The connection of denoting with the collection of one’s thoughts, desires, memories, consciousness and beliefs is important, and helps, I think, to solve some rather serious problems. The question whether identity is or is not relative, and even if it exists at all, is not easy to answer. For, it may be said, identity cannot be relative, since, where it is truly stated, we have only one term, whereas two terms are required for a relation. And true identity, an objector may need, cannot be anything at all: two terms purely are not identical, and one term cannot be, for what is it identical with? Nevertheless, identity must be something. We might attempt to remove identity from terms to relations, and say that two terms are identical in some respect when they have a given relation to a given term. But then we shall have to hold either that there is strict identity between the two cases of the given relation, or that the two cases have identity in the sense of having a given relation to a given term; but the second view leads to an endless process of the illegitimate kind. Thus identity must be admitted, and the difficulty as to the two terms of a relation must be meet by a sheer denial that two different terms are necessary. There must always be a symbol and an object that holds the relation, but these need not be different; and where identity is declared, they are not so.

But the question arises: why is it ever worthwhile to uphold identity? This question is answered by the theory of denoting. If we say “Edward VII is the King,” we assert an identity; the reason why this assertion is worth making is, that in the one case the actual term occurs, while in the other a denoting concept takes place. (For purposes of discussion, I ignore the fact that Edwards form a class, and that seventh Edwards form a class having only one term. Edward VII is practically, though not formally, a proper name.) Often two denoting concepts occur, and the term itself is not mentioned, as in the proposition “the present Pope is the last survivor of his generation.” When a term is given, the statement of its identity with itself, though true, is perfectly useless, and is never made outside the logic-books; but where denoting concepts are introduced, identity is automatically seen to be significant. In this case, of course, there is complicated, but not stated, a relation of the denoting concept to the term, or of the two denoting concepts to each other. But the is which occurs in such propositions does not itself state this further relation, but states pure identity.