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# A Review of Recanati's *Mental Files*

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## Abstract

In *Mental Files*, Recanati proposes a non-descriptivist approach to reference in terms of mental files, mental representations that play the role of Fregean mode of presentation. Recanati argues that we refer via mental files and that the reference of a file is determined relationally, rather than satisfactorily; files are not to be equated to the information they contain, but typed by their function—to store information gained through certain epistemically rewarding relation to objects in the environment. I offer a critical overview of Recanati's framework and raise two questions about

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the nature and workings of files.

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# A Review of Recanati's *Mental File*

## I. Preamble

A large portion of contemporary philosophy of language centers around the nature of reference. Prominent examples include foundational issues raised by Frege's distinction between sense and referent, Russell's theory of description, Kripke's arguments for causal-historical theory of names, Putnam and Burge's externalist semantics of natural kind terms, and Kaplan's work on demonstratives. In more recent years, on-going interests in the mechanism of reference have expanded to topics such as whether names and descriptions are predicates (Graff Fara 2015, 2016), how to properly analyze definite and indefinite descriptions (Szabo 2005, Lewis 2012), and the possibility of a unified account of all referring expressions (Cumming 2008, Schoubye forthcoming). Note that debates in this and neighboring areas typically fall into two main camps, i.e., descriptivism and non-descriptivism; the former takes descriptions as necessary in reference fixing, and the latter does not.

This is the background of Recanati's *Mental Files*. The book has a clear goal: to recast the *non-descriptivist* approach to reference in terms of mental files. The metaphor of mental files, initially due to Grice (1969), takes the mind as a filing cabinet and our mental representations as file cards on which a variety of information is written. This conceptual tool has many advocates in philosophy of mind and language (e.g., Bach 1987, Strawson 1974, Perry 1980, 2001, Evans 1982, Devitt 1989, Forbes 1990,

Crimmins 1992, Jeshion 2010, Recanati 1993, 2012) as well as in formal semantics (e.g., Karttunen 1976, Heim 1983, Kamp et al. 2011, Kamp 2015). Despite the many variants therein, the mental file framework (hereafter MFF) in general assumes that a file is a representation whose function is to enable the collection, storage, and update of a body of information pertaining to a single thing.<sup>1</sup>

What distinguishes *Mental Files* from the rest is the depth and width. Recanati goes beyond the metaphor and develops a detailed account that branches out to a wide range of connected issues. *Mental Files* is by no means easy. The book has nine parts and is composed of eighteen chapters. In Part I (Chapters 1 and 2), Recanati motivates a neo-Fregean approach to singular thought; in Part II (Chapter 3 and 4) he introduces files as non-descriptive mode of presentation; in Part III (Chapter 5, 6, and 7) he explicates an indexical model. The distinction between presumption of identity and judgment of identity is discussed in Part IV (Chapters 8 and 9); epistemic transparency is explained in Part V (Chapters 10 and 11). Recanati then addresses singular thought without acquaintance is addressed in Part VI (Chapters 12 and 13), attitude ascription in Part VII (Chapters Chapter 14 and 15), first-personal thinking and its communication in Part VIII (Chapters 16 and 17). Part IX (Chapter 19) compares the mental file framework with its competitors.

Readers may find the book daunting as it discusses such a broad array

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<sup>1</sup> For example, according to Perry (1980), to think of an individual as numerically identical over time is to represent it via the same file, rather than as having the same properties.

of topics;<sup>2</sup> however, I want to highlight the following essential tenets:

- (I) **Singular Thought:** Singular thinking about an object *o* proceeds through the deployment of a mental file whose referent is *o*.
- (II) **Indexical Model:** Mental files determine the reference of linguistic expressions they are associated with via the epistemic rewarding (ER) relations, or acquaintance relations, that they are based on at the time of tokening.
- (III) **Transparency:** Mental files account for cognitive significance. Files play the role of non-descriptive mode of presentation. Frege's Constraint declares that if a rational agent *A* can believe of a given object *o* that it is *F* and that it is not *F*, then *A* thinks of *o* via distinct files.
- (IV) **Co-reference *de jure*:** If two singular terms *N1* and *N2* are associated with the same file, it is presupposed that they co-refer, if they refer at all. Sameness of files enable co-reference *de jure* and a presumption of identity, distinct from a judgment of identity.

(I) asserts that mental files are necessary for singular thinking; (II) says that

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<sup>2</sup> For example, acquaintance relations, cognitive significance, the vehicle/content distinction, the nature of indexical concepts, *de jure* vs *de facto* co-reference, cognitive dynamics, descriptive names, the communication of indexical thoughts, Generality constraint, and two-dimensional defense of Descriptivism, among many others.

Recanati's MFF is the indexical model; (III) affirms that transparency is the benchmark of cognitive significance, and (IV) states that files make possible a certain fundamental thinking about identity.

To help the readers better appreciate the framework, I will explain these central theses in more detail in Section II. I will raise one clarificatory question and a more critical challenge to Recanati's theory in Section III, so that readers can situate the account in recent literature and evaluate its prospect more fairly.

## II. Recanati's mental files

### A. The fundamentals

According to Recanati, an agent stands in an abundance of relations with the objects in her environment; some of these relations are *epistemically rewarding* (ER), acquaintance relations being the paradigmatic cases, such that they enable the agent to gain information from the object. The role of the files is to store information made available by such relations. That is, we refer via the employment of files, i.e., the reference of a linguistic expression stems from that of the file we associate with it. Thus, mental files are like singular terms in the language of thought; they refer, or are supposed to.

Crucially, however, mental files are individuated not by the information or misinformation they contain, but through the specific ER relations to objects in the agent's environment (Ch 3, 5). Each file  $m$  corresponds to an acquaintance relation  $R_m$ , and if a file  $m$  refers, it refers to the object to which the file bears the relation  $R_m$ . For instance, Emma

can visually track a sheep running on the meadow. She opens a file based on her tracking dispositions that gathers and integrates information about the sheep. Emma's thoughts represent a particular sheep not in virtue of the properties she takes the sheep to have, but in virtue of her tracking dispositions. The referent of the file is the object to which Emma stands in the ER relation; it is the object from which the descriptive information derives from, regardless of the information being true or not. In other words, the referent of a file is determined "relationally" rather than "satisfactionally" (Bach 1987). It is in the sense that mental files are based on these tracking relations that they are like "mental indexicals." Note that the indexical model and the ER relations are not limited to just context-dependent episodes of reasoning such as visual tracking; other ER relations, including perception, memory, testimony, and recognition, also enable the generation of files. Recanati introduces a hierarchy of "containment" among files (Ch 6), and since files are typed by their function, i.e., to store information derived through the types of relation to objects in the environment, the reference of higher-order files is fixed by their standing in some ER relation to an object. Hence the typology of files include, for example, proto-files, demonstrative files, memory files, recognitional files, encyclopedic files, and conceptual files.

This indexical model opens up the possibility of a "two-level" semantics for singular thought (Ch 3). In the Fregean framework, singular terms have, besides the referent, a mode of presentation. The distinction between sense and referent is supposed to illuminate non-trivial identity statements such as "Hesperus is Phosphorus." Senses, or modes of presentation, respect what Schiffer coins "Fegre's Constraint" (Schiffer 1978: 180): if a rational person can think of some object *o* both that it is *F* and that it is not *F*, there are two distinct modes of presentation under which

the subject thinks of *o*. Sense is transparent to the thinker because it is the level at which the agent's rationality can be evaluated.<sup>3</sup> The exact nature of sense, however, remains obscure. As Fine puts it,

The main problem with the Fregean position (. . .) is to say, in particular cases, what the difference in the meaning or sense of the names might plausibly be taken to be. Although there appear to be good theoretical reasons for thinking that there *must* be a difference, it seems hard to say in particular cases what it is. (Fine 2007: 35)

What Recanati offers is a novel account according to which files are the *non-descriptive* Fregean sense: files fix reference (by acquaintance) and they explain Fregean cognitive significance (Evans 1982). To substantiate the claim that mental files play the role of Fregean senses, Recanati discusses many examples concerning *co-reference* (Ch 4, 8, 9) and cases where reference go awry, including confusion, mistakes, infelicitous tracking and Twin-Earth style scenarios (Ch 10, 11).

For our purpose, the crucial idea is that two terms associated with the same file have the same sense, which allows a rational agent to “trade upon identity” (Campbell 2002). In the terminology of MFF, this means that the two terms associated with the same file are coreferential *de jure*: “anyone who raises the question of whether the[ir] reference [i]s the same would thereby betray his lack of understanding” (Fine 2007: 40). A case in point is anaphora and its antecedent. An anaphoric term and its antecedent term, whether they are names or descriptions, are coreferential *de jure* because

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<sup>3</sup> See also Dummett 1978:131.

they are associated with the same file. By contrast, a rational agent may fully understand the statement “Hesperus is Phosphorus” but still wonder whether it is true (that is, whether the two terms “Hesperus” and “Phosphorus” are really coreferential). In short, cognitive significance rests on the distinction between *presumption* and *judgment* of identity, and is ultimately explained by the identity of files.

Here is how a rational agent, George, can believe simultaneously that Hesperus is bright and Phosphorus is not. George has two distinct mental files,  $m_1$  and  $m_2$ , such that  $m_1$  is associated with “Hesperus” and contains the predicate IS BRIGHT;  $m_2$  is associated with “Phosphorus” and contains the predicate IS NOT BRIGHT. Files  $m_1$  and  $m_2$  both refer to Venus; this is so not because Venus is the unique object satisfying the predicates inscribed on the respective files, but because  $m_1$  and  $m_2$  stand in a certain ER relation to Venus. In this case, George associates one single object with two distinct names and files. The two files have the same referent, but their very existence as two files (presumably backed up by distinct history of ER relations) means that there are two senses.<sup>4</sup>

A strong point of the Recanati's MFF is its sophisticated explanatory power. Consider Kripke's classic puzzle of belief.<sup>5</sup> Peter learns the name “Paderewski” with the descriptive information that this person is a famous pianist. Peter later learns of someone called “Paderewski” who was a Polish nationalist leader and Prime Minister. Since he doubts the musical abilities

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<sup>4</sup> Here is another scenario where an agent employs distinct files and refers (unbeknown to himself) to the same object. Suppose George has two distinct mental files,  $m_1$  and  $m_2$  such that  $m_1$  is associated with “Hesperus” and contains the predicate IS Venus;  $m_2$  is associated with “Phosphorus” and contains the predicate IS NOT Venus. Again, both files refer to Venus, but for George, they are distinct senses.

<sup>5</sup> Kripke 1979: 130.

of politicians, Peter concludes that these are two different people who were both named “Paderewski.” Given the MFF, Peter has two distinct homophone “Paderewski” files which, contrary to what he thinks, refer to the same individual. When the identity is discovered, the two files will be *linked*, and consequently the information can flow freely between them. The two files may, however, be *merged* eventually. Merging is a complex process: first, an “inclusive file” is created such that the information from the previously distinct files would all feed in to it; next, the distinct, initial files would be deleted.<sup>6</sup>

As far as I know, no previous accounts have addressed the Paderewski case with such thoroughness. The MFF delineates a plausible account of the workings of sense, as files permit various operations. Besides the linking, merging, and deletion just mentioned, files can also under go conversion (Ch 4, 5 and 7).<sup>7</sup> Conversion is “the process through which information stored in a file is transferred into a successor file when the ER relation which sustains the initial file comes to an end” (81). For example, suppose at time  $t_1$ , I look at the clock and think to myself, “It is 4:20 pm now.” I associate time  $t_1$  with a now-file  $\gamma_1$ . Half an hour later, at time  $t_2$ , I realize that the clock has stopped, and I cannot be sure when it began malfunctioning. So at time  $t_2$ , I associate a then-file  $\gamma_2$  with time  $t_1$ .  $\gamma_1$  and  $\gamma_2$  are distinct modes of presentation, even though they refer to and track the same time.

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<sup>6</sup> The deletion of the initial files is not mandatory, however. In cases like *partial merging*, the initial files are retained even after an inclusive file has been opened. See Recanati 2012: 111.

<sup>7</sup> In *Mental Files in Flux*, Recanati adds fission, or file splitting to the list. See Recanati 2016: Ch 3 and 5.

## B. Beyond acquaintance

Because *Mental Files* aims to offer a unified account of reference, it needs to address the problem of empty representation. This is no simple task, especially given the externalist commitment demonstrated in (I) and (II), according to which singular thinking proceeds through the employment of mental files and the existence and individuation of files are based on ER relations. While one might expect that acquaintance is *necessary* for entertaining a singular thought, Recanati maintains that one can think a singular thought in the absence of acquaintance (Ch 12, 13).

Several clarifications must be in order to qualify this seemingly contradictory claim. First, Recanati notes that it is a *normative* claim that a mental file requires an agent to stand in a suitable acquaintance relation to its referent, which is different from the “factual claim that there is no mental file tokening without some acquaintance relation to the referent” (63, also 154).<sup>8</sup> Second, he adds that though files are typically opened based on actual acquaintance, *expected* and even *imagined* acquaintance<sup>9</sup> suffice the tokening of files (Crane 2013). For instance, Recanati thinks that in cases of descriptive names such as “Jack the Ripper,” both the file and the referent are “determined in advance, by stipulation” before the ER relation actually comes about (161-162). For another example, NASA scientists have been working on Parker Solar Probe for more than a decade. As their project develops (including temporary cancelation due to administrative policy

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<sup>8</sup> Recanati provides an interesting quote from Vendler: “the fact that a tool can be misused does not alter the function of the tool” (Vendler 1967: 51-52).

<sup>9</sup> Recanati 2012: 164, 168.

change), the scientists gather more information about it, but the spacecraft itself, as a concrete object, did not come into existence until much later and was finally launched on August 12, 2018. It cannot be denied that people have singular thought regarding Parker Solar Probe even when acquaintance with the object in its full-fledged status is only anticipated.<sup>10</sup>

Third, Recanati resorts to the distinction between thought-vehicle and thought-content to tell the difference between the necessary conditions of tokening a singular thought from those of its success (160).<sup>11</sup> The conditions for the *generation*, or tokening a file can be permissive—expected and imagined acquaintance are sufficient; however, the *success* condition is more stringent. Recanati insists that when it comes to singular thought in the sense of thought-*content*, we are talking about truth-evaluable content. So, a *successful* singular thought is one that has singular truth-conditions such that there is an  $x$  such that the thought is true if and only if  $x$  satisfies the predication in the relevant ways; when there is no object to which the speaker refers by deploying the relevant file, there is no such content.<sup>12</sup> Hence, a singular term was tokened when Le Verrier

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<sup>10</sup> Excellent examples of expected and imagined acquaintance are also found in Robin Jeshion. Regarding expected acquaintance: “Imagine a well-adjusted adoptee of loving adoptive parents, who, because of his closed-adoption, lacks all access to knowledge of his biological parents. Yet he hopes to know them, especially his biological mother. He wonders what she is like, fantasizes about meeting her, writes letters to her in the hopes that he may someday get to know her. He says, ‘I’ll do anything to finally meet her.’” (Jeshion 2010: 117) Regarding imagined acquaintance, Jeshion discusses a child’s imaginary friend. See Jeshion 2010: 136.

<sup>11</sup> For a detailed discussion of the neo-Fregean distinction, see Recanati 1993: 98-103.

<sup>12</sup> Recanati (2012) claims that to think a singular thought-content, “one must at least expect acquaintance and be right one’s expectation” due to the fundamentally relational nature of singular thought (169-170). But in his work (2013, 2014a&b), he takes the somewhat compromised position that “the only thing that matters is that tokening a singular vehicle is not sufficient for thinking a singular thought content” (Recanati 2014a: 5).

thought “The discovery of Vulcan will make me famous”; but no singular thought content was thereby entertained, because there is no object about which Le Verrier’s thought is true.

It does not follow that using an empty singular term always prevent one from expressing a truth-evaluable content, however. If Charlotte thinks,

(1) Le Verrier thought that the discovery of Vulcan would make him famous.

Recanati argues that Charlotte’s thought is true given that Le Verrier actually thought that thought (that the discovery of Vulcan would make him famous). Recanati submits that in attitude ascription such as this, Charlotte ascribes to Le Verrier a “pseudo-singular belief.” Attitude ascriptions allow files to be used *vicariously* (Ch 14, 15). Due to the *meta-representational* function that mental files can play, it is claimed that an agent (Charlotte in our example) can successfully entertain a truth-conditional content despite using an empty singular term.

The meta-representational aspect of files is Recanati’s another novel idea. To spell out this meta-representational use of files, Recanati introduces the notion of an *indexed* file, i.e., a file that stands, in one agent’s mind, for another agent’s file about an object. Indexed files consist of a file and an index, so that the other agent whose own file the indexed file stands for is marked clearly. For instance, consider three agents,  $A_1$ ,  $A_2$ , and  $A_3$  and an object  $o$ . Each agent has a mental file whose referent is  $o$ . Now take  $A_1$ . She has an indexed file  $\langle f, A_2 \rangle$  in her mind, which stands for the file that  $A_2$  presumably uses in thinking about  $o$ .  $A_1$  can also have the indexed file  $\langle \langle f, A_3 \rangle, A_2 \rangle$  in her mind, which stands for  $A_2$ ’s way of thinking of  $A_3$ ’s way of thinking about  $o$ .

Besides the possibility of multiple embedding to represent how others (including one's previous self) think about objects in the world, indexed files may be linked to regular files. Sometimes, an indexed file is linked to the regular file in the agent's mind referring to the same entity; this is the "loaded" use. Sometimes, however, an indexed file is not linked to any regular file in the agent's mind; this is the "unloaded" or free-wheeling use of indexed files. For example, in Geach's discussion of intentional identity, the reporter himself need not believe in witches, but can still ascribe to the villager's thoughts about a certain witch that they think are responsible for plaguing the animals (Geach 1967). In this case, the reporter expresses only a vicarious singular thought, not a genuine singular thought about the witch. According to Recanati, only loaded indexed files have existential import (184).

Let's return to Charlotte. In entertaining the thought that (1) (Le Verrier thought that the discovery of Vulcan would make him famous), Charlotte employs for the empty singular term "Vulcan" a file indexed to Le Verrier; she is using the file vicariously, and this indexed file is unloaded from Charlotte's own perspective.

Let me close this section with the following case of attitude ascription:

(2) I was deliberating whether to investigate both Hesperus and Phosphorus; but when I realized their identity, I immediately sent probes there.<sup>13</sup>

The ascriber in this example is the agent herself in a previous doxastic stage. We can distinguish three files. Before learning their true identity, the

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<sup>13</sup> This example is a mild alteration of the example from Pinillos (2011) and Recanati (2014).

confused agent used both the “Hesperus” and “Phosphorus” files to think about Venus. When enlightened, the agent opened an inclusive file for Venus and transferred information from the “Hesperus” and “Phosphorus” files to it. This inclusive file is associated with the adverb “there” at the end of the sentence. Meanwhile, the agent did not delete her “Hesperus” and “Phosphorus” files, but they now serve to enable the agent to represent how she thought of Venus previously. That is, the two files are linked together and also link to the inclusive file: they are the files indexed to her earlier self to vicariously represent how she used to think of Venus; they are loaded in that they are linked to the regular, inclusive file associated with “there.”

### **III. What are files and indexed files good for?**

Recanati's analysis offers a viable alternative to the descriptivist approach to reference. Compared to traditional direct reference theories, it is more fine-grained and takes cognitive significance seriously. The detailed depiction of various transformation and operations on files, as well as the attempt to account for attitude ascription and empty representation, including empty names and descriptions (definite and indefinite alike) that lack referent, is unparalleled in recent literature. Meanwhile, the MFF is a work in progress. Recanati has adjusted aspects of his account in response to critics, resulting in particularly the publication of *Mental Files in Flux* in 2016. The core of the account remains, meaning that (I) through (IV) stay largely intact despite certain modifications.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> I will not repeat the crucial criticism in response to which Recanati modifies his analysis;

I have one general comment and two questions, which are independent of and not answered by the revisions Recanati makes in the sequel. Both questions, one mostly clarificatory, the other more critical, stem from the general observation. I raise them so that readers can situate the account in recent literature and fairly evaluate its prospect.

To begin, there is an unmistakable overall similarity between Recanati's mental files and the notion of discourse referents in Kamp's Discourse Representation Theory (DRT). Recanati himself acknowledges the resemblance and explains that "what corresponds to a mental file in the DRT framework is therefore the internally anchored discourse referent." (Recanati 2012: 174, fn 17). To be more precise, the DRT framework takes the notion of discourse referent, referent that has a referential function in discourse, but not necessarily outside of the discourse, to be fundamental.

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interested readers can refer to, for instance, Ninan (2015), and Onofri (2015).

Here I summarize a few key clarifications and changes in Recanati (2016):

1. The distinction between "dynamic files" and "static files": While the notion of conversion is to highlight continuity, to fully advance it, Recanati (2016) introduces a further distinction between files as (i) continuants (i.e., dynamic files) and (ii) as time-slices thereof (i.e., static files). Strictly speaking, it is the static files or file-stages that are modes of presentation, and it is also these files that undergo operations such as conversion, incremental conversion, fission, fusion (or merging), and so on. In contrast, dynamic files are chained sequences of these fine-grained static files related by such operations (Recanati 2016: 83-84).
2. The distinction between the "weak" and "strong" co-reference *de jure*: Weak co-reference *de jure* is not transitive, but strong co-reference *de jure* is. Static files (or file-stages) account for Frege cases and cognitive significance; dynamic files (or continuants), underline tracking, recognition, and information update, so only the weak form of co-reference *de jure* holds between stages of the same dynamic file (Recanati 2016: Ch 2, 3, 4).
3. The qualification of the indexical model: Strictly speaking, maximally inclusive files, or encyclopedia entries, are not practically indexical. These files are not based on any specific ER relation, but the totality of information an agent gains via the ER relations available to her.

In Kamp's theory, discourse referents that refer to real individuals are externally anchored, whereas discourse referents that are internally anchored are those that the subject herself presumes (potentially fallaciously) external anchoring.<sup>15</sup> That is, discourse referents allow a two-level anchoring system. In contrast, Recanati's MFF, with "the presumption that the subject is suitably related to something external" (ibid) as a built-in feature, does not make such a distinction. However, recall the normative condition of the existence and individuation of files, according to which the tokening of a file requires that the agent should stand in a suitable ER relation to some entity. This presumption can, nevertheless, fail to obtain. Therefore, even though MFF does not explicitly recognize two levels of anchoring, it has to, and indeed does, implicitly admit a comparable division.

Given the understanding that Recanati's MFF and DRT are extremely close in nature, my first question concerns the type of information (and misinformation) that files can contain. On the one hand, if files are equivalent to discourse referents, it seems that the information they store must be linguistic, i.e., predicates and variables. On the other hand, it is very limiting, if not incorrect, to think that files store only linguistic information. The array of ER relations available to an agent includes at least perception, memory, testimony, and recognition; perception alone permits information of wide diversity: the smell of a rose, the touch of a cashmere scarf, and the taste of a madeleine, to mention just a few. I do not see why information of various modalities should not be incorporated in

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<sup>15</sup> For the notion of internally anchored discourse referents, see Kamp et al. 2011 and Kamp 2015.

files.<sup>16</sup>

One potential resource is provided by Newen (2011). Working in the MFF broadly construed, Newen's idea is that person or object files (i.e., a variant of mental file) are contentful, complex representational entities that are not purely language-like. Files are comprised of three fundamental types of information—sensory-motor information; image-like information; and descriptive information. Take for example a blue scarf. We have sensorimotor information by holding the scarf and image-like information by looking at it. Such information can be grasped independent of language. Descriptive information such as “my blue scarf” or “my favorite scarf” is acquired after the acquisition of language. Of course, Recanati may welcome the addition of multi-sensory information in the files, in which case he will have to further clarify what files can contain, together with an explication of the resemblance and difference files bear to discourse referents.<sup>17</sup>

Nevertheless, unlike DRT, the MFF is no formal semantics. The conceptual resources it offers are supposed to help *represent* various readings, including tricky cases such as Frege's puzzles and Kripke's puzzles, but do not by themselves determine their truth-values.

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<sup>16</sup> Recanati (2016) emphasizes that information coming from modalities such as visual (e.g., seeing the face) and auditory (e.g., hearing the voice), among others, must coordinate. Accordingly, files should be hospitable to information of different modalities.

<sup>17</sup> Admittedly, this question is not detrimental and is not intended to be. It is a request for further clarification. Besides, it is not specific to Recanati's account; the question of “what sorts of information can and is stored in files?” is an issue anyone who adopts a file framework needs to address. Because the notion of file occurs in philosophy, psychology, as well as linguistics, researchers in different fields tend to stress different features thereof. See also Murez and Recanati 2016.

This brings me to my second worry, which concerns indexed files and their presumed contribution, i.e., their meta-representational function to the MFF. Consider a variant of the intentional identity scenario:

There is a mysterious woman living in the periphery of the village. All the villagers have seen her, but none knew her real name. A reporter, Ming, has met this woman a couple of times and knows that her name is Susan. Hob believes, of this woman, that she is the witch that casts dreadful spells on the animals, but he keeps this conviction to himself. Thinking of this woman, Hob says, "I believe a witch blighted Bob's mare." Though Ming does not believe in witches, hearing what Hob says, he reports, "Hob believes that a witch blighted Bob's mare."

According to Recanati, Ming can ascribe to Hob the thought that *a certain witch* has blighted Bob's mare. Ming's use of the term "a witch" (a specific indefinite) is a file indexed to Hob; furthermore, this indexed file is free-wheeling and has no existential import because Ming does not believe in witches and would not link it to any regular files.

However, (a) Hob's thought is indeed a singular thought regarding Susan, and (b) Ming does have a regular file of Susan, so Ming's indexed file (associated with "a witch") and his regular file (associated with "Susan") ought to be linked. But Ming fails to do this. Ming thinks Hob has just a pseudo-singular thought, while Hob in fact has a singular thought in the full sense. Ming is mistaken. The question is, how serious is this mistake?

On the one hand, this is just yet another Frege's case, in which the agent, Ming, does not realize the link between some of his files, and when

he does, he learns something new. There is nothing against Recanati's MFF since no agent is required to be aware of the *de facto* co-reference of files. Moreover, that Ming has distinct files of the same person without knowing it himself not only upholds Frege's Constraint but supports the idea that files account for cognitive significance.

On the other hand, the case above indicates a deep problem about the notion of indexed files and what we should do with them. The problem is two-folded. First, Recanati holds that "in belief ascriptions, the files associated with linguistic occurrences do not necessarily reflect the speaker's current point of view, but may reflect the ascriber's point of view. In other words, attitude ascriptions allow files to be used *vicariously*" (182). The case above, however, illustrates how the ascriber's point of view can be *misrepresented* by the speaker. After all, other people's thoughts are not always transparent to us, and if linguistic expressions are our only resources to reconstruct how other subjects think of objects in the world, we are prone to errors. But this means that indexed files, despite good faith, can fail their *meta-representational* function. This is the problem of *misrepresentation*. I am not saying that indexed files can never fulfill their role, but it would not be difficult to imagine further counter-examples; my claim is simply that one is not always in a position to know how other subjects think about objects in the world. The second problem, which follows immediately from the first one, is that one is not necessarily in a position to know whether one's indexed file ought to be linked to one's regular file. Call this the *linkage* problem. As mentioned earlier, the linkage problem is a special case of the widespread phenomenon—an agent fails to realize that her files are coreferential *de facto*.

Things become much worse when we consider this in relation to, once

again, the *normative* condition imposed on files. According to Recanati, files require a suitable relation to the referent, *normatively* understood; this is “distinct from the factual claim that there is no mental file tokening without some acquaintance relation to the referent” (156). Now, just as regular files are presumed to stand in an ER relation to an object but can fail to, distinct files (including indexed files) that ought to be linked can also fail to be. Crucially, this entails that whether an indexed file is linked or not does not guarantee existential import, contrary to Recanati's analysis, they can be pairs of one's indexed file and presumably regular file, linked, but still fail to refer. As the case in question illustrated, there can also be pairs of one's indexed file and regular file, not linked, but both refer.

Each taken by itself, the misrepresentation problem and the linkage problem seem unremarkable. The speaker (i.e. the attitude ascriber) can misrepresent the ascriber's point of view, or how the ascriber thinks of objects in the world, and the subject can fail to link an indexed file and a regular file that are co-referential *de facto*. However, together these two otherwise uncontroversial observations cast doubt on the point of introducing indexed files, as free-wheeling indexed files can turn out to be loaded and indexed files may fail their meta-representational role.

Relatedly, we should be more careful with the alleged successful attitude ascription in cases such as (1). Even if the attitude ascriber, Charlotte, faces no difficulty of misrepresentation or linkage, we can still question whether her thought is indeed truth-evaluable. Recanati owes us a more comprehensive account of how, by appealing to indexed file, Charlotte's thought is truth-evaluable despite the fact that Le Verrier's thought is not.

Recanati's account is supposed to enjoy an enhanced explanatory

power over traditional models of mental representation, in particular “[t]he distinction between regular files and indexed files, and the linking relation between files, make it possible to capture readings of attitude sentences that standard frameworks are not equipped to even represent” (Recanati 2015: 433). The worry I raise about indexed files complicates this picture.<sup>18</sup>

#### IV. Concluding remarks

Even so, I remain extremely sympathetic to a unitary framework of representation that aims to account for the mechanism of reference, including both standard and the vast array of deviant cases. In particular, empty names and attitude ascriptions are widely recognized as some of the most interesting but challenging phenomenon (Garcia-Carpintero and Marti 2014, Sandgren 2019), so it seems no surprise that Recanati’s account leaves something to be desired. However, the MFF has great potentials. While I believe the framework is in need of work, navigating through the many critical discussions in the book is extremely rewarding intellectually. Recanati brings many current debates—such as those of singular thoughts, direct coordination (or trading upon identity), indexical thoughts, etc., to the next level and weaves together multiple threads of arguments into an almost coherent whole. Whether readers are ultimately convinced by all of Recanati’s arguments, the MFF sheds light on many foundational issues, including the nature of referring, representing, and the

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<sup>18</sup> In Recanati 2018, Recanati delves into the analysis of fictional names in the MFF. There he puts forward a three-way distinction of the uses of fictional names and their corresponding files. The notion of indexed files again plays a crucial role. If the challenges I raise against indexed files are sound, one needs to critically reconsider their presumed meta-representational function.

dynamics of thinking and communicating. *Mental Files* is lucidly written, stimulating, rich in content, and engages extensively with existing literature. Because whether one adopts a descriptivist or non-descriptivist approach, further advances in the field must address the points raised in this book, it is a must-read for anyone interested in one of the leading approaches to mental representation and the nature of reference.

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# 書評： *Recanati's Mental Files*

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## 摘要

在 *Mental Files* 一書中，Recanati 以心智檔案提出一非描述論的進路來解釋指謂現象。心智檔案乃是一種心靈表徵，扮演著弗列格式的呈現模式的功能。Recanati 主張，指涉皆是透過心智檔案：心智檔案的功能在於儲存我們經由某些知識上有益的關係所取得的關於事物的訊息。儘管心智檔案的分類與其儲存功能相關，但檔案不能被等同於其所儲存的訊息。心智檔案的指涉繫於其與所指事物之間的外部關係，並不是取決於檔案中內含的描述與所指之事物是否吻合。本文針對 Recanati 的理論提出批判性的介紹，並提出兩個難題。

關鍵詞：心智檔案、單稱思想、非描述論、弗列格式意義