

WHY PHENOMENAL CONTENT IS NOT INTENTIONAL

HOWARD ROBINSON

Central European University

ABSTRACT

I argue that the idea that mental states possess a primitive intentionality in virtue of which they are able to represent or 'intend' putative particulars derives largely from Brentano's misinterpretation of Aristotle and the scholastics, and that without this howler the application of intentionality to phenomenal content would never have gained currency.

Key words: intentionality; perception; phenomenal content; sensation

1. Why there is a problem

The term 'intentionality' is used to signify at least three things that blur into one another. First, it is the name for an undoubted phenomenon of at least some mental states, namely their so-called *aboutness* - the fact that states with propositional content and perhaps others point beyond themselves to a topic, subject matter or 'object'. This object may be existent, like Socrates or the Queen of England, or it may be non-existent, like Zeus or the fountain of youth. No-one, I think, denies that thought, for example, has a feature that can be characterized at least roughly in this way. Second it is the name for a problem (or perhaps more than one) centred round the issue of how we are to understand or explain this aboutness. It does not appear to be a standard physical property, so the naturalist has to explain how he is going to treat it, and even a non-naturalist will probably want to throw some further light on its logical and ontological features. Third, it is proposed as an answer to a problem. Intentionality is invoked as

an explanation of how mental states can be about things – it is because they possess intentionality. The idea is that intentionality – being directed upon an object – is a primitive property of some or all mental states *qua* mental. Once you build intentionality in as a primitive notion, various problems are supposedly solved or alleviated, particularly problems concerning the ontological status of mental contents. The name of the problem becomes the name of its answer.¹ A main point of this paper is to deny that intentionality is a primitive psychological phenomenon, but rather to argue that it is sustained by a background complexity and that, as a consequence, it cannot be a property of basic phenomenal consciousness.

Although there is, I hope, a reasonably tight thread of argument running through this paper, the issue of intentionality overlaps with various controversial and much discussed topics, and, although I cannot avoid these controversies, I can only deal with some of them by setting out my positions on them in a rather summary fashion.

2. Universal intentionalism: its nature and rationale

It is generally accepted that what might broadly be called *cognitive states* or *propositional attitudes* exhibit intentionality, for they are or can be directed upon or about objects. Thus I can love, fear, worship, admire or believe in Zeus, or Socrates. When it comes to perceptual, sensational and ‘what it is like’ states, the issue is more complicated.

In the case of perceptual experience, it is agreed that, if I hallucinate a pink elephant, there is no instance of elephant of which I am aware, and hence that *the elephant* is an intentional object of my experience. But there is no similar agreement about the nature of the involvement of the sensible or phenomenal qualities that figure in the experience. The sense-datum theorist thinks that there are instances of pinkness and elephant shape that are objects of my awareness. The intentionalist, by contrast, puts the qualities of shape and colour in the same category as the substantive elephant – all are ‘intentionally inexistent’, which is interpreted by analytical philosophers to mean that they are somehow *represented* by something mental, but are not *instantiated*. This way of putting things is meant to be the answer to problems concerning the ontological status of sensory contents.

This intentionalist view about perception claims two things. (i) That intentionalism is a primitive phenomenon, in the sense that, though there may be a naturalistic reduction (I shall discuss this briefly in section 5), within the scope of our normal psychological concepts, intentionality is basic and a *sui generis* property of individual mental states. (ii) That intentionality ‘goes all the way down’: it applies to the sensational or qualitative contents in perception, as well as to the objectual – to the pinkness and

¹ The most impressive use of intentionality in this way is found in Crane 2001.

shape as well as to the elephanthood. These two theses are connected in the following way. It is fairly clear that the having of qualia or sensations cannot be further analysed, at least within a mentalistic framework, so it would appear to be the case that if these states are intentional, intentionality must be a basic property, not further analysed.

There are, I think, two motives which can lead philosophers to adopt intentionalism about the qualitative or 'what it is like' states, as well as about the intellectual states. The first is a desire for a uniform account of mind, and, given that propositional attitude states have to be intentional, a unified account is better served if it can also be applied to qualitative states. The second motive is bound up with the desire to avoid a sense-datum-type account of qualitative states. If one denies that the qualitative nature of *what it is like* states is constituted by an instantiation of the quality in question then the obvious alternative account of the involvement of the quality in question is the intentional or representational one. (The quality must be involved somehow, for *seeming to see red* definitely involves red in some manner or other.)² The hope of the perceptual intentionalist is to defend a form of direct realism: the qualitative or 'what it is like' state is *that by which* one is aware of the external object, not *that of which* one is aware. The comparison with the intentional objects of propositional attitudes illuminates this point. If I think of the Eiffel Tower, it is the tower itself of which I think: the vehicle by which I think – the sentence, words or proposition – is not that of which I think. There is no threat that my thought of the Tower could be a 'veil' between me and it. It is similar, for the intentionalist, in the case of the subjective phenomenal qualities of sensory-type experience.

The thesis of this paper is that this deployment of the notion of intentionality is fundamentally misconceived. I shall argue that the idea that intentionality is a primitive property of individual mental states has its origin in a howler committed by Brentano in his interpretation of Aristotle and the scholastics, and that once one understands how intentionality actually works, one can see why it cannot be applied to the sensory-qualitative group of states. First, let us look at the most generally acknowledged problem facing intentionality.

3. The standard problem for intentionality: the ontology of intentional objects

It is agreed that the central problem in understanding the intentionality of mental states comes in giving a coherent account of their objects or contents. Intentionality is characterized by its objects, or what it is directed upon. So the nature of an intentional

² There might seem to be another option, namely adverbialism. Sometimes – for example, Chisholm 1957, 120-5 – adverbialism is presented as an interpretation of intentionalism: it supposedly shows what it is for the object to be intentionally inexistent. More usually, adverbialism is an independent theory. It is argued, however, in Robinson 1994, 174ff that adverbialism is more radically inconsistent with direct realism than is the sense-datum theory.

state appears to depend upon its object. But this object need not exist, for one can think of, believe, seem to see, fear, etc things that do not exist. Because the object need not exist, it would seem that intentional objects cannot be treated as ‘things’ and that intentionality, therefore, is not really a relation. In response to this problem, the object itself is explained as no more than an expression of the directedness of the act itself, which may be characterized as the content of the act, in contrast with its object. But directedness makes sense only in terms of what it is directed *at*, namely its object, so neither ‘content’ nor ‘directedness’ seem to be notions independent of ‘object’. Ever since Brentano introduced the jargon, there has been a back-and-forth between explaining objects in terms of contents or acts, and explaining the contents in terms of the objects. Originally Brentano, followed most extremely by Meinong put the emphasis on the object. Others, for example Husserl, emphasized the ‘immanent’ object is really a content, not a *relatum*, which turns it into a kind of internal accusative. This idea when developed by Chisholm, ends up as a form of adverbialism. The situation seems to be inherently unstable, because the buck is passed from object to the act and its content, variously construed, and back, without any satisfactory position being found.³

More recent analytical attempts to solve this problem seem to me to have progressed no further. Crane, for example, says

...for a state of mind to have an intentional object is for it to be directed on that object. So, in so far as a state of mind is directed, it has an intentional object. The intentional object of a thought is given in the answer to the question ‘what is your thought about/what is your thought directed on?’ (Crane 2001, 29)

The fact that the object can be *reported* in an answer to a question in a certain way hardly settles or explains its ontological status as a component of a mental state. Crane seems to me to be caught in the same vicious circle as Searle. Searle claims both that language is the only model that we have for understanding the intentionality of mental states and that the intentionality of language is derivative and that of mental states intrinsic.

Intentional states represent objects and states of affairs in the same sense of “represent” that speech acts represent objects and states of affairs (even though...speech acts have a derived form of Intentionality and thus represent in a different manner from Intentional states, which have an intrinsic form of Intentionality). (Searle 1983, 4-5)

Given that what the intentionality of language is derived *from* is the intrinsic intentionality of the mental, then there ought to be an account of what it is about the mental that enables it to endow language with these properties that does not simply appeal to

³ For a brief discussion of this dialectic, see Robinson 1994, 19-27 and 174.

the derivative properties of language. If language can only be *about* things because of the intrinsic *aboutness* of thought, then there must be an account of the psychologically real structure of thought that exhibits its intentionality, for it is by mapping onto that that language derives its intentionality. This is perfectly consistent with the truism that there is no way of *expressing* the intentional content of thought except by using the appropriate sentence. So the ontology of the mental that does not depend on its parallel with language: there cannot be foundations of which the only illuminating truth is that they support the walls. The ‘linguistic turn’ does not offer an adequate explanation of the ontology of the mental. Searle, however, refuses to give any account of what ‘representation’ as a psychological state is:

...we [can] justifiably call such Intentional states as beliefs and desires “representations” provided that we recognize that there is no special ontology carried by the notion of representation and that it is just a shorthand for a constellation of independently motivated notions such as conditions of satisfaction, Intentional content, direction of fit, etc. (Searle 1983, 45)

But these other notions are ‘meaning saturated’ concepts: they cannot be used to explain that very psychological feature which explains how language acquires its intentionality.

We will see later, however, that Crane’s comment does point to something important that is missed by the form of intentionalism that sees intentionality as a primitive and intrinsic property of individual mental acts. In order to answer the question ‘what is your thought about?’ you must have a conception of the object in question, and having such a conception of the object is a richer and more diverse thing than its being the intentional object of that particular act alone. This is what I mean when I deny that intentionality is primitive: it involves having a conception of the object intended, and this is something of which one needs a further account: it is not to be explained in terms of the intentionality of the act itself. Directedness is not simply an autonomous or internal property of individual acts, in the way that making intentionality the distinguishing feature of mental acts per se would suggest. I shall try in section 4 to show how one can give an account of *having a conception* of an object that does not involve a primitive notion of intentionality and which is, fairly clearly, not applicable to phenomenal content.

It seems that the initial predicament on intentionality, namely how to deal with its ‘intentionally inexistent’ objects, is not solved by modern analytics, such as Crane or Searle. In order to see a way out of the problem, we need to uncover a certain howler of Brentano’s.

4. Brentano's howler

The concept of intentionality was introduced into modern philosophy by Brentano, who claimed to be importing the notion from the Aristotelian and scholastic traditions. The mind connects with the external world by taking its external objects *intentionally*, that is by having them as its intentional objects. Notice that the point of this account is that *particular things* are taken into the mind as its objects. One's suspicions should be aroused, however, by the fact that, even whilst citing Aristotle as his authority on this, he claims that Aristotle does not get it quite right. Brentano says:

Aristotle says in chapter 12 of *De Anima* 2 that the sense receives the sensible form without matter, and he illustrates this with the metaphor of the wax which takes on the form of the seal without receiving any gold or iron into itself. Of course, this metaphor is not absolutely perfect in that the formed wax does not individually bear the same form as the seal, but only one like it... (Brentano 1977, 55)

What is happening here is something easily missed by philosophers not well acquainted with the scholastic interpretation of Aristotle. Brentano clearly believes that Aristotle is claiming that it is the particular or individual form that the sense receives, not the form as universal, and that Aristotle lets himself down by illustrating his point with an example that only captures the transmission of the type or universal. Brentano is following the (probably correct) scholastic interpretation of Aristotle, according to which *forms in objects* are individuals (or *individualized forms*) and assuming that when the sense receives the form without the matter it is the individualized form in question that it receives.⁴ He, therefore, complains that the metaphor is misleading, for only the shape as a type is transferred, not the individual instance. Aristotle, however, whatever his view of the individuality of forms in objects, is clear that in the sense, as well as in thought, they are universal, because they are without their matter.

...the sense is that which is receptive of the form of sensible objects without the matter, just as wax receives the impression of the signet ring without the iron or gold...;so in every case it is affected by that which has colour, or flavour, or sound, but by it, not *qua* having a particular identity, but *qua* having a certain quality, and in virtue of its formula (*kata ton logon*) (424a18 – 25)

Aristotle could not say more explicitly that it is not the particular but the universals that is transmitted. That Aquinas is committed to a doctrine of individualized forms in external objects is uncontroversial, but he does not attempt to explain how thought

⁴ There is a massive literature on the issue of whether Aristotle believed in individualized forms, with the consensus moving towards the view that he did. There is a discussion, for example, in Irwin 1988.

can be of particulars by appealing to the reception of forms *qua* individualized. His account is as follows

Hence our intellect knows directly only universals. But indirectly, however, and as it were by a kind of reflexion, it can know the singular, because...the intellect, in order to understand actually, needs to turn to the phantasms in which it understands the species...Therefore it understands the universal directly through the intelligible species, and indirectly the singular representation by the phantasm. (*S.T.* Pt. I, Qu. 86, art.1)

There is no suggestion that the individualized form itself is the kind of thing that can enter the soul; the individuality has to be provided by something else. Just as matter provides the individuality to the universal form in external things, the phantasm provides it in the intellect. But how it does so is mysterious, especially given that it would seem to be required to provide the individuality for the *object* of the mental act, not for itself, unlike normal matter, which constitutes the individuality of the thing of which it itself is a part. If the phantasm were to represent the individuality of the object that caused it, it – the phantasm itself - would have to possess intentionality, which is quite contrary to what Brentano intends, where the form is what provides the intentionality. To say that the intellect ‘turns to’ the phantasm does no more than say that *somehow* the particularity of sense-contents contributes individuality, it does not explain how.

The problem is as follows. It is agreed that the scholastic term *intentio* means *concept*. Concepts are, of course, general. In modern parlance, they correspond to the intension (note the ‘s’) or meaning of a word rather than its extension which is the particulars that fall under it. Intentional objects, on the other hand, are particulars or putative particulars that are the objects of mental acts. The issue is how one makes the move from the general intension to the particular or putative particular intentional object. Some intentionalists seem to think that this distinction is not salient. Tim Crane cites as a typical list of intentionally non-existent entities

unicorns, phlogiston, Pegasus, Vulcan, the Golden Mountain, the fountain of youth... the round square and the greatest prime number. (Crane 2001, 23)

This list starts with two general concepts, then moves on to the particulars. But no-one thinks there is a mystery about the nature of the thought that there are unicorns or that there is phlogiston. The mystery of the ontological status of intentional objects does not obtain for quantified expressions such as ‘that there are unicorns’ or ‘that there is phlogiston’. This issue arises for particulars which do not or may not exist, such as Pegasus or the fountain of youth. It is such putative particulars, which are almost invariably the examples chosen in the literature as cases of intentional objects, whether existent or not. Searle cites President Carter (1983, 117), Husserl cites (the god) Jupi-

ter, Bismark, Cologne cathedral, a (that is a particular) thousand sided polygon, the Schloss in Berlin. (2001, 99)

It seems that there are two fundamental features of thought that Brentano and his followers conflate. One is that thought involves the apprehension or deployment of what might variously be characterized as concepts or meanings. The point is that these ‘entities’ are the intellectual and linguistic correlates of properties or universals in the world (hence the use within the Aristotelian tradition of the same term – *form* – for both mental and non-mental functions) and they are intensional (with an *s*), not extensional entities, that is, their nature is not defined by which particulars fall under them, but by conceptual content. The other fundamental feature of thought is its ability to be *about* or *of* things distinct from itself, including things in the external world. This is ‘intentionality-with-a-*t*’.

Now it might be thought that there is no real or at least relevantly important distinction here. Crane says

The objective reality of the idea of a dog consists in the fact that it is about dogs; thus the objective reality of an idea is its intentionality: the characteristics it has as the representation of something. (Crane 2001, 10)

It is not clear whether Crane would move from saying that the idea ‘dogs’ is about dogs to saying that actual dogs are the intentional objects either of the concept ‘dog’ or of someone’s general belief that there are dogs (that dogs exist). In a way, it does not matter whether one uses the term *intentionality* to cover both the way a general concept, such as *dog* comprehends its extension, and the way a name or definite description picks out a particular. The point is that one cannot appeal to anything about the Aristotelian or scholastic use of *intentio, esse intentionale*, or the like to explain, in a straightforward and direct way, how the mind connects to particulars or putative particulars in the world, and so how we can think about Pegasus, or the golden mountain, or hallucinate a pink elephant.

5. The alternative modern account?

Why should one conclude from the fact that Brentano misinterpreted the Aristotelian tradition, that modern deployment of the notion of intentionality is defective? Perhaps, either Brentano’s mistake was a serendipitous one, or the modern concept is fundamentally independent of – though no doubt prompted by – Brentano’s notion.

One might just insist that the primitive and fundamental idea(s) of *of-ness* or *about-ness* do not, in the end, depend on the Aristotelian tradition. What they depend on is that feature of mind which is expressed in the way propositional attitudes take their

objects. The crucial thing is that one can believe in, search for, hope for etc *and seem to see* things that do not exist. In all cases the objects are particulars, so the restriction of *intentio* to universals with Aristotle is of no contemporary interest. Modern causal theories of reference, as in, for example, Stampe (1979) and Dretske (2000), all attempt accounts of how representations within our brains refer to particulars. Surely these approaches circumvent any weakness there might be in the Aristotelian account?

It is impossible in the present context to provide an adequate discussion of a naturalized causal semantics. My remarks will, therefore, be programmatic and brief, simply locating my position. The project of a causal semantics is intimately connected with naturalism and, often, a computational account of the mind. As such, it is either associated with a functionalist account of consciousness, or it brackets off consciousness altogether. In this paper I shall assume that functionalism alone does not capture consciousness. I accept, too, that a causal account alone cannot adequately explain what makes some internal state seem to of, or to be a representation of, something external. McDowell (1986) seems to be right here: an inner state is not experientially or consciously *of* the world just by being caused by something in the world: a purely external or causal relation cannot make the inner state a conscious experience of the external cause. In the light of these considerations, it seems that a modern causal semantics cannot provide an account of the *intentionality of consciousness*, which, with our eye on perception and sensation, is what is required.

The consequence of the argument so far is that universal intentionalism fails, regardless of how its representational conception of conscious mental states works. Neither Brentano's appeal to tradition nor the Searle/Crane appeal to language will do the job, and the causal-naturalist approach is, at best, irrelevant in this context.

6. How does intentionality work, and what, then, are intentional objects?

Consider the following cases of sentences, or reported mental states, which might be thought to involve intentionality.

- (a) Fred believes in Zeus.
- (b) Fred is searching for the Abominable Snowman.
- (c) Fred admires the Queen of England.
- (d) Fred seems to see a grey patch.

The first three involve propositional attitudes of the standard intellectual kind, and the fourth is perceptual/phenomenal. The first two involve non-existent entities, the second and third, definite descriptions and the first a proper name.

All four involve putative particulars as their objects, but (a), (b) and (c) are importantly different from (d) in the mentalistic realization of the particular. (a), (b) and (c) presuppose that Fred knows who or what Zeus or the Abominable Snowman or the Queen of England are supposed to be. Robinson (2003, 543-54), following up on the work of Strawson (1974), Lockwood (1971) and others, attempts to explain what is involved in conceiving of individuals in this way. Briefly put, these labels pick up anaphorically on a file or dossier which is Fred's 'individual concept' of Zeus, the Snowman or the Queen. (One can, for these purposes, think of a file or dossier as rather like a very complicated definite description or co-referential collection of the same.) The crucial point is that these thoughts cannot, in their primary form, spring up without conceptual and descriptive background. There is not a pure 'of-ness- or 'about-ness' concerning Zeus or the Yeti which is complete and sufficient in the particular mental event. It is such descriptive background that makes possible the intentional objects of thought – that is, of the whole range of propositional attitudes, excepting basic sensation. The way we can have a conception of an object, by having a dossier of belief, explains how we can think of things that might not exist. It explains, that is, how intentionality is possible: it is essentially a conceptual construction. Fred's dossier on the Abominable Snowman, for example, will involve information locating the Himalayas in his 'world map', and locating the Yeti descriptively, more or less clearly, but clearly enough to distinguish it from the other things in which he believes, or the existence of which he entertains. Fred might have picked up the name 'Abominable Snowman' by overhearing a reference in a pub, but then his ability to think of that creature will depend on others whose dossiers is more complete. The important point is that such intentional objects rest on much background information. In order to seem to see a grey patch, on the other hand, Fred need have no conception of the object seemingly presented – he need not even have an articulated conception of grey, or, perhaps, any kind of conception of it at all. This state can exist in an isolated way, as the direction of the mind towards the Yeti cannot. We are, therefore, in the case of sensation, deprived of the resources, which apply to all other cases, for explaining how there can be this peculiar kind of thing – an intentional object – which can figure in 'relations' without existing. It undermines the attempt to set up a parallel between 'intellectual conceiving' and something called 'sensory conceiving', as if they were the same kinds of thing, but existing in different modalities. The elements of intellectual conceiving are the entertaining of concepts, which are universals: with this material, with definite descriptions and what in Robinson (2003) are called *World Maps*, an individual concept can be built up. Perhaps the point can be summed up as follows. The intentional objects of the standard propositional attitudes are confabulated, basic sensory content is not. If Brentano's reading of the classical tradition had been right, there would not have been this contrast between the intellectual and the phenomenal cases, because no complex descriptive structure would have been required for the former: the mind would simply take on the *individualized* form of its object, in the way that, according to the phenomenal intentionalist, when we hallucinate a grey object, we simply *represent* it as present.

But we can see now why this is a complete misreading of how intentionality is sustained. An individual concept arises out of descriptive complexity: it is not a primitive directing of the mind onto something, a primitive of-ness, but a constructed case. And this is how one derives intentionality out of intention – out of purely general meaning: one builds up a conception of an object. The phenomenal content of perception is entirely different from this – these phenomena are just given, not confabulated.⁵

7. A different model of intentionality for sensations?

Nevertheless, is it not possible that sensational states are intentional, but in a different style from the others? Sensible conceiving is a *sui generis* kind of thing, analogous to intellectual conception. We have the intellectual concept ‘grey’ which is exercised in thought and a sensible version which is exercised in sense-experience. Is this impossible?

This suggestion misses a fundamental point, and one which parallels the way in which Crane treats intentionality as common to the intentions of concepts and directedness onto particulars. Intellectual conceiving of grey is essentially general, but sensory experience, veridical or not, represents putative particulars. If the grey patch in the centre of Fred’s visual field is the content of a representation, it is a representation of something directly in front of him in space; this is a putative particular, not a general content like the content of a conceiving.

The following seems to me to be the most reasonable position. There are two ways in which a particular can figure in the content of a mental state. One is to be an instance of the kind of confabulated construction that, I have argued, are the intentional objects of propositional attitudes. The other is to be an actual particular – a real instance of some property. Phenomenal contents are certainly not the former, so they must be the latter.

Nevertheless, someone might simply insist that a sensation is a *sui generis* entity, a bare sensory representation. How might one reply to this thought?

I think at this point the issue becomes whether stipulating or postulating (whichever you prefer to see it as being) a *sui generis* form of sensory conceiving really solves any problems or simply redescribes the situation in a way that leaves all the same problems, even if at first sight it seems to avoid some of them: the same lump reappears at a different point in the carpet. As an analogy, Christopher Peacocke (1983) characterizes subjective perceptual states as possessing such qualities as *red*’ because he wants to reserve *red* for physical objects, but, at least assuming that visual sensations also possess

⁵ This paper was at an advanced stage before I came across D. W. Smith and R. McIntyre, 1971. Its title – Intentionality via intentions – indicates its similarity to my point. That paper, however, concerns Husserl rather than Brentano.

primary quality analogues, such as *square*, then it is not clear how any of the problems of the sense-datum theory are avoided in this move. Is it clear that characterizing the subjective state as *representing red* really advances the situation over an account which has it *instantiating red*? Consider the following.

Fred is perceiving a white wall, but he hallucinates an opaque blue circle in the middle of his visual field. Suppose that in the area of the white wall at which he is hallucinating the blue circle there are marks that would normally be visible. Fred cannot see those marks because of his hallucination. The part of the wall that is occluded corresponds exactly to the geometrical character of the hallucination. Someone who says that visual phenomena involve the instantiation of sensible qualities – as does the sense-datum theorist – says that Fred is aware of an instance of blue that occupies his visual field at a point where it ought, if he were not hallucinating, to have been occupied by the marks on the wall. The intentionalist says that Fred is in a mental state that involves representing blue at a location where he should, if he were not hallucinating, have been representing those marks as located. But then it is beginning to look as if it is the internal ('immanent') content of the conscious state that constitutes the content of Fred's purely sensory awareness cognitively blocks off an area of the world from Fred. Isn't this as good a 'veil of perception' as sense-data are held to constitute? The formal reification of the sensible qualities involved in the content seems irrelevant.⁶

The thought that intentionalism nevertheless preserves direct realism might be defended as follows.

'But if you seem to see something blue, and there is something blue at the location at which you seem to see it, isn't the thing you seem to see the very thing that is there, just in the way that, if you think of the Eiffel Tower, then, given the reality of the Tower, it is the Tower itself of which you are thinking, and isn't this direct realism?'

The difficulty with this line of argument is that the requirement that the contact is direct is more demanding in the case of perception than in thought because of the concrete or non-abstract nature of sensory representation. You can, on a given occasion, think of something under a more or less loose description which is none the less accurate. Sense experience does not possess this flexibility. Suppose Fred's visual experience represents the blue object in a slightly deviant shade or in a blurred manner, is this direct contact with the external object? If the above hallucinatory case shows that representational contents can occlude the area that they are purporting to represent, would not the same apply to more ordinary cases of perceptual misrepresentation? A loose conceptual characterization can be true as far as it goes: an opaque sensory representation purports to represent something in its sensible entirety.

⁶ See footnote 2 above for an account of how adverbialism and intentionalism find themselves in a similar predicament.

The issues here seem to be essentially similar to those that arise for the sense-datum theory in Moore's discussion, when he considers whether our sense-data might be the actual surfaces of objects. They could not be this unless they matched the object exactly and this would be vanishingly rare, if ever.⁷

Although the sense-datum theory remains unfashionable, I take it that both it and naïve realism are intuitively preferable to the intentional theory at least in the following sense. To say that, when I seem to see red then there is indeed some red of which I am aware, has a straightforward phenomenological and conceptual clarity not possessed by saying that I am in a state which *visually represents* red. The standard contemporary account of representation, in terms of causal co-variance, is (as I sketched out above) inapplicable to perceptual consciousness, unless one accepts a functionalist account of consciousness. If one avoids being reductive about the phenomenology, then *visually representing red* means representing it *as being-present-to-me-in-a-way-that-makes-me-aware-of-it*. This seems to suggest that, phenomenologically the correct description of my experience, as a subjective phenomenon, is in terms of the experiential presentness of the sensible quality that characterizes my experience, namely red; but that, for the intentionalist, in some more basic sense, no red is really involved. As an account of experience, as opposed to an account of what is actually there in the outside world (we all agree that I can seem to see red and nothing 'real' and red be present) it is unclear what the disclaimer of the presence of red actually achieves. This seems especially clear if one takes into account the way in which contents, intentional or not, can occlude the actual features of the world, as argued above.

8. The intentionality of sensation as necessary if experience is to put us in touch with the world

Nevertheless, there might be the following thought favouring intentionalism about sensations, namely that it is only if sensations were intentional that sense experiences could point out to the world.

A major controversy in the philosophy of perception in recent years has been that between intentionalists and so-called relationists. The latter, exemplified by John McDowell (2008) and John Campbell (2002) think that only if perception is a direct relation to the world could we have any conception of the world as external at all. McDowell rejects the notion of intrinsic intentionality as 'magical'. Intentionalists, on the other hand, are happy to accept as natural this 'magical' state and think that it is the intrinsic intentionality of mental states that enables them to put us in touch with the

⁷ See Robinson 1994, 56-7 for a discussion of the generalization of the sense-datum analysis to all cases. Robinson 2003, 527-42, however, tries to give an account of how the sense-datum theory can be reconciled with a form of *judgemental* direct realism. My point in this paper is only that universal intentionalism is no better position regarding direct realism than the sense-datum theory.

world. I have already indicated some of the problems that I think there are with universal intentionalism. The relationists, on the other hand, are forced to be disjunctivists, and this leads them into various problems (Robinson 1994, 152-9 and forthcoming). It would be fair to say that disjunctivists have no agreed account of non-veridical perceptual states.

Both sides in this dispute fail to consider another option, and one which seems to me more plausible than either of their theories. This is that experience suggests the objectivity of the world in virtue of its orderly structure – what Hume called its *constancy and coherence*. Without that feature, it seems to me, no experiences, whether relational or intentional would suggest an objective world; and with appropriate ordering, sensations, whether intentional or not, would suggest objectivity. (See Robinson forthcoming for a more detailed statement of this argument.) Intrinsic intentionality is not, therefore, either necessary or sufficient to explain the ability of experience to seem to present an external world.

9. Conclusion

The ascription of primitive intentionality – the ability to pick out putative individuals – to sensations or any other mental states is a mistaken move. It has no grounds in the history of philosophy prior to Brentano, it rests on a radical misunderstanding of how the ‘aboutness’ of mental states works, and, if still resolutely affirmed, constitutes a verbal modification that makes no difference to any substantive philosophical problem. Our ability to experience the world as external and objective rests on the patterning and structure of experience, not on its possessing a primitive intentionality.

REFERENCES

- Brentano, T. 1977. *The Psychology of Aristotle*. Berkeley.
- Campbell, J. 2002. Berkeley’s Puzzle. In *Perceptual Experience*, ed. T. S. Gendler and J. Hawthorne. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Crane, T. 2001. *Elements of Mind*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dretske, F. 2000. *Perception, Knowledge and Belief*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Husserl, E. 2001. *Logical Investigations*. London: Routledge.
- Lockwood, M. 1971. Identity and reference. In *Identity and Individuation*, ed. M. Munitz. New York: New York University Press.
- McDowell, J. 1986. Singular Thought and the Extent of Inner Space. In *Subject, Thought and Context*, ed. P. Petit and J. McDowell. Oxford: Clarendon Press. [Reprinted in his *Meaning, Knowledge and Reality*. Cambridge: Harvard]

- McDowell, J. 2008. The Disjunctive Conception of Experience as Material for a Transcendental Argument. In *Disjunctivism*, ed. A. Haddock and F. Macpherson. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Peacocke, C. 1983. *Sense and Content*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Robinson, H. 1994. *Perception*. London: Routledge.
- Robinson, H. 2003. The ontology of the mental. In *The Oxford Handbook of Metaphysics*, ed. M. Loux and D. Zimmerman. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Robinson, H. 2010. The failure of disjunctivism to deal with ‘philosophers’ hallucinations. In *Hallucination*, eds. F. Macpherson and D. Platchais. MIT Press (forthcoming).
- Searle, J. 1983. *Intentionality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Stampe, D. 1979. Towards a causal theory of linguistic representation. In *Contemporary Perspectives on the Philosophy of Language*, ed. P. French, T. Uehling and H. Wettstein. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Strawson, P. 1974. *Subject and Predicate in Logic and Grammar*. London: Methuen.

Received: August 20, 2009
Accepted: October 12, 2009

Central European University
Budapest, Nador utca 9.
1051 Hungary
robinson@ceu.hu