I locate the central question of the theory of reference in the theory of propositional attitude psychology. For to know the meaning of a sentence is to know what propositional attitudes a speaker must have if he is to utter that sentence seriously and literally. And to know the meaning of a word or an expression is just to know what contributions it makes to the meanings of the sentences in which it occurs. A theory of reference is, first and foremost, a theory of the meaning of singular terms. The basis of a theory of reference must therefore be a theory of the thought in the mind of a person using a singular term; typically, this thought is a thought about the object referred to by the singular term on the particular occasion of use. So the basis of reference is a theory of our thoughts about things; it is, to use the current jargon, a theory of de re propositional attitudes.

Rather a long time ago there was a popular theory of reference, nicknamed "the "Fido"-Fido theory" by Professor Ryle, who was very good at giving abusive nicknames to philosophical theories that he thought were silly. The "Fido"-Fido theory held that the function of a singular term was to introduce its referent, on a given occasion of use, into the proposition asserted by the utterance of the sentence containing the term; consequently, the theory also held that if one uttered a sentence containing a singular term which failed of reference, then no complete thought was expressed, no statement with determinate truth conditions was made.

A singular proposition, we shall say, is an ordered pair of the form

\[ \langle F^n, \langle x_1 \cdots x_n \rangle \rangle, \]

where \( F^n \) is a non-o-ary propositional function, and \( \langle x_1 \cdots n_n \rangle \) an n-ary sequence of items. Such a proposition is true in any given possible world if and only if its n-ary sequence satisfies its n-ary intension in that world. The "Fido"-Fido theory, then, may be restated thus: if \( t \) is a singular term, and \( S(t) \) a sentence in which \( t \) occurs, then the proposition asserted by an utterance of \( S(t) \) is a singular proposition containing the referent of \( t \)
on that occasion, if it has one; otherwise the utterance of $S(t)$ expresses no complete proposition.$^1$

Both Frege and Russell began as 'Fido'-Fido theorists, but were led by their dissatisfaction with that theory to the famous theories we now associate with them. One primary source of their disaffection lay in the cavalier way in which the 'Fido'-Fido theory ignored the connection between semantics and psychology. For to know the meaning, and hence the truth conditions, of a sentence is to know the kind of thought expressible by it, and, viewed from this perspective, the 'Fido'-Fido theory appears woefully inadequate, suggesting, as it does, that the thought expressed by a sentence containing a singular term is the same as the thought expressed by whatever sentence results from substituting for that singular term any other singular term with the same referent. And surely, both Frege and Russell would reason, this is inadequate; for one could know the proposition expressed by 'Tony Curtis is an actor' but not know the proposition expressed by 'Bernie Schwarz is an actor'; and yet, since Bernie Schwarz is Tony Curtis, the 'Fido'-Fido theory would have it that both sentences express the singular proposition $\langle x \text{ is an actor},$ the person named 'Bernie Schwarz' and 'Tony Curtis\rangle$.

Russell's alternative to the 'Fido'-Fido theory consists of two related theories. The first is a theory of the thought in the mind of a person using a singular term, the second a theory of the semantics of singular terms. I shall refer to the first as the description theory of de re thought, and to the second as the description theory of singular terms.

The description theory of de re thought begins with a concession to the 'Fido'-Fido theory viewed as a theory of the thought in the mind of a person using a singular term. It allows that each of us has certain thoughts that are irreducibly de re, and that the complete content of each such thought is given by some singular proposition. But Russell held that, while each particular is a constituent of an indefinite number of singular propositions, a person could believe – or stand in any other propositional attitude relation to – only those singular propositions of which he or his sense data were constituents. For it was, Russell wrote, a fundamental epistemological principle of his that "every proposition which we can understand must be composed wholly of constituents with which we are acquainted"$^2$ and he held that, among particulars (as opposed to universals), each person is acquainted – in Russell's technical use of that