

## Intentionality and Representation

### Lecture 1: Naturalising Intentionality

#### 1. Course Outline

Can intentional or representational states of the mind be naturalised, i.e. be explained by a naturalistic theory of the world? This depends on what we take representation or intentionality to be, and on what it is to naturalise a phenomenon. The respective definitions we can give from the outset are only rough. But they are precise enough to be able to evaluate three attempts at naturalising intentionality:

- Causal theories of intentionality
- Teleo-functionalist (or teleosemantic) theories of intentionality
- Conceptual role theories of intentionality

#### 2. Two kinds of representation

‘Representation’ is (or has become) a term of art. As a concept it is used in philosophy, cognitive science, art theory, political theory, mathematics, etc. It is unclear whether there is a unified phenomenon here.

To bring some order we can at least conceptually distinguish representation that requires interpretation (x represents y for z), and representation that does not require interpretation (x represents y, *simpliciter*). (Compare this distinction with Charles Travis’ distinction between *allo*-representing and *auto*-representing.)

Both kinds of representation owe their status as representation to the fact that they possess intentionality.

#### 3. Features of intentionality

Philosophers have described a number of distinctive features of intentionality.

- Representations have ‘content’ (or an ‘intentional object’)
- Representations can represent things that do not, never did, and perhaps never could exist
- Representations do not depend on the presence of what they represent
- Representations can misrepresent

Are these four features distinct, or at root the same property (separability, robustness, intentional-inexistence)?

#### 4. Intentionality and representation

Some representations have a nature that goes beyond their intentional properties. Representations that require interpretation require something to be interpreted: a *vehicle* of representation.

A vehicle of representation possesses intentionality (e.g. it has a meaning or bears a content), but it may also have physical properties, a location, history, etc. Representations that do not require interpretation only have intentional properties (and perhaps properties entailed by those intentional properties).

If we want to explain how intentionality is possible, which, if any, form of representation should we prioritise? Many philosophers have tried to account for the intentional properties of a representation in terms of its non-intentional properties. This is true in particular of naturalistic theories of intentionality.

#### 5. Naturalising intentionality

A caricature: Naturalism as the project of explaining how the non-natural is natural after all. Sometimes philosophers' attempts come very close to the caricature.

A more charitable way of understanding naturalism is in terms of a privileging of science:

- all there is, is the world studied by science (ontology)
- all genuine knowledge is scientific knowledge (epistemology)

But which science? Either we include psychology, in which case we're done. Or we only include the fundamental sciences, i.e. physics, so that naturalism is physicalism.

Can a naturalistic theory of intentionality steer away from physicalism, but be more than trivial? Suggestion: understand the project of naturalism not in terms of a privileged science, but in terms of a distinction between our (human) form of existence, and the way the rest of nature exists. To naturalise a phenomenon is to show that it is not peculiar to human beings, but could arise or perhaps even occurs in many other places in nature, and quite independent of human beings. (Compare: naturalism in ethics.)

#### 6. An ought from an is?

Some think that intentionality, possessing content, entails normativity: intentional facts are (in part) normative facts. If that is right, then does a naturalist about intentionality commit a naturalistic fallacy? We can only answer yes if we assume (a) that it indeed is impossible to 'derive an ought from an is', and (b) that all natural facts are not normative facts.

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