

Mental Files and Identity

François Recanati

Institut Jean-Nicod, CNRS, France

Mental files serve as individual or singular concepts. Like singular terms in the language, they refer, or are supposed to refer. What they refer to is not determined by properties which the subject takes the referent to have (i.e. by the information stored in the file), but through relations to various entities in the environment in which the file fulfills its function. Files are based on *acquaintance relations*, and the function of the file is to store whatever information is made available through the relations in question.

I offer a typology of files. The most important distinction is between proto-files and conceptual files. In contrast to proto-files, conceptual files can host not only information derived through the specific relation on which the file is based, but also information about the same object gained in some other way.

In this framework identity comes into the picture twice. (i) Identity is presupposed when two pieces of information occur in the same file. Such ‘presumptions of identity’ ground the linguistic phenomenon of *de jure* coreference, which takes place when two singular terms, or two occurrences of a singular term, are associated with the same file. (ii) Judgments of identity work by linking two *distinct* files, thereby enabling information to flow freely between them. This corresponds to *de facto* coreference. (Linking is not merging ; identity judgments have the effect of merging files only when the files belong to a very specific category, that of ‘encyclopedia entries’ — a type of conceptual file based on a higher-order relation rather than on a specific acquaintance relation.)

In the last part of the paper I will discuss, and attempt to rebut, two objections to the mental-file account. According to the first objection, the account is circular ; according to the second objection, *de jure* coreference cannot be accounted for in terms of identity of the associated mental files because *de jure* coreference is not a transitive relation.