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Intentional objects[1]

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Is there, or should there be, any place in contemporary philosophy of mind for the concept of an intentional object? Many philosophers would make short work of this question. In a discussion of what intentional objects are supposed to be, John Searle's answer to our question is brisk and dismissive:

> an Intentional object is just an object like any other; it has no peculiar ontological status at all. To call something an Intentional object is just to say that it is what some intentional state is about. Thus, for example, if Bill admires President Carter, then the Intentional object of his admiration is President Carter, the actual man and not some shadowy intermediate entity between Bill and the man.[2]

The last claim expressed here seems obviously correct. For on the face of it, Bill's admiration of President Carter makes direct contact with the man himself; Bill does not first admire something else – some mental or non-mental 'intermediary' – and in virtue of admiring this thing, he admires President Carter. This makes little phenomenological or metaphysical sense, and there is no particular reason to believe it. We should surely join Searle, then, in rejecting 'shadowy intermediaries' in thought.

But the rest of this passage of Searle's, it seems to me, is problematic. For one thing, it is in need of an obvious and simple clarification, since as it stands it cannot be true. But even once this clarification is made, Searle's claim entails an absurdity when combined with a familiar and recalcitrant fact about intentionality: that

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[1] I am grateful to Katalin Farkas, Paul Horwich, Greg McCulloch, David Smith, Jerry Valberg and the participants at the Reading conference on Meaning and Representation in April 2000, for discussion of the issues raised in this paper.

[2] John R. Searle, *Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1983).

intentional states can be about things which do not exist. I will make the clarification first, and then bring out the absurdity.

In elaborating his claim about intentional objects, Searle says that intentional objects are 'ordinary objects'.[3] If he means by 'object' what is usually meant when we contrast objects with *properties*, *relations*, *events*, *propositions, facts* or *states of affairs* – that is, particular objects – then the claim that all intentional objects (defined above as 'what some intentional state is about') are objects in this sense is simply false. Intentional states can be about events, properties and all things in all the ontological categories just mentioned. There is no reason to think that the only things our intentional states are about are particular objects in the ordinary sense. So Searle cannot mean *object* in this sense; he must rather mean something like *ordinary existing thing* or *entity* (where *thing* or *entity* is the most general ontological category: properties, relations and so on are all things or entities). So now the claim that intentional objects are ordinary *objects* just means that what intentional states are about are ordinary existing *entities*.[4]

But once we make this clarification, and once we bring into play the idea that intentional states can be about things which do not exist, then the absurdity of Searle's claim comes to the surface. For consider the conjunction of Searle's two claims with this idea:

(1) Intentional objects are ordinary existing entities.
(2) Intentional objects are what intentional states are about.
(3) Intentional states can be about things which do not exist.

It follows from (1)-(3) that some ordinary existing entities do not exist, which is absurd, and clearly not what Searle has in mind. It might be thought that the way to respond is to drop 'existing' in (1), but the conclusion that some ordinary entities do not exist is only superficially less absurd. If there are entities which do not exist, then they hardly deserve to be called ordinary.

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[3] John Searle, *Intentionality* p.18.
[4] Cf. M.G.F. Martin, 'An eye directed outward' in C. Wright, B.C. Smith and C. Macdonald (eds.) *Knowing Our Own Minds* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1998) p.101.

What has gone wrong? It seems that (1)-(3) cannot be true together; but which of them is false? Claim (2) is simply a definition and so cannot be sensibly debated. But is (3) true? It is certainly hard to deny. Consider a debate between an atheist and a theist, and suppose for the sake of argument that the atheist is right: God does not exist. (Let's suppose that the debate they are having is a straightforward one over the existence of the Christian God as traditionally conceived: the all-powerful creator of the universe who loves us as a father loves his children etc.) If the atheist is right, then the theist has been talking about (and thinking about) something which does not exist. Yet the theist's words made sense, it seemed that he was able to put these thoughts about God into words. His thoughts are thoughts about something that does not exist. Or consider H.H. Price, hallucinating a pile of leaves on his counterpane under the influence of mescaline.[5] If Price thought 'That pile of leaves wasn't there this morning' then he was thinking about something which does not exist: there is no pile of leaves. And there are many other kinds of examples: from myth and fiction (Pegasus), the history of science (Phlogiston, Vulcan), and from the experience of after-images and double vision etc. Even if you thought you could explain away some of these examples without appealing to the idea of 'thinking about something which does not exist', the prospect of explaining all of them away seems unpromising.

So the initial simple plausibility of (1) is misleading; given (2) and (3), it seems that we should abandon it. If we do, then it may seem too that we need a *theory* of the special nature of these intentional objects. In appealing to intentional objects in giving an account of perceptual experience, Gilbert Harman admits that he has no 'fully worked-out account' of intentional objects – implying that this is what is needed for a proper account of perceptual intentionality. Harman agrees that it is no solution to say that intentional objects are *mental* objects (or at any rate, that not all of them are). When Ponce de Leon looked for the Fountain of Youth, he was not looking for something in his (or anyone else's) mind. So however the final theory of intentional objects turns out, it 'had better end up agreeing that Ponce de Leon was

[5] The story is referred to by G.E.M. Anscombe, 'The intentionality of sensation: a grammatical feature' in R.J. Butler (ed.) *Analytical Philosophy: 2nd Series* (Oxford: Blackwell 1965).

looking for something when he was looking for the Fountain of Youth, even though there is no Fountain of Youth, and the theory had better *not* have the consequence that Ponce de Leon was looking for something mental'.[6]

But if intentional objects are not mental objects, what are they? If we accept (2) and (3), then on the face of it we must accept that some intentional objects do not exist. So we need a theory of non-existent objects or entities. (Harman himself mentions Terence Parsons' theory.[7]) According to such theories, the things which exist do not exhaust all the things that there are; for there are many things which do not exist. Of all the things we think about, some of them (like Carter) exist, and some of them (like Pegasus) do not. It could be said that Pegasus has being, but he does not exist. And if we can think about impossible objects, then there are these things too. They necessarily do not exist. It cannot be an objection to this theory that it denies Quine's view that the English quantifier 'There are..' expresses existence (so that 'There are things which do not exist' is a contradiction) since the theory is explicitly proposed in opposition to the Quinean orthodoxy.[8]

But it seems to me that such a theory is fraught with problems. How are we supposed to understand the distinction between being and existence? Specifying two domains of quantification, one a subset of the other, is not enough by itself, since what we need to understand is what distinguishes the things in the subclass (the existent) from the things in the broader class (the entities, things which have being). Moreover, the nature of the postulated entities is obscure. On the face of it, we do not have any idea of what makes it the case that two people are thinking about the same non-existent object. Indeed, intentional objects can be indeterminate, even in a sense that vague objects (if there are such things) never are. As G.E.M. Anscombe puts it,

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[6] Gilbert Harman, 'The intrinsic quality of experience' in J. Tomberlin (ed.) *Philosophical Perspectives* 4 (Atascadero: Ridgeview 1990); reprinted in Ned Block, Owen Flanagan and Güven Güzeldere (eds.) *The Nature of Consciousness*; p.666 in the reprint. I should add that Harman does not commit himself to the theory of non-existent objects. As he says: 'I am quite willing to believe that there are not really any nonexistent objects and that apparent talk of such objects should be analysed away somehow'.
[7] Terence Parsons, *Non-existent Objects* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1980).
[8] See W.V. Quine, 'On what there is' in Quine, *From a Logical Point of View* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press 1953).

> I can think of a man without thinking of a man of any particular height; I cannot hit a man without hitting a man of any particular height, because there is no such thing as a man of no particular height.[9]

So we need to understand not just the idea of objects which do not exist, but also the fact that they can be indeterminate in this way. But what sense can be made of an indeterminate object? The man who is of no particular height: what colour is his hair? No particular colour? But that surely means: no colour at all. And how can anything have hair without that hair being any colour at all? Is this just an expression of our 'prejudice in favour of the existent', that something which has hair has hair of some particular colour? But what is the real alternative to this prejudice? The view, as far as I can see, offers no real answer to these questions.

What has emerged is a dilemma: either deny that intentional states can be about things that do not exist, or accept that there are non-existent objects. Neither position is acceptable. The way out of the dilemma is to reject an assumption shared by both unacceptable positions: that *to be an intentional object is to be a thing or entity of a certain kind*. The position which denies (3) assumes that intentional objects are just existing entities. The position which postulates non-existent objects assumes that all intentional objects are entities, although some of them are non-existent ones. The common assumption is that to be an intentional object is to be an entity. This is what I shall deny.

This might sound perverse or paradoxical. If I am thinking about Carter, Carter is the intentional object of my thought. Yet Carter exists, he is an entity. So how can I deny that some intentional objects actually are entities? I do not deny this: this is just another way of saying that some intentional objects exist and some do not. What I am denying is that *being an intentional object as such* is *being an entity* of any kind.

The basis of this view is a proper understanding of what an *object* is in this context. We use the term 'object' in a number of different ways, and some of these ways are very different from others. One is when we talk about physical objects. Here

[9] G.E.M. Anscombe, 'The intentionality of sensation', p. 161.

the word can be replaced by 'thing': my computer is a physical object; therefore it is a physical thing. Interestingly the converse is not true: if *x* is a physical thing, it's not always true that *x* is a physical object. It makes sense to say that gravity is a physical thing; but not that it is a physical object. Someone who says that love is a physical thing is not thereby committed to its being a physical object. This supports my suggestion above that 'thing' picks out a more general ontological category than 'object'. So all physical objects are physical things, but not all physical things are physical objects.

Contrast the phrases 'object of attention' or 'object of experience'. As J.J. Valberg has pointed out, we cannot replace the word 'object' in these phrases with the word 'thing' and retain sense: 'thing of attention' and 'thing of experience' make no sense.[10] The word 'object' has a different meaning in these phrases than in does in the phrases 'physical object', 'material object', 'mental object' and even 'abstract object'. This is the key to the idea that being an intentional object is not being a thing of any kind. For 'intentional object' in this respect (unsurprisingly) is like 'object of attention' rather than 'physical object'. If it makes sense at all, 'intentional thing' means the same as 'intentional entity', which someone might take to mean *intensional entity*, in the sense in which propositions and other intensions are intensional entities. Whatever the merits of the view that there are intensional entities, such entities are plainly not what is meant by talking of intentional objects. When I consider my cat Jeffrey, it is the cat which is the object of my thought, the thing I am thinking about. I am not thinking about an intension. I am thinking about a cat. So even if there are intensional entities, this is not what intentional objects are.

When something is a thing of a certain kind, there are general conditions that it meets which make it a thing of that kind. Here I do not want to propose any view about what these conditions might be in any detail; I'm just assuming that we do have an idea of such conditions, even if detailed accounts of them are disputable. For example, it is a necessary condition for something's being a physical object that it has

[10] J.J. Valberg, 'The puzzle of experience' in Tim Crane (ed.) *The Contents of Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1992) p.22.

a location in space-time. Or: it is a necessary condition of being a mental event that it exhibits either consciousness or intentionality or both. To develop a full account of mental and physical things or entities would be to elaborate what I shall call a 'substantial' conception of a thing or entity. A substantial conception of a thing tells us about the nature of that thing. Ontology deals in such substantial conceptions: an ontological theory of physical objects, for example, tells when such objects are the same or different, what the necessary conditions for being such an object are, and whether objects of these kinds are fundamental, or whether they reduce to other kinds of entity (that is, whether their existence and nature consists in the existence and nature of some other kind of thing).

What I am denying is that there is, or can be, any similarly substantial conception of intentional objects. This is the mistake of both unsatisfactory theories dismissed above: each theory assumes that they have to give an account of what intentional objects are, and then goes on to say either (with Searle) that the existence of intentional objects consists simply in the existence of some other 'ordinary' entities, or (with the theory of non-existent objects) that some intentional objects are non-existent entities. There is no necessary condition which something must meet in order to be an intentional object, in the sense of there being something substantial that all intentional objects in themselves have in common. There can be no substantial conception of intentional objects, since there is nothing entities have to be, in general and in themselves, in order to be intentional objects. Intentional objects, considered as such, have no nature.

Of course, it is true that all intentional objects are the objects of intentional states or acts. (By 'act' I mean a mental phenomenon that has an object and has a place in a time-series, like an act of judgement, or a decision.) But this doesn't mean that the *nature* of intentional objects is to be the objects of intentional states, in the sense that the nature of physical objects is to have a certain spatio-temporal location and to have certain physical properties. What is true, rather, is that something is an intentional object only in so far as it is an object *for* some thinker or some subject.

‘Object’ in this sense makes sense only relative to ‘subject’. Objects are what is given or presented to subjects in intentional states of mind. When a real thing is given or presented to a subject there is nothing about it, considered in itself, which makes it the object of that subject’s thought.

The fact that an intentional object is an object only *for* a subject entails the possibility that something might be an object for me, say, but not for you; or that certain kinds of minds or creatures can direct their minds on certain objects which are unavailable to other kinds. If you are more musically sophisticated than me, then you can hear things in music which I cannot; you may be able to hear an interrupted cadence in a piece of music which I cannot. The cadence is an object of your musical attention, but it is not an object of mine. It is an object *for you* but not an object *for me*. The high-pitched sounds which dogs can hear are objects for them but not for us; the colours of objects which sighted people see are objects for the sighted but not for the blind.

The idea of an intentional object, then, is similar to the idea of a *world*, in the sense in which a creature who is conscious can be said to ‘have a world’. It is in this sense that the world of the blind is very different from the world of the sighted. ‘World’ in this sense is not, of course, the metaphysical idea of *all that is the case* or *the totality of facts*. I can say that the world of the blind is different from the world of the sighted without denying that there is one totality of facts. A.R. Luria’s famous book, *The Man with the Shattered World* tells how the world is from the point of view of a soldier who has suffered massive brain damage, resulting in chaotic visual experience, impaired linguistic ability and little sense of himself as an integrated, unified locus of thought and consciousness.[11] The soldier’s world is different from ours. It would be perverse to take this perfectly ordinary idiom to be purporting to imply that there is more than one world, in the sense of more than one totality of facts. Similarly, when I say that X is an intentional object for me but not for you (because you cannot, for some reason, apprehend X in an act of thought, say) I do not

[11] A.R. Luria, *The Man with the Shattered World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1987).

mean to imply that X *exists* in my world but not in yours, or that X *exists* for me, but not for you. X either exists or it does not. But whether or not it does has nothing to do with whether it is an intentional object for me or for you. Nonetheless, two people's thoughts can have the same intentional object, when they are thinking about (looking for, desiring, contemplating etc.) the same thing. To say that something is an object for me does not imply that it cannot be an object for you.

The idea of an object in this sense plays an important role in the theory of intentionality of Husserl and his followers. But in analytic philosophy, this kind of idea has been somewhat neglected. There are a number of different sources of this neglect. One is a deflationary tendency to treat the idea of an intentional object as a merely grammatical idea. This is the approach taken in a classic paper by Anscombe. [12] Anscombe claimed that to be an intentional object is to be a kind of *direct object* in the grammatical sense, that is, the object of certain transitive verbs, which she calls intentional verbs. The comparison of grammatical and intentional objects is illuminating; it shows again how the word 'object', used in both cases in contrast with 'subject', does not always mean what it does in (e.g.) the phrase 'physical object'. A direct object is just what plays a certain role in a sentence containing a transitive verb. However, we can find this comparison illuminating without having to agree with Anscombe that an intentional object is just the direct object of an intentional verb; i.e. that the idea of an intentional object is really a grammatical idea. For one thing, Anscombe's criterion of what makes a verb intentional is unsatisfactory, on at least two grounds. First, it is really a criterion of intensionality, and has often been pointed out, intensionality and intentionality are importantly different concepts.[13] And second, Anscombe's criterion fails to count 'belief' as an intentional verb (as she herself admits). But surely an account of intentionality which does not put the concept of belief at its centre is barely an account of intentionality at all.

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[12] G.E.M. Anscombe, 'The intentionality of sensation: a grammatical feature'.
[13] See Searle, *Intentionality*, chapter one, and my *Elements of Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2001) §4.

In any case, it would surely be surprising if the idea of an intentional object, and related ideas like object of attention, object of experience and object of thought, were mere shadows of the grammar of our language (unless, of course, one held the implausible view that all philosophically interesting concepts were mere shadows or artefacts of grammar). These ideas are phenomenological ideas, ideas we use in trying to articulate to ourselves the fundamental nature of what our experience and thought is like. Why should we expect the fundamental nature of experience and thought to be *explained* in terms of grammar? If anything, the explanation should be the other way around.

A more popular reason for the neglect of this idea of an intentional object in recent years is a certain re-alignment in discussions of intentionality. One dominant contemporary approach to the problem of intentionality has identified intentionality with *representation*. States of mind are representations: an *intentional state* is one which involves a representation of things as being a certain way. The state thus has a representational or intentional *content*, which is how the world is represented as being. A desire that *p*, a belief that *p,* an expectation or wish that *p*; all these mental states have the same content, they involve a representation of the world as being the *p*-way. In a desire, the world is desired to be the *p*-way, in a belief it is believed to be the *p*-way, and so on. The fundamental notions here are *representation*, *intentional state*, and *intentional* or *representational content*. One reason to avoid bringing in talk of intentional objects may be the one I located in my discussion of Searle's views above: all intentional states are about something (they have a content) but what they are about sometimes does not exist, so (given the equation of *object* and *entity*) their 'aboutness' in general cannot consist in a relation to an object/entity. So aboutness should just consist in a state's having an intentional or representational content. The concept of an intentional object is not one which a fully worked-out theory needs to employ.

I want to dispute this view, and argue for an indispensable role for the concept of an intentional object. In fact, I think that the concepts of intentional object and

intentionality should be explained together with the concept of representation; intentionality cannot be explained in terms of representation. I say this not because I reject the idea of intentional content. On the contrary, I think we need both the idea of intentional object and the idea of intentional content in a proper account of intentionality.[14] Two states of mind may have the same intentional object – they may be about the same object – but differ in the way in which they present that object, or in what they predicate of it. These differences are differences in content. I would also claim that two intentional states may have the same content but differ in their objects (indexical thoughts are an example) but this use of 'content' is controversial and I won't defend it here. The content of a state of mind is, in a phrase of Valberg's, *what you would put into words*: when you put your thoughts into words, what you express is the content. (This is assuming, of course, that you have the words into which to put the thoughts. And this is also not to deny that there may be elements of content which cannot be put into words. It's just that what you *do* put into words, when you put your thought into words, is the content.) So I do not replace the talk of content with talk of objects; rather, I want to argue for an indispensable role for the idea of an intentional object. So we should not replace talk of intentionality and intentional objects with talk of representation or representational content. The two ways of talking should be understood together.

At first sight, one way in which it might seem as if the idea of representation is more straightforward than the idea of intentionality is that we are familiar with many everyday concrete examples of representations: written and spoken sentences, signs, pictures. Compared to these, the idea of something being an *object of thought* can seem worryingly insubstantial and evanescent. After all, here are the concrete things, the representations, before us: we can pick them up and manipulate them. Isn't this an indication that the idea of representation is a better starting point?

This is, of course, an illusion. Sentences and pictures are concrete representations; but no-one thinks that they represent in and of themselves. They have

[14] For more details, see my *Elements of Mind* §§5-8.

their power to represent only *derivatively,* deriving from the states of mind of thinkers who use them. To understand why these things are representations we need to appeal to the thoughts, intentions, plans and desires of thinkers: in short, their intentional states. Even those who follow Jerry Fodor, and think that these intentional states themselves involve sentences in a language of thought, do not think this because they think that sentences are in some way better equipped to represent the world, in and of themselves. No, the justification for the language of thought hypothesis derives from the systematic nature of mental processes, not from any assumption about the power of sentences to represent.[15] Those who defend the hypothesis are at pains to make it clear that postulating sentences in the head is one thing, and explaining how those sentences get their meaning – giving a 'semantics for the language of thought' – is quite another.

So familiar concrete representations get their meaning from the use that is made of them by thinkers. If we are to explain how the representational states of our minds 'get their meaning' then we had better do this in some other way. In what way? The standard approach among physicalist philosophers of mind is to give some account of what some call the 'representation relation' in non-intentional (usually causal) terms. But thus formulated, the project cannot succeed. For if it is possible to represent things which do not exist, then *there can be no representation relation*, since relations entail the existence of their relata. It follows from this that – whatever the other problems with the idea that representation reduces to causation – causation cannot underpin representation in general, since causation is a relation and representation isn't.[16] Beliefs might be relations to mental sentences; they might be relations to propositions; but none of this makes '*x* represents *y*' express a relation, if *x* can represent *y* when *y* does not exist.

These points might be acknowledged, but dismissed on the grounds that the causal model of representation being assumed is far too crude. This it doubtless is; the

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[15] See, for example, Jerry Fodor, *Psychosemantics* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press 1987) Appendix.
[16] I assume here that causation is a relation, though this has been denied – for example by D.H. Mellor in *The Facts of Causation* (London: Routledge 1995).

question is whether the more sophisticated versions of the theory can avoid this fundamental problem. The question is: where does one place the causal relation in a more sophisticated account? What role, precisely, does causation play? Could one say that causation can explain representation when the object represented does exist, but not when it doesn't? What, in that case, does one say about the case where the represented object does not exist? One proposal is that we should explain the representation in this case in terms of the represented item's *counterfactual* causal relation to the representation, rather than its *actual* causal relation.[17] Thus we might say, not that Pegasus causes my Pegasus-representations, but that Pegasus *would* cause my Pegasus-representations *were* he to exist; or alternatively, that what makes a representation a Pegasus-representation is that is *would* be caused by Pegasus in worlds in which he exists.

But even if this counterfactual is true, it is hard to see the proposal as an advance over the idea that one can represent things which do not exist. We started off with the idea that one could represent something even if that thing does not exist. Now this is supposed to be explained by the idea of a *causal relation that does not exist*. We are still in the position of needing an explanation of how something (either an object or a causal relation) which does not exist can be connected to an *actual* (not a counterfactual) thought about that 'something'. 'Representation' is certainly a good word for this connection, but in that case we should not think we have *explained* the representation of the non-existent in terms of a non-existent causal relation. How could this be an advance in our understanding?

It seems to me, then, that the appeal to causation in the theory of representation is a mere gesture unless it can say something more about the representation of the non-existent. Of course, it is true that thinkers think about many of the things they causally interact with, and that in many cases, it is hard to see how they could have come to have thought about these things unless they had causally interacted with them. But what we are after, presumably, is not the causal history of

[17] For a good account of the move from actual to counterfactual causal relations, see the introduction to Barry Loewer and Georges Rey (eds.) *Meaning in Mind* (Oxford: Blackwell 1993).

this or that specific representation (or representation-type) but rather what makes representation possible in general. And no answer to this question is satisfactory unless it gives an answer to the question of representation of the non-existent.

So moving to the idea of representation has not enabled us to get away from the notion of what a representation is about; that is, its intentional object. For a representation is a representation of Pegasus not because it necessarily looks like Pegasus, nor because it is caused by Pegasus, but because it can be used to express thoughts (intentional states or acts) about Pegasus. A *mental* representation of Pegasus just is a thought (of some kind) about Pegasus. But to say that a thought is about Pegasus is to say that Pegasus is the intentional object of the thought. A thought's being about *x* and *x's* being its intentional object are just the same idea. So as long as we talk about a thought's being about something, then we are talking in terms of intentional objects.

That we do employ the idea of a thought's being about something (and not just the idea of a thought's having representational content) is shown by the fact, noted above, that we can count thoughts as being about the same thing even when they have different contents. You might be thinking about Napoleon's exile on Elba, I might be thinking about his exile on St Helena. There is a sense in which we are thinking about the same thing: our thoughts have the same object. So we need more than the idea of content. This is hardly surprising: one of the intuitive glosses which we put on the notion of intentionality is that it is *aboutness*. And it is clearly a better starting-point to say that thoughts are about their objects than to say that they are about their contents. Thoughts *have* contents, and it is because of this that they are *about* their objects. Retaining the intuitive notion of aboutness means retaining the intuitive idea of what thoughts are about, and this in turn means retaining the idea of an intentional object.

In this paper, I have argued that the idea of an intentional object creates an dilemma for theories of intentionality: either intentional objects are ordinary existing entities, or they are the kind of entities some of which do not exist. If we say the first

thing, then how do we make sense of intentional objects which do not exist? But if we say the second, then we have to accept the incredible view that there are non-existent entities. The way out of this dilemma is to deny an assumption made by each horn: that being an intentional object is being an entity of some sort. Rather, an intentional object is just the object (for some subject) of an intentional state or act. Of course, if all we have to say about intentional objects is that they are what intentional states are about, and all we have to say about intentional states is that they have objects, then the proposal is hopelessly circular. But a proper account of intentionality will have more to say, by giving a detailed account of the nature of various intentional phenomena. (I do not pretend to have even started on such an account here.) However, I believe, for the reasons given above, that a theory of intentionality will not be helped by appealing to causal relations between thoughts and their objects. And nor do I think that progress would be made by *replacing* talk of intentional objects with talk of representation. For a representation (linguistic, pictorial or mental) is the representation it is partly because of what it is about. And as long as we continue to make use of the idea of *what a mental state is about*, then we will need to make use of the idea of an intentional object.

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