TALKING ABOUT INTENTIONAL OBJECTS

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Tim Crane has recently defended the traditional notion of intentional object. In particular, he holds that all intentional states have objects, even when these objects do not exist. In this discussion note I first set forth some crucial elements of Crane's view: his reasons for accepting intentional objects, his rejection of certain ways of thinking about them, and his distinction between the 'substantial' and the 'schematic' notion of an object. Then I argue that while Crane's account successfully explains what intentional objects are not, it leaves unexplained how it could make sense to say that intentional objects need not exist. Finally I propose that we can do justice to Crane's reasons for talking about intentional objects by re-interpreting talk about intentional objects as talk about the truth- or satisfaction-conditions of intentional states.

An old problem in the theory of mind runs as follows. Suppose that Sophie tells Teresa she has a dog, and that Teresa believes her, but that Sophie is lying and has no dog. Is Teresa thinking about something? Saying 'yes' makes it clear why her thought is an intentional state, but it creates the problem of explaining just what she is thinking of: 'Sophie's dog' seems like the wrong answer, because there is no such animal, and other candidate responses (e.g., that she is thinking of a special, non-existing kind of dog) seem even worse. Saying 'no' avoids that problem but leaves it unclear how Teresa's thought is intentional.

In some recent publications,[1] Tim Crane has attempted to get philosophers of mind to pay more attention to the traditional notion of intentional objects, and one of his goals is to be able to handle cases such as the one just described. For Crane, the intentionality of Teresa's thought is to be affirmed in the same way in which the intentionality of all intentional states[2] is to be affirmed, by saying that it has an intentional object. The intentional object in the case at hand is Sophie's dog, and his non-existence is part of the solution, not part of the problem:

[1] See Tim Crane, *Elements of Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), and Tim Crane, 'Intentional Objects', *Ratio* 14 (2001), 336-49. Future references to these works will be made in the body of the paper, using the abbreviations EM and IO.

[2] Here I use 'state' as a catch-all term covering not only what Crane would call 'states' but also what he would call 'acts'. For discussion of this interesting distinction, see EM, 35-40.

existence is not required for something to be an intentional object, and a case like that of Sophie's dog is precisely a case in which the object of an intentional state is non-existing.

Of course Crane does not merely assert all this, but attempts to explicate the notion of intentional object. In this paper I argue that although his account is helpful in certain ways, he does not say enough about what it means to talk about intentional objects, with the result that his approach does not do enough to prevent the recurrence of the false views he rightly criticizes. To remedy the problem I develop the following proposal: to talk about the object of an intentional state is really to talk about the intentional state itself.

Crane's approach and its limitations

Cases like those mentioned in the opening paragraph convince Crane that not all thoughts are relations between thinkers and what they think about (EM 26). It might seem natural to say as well that not all intentional states have objects, but Crane rejects this move: 'I could have said . . . that some intentional states have no intentional objects. But then I would have been at a loss to say what makes this latter class of states *intentional'* (EM 22; cf. IO 336-8).[3] So for Crane, the intentionality of intentional states is acknowledged by embracing the idea that all such states have intentional objects. Two other arguments that he gives for the indispensability of intentional objects are more specific. First, a thought about Zeus and a thought about Pegasus are both thoughts about non-existent things, but if we say simply that they are both thoughts 'about nothing', then we will not be able to say what makes one thought different from the other. Clearly they are different from one another, and the difference is that they have different objects (EM 25-6). Second, there can be two thoughts, each with a different representational content from the other, that are both about the same

[3] Crane makes this comment by way of criticizing Searle; a similar criticism of Searle can be found in G. Bar-Elli, 'Intentionality and Belief *De Re*: A Critical Study of Searle's Representative Internalism', *Erkenntnis* 41 (1994), 83-4, n. 11.

thing. To capture what they have in common we must use the idea of an intentional object: two such thoughts have the same object, although they represent it in different ways (IO 345, 348).

If a good theory of intentionality cannot do without intentional objects, then it is very important to understand them. It is also very difficult, as this understanding must accommodate the fact that even radically non-veridical states such as Teresa's thought about Sophie's dog have such objects. Crane rejects the view that an intentional state directed at something non-existent has as its object the thinker's own idea: it is true that Teresa has an idea about a dog, indeed an existing idea, but the intentionality of her thinking about Sophie's dog cannot be saved by claiming that it is a thought about that idea (EM 23-24; cf. IO 338-39). Crane also rejects the view that an intentional state directed at something non-existent has as its object some sort of extraordinary entity that differs from ordinary ones by virtue of being non-existing: the intentionality of Teresa's thought cannot be saved by saying that her thought is related to a special kind of non-existing dog that is somehow still 'real' (EM 24-5; cf. IO 339-40).[4]

The key to Crane's own account is a distinction between the 'substantial' notion of an object and the 'schematic' notion (EM 15-17, 22; cf. IO 340-44). Something is an object in the substantial sense if it is a certain kind of entity: 'A substantial conception of a thing tells us about the nature of that thing' (IO 341). 'Physical object' and 'mathematical object' are examples of this use of the word 'object', but intentional objects are not objects in this sense: '[T]he object of a thought is not, as such, a certain kind of entity' (EM 22). 'What I am denying is that there is, or can be, any similarly substantial conception of intentional objects. . . . 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

[4] I agree with Crane in rejecting both of these views, but discussing them would take us too far afield.

themselves must have in common' (IO 341-2). Understanding the notion of intentional object requires grasping that not everything that is rightly called an 'object' is an object in the substantial sense. Instead, intentional objects are objects in the schematic sense.

Crane introduces this distinction to make the point that there is a use of the word 'object' that allows us to say that a number of things are all intentional 'objects' without thereby committing ourselves to the view that they have some nature in common. But he introduces it for another reason as well, namely, to shed light on the problem discussed at the beginning of this paper:

> 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* (IO 340).

So in trying to understand Crane's distinction, we must ask not only what he means by a schematic object, but also how this is going to help us understand the problem of intentional states with non-existing objects.

Unfortunately, Crane's account of the schematic notion of 'object' is inadequate. Aside from explaining that the notion is not the same as the substantial one, Crane does nothing more than give three examples of objects in the schematic sense. The first two are quite similar to one another: 'object of attention' and 'object of experience' (EM 341; IO 15). 'An object of attention', for example, 'is something to which someone is or can be attending. But clearly there is nothing which all objects of attention need have in common: objects of attention have no "nature"' (EM 15). The third is 'grammatical object': 'a

grammatical object is whatever stands in the relevant relation to a transitive verb' (EM 16), but '[t]he object of a sentence is not, as such, a certain kind of entity' (EM 22).

Let us begin by thinking about the third example. Perhaps it would be quibbling to point out (a) that Crane says a grammatical object is what stands in a *relation* to a transitive verb and (b) that for Crane the existence of a relation entails the existence of both relata (EM 24-25; IO 346), and then to argue on that basis that he has left out the crucial point, namely, the object's possible non-existence. Presumably this is just a case of inaccurate phrasing. Instead I want to point to the fact that Crane himself tells us that reflection on grammatical objects does not contribute very much to a grasp of how intentional objects fit into our overall understanding of intentionality: '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' (IO 344); 'intentional objects and grammatical objects are both objects in the schematic sense, but the first is not explained in terms of the second' (EM 17).

If the third example does not help very much, what about the first and second? They can easily be developed in a way that sheds light on important points, but unfortunately they leave us in the dark on the precise question we are concerned with. If we think of some entity—a certain boat, for example—and then think of someone paying attention to it or having some experience of it, then it will be clear enough why the boat, *qua* being an object of experience or attention, is not a particular kind of thing, not an object in the substantial sense. The boat is, of course, an object in the substantial sense, an object of a certain sort—but not *qua* object of experience or attention. *Qua* object of experience or attention, one might say, it only plays a certain role or stands in a certain relation. The problem with such reflections, however, is that they start from the assumption that the boat already exists as an object in the substantial sense and go on from there to explain how it can come to be an

object in the schematic sense. This is precisely what we cannot assume here: thinking of 'schematic object' as a role that something can play does not help us understand what is going on when there is nothing to play that role. There must be some other way of thinking, one that is applicable to the case in which there is no substantial object to play the role of schematic object, but Crane gives us no explanation of what it might be.[5]

So when Crane applies his substantial-schematic distinction to intentional objects and says, for example, that to be an intentional object is 'to be that upon which the mind is directed when in an intentional state' (EM 17), we can see what he means by saying that this is a non-substantial use of the word 'object', but we cannot see how this applies to a case in which there is nothing there for the mind to be directed upon. Again: the point is not that Crane should give us an ontology of intentional objects as such. The point instead is that he should explain how understanding intentional objects in the way that he recommends permits intentional states to have non-existing objects. And this he does not do.

Talking about intentional objects

If it makes sense to say things like 'X is an intentional object', and furthermore to add, 'X does not exist', then it will seem natural to ask, 'If X doesn't exist, then what does it do? Subsist, perhaps?' If it makes sense to say things like 'Intentional objects don't have any substantial nature', then it will seem natural to ask, 'Then what do they have instead? A schematic nature?' Such questions will keep arising whenever we say things like 'Intentional objects are such-and-such' or 'Sophie's dog is an intentional object', because such assertions can seem to be statements about something distinct from any intentional state, something that (strangely enough) needn't exist or have a nature.

[5] In this analysis of Crane's first two examples I have taken for granted that it really is possible for there to be non-existing objects of experience and attention. If one suspects that experience and attention are (like perception) forms of intentionality that do not allow for this possibility, then one has additional reason to doubt the value of these examples.

While Crane's notion of an object in the schematic sense is obviously meant to discourage such questions, we have seen that it leaves unexplained the crucial point, namely, how thinking of intentional objects as schematic and not substantial allows us to make sense of intentional states whose objects do not exist. Crane does a good job of explaining what it does *not* mean to talk about intentional objects, but he doesn't do enough to explain what it *does* mean. I submit that intentional objects and their role in the theory of intentionality will only be understood when we recognize that talk about intentional objects is, to put it paradoxically, actually talk about something else, namely, intentional states. Appearances notwithstanding, to say 'Sophie's dog is the intentional object of Teresa's thought' is not to say something about Sophie's dog. It is, rather, to say something about Teresa's thought.

Obviously this needs spelling out. To develop the point in a way that hews as closely as possible to Crane's own understanding, let me turn very briefly to his discussion of internalism, the view that no thought depends for its existence on the existence of that to which it is directed (see EM 117-28). Crane is very favourable to internalism and argues that it is in just as strong a position as externalism when it comes to individuating beliefs in terms of their objects: externalists individuate beliefs by means of really existing objects, while internalists individuate them by means of really existing 'descriptions' of objects. [6]

Now according to the internalist picture, the objects described might not exist, and the truth or falsity of the beliefs depends on the objects' existence or non-existence. So the object-descriptions in terms of which beliefs are individuated are descriptions of what must exist or not exist in order for the beliefs to be made true, and that suggests the following way

[6] Better: mental contents expressible by 'descriptions'. The scare quotes here and in the main text are used because Crane says that 'internalism can understand demonstrative thought not in purely descriptive terms, but in combined descriptive-indexical terms' (EM 127), which suggests that he would not accept this account of internalism in terms of descriptions. In fact, the difference is only terminological: I am, for the sake of brevity of expression, taking 'description' in a wide sense that encompasses indexical content as well as non-indexical content; cf. John R. Searle, *Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), esp. chaps. 2 and 9.

to make sense of the language of intentional objects. When we talk about Sophie's dog as the intentional object of Teresa's thought, what we are really doing is describing Teresa's thought in terms of its truth-conditions. If she thinks, for example, that Sophie's dog is small, then her thought is such as to have among its truth-conditions the existence of a dog belonging to Sophie. If her thought is the thought that Sophie's dog does not exist, then her thought is such as to have among its truth-conditions the non-existence of a dog belonging to Sophie. To say that Sophie's dog is the intentional object of Teresa's intentional state is not to talk about Sophie's dog—thereby inviting the ontological questions that Crane rightly tries to ward off—but instead to talk about Teresa's intentional state and say that its truth-conditions include the existence or non-existence of a dog belonging to Sophie.

Perhaps it is worth spelling out why I have said that something's existence or non-existence is 'among' the thought's truth-conditions rather than that it is 'the' truth-condition of the thought. Typically, a thought will not be true simply in virtue of the existence or non-existence of something. The thought that Sophie's dog is small has as a truth-condition not only that there exist a dog belonging to Sophie but also that that dog be small. The thought that Sophie's dog chews its bowl has as a truth-condition not only that that dog exist but also that its bowl exist and that the dog chew it; a thought like this one can be taken to have two objects.[7]

It could be objected that this talk of truth-conditions is too narrow for an account of intentional states in general: visual states, for example, would not normally be called either 'true' or 'false'. This objection can be handled by making use of the broader notion of satisfaction-condition.[8] For present purposes, however, it will be simpler and more natural to continue speaking of truth-conditions.

[7] See Crane, EM 17, for the idea that a thought can have more than one object.
[8] See Searle, *Intentionality*, p. 10-13.

There is another reason for doubting that we can always explain intentional objects in terms of truth-conditions: perhaps some states do not have truth-conditions because they are not propositional in form. Teresa might not only think that Sophie's dog is brown, she might also like Sophie's dog, and her intentional state of *liking Sophie's dog* is not a state with truth-conditions.[9] According to this objection—which Crane himself might level insofar as he denies the 'propositional attitude thesis' (EM 112-114)—my account of what it means to speak of intentional objects does not work for an important class of intentional states, namely, those that are not propositional in form. In response it can be said that if it is granted that there are such non-propositional states, still they presuppose states that are propositional in form; the intentional state of liking Sophie's dog, for example, presupposes the intentional state of believing that Sophie's dog exists. This suggests a reformulation of my account. Instead of saying that the meaning of 'Sophie's dog is the intentional object of Teresa's intentional state' is that her state has his existence as a truth-condition, we can say that its meaning is that her state either has his existence as a truth-condition or else presupposes some state that does. For the sake of simplicity, I will use the simpler formulation in what follows, but it is important not to forget the more complicated and more accurate one.

I want to stress that my proposal about intentional objects applies to all intentional states, not just to those directed at things that do not exist. Sophie exists but has no dog. If Teresa thinks that Sophie's dog is small, and if we therefore say that Sophie's dog is the intentional object of Teresa's state, we are making a remark about Teresa's state and its truth-conditions. In just the same way, if Teresa thinks that Sophie has brown hair, and if we therefore say that Sophie is the intentional object of Teresa's state, this too is a remark about Teresa's state and its truth-conditions. A statement of the form '*a* is the intentional object of

[9] It is important not to confuse Teresa's liking Sophie's dog, an intentional state without truth-conditions, with (for example) someone's belief that Teresa likes Sophie's dog, an intentional state that *does* have truth-conditions.

b's intentional state' is a statement about *b*'s intentional state regardless of whether *a* exists or not.

The question then arises whether there is a general formula for determining, for a given statement, what that statement is about. The answer I shall give is parallel to what I have been saying about intentional states, and that is no coincidence, given the structural similarities between speech-acts and intentional states.[10] Statements are truth-claims, and as such they have truth-conditions. A given statement is about whatever it is that must exist (or not exist) to make the statement be true. The statement that Sophie is tall is about Sophie because Sophie's existence is among its truth-conditions; the statement that Sophie is taller than Teresa is about both Sophie and Teresa because its truth-conditions include the existence of both of them.

Now the truth-conditions of statements are not always obvious, or at least not to everyone. Someone who was mathematically illiterate might think that the statement 'The average girl in the seventh grade class is over five feet tall' is about some special entity known as 'the average girl', that it has the existence of this girl as a truth-condition. In fact, however, the statement's truth-conditions include the existence of seventh-grade girls with heights that can be summed and then divided by the number of the girls; these girls, their heights, and so on, and not some 'average girl', are what the statement is about. And similarly, statements in which someone or something is said to be an intentional object are statements whose truth-conditions and subject-matter are not immediately apparent. The statement 'Sophie is the intentional object of Teresa's thought' depends for its truth not on the existence of Sophie but on the existence of Teresa's thought about Sophie, and therefore it is not about Sophie but about Teresa's thought.[11]

[10] This parallel is helpfully laid out by Searle, *Intentionality*, pp. 4-13.

[11] Fiction is another realm of discourse in which it is not immediately clear what our statements are about. The statement that Hamlet is Danish seems to be about Hamlet; is it

At this point it is possible to discuss another objection to my proposal. Suppose that Sophie's stories about her dog involve quite a lot of detail and that this detail includes the dog's name, 'Fido'. Couldn't my analysis then be transformed into the idea that Teresa's state has among its truth-conditions the existence of *x* such that *x*=Fido, or even that her state has among its truth-conditions that Fido exists? But if that were allowed, it seems we would be back to saying that 'Sophie's dog is the object of Teresa's intentional state' is really a statement about a dog, namely, Fido; it would say about him that he is that entity which has to exist for Teresa's thought to be true.

One way of replying to this objection would be to argue that it is not legitimate to move from my formulations to the formulations that include 'the existence of *x* such that *x*=Fido' or 'Fido exists'. But this would involve a lengthy detour, so instead I will reply by pointing to what I said above about how we can tell what a statement is about. Teresa's thought that Sophie has a dog, and her statement to that effect, viz., 'Sophie has a dog', has among its truth-conditions the existence of a dog belonging to Sophie. Now if we wish to call that dog 'Fido', then we can say that that thought and that statement are about Sophie and Fido. But things are otherwise with the statement or thought 'Teresa's thought can't be true unless there exists an entity *x* such that *x*=Fido' or the statement or thought 'Teresa's thought can't be true unless Fido exists'—as well as with the statement or thought 'Fido is that entity that must exist for Teresa's thought to be true'. These statements/thoughts do not depend for their truth on the existence of Fido: after all, they are clearly meant to leave open the possibility that Fido does not exist! Instead, their truth depends on the existence and nature of Teresa's thought. So I conclude that even if we allow ourselves to explain what it means for Fido to be the intentional object of Teresa's thought by saying things like 'Fido is the

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then true only if Hamlet exists? One can avoid answering in the affirmative by reconstruing statements about Hamlet as, for example, statements about texts. Or one can answer in the affirmative by developing an ontology of fictional entities; see for example Amie Thomasson, *Fiction and Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

entity that must exist in order for Teresa's thought to be true', even then (surface appearances to the contrary notwithstanding) we are not talking about Fido. What we are talking about is Teresa's intentional state: our statement's truth or falsity depends not on whether Fido exists, but on whether her state exists.

Now let us turn to a certain complication. As Elizabeth Anscombe points out, [12] intentional objects need not have determinate identities: it is possible to think of *some* man, or of *some* dog belonging to Sophie, and the truth-conditions of thoughts like these do not include the existence or non-existence of any particular man or dog. But many thoughts do have a specific particular as an intentional object: one can think of this particular man or dog. Saying so seems uncontroversial when the specific particular in question is a being that exists now or that has existed in the past, but what if the particular in question neither exists nor ever has existed, but is merely possible? Inspired by authors like Quine,[13] one might hold that merely possible particulars lack determinate identities. If that were the case, then talk of *this* or *that* possible particular would have no place, and it would be mistaken to suppose that we can have thoughts directed at specific merely possible particulars.

There is no space here to decide whether merely possible particulars have determinate identities. If they do not, then indeed there cannot be thoughts about specific possible particulars, even if it might seem to us that there are such thoughts (perhaps we are sometimes in error about our own mental states). If, on the other hand, merely possible particulars do have determinate identities, and if these can be represented in internalist-descriptivist fashion (of course there will be no *externalist* account of non-existing objects), then there can be thoughts about such particulars, and they will have those particulars as their

[12] See G. E. M. Anscombe, 'The Intentionality of Sensation: A Grammatical Feature', in R. J. Butler, ed., *Analytical Philosophy: Second Series* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965), 159, 161.

[13] For Quine's doubts on the identities of mere possibles, see W. V. O. Quine, 'On What There Is', in his *From a Logical Point of View*, second edition (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1980), 4.

objects in the way already noted. A thought will have a certain merely possible particular as its object just in case the existence of that particular is among the thought's truth-conditions.[14]

To return to the main line of argument: I have presented my account of intentional objects in internalistic terms, but it is worth noting that it could be adopted even by someone who rejects internalism and holds that some thoughts are such that they cannot exist apart from the actual existence of something to which they are related. One might say, for example, that the thought expressible by the sentence 'The man I am now seeing is wearing a red hat' cannot exist as this particular thought unless there actually is a man that I am now seeing. Let this be granted for the sake of argument. Still the thought's having the man that I am now seeing as its intentional object consists in the thought's being true only if such a man exists. The thought has this intentional object because it has this truth-condition. The fact that this thought cannot exist without that condition's actually being satisfied, while obviously very important, is simply another matter.

Also worth noting is the way in which the solution here proposed dovetails with a thesis emanating from the Brentano school, namely, that the expression 'intentional object' does not have meaning on its own. We cannot speak coherently of an intentional object and then raise a further question about whether anyone 'has' it. The expression 'intentional object' has meaning only as part of a larger expression predicable of intentional states, such

[14] Alberto Voltolini proposes that merely possible particulars can be individuated in terms of their causal origins. He gives as an example the son of Elizabeth I and Philip II, who can be individuated as the man generated from certain gametes at a certain time and place; see Alberto Voltolini, 'Objects as Intentional and as Real', *Grazer Philosophische Studien* 41 (1991), 22-5. The idea of individuating merely possible particulars in terms of their causes has merit, in my view, although its applicability is very restricted. There are not many *possibilia* that we can think of in this way. For example, we cannot now think of any particular son of Elizabeth and Philip, because we cannot now think of any *particular* gametes from either of them.

as ‘has such-and-such as its intentional object’.[15] Once this is appreciated, the proposal I am making is confirmed. If the expression ‘intentional object’ is allowed to be used on its own, the temptation arises to use it as a predicate nominative in sentences with subjects that refer to existing things: ‘My shoe is an intentional object’. Once one begins talking like that, it is easy to go on and start using the expression in sentences with subjects that do not refer to existing things: ‘Sophie’s dog is an intentional object’. And once that happens, questions about the nature and existence of Sophie’s dog are nearly inevitable. But if the expression ‘intentional object’ is kept together with the whole expression that it properly belongs with, no such temptation can arise. No one can miss the point that ‘has X as its intentional object’ is correctly said only of intentional states.[16]

The point just made should be refined, however. It might be tempting to legislate against predicate-nominative uses of ‘intentional object’, perhaps by arguing that a sentence of the form ‘*a* is F’ cannot be true if ‘*a*’ is an empty name. But I have no desire to assert this as a general rule: people—or philosophers, anyway—do say that this or that thing is an intentional object, even when the thing is non-existent, and they are not going to stop saying it. The point is to make sure that the real import of such a form of words is appreciated. To

[15] See Oskar Kraus’ introduction to Franz Brentano’s *Psychologie vom Empirischen Standpunkt*, ed. O. Kraus, Erster Band (Leipzig: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1924), xix-xxiii. This reference might suggest further questions about the historical antecedents of my solution. One might ask, for example, whether I am proposing an adverbialist solution of the sort sometimes attributed to Brentano and developed by authors such as Roderick Chisholm (*Perceiving: A Philosophical Study* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1957]) and Michael Tye (*The Metaphysics of Mind* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989]. According to the adverbialist, Teresa’s thinking about Sophie’s dog is (to a first approximation) Teresa’s thinking ‘Sophie’s-dogly’. Insofar as this give us a way to talk about intentional states without thereby committing ourselves to existing entities for the states to be about, the solution I am proposing here can only agree. But what does it really mean to ‘think Sophie’s-dogly’? Space does not permit me to do justice here to the various ways in which adverbialists would answer that question. My own answer, of course, would appeal to truth- and satisfaction-conditions, and in that respect it recalls Husserl’s account in the fifth *Logical Investigation*—see especially sections 13 and 21.

[16] Or perhaps one should say: of the people who have them. For more on this question, see Johannes Brandl, ‘Intentionality’, in L. Albertazzi et al. (eds.) *The School of Franz Brentano* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996), 265.

say ‘X is an intentional object’ is really just to say that there is some intentional state that has X as an intentional object, interpreting ‘has X as an intentional object’ in terms of truth-conditions.

So, to say that a person has X as an intentional object is to say that the person is in an intentional state and that the truth-conditions of that state include the existence (or non-existence) of X. To say that X is an intentional object is to say that there is a person who is in an intentional state and that the truth-conditions of that state include the existence (or non-existence) of X. The second of these formulations, the ‘predicate nominative’ version, is derived from the first; it does not represent a shift away from treating talk of intentional objects as talk about intentional states.

Still another noteworthy point is the following. I have claimed that when we say that an intentional state has something as its intentional object, we are really saying that the state’s truth-conditions include the existence (or non-existence) of that thing. But as suggested by certain things said above, it is not always obvious just what or who it is whose existence is in question. Consider for example the thought that blue is a colour. Some philosophers would say that the truth of this thought requires the existence of the universal Blue, understanding this universal ‘Platonistically’; others would want to describe the thought’s truth-conditions as involving, for example, the existence of the set of all instances of blue. The point here, of course, is not to take sides in the debates over universals, but simply to make clear that the approach I am advocating would be used differently by different philosophers.

The way of thinking proposed in this paper does justice to the three reasons Crane gives for acknowledging intentional objects. First, the intentionality of intentional states can be acknowledged by saying that all such states have intentional objects, meaning thereby that all of them are such that their truth-conditions include the existence (or non-existence) of something. Second, saying that the thought that Zeus is powerful and the thought that

Pegasus is swift are different in virtue of having different objects can be understood to mean that their truth-conditions involve the existence or non-existence of different things: the first requires among other things the existence of a certain deity, the second requires among other things the existence of a certain horse. Third, saying that two thoughts with different contents are similar in virtue of having the same object can be understood to mean that there is one entity whose existence or non-existence is included in the truth-conditions of both thoughts.

Conclusion

We should resist the idea that saying something about an intentional object is saying something about 'that thing' in a way that commits us to the thing's existence. But we cannot resist it merely by saying that the word 'object' is not being used in a substantial sense; a more fully-developed alternative account is required. Assertions apparently about objects with strange properties are actually assertions about intentional states, and the point of saying so is not to legislate against certain forms of words, but rather to remind ourselves what they mean.[17]

[17] I am grateful to anonymous referees for helpful comments and objections, and also to [other acknowledgements omitted for blind refereeing].