big blue bird down by the river is building a nest*. Call this putative thought  $P$ . Let's walk through the four possibilities Evans lists, plus a fifth well-grounded case.

1. In the first case, there is a *source*,  $x$ , of the identifying information (big, blue, bird), but there is no unique object identified by the mode of identification, either because there is more than one object that fits the description, or because there is none. One way the latter case could occur is if  $x$  were a green rock that looked vaguely bird shaped from one particular angle to my neighbor with poor vision, and due to a trick of lighting appeared blue from that angle. Either way, there is no unique satisfier of the description. And either way, the doctrine is that my thought that *That big blue bird down by the river is building a nest* is ill-grounded.

2. The second case is like the first in that there is an object  $x$  that is the source of the information, except that in this case there happens to be something  $y$  ( $y \neq x$ ) that fits the description. My neighbor never saw it, he only saw the rock. It was purely accidental that  $y$  was there. So my thought that  $P$  would also not well-grounded in this case.

3. In the third case, there is no object that is the source of information. My neighbor lied, or suffered a hallucination. Even so, there happened to be an object  $y$  that fit the description. Again, my thought that  $P$  is ill-grounded.

4. In the fourth case, there is no source for the information (it was the result of hallucination or lying), nor is there anything which fits the description. Again, the thought that  $P$  would be ill-grounded.

5. The only case which would be well-grounded is one in which there was one big blue bird, and it was the source of the information. Notice that ill- vs. well-groundedness has nothing to do with the *truth* of the thought. My thought could be false even if well-grounded, if the big blue bird was in fact not building a nest.

Proponents of the PM will take it that (1) and (2) are cases where the thought that P is legitimate, and its object is the causal source  $x$ . I am thinking of the rock when I think *that big blue bird down by the river is building a nest*. In cases (3) and (4) the PM theorist would presumably say that there is no thought. Much of Kripke's causal theory of reference concerned *linguistic analogues* of (1) and (2). A description theorist of proper names would say in a linguistic case analogous to (1) that there would be no referent, and in (2) (and (3)) the referent would be  $y$ . Whereas Kripke argues that in proper names situations analogous to (1) and (2) the referent would be  $x$ .

Evans own analysis starts at the bottom of p. 133. He begins by pointing out that in (2) and (3) the PM theorist will claim, contra a description theorist, that despite the fact that there is a  $y$  that fits the description,  $y$  will not be the object of the thought. Evans agrees that in such cases "we have an extreme reluctance to allow" that  $y$  would be the object of the thought. But although Evans and the PM agree on this, Evans is not adherent to the PM. That is because the PM adherent will argue that in (1) and (2)  $x$  is the object of thought. But Evans then points out that if this is right, then so long as  $x$  is in fact  $F$ , regardless of how much mismatch there is between  $x$  and the descriptive content  $\varphi$ , we should count the subject as entertaining a true thought, and Evans claims we feel a resistance to this.

Evans support for this is his observation that if we wish to attribute a thought to the subject in this case "we would be extremely embarrassed if we had to provide an account of what it was that he thought." (p. 134) It is not clear how persuasive this argument will be, since proponents of the PM are not easy to embarrass. But the idea would be something along the lines that the PM doctrine would seem to entail that I am thinking that *that green rock down by the river is building a nest* when I am entertaining the thought that I would express linguistically as "that big blue bird down by the river is building a nest." And it's only slightly less grating if the predicate actually applies truly to  $x$  – that is, I am thinking, truly, that *that the green rock down by the river is getting wet*, when, upon learning that it is raining down by the river, I entertain a thought I would express as "that big blue bird down by the river is getting wet."

Notice that Evans has not framed any of these points in terms of the thought failing to be a thought, or of the thought failing to actually have an object. So far he is only framing his points in terms of resistance we might feel to treating certain things as the thoughts entertained. And he accounts for that resistance as a manifestation of our recognition that people have, as a goal for their information-based thoughts, that they be well-grounded.

Most of the time information-based thoughts are well-grounded, and there is a match between the descriptive content used to discriminate the object of the thought and the object that is the causal source. In cases where there is minor descriptive mismatch, we tend to overlook this mismatch, and still attribute to the subject the thought about the object that is the causal source. Such cases lend intuitive support to the mistaken idea that being the source of information is sufficient to determine the object of thought. But when the mismatch between the identifying content and the causal source is more pronounced, it becomes more apparent that there is a problem.

That said, the point is not that only when there is a significant degree of mismatch is the thought ill-grounded. Rather, it is that when the mismatch is significant that it becomes more intuitively apparent that there is a problem attributing to the subject a thought about the causal source. But the doctrine is that even in the cases of less jarring mismatch the thought is still ill-grounded, it is just less evident that there is a problem, because there is less resistance to just accepting the interpretive drive to register the causal source as the object.

## 5.5 Preview

Several moves are being made here which are implicit. He opens by pointing out that the argument of the previous section is a quite general defense of the Russellian status of many kinds of singular terms, an understanding of which requires an information-based thought, since in such cases if there is no object, then there can be no object that is the source of the information, and so the thought-attempt will be ill-grounded. What is implicit here is something that Evans never explicitly stated in the previous section, that being ill-grounded can render a thought attempt unsuccessful. The next issue concerns whether this applies to all information-based thoughts, or only certain categories.

It is unclear in this section, but his current point seems to be that for demonstrative and recognition-based thoughts (both of which are information-based), being ill-grounded renders the thought attempt unsuccessful, and so these thoughts are Russellian. But, for the sort of thoughts discussed in the previous section, because there is a purely descriptive component, there is a coherent content to be thought even if there is no object.

The source of possible confusion is that Evans makes the point here by referring to the sorts of examples from the last section as “description-based identification”, and one might naturally read this as him talking about thoughts of the form *the*  $\varphi$ , rather than *that*  $\varphi$ . But it becomes clear in the Appendix that he here intends thoughts of the form *that*  $\varphi$ , because in the Appendix he is going to argue that what he is saying here is incorrect, and that even thought-attempts of the form *that*  $\varphi$  are unsuccessful if there is no object.

But his current point concerns other sorts of information-based thoughts, including ordinary demonstratives, past-tense demonstratives, testimony demonstratives, recognition-based thoughts. And he says that in these cases, the Ideas employed by such thoughts require Ideas which are object-dependent. What this means will make more sense when these kinds of thoughts are discussed in more detail later on. The *object-dependence of an Idea* is a distinct consideration from the *object-dependence of well-groundedness* consideration discussed in this chapter. And so demonstrative and recognition-based thoughts have their Russellian status overdetermined.

So the upshot is

- A. Evans is now implying that being ill-grounded is sufficient to render a thought-attempt unsuccessful. This will render information-based thoughts of any sort Russellian.
- B. Evans claims that some kinds of information-based thoughts, including ordinary demonstratives, also employ Ideas which are object-dependent. And so for these thoughts, there Russellian status is over-determined. In the Appendix Evans will argue that in fact the Ideas employed by thoughts of the form *that*  $\varphi$  are also object-dependent, contrary to what is implied in this section.
- C. There are further kinds of thoughts, here-thoughts and I-thoughts, which are not information-based in such a way that considerations of well-groundedness can come into play, but nevertheless have Ideas which are object-dependent, and so they are Russellian as well.

## 5.A Appendix

*The appendix is more or less a re-working of some of the points from Section 5.4 and 5.5 in more detail, with some alterations. The upshot is that within all information-based thoughts, even information-based descriptive thoughts ('that  $\varphi$  is  $F$ '), the fact that they are information-based is reflected in their content. But this difference of content is not accounted for by the material in the purely descriptive component ( $\varphi$ ), and so is a manifestation of the nature of the Idea of an information-based thought. In particular, the difference between **the**  $\varphi$  and **that**  $\varphi$  is not only the fact that, because the latter is information-based, the well-groundedness requirement is in play. In addition to this, the nature of the Idea is different.*

Evans points out that all information-based particular thoughts involve a 'duality of factors'.

1. Information, derived from the object, and
2. The subject's ability to identify the object (in the sense of having discriminating knowledge) that his thought concerns, in a way that allows for satisfaction of Russell's Principle.

In purely descriptive thoughts, of course, (1) is not a factor.

This is all from the previous sections. Here Evans is wrestling with the following issue, which is how the fact that a thought is information-based is taken account of. Or to put it in a way that, while it makes sense only for what Evans calls past-tense demonstratives, what accounts for the difference

between “the  $\varphi$ ” and “that  $\varphi$ ”. We can call the former a purely descriptive mode of identification, and the latter a “descriptive identification employed in an information-based thought” (from the top of p. 140). There are three options:

- A. It is taken into account by the well- vs. ill-groundedness criterion. With information-based thoughts, subjects have the *high level goal* of thinking of the object that is the causal source of their discriminating knowledge.
- B. The fact that the object is the causal source could be explicitly included as descriptive content — if the phi is ‘the tallest spy in the room’, that phi would be “the tallest spy in the room who is also the causal source of my information”
- C. The *Idea* of the object reflects the fact that thoughts employing it are information-based.

While (B) is certainly possible, Evans wants to maintain that in such a case the thought would switch from being information-based to purely descriptive. At least, Evans wants to try to keep (B) out of consideration for the difference between *the  $\varphi$*  and *that  $\varphi$*  as much as possible.

In the second full paragraph of p. 139, Evans says that while the “content” is usually thought of as being given by the descriptive material in ‘ $\varphi$ ’ (the factor in (1) above) it seems as though the fact that the thought is information-based is part of the content. The question is, how can it be understood to be part of the content without collapsing into (B)? As Evans puts it:

Surely the difference between the thought that the  $j$  was  $F$  and the thought that *that*  $j$  was  $F$  is a difference of *content*, and not a difference which can be wholly shunted off into some sphere of considerations external to the determination of content. [p.140]

So the suggestion is that the *Idea* employed in information-based descriptive thoughts — the subject’s way of thinking of the object that provides discriminating knowledge — is partly constituted by its information-based applicability. That is, the two Ideas *the  $\varphi$*  and *that  $\varphi$*  have identical descriptive content, but differ in that one just is an Idea designed, so to speak, for use in information-based thoughts.

This aspect of such Ideas could be hived off explicitly and included as part of the content of a purely descriptive Idea, but doing so would not result in the same sort of Idea. Think of this as a sort of functional characterization of information-based Ideas, part of their structure.

This means that a claim made in section 5.5 needs to be altered. There it was stated that in the case of a information-based descriptive thought, there is still a coherent Idea of the object available even if there is no object, because the descriptive content provides for one. But now Evans says this

isn't quite right. Rather, there is a coherent Idea — a purely descriptive Idea — which is very much like the Idea that is in fact in play.

Evans closes by pointing out that this way of conceiving of things keeps open the possibility of these Ideas underwriting a notion of Fregean sense. If the fact that the thought were information-based were worked into the descriptive content, then it would not be possible for two subjects to employ the same mode of identification, because they would be using different descriptions — each description would include a clause about a causal link between “the object and me”, but since the ‘me’ is different in the two cases, so are the descriptions, and hence so are the Senses. But if the fact that they are information based is a constitutive part of the Idea, then two subjects can still employ the same Idea of the object, meaning they can think of it in the same way. Specifically in the information-based way.