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## INTENTIONALITY NATURALIZED: DISPOSITIONS AND QUOTATIONS

Ullin T. Place

### *Abstract*

Martin and Pfeifer have argued that physical dispositions satisfy all the accepted marks of intentionality. My own researches suggest the following conclusions:

1. 'Intentionality' means whatever the accepted marks make it mean.
2. Hence, if Martin and Pfeifer are right, intentionality is the mark, not of the mental, but of the dispositional.
3. We need to distinguish intentionality, as described by Brentano, Anscombe and Searle's "intentionality-with-a-t" which is the mark of the dispositional from Frege's "indirect reference", Quine's "referential opacity", Geach's "non-Shakespeareanity" and Searle's "intentionality-with-an-s" which is the mark of a quotation.

### *Do physical dispositions satisfy all the accepted marks of intentionality?*

In an unpublished paper entitled 'Intentionality and materialism' presented to the Department of Philosophy at the University of Sydney c. 1968, a copy of which is in my possession, John Burnheim argued that a purely physical disposition such as the brittleness of a glass satisfies all "three salient things about" intention cited by Elizabeth Anscombe in her 1965 paper 'The intentionality of sensation: a grammatical feature'. Thus:

ST1. Just as "not any true description of what you do describes it as the action you intended: only under certain of its descriptions will it be intentional."

So not any description of a manifestation of the brittleness of a glass describes it as a manifestation of its brittleness: describing it as a breaking of the glass does not.

ST2. Just as "the descriptions under which you intend what you do can be vague, indeterminate."

So the description of a glass as brittle is vague, indeterminate, with respect to when, where and how the glass will actually break, if and when it does so.

ST3. Just as "descriptions under which you intend to do what you do may not come true."

So the description of a glass as brittle (i.e., as liable to break, if struck violently by or against something hard), considered as a prediction of its ultimate fate, may not come true.

In 1986 C. B. ("Charlie") Martin and Karl Pfeifer published a joint paper entitled 'Intentionality and the non-psychological' in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* in which they argued that five marks of intentionality culled from the writings of Chisholm (1957), Anscombe (1965) and Searle (1983) are all satisfied by physical dispositions or rather by sentences describing them. The first three of these which come from Chisholm (op.cit. pp 170-1) are as follows:

Mark 1. "A simple declarative sentence is intentional if it uses a substantival expression - a name or a description - in such a way that neither the sentence nor its contradictory implies either that there is or that there isn't anything to which the substantival expression truly applies."

This, as Chisholm acknowledges in a footnote, is a re-statement in linguistic terms of Brentano's (1871/1995) concept of "intentional inexistence".

Mark 2. "Any noncompound sentence which contains a propositional clause, . . . is intentional provided that neither the sentence nor its contradictory implies either that the propositional clause is true or that it is false."

This would appear to be a further attempt to re-state Brentano's principle in linguistic terms, substituting the truth or falsity of a declarative sentence or proposition for the existence/non-existence of an object referred to by or within the grammatical object of a verb.

Mark 3. "Suppose there are two names or descriptions which designate the same things and that *E* is a sentence obtained merely by separating these two names or descriptions by means of 'is identical with' (or 'are identical with' if the first word is plural). Suppose also that *A* is a sentence using one of those names or descriptions and that *B* is like *A* except that, where *A* uses the one, *B* uses the other. Let us say that *A* is intentional if the conjunction of *A* and *E* does not imply *B*.

This, as Chisholm acknowledges in a footnote, is the phenomenon which Frege (1892/1960) calls “indirect reference”. Quine (1962/1968) calls it “referential opacity”. Peter Geach (1962/1968) calls it non-Shakespearianity, a reference to Shakespeare’s “A rose by any other name would smell as sweet” (*Romeo and Juliet*, Act II, Scene II). John Searle (1979; 1983), following Kneale (1968), calls it “intensionality-with-an-s”.

Mark 4. Martin and Pfeifer’s fourth mark of intentionality is John Searle’s (1983, p.1) principle whereby intentional states “are directed at or about or of objects and states of affairs in the world”.

This is a principle which is very much part of Brentano’s original formulation of the concept of intentionality, but which gets written out by Chisholm when he reformulates the notion of “intentional inexistence” in linguistic terms (his and Martin and Pfeifer’s Mark 1)

Mark 5. Martin and Pfeifer’s fifth and final Mark of intentionality we have already encountered in the shape of Anscombe’s second “salient thing about intention” whereby “the descriptions under which you intend what you do can be [I would say invariably are] vague, indeterminate.”

It is perhaps worth remarking in this connection that of Anscombe’s “three salient things about intention” only two, her second and her third, correspond to marks of intentionality mentioned by Martin and Pfeifer. Her third salient thing, “descriptions under which you intend to do what you do may not come true”, assuming that a description of a disposition comes true when the disposition is manifested, corresponds to Brentano’s “inexistence” of the intentional object whereby it has not yet and may or may not [come to] exist. Anscombe’s first salient thing whereby “not any true description of what you do describes it as the action you intended” is not mentioned. This is presumably because it is apparently at odds with their (and Chisholm’s) third Mark of intentionality (“indirect reference”, “referential opacity”, “non-Shakespearianity”, “intensionality-with-an-s”). The conflict arises in that what it claims in effect is that descriptions of the manifestation of a disposition, so far from being referentially opaque, are referentially transparent. Descriptions of the event whereby a disposition is manifested can be replaced by a description which does not mention the disposition which is thereby manifested *without* affecting the truth value of what is asserted. This, it should be noted, is not inconsistent with the claim that descriptions of a disposition, as opposed to descriptions of its manifestations, are (at least in the case of human mental dispositions) referentially opaque.

*Is intentionality one kind of thing or more than one?*

In contrast to Anscombe all of whose “salient things” are illustrated by the same example, the example of someone intending to do something (disposition) and doing what they intended to do (manifestation), Martin and Pfeifer follow Chisholm in illustrating each Mark of intentionality with a different example. Moreover, whereas each of Anscombe’s “salient things” can, as we have seen, be paralleled by the same example of a physical disposition (the brittleness of a glass); Martin and Pfeifer also use a different example in each case in order to substantiate their claim that physical dispositions or rather descriptions of them satisfy all five Marks.

The use of different examples in each case must raise the question whether in fact intentionality as defined by these different marks is the same thing - whether in fact they carve up this particular universe of discourse in the same way. For Martin and Pfeifer, as for Burnheim before them, this is of no consequence. They are persuaded that whatever else it is, intentionality, is the mark of the mental. Consequently, if they can show, only by a single example, that a particular Mark is satisfied by a purely physical disposition, they have shown that it cannot be a mark of the intentional in the relevant sense.

The trouble with this view is that if it turns out, as I am confident it will, that the mental/intentional is what Wittgenstein (1953) calls “a family resemblance concept” which has no single “essence” marking off all mental/intentional things from all non-intentional/physical things, intentionality so defined will turn out to be an empty concept. Far better to recognize that ‘intentionality’ is a philosopher’s technical term which means whatever the various marks of intentionality proposed by the philosophers make it mean. But in that case, if Burnheim and Martin and Pfeifer are correct in claiming that physical dispositions or their descriptions satisfy all the marks of intentionality proposed by the philosophers, intentionality must be the mark, not of the mental, but of the dispositional. But if *that* is the thesis to be defended, it ceases to be a matter of indifference whether the different marks of intentionality proposed by the philosophers pick out the same or some different classes of thing.

*Testing the five marks against the same pair of examples*

In a paper entitled 'Intentionality as the mark of the dispositional' (Place 1996) I tried to assess both the extent to which the different marks of intentionality are marking off the same class or different classes of things and how far the claim that physical dispositions satisfy the five Marks listed by Martin and Pfeifer. I did this by repeating their examination using the same pair of examples throughout. The examples I chose were, in the case of a mental or psychological disposition, the sentence 'Joe wants an apple', and, in the case of a non-physical disposition, 'the pane of glass is liable to break'. This exercise revealed two important points. Firstly, it showed that Martin and Pfeifer's five Marks of Intentionality fall into two groups (a) those which look beyond a particular variety of linguistic expression to the existence or non-existence of objects events and states of affairs referred to by those expressions, and (b) those which are defined purely in terms of the linguistic properties of the expressions in question. Following Kneale (1968) and Searle (1979; 1983), I refer to the former as marks of T-intentionality and to the latter as marks of S-intentionality.

#### *T-intentionality as the mark of the dispositional*

Of Martin and Pfeifer's five Marks three, Marks 1, 4 and 5, are marks of T-intentionality. As we have seen, combining Martin and Pfeifer's 1 (the inexistence of the intentional object) with 4 (directedness towards it) brings us back to Brentano's original definition of intentionality as directedness toward an in-existent object. Together with Martin and Pfeifer's Mark 5, Anscombe's vagueness, they serve to specify the range of possible manifestations that characterize a disposition. All three Marks apply, whether the disposition be mental, as in 'Joe wants an apple', which is directed towards or about obtaining something 'an apple' which he may or may not get and is vague in so far as he had no particular apple in mind, or physical, as in 'the pane of glass is liable to break' which is directed towards or about a breaking which may or may not eventually happen and which is vague in so far as the particular occasion and pattern of breaking is indeterminate until it actually occurs. To these we may add Anscombe's first "salient thing" which tells us that descriptions of the event or state of affairs that manifests a disposition, whether mental or physical, are invariably transparent. Both the apple that Joe gets and the event whereby the glass eventually breaks are particulars whose description, if true, can vary without affecting the truth value of the sentence in which it is referred to.

*S-intentionality as the mark of the quotational*

The remaining two of Martin and Pfeifer's five Marks, Marks 2 and 3, both of which, as we have seen, come from Chisholm, are defined purely in terms of the linguistic expressions involved and are thus marks of S-intentionality. They both relate to the use of embedded sentences and phrases in *oratio obliqua* or indirect reported speech to quote what Peter Geach (1957) in *Mental Acts* calls "the gist or upshot" of what someone has said or might be expected to say. The use of the *oratio obliqua* for these purposes reflects the fact that in spontaneous speech, as Chomsky (1957, *etc.*) has repeatedly emphasized, sentences, in so far as they convey information, are seldom repeated word for word, but are constructed anew, albeit out of what Jim Miller (1998) calls "prefabricated chunks", phrases and sentence frames that *are* repeated.

*The oratio obliqua and mental dispositions*

There are three important points to be made about the use of the *oratio obliqua* construction to characterize a mental disposition. In the first place, what the *oratio obliqua* acknowledges is that the sentence which an individual actually utters is, in so far as it is spontaneous and information-providing, a manifestation of a disposition to say "the same thing in other words" which, like any disposition is directed towards an indeterminate range of possible manifestations none of which need actually occur for the disposition to exist.

Secondly, quoting what someone is disposed to say, particularly the propositions they are disposed to assert, is often a very good way of characterizing a person's behavioral dispositions. The reason for this is that there are powerful social sanctions which ensure that, for the most part, a consistent and rational connection is maintained between what an individual says on the one hand and the way he or she behaves on the other. Given that consistent and rational relation between what someone says and what he or she otherwise does, characterizing an individual's behavioral dispositions in terms of what that individual is typically inclined to say, gives us a powerful insight into the kind of persuasion he or she would need to alter his or her behavior in circumstances where persuasion is the only morally and socially acceptable way of modifying that behavior.

Thirdly, it would seem that the main reason for the persistent belief that intentionality is especially connected with the mental is that it is only in the psychological domain that dispositions are regularly characterized by means of a transitive verb whose grammatical object depicts the possible future manifestation of the disposition in question. The more common way of characterizing a disposition, whether mental or physical, is by means of an adjective such as ‘intelligent’ or ‘brittle’ or by the use of modal auxiliaries such as ‘can’ or ‘would’ combined with a verb which in this case serves to characterize the manifestations of the disposition. It seems that it is the widespread use of the *oratio obliqua* construction to quote what an agent would be inclined to say when deciding what to do, combined with the fact that this device is appropriate only when explaining the behavior of linguistically competent humans, which explains why it is only when characterizing a mental disposition that we use a transitive verb and its grammatical object.

#### *Quotational S-intentionality and the case for behaviorism*

If this account of what Davidson (1970/1980) calls “the vocabulary of propositional attitudes” is correct, it is easy to see why the behaviorists in psychology should have objected to the use of what they call “mentalistic explanations” in a scientific account of the behavior of non-human free-moving living organisms (animals) and of human behavior in so far as it is continuous with that of animals. For although some of the higher mammals such as dolphins (Herman, Richards, and Wolz 1984; Herman, Kuczaj and Holder, 1993) and sea lions (Shusterman and Krieger, 1984; Schusterman and Gisinger 1988; 1989) can be trained to respond to simple imperative sentences, and although apes can be trained to produce such sentences using sign language (Linden 1975) or pictograms (Savage Rumbaugh, 1986) linguistic communication beyond the level of a human two-year old has never been demonstrated and presumably never will be. Consequently to explain the behavior of such creatures by quoting what they would say, if *per impossible* they had the linguistic ability to do so, is, as the behaviorists have always insisted, a scientifically unacceptable anthropomorphism. Whatever we may think of existing attempts to develop a behaviorist alternative – and many developments have taken place since the majority of philosophers and psychologists ceased to listen

to what the behaviorists were saying – the need for such a behaviorist alternative cannot, I suggest, be gainsaid.

*Quotational S-intentionality and physical dispositions*

If, as I have argued, S-intentionality, as represented by Chisholm's and Martin and Pfeifer's Marks 2 and 3 consists in the use of sentences and phrases in *oratio obliqua* to quote what a human agent has said or would be expected to say concerning matters relevant to his or her own prospective or past actions, not only does it justify the behaviorist repudiation of such explanations, it also explains why Martin and Pfeifer have failed to provide acceptable examples of sentences describing a physical disposition which satisfy their and Chisholm's Marks 2 and 3, the only two of their Marks which involve the use of an embedded quotation. In the case of Mark 2 these difficulties are illustrated by Martin and Pfeifer's and my own attempts to construct such an example. Their example reads:

“Neither [the sentence] *Physical apparatus A is* nor [the sentence] *Physical apparatus A is not capable of affecting the clouds so that it will rain tomorrow* implies the truth or falsity of [the sentence] *It will rain tomorrow.*”

My example is:

“Neither [the sentence] *It is liable to be true* nor [the sentence] *It is liable to be false that the pane of glass breaks* implies the truth or falsity of [the sentence] *The pane of glass breaks.*”

In both these examples there is an embedded sentence introduced by the pronoun *that* which may be either true or false. In the first case it is the sentence ‘it will rain tomorrow’. In the second case it is the sentence ‘the pane of glass breaks’. But despite the use of the pronoun *that* in introducing them, these are not examples of the use of *oratio obliqua* to quote something someone has said or might be expected to say. The reason why such sentences are neither true nor false is not, as it is in the psychological cases, because when you quote you do not commit yourself to either the truth or falsity of what is quoted. In the case of these physical dispositions it is because the truth or falsity of the embedded sentence is determined by the occurrence or non-occurrence of the manifestation event the sentence describes. To say that a disposition

exists indicates the conditions under which a manifestation is to be expected. It says nothing about whether in fact those conditions have been realized. In other words these examples illustrate in terms of the truth and falsity of the relevant sentences exactly the same principle as that formulated in terms of the existence of the corresponding events and states of affairs in Mark 1. Only in cases, for which there is no counterpart in the case of a true physical disposition, where the sentence following the pronoun ‘that’ is an indirect quotation of something someone has said or might be expected to say, does the truth or falsity of such an embedded sentence introduce a new principle. Only where an embedded sentence is a quotation does the indeterminacy of its truth or falsity justify identifying it a distinct mark of intentionality.<sup>1</sup>

In the case of Mark 3 (referential opacity within intentional contexts) the attempt to construct on a physical counterpart for the mental cases is an even more conspicuous failure. Martin and Pfeifer’s example is as follows:

“Although the substantival expression ‘*The only pink object O at location L*’ designates the same object as the substantival expression ‘*The only object M of mass f at L*’, it does not follow from the truth of ‘*Acid A was able to turn litmus paper P into the only pink object O at location L*’ that ‘*Acid A was able to turn litmus paper P into the only object M of mass f at location L*.’”

This example depends on a failure to distinguish between what is true of the object at L before and after the application of acid A. After acid A has done its work, assuming that its disposition is manifested, the only object M of mass f at location has become the only pink object O at location L, but for all we are told, object M was already the only object of mass f at L before that event. If so, it is that acid A didn’t change into the only object M of mass f at L which explains why the two descriptions, thought true of the object after the application of the acid, are not true of the change brought about by its application or of the disposition to bring about such a change which existed before or in the absence of such an event. This is not a case of the failure of substitutivity within an opaque context.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In ‘Intentionality as the mark of the dispositional’ (Place *op.cit.*, pp 107-8) I gave a different and less satisfactory account of why Chisholm’s Mark 2 should be rejected.

<sup>2</sup> I used another and less cogent argument to defeat this example in ‘Intentionality as the mark of the dispositional’ (Place *op.cit.*, pp 109-112)

Indeed, as I was finally convinced by Mark Sainsbury who criticized (personal communication) my earlier attempts to construct referentially opaque contexts involving physical dispositions, no such examples can be constructed. Moreover, as Donald Davidson (1982) has shown, when a propositional attitude is ascribed to an animal, the embedded sentence which would be an opaque context, if it were ascribed to human beings, becomes transparent. The only plausible explanation of this phenomenon is that such embedded sentences which are quotations when ascribed to humans, cease to be so when ascribed to animals.

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