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CLASSICAL INTENTIONALITY

ABSTRACT. In the first part, the paper describes in detail the classical conception of intentionality which was expounded in its most sophisticated form by Edmund Husserl. This conception is today largely eclipsed in the philosophy of mind by the functionalist and by the representationalist account of intentionality, the former adopted by Daniel Dennett and David Chalmers, the latter by John Searle and Fred Dretske. The very considerable differences between the classical and the modern conceptions are pointed out, and it is argued that the classical conception is more satisfactory than the two modern ones, not only regarding phenomenal adequacy, but also on the grounds of epistemological considerations. In the second part, the paper argues that classical intentionality is not naturalizable, that is, physicalizable. Since classical intentionality exists (in the experiences that display it), the non-naturalizability of classical intentionality implies psychophysical dualism.

Intentionality is widely assumed to be a naturalizable – that is, physicalizable – feature of reality, and therefore to pose no problem for physicalism. In the second part of this paper, I will argue that this is *not true* of a particular form of intentionality – an important form, which has at least every historical right to be considered *the core form of intentionality*, because it is the form of intentionality that has for the longest time been a subject of sophisticated philosophical investigation. It was discovered by Franz Brentano, and became a life-time subject of research for Edmund Husserl. One might, therefore, call it *Brentano-Husserlian intentionality*, in honor of these two eminent philosophers of the mind. But I prefer to call it *classical intentionality*. Designating it that way provides a shorter name and, what is more important, safeguards against a misunderstanding, namely, that it is a purpose of this paper to interpret the Brentano-Husserlian theory of intentionality (as historically documented), and that, therefore, the paper is successful if and only if I manage to correctly interpret what Brentano or Husserl have to say about the matter. But, in fact, my objective in this paper is *purely systematic*, not historical, not

exegetical. Nevertheless, what I am going to offer in the purely systematic regard is indebted to the writings of the two founders of intentionality-theory, and especially to the writings of Husserl (which will be evident to anyone who is knowledgeable about them also in the places where I do not document it).¹

Classical intentionality is not naturalizable, as I will argue. Therefore, the only escape for physicalists, if they want to remain physicalists, is to deny that classical intentionality exists (though they may allow the existence of other, naturalizable forms of intentionality). However, such a denial is not a philosophically reasonable step to take, since it does not save the phenomena, but sacrifices them to the insatiable demands of a metaphysical Moloch. Thus, the only philosophically reasonable move in the face of the apparent existence of classical intentionality is to adopt a form of psychophysical dualism.

However, before any far-reaching conclusions are drawn, what must be described first is the nature of classical intentionality – and since classical intentionality is a largely unknown quantity in today's philosophy of mind, doing so will in fact fill the larger part of this paper. In describing classical intentionality, there will be ample occasion to contrast it (favorably) with what contemporary philosophers think that *intentionality* is or should be.

1. WHAT IS CLASSICAL INTENTIONALITY?

- (1) Classical intentionality is not the intentionality of linguistic expressions or of behavior (including linguistic behavior), or of anything else in the world outside of consciousness (for example, propositions).
- (2) Classical intentionality is manifest, not latent.
- (3) Classical intentionality is entirely internal to episodes in consciousness – to *experiences*, broadly conceived – and does not consist in, or merely essentially involve, a relation of reference to anything in the world outside of consciousness.
- (4) Classical intentionality is manifested in the two-poled structure that can be discerned in most, though not in all, experiences: an *intentional subject* is *directed in a certain way at an intentional object*. There may, and usually are, several intentional objects *in one experience* at which the intentional subject is directed.
- (5) The way in which the intentional subject is directed at an intentional object is of a certain type (for example, vision, touch,

belief, imagination, volition, apparent memory, expectation, understanding, ratiocination, fear, etc.). That type is the crystallization point of a complicated organization of experiential material, forever changing with time. The intentional object is not external to that organization, but given by it: determined.

- (6) However, neither the intentional subject nor the intentional object(s) of an experience that displays classical intentionality – in short: an *intentional experience* – is in any real sense a part of that experience. This must be so, since the very same intentional subject and the very same intentional object(s) recur in other experiences, earlier and later ones. Both poles of classical intentionality are, therefore, merely implied by an intentional experience and are in, a certain sense, *transcendent* to it.
- (7) Although the intentional subject and the intentional object(s) are merely implied by an intentional experience, they are, nonetheless, *in* it (and hence they are *not represented* by it). It is the intentional object *itself* which is *in* an experience of which it is an intentional object, and it is the intentional subject *itself* that is *in* an experience of which it is the intentional subject.
- (8) Although an intentional object is *given* – not represented – by an intentional experience, it is normally *not completely* (regarding its aspects) given by it. In this way, too, an intentional object is transcendent to an intentional experience in which it figures (compare (6)). These eight points need both commenting and being put in perspective:

Concerning (1): Most contemporary concepts of intentionality are *wider* than the concept of classical intentionality. According to them, intentionality is also instantiated by something besides episodes in consciousness, and is a feature of linguistic expressions and of (some) behavior. This is an obvious consequence, for example, of the definition of intentionality offered by George Bealer:

A phenomenon (state, event) is intentional if and only if it is about something. Thus, intentionality is the property of aboutness possessed by certain phenomena [Bealer 1993, p. 104]

It is worth noting that the concept of classical intentionality, though certainly much narrower than Bealer's, is still wide enough to encompass the intentionality exhibited by *experiences of acting*, by *experiences of using language*, and by *experiences of understanding language*. If the narrowness of classical intentionality is nonetheless felt to be a deficiency, then that's fair enough: *extending* – merely extending – the concept of intentionality beyond the limits of

classical intentionality is not something philosophers need to worry about.

In the vicinity, however, there *is* something one ought to worry about philosophically. Some contemporary philosophers do not *extend* the notion of intentionality beyond its native place in experience, but *remove* it from it by applying it only to *behavior* and behavioral dispositions. The problem is compounded if intentionality is not even regarded as an objective feature of behavior but merely as a theoretical fiction that provides a useful perspective for explaining behavior (including the behavior of inanimate objects, like chess computers).² Of course, the philosophers in question do not see this attitude as problematic, but as the right attitude to adopt. In reaction, I can only point at certain phenomena – at what one *experiences* when one is seeing a tree, drawing a conclusion, wishing that someone were here, etc. – and demand that these phenomena be respected, insisting that the universal structure that all these phenomena exhibit can rightfully be called *intentionality*.

John Searle, indeed, is one philosopher who has emphasized the centrality of *consciousness* for intentionality:

Only a being that could have conscious intentional states could have intentional states at all, and every unconscious intentional state is at least potentially conscious. [Searle 1992, p. 132]

This suggests a wider conception of intentionality for which classical intentionality remains central (but, in fact, this is *not* Searle's conception: there are deep differences between classical intentionality on the one hand, and what is the core of intentionality in Searle's sense on the other; see below). There is not much to quarrel with such a conception. But what is important, given the current philosophical situation, is that classical intentionality be not ignored or denied; it is *not* important that the form of intentionality which is intentionality only in an extended sense ought to be reducible to, or at least ontologically dependent on, the core of intentionality, which is classical intentionality.

One might think that being oblivious to, or in denial of, classical intentionality is characteristic of physicalist philosophers like Daniel Dennett, who writes:

Like such *abstracta* as centres of gravity and parallelograms of force, the beliefs and desires posited by the highest stance [of explanation³] have no independent and concrete existence ... I have tried to undermine ... the idea that there have to be events or entities that *really* have intentionality (as opposed to the events and entities that only behave *as if* they had intentionality). [Dennett 1994, pp. 239–240]

But, in fact, a negative attitude towards classical intentionality is not restricted to physicalists. Here goes David Chalmers:

[T]here is reason to believe that this view [the functionalist view of belief] captures much of what is significant about belief. It is related to the idea that belief is something of an *explanatory construct*: we attribute beliefs to others largely in order to explain their behavior. [Chalmers 1996, p. 19][I]ntentional properties are best seen as a kind of third-person construct in the explanation of human behavior, and should therefore be analyzable in terms of causal connections to behavior and the environment. [Chalmers 1996, p. 82]

Clearly, Chalmers, the dualist, is here being remarkably true to Dennettian, physicalist lines of thinking; and like Dennett, Chalmers misrepresents the nature of belief. We certainly do not usually attribute beliefs *to ourselves* in order to explain our behavior to ourselves or to others. We usually attribute beliefs to ourselves because we have certain *intentional experiences: belief-experiences* (usually not in isolation, but interwoven with other intentional experiences of ours, for example, with other beliefs and, very often, with perceptions). These belief-experiences are certainly rather far from being theoretical constructs – and so are the *beliefs* whose vehicles the belief-experiences are. When we, in turn, attribute beliefs to others, as beliefs they *manifestly* have (and not just dispositionally), then we usually do that on the basis of assuming – on the grounds of observed behavior, yes – that they, too, have the corresponding belief-experiences. It is quite incidental to our belief-attributions that the beliefs may serve to explain the behavior. It would be an unusual situation indeed in which we, even as detached philosophical spectators, would be inclined to say anything like the following: “Look, he is believing that the murderer is still in the room, but he does not have the experience of believing that the murderer is still in the room. No, believing that the murderer is still in the room is just a third-person explanatory construct we attribute to him in order to explain his behavior.”

Concerning (2): In contrast to classical intentionality, modern intentionality is allowed to be latent, not manifest. Latency has two kinds, not often distinguished: (1) what, at the time, is not actual, but merely potential or dispositional, and (2) what is actual at the time, but (in some way or other) *hidden*. The assumption of latent intentionality of the first kind is betrayed (for example) by talk of *dispositional beliefs*, whereas the assumption of latent intentionality of the second kind is betrayed by talk of *unconscious beliefs*.⁴ Again, *extending* the concept of intentionality beyond the limits of classical intentionality – here in order to make room for latent intentionality

of both kinds – is not something one needs to worry about philosophically, although talk of having dispositional beliefs is a bit like talk of having dispositional sex. (Wouldn't it be better to say that a person X has the disposition to believe that B, instead of saying that X has the dispositional belief that B?) What is philosophically problematic, because it appears to indicate blindness to the phenomena (even a willful, ideological blindness), is the current tendency of allowing manifest intentionality to be moved into the background, or completely lost sight of, in favor of latent intentionality, especially of the second kind. The motivation behind this tendency is not far to seek: by being dissociated from actual experience, latent intentionality is more easily amenable to physicalism than manifest intentionality.

Concerning (3): According to (1) and (2), classical intentionality cannot be hidden or merely dispositional, and it exists, if at all, in consciousness; (3) adds to this that classical intentionality is constituted purely within consciousness. This means that the (concrete) intentionality of an *intentional experience* – that is, of an experience that displays classical intentionality – does not essentially imply anything about the world outside of consciousness; in other words, the intentional experience *could*⁵ remain in its essence, and hence its identity, intact although the world outside of consciousness were very different. Specifically, it could display this very same intentional object in the very same way, although the world outside of consciousness did not contain that object. Thus, according to the classical theory of intentionality (i.e., the theory of classical intentionality), the intentionality of my visual experience of *this* chestnut tree in bloom could in all essential respects – which include the intentional object, and the intentional object's way of being given – be exactly the same even if the world outside of consciousness did not contain that chestnut tree, or indeed any chestnut tree.

John Searle defines intentionality in the following way:

Intentionality is that property of many mental states and events by which they are directed at or about or of objects and states of affairs *in the world*. [Searle 1983, p. 1; my emphasis]

This clearly suggests an *externally referential* view of intentionality,⁶ and the impression is borne out further on in Searle's book:

To call something an Intentional object is just to say that it is what some Intentional state is about. ... In both the case of speech acts and the case of Intentional states, if there is no object that satisfies the propositional or the representative content, then the speech act and the Intentional state cannot be satisfied. In such cases, just as

there is no “referred-to object” of the speech act, so there is no “Intentional object” of the Intentional state: if nothing satisfies the referential portion of the representative content then the Intentional state does not have an Intentional object. [Ibid., pp. 16–17]

Accordingly, Searle (1983, p. 49) locates the intentional object of, for example, *perception* outside the intentional state, and he lets the intentional state be directed at – that is, for Searle, *refer to* – its intentional object (if it has one) with the crucial help of causation that originates in the intentional object and terminates in the intentional state:

On this account perception is an Intentional and causal transaction between mind and the world. ... We can say ... that it is part of the content of the visual experience that if it is to be satisfied it must be caused by its Intentional object.

But, not at all fitting this (partly) causal theory of “Intentionality” as a kind of reference, *classical* intentionality has nothing to do with *reference* (if taken to be a relation that is *external* to the relata, as it is in the paradigmatic case of *linguistic* reference, which is the relation on which Searle models the intentional relation), and it is as far as it can possibly be from causality. In fact, classical intentionality, though essentially about intentional objects, is not essentially about anything “in the world,” if by the expression “the world” one means the world outside of consciousness (and not merely *the total intentional correlate of consciousness*, as did Edmund Husserl). According to the classical theory of intentionality, intentional states, intentional experiences can never fail to be *about* something or other, can never fail to have determinate intentional objects (*contradicting* Searle’s theory of intentionality, and the externalist intentionality-theories of many others, as for example Dretske’s theory), though quite often their intentional objects *do not exist* (with or without the intentional subject’s believing that this is the case), in a sense that has nothing to do with a failure of reference.

Intentional experiences (or states) are in some sense *about* objects, and it is quite true that this, as Searle points out, makes these objects intentional objects. But whatever this aboutness precisely consists in (see *Concerning* (5)), according to the classical theory of intentionality, it does not reach beyond the bounds of the intentional experience itself.⁷ And therefore, what an intentional experience is about – that is, its intentional object (but *not* the existence of that intentional object) – does not depend in any way upon what is outside of it, but only upon itself. This point about classical intentionality is rather strikingly made by Husserl himself:

If this [intentional] experience is present, then – and this, I emphasize, is due to its own *essence* – the intentional “relation to an object” is *eo ipso* [*ipso facto* is more common in English] consummated, an object is *eo ipso* “intentionally present”; for the one and the other expression mean exactly the same. And of course such an experience can occur in consciousness, with this very intention of it, without the [intended] object existing, and perhaps even without its being able to exist; the object is intended, that is, its being intended is experienced; but it is then [when it does not exist] only intended [bloß vermeint] and in reality nothing. ... For consciousness, what is given is essentially the same, whether the presented object exists, or whether it is fictitious and perhaps even self-contradictory. [Husserl 1913, pp. 372–373; my translation.]

It can only be emphasized that, according to classical intentionality-theory, the existence or non-existence of an intentional object *does not* affect its status of being in some determinate manner the intentional object of an intentional experience. Thus Husserl:

Here it must be noted that the actual being or non-being of the object is irrelevant for the proper essence of the perception-experience, and hence also for its being perception of this – thus and thus appearing, as such and such intended – object. [Husserl 1913, p. 382; my translation] If I present to me God or an angel, an intelligible being in itself or a physical object or a round quadrangle, and so on, then that which has here been named and is transcendent is precisely that which is meant, that is (using only another word): the intentional object; it does not matter whether this object exists, whether it fictitious or absurd. [Husserl 1913, p. 425; my translation]

Curiously, Searle can seem to have been converted to Husserl’s point of view. In Searle (1994, p. 380), he says the following:

This question [what “about” means in the definition of intentionality] becomes more pressing when one realizes that an intentional state can be about something even though the thing it is about does not exist. Thus a child can have a belief that Santa Claus will come on Christmas Eve even though Santa Claus does not exist.

But the second sentence in this quotation strongly suggests that what Searle really has in mind with its first sentence is what he expresses a few pages further on (*ibid.*, p. 386) in the following, much more adequate way:

[I]ntentional-with-a-t states are representations, and ... the content of the representation can be reported independently of whether or not it is satisfied, or even independently of whether or not the objects purportedly referred to by the representation even exist [“exist” meaning for Searle: *can be referred to*] ... [A] mental representation can be reported accurately even though the objects purportedly referred to by that representation do not exist [“do not exist” meaning for Searle: *cannot be referred to*].

Concerning (4): An intentional experience, due to its being structured in the two-poled manner of classical intentionality: an *intentional subject* being *directed in a certain way at an intentional object*,

displays both directed-*at*-ness and given-*to*-ness. This is so because directed-*at*-ness entails given-*to*-ness: if an intentional subject is *directed in the manner F* (intrinsic to the intentional experience) *at* an intentional object, then, necessarily, this object is *given in the manner F to* that subject. And conversely: if an intentional object is *given in the manner F* (intrinsic to the intentional experience) *to* an intentional subject, then, necessarily, this subject is *directed in the manner F at* that object. “X is F-given to Y” and “Y is F-directed at X” are, in the context of describing relationships of classical intentionality, just two necessarily equivalent converse ways of speaking. However, the first and less usual way has the advantage that it brings out more clearly than the second and usual way of speaking that a relationship of classical intentionality has an essential aspect of *subjectivity* to it.

If an intentional subject Y is directed at an intentional object X, then X can be all sorts of things. X can be existent or nonexistent, abstract or concrete, an object in the narrow sense (for example, a material object) or an object in the wider or widest sense (for example, a state of affairs, an event, a property). In fact, anything that anybody could be *conscious of* – including intentional experiences themselves, of whatever level (first-order, second-order, etc.), and intentional subjects – can be an intentional object. This huge diversity of possible (and actual) intentional objects is entirely covered by the conception of classical intentionality (see Husserl’s writings). In striking contrast, intentional subjects are of a much more uniform nature. In all my innumerable intentional experiences, the uniform intentional subject is – *I*. In all your, likewise innumerable, intentional experiences, the uniform intentional subject is – *you*.

An intentional subject – in the classificatory, not in the implicitly relational sense – is just a subject of some intentional experience or other. Thus, every intentional subject is a *subject of (some) experience*, though, perhaps, the converse of this is not true: perhaps there is some subject of experience which is not a subject of any intentional experience. Now, different *subjects of experience*, whatever else they may differ in, are bound to differ in the experiences, intentional or non-intentional ones, of which they are the subjects. Hence the following identity-principle is true:

For all subjects of experience Y and Z: if Y is subject of the same experiences that Z is subject of, then Y and Z are identical.

In fact, the following logically stronger identity-principle seems true as well:

For all subjects of experience Y and Z: if Y is subject of some experience that Z is subject of, then Y and Z are identical.

It is a logical consequence of this latter principle that different subjects of experience do not have any experiences in common.

It should be noted that these two principles prejudge nothing regarding the ontological nature of subjects of experience, and hence nothing about the ontological nature of the intentional subject of *your* intentional experiences, or *mine*. They are quite neutral regarding this ontological question. It should also be noted that they are not intended as specifying *criteria* of identity for subjects of experience. If they were thus intended (but they aren't), then, indeed, the objection of circularity against the first principle would be a fair objection to it (since experiences, apparently, cannot be found to be the same without already finding that their subjects are the same).

It is an interesting question whether, in addition to experiences that have both a subject and an object, there are *other* experiences: experiences (1) without subject but with an object, (2) with a subject but without object, (3) without subject and without object.

Regarding hypothesis (1), it is notable that neither Bealer's nor Searle's definition of intentionality (see above) mentions a subject of intentionality. For all their definitions say, every instance of intentionality might be, so to speak, anonymous, or *subjectless* (though of course not objectless). Even more significant than this is the fact that Searle's *analysis* of intentionality leaves subjects of intentionality quite out of consideration, whereas Bealer's analysis mentions them in a very inconspicuous way,⁸ and then has nothing more to say about them. This contrasts rather strikingly with the prominence that the intentional subject – *the self* – is accorded, and must be accorded, in the classical theory of intentionality.⁹

Bealer's and Searle's analyses of intentionality, which more or less sidestep the self, are symptomatic of a general tendency. The idea of subjectless experiences has won ever more adherents since the days of David Hume – for various reasons, some of which have nothing to do with philosophical or scientific reasons. Despite its current popularity, it remains a highly implausible idea. For example, for every pain-experience there seems to be an addressee of it, essentially implicated in the very experience itself; and the same appears to be true of every belief-experience and other thought-experience,¹⁰ of every perceptual experience, volitional experience – and so on, whatever kind of experience one cares to look at. It should go without saying (but unfortunately it doesn't, and that is why I say it) that an

experience can have an intrinsic addressee – a subject – without this addressee being *reflectively* (and hence explicitly) aware of the fact.

Much more plausible than the hypothesis that there are subjectless experiences – be they with or without an object: the disjunction of the hypotheses (1) and (3) above – is the hypothesis that there are experiences with a subject but without object: hypothesis (2). Most people who have thought about intentionality believe this (though Brentano *didn't*). Supposing that all experiences have a subject and that intentional experiences are experiences that have both a subject and an object, hypothesis (2) can also be articulated in the following way: “There are experiences that are not intentional experiences.” Pain-experiences are the standard examples adduced. “Groundless” emotional experiences – like a “groundless” feeling of anxiety – seem to be other cases in point.

Concerning (5): The coming into being of the (more or less momentary) concrete way in which an intentional subject is *directed* at an intentional object – or the latter is *given* to the former – is the locus where intentionality is produced in experience. Notoriously, the processes of “intentional constitution” and “intentional achievement” (both these terms are Husserl’s, in German: *intentionale Konstitution*, *intentionale Leistung*) are utterly difficult to describe, even in cases where these processes are more or less static in time, involving hardly any change. The subjectively phenomenal, or “qualitative,” or, as Husserl would put it, *hyletic* aspect of intentional constitution is in good part responsible for this difficultness. The difficultness is not surprising, since language is for the most part – at least initially – made for describing intentional objects and the *objectival* aspects and changes of such objects, and not for describing the subjective manner in which intentional objects “come about” for the intentional subject. Notwithstanding this fact (and in awareness of it), the elucidation of *essentially how*, for the various types of classical intentionality, the intentional object is constituted for the intentional subject was the central *scientific* project of Husserlian phenomenology.

Concerning (6): The sense in which the poles of classical intentionality – intentional subject and intentional object(s) – are *transcendent* to an intentional experience is *not* that they are something “beyond” the experience, something “out there,” as they are according to the externally referential or *representational* theory of intentionality (see *Concerning* (3) and *Concerning* (7)). Rather, their transcendence is something that is constituted in the experience itself. If I look at a cup standing on the table, and later look at it again

(after being a few hours away, or after closing my eyes for just a few seconds), then the cup is given to me in (or *through*) a subsequent visual experience *as the very same cup* that was given to me in an earlier visual experience, hence *as* something that transcends both these visual experiences. And by having the cup visually given to *me* as that same cup *I* looked at before, I am immediately implied – at the other end of intentionality, so to speak – *as* the identical subject of temporally separate visual experiences, hence, too, *as* something that transcends these experiences. (Note that matters are, in effect, the same regarding objectival transcendence if I am looking at the cup *continuously*.) Thus it is no surprise that *for Hume*, on the disappearance of *the subject* persisting numerically identically through time, *the objects* persisting numerically identically through time disappeared, too, and vice versa, leaving behind a confetti-world. But Hume's case is just a colossal case of phenomenological blindness.

Concerning (7): Classical intentionality is *not representational*. This is another way of putting the point already made above (see *Concerning (3)*): classical intentionality is *not externally referential*. For every *successful* representation – every representation that *indeed represents something* – is a successful act of external reference – an act of external reference in which indeed something is referred to; and every successful act of external reference is a successful representation (though the representation may have no significant similarity with what is represented, as in the case of linguistic reference). Given the close connection between external reference and representation, it is fitting that John Searle who is a proponent of intentionality as externally referential intentionality is also a proponent of intentionality as *representational intentionality* (in a special sense):

[T]he key to understanding intentionality is representation in a special sense of that word that we can explain from our theory of speech acts. [Searle 1994, p. 382]

However, since classical intentionality is certainly a form of *intentionality*, but nevertheless *non-representational*, it cannot be, without qualification, true that “the key to understanding intentionality is representation.” The essence of representation is the positing of two sides: the representing side and the represented side, with the representation-relation between them.¹¹ But classical intentionality does without this duality, and it seems, in doing so, it is in fact truer to the phenomenological character of experience. Unless an experience is rather special, namely, an experience where an object is experienced as an image mimetically *representing* something, or as an item that, though not mimetically representing something, is at least standing

for something (symbolizing it) – unless we have these special cases before us, there is not a trace of experienced representation in experience. There is not a trace of experienced representation, for example, in direct visual experiences: the visual experience is of the object itself, directly, without anything mediating interposing (least of all a causal connection between the seen object and the experience). This is how the visual experience is experienced; the concept of representation is, therefore, a theoretical construct that Searle and many other philosophers superimpose upon its phenomenological character.¹² The superimposition may be theoretically useful, and representation, though being largely non-phenomenological, may nonetheless prove to be “the key to understanding intentionality.” There are, however, very considerable epistemological problems connected with it (see below).

Husserl, for one, is very clear on the non-representational phenomenological nature of most of the instances of (classical) intentionality, and vehemently opposes representationalism in the theory of intentionality (though the representationalism he opposes is certainly less sophisticated than Searle’s; see Husserl (1913, pp. 421–425).¹³ For further underlining the contrast between classical intentionality and the predominant representational, externally referential conception of intentionality, another quotation from Husserl is meant to be helpful:

One must learn to understand that, in every case, there is required a “constitution” *for* consciousness of the object of consciousness [Vorstellungsgegenstand], and *within* consciousness, within its own essential content; that, therefore, an object for consciousness is not thereby an object for it [vorgestellt] that some “content,” somehow similar to the transcendent object itself, simply *is* in consciousness (which view, considered closely, resolves itself into pure absurdity); but thereby that in the *phenomenological essence* of consciousness itself all relatedness to its object matter is included, and can, as a matter of principle, only therein be included, and precisely as a relatedness to a “transcendent” object. This relatedness is a “direct” one if we are dealing with simple being for consciousness [schlichtes Vorstellen], and a mediated one if we are dealing with grounded, for example, image-mediated being for consciousness [abbildendes Vorstellen]. [Husserl 1913, p. 423; my translation]

The Husserlian position also contradicts the rather representative opinions of Fred Dretske, for whom, much more outspokenly than for Searle, “a representational account of the mind provides a satisfying explanation of intentionality” (Dretske 1995, p. 28). Dretske believes that

[w]hen I am experiencing an object, nothing in my experience of it determines *which* object I’m experiencing anymore than there is something about a gauge’s

representation of a tire's pressure that determines which tire it is registering the pressure of. Representations are not like that. Neither are experiences. [Ibid., p. 33]

This is said from the point of view of the representationalist paradigm of intentionality, and it exhibits the central difficulty of that paradigm. For the natural, the obvious epistemological question to ask is this: If nothing in my experience determined *which* object I am experiencing, then how could I ever *know* which object I am experiencing? Dretske's representationalist idea is that it is only *strongly objectively* – outside of experience, by a “certain external causal or contextual relation,” which is (suspiciously) hard to specify (see Dretske 1995, p. 24, 173) – determined which object I am experiencing (if I am experiencing any object at all). But that won't help me a bit if I want to *know* which object I am experiencing – which is certainly not an idle question, but a question which at least in some cases must be satisfactorily answered if I am to have any *knowledge* of the objective world at all. And, it seems, representationalism cannot answer that question satisfactorily, since, for knowing which object I am experiencing, the object I am experiencing must *itself* be subjectively accessible to me, without any representation interposing – an idea utterly foreign to representationalism. Suppose I have no subjective access to the experienced object itself; then there are two possibilities: (1) I have direct subjective access to a representation of that object; (2) I do not even have direct subjective access to a representation of it. *In the latter case*, the object that is experienced by me, even if in fact (somehow) represented in me, is just *nothing* to me epistemically (though it may still causally influence my behavior, which would make me like Dretske's gauge), and in this case one should really put the word “experienced” in the phrase “object that is experienced by me” in scare-quotes. *In the former case*, I *do* know which representation I am experiencing, but this by itself does not reveal to me the object of the representation (i.e., the object that is experienced by me, according to the representational theory of intentionality), as little as a sequence of inscriptions, no matter how well I know it, reveals to me by itself what it stands for, or indeed that there is anything it stands for. In effect, this was already the objection Bishop Berkeley raised – with idealistic intent – against Locke's representationalism.¹⁴

Thus, if there is to be any knowledge for us of the objective world at all, we cannot do without direct subjective access to the objects we are experiencing. Hence *science* cannot do without that access, either – science which is often naively taken to tell us, so to speak, “out of the blue” what is really objectively the case, correcting intentional

experience, it seems, from a higher point of view, indeed invalidating it. Husserl has put it very well:

The contemptuousness with which all that is “merely subjectively relative” is treated by a scientist who follows the modern ideal of objectivity does not change anything regarding his own [subjectively relative] mode of being, nor does it change anything about the fact that what is subjectively relative must be good enough for him wherever he has recourse to it and, inevitably, must have recourse to it. ... While the natural scientist is in this manner [of constructing and testing hypotheses] objectively interested and in action, what is subjectively relative does certainly not function for him as an irrelevant thorough-fare, but as that which is ultimately grounding the theoretical-logical validity for all objective corroboration, that is, as a source of evidence, of corroboration. The seen scales of measurement, the lines of gradation, etc. are used as really existing, and not as illusions; hence what really exists in the life-world is indeed a premise, is presupposed as something valid. [Husserl 1992b, pp. 128–129; my translation]

There is, normally, *no representation* in classical intentionality, but always a lot of what might be called *perspectivation*: the perspectivation of the intentional object which is given to the intentional subject. This perspectivation is intended by the phrase “given in the manner F” used above (see *Concerning* (4)). It must not be confused with representation, and it must not be taken to entail representation: that a spider is given in the mental manner F to the subject *does not* mean or entail that there is an F-type mental representation of a spider in the subject, or worse: that what is *given* to the subject is a F-type mental representation of a spider. No, according to the classical theory of intentionality, there is as little *representation of a spider* in an *experience of a spider* as there is, in it, representation of the subject of that experience — namely, *none*.

In accordance with putting perspectivation in place of representation, as is required by classical intentionality, the discovery that an intentional object, which was thought to exist, does not in fact exist is not a matter of discovering that something that was thought to mentally represent it does, in fact, not represent anything at all; rather, it is simply a matter of a change of perspective on the intentionally persisting identical object: from the existence perspective to the non-existence perspective — in the light of new experience:

It is for everybody — with the exception of the confused philosopher — absolutely self-evident that the object that is perceived in perception is the object itself, in its own being, and that if perceptions deceive, then this means that they are in conflict with new perceptions that show with certainty what is actual in place of the illusory. [Husserl 1992a, p. 287; my translation]

It is important to keep in mind that, in the classical theory of intentionality, *perspective* — of course in a richer than merely spatial

sense – is not merely a subjective additive to what is objectively given independently of it, but something that affects objectivity itself: contributes to making it what it is. This has large implications for the question what *realism* could mean from the point of view of the theory of classical intentionality. This paper is not the place for treating this very large question, but let it be said that adopting the classical theory of intentionality does certainly not force one to become an *idealist* (though Husserl did become one).

Concerning (8): The incompleteness with which intentional objects normally figure in intentional experiences is another feature of their being, so to speak, *immanently transcendent* to these experiences (in addition to the feature addressed in (6)). This incompleteness is a consequence of *perspectivation*: given the perspective of the intentional subject on the intentional object, there is, normally, only one side (of many sides) of the intentional object revealed to the intentional subject. The intentional object is experienced by the intentional subject with precisely this character. Moreover, the sequence of sides, or aspects, of the numerically identically persisting intentional object that is run through in the course of time by the intentional subject is, normally, not experienced as exhausting the aspects the intentional object has, but on the contrary as being forever prolongable (and prolongable in various possible ways). More than anything else this intentional incompleteness suggests the mind-independent nature of intentional objects – of *physical* objects foremost, but not only of them: of *abstract* objects, too. The seeming inevitability with which representationalism forces itself onto the minds of so many is likely to be the result of the fact that it seems to connect so very naturally to intentional incompleteness, the mainstay of *realism*. One is very much tempted to regard intentional incompleteness simply as the incompleteness of the representation of objects that are *beyond* experience, not just *immanently transcendent* to it, but *absolutely*. But one is not forced to adopt this position, which is unsatisfactory from the epistemological point of view. As Berkeley saw long ago, representationalism does nothing for realism; on the contrary, it can put one on a track that is detrimental to realism, as is shown in the history of philosophy by the long reign of idealism after Berkeley.

2. IS CLASSICAL INTENTIONALITY NATURALIZABLE?

First, what could it mean that classical intentionality is naturalizable? Obviously this: that classical intentionality is – correctly regarded – nothing over and above nature. But take the word “nature” in a wide

enough sense, and it becomes trivially true that classical intentionality is nothing over and above nature. This, surely, is not the naturalization intended by those who believe that a phenomenon is *naturalizable*; rather, what they have in mind is that the phenomenon is nothing over and above *physical* nature, or *the physical*, in short. So the question is whether classical intentionality is “nothing over and above the physical.” But, as the quotation-marks indicate, there is still unclarity about the phrase “nothing over and above the physical.” The word “physical” in itself is highly unclear, but I will let this pass, since for what follows what grasp we have of its meaning will quite suffice. The problem that cannot be neglected is this:

If a phenomenon is *not something else than the physical*, then, clearly, it is nothing over and above the physical. But is the converse of this also true? Or could it be that a phenomenon is nothing over and above the physical, but nevertheless *something else* than the physical – in the straightforward sense that it is *not* a physical phenomenon? In recent years, many physicalists, dissatisfied with the so-called (psychophysical) *identity theory* – which in its most general form makes the straightforward claim that everything mental is (identical with something) physical –, have indeed appeared to believe just this: that a phenomenon could be *nonphysical* and still “nothing over and above the physical” (though I doubt that they would have explicitly admitted to this belief if asked). The rationale of this position is that the *mere dependence* of a phenomenon on the physical – a dependence variously conceived of – is regarded as sufficient for its naturalizability (that is, physicalizability). But the rationale does not appear to be reasonable. A statue is clearly dependent on the material it is made of: it is in the strongest sense impossible that the statue exist *without* the material it is made of; but nevertheless the statue is certainly “something over and above” the material it is made of (and not only something else than it).

In view of these considerations, it seems, after all, best to consider the phrase “nothing over and above the physical” to be tantamount in its meaning to the phrase “not something else than the physical” (thus answering the question at the beginning of the previous paragraph with “yes”). In consequence, the question whether classical intentionality is naturalizable comes down to the question whether classical intentionality is nothing else than the physical, not different from it, in other words: *whether classical intentionality is a physical phenomenon*.

After the preparations made, the answer to this question can be brief. In view of the description of classical intentionality that has

been provided in the previous section, it is already rather unlikely that the answer to our question could be “yes,” since the concepts needed for truthfully describing classical intentionality are as dissimilar to the concepts of natural science, and of physics in particular, as they could possibly be. Nevertheless, a direct refutation of the claim that classical intentionality is a physical phenomenon can also be provided. Consider an intentional experience; consider, for example, the visual experience that I have – that I am the intentional subject of – when I look, in broad daylight, at a straight wooden stick which I immersed, a moment ago, into the clear water standing in a bucket. This visual experience has at least two intentional objects (they certainly get most of my attention): *this wooden stick* and the state of affairs *that this wooden stick forms an angle*. Hence this visual experience is partly illusory, and partly not: the wooden stick is visually given to me (in, or *through*, the experience) *as existing*, and the state of affairs that the wooden stick forms an angle is visually given to me *as obtaining*. But I know (though it is philosophically speaking, not a simple matter at all how I came by this knowledge) that only the first of the two mentioned intentional aspects of the entire visual experience is veridical, not also the second.

Is this visual experience of mine any particular physical phenomenon? If *not*, then it is *false* that classical intentionality is (that is: is always) a physical phenomenon. But *how* could my visual experience be any particular physical phenomenon? For being such a phenomenon, it must be a physical event, or in other words: a spatiotemporal part of the physical world. And it evidently *is not* a spatiotemporal part of that world. My visual experience is not a part of what is happening in the brain (all that’s happening there is the activity of neurons going about their mind-bogglingly complicated electro-chemical business),¹⁵ and it is also not a part of what is happening in my entire body. It is, obviously, also not a part of what is happening in the physical world outside of my body. Nor is it a part of what is happening partly in my body and partly outside of it, straddling both sides. Although these latter goings-on are especially well-suited to *causally explain* my experience, the experience itself forms no part of them. My visual experience, in short, is not a physical event, and therefore: it is not any particular physical phenomenon (although a *physical* object and a *physical* state of affairs are intentional objects of that experience: a striking illustration of the peculiar transcendence of intentional objects to intentional experiences). Hence I conclude that classical intentionality cannot be naturalized.

The only way out for physicalists (short of becoming dualists) is to deny that my experience does exist in the way it seems to me to exist, namely, as an instance of classical intentionality. Accordingly, Dretske thinks that “intentionality is real enough, but it turns out, as Fodor ... suggests it must, to be really something else” (Dretske 1995, p. 28) – something that always involves what classical intentionality, usually, does not involve: *representation*.¹⁶ And Dennett would certainly hold that what I believe to be an *intentional experience* – an episode in consciousness that displays *classical intentionality* – is in reality nothing but a complex, linguistically generated fiction, grafted (though, for the time being, mysteriously enough) onto a stock of neuronal dispositions.¹⁷ But who can *really* believe this? *I* certainly can’t.

NOTES

¹ It is unfortunate that Husserl’s writings are largely ignored by analytic philosophers. But hardly anyone else has written with so much depth and sophistication about the subject of intentionality. Husserl’s amazing grasp of intentionality is already quite apparent in the early *Fifth Logical Investigation: About Intentional Experiences and Their ‘Contents.’*

² See Daniel Dennett’s conception of *the intentional stance* in Dennett (1971), concisely summarized by himself in Dennett (1994, p. 239). According to Dennett, in explaining/predicting behavior, it is often useful – and sometimes indispensable: if, due to excessive complexity, a mechanistic or functional explanation/prediction is out of the question – to treat behavior *as if* it were the intentional action of a rational agent on the basis of its beliefs and objectives. According to Dennett, there is no point in asking whether this is *really* the case; what matters alone is the explanatory/predictive leverage it provides.

³ See note 2

⁴ Searle (1994, p. 380) is conflating the two kinds of latent intentionality when he says: “[A] person can have [a] belief while he or she is sound asleep. In such a case, the intentionality is unconscious.”

⁵ “Could,” *not* “would.” Though there is no metaphysical necessity for this, intentionality may nevertheless vary – and even vary necessarily – with the world outside of consciousness.

⁶ In Meixner (2004, pp. 330–333), I provide a contrastive description of *referential intentionality* and *content-intentionality*. The interpretation of intentionality as referential intentionality is ascribed to Searle, the interpretation of intentionality as content-intentionality to Husserl. Thus, content-intentionality is *classical intentionality*.

⁷ Also according to the classical theory of intentionality one can describe aboutness as a kind of *reference* – if one keeps in mind that what is meant is *internal* reference, and nothing which is analogous to linguistic reference (the paradigm of *external* reference).

⁸ Bealer (1993, p. 111): “The aboutness of all intentional phenomena derives from individuals’ bearing relevant connections (namely, *intentional connections*) to complex intensions that, just on their own, are about things.”

⁹ Lowe (1996) has “subjects of experience” as its title. Curiously, *subjects of experiences* are not much emphasized in connection with *intentional experiences* in that book (for example, on p. 96, the intentionality of perceptual experiences is characterized *without* reference to their subjects). However, Lowe does of course connect subjects with experiences, and indeed emphasizes that experiences are *in their nature* experiences *of* subjects (ibid., p. 25). He also implicitly states the above second identity-principle for subjects of experience (ibid., p. 31).

¹⁰ Manifest thoughts are episodes in consciousness, and hence they are here counted among the experiences and not put in opposition to them. Instead of opposing manifest thoughts to experiences – as is done in Dretske (1995, p. 10) –, it seems to me more useful to distinguish between highly conceptualized experiences and more or less non-conceptualized ones.

¹¹ “Insofar as a representational account of sense experience depicts experience as representational, it likens experience to something like a story,” says Dretske (1995, p. 34), going on to distinguish the two sides of a story: “the story-vehicle” and “the story-content,” and hence, in view of the analogy he has in mind, “representational vehicle” and “representational content.” But if experience – in the broad sense, in another word: consciousness – where indeed like a story, how could we ever know that experience is, at least partly, *true to the facts*? For whether a story is true to the facts is not something that can be found out by reading that story or other stories; to determine whether it is true to the facts, one must go beyond the realm of stories. But we certainly cannot go beyond the realm of experience: we cannot overstep our cognitive horizon. This forcefully suggests that experience is really not like a story at all.

¹² In the case of visual experiences, Searle (1983, p. 46) speaks of *presentations*, instead of *representations* and seems to distance himself from what he calls “the representative theory of perception.” But Searle’s *presentations*, as Searle himself notes, are just a special subclass of representations. Hence no distancing from the representational theory of perception is in fact achieved by him, not even in the case of visual experience.

¹³ The extent to which representationalism rules the roost in contemporary theory of intentionality is strikingly revealed in the following quotation from Lowe (1996, p. 96): “Perceptual experiences are *intentional* (or, in the currently fashionable jargon, ‘representational’) states of mind.” The “currently fashionable jargon” is no accident, of course.

¹⁴ According to the modern representationalist Dretske (1995, p. 26), “one cannot know, at least not by introspection, what object (or whether there is an object) one is experiencing.” Indeed, introspection won’t help here. But since we usually have the knowledge that is in question, *how* do we obtain it? Dretske doesn’t tell us. In fact, within representationalism, there *cannot* be a rationally satisfactory answer to this question.

¹⁵ For Dretske (1995, p. 151) it is an “obvious fact ... that what goes on in the mind – what we think, feel and experience – ... [is] nowhere to be found in the head – where the thoughts, feelings, and experiences are.” But since, *contradicting* Dretske’s externalism, *what we experience* is an essential, intrinsic aspect of *the experience*, also the experiences themselves “are nowhere to be found in the head.”

¹⁶ Note that the brain-state corresponding to the above described visual experience *is* representational whereas the experience itself *is not* – according to the classical theory of intentionality, which respects the subjective phenomena and imposes nothing on them which is not in them. Hence it follows, according to the classical theory of intentionality, that the experience is not identical with the corresponding brain-state.

¹⁷ This is the central message of Dennett (1991).

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