

Symposium

Aspects of Psychologism: Précis

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*ASPECTS OF PSYCHOLOGISM*¹ IS A collection of essays unified around a philosophical approach to the mind that is non-reductive and yet compatible (or continuous) with scientific psychology. The essays in the book, published over a period of twenty years, investigate the phenomena of intentionality and consciousness, with a special emphasis on perceptual phenomena. The central theme which unites the essays is an approach to the mind which I call “psychologism about the psychological”.

Psychologism about the psychological, as I understand it, is a vision of what is important in the study of the mind. It asserts the reality of the psychological and the need to investigate it through a variety of approaches, of which metaphysics, psychology, cognitive science and phenomenology are examples. These disciplines, according to psychologism, are concerned with fundamentally the same subject-matter: the mind. But since I have found it difficult sometimes to get this point across in abstract terms, perhaps it is easier to introduce what I mean by “psychologism” by saying what it is not.

The last fifty or so years of analytic philosophy of mind have been dominated by two problems: the problem of consciousness and the problem of intentionality. Both of these problems have been framed against the

background of a physicalist or materialist metaphysics: the problems are about how physicalism or materialism can account for consciousness and intentionality. But there is a prior question: how should consciousness and intentionality be conceived?

A crude description of the philosophical answers of the last fifty years to this question is this: consciousness should be understood in terms of *qualia*, and intentionality in terms of the *propositional attitudes*, mental states thought to be relations to abstract entities called “propositions”. My psychologism rejects both these answers.

The best way to understand this rejection is to consider the usual approach to the propositional attitudes. I think it is fair to say that the investigation of the propositional attitudes in the last few decades has progressed by looking at the semantic form or structure of natural language propositional attitude ascriptions, and has read off from these ascriptions claims about the psychological nature of intentionality. This is the only way to understand the pervasive claim that intentional states are “relations to propositions”.

A much more natural thought – although one I ultimately reject – is that intentional states are relations to things in the world: the objects around us and their properties. The idea that intentional states are relations to

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propositions is something that takes quite a lot of theorising to get to.

But the origin of this idea derives from certain core assumptions of the 20th century semantic tradition: the idea that judgment or belief has a certain priority in understanding language and therefore thought, that meaning is compositional, that propositions must be mind-independent, that thought must ultimately be communicable, and so on. The semantic tradition stemming from Frege has understood intentionality in terms of linguistic meaning, and meaning in terms of the proposition. It is the ideas of this tradition applied to the study of the mind which my psychologism rejects.

The most vivid way of explaining this rejection is by using an analogy Frege himself used in *On Sense and Reference*, to illustrate the difference between reference, sense and what he called *associated idea* (*Vorstellung*, sometimes translated into English as “representation”). Consider someone who looks at the moon through a telescope. «I compare the moon itself to the reference», Frege writes, «it is the object of the observation, mediated by the real image projected by the object glass in the interior of the telescope, and by the retinal image of the observer. The former I compare to the sense, the latter is like the idea or the experience».²

The semantic tradition has concentrated on understanding the mind-world interface in terms of sense and reference. The references of our words are out there, in the world, and sense inhabits Frege’s famous “third realm” of abstract entities. Thoughts – the senses of whole sentences – are what is communicated when all goes well.

It is impossible to exaggerate how influential this picture has been in analytic philosophy. Even for those philosophers, and there are many of them, who reject Frege’s own theory of the proposition, and sense and reference, the picture of intentionality as consisting of relations to abstract propositions has the whole discipline in its grip. And even for those who claim to want to integrate the theory of

mind with the theory of language, and to explain the latter in terms of the former, the anti-psychologistic strains run very deep.

Gareth Evans’s *The Varieties of Reference*, for example, makes a big deal of the idea that «an understanding of how singular thoughts are related to objects is essential for a proper treatment of the linguistic devices by which such thoughts are expressed».³ And yet the first three chapters are about some of the semantic views of Frege, Russell and Kripke. The starting point of Evans’s investigation is Frege’s semantic theory, not his conjecture about ideas.

If I could sum up my psychologism in a phrase, then, it would be this: the study of intentionality, and therefore the study of the mind, should begin with what Frege called “ideas” and not with his concepts of sense and reference, or related notions.

Aspects of Psychologism consists of an introductory essay plus fifteen more, divided into four parts: History, Intentionality, Perception and Consciousness. The introductory essay elaborates on the conception of psychologism just sketched, and argues for a specific version of psychologism about intentional content.

The historical essays in Part I discuss three aspects of the history of philosophical discussions of intentionality: the re-introduction of the terminology of intentionality by Brentano in 1874, Wittgenstein’s attempts to dissolve the problems of intentionality, and the relationship between intentionality and consciousness (in terms of the notion of “*qualia*”).

Part II contains four essays on intentionality, the central concept of my psychologistic conception of the mind. Psychologism holds that the mind forms a unified subject-matter, and intentionalism is the view that the subject-matter is unified by intentionality: the direction of the mind upon its objects. What this means is developed in these essays.

The essays in Part III discuss the intentionality of perception. I have argued that perception is in a certain sense nonconceptual, and also that it has intentional content which is not propositional. I now think of these claims as underpinned by psychologism, in the

way explained in essay 12, *The Given*.

Part IV contains four essays on consciousness, which make contributions to a number of the central debates in the recent philosophy of consciousness. The essays in this section are mostly negative: they criticise some of the orthodox ideas in terms of which the “problem of consciousness” is sometimes understood. The ideas criticised are: that there is a meaningful distinction between conscious and unconscious belief; that the knowledge argument is a threat to physicalism; and that notions of “*phenomenal concepts*” and “*acquaintance*” are helpful no-

tions to use in understanding consciousness.

■ Notes

¹ See T. CRANE, *Aspects of Psychologism*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA) 2014.

² G. FREGE, *Über Sinn und Bedeutung*, in: «Vierteljahrsschrift für wissenschaftliche Philosophie», XVI, 1892, pp. 192-205 (En. trans. *On Sense and Reference*, in: A.W. MOORE (ed.), *Meaning and Reference*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1993, pp. 23-42, here pp. 26-27).

³ G. EVANS, *The Varieties of Reference*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1982.