Recanati on Mental Files

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Given my own views on mental files ("dossiers") and attitude ascriptions, it will come as no surprise that I find François Recanati's recent book, *Mental Files*, to be highly congenial. However, this is supposed to be an author-meets-*critics* symposium, so 'highly congenial' is not much to bring to the table. I shall therefore try to be more of a critic by focussing on particular parts of Recanati's book where I found myself having doubts.

1.   *The circularity objection*

Recanati proposes to use the idea of a mental filing system to explain *de re* ("non-descriptive", 34) modes of presentation, and thereby, to explain singular thought. "By deploying the file (or its 'address' or 'label') in thought, the subject can think about the object in virtue of standing in the relevant relation to it" (37), where the 'relevant relation' is the 'epistemically rewarding' ('ER') acquaintance relation to the object S's entering into which triggered the setting up of the file in S's mind. It is these relations that determine which thing a file is 'about'; the criterion is *not* that the file is about whatever satisfies its contents, or a weighted proportion of its contents (57).

   In the ideal situation, there is a 1-1 correspondence between S's files and the objects to which S stands or has stood in ER relations. But in the real world, we often make many-one errors, failing to recognize identities and as a result creating dis-

tinct, unrelated ('unlinked') files. The proposal is then that we can analyze identity judgements in terms of 'a linking operation on files' (99). However, a circularity problem arises, for the operation of the filing system depends on identity judgements: we put information acquired through various ER relations into *this* file rather than *that* one because we take the object we are acquiring information about to be the object that this file rather than that one concerns.

   The circularity problem is only a problem if the identity judgements the filing system is supposed to explain are of the same sort as the identity judgements which control the filing of this piece of information here and that one there. For then these controlling identity judgements could not be given an explanation in terms of distinctness of files. Recanati's response, as I understand it, is to deny that the filing system is controlled by identity judgements. He distinguishes two kinds of files, proto-files and conceptual files (64–5). A proto-file allows acquisition of information through just one ER relation, e.g., introspection for the proto-file **self***. A proto-file then evolves into a 'conceptual' file, or just 'file', by allowing information from any source, so long as it is taken to be information about the same object as the file concerns (**self**, but not **self***, includes your date of birth, 65). But a proto-file can be augmented without any mental act of *taking this thing to be the same as that one*. So there are no identity judgements which are in any sense prior to the file architecture.

   On what basis are proto-files augmented, if not via an identity judgement? Recanati appeals to a distinction between *judgements* of identity and *presumptions* of identity. This is illustrated (48) by

   (1)   Cicero is Roman; Cicero is an orator; so, some Roman is an orator.

The idea is that we can make this inference without judging that (the first-mentioned) Cicero is (the second-mentioned) Cicero, so to speak: we simply presume the identity of the person we are talking about in the first premise with the person we are talking about in the second premise. To suppose that there is a suppressed identity premise is to embark on a regress (Campbell *et al.*) or to make room for a question, is Cicero Cicero?, which no-one who understands the discourse can sensibly raise (92, quoting Fine). Another example, due to Campbell, involves information gained through different modalities: if I see a glass of water and think "it's very full" and then touch it and think "it's cold", I can file "very full" and "is cold" in the same proto(?)-file without depending on some identity judgement like "what I'm seeing is what I'm touching".

I find the examples unpersuasive and the general strategy dubious. In the case of (1), I don't see why there isn't a judgement like "the reference of my first use of 'Cicero' is the same object as the reference of my second use" supporting the inference – unlike formal languages, in natural language the very same name can have multiple references, and the second "Cicero" in (1) might refer to my neighbour Cicero, who, though no Roman, is quite the orator. And ruling this out with an implicit identity premise doesn't seem to launch us on an endless regress (the "my"'s have to be co-referential, but the first person is surely a special case).

In the case of cross-modal judgments, one can certainly be mistaken. Suppose a vial of perfume on a shelf in front of you tips over, a few drops spill, and moments later the air is heavy with scent. You might think, looking at the drops, "it's pale green", and then a moment later, "it smells of lilies" and file both items in the same place. But you would be wrong to do so, for the perfume that spilled is a display prop and has no scent, and you did not notice that just as the vial tipped over, a

woman wearing a different perfume walked up behind you. So what you're looking at is *not* what you're smelling. If you discover this you will split your single file into two, which suggests that the false identity was implicated in your initial file set-up.

Moreover, the verbs one is tempted to use to describe the use (or supposed non-use) of identity judgements are all attitude verbs: one assumes, presumes, presupposes or takes for granted that so-and-so is identical to such and such (Campbell's 'trade on' means, I think, 'presuppose'). So the proposition appears to be entering into thought in *some* way as the assignment of new information to current files and the creation of new files proceeds. Recanati (100) ends up denying this, asserting that linking of proto-files proceeds at a 'preconceptual' level. This seems to me to be something of a retreat, and it's not clear it's necessary. What we want from the theory of files is ultimately an account of the senses of referring terms that explains how some identity judgments can be informative. I am not sure the apparatus of proto-files is needed for this. On coming to be in an ER relation to *x*, one may make the judgement 'this guy is Cicero', perhaps because he is indulging in oratory. Here there is a demonstrative mode of presentation of the speaker ('this guy') and a pre-existing 'Cicero' file. The name gets its sense from the file, perhaps 'the subject of this file', while the m.p. expressed by 'this guy' has nothing to do with files; hence the informativeness of 'this guy is Cicero'. Alternatively, 'this guy' is associated with a temporary file and the realization that he's Cicero establishes a 'downloading' link from the temporary file to the preexisting 'Cicero' file. 'This guy is Cicero' is still informative, and I don't see any circularity that threatens explanation of the informativeness as association of the terms with distinct files.

2.   Descriptive names

Recanati holds that for *S* to be capable of having a singular thought about an object *x*, *S* must be in possession of a mental file, one whose subject is *x* by virtue of its having been generated by *S*'s coming to be in an *acquaintance relation* to *x* (147). However, the category of descriptive names threatens to be a counterexample to this: if 'Julius' is stipulated to refer to whoever invented the zip, then if I say 'Julius was ingenious' I am expressing a singular thought about Gideon Sundback, and therefore from (2a) we can move to (2b):

(2)   a.   I believe Julius was ingenious

b.   There is someone who I believe was ingenious, to wit, Julius, i.e., GS

even though I stand in no acquaintance relation to Sundback.

Recanati is willing to take (2b) at face value, with the result that a problem is generated for his account of singular thought that he responds to by appeal to a distinction I am not sure I understand, between thought-*vehicle* and thought-*content*. I think instead that he should reject (2b), for it is arrived at by a step of exportation: first we move 'Julius' above 'believes', and *then* existentially generalize. But the legitimacy of the exportation step depends entirely on already taking my *Julius was ingenious* as a singular thought about Sundback.

The general problem with exportation is illustrated in the following example in the style of one of Recanati's (152):

(3)   Imogen believes anyone can learn French in a week.

Suppose François knows (3), knows that I am someone of whose existence Imogen has no inkling, and says to me: Imogen believes *you* can learn French in a week.

There is, according to Recanati, a sense in which this belief-ascription is true. But I don't think there is such a sense, since the example relies on the same kind of illicit exportation as in (2) (assuming it's not being supported by a very implausible principle of closure of belief under Universal Elimination ($\forall$E)). First, 'anyone' is exported: anyone is an x such that Imogen believes x can learn French in a week. Secondly, $\forall$E is applied: *you* are an x such that Imogen believes x can learn French in a week. Probably this is a perspicuous synonym of 'Imogen believes *you* can learn French in a week', but if not, the exportation error is compounded by importing or lowering the indexical into the scope of the attitude verb. I am not just banging my fist on the table here. If there is anything at all to the *de re/de dicto* distinction, exportation of quantifiers (determiner phrases) across attitude verbs is invalid. For example, like everyone else in this room, I believe that some person or persons invented the zip (the prototype didn't just materialize out of thin air). But I think that for most of us there was no person, or there were no persons, whom we believed invented the zip, until I mentioned Sundback. So I don't find the use of attitude ascriptions to attribute singular thoughts in these cases to have any intuitive appeal.

Independently, there is a strong argument against singular thought-expression by 'Julius' judgements, namely, Evans' challenge to distinguish the belief 'Julius invented the zip' from the belief 'the inventor of the zip invented the zip'. An example without proper names may be useful. Suppose you're wondering if bicycling and canoeing the Equator would be a sensible retirement project, and you ask me 'how long is the circumference of the Earth at the Equator?'. I do not have a clue, but unwilling to disappoint, I reply: "Let's introduce the term 'one girdle' to stand for the distance that is the circumference of the Earth at the Equator. There you go, then – the Earth's circumference is one girdle." There is a clear sense in which you still

don't know how long the trip would be, because you do not know how long a girdle is (so this isn't like Kripke's metre-stick example, where, I presume, the reference-fixer in standing in front of the stick and can *see* how long a meter is).

In the same vein, if a detective investigating the (canonical five) Whitechapel murders expresses his frustration with "We'll never find out who did this", his assistant might reply, "Well, let's stipulate that 'Jack the Ripper' stands for whoever did this. So now we know that Jack the Ripper is the culprit. Happy?" One imagines that this increases frustration instead of relieving it. Indeed, this case provides an argument, not just an intuition, against exporting descriptive names. For the following is true:

   (4)   Even today, we don't know who committed the Whitechapel murders.

But if we don't know who committed them, there cannot be someone who we know committed them. So even if we do know Jack the Ripper committed the murders, exportation of 'Jack the Ripper' outside the scope of 'knows' is invalid. Therefore, a singular thought is not expressed with 'Jack the Ripper committed the Whitechapel murders'.[1]

However, this way of resolving the challenge to Recanati's necessary condition for singular thought (possession of a mental file generated by coming to be in an ER relation to something) does not solve all the puzzles descriptive names generate. For an intuition of singularity can still be elicited, even if attitude ascriptions don't lend themselves to this purpose: indicative unembedded statements using descriptive names seem to have *singular truth-conditions*, as becomes apparent when they

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1.   The truth of (4) fixes a sense of 'know who'. Perhaps there is some other sense of 'know who' in which we do know who because we know it was Jack. But it's a further step to allow exportation of 'Jack' and the consequent attribution of singular knowledge. The truth of (4) might be held to show that all we really know is that 'Jack the Ripper' denotes whoever committed the murders (descriptive names *would* be exportable if we could use them to express knowledge).

are embedded in *modal* contexts: Julius could have been a dimwit and invented nothing, if Jack had died in infancy he would have murdered no-one, and so on. The singularity consists in the states of affairs whose possibility these judgements depend on having an individual as a constituent: the person who invented the zip, the person who committed the Whitechapel murders, etc. It must be possible for *that* individual, whoever he or she was, to have been a dimwit, to have died in infancy, etc., for any of those 'could' statements to be true.[2]

As Kripke has made familiar, this raises an epistemic issue: if it's contingent whether or not Julius invented the zip, then there are possible worlds where he does and possible worlds where he doesn't. Isn't it an empirical question which group the actual world belongs to?[3] Yet it seems we can know without empirical investigation that Julius invented the zip – it is *a priori* – just because of the way 'Julius' was introduced into the language. Thus the actual world belongs to the group of worlds where Julius invented the zip, and we've just established this without empirical investigation.

Responses to this quandary fall into two main classes: those which accept that there is a single semantic entity which is both *a priori* and contingent, and try to defuse the puzzlement this causes by arguing that the contingency is cheap (Evans, Davies, Humberstone), and those which implement some version of Dummett's assertive content/ingredient sense distinction (Donnellan, Kaplan, Chalmers, myself)

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2.   I ignore issues about counterfactuals with impossible antecedents.

3.   Consider the principle Q: 'for any individual *x*, it is an empirical question whether or not *x* invented the zip'. If we grant Q, then for Julius it is an empirical question whether or not *he* invented the zip. This attempts *de re* quantification into 'it is an empirical question whether', and if it's accepted then we're one importation away from the conclusion that it's *a posteriori* whether Julius invented the zip. But for a Fregean, Q is unacceptable, since an objectual variable occurs free in an epistemic context. What is meaningful is Q': for any individual *x* and any mode of presentation *m* of *x*, it is an empirical question whether or not the proposition consisting in *m* composed with the sense of 'invented the zip' is true. Q' is false if the reference-fixing stipulation for 'Julius' endows the name with a mode of presentation of Sundback, and irrelevant if the stipulation did not.

on which there is no one thing which is both contingent and *a priori* (what's *a priori* is something metalinguistic in Donnellan and perhaps Kaplan).[4] Where is Recanati's vehicle/content distinction situated in this landscape?

Recanati suggests that we can understand the principle

(5) To possess and exercise a mental file whose referent is *x* the subject must stand in some acquaintance relation to *x*

'normatively' (158). This reduces the 'must' in (5) to 'should' or 'ought to', which is much weaker than the natural reading, since it doesn't impose any constraint on what the actual world is like, and leaves us wondering what conditions there are whose satisfaction by *S* can be inferred from *S*'s possession of a *de re* file (the alethically necessary conditions). According to Recanati, you don't need actual acquaintance with *x* to open a file referring to *x*. Rather, it is sufficient to *expect* acquaintance (164). And then the things we are in a position to entertain are not singular thoughts about *x*, but rather singular thought-*vehicles*, items that lack a certain content but will acquire it if we do eventually come to be in an acquaintance relation to *x*.

One problem here is that since 'expect' is an attitude verb, the 'expected acquaintance' criterion had better not demand that there *be* an object such that we expect acquaintance with *it*. For on Recanati's own view, there isn't (yet) such an object, only a vehicle awaiting its passenger. Perhaps a *de dicto* expectation is sufficient, but this seems unlikely. For the file has to *refer* to *x* if we are to make sense of the modal cases. Perhaps it does, but then reference has been cut loose from acquain-

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4. Kaplan's view seems metalinguistic because the logical truth of 'I am here now' is a result of its having a true content in each context. Non-metalinguistic proposals tend to run into the 'mixed context' problem raised by Richard against an early version of my view, according to which I am committed to '◇(Julius didn't invent the zip and the proposition that Julius invented the zip is true)'. Somehow this sounds less bad with 'the assertive content that Julius invented the zip is true'.

tance relations.

Second, there is the question of understanding 'vehicle'. Is this like Kaplan's character? If so, it's again a problem to see how the modal cases are to be accounted for, since a contentless character won't refer to an object. Yet it's on account of 'Julius' referring to Sundback that 'Julius invented the zip' gets its contingency. Indeed, even if thinking of the vehicle metaphor in terms of Kaplanian character is wrong, it's hard to see how to explain 'vehicle' in any way that accounts for the modal cases, since the content, and thus the object, has yet to get on board. So there will have to be some other entity of which modal status is predicated, one which involves the object. And then we have another two-entity theory of the kind which has trouble with Richard's mixed contexts (see note 2).

3.   Attitude ascriptions

Recanati thinks that mental files sometimes enter into the truth-conditions of attitude ascriptions in a rather complex way. For he argues that the truth of some ascriptions of mental states to others requires a specific mental file to be possessed by the ascribee. The ascriber gets to invoke the ascribee's file *via* a so-called *indexed* file (183), which is the ascriber's representation of the ascribee's representation of the object the ascribed state is about. Recanati, perhaps advisedly, does not attempt a recursive semantics implementing this theory, but a target logical form might be something like

(6)   *S* believes *t* is *F:* **bel(S, m_t⌢⌜is F⌝)**

where corners are sense quotes, m_t is a specific mode of presentation of *S*'s of the denotation of *t*, picked out by the ascriber's indexed *S*-file for *t*, and the concatena-

tion symbol stands for composition of senses.

The motivating example, the Roll Call Game, is due to Daniel Morgan (186). I present a version in more familiar guise. Lois sees that she is in some danger and is visibly in an agitated state of mind. The Man of Steel, personified as Clark, approaches her, notices that though she sees him she doesn't seem any happier, and thinks to himself: "To be expected. She doesn't realize that I am Superman." According to Recanati, the Man of Steel employs in thought an indexed file standing for Lois's visual mode of presentation of the approaching extraterrestrial, and for the Man of Steel's ascription "She doesn't realize that I am Superman" to be true, Lois has to be employing that visual mode of presentation when she thinks, "Oh, it's only Clark". So where $\mathbf{m_{vis}}$ is this mode of presentation, or more carefully, some indexed file in the mind of the Man of Steel representing it, the truth-condition for (7a) is (7b):

(7) a. She doesn't realize that I am Superman

 b. **not(realize(she, $\mathbf{m_{vis}}$⌢ ⌜is superman⌝))**

However, I am sceptical that even the Man of Steel can *refer* to ('stand for', 183) private modes of presentation Lois employs in her thinking, and it's hard to see how this idea allows for straightforward communication. If the Man of Steel tells A that Lois didn't realize that he was Superman, does this require A to have an indexed file for the Man of Steel's indexed file? And then if A tells B, does B need a representation of A's representation of a representation? We seem to be generating another unappealing infinite hierarchy here.

I think it abstracts too much from the context to offer just (8a) for (7a), but (8b) looks better:

(8) a. **(some m: of(m, me))[not(realize(she, m ⌢ ⌜is superman⌝))]**

 b. **(some m: of(m, me, as now personified))**
 [not(realize(she, m ⌢ ⌜is superman⌝))]

Even assuming the range of **some** to be contextually restricted to modes of presentation in Lois's repertoire, it's too easy to for (8a) to be true, e.g., Lois may have seen the Man of Steel in the distance yesterday and have had no idea who it was; this is a verifying instance of (8a), but we don't want it to be a verifier of (7a), for the context-dependence we surely take into account when evaluating (7a) is lost. However, (8b) goes some way to restoring it, and the constraint **of(m, him, as then personified)** is easily passed along in communication with third, fourth and fifth parties.[5]

4. *Names and the a priori*

One of Kripke's most effective objections to 'famous deeds' sense theories of names is that such theories predict *a priori* status for judgements involving (i) the name and (ii) mention of the famous deeds in question. For it is obvious (now that Kripke points it out) that these judgements are all *a posteriori*. So if the sense of 'Aristotle' is 'the philosopher who tutored Alexander and wrote the Nicomachean Ethics', then it's *a priori* that Aristotle wrote the Nicomachean Ethics and tutored Alexander, according to the famous deeds sense theory. But who's to say that Nicomachus didn't write the book himself, and his father just took the credit? And that tutoring Alexander wasn't just a story put about by Aristotle's friends to make him seem more connected to the powerful than he actually was?

The same question arises for any sense theory, if there are descriptions which according to the theory capture the sense of the name. In Recanati's case, the relevant

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5.   In **'of(m, him, as then personified)'**, '**as then personified**' characterizes a type of mode of presentation the tokens of which include the m.p. Lois exercised in the encounter in question.

description would be something like 'the subject of this file' or 'the person this file is about'. So if on first encountering the name 'NN' I open a file labelled by the name, is it *a priori* that NN is the subject of the 'NN' file? It seems, for Kripkean reasons, that the answer must be 'no', for I may misidentify a certain individual *y* as NN, and fill up my file on NN with the states and doings of *y*. Then I realize my error, and think 'None of this information is about NN', which seems true. Does that mean the file itself was not about NN? Note that this is a question about the file *before* my realization of my error, not about some file that results from operations triggered by my realization of my error.

I am not sure what the answer to this question is. If, following Evans, we take the subject of the file to be the dominant causal source of the information in it, then *y*, not NN, is the subject of the 'NN' file. We might be able to resist this, but it's hard to see how to do so in a way that doesn't make the cognitive architecture of files irrelevant to the determination of reference. For if the information in the file doesn't settle the subject of the file, all that's left, apparently, is the name itself: the file refers to NN despite my error, because the name that labels it refers to NN (as opposed to *y*). And why wouldn't a Geachean apostolic succession suffice to explain *that* fact? But perhaps the files of others have a role to play in such a succession. I look forward to hearing Recanati's views about this.