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How Many Concepts of Intentionality?

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Abstract:

The current discussion of the intentionality nature has become more sophisticated and complex. In this paper I will delineate a number of approaches to intentionality in contemporary philosophy: 1 mentalistic; 2 semantic / linguistic; 3 pragmatic; 4 somatic; 5 and naturalistic. Although philosophers identify and analyse many concepts of intentionality, from the author point of view, there is only one intentionality: mentalistic intentionality (conscious mental states are intentional). Furthermore, there are the pre-intentionality in the physical world and the meta-intentionality (or the derived intentionality) in the world of culture.

Keywords: intentionality, mentalistic intentionality, linguistic intentionality, pragmatic intentionality, somatic intentionality, naturalistic intentionality

Contemporary problems of intentionality originated in Brentano's psychological and philosophical reflections, but the idea of intentionality is older. Some relevant intuitions were developed by some philosophers in Ancient and Middle Ages (A. Kenny, D. Perler, R. Sorabji). Intentionality usually refers to mental phenomena (perceptions, thoughts, beliefs, desires, judgments etc.) being directed toward something. It plays a crucial role in phenomenological tradition (E. Husserl, M. Scheler, R. Ingarden, M. Heidegger, M. Merleau-Ponty), but – and it must be emphasized – it is understood in very different ways by various phenomenologists. Furthermore, it is one of the most important issues of analytic philosophy, and particularly in analytically oriented theories of the mind and language (G. Frege, B. Russell, R. Chisholm, J.R. Searle, H. Putnam, S. Kripke, R.C. Stalnaker). In the latter, intentionality plays an important role in this part of pragmatic theory of language which is the reason why the author of this paper will at a certain point turn his attention towards pragmatics (L. Wittgenstein, R.B. Brandom).

The issue of intentionality generates many questions: What is the real nature of intentionality? What kind of relation is it (if it is a relation): internal, conceptual or a priori? What is the mental content and what is its character? What is the intentional object? What are the kinds of it? How and in what degree do intentional objects (of perception, imagination, memory, hope, expectations etc.) determine intentional acts? What is the object of reference of such a phenomena like fear or melancholy? Is the phenomenal consciousness intentional? How the intentionality is expressed in language and actions? Can intentionality be naturalized? Are physical brain events intentional?

The question, ‘What is intentionality?’, meets a number of various answers in contemporary philosophy. In the present paper I will discuss the five basic concepts of intentionality: 1 mentalistic; 2 semantic / linguistic; 3 pragmatic; 4 somatic; 5 and naturalistic¹.

1. Probably the well-known and the least controversial is the mentalistic approach to

intentionality. However there are several types of it. One can distinguish at least two basic variants: weak (general) and strong (intentionality as representation). Both assume that the intentionality of mental states is the proper one, or it is primary in relation to, e.g., the intentionality of language, and that is derivative.

(A) *The intentionality is a property of mental states (perceptions, thoughts, memoirs, imaginations, emotions) that makes them to be directed to an object.*

Usually F. Brentano is considered the father of the concept and the term ‘intentionality’. At the starting point of his psychology he distinguished physical and psychic phenomena. Next he divided the psychic into three classes: presentations, judgments and emotions. The intentionality characterizes all of them:

Every mental phenomenon is characterized by what the Scholastics of the Middle Ages called the intentional (or mental) inexistence of an object, and what we might call, though not wholly unambiguously, reference to a content, direction toward an object (which is not to be understood here as a thing), or immanent objectivity. Every mental phenomenon includes something as object within itself, although they do not all do so in the same way. In presentation something is presented, in judgement something is affirmed or denied, in love loved, in hate hated, in desire desired and so on.

This intentional in-existence is characteristic exclusively of mental phenomena. No physical phenomenon exhibits anything like it. We can, therefore, define mental phenomena by saying that they are phenomena which contain an object intentionally within themselves [4, pp. 88–89].

This passage is not clear and created lots of problems with interpretation. First, it was difficult to answer what the object of intentional reference was to be – something immanent or transcendent in relation to the subject. Usually researchers find three important theses hidden in this passage: (1) it is constitutive of the phenomenon of intentionality, as it is exhibited by mental states such as perceiving, believing, judging, desiring, hoping, loving, hating, and many others, that these mental states are directed towards something; (2) it is characteristic of the objects towards which the mind is directed by virtue of intentionality that they have the property which Brentano called intentional inexistence; (3) intentionality is the mark of the mental: all and only mental states exhibit intentionality (intentionalism)².

K. Twardowski appeared to be much more precise about the object of reference. He noticed an essential ambiguity of expressions ‘presentation’ and ‘the presented’. When you had used the term ‘presentation’ you could have meant the act and its content as well, and as the presented you could have meant the content and the object. Therefore he distinguished precisely the act, the content and the object of presentation. He claimed that it is not enough to distinguish the act from the object, but also it is necessary to underline the difference between the content and the object: the content of a presentation (the immanent object of consciousness) and its object are two different things; see [60].

J. Searle’s representationalist approach to intentionality:

(B) *The intentionality is a property of mental states (they can be in one of three psychological modes: perception, belief and desire) that relies on directing to an aspect of reality; the pointing is possible by the representational content expressed in a subordinate clause (e.g. X can see that the pen is lying on the table).*

First of all, “Intentional states represent objects and states of affairs in the same sense of ‘represent’ that speech acts represent states of affairs” [51, p. 4].

Intentional mental states comprises of the intentional content (propositional attitudes – propositional contents) and the psychological mode. An intentional state always refers to things by its content. It is the content that represents an object or a state of affairs. The intentional content always appears in a psychological mode. The latter is the character or the type of our intentional mindset: supposition, angst, expectation, wish etc. For example, I can express my belief concerning the rain with the statement that it is raining. And also I can express my angst or my supposition that it will be raining, or my wish that it is raining at last. In all of these cases I present not only the content of my mental state but also the character of the mindset.

According to Searle, another general feature of intentional states is that they are characterized by directions of fit. A detailed intentional state is realized in a detailed way and is featured by special conditions. They may be truth conditions – for perceptions and beliefs, conditions of fulfillment – for desires and hopes, and conditions of realization – for intents and decisions. Searle highlights also that an intentional state is the sincerity condition of a given type of speech acts. If I make the statement that *p*, I express a belief that *p*. I can’t say, ‘It’s snowing but I don’t believe it’s snowing’.

The performance of the speech act is *eo ipso* an expression or the corresponding Intentional state; and, consequently, it is logically odd, though not self-contradictory, to perform the speech act and deny the presence of the corresponding Intentional state [49, p. 9].

The key issue is that „every Intentional state consists of a representative content in a certain psychological mode” [51, p. 11].

The kind of intentionality that is now discussed is the primary (internal) intentionality of mind. Searle claims that there is also the intentionality of language, words, sentences (and also of pictures, symbols, diagrams or charts), and that is the secondary one, ‘derived intentionality’. It exists thanks to the internal intentionality. Such words like ‘Clinton’, ‘Washington’, ‘the Earth’ refer to and designate respectively: the president of the U.S.A., a town in the United States and one of planets merely because intentionally we use them in these senses. Words or other conventional signs written accidentally do not mean anything themselves. They obtain the meaning by our internal intentionality of mind. Searle distinguishes these two kinds of intentionality from ‘as-if intentionality’, „which do not literally ascribe any intentionality at all, even though the point of the metaphorical ascription might depend on some intrinsic intentionality of human agents” [52, p. 5]. He also recognizes the collective intentionality. It is the form of intentionality that is expressed as ‘we intend’, ‘we hope’, ‘we are afraid’ etc., and it is not reducible to the primary intentionality.

2. Next to the mentalistic explanation of intentionality there is the linguistic one. Its exponents claim that it is necessary to take into account the semantic aspect or (the stronger version) that the speech and language are primarily intentional.

The intentionality is a semantic property of language. It relies on that expressions (names) mean something, and sentences possess the logical value (true or false).

Main representatives are: G. Frege and B. Russell. Frege asked: how can one rationally hold *two* distinct singular beliefs (or names: ‘the morning star’, ‘the evening star’) that are both about one and the same object? The solution is distinction between the *reference* (or *Bedeutung*) and the *sense* (or *Sinn*) of an English individual name. The sense, which is the mode of presentation of the

reference, is presumably something abstract that can be both instantiated by a concrete individual and present to, or grasped by, a mind; whereas a proposition (a sentence) expresses a thought (a sense) but it denotes a logical value (the truth or false); see [24].

Russell criticized Frege's distinction. Actually he noticed that it explained why sometimes it is worth to predicate identity, but besides it introduced unnecessary confusion. In the theory of denotation there was no place for meaning; see [47]. Afterward Russell presented his theory of descriptions. They may be of two kinds: definite and indefinite. The former include expressions with the determiner 'the' like: 'the', 'the so and so', 'the such and such', e.g. 'the author of Waverley'. The definite description should be understood with application of unitary quantifier: 'there is exactly one'. Indefinite (polysemous) descriptions include expressions like: 'a thing', e.g. 'a man'. They may refer 1. to more than one object or 2. to nothing.

Rudolf Carnap was not so inspired by Frege's idea, but he formulated his own semantic theory. The basis of it was the difference between extension and intension. The distinction refers to constative sentences, individual expressions and predicators. The extension of a sentence is always one of the logical values, and its intension is the proposition expressed by it. The extension of an expression is an object, and its intension is a concept. The intension of a predicator 'P' is by Carnap understood as a property (feature, quality) P, and its extension is a given class; see [9].

The semantic intentionality may have a different form when it is founded on a different semantic theory, and there are many of approaches to choose: Husserl's phenomenological semantics (the sense as an ideal object), S. Kripke [32] and H. Putnam's causal semantics [44], R. Carnap's verificationist theory of meaning [8], K. Ajdukiewicz's directival theory of meaning [1], A. Tarski's theory of truth [59] or D. Davidson's truth-condition theory of meaning [16]. It is worth to indicate two tendencies here (they are closely bound together by the way): the ambition to have done with mentalism and putting the language at the main place (the primacy of language). First let us focus on the latter.

Some philosophers go further and find speech and language primarily intentional. They take it as the model of thinking and of the conceptuality of the mind. One of them was W. Sellars³. According to him, we gain various concepts, the concept of a thought as well, by educated and controlled language acts. An unexpressed simple thought is merely a disposition to thinking aloud ('a thinking-out-loud'). Proper thoughts come into prominence during explicit language behaviors, i.e. utterances aloud. The basic sense of thinking that *P* is thinking out loud that *P*, and it is a spontaneous and honest saying that *P* (verbal behaviorism). It means that thoughts and consciousness possess their intentionality thanks to semantic properties of speech and language.

There is a widely spread idea in philosophy that language is a system of conventional signs and its basic purpose is the expression and communication of thoughts. It means that primarily words mean nothing, and they are derivatives of thoughts. For example Kripke-Putnam's semantics is an attempt to make linguistic meanings independent from the intentionality of thoughts. Putnam puts it directly: "Meaning just ain't in the head" [44, p. 227]. The meaning depends on the external surroundings (the physical environment) and the expert knowledge concerning it. Kripke underlines the act of baptizing and the meaning-creating role of language community. He claims that proper names make reference in a rigid way: they refer to the same objects in all possible worlds [32].

3. The above approach is closely connected with the next which is the pragmatic one:

The intentionality is a property of various kinds of practices: the primarily intentional is activity.

Such an approach is presented in pragmatism of W. James and J. Dewey. In a general and radical interpretation it is opposite to Descartes, and it preaches the primacy of action. The human ability to conceptualize and reason, use language, attribute truth, create theories and philosophy

stems only from activity. Other protagonists of such conception are M. Heidegger and pre-eminently L. Wittgenstein and R.B. Brandom.

We can say, Heidegger formulated his theory of intentionality in opposition to Husserl's phenomenology. He found the intentionality of consciousness secondary in reference to the primary intentionality, and the latter was related to the transcendence of being-in-the-world. The human was thrown into the world and permanently was coming out of himself, activity was one of the ways. First he acted and only afterwards he thought and knew, used language, created tools and culture. Nevertheless one can have doubts if Heidegger really meant that. The basic sense of the essential thinking was to discover the ontological difference between being (*Sein*) and existence (*Dasein*). His analyses concerned the level that is deeper than activity of existence [26]. As Dreyfus noticed, Heidegger did not put practice at the first place but he wanted to demonstrate that neither the activity nor thinking should be understood as a relation between a self-sufficient subject and an independent object, but it should be done in a more formal way [21].

According to late Wittgenstein one can look at human existence from various points of view, each of them is connected with a language game. The activity is a common property of these games. Wittgenstein bound strictly the meaning of expressions of a language with the role they play in communicational practice. He treated sentential utterances as tools of communication, and underlined that language expressions and actions are as closely tied together that it is not possible to understand the meaning of expressions outside of the context of their use.

Brandom claims were similar. In his opinion, in the way of analyzing various practices one can derive language practices and semantical relations – the analysis of activity exposes the involvement in discourse practices that unveils how things are hooked up to the world. As he states, everything started from American pragmatists. They proposed to resign from the reflection over the object and the representation and begin from the nature of activity and processes that constitute the relation.

One can reconstruct Brandom's conception with the following statements:

(1) The main idea of pragmatism holds that the basic kind of intentionality (which is usually understood as direction to an object) is a practical engagement in interactions with objects. They are typical for thinking beings that get involved in relations with the world.

(2) The rudimentary form of activity of this kind is the cycle Test-Operate-Test-Exit (TOTE). It includes perception, action and the evaluation of results of the last and the next actions. This kind of practice consists of an indefinite number of actions that are controlled by a feedback.

(3) Practices controlled by a feedback are 'thick'. It means that essentially they embrace objects, events or states of affairs in the world. The opposite are 'thin' reactions of processes on the micro-level. The involvement in these practices relies among other things on incorporating some parts of reality into them.

(4) The semantic intentionality can be observed in language use or in various discourse practices. It should be treated as a developed and specific case of the practical intentionality. The latter appears in actions controlled by feedback.

(5) The semantic or discourse intentionality is a phenomenon with two aspects. On the one hand, there are objects of knowledge and actions and also acts of representation; on the other hand, there are things that beliefs refer to (the beliefs are conditions of actions), objects and objective states of the represented world. One cannot understand all of these regardless of semantic relations that take place between them. It is not possible to handle them separately, and yet expose relations between them and obtain the adequate picture of the whole. The starting point should be the analysis of 'thick' and essentially 'world-involving practices'. This would be the only basis that one could derive upon it two aspects of intentional semantic relations that are constituted by these practices and abilities [7].

4. Human actions rely on sensorimotor abilities of the body. There is a philosophical

tradition, the phenomenological one, that accepts somatic intentionality as primary:

The intentionality is a property of the body: the body pre-reflexively but usually actively refers to the external world.

A proponent of this position was M. Merleau-Ponty. In his view the intentionality is a direct and spontaneous reaction of the body to things in the world (the body and things comprise a unity⁴). The body is intentional because it ‘stands-in-relation-to’, usually it moves toward various things in the world. However the ‘standing-in-relation-to’ or moving is not conscious or premeditated. These actions – let us repeat this – are direct and spontaneous. An unwitting move of a hand, a movement caused by force or in danger, or when one draws his hand back if the object he reaches for is too hot, are intentional. Such movements are intrinsic elements of the body, and the pre-reflexive ‘motor intentionality’ is inscribed in it:

A movement is learned when the body has understood it, that is, when it has incorporated it into its “world”, and to move one’s body is to aim at things through it; it is to allow oneself to respond to their call, which is made upon it independently of any representation. Motility, then, is not, as it were, a handmaid of consciousness, transporting the body to that point in space of which we have formed a representation beforehand. In order that we may be able to move our body towards an object, the object must first exist for it, our body must not belong to the realm of the ‘in-itself’ [35, pp. 138-139].

At first the intentional move of the body in the world is an unthinking, unconscious and spontaneous movement that is expressed among other things by somatic reflexes, drives or habits. The motions of the body are not any conscious reaction of a psycho-physical subject to a stimulus, but they are something much more primary and not intermediated: either by language and meaning or by thinking and concepts or even by perception and interpreted impressions. They come out from the primitive experience of the body with the world, and that is, as Merleau-Ponty claims, the source of any sense:

In short, my body is not only an object among all other objects, a nexus of sensible qualities among others, but an object which is sensitive to all the rest, which reverberates to all sounds, vibrates to all colors, and provides words with their primordial significance through the way in which it receives them. It is not the matter of reducing the significance of the word ‘warm’ is not an actual warmth. It is simply my body which prepares itself for heat and which, so to speak, roughs out its outline [35, p. 236].

5. Finally, for some philosophers, the intentionality is a property of the natural world, e.g., a property of living organisms (though, as we will see soon, not only organisms). In this manner some biologists and also some naturalist philosophers see it. At the starting point one can accept the following formula for this:

The intentionality is a property of the natural world and thanks to it various elements of the world come out of themselves and cooperate with other elements in their surroundings.

Keeping in mind the general difference between the animal and plant kingdoms, one could

accept two variants of biological intentionality. The first (the weak one) would refer to animals only. In this case the intentionality would be a property of (among other things) various cognitive activities, planning, foreseeing or instinctive animal behaviors. Nevertheless this restriction seems to be very controversial because plants also perform some activities connected with coming out of themselves and with, e.g., cognitive exploration of the environment. Hence one can spread the intentionality also for other organisms, like protista, plants and fungi, and treat it (the strong variant) as a property of the nature itself: the natural world is ordered, its elements are closely bound together and its development is purposeful⁵. The fundamental here is the fact of directing or transcending, i.e. of coming out of oneself. Every piece of the natural world that is directed toward a thing or set to collect information about a thing is intentional.

Some philosophers interpret the intentionality with biological terms. R. Millikan belongs here. She claims that the intentionality should be analyzed independently from the content of mind, rationality and consciousness. It is so because the intentionality ('ofness', 'aboutness') is based on natural relations that are external to the subject. For the correct understanding of the intentionality, Millikan proposes to use the concept of function, especially the proper function. The latter in reference to various organisms, organs, tools, and also thoughts and language are an undoubtedly biological property: it is a variable dependent on the conditions in the given environment. The intentionality is an X of organs, thoughts, language and other phenomena that relies on the way in which they fulfill their proper function [36, 37].⁶

In the Polish literature among others B. Sadowski and J.A. Chmurzyński in their article 'Biologiczne mechanizmy zachowania' (*Biological Mechanisms of Behavior*) use the term 'intentional moves' ('ruchy intencjonalne'). It refers to various primitive instinctive and conditioned behaviors of organisms.

The strength of a drive determines the intensity of performed actions. When the drive that controls the given action is still weak the relevant action appears in the opening form—the intentional move. (...) Intentional moves often derive from instinctive activities. (...) The term 'intentional move' covers also all the other conditioned reactions, e.g. raised by fear [49, p. 361].⁷

Stephen Mumford is braver. He offers an understanding of intentionality that includes also the physical. The intentionality in this domain is suggested by dispositional terms: 'increasing', 'decreasing', 'frangible', 'soluble'.

An alternative has recently been offered. It is radical and challenging. It is the claim that the physical world, and not solely the mental, includes the phenomenon of intentionality. Certain properties, those usually understood as powers, potencies or dispositions, are said to be distinguished from categorical properties in virtue of being directed towards certain possible manifestations when a particular set of conditions are realized. This is the main contention in recent work by U.T. Place. It offers new ways of understanding dispositions, how the physical world works and the nature of causal interactions [40, pp. 215–225].

Conclusion

As one can see in the above overview (that is necessarily sketchy and tendentious, e.g. D. Dennett was ignored) various philosophers interpret the intentionality in different ways and they attribute it to different things: thoughts and other mental states, consciousness, mind, brain, body, language, creations of culture, natural phenomena. Here is not the place for a detailed presentation and

defending my own position. Besides it is not necessary because it is not unexampled. According to my deepest conviction Brentano was right – there is one primary intentionality and it is the intentionality of mental states and consciousness. The intentionality of language, works of art, maps, thermostats etc. is secondary and it is possible to explain by the former (that is irreducible to anything) and not vice versa.

There is no doubt that we are a part of the natural world. As a result of the development of the more and more composite world, anthropoid apes appeared. In some respects modern human is not different from apes: we share about 98% with gorillas and chimps. The difference is in the size and the organization of the brain. The brain of a chimpanzee weighs about 400g whereas a human one about 1300g. Minds appear upon the activity of brains. Brains different in size and organization generate different minds. The gradual growth of human brain is the effect of evolution and it is the resultant of a few factors: diversity (genetic mutability), natural selection, isolation and accidental events.

Additionally, it is worth highlighting two things: first, animals explore the external environment intensively and cooperate with it, they are conscious beings, and their consciousness is also intentional. So it seems that the intentionality – the same as consciousness – can be gradable: there is the weak intentionality of animal organisms and the strong intentionality of man (it appears in such intentional creations like works of literature and art). Second, the natural world, evolutionary mechanisms in it, bodies or brains do not evince any intentionality. At best (for example in mechanisms of adaptive fitness, selection) one can talk about a form of pre-intentionality. Therefore most of all there are: the pre-intentionality in nature, the primary intentionality in mind and the meta-intentionality (the secondary one) in creations of culture.

One of the most important questions is how nature can produce intentional mental states? Today, scientists and philosophers should focus and work on this problem together.

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Notes:

1. Some philosophers have distinguished different kinds or types of theories of intentionality. W. Lyons critically analyzed modern approaches: the instrumentalist approach, the representationalism, the teleological account, the purest functionalism. He also recognized a few levels of intentionality: (1) the level of brain (the brain has the weakest intentional power); (2) the behavioural version of intentionality with central role of sensory experience; (3) the level of language, and (4) the holistic level of 'whole person performance' [34]. Considering intentionality from an externalist perspective, P. Le Morvan has distinguished between three basic kinds of intentionality (in the case of seeing), which he calls 'transparent', 'translucent', and 'opaque' [33]. See also: J.N. Mohanty [38, 39].
2. Some philosophers claim: many mental states exhibit intentionality but not all (pain, anxiety, depression, elation, for example, are not intentional). The claim is called anti-intentionalism. E. Husserl, J. Searle, G. Strawson, N. Block, C. Peacocke have defended different forms of anti-intentionalism.
3. Sellars explained the inception of the concept of thought in his science fiction story on Ryle's ancestors and Jones' case. Ryle's ancestors possess a language that the basic descriptive vocabulary of it refers to space-

temporal objects. They also can perform such operations like: conjunction, disjunction, negation, quantification or conditionals. According to Sellars, all of this is not enough to talk about experiences and thoughts of one's own or of anybody else – tools of semantic discourse are necessary yet; see [55, pp. 178–189].

4. This unity was discussed already by I. Kant, and afterwards by E. Husserl. The latter finally distinguished the intentionality of an act (of our judgments and conscious attitudes) from the intentionality that works implicitly (*fungierende Intentionalität*) and creates the natural and pre-predicative unity of the world and our life. This primary unity had been noticed but not discovered. The main purpose of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy was to expose it.
5. Purposefulness has very different interpretations in biology and philosophy; see, e.g., [45].
6. Similarly M. Okrent explains the intentionality with the biological. Nevertheless he uses the concept of purpose rather than function. The intentionality is fontally inscribed in the teleology of the natural world; see [42].
7. „Siła popędu decyduje o natężeniu wykonywanych działań. Gdy popęd 'sterujący' danym zachowaniem jest jeszcze słaby, odpowiednie działanie pojawia się w zaczątkowej postaci – ruchu intencjonalnego. (...) Ruchy intencjonalne często wywodzą się od zachowań instynktownych. (...) Mianem ruchów intencjonalnych określa się również wszelkie inne zaczątkowe reakcje popędowe, np. zachodzące pod wpływem strachu” [49, p. 361].