



NEW DIRECTIONS IN THE STUDY OF THE MIND

research project 2015-2017



UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE



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Foundation

newdirectionsproject.com

This term: intentionality continued

NB There will be no seminar next week, 1 February

Seminar 26

1. The story so far
2. The problems of intentionality: two themes
3. The problem of identifying objects of thought

1. The story so far

Intentionality as 'directedness' on an object

Distinction between semantic and psychological questions

Intentional object and intentional content

The content of an intentional state is **the way its object is represented**

‘Ways’

‘Way’ could mean two things:

(1) A **imagines** B vs. A **desires** B

(2) A imagines **B** vs. A imagines **C**, when $B=C$

The difference in (1) is a difference in what I call MODE

The difference in (2) is a difference in what I call CONTENT

See Searle *Intentionality* ch 1, Crane *Elements of Mind* ch 1

Content

This definition does not imply that all intentional content (i.e. all ways in which intentional objects are represented) is propositional

The idea of non-propositional content is coherent and conceivable

See Tim Crane, *The Objects of Thought*, Chapter 4

This week

2 problems of intentionality

- the problem of non-existence
- locating intentionality in the physical world

Put the second to one side

2. Two problems of intentionality

First problem: the problem of non-existence

(A) Intentional states are relations between thinkers and intentional objects

(B) Relations entail the existence of their relata

(C) Some intentional objects do not exist

Non-existent objects

- (i) We can think about things that do not exist
- (ii) What you think about = the object of your thought or its intentional object

Therefore: some intentional objects do not exist

what does this mean?

Remember last term

Intentional object is not an ontological category

The intentional object of a thought is what the thought is about

So: 'some intentional objects do not exist' = 'we can think about things that don't exist'

things that don't exist is not an ontological category either

The problem of non-existence

- (A) Intentional states are relations between thinkers and things thought about
- (B) Relations entail the existence of their relata
- (C) We can think about things that do not exist

Second problem: the place of intentionality

‘I suppose that sooner or later the physicists will complete the catalogue they've been compiling of the ultimate and irreducible properties of things. When they do, the likes of spin, charm, and charge will perhaps appear on their list. But aboutness surely won't; intentionality simply doesn't go that deep...If the semantic and the intentional are real properties of things, it must be in virtue of their identity with (or maybe of their supervenience on?) properties that are themselves neither intentional nor semantic. If aboutness is real, it must be really something else.’

Jerry Fodor *Psychosemantics* (1987)

What is the problem?

- (1) Physics will provide a catalogue of the ultimate and irreducible things
- (2) Intentionality is not ultimate and irreducible
- (3) All real things are either ultimate or reducible
- (4) If intentionality is real, it must be reducible

What is a reduction of intentionality?

Causal theories: intentionality is based on causal or ‘informational’ relations between states of thinkers and objects thought about (Dretske, *Knowledge and the Flow of Information*)

Nomological theories: intentionality is based on lawlike relations between thinkers and objects thought about (Fodor, *A Theory of Content*)

Teleological theories: intentionality is based on those registrations of the environment that are the product of natural selection (Papineau, *Representation and Reality*)

More on these theories

- (1) Maarten Steenhagen's lectures this term: Friday 3pm
- (2) Tim Crane, *The Mechanical Mind*, 3rd edition, chapter 9 and 10

A general problem

All these theories explain intentionality in terms of some real relation to intentional objects:

- causation
- nomological relations
- selection relations

How do they accommodate thought about the non-real, the non-existent?

The problem of error

All these theories have had problems explaining error or misrepresentation

Might the relational character of the explanations be the source of the problem?

Physicalism

New Directions rejects (or suspends judgement on) physicalism 'and all its works and empty promises'

Does this mean that *this* problem of intentionality does not arise for New Directions true believers?

It seems not, according to many

3. The problem of identifying objects of thought

‘When I look at my dog and think a thought I would express by saying “he is asleep”, there is an intuitive sense in which my thought is “about” the dog rather than any other individual... But what does this intuitive aboutness consist in, and how is it secured? What makes a thought or utterance about a particular ordinary thing?’

Imogen Dickie, *Fixing Reference* (2015)

Putnam's ant

‘An ant is crawling on a patch of sand. As it crawls, it traces a line in the sand. By pure chance the line that it traces curves and recrosses itself in such a way that it ends up looking like a recognizable caricature of Winston Churchill. Has the ant traced a picture of Winston Churchill, a picture that depicts Churchill?’

Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History* (1981)

Putnam ctd

‘Most people would say, on a little reflection, that it has not. The ant, after all, has never seen Churchill, Or even a picture of Churchill, and it had no intention of depicting Churchill. It simply traced a line (and even that was unintentional), a line that we can “see as” a picture of Churchill.’

Putnam ctd.

‘We can express this by saying that the line is not “in itself” a representation of anything rather than anything else. Similarity (of a certain very complicated sort) to the features of Winston Churchill is not sufficient to make something represent or refer to Churchill. Nor is it necessary: in our community the printed shape “Winston Churchill”, the spoken words “Winston Churchill”, and many other things are used to represent Churchill (though not pictorially), while not having the sort of similarity to Churchill that a picture — even a line drawing — has.’

The question

‘If similarity is not necessary or sufficient to make something represent something else, how can anything be necessary or sufficient for this purpose? How on earth can one thing represent (or ‘stand for’, etc.) a different thing?’

Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History* (1981)

Putnam's answer

Not by 'magic'

It must be by 'causation'

What does this mean?

Why believe it?

Causation

As contingent fact and as necessary requirement for thought

If we are not assuming physicalism, why is this a requirement?



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