



NEW DIRECTIONS IN THE STUDY OF THE MIND

research project 2015-2017

 UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE



John
Templeton
Foundation

newdirectionsproject.com



Seminar 27

1. Recap: two problems of intentionality, and the question of identifying objects of thought
2. Putnam's assumptions
3. Reference and intentionality contrasted, once again

1. Recap

Two problems of intentionality:

(i) non-existence

(ii) intentionality in the physical world

The underlying question in (ii): what makes something an object of your thought?

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

Second problem: the place of intentionality

How do intentional phenomena fit into the world as conceived by physics, or by the physical sciences?

Reduction of intentionality: causal, nomological, teleological theories

The problem of identifying objects of thought

What makes it the case that a thought is about a certain object?

Is it by causal connection, by resemblance? or by 'description' or some other mechanism?

It is clear why this question arises for physicalists

But does this question *only* arise if you are a physicalist?

In the last seminar, I suggested the answer *no*; I now want to reconsider

But is this right?

What assumptions give rise to this question?

That is: what do you need to assume in order to think there must be a general answer to the question of what makes a thought about an object?

Let's look again at Putnam

2. Putnam's assumptions

‘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)

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)

The same applies to intention and thought

“But to have the intention that anything ... should represent Churchill, I must have been able to think about Churchill in the first place. If lines in the sand, noises, etc., cannot ‘in themselves’ represent anything, then how is it that thought forms can ‘in themselves’ represent any thing? Or can they? How can thought reach out and ‘grasp’ what is external?”

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The appeal to intentionality

“Some philosophers have, in the past, leaped from this sort of consideration to what they take to be a proof that the mind is essentially non-physical in nature... Thoughts have the characteristic of intentionality — they can refer to something else; nothing physical has ‘intentionality’, save when that intentionality is derivative from some employment of that physical thing by a mind. Or so it is claimed. This is too quick; just postulating mysterious powers of mind solves nothing.”

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

What are 'thought forms'?

Putnam's question presupposes that there is something about the thought that can be identified independently of the question of what its object is

Names and bearers

“We saw that the ant’s ‘picture’ has no necessary connection with Winston Churchill... Some primitive people believe that some representations (in particular, names) have a necessary connection with their bearers; that to know the ‘true name’ of someone or something gives one power over it. This power comes from the magical connection between the name and the bearer of the name; once one realizes that a name only has a contextual, contingent, conventional connection with its bearer, it is hard to see why knowledge of the name should have any mystical significance.”

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The connection between thoughts and objects

Do thoughts have a 'contextual, contingent, conventional connection' with their objects?

Contextual

Contingent

Conventional

Do thoughts have a ‘contextual, contingent, conventional connection’ with their objects?

Contextual — ??

Contingent — YES

Conventional — NO

Names and thoughts (or mental representation)

“What is important to realize is that what goes for physical pictures also goes for mental images, and for mental representations in general; mental representations no more have a necessary connection with what they represent than physical representations do. The contrary supposition is a survival of magical thinking.”

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

Putnam's conclusion

“Thought, words and mental pictures do not *intrinsically* represent what they are about”

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

The basic assumption

There is some way of identifying thoughts independently of their intentionality

Is this a physicalist idea?



3. Reference and intentionality contrasted once again

Putnam: words have a contextual, contingent, conventional relation to what they are about

This is supposed to have a bearing on thought too

Ignore convention; look at *contingency*

‘What goes for names goes for mental representations in general’

There is no necessary connection between thoughts and what they represent

But intentionality does not require a *necessary connection*

It requires a representational connection

Wittgenstein on internal relations

‘The gramophone record, the musical thought, the score, the waves of sound, all stand to one another in that pictorial internal relation, which holds between language and the world. (*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* 4.014)

‘a property is internal if it is unthinkable that its object does not possess it’ (*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* 4.123)

‘this bright blue colour and that stand in the internal relation of bright and darker *eo ipso*. It is unthinkable that these two objects should not stand in this relation’ (*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* 4.123)

PMS Hacker comments

“thought and proposition alike are internally related to the state of affairs that makes them true. The thought that p is the very thought that is made true by the existence of the state of affairs that p, and so too, the proposition that p is the very proposition that is made true by the existence of the state of affairs that p. What one thinks, when one thinks that p, is precisely the case if one’s thought is true. In this sense one’s thought reaches right up to reality, for what one thinks is that things are thus-and-so, not something else—for example, a proposition or a Fregean *Gedanke*, which stands in some obscure relation to how things are.”

PMS Hacker ‘An Orrery of Intentionality’ (1996)



The problem

How is falsehood possible on this picture?

The relation cannot be 'internal' in Wittgenstein's sense

Reference and intentionality

Contrast between fixing reference 'by description' and fixing reference 'directly' (causally?)

Does the same distinction apply to intentionality?

Eros Corazza on Imogen Dickie (2017)

“The basic idea is that the 'aboutness' of our thoughts is cognitively motivated. For it rests on a notion of cognitive focus, i.e. on the way the thinker focuses her thoughts on a given object. The interpretation developed in the book incorporates both the insights of the causalist picture (roughly, the view that a tokened singular term relates to its referent via a causal chain of reference) and the descriptivist picture (roughly, the view that a tokened singular term is about an object insofar as the latter satisfies the descriptive content the speaker associates to the term she entertains). In brief, some 'aboutness-fixing' is causally driven while some is descriptively driven.”



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