

Guide to Chapter Eight of Gareth Evans' *The Varieties of Reference*

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Chapter 8 Overview

In the early chapters of the book Evans pointed out that there have traditionally been three ways deemed to be sufficient for providing individuating thought about objects: description, acquaintance/perception (aka demonstrative identification), and recognition. Evans hasn't discussed description much, mostly because he is mainly interested in information-based thoughts and purely descriptive thoughts are not based on information about the world (at least not in the relevant way). And he has discussed acquaintance/perception/demonstrative identification at length in Chapter 6 as a demonstrative mode of identification. That leaves recognition. Evans does three main things in this chapter. First, he argues for the importance of recognition in our communicative and even non-communicative practices. Because we are concerned to acquire knowledge about individuals, as opposed to types, we need a way to recognize when we are confronted with the same individuals again. Second he addresses the objection to the effect that there is no guarantee that recognitional capacities are genuinely individuating, for there may be

duplicates that one would misidentify as the recognized object. Evans responds to this by pointing out that our recognitional capacities have spatiotemporal constraints built into them. This proposal, however, will be modified in the Appendix. Third, he argues at length that recognition can't be reduced to, or understood as a special case of, descriptive identification. This is an important point for two reasons: it seems correct, and it also is required if one is to maintain that recognition-based thought are Russellian.

8.1 Introductory

In this section Evans discusses a third way (in addition to perception/demonstrative identification, and definite description) in which one may satisfy Russell's Principle — one may be able to recognize the object if presented with it. Later sections will work out the details of the view, but in this introductory section Evans does two things. First, he provides some initial suggestions as to why a recognitional capacity for an object should not be assimilated to knowing a description of the object. Evans will go into this in much more detail in later sections. Second, he discusses two prima facie challenges to the view. The first is that the recognitional capacity may not single out a unique object. He will discuss this in more detail in Section 8.3. Second, an object may change its appearance such that one no longer is able to recognize it. Evans says we can still have thoughts about the object by means of the recognitional capacity together with knowledge of how objects persist through time.

Evans opens by discussing the issue of how one might think of something that one encountered previously, and from which one retains information. In the original encounter, the subject's ability to satisfy Russell's Principle, and have an adequate Idea of the object was underwritten by knowledge of the object's location in space. But this is not available at the later time. One possibility, if the subject wishes to think a thought about that object at a later time, is to try to exploit some individuating facts about the object to construct an information-based description (e.g. *that G was F*, see the examples from Chapter 5). Another possibility would be a definite description that exploits a description of the information link. But Evans thinks there is another way in which RP can be satisfied at the later time, namely, a *recognition-based* Idea. Prototypically this happens when someone gains a capacity to recognize an object on the basis of an encounter with it.

But any such encounter will also typically be one in which the subject receives information from the object that could potentially be used to construct a *description* of the object. So there is an issue concerning how to understand the differences between these two, that is, the difference between i) gaining a recognitional capacity for the object; and ii) gaining knowledge about an object, through an encounter with it, that one can use to build a description of the object ('the one with the white dot' is Evans' example). Some theorists might want to assimilate recognition to this sort of descriptive knowledge, or assign it less importance than descriptive knowledge. But Evans will argue that a recognitional capacity cannot be analyzed as descriptive knowledge (even if the materials the description is built on were obtained through perception), and also that recognitional capacities are 'dominant' over descriptive materials:

... if a subject is disposed to identify a particular object as the object of his thought, and in so doing is exercising a genuine recognitional capacity stemming from the encounter or encounters from which the memory-information that saturates his thought derives, then, it seems to me, that object is the object of his thought, irrespective of whether or not it can be identified by means of any descriptions which the subject might otherwise use. The subject may have a perfectly erroneous view of the place and time of the encounter, and quite misremember what took place in it, without this preventing him from having a perfectly clear Idea of the object he means. We would certainly not obtain this result if we thought of a recognitional capacity as merely amounting to the knowledge of one description (presumably a description of the thing's appearance), to be thrown with the other descriptions into a composite descriptive identification; for if the subject was radically mistaken in his other beliefs, such a composite description would identify nothing. [p. 269]

In the middle paragraph of p. 270 Evans points out that there are cases in which recognitional capacities are clearly involved and dominant in our thought: he gives the example of observational concepts, such as *red*. Here it is our capacity to recognize the color *as red* when presented with something red that is the relatively uncontroversial foundation of our ability to think thoughts involving the concept *red*, not any descriptive general knowledge we may have of the color.

At the bottom of p. 271 Evans points out two challenges to the view that a recognitional capacity can provide for an adequate Idea and thus satisfy Russell's Principle. The first, which he will mention now but not address until 8.3, is that Russell's Principle requires discriminating knowledge in the sense that the subject must be able to distinguish the object of thought from *all other objects*. And it seems as though a

recognitional capacity cannot do this, since it seems always possible that there might be more than one object that one would be inclined to 'identify' as the one previously encountered — a previously unmet twin that one didn't know existed, for instance.

The second problem is the reverse: cases where the recognitional capacity fails to recognize the right object — for instance cases in which the object has undergone alterations of appearance that would foil the current recognition attempt. Evans discussion of this challenge begins with a parallel case: one's thought to the effect that some object was *red*. In this case, one's recognitional capacity for the property *red* allows one to have an adequate Idea — a fundamental Idea, actually, since the recognitional capacity will hinge on the phenomenal properties of red, and these constitute the fundamental grounds of difference of colors. This Idea of red is not tied to thoughts about objects whose time indication is such that the subject can effect the recognitional capacity at that time. Evans discussed this sort of case in Chapter 4. The suggestion is that a recognitional capacity for red allows me to understand [δ is red] for arbitrary δ . And my knowledge of identity conditions through time for objects of the relevant sort allows me to understand statements such as [$\delta_t = \delta_{t'}$]. So my thought now, at t' , that *this object was red at t* , is a product of my knowledge that [this = δ_t], [$\delta_t = \delta_{t'}$] and [$\delta_{t'}$ is red]. That is, I can employ my Idea of red in thought even when not presented with a red thing.

Evans treats the situation with recognitional capacities for particulars in a similar way. Evans introduces the notion of something's being *recognizably a*. Upon an encounter with an object a , one can gain a capacity to recognize a . This capacity endows the subject with a concept of something's being *recognizably a*, a concept which gives the subject an

adequate Idea of the object, and which is applied to *a* again when recognized. If *a* goes out of existence, or changes appearance so that it would no longer be recognized by the subject *as a*, this does not obliterate the concept or the capacity to think of *a* by means of that Idea. One can entertain the thought *this was recognizably a* in a manner parallel to my grasp of *this was red* discussed above.

8.2 Recognition and the Informational System

This section does not describe the workings of recognitional capacities so much as provide reasons why such capacities have selective utility and are so important in our dealings with the world. The basic idea is that it is extremely valuable for us to be able to collect information about individuals (as opposed to types) and bring that information to bear on how we deal with those individuals. In this section can also be discerned two distinct (but related) roles that recognition will play in Evans' project: the first is the ability to recognize objects and landmarks that set and define the cognitive map which undergirds our objective thought about the world. The second is the capacity to recognize specific people and places (and some other things that receive proper names) — this will play a significant role in Evans' account of proper names to be developed in Chapter 11.

After pointing out that much of our information about the world, both present and past, has been gathered in a way that makes essential use of recognitional capacities, either by ourselves or by those from whom we

have received the information, Evans goes on to briefly discuss one particular application of recognitional capacities: the ability to recognize physical objects. The argument here is compressed, and filling it out would take us too far afield. But the claim is that an ability to have a cognitive map of space, that represents objects objectively, rests on an ability to recognize specific objects. Evans cites Swinburne here, but he might as well have cited work of his own in Chapter 6, as well as Strawson's groundbreaking work in *Individuals* and *The Bounds of Sense*.

What Evans does expand on is the utility of recognition of particular agents. His discussion opens with a consideration of the difference between two kinds of learning systems: a system that, on the basis of encounters with individuals, retains information only about the *type* of individual encountered. Evans' examples here are perfectly clear. The result of such learning would be that objects of type *G* are liable to perform certain kinds of acts with certain probabilities: dogs are very likely to bite; men with beards are quite unlikely to give me ice cream; or whatever. Contrast this with a learning system that, in addition to learning such propensities of kinds, is also able to initiate and maintain dossiers of information about *individual agents*. There are clearly many conditions under which being able to do so yields great utility. A subject might learn that while in general dogs are very friendly, the particular dog *d* is almost certain to be aggressive and violent. Of course, the utility of this depends on a number of things. First, that there are differences in how individuals of a given type are likely to behave. If there are not, then keeping information about the type is sufficient. Also, the individuals' distinctive behaviors must persist enough that storing information about them has value for future encounters. If the individuals had different propensities but those propensities changed frequently, the value of storing information about the individuals would

vanish. Third, it must be the case that one regularly encounters individuals on multiple occasions. If this weren't the case, there there would be limited utility in storing information about their distinctive and persistent behaviors.

While the utility of such informational dossiers initiated and maintained for a single particular in mind is clear, less appreciated is that in fact recognitional capacities equal to the task of reliably recognizing the individuals that are the target of the dossiers is almost always a precondition for having such individual-targeted dossiers. After an initial encounter, when a dossier is started, all future encounters will need to be recognized as encounters with that same individual in order for the subject to be able to invoke the correct dossier — whether the goal at the time is simply to add more information to the dossier, or to bring the information already in it to bear on the subject's thoughts and deliberations during the encounter. And descriptive information making appeal to the time and place of an encounter with the object is seldom up to the task. Near the bottom of p. 276, Evans says:

... in any system in which information is stored about particular objects, there will be a central core of cases in which the subject has associated information with a capacity to recognize a particular individual. (p. 276)

This is helpful in that it gives us one of the best clues as to how Evans takes Ideas of objects to be organized. We collect information about an individual, in a dossier. And the (subpersonal psychological) principle used to, so to speak, identify the correct dossier is the recognitional capacity. For everyone you know well, there is a dossier of information. This dossier is connected to an Idea you have of this person. Your Idea of this person is not

fundamental. You don't track their physical location at all times in such a way as to enable you to have a fundamental identification of them. The suggestion here is that the core aspect of this Idea is the recognitional capacity. And this Idea is adequate because the recognitional capacity provides an ability to know what it would mean for this person to be identical to a person identified fundamentally (located perceptually in physical space).

At the top of p. 277, Evans lists some ways in which this operation of this system can depart from the normal case: the Idea (the dossier and the recognitional capacity) may outlive the individual it is associated with, or outlive the reliability of the capacity's ability to recognize that individual; more than one object may, unbeknownst to the subject, be erroneously 'recognized' as the same by the subject's recognitional capacity, with the consequence that information from more than one object is stored in the dossier; and so forth. Many of these will be discussed, especially in Chapter 11. But the occasional problems of this sort don't undercut the tremendous value of the overall process.

Evans closes with a plausible explanation for why we are ready to allow recognitional capacities (and location in space) to trump descriptive modes of identification. Evans remarks in this final paragraph are sparse, but I think his point is this. Descriptive resources are built on the basis of conceptualizations of information that have been derived from one or more information channels. But it is the nature of many of these channels that misinformation is not infrequent: especially in the testimony system, but memory as well. And even if the information was initially fine, the features of objects that are most likely to be of use in a definite description (but are not involved in recognition) are often likely to change from encounter to encounter, and less likely to be usefully individuating. Indeed,

one would expect any evolved recognition system to key precisely on features that are less likely to spontaneously change, and more difficult to purposefully change. (This yields some practical advice: if you are going to rob a bank, and you can obscure *one* thing, obscure the thing most commonly used for *recognition* — your face. The things most likely to be used to build a description — your hair color, the type and color of shirt you were wearing, your height, race, and so forth — won't be *useless* to the prosecution should you be caught, but they'll be much less useful than a video clip showing your face.)

8.3 Recognitional Capacities and Space

Here Evans does two things. First, he addresses a concern that was raised in 8.1 but put off, to the effect that recognitional capacities cannot be sufficient to distinguish an object from all others because of the possibility of confounding duplicates. He points out that our use of recognitional capacities is constrained by our implicit understanding of spatial and temporal factors. We understand that our recognitional capacities have limits — they can be relied upon only within some search domain. Second, Evans discusses the possibility of 'mixed Ideas' that have a recognitional component as well as a descriptive component — such as “the one I met”. The idea is that in some cases, especially when one realizes that there is a duplicate around, or when one just sort of knows that the spatial and temporal boundaries that constrain their recognitional capacity have been exceeded, subjects have an ability to construct a mixed-Idea that supplements their recognitional

capacity with further materials in order to render the Idea adequate. (This proposal will be modified considerably in the Appendix.)

Evans claimed in 8.1 that a subject's having a recognitional capacity for an object was sufficient for that subject's satisfaction of Russell's Principle — that is, it provides an adequate Idea of the object. Evans there brought up the following possible objection: since we can never know that there are not physical objects similar enough in appearance to the target object that we would mistakenly identify them as the target object, we can never be justified in claiming that these capacities allow us to distinguish the object from all others, as Russell's Principle requires. Thus recognitional capacities cannot underwrite adequate Ideas.

Evans' reply to this is that there is more to a recognitional capacity than just that aspect that this objection keys on. The objection focuses on what might be called *narrowly* recognitional aspects, based on the object's appearance. But Evans claims that *spatiotemporal location* is also an aspect of a recognitional capacity:

However good a child is at responding differentially to presentations of his mother's face, he cannot be credited with recognizing a particular person, rather than a comforting type of person, unless he has the resources for rebutting, on spatio-temporal grounds, provisional re-identifications of other objects rendered plausible by their appearance. (P. 279)

So if the child responded to a mother-looking person who entered from a door on the left in the same way that she responded to a mother-looking person who exited the door on the right just a half second

prior, then this would be evidence that what the child is exercising is not a recognitional capacity for an individual (her mother), but for a type (comforting people).¹

There are two kinds of location that can serve as the supplement to appearance-based recognition: egocentric and allocentric. The commonality is that in both cases, the location sets up a sort of default domain within which one takes it that one's narrow appearance-based capacity suffices to single out just one individual.

Evans' example of the sheep is of the egocentric variety, and it is clear enough. The radio example is of the allocentric variety. With these spatial considerations articulated, Evans cashes out (at the bottom of page 279 and the top of p. 280) what it is for a subject to have a recognitional capacity for some particular individual: i) the subject must be disposed to recognize x on the basis of its appearance; ii) there must not be another other individual y other than x in the relevant search domain that the subject is disposed to recognize with the same capacity; and iii) x is the right individual, that is, the sheep from which the subject's information derives.

The addition of egocentric and allocentric spatial location criteria to recognitional capacities rules out the blanket objection to seeing recognitional capacities as capable of satisfying Russell's Principle. Of course such capacities can still be undermined by the unknown presence of confounding individual *within the search domain*, but this is a different sort of worry (to be addressed presently). And a requirement of this sort of recognitional capacity is the ability to make a number of practical

¹ Though the issue is perhaps more complicated than Evans here suggests, since one could credit to the child a recognitional capacity for a particular, so long as one takes it the child conceives of particulars as capable of instant teleportation. We can see that reconitional capacities, space, and our understanding of objects are deeply interconnected.

inferences about the relevant search domain, based in large part on knowledge of how things, including oneself, moves in space.

Note that Evans speaks in terms of distances (e.g., "... so long as they are sufficiently far away") but this is shorthand for something like "within a relevant search domain". This is determined by implicit world knowledge that involves distances, time, kinds of movement, likelihood of qualitatively similar individuals, and much else. We in fact unarguably have such implicit knowledge: it can be seen to manifest when one leaves their laptop of a coffee shop table unattended for ten minutes, and returns to the right one despite several identical ones being meters away; but will check the name tag on a cat if left for only a few seconds in a room with one visually identical cat. (Consider also the kinds of knowledge in play when one takes from an airport baggage claim a bag last seen thousands of miles away only hours ago, from a line of dozens of similar bags.)

So what if there is such a confounding individual, an *unencountered* duplicate in the relevant domain? (Cases in which the subject encounters both but thinks there is only one will be discussed later.) This brings up the second issue Evans discusses in this section. There are **two sorts of case** here. In the **first**, we imagine that the subject *continues to assume that her recognitional capacity is adequate* because she is unaware of the confounding individual. In such a case the recognitional Idea will no longer be adequate.

The **second** sort of case is one where the subject becomes aware of the fact that there is a confounding individual in the search domain, and is aware of the fact that this individual has still not been encountered. Evans is keen to argue that from the fact that in the first sort of case described above the subject would not have an adequate Idea, it does not follow that in the second sort of case the subject must lack an adequate Idea. The reason is that upon learning of the second confounding individual, the subject will, so

to speak, switch Ideas from the one that she has just realized is not adequate to one that is. This new Idea is what Evans calls a *mixed Idea*. In this case, the mixed idea in question is based on the recognitional capacity along with a bit of conceptual supplementation of the form '... which I have met' or '... which I saw', or something of the sort that exploits the fact that the individual the subject means to think of is the one that was encountered.

Evans is careful to point out that even in the normal case this conceptual material, referencing the fact that the individual was met or perceived, is *available* to the subject. But normally it is redundant, and so normally is not exploited in the construction or maintenance of the subject's Idea of the object. But because it *is* there, the subject has an immediately available fall-back Idea to exploit, a mixed Idea. (This will be discussed further in the Appendix.)

8.4 Recognition and Recall

In this section and the next, Evans tries to cement the central place of recognition in a theory of thought and reference by pointing out that it cannot be analyzed away as just a kind of description. Evans' argument in this section and the next against a descriptivist analysis of recognition revolve around identifying three requirements of the descriptivist model: 1. The information used to effect recognition is stored in descriptive terms; 2. The subject can access this information; and 3. The subject actually accesses this descriptive information and uses it to recognize objects. In this section 8.5 will address (1). In this section, he argues that even if (1) were true, (2) and (3) would still be problematic. The argument directed at (2) is based on psychological facts about the differences between recognition and recall, specifically,

that people simply as a matter of psychological fact cannot recall many things they can recognize. The argument against (3) is brief, and mainly consists in spelling out what that would be like, and pointing out that once it is laid bare, it seems quite unlike how recognition is actually effected.

The reason this issue is important is that if recognition were a kind of covert description, then thoughts based on recognition would not be Russellian. But Evans thinks that recognition-based Ideas of objects are object-dependent, that is, are Russellian.

Evans will argue that recognitional capacities cannot be understood as kinds of descriptions. But first he explains why this is important. If they are a special case or a limiting case of a definite description, then like any definite description they would have a perfectly determinate content even if empty. The Ideas they support would not be Russellian, so to speak. But Evans thinks there is reason to take such Ideas to be Russellian:

It is difficult to see what could be the content of a thought which purported to rest upon a recognitional capacity, if there was no unique object which the subject was (or at least had been) disposed, in the exercise of the purported capacity, to identify. (VR pp. 284-5)

He starts his argument that recognitional capacities cannot be understood as a type of description by pointing out a distinction between two kinds of memory, *recall* and *recognition*. (It should be noted that in the memory literature Evans is discussing, 'recognition' is used in a particular way defined by that literature, it is not exactly the same as 'recognition' that is the topic of this chapter. We have two different technical terms here, but

it should be clear from context which is intended.) Evans describes the canonical psychological experiment demonstrating the difference: when presented with a list of words that one is to remember, there will be many items which, though one is not able to *recall* them later (if asked to write out a list of the words on the original list, the subject will not include these words), the subject will, if presented with them later, *recognize* them as words that were on the original list. This is part of common experience: if asked to name all of my colleagues at my former institution of employment, I am sure I would forget a few of the names; but if presented with a list including all of them (even if the list included a large number of 'distractor' names), I would be able reliably to recognize all of them.

Evans then develops another example: our memory for routes and landmarks. My ability to recall the features — even crucial landmarks — of a route I often drive may be rather poor; but my capacity to recognize items on the route might be very good.

Evans' point with all this is not to quibble over the term 'remember', but is to point out two things. First, that the information one can recall is often insufficient to serve to adequately describe or discriminate things that one in fact has a very good ability to recognize. My ability to recognize the right route to a location often requires much more by way of discriminatory power than what I can recall.

Second, the information that plays a role in the subject's recognitional capacities but which is not accessible to recall cannot be part of what the subject is *thinking*. The idea here seems to be that this information is stored subpersonally, in the subject's nervous system, and hence not available to the subject as materials to construct a description that they entertain.

(Note that there is a typo at the end of the first paragraph on page 287. It reads "... with his having forgotten that there is such a route", but should

say "... with his having forgotten that there is such a house." That 'house' is correct should be clear from the point being made in the text.)

With these points in hand, Evans claims that we must count recognitional capacities as providing for a capacity to support thought that cannot be understood on a descriptivist model. Evans provides an example of the man who thinks "That Russian was drunk." Given that the subject has a recognitional capacity for the object of his thought, we must accept that the subject really can entertain this thought. And this is true even if the subject is unable to recall features of the person sufficient to distinguish him from all others — as a *description* would have to do in order to be adequate to sustain singular thought. (Of course, the subject *could* very well think of the same person by description, as 'the man I saw last night in the corner drinking vodka', but Evans' example is meant to involve a subject essaying a recognition-based thought expressible felicitously as 'That Russian', as opposed to a descriptive thought of the form just mentioned. Evans' point is that the recognition-based 'That Russian' cannot be understood as a sort of covert description — a description of the Russian's appearance; not that one could not think of what is in fact the same person by means of a description.)

Evans' argument against the descriptivist model can be seen as putting pressure on three claims that are needed to assimilate recognitional capacities to descriptions:

1. What is stored, and made use of, in effecting a recognition is analyzable as a description.
2. It is a description the subject (as opposed to the subject's nervous system) can access.

3. The subject actually does access this information and effects recognition by means of it.

Evans' earlier remarks about the distinction between recognition and recall are directed at (2). At the top of page 288, Evans turns to (3), which is that *even if* (1) and (2) held, it would greatly falsify the facts of recognition to claim that we recognize something by recalling the vivid detailed image or description and comparing it to the object. The point can be made more strongly than Evans makes it. I can recognize any of hundreds of people as I walk through campus, where I typically see thousands of people walking about. Does it really make sense to think that for each of the thousands of faces I see *I* — not my nervous system, but *I* — run through each of these hundreds of descriptions (the vast majority of such attempts yielding a 'no match' assessment) and when one of them corresponds to the description of, for example, the department chair I effect a recognition? Surely not. The mechanisms of recognition are best understood, as Evans claims, by neural mechanisms, not mental (e.g. formulating and applying a description) ones.

In the last paragraph, Evans points out that so far he has not challenged the primary issue, which is (1). His points so far have been that even granting (1), the descriptivist model would face problems. In the next section he will address (1) directly.

8.5 Recognition by Description

In the last section, Evans argued first that even if the information used by the recognitional capacity were stored in terms suitable for constructing a description, subjects would not typically be able to recall it well enough for it to be used for that

purpose. And second, that even if we could recall it, recognition does not appear to involve anything like using such a recalled description to assess a match with an individual. In this section Evans moves to the deeper issue which is whether it makes sense to think of the information employed by a recognitional capacity in descriptive terms at all. The argument essentially shows that any such information, if it is used in this way, is best understood as playing a causal or dispositional role in a practical capacity. If we try to understand it as playing a role in reasoning, via an understanding of truth conditions supplied by the concept, then we provide for the possibility of errors that, in such cases, can't occur.

In the previous section, Evans granted provisionally that the information stored and used by our recognitional capacities could be employed in descriptively, and he argued that even if that were so, it does not seem plausible that we use that information to effect recognition in the way the descriptivist approach would require. In this section, Evans will argue that when we look at how the sub-personal mechanisms that effect recognition work, the suggestion that the use that information is put to is in terms of a description is untenable.

The first issue is how to understand the descriptivist proposal. It is not that the information that is stored is an actual description, such as 'has a receding hairline' or the ratio of the distance between the eyes to the distance between the nose and the mouth.²

² The investigation of how the brain codes for facial recognition has advanced much since Evans wrote this, but in a way that only makes his point stronger. The manner in which the nervous system effects face recognition hinges on features even more abstract than the sorts of features Evans mentions here (e.g. 'eigenfaces'), and hence even less amenable to descriptive capture.

Rather, Evans articulates what he takes to be the best version of the descriptivist proposal this way:

Granted, the *stored information* is not used by the subject to construct a description directly, in terms of eye spacing or ratios of distances between facial landmarks, or whatever. Rather, the information is used to construct a mental image that the subject does have access to, and the description used by the subject is something along the lines of 'x looks like *this*' or 'x looks more like *this* than anyone else I have met' where the 'this' is a sort of inner demonstrative aimed at this internally generated image of the face.

Evans says we can make the proposal even more plausible for the opposition, and easier to assess, if we conceive of the relevant image as external (like a police sketch) rather than internal. So the idea is that the subject is using the image to construct a description *the* ϕ , where the key concept in this description is "... looks like [image]" or "... looks more like [image] than anything else."³

³ Near the top of p. 291 Evans says:

It is slightly unfortunate to have a reference specifically to the subject's image in the appearance description, since ultimately it is intended that just such a description might figure in a specification of what is said or communicated between two speakers of the language. (p. 291)

It isn't entirely clear what Evans has in mind here, since it isn't clear that this would have to figure in the content of what is said, in the relevant sense. We are currently assessing whether an individual subject's recognitional capacity can be understood in descriptive terms. And this concerns the question whether recognition, as a way of *knowing which* object one is thinking of, is just a special case of a description. Now surely when one uses a *linguistic* description to identify the referent for communicative purposes, this description must figure in a specification of what is said. But the question whether the subject's recognitional capacity allows the subject to satisfy Russell's Principle in descriptivist terms is distinct from the question what is said by an expression that is understood by invoking one's recognitional capacity. For example, Evans' account of proper names is that in order to understand the

In order to qualify as a description, and in order to be a threat to Evans' contention that recognition-based Ideas are Russellian, this description needs to specify truth conditions. For it is just such conditions that are spelled out by the description, and explicate the content of the thought in absence of the object. One way to understand Evans' argument is that if we analyze the capacity such as to be able to see it as providing truth conditions, then it is no longer adequate as an account of how subjects effect recognition; and if we analyze it such as to do justice to how recognition is effected, then it doesn't provide for truth conditions.

In order to see the sketch plus *similarity* as providing for *truth* conditions, the sort of similarity assessment in play must be capable of being *true or false*, that is, it must be a *judgment*. It must make sense for the subject to be mistaken, to judge that the person is the thing more similar to [this] than anything else, and yet to be wrong about that.

On the other hand, a similarity assessment as usually understood is not assessable as true or false in this way. If I show you a sketch, and ask you which of two people seems to you to seem most similar to the sketch, then whatever you say goes. One response isn't right and the other wrong.

To illustrate this suppose that for whatever reason I start to use an external sketch to 'recognize' my Barack Obama. I hire a police sketch artist, and with my assistance they produce a sketch that fills its purpose. I carry it around, and when I come across someone I look carefully at them and the sketch, and if they strike me as sufficiently similar, I 'recognize' the person

name, one must think of the referent *in some way or other*. There is no prescribed way of thinking of the object. Hence, it is possible that one can understand the proper name by thinking of the referent via a recognitional (understood as a description) capacity, and yet this need not play a role in a description of *what is said* by the speaker who used the name.

as Obama. And let us suppose the process works very well, as well as normal facial recognition works.

Now it is consistent with all this that the sketch I carry has the following curious feature: if given to anyone else to use for the same purpose, they would invariably single out my brother as the 'recognized' person, and claim that Obama looks nothing like the sketch. This is the possibility of someone with an idiosyncratic similarity space. (We could make the example more stark, and the similarity space even more atypical by taking the sketch to consist of a single straight line segment.)

There is nothing at all about the conditions required for a sketch to be used by me for the intended purpose that rules this situation out. For purposes of my 'recognition' of Obama, it doesn't matter how well or poorly my similarity space matches up with those of other humans, and hence it does not matter what other people think the sketch looks like. All that is required is that the sketch has a structure that allows me to use it successfully.

With this background, let's explore the two possible ways of understanding the concept putatively being used here. First, let's suppose we take the concept to be objective. That is, the relevant *concept* I am using to construct a description for recognizing Obama — something like *the person most similar to this sketch* — is understood to be an objective concept. This requires that applications of the concept be subject to objective standards of correctness. Whatever those turn out to be would let the argument proceed, but let's assume that it is something like public or interpersonal agreement.

The good news about this way of looking at things is that the concept would be capable of providing truth conditions, even in absence of an object. And this is ultimately what would be required as part of an argument

to the effect that recognition-based identification is a type of description, and hence non-Russellian.

The bad news is that this understanding has unacceptable consequences. Evans summarizes the point in this way:

Yet it would surely be absurd to be driven to the conclusion that X was really thinking of Y's brother (whom he has also met), and not Y, on the ground that most people find the police artist's representation more like Y's brother than Y. (p. 294-5)

The point is that if we treat the similarity assessment as objective, and hence as capable of being true or false (and hence as capable of providing truth conditions), then it will be true that in my example, I am thinking, via the sketch, of my brother, despite the fact that everything about my behavior, including the fact that I successfully use it to identify Obama, suggests that that is absurd.

So the stratagem of treating the concept as objective hits a brick wall. Suppose we take it to be subjective, that is, as supporting a description along the lines of: *the person (who strikes me as) most similar to this sketch*. Here another problem emerges. We are invited to explain my success in using the sketch to help me identify Obama as due to the fact that the sketch looks *to me* to be similar to Obama. In order for this explanation to be non-vacuous, the subjective similarity must be there independently of my identification of Obama.

But as the case makes clear the explanation seems to go the other way around. It is only because my use of the sketch in this way results in me identifying Obama that it makes sense to say that the sketch *looks to me to be similar to Obama*. As Evans put it at the end of the section:

We cannot say that X recognizes Y because Y satisfies the property ϕ ; rather, we can say, at most, that Y satisfies property ϕ in virtue of X's recognizing him. (p. 296)

In this case, what we have is an expression of a disposition with respect to some physical structure. Something about this structure allows it to play a part in a causal or even information-processing account of how I might recognize my brother. But this will be an explanation in terms of subpersonal mechanisms trading in physical structures and (non-conceptual) information processing. But it doesn't give us the materials for a truth-condition-specifying description.

We can see now the point of constructing a case where the sketch looks objectively nothing like the person it is used to recognize. It allows us to separate two things that normally go together, and by separating them avoid a confusion. Because most people are 'normal' in this way, it will turn out that whatever physical structure is useful to one person for purposes of recognition will also be a structure that is objectively (publicly) similar to the object. This makes it too easy to see the sketch as providing a *reason* for making the recognition, as opposed to its merely playing a causal role in the recognition. But by making the sketch objectively unlike the object, we can see how these two elements come apart.

Notice that one can see a connection between this topic and topics that came up in Chapters 6 and 7. It is agreed on all sides that there is information stored by the nervous system. The question is how to understand it. For Evans, this information is non-conceptual. By itself, it is not suitable for specifying truth conditions, it is not assessable as true or false. It can, however, "[serve] as the input to a thinking, concept-applying, and reasoning system" (p. 158) and when this happens, the result is

something that is so accessible, and can provide truth conditions. But even when this happens, it is not that the information state itself has suddenly become conceptual. Rather, there is a performance, a judgment, guided by the information, that carries the content.

And as Chapter 7 points out, our only access to this information is through such truth-evaluable performances. We can correctly assess a bit of this sub-personal information as being differentially responsible for some judgment — that the thing I am looking at is red (as opposed to any other color) — and hence acquire an easy (but misleading!) way to characterize that information as carrying the content “... is red” (or “... is Obama”). This topic is one explored at length by Sellars in, e.g. *Science and Metaphysics*.

8.6 Mixed Ideas

In this brief final section, Evans expands on a topic first broached in 8.3: the possibility of a subject having an Idea of an object that is mixed in that it involves more than one way of knowing which object is in question. For example, I might encounter someone I met on a previous day, and in taking them to be the same person I would have an Idea that was both recognition-based (from the previous encounter) and demonstrative (from my current encounter). Such mixed Ideas are hybrids of more than one of the pure ‘ways of knowing which’. Evans argues that these mixed Ideas can, depending on specifics, fail to be adequate if in fact each component identifies a different object. I close the section by suggesting that this last claim of Evans might not, given other aspects of his system, be his considered opinion.

Evans starts off with by introducing a technical term that could cause confusion. Starting in Chapter 1 we have been using the expression 'atomic statement' to mean a statement that does not have parts that are themselves statements. Here Evans introduces 'atomic thought' but its meaning isn't the thought analogue of atomic statement. Rather, it is a thought that employs no more than one way of thinking of the object. Evans opens with an example of a thought that involves two ways of thinking of the same object: an Idea of an object resulting from a judgment of identity between a man met on a previous day, and a man currently demonstratively identified. Upon making the identity judgment, the information in the controlling conceptions of each of these Ideas will be combined into a single dossier on the strength of the identity judgment. But moreover, the means of identification of the object — one's ability to know which object is in question — involves both a recognition and demonstrative aspect. Indeed, it doesn't just involve both, but it depends on both converging on the same object.

Evans points out that in the sort of case just imagined the Idea, though mixed, will be *decomposable* into its components, because presumably the subject will be in a position to recover the original Ideas by segregating the information back into distinct controlling conceptions. This might be necessary if the subject learns that she has made a mistake, and that *this man* is in fact not *that man*. In such a case, Evans says, the subject is not in trouble, for she can recover her original Ideas in such a way as to make sense of the denial of the identity judgment. (She will have adequate Ideas capable of serving on both sides of the identity operator.)

But it is also possible that the subject is not in a position to recover the original Ideas. For example, after a long period of time over which the subject had many encounters with what she took to be one person but were in fact two — twins perhaps. In each new encounter the object is identified demonstratively, and the information gained is added to the growing dossier. We are to imagine that the subject is unable to segregate the information into distinct files that correspond to the two objects. In this sort of case Evans claims that no coherent Idea of the object is available.

That, anyway, is the doctrine as stated in the text. I should point out that I think it can't represent Evans' considered opinion, though. The argument of this section seems to require that one's ability to know which object is in question derives somehow from the information that is in the controlling conception of the object. It is only if this is so that an inability to segregate the information well enough could prevent one from making the required identification(s). But it isn't clear that on Evans' view the information in the controlling conception plays this role. There are two possible routes from this information to an identification of the object. First, the informational content might single some object out; second, any bit of information will have some object as its causal source. Evans is clear throughout the book that the first mechanism is not in play. The second plays a role in a thought's well-groundedness, and so understood an Idea with information from multiple sources would be incapable of supporting a well-grounded thought.

But this does not appear to be what Evans has in mind here. First, well-groundedness never gets mentioned. Second, he describes it as a new sort of error:

But, as with all mixed Ideas, there is now a new possibility of error — the possibility that there should not be just one object which the Idea identifies. And in this kind of case (unlike the case of decomposable mixed Ideas), where this possibility obtains, no coherent thought-content can be found. (p. 297)

So here it seems to be that the problem is one of identifying an object. But the information in the controlling conception doesn't, in either of the two ways discussed above, do the work of identifying the object. First, to repeat, Evans is clear that the informational content is not used to identify the object. He is clear that misinformation can be rampant. Second, the entire argument against the PM is that the object of thought is NOT determined by the information's causal source. Indeed, the fact that the Idea can identify an object other than the one that is the causal source is why ill-groundedness is a threat.

Here is my best attempt to repair the point. First, it is certainly possible that because I take myself to have successfully re-identified a single object on multiple occasions, I might, so to speak, *conjoin* the means of identification in such a way as to yield no object if in fact the previous episodes were not identifying the same object. I might think of an object as the thing that I saw last week AND I can recognize AND is standing over there. So there is this danger. But note that there is no massive barrier to decomposing the Ideas here. And moreover, as we shall see in Chapter 9, there will typically be an 'intended referent' provided by one of these modes of identification over the others. (See remarks in Section 9.3 on the 'lowest level action plan' of reference.)

Second, we can ask why Evans, for purposes of filling out his program, might think that the result he argues for here is necessary. What would be lost if we just recognize the 'conjunction' version of the problem I

offered above, and left it at that? The situation is not a matter of ill-groundedness. And it is not like the case of the subject who attempts a 'here'-thought when they believe themselves to be stationary but are really moving. The examples are similar, since they are cases where there are multiple objects (/locations) in a situation where the subject thinks there is only one. But the problem there was that the subject employed *one* means of identification, and it didn't net one object. Here there are distinct, successful, means of identification employed on each occasion.

A third possibility might come from Chapter 11. There Evans will make use of the notion of the information in circulation via a name, and a problem can arise if more than one object is the source of information circulating via a name. And he will argue that there are situations in which, because there is information from two distinct objects associated with a name in a community, the name has no referent. This is analogous to the point being made here. But despite some analogies, the phenomenon discussed in that context is crucially distinct in several ways. (This should be clear once we've finished Chapter 11.)

Given all this, I think the safe move is to take these comments by Evans to have been a misstep. There are indeed dangers similar to the one he tries to identify here: a risk of conjunction-failure (as described above) if the subject was unaware of the problem; and a more general threat of ill-groundedness that might be an issue even if the subject became aware of the problem. But it doesn't seem as though the exact sort of problem Evans alludes to here is in fact a problem, given other, more central, parts of his program.

8.A Appendix

In the Appendix McDowell traces some lines of thought Evans probably would have explored more had there been time. These lines concern the right way to understand the aspect of recognition-based thoughts that renders them typically immune to the problem posed by duplicates elsewhere in the universe. There are two parts to this section. First, Evans suggests that what he described in the chapter as a fall-back option — a hybrid Idea consisting of a recognitional capacity and (something like) a descriptive element to the effect of “which I met” — is in fact the primary mode of identification. Second, he points out that if this is the standard mode of identification in recognition-based thoughts, then it provides another argument for their Russellian status. At the end I explain why I think the position discussed in this Appendix is probably not the best way to frame what ought to be Evans' considered opinion, and that we can reconstruct a friendly amendment by bringing in resources from the Appendices to Chapters 5 and 6.

The body of the chapter maintained that having a recognitional capacity is sufficient for having an adequate Idea of an object, so long as this is understood to include the appropriate spatiotemporal limitations described in 8.3. But it was also claimed that in a situation in which the subject became aware of a duplicate in the search domain, some descriptive material along the lines of ‘which I have met’ would be available to construct a fall-back Idea up to the task of individuating the object. (Interestingly, the text says that the recognition-based thought is *supplanted* by, not *supplemented with*, an Idea that incorporates this additional descriptive material. The suggestion seems to be that the resulting hybrid

Idea — incorporating somehow both a recognitional and a quasi-descriptive element, is *sui generis*, not just the original Idea plus some descriptive material.)

But now in the Appendix the suggestion is that this fall-back case is actually the primary case:

... it seems undeniably the case that at least part of the conception that one has of an individual one can think of, in the way that is the concern of this chapter, is that it is a conception of an individual which one has met. (p. 299)

Note that this is not exactly the same work that is done by the implicit 'search domain' that is taken limit the adequacy of the recognitional capacity to some spatiotemporal domain. The current proposal has to do with the Idea incorporating the 'conception of' an actual information gathering encounters with the object. One could have either of these (search domain, conception of encounters) without the other.

The final paragraph canvasses another potential advantage of this new conception. The argument of 8.4 and 8.5 centered around an attempt to preserve the Russellian status of recognition-based thoughts by arguing that they were not special cases of descriptions. Evans now voices a potential objection to this defense, which is this: if the only two options are descriptive or Russellian, then showing that an Idea is not (so to speak) descriptive will show that it is Russellian. But perhaps there is another way to be non-Russellian. Specifically, perhaps even if recognitional capacities are not descriptive, they might still be nono-Russellian, in that they might be able to establish truth conditions even in absence of an object. As Evans says, in filling out this objection:

... a recognitional capacity is a disposition to respond in certain ways to an object on the basis of its appearance (the basis being agreed not to be capturable in a description); and surely someone could have such a disposition even if no object capable of presenting the triggering appearance had ever existed — it could still be true that if an object were to present the requisite appearance it would activate the disposition. (p. 301)

Evans claims that even if this is correct, on the new conception (on which a recognition-based thought aimed at a particular is a sort of recognition-descriptive hybrid invoking the conception of an encounter between the object and the subject), the Russellian status of these thoughts is secured.

I don't think that this is stated in the best way. First, I will indicate why the position outlined in this Appendix doesn't quite work as advertised, and then how we get proposal that does work by bringing in some lessons from the Appendices to Chapters 5 and 6.

The problem with the suggestion that the hybrid Ideas do better at establishing the Russellian status of thoughts employing the Idea is that it seems as though the non-existence of the object would not render the thought-attempt contentless, exactly because it is, in essence, additional *descriptive* material. Indeed, a perfectly coherent notion of the content would be available: an object that would trigger the recognitional disposition and also be such that the subject had encountered it. Just as a recognitional capacity can be a disposition that would pick out a specific object if it existed, so too the descriptive component 'which I have met' would also be true of an object if I had met it. It seems that truth conditions can be constructed from these materials. Adding these two non-Russellian ingredients together does not obviously result in a Russellian Idea.

Here is an attempt at a friendly ammendment. Recall the topic from the Appendix to Chapter 5, which was how to understand the difference between *the* ϕ and *that* ϕ . In my notes on that Appendix I pointed out that there were three options for understanding what this difference amount to:

- 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* ϕ is *the tallest spy in the room*, *that* ϕ would be cashed out in terms of the definite description *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* (not the conception that) thoughts employing it are information-based.

Evans argues in many places that B is not the way to go. And in the main text of Chapter 5 adopts a position along the lines of A. The line he explored in the Appendix to Chapter 5 is to go with C. That is, to reconceive the relevant Idea not as a descriptive Idea that has another requirement (well-groundedness) bolted on to it, but as an Idea that has, as part of its constitutive requirements, that it is information-based.

Here in Chapter 8 we see Evans exploring recognition-based Ideas, and in the body of the chapter he argues that a hybrid Idea understood essentially along the lines of B can be used as a fall-back if one becomes aware of unencountered duplicates. Here in the Appendix he is suggesting that these hybrid Ideas are in fact the primary case, not a fall-back. I am now suggesting that Evans considered opinion should be to amend the

proposal of of the chapter not to the B-esque hybrids, but rather to something along the lines of C.

The reasons are first that it seems to do the work that needs to be done, but in a way that makes it consistent with what he says elsewhere. Assuming of course we take the notes that became the Appendix to Chapter 5 to represent, so to speak, the cutting edge of the evolution of his thinking on these matters that didn't quite make it into his revisions by the time of his death. And in particular, we take it that those notes were written later than the notes that were used by McDowell to construct the Chapter 8 Appendix. And second, that it does a better job of doing what he wants to achieve in this last part of this Appendix, which is produce an argument for the Russellian status of recognition-based Ideas.

How this last bit works may not be obvious, since it might be wondered why working in "which I have met" as part of a supplementation to the purely recognitional component fares any worse than working in a requirement that the Idea has as part of its characterization that it be information-based in this way. A key can be seen in the last parenthetical remark of the appendix:

We can now see that when we say that a recognitional capacity is a disposition to respond in certain ways to an object on the basis of its appearance, we have to give the phrase 'an object' wider scope than the specification of the content of the disposition. (p. 301)

This is enigmatic, but here is one way to cash it out. In the guide for Part 5 of the Appendix to Chapter 6 I tried to spell out a distinction Evans too-quickly made between 'content-giving' descriptions from 'situation-specifying' descriptions. I tried to spell it out this way:

1. Specifying the content of the 'thought' the hallucinator is having. Or to put it another way, the truth condition: the conditions that would make the thought true.
2. Specifying the sort of situation such that, had it obtained, the thought-attempt would have content. Or to put it another way: the conditions, such that had they been actualized, there would have been a thought content.

I suggest that we can use this to provide an interpretation of what is meant here. If the descriptive aspect of the hybrid Idea is understood as a content-giving description, then it is just another version of B above. But if we understand it as a situation-specifying description, then this is not the case. This is one way to unpack what the wide-scope reading of 'an object' would amount to. The description of the situation such that, had that situation obtained the thought-attempt would have been successful, is a description that might use an existential specification: *had there been an object that was the source of the recognitional capacity, then the thought would have content*. But given the distinction between (1) and (2), we cannot then assume that the existential that worked fine as part of a situation-specifying description would serve as part of the content-giving description.