

Symposium

## Aspects of Psychologism: Reply to Critics

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### Reply to Masrour

FARID MASROUR'S PENETRATING COMMENTS, focussing mainly on my essays *The Given* and *Intentional Objects*, fall into two parts.

The first part describes three theses that characterise my views – (1) the non-relational character of intentionality; (2) content pluralism; and (3) phenomenal intentionalism – and argues that there are three specific tensions between all or some of (1)-(3).

The second part questions whether I can hold that concrete particular objects are the intentional objects of mental states, compatible with my internalism about the mind.

First, the tensions between (1)-(3). The first tension relates to (1) and (2). Masrour claims that a pluralism about content ought to eliminate the motivation for anti-realism about content, and he takes the non-relational view of intentionality to be a form of anti-realism about content. Just as Davidson's pluralism about meaning removes the disagreement between different moral systems (since they must be interpreted as meaning different things with their evaluative words) and can lead to a kind of realism about morality; so Chalmers's content pluralism removes the disagreement between Russellianism and Fregeanism about

propositions, and leaves room for a genuine "relationism" about intentionality:

the pluralist dissolution of the disagreement seems to take away the motivation for rejecting the view that experiences can be identified with relations to propositions.<sup>1</sup>

The point is ingenious, but I want to resist the idea that there is a problem here. The non-relational character of intentionality means, to me, that experiences and other intentional states are not *fundamentally* relations to propositions. It is not, so to speak, a natural or interpreter-independent fact that intentional states are relations to propositions. It is a product of the fact that they are truly described by interpreters as such relations.

I take inspiration from the much-used analogy with physical magnitudes. We use numbers to measure weights, lengths and so on. Weights can be seen as relations to numbers. But this is only a product of the measuring practice; considered as part of observer-independent nature, weights are not relations to numbers.

How does this relate to realism and "instrumentalism" about content? Content pluralism, as I defend it in *The Given*, is compatible with there being one way an experience or other mental state represents the world to be. In-

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deed, I think there is such a way: it is the way determined by the phenomenal or “real” content of the mental state. In this sense, there is a fact of the matter about what the “real” or phenomenal content of a conscious mental state is.

The point of the distinction between semantic and phenomenal content is to identify those ways of representing the world that are intrinsic to the state itself and those that are artefacts of theory – relations to propositions are in the second category. (These remarks are also relevant to Alfredo Paternoster’s concerns about content realism).

I would say the same kind of thing in response to Masrour’s second worry about claims (1)-(3). He points out that there seems to be a tension between non-relationism (doctrine (1)) and my claim that it is literally true that intentional states are relations to propositions. This point seems plausible at first sight. But I want to stress that the essence of the idea that intentionality is not a relation, as I mean it, is that it is not a relation to intentional objects – i.e. what is thought about, what is feared, what is desired etc. – but I am happy with the idea that some intentional states are relations to propositions.<sup>2</sup> It seems to me that it can be literally true that an experience is a relation to a proposition even if this literal truth is established by the interpretations of others. The truth can be literal, though derivative. The same can be said about weights as relations to numbers.

Third, Masrour asks how I can maintain non-relationism and hold that every thought has an object. If every thought has an object, then why is intentionality not a relation to these objects?

Masrour offers me a number of options, none of which appeal to me. The last option he offers starts well – that I might wish

to endorse a phenomenological conception of directedness or aboutness. Accordingly, intentional states have an essential phenomenology of directedness or aboutness, and this grounds the fact that they can only be described in relational terms.<sup>3</sup>

This is indeed what I think, but Masrour’s next remarks suggest that we cannot mean this in the same way:

However, this seems to clash with another aspect of Crane’s overall outlook. On Crane’s version of phenomenal intentionalism, phenomenal consciousness is grounded in the entire intentional nature of mental states. So, Crane seems to ground phenomenology in intentionality. But the phenomenological solution seems to ground intentionality in phenomenology.<sup>4</sup>

This criticism presupposes that phenomenology and intentionality can be understood independently of each other. But I reject this presupposition. I don’t think that you can specify phenomenal properties (e.g. perceived colours and shapes) independently of how they seem to you, and this is a description of the intentionality of the experience (this point connects with my reply to David Pitt below).

When I say I would endorse a phenomenological account of aboutness or directedness, I mean that the ultimate facts about intentionality involve facts about how things consciously appear to the subject. So I am taking consciousness for granted in describing the ultimate basis of intentionality. (This may look like having the benefits of theft over honest toil – but I would argue that defenders of *qualia* are just in the same position, by appealing to properties which are intrinsically conscious; this is as much of an assumption of the existence of consciousness as is involved in my intentionalist view).

That is my response to Masrour’s initial criticisms. But his main worry is that there is a tension between my phenomenal intentionalism – in the sense in which I hold that doctrine – and my internalism (or anti-externalism). He argues that it is «undeniable that ordinary external particulars can be intentional objects of experiences», but that internalism makes this obvious fact hard to sustain.<sup>5</sup> Masrour describes a case of subject who is hallucinating something that looks like the

Eiffel Tower, and having an experience where things seem exactly like they would to someone seeing the Eiffel Tower; and where there is an object (the “D-Tower”) which looks just like the Eiffel Tower, coincidentally at the place where the Eiffel Tower seems to be. What is the intentional object of this subject’s experience?

Masrour argues that on the one hand, it should not be the D-Tower, since that would just be a matter of luck, and one’s experience does not have an intentional object just through luck. But on the other hand, if we build in some causal constraints into what makes something an intentional object, then these constraints would – according to the phenomenal intentionalist – have to be phenomenologically manifest; and this is plainly implausible.

I am sympathetic to this criticism of the proposed theory of intentional objects. And I agree wholeheartedly with Masrour’s conviction that ordinary external particulars can be the intentional objects of experiences. Masrour misreads me on this, taking me to have a «demanding notion of intentional objects [...] when [Crane] denies that concrete particulars can be the intentional objects of experiences».<sup>6</sup> I have never denied that concrete particulars – towers, churches, apples and oranges etc. – can be intentional objects. What I did deny (in the essay *Intentional Objects*) is that the category *intentional object* is the same as the category *concrete particular*.

Here I was rejecting John Searle’s idea that intentional objects just are ordinary objects.<sup>7</sup> Since we can think about things that do not exist, and an intentional object is just what is thought about, some intentional objects do not exist. On this basis, I argued that *being an intentional object* is not the same as *being an entity of any kind*, even though many (most?) intentional objects are, in fact, entities. So like Masrour, I have a “permissive” conception of intentional objects: anything that can be thought (etc.) about can be an intentional object. But it is not part of the nature of any intentional object that it is an intentional object.

What does this imply about the case of

the hallucinated D-tower? In itself, very little. My view of intentional objects does allow that the Eiffel Tower can be the intentional object of an experience. I also allow that a subject can hallucinate the Eiffel Tower – though I think this is only possible if the subject had seen the Eiffel Tower or a picture of it. Suppose a subject who had never seen the Eiffel Tower had a hallucination exactly resembling a knowledgeable subject’s hallucination of the Eiffel Tower; would this be a hallucination of the Eiffel Tower? I would say no; no more than an Icelandic fisherman who has never met her can hallucinate my mother. In this way, I agree with Masrour that what your hallucinations are of cannot be a matter of brute luck.

But nor would I build some causal condition into the specification of the content of the experience, some condition that would determine a real object as the intentional object of the experience. I am sceptical that there are any such general conditions which determine whether or when something is an object of a given thought. Elsewhere I have argued that we should accept many different kinds of thing – entities, non-entities, indeterminate and determinate – as objects of thought and we should not look for a general theory of what fixes something as such an object.<sup>8</sup>

Turning finally to Masrour’s case, then, I would say that the space soul is not perceiving the D-Tower, for the reasons he says; but nor is it having a hallucination of the Eiffel Tower. It is having an experience, I am happy to grant, and it could probably describe the intentional object of its experience in some way; but the intentional object of this experience is not a concrete particular, since it does not exist. But this fact does not stop us, we who live in the real world, from having concrete particulars as the objects of our thoughts.

The key assumption that needs to be accepted here is that the content of an experience – how things seem – does not determine its object. Two experiences could seem the same way and have different objects. This is the essence of internalism, as Katalin Farkas has argued.<sup>9</sup>

## ■ Reply to Paternoster

Alfredo Paternoster's interesting comments revolve around the question of realism about intentionality. Paternoster is dissatisfied with my treatment of Wittgenstein's remarks on intentionality, and independently of this, he wonders to what extent I am an intentional realist.

On the question of the interpretation of Wittgenstein, Paternoster is perhaps right that my attribution «you can *only* describe the object of the expectation in the way it is specified in the description of the expectation itself»<sup>10</sup> may not be wholly warranted on the basis of Wittgenstein's own texts. It is true that Wittgenstein's remarks on the question of intentionality are somewhat fragmentary and open to other interpretations. My aim was to try and impose some precision on these remarks, and try and make sense of the idea that there is a merely "grammatical" connection between the expectation and what is expected. I said in my essay,

we find the "contact" between expectation and fulfilment in the fact that we use the same words ("he'll come in") as an expression of what we expect, and as a description of what fulfils it.<sup>11</sup>

This is why I proposed, as a generalisation of this point, the idea that you can only describe the object of expectation in a way that the description specifies. As far as I can see, Wittgenstein offers no further clue as to how to spell out his "grammatical" suggestion; but if Paternoster can find a better clue, then I look forward to hearing about it.

The heart of my criticism of Wittgenstein is in the following passage from my paper:

Wittgenstein's answer in § 437 to his own question about what makes a proposition true – "Whence this determining of what is not yet there?" – seems to be this: the "determining" of what is not there simply consists in the grammatical truth that

"the thought that *p* is the thought that is made true by the fact that *p*". But, as we have observed, the thought that *p* can be made true by the fact that *q*: and this is not a grammatical remark.<sup>12</sup>

Wittgenstein might wish to say that the fact reported by "p" and the fact reported by "q" have some connection between them; but what is that connection? By appealing to representational content, I have an answer to that question: they represent the same things, or some of the same things, in different ways (different contents). What is Wittgenstein's answer? I'm not saying that one can't be given, but I can't find it in the pages of the *Philosophical Investigations*.<sup>13</sup>

However, I would resist Paternoster's description of my criticism of Wittgenstein that Wittgenstein's view does not allow for any "perspectival" element in intentionality. Perspective, as I think of it, could be a "grammatical" fact in Wittgenstein's eccentric use of that word. It could be a grammatical fact, for example, that "Hesperus is Hesperus" is a priori knowable, and "Hesperus is Phosphorus" is not. These facts express differences in perspective, in my sense.

Paternoster's second theme is intentional realism, which he characterises as «the thesis according to which mental states are realized by computational (and ultimately cerebral) states».<sup>14</sup>

Although I recognise that this is one way that the debate about realism has been traditionally formulated, I think other ways of conceiving of realism should also be on the table. One way of doing this to which I am attracted bases intentional or psychological realism on a commitment to the reality of psychological capacities and their exercises: the capacity for memory, perception, imagination and so on. Some of the exercises of these capacities are conscious, and some are not.

Capacities need mechanisms, of course, but there is no need to assume a priori that these mechanisms must have a particular computational structure. Perhaps this is why

Paternoster calls me a “mild realist”. Does this mean that intentionality as such, as Paternoster says, «is just an explanatorily useful concept, not a genuine “real” property»?<sup>15</sup>

This depends. The way I think of it, intentionality is an abstract way of categorising the essential feature of certain (or all) psychological capacities: psychological capacities and their exercises all have objects. But this does not mean that there is a quality or property – the natural, substantial property *intentionality* – that all these capacities and their exercises must have. Of course, it is true that they are intentional capacities, so they have the property in the “pleonastic” sense.

However, my talk of content pluralism in *The Given* may lead Paternoster and others to think that I have gone over to an “instrumentalist” view of intentionality, as opposed to the realism of Jerry Fodor and others. After all, in this paper I claim that there may be many contents associated with a single intentional state, and that these models depend in a certain sense on the interests and purposes of the attributer.

I am happy to acknowledge this departure from standard realism. It seems to me that many of Dennett’s points about our actual attributions of content have been unduly neglected, and I think the philosophy of mind would do well to go back and consider them. It’s time to step back from the commitment to heavy duty theses like the Language of Thought hypothesis.

## ■ Reply to Perconti

Pietro Perconti helpfully outlines the importance of the issue of psychologism in general, noting that the

coming and going of psychologism and anti-psychologism is in fact a typical feature in the history of the theory of knowledge in the modern age.<sup>16</sup>

He gives a lucid description of what I take psychologism about the psychological to be. But he criticises me for my claim that psy-

chologism is not simply the investigation of commonsense or folk psychological concepts or categories. On the contrary, he argues, if the study of the mind is going to be open to empirical investigation, then it must also be sensitive to the things that empirical science finds out about folk psychological categories. The more we discover about the mechanisms of the mind, the more it will raise questions about the reality of things picked out by our psychological concepts like belief, desire, intention and so on. So a genuinely psychological approach should not ignore folk psychological concepts.

Perconti is quite right here, and I should not have said or implied that psychologism should have no interest in the folk psychological. In fact, psychologism is a good way to address the interaction between the commonsense conception of the mind and the findings of science. Our understanding of one another starts by assuming the integrity of certain psychological categories – memory, imagination, perception etc. – the things I call the intentional *modes*. These categories divide up mental reality into capacities or faculties, according to our commonsense scheme. How does what we learn from neuroscience and psychology affect this classification?

It is implausible that there is some general recipe here for deciding when a psychological category is part of the scientifically validated architecture of the mind. But it is pretty clear from the current state of cognitive neuroscience that certain fundamental categories are here to stay – vision, language, intention and decision-making – while other coarse-grained folk psychological categories (e.g. emotion and reasoning) need to be broken down in the light of empirical evidence. These discoveries can then feed back into the commonsense conception of the mental, as Perconti says.

How does this relate to the distinction between empirical science and conceptual analysis, which Perconti claims I am returning to?

There are various distinctions one can make here, but what is important to me is to distinguish between our everyday, or folk or

commonsense knowledge of the mental, and conceptual analysis, as that idea has been understood in the fairly recent philosophical tradition. This tradition has thought of conceptual analysis in terms of non-circular necessary and sufficient conditions for the application of a concept. I don't see any future in this notion, and I don't think its viability is presupposed by the idea of commonsense knowledge of the mental.

### ■ Reply to Pitt

David Pitt is a philosopher whose views are, to my way of thinking, deeply psychological. Indeed, if he hadn't called his 2009 paper *Intentional Psychologism*,<sup>17</sup> this would have served as a good title for my own book.

His own version of psychologism takes things in a rather different direction from mine, and his conception of the relationship between the phenomenal and the intentional is not quite the same as mine (essentially, he believes that there is an independently understandable conception of the phenomenal in terms of which conscious intentionality can be understood, and I deny this).

But there is so much we share in our approach to these matters that I am delighted to have his perceptive and thoughtful critical comments here.

Pitt takes issue with my view that beliefs are not conscious. I argued this on the grounds that beliefs are (i) states, not events; and (ii) that, as states, they persist through changes in, and the absence of, consciousness: you still count as believing things when you are asleep. Pitt questions both these ideas. He argues, against (i), that there can be an event of believing something – why isn't coming to believe a case of belief?

And against (ii), he thinks that although we say people believe things when they are asleep, this is like saying that they have a good singing voice when they are asleep – it is just a disposition to have conscious beliefs. Indeed, he thinks that «belief is essentially an occurrent, experiential phenomenon [...]

beliefs cannot be unconscious».<sup>18</sup> I will take these two points in turn.

On the question of coming to believe, there is one issue on which we agree: that there really is such a thing as coming to believe, and this is an event. I deny this event is itself a belief, any more than coming to own a house is owning a house, or getting married is being married. Pitt asks how can it be «that belief is essentially a taking-to-be or accepting or endorsement, if these are events»?<sup>19</sup>

My reply is that that “taking-to-be” is a term that can apply to long-held convictions (“For years I have *taken Italy to be* the country that has perfected the art of making coffee”) or to experiential occurrences (“From what I have tasted so far, I *take* this wine *to be* a New Zealand Pinot Noir”). And the same applies to accepting or endorsing. It is clear that, in the way we ordinarily talk, there are two kinds of thing: the persisting state and the experiential occurrence. Which one deserves the name “belief”?

The standard view is: both. My view is: the first. Pitt's view is: the second. The appeal to notions like *taking-to-be*, *acceptance* or *endorsement* does not settle the question in favour of any of these answers.

So what would settle it? Sometimes the question can seem merely terminological. Pitt and I both agree that there is the conscious occurrence and the persisting unconscious state. Does it matter whether or not we call one “belief” or not? Well, there is the fact that we ordinarily *say* that people believe things whether or not they are currently contemplating them, or conscious at all. Pitt argues that this is a superficial fact – we might say that someone is a good singer when all this means is that they have the disposition to sing well, and can have this disposition even when asleep.

I am perfectly happy to say that the belief is a disposition to have certain experiences and thoughts, so long as we also allow that this very same disposition controls the subject's actions (something which is left out of Pitt's picture, at least as described in the current paper). When one adds that the same (disposi-

tional) state controls both what we say and consciously think, and what we (consciously or unconsciously) do, then I think this adds up to saying the dispositional state is a belief.

But if Pitt disagrees with me, I will not mind so long as he accepts that the unconscious persisting state has the properties I have just mentioned; we can then just agree to differ on how to use the word “belief”. However, the claim that there is a single state that has all these properties is not a trivial claim – so if he disagrees with this, there is something substantial we are really disagreeing about.

However, Pitt thinks that there is an independent reason to reject my view and my taxonomy, which comes from the fact that unconscious dispositions cannot have any *phenomenal* content. If this is so, then they cannot have the same content as a conscious thought. And if this is so, then the content of conscious thoughts cannot be phenomenally constituted, and so I cannot hold the phenomenal intentionality thesis, as he and others understand it.<sup>20</sup>

Pitt is absolutely right that it is not possible to hold the phenomenal intentionality thesis, the thesis that unconscious beliefs and conscious thoughts can have the same content, and the thesis that all beliefs are unconscious. He urges me to give up the thesis that all beliefs are unconscious. But for me the choice is obvious: the phenomenal intentionality thesis is not something I have ever endorsed and it doesn't fit with my conception of the relationship between intentionality and phenomenology. I will finish my comments with a brief explanation.

In order to defend the idea that “content is phenomenally constituted” as a substantive doctrine, one has to have relatively independent ideas of content and phenomenology (or “phenomenality”). One way to have these independent ideas is to take content to be the proposition, and phenomenality to be a matter of having *qualia*. These are independent ideas and on the usual understanding, they are ideas of very different things – propositions are abstract entities, qualia are

concrete properties of mental states. So understood, it is barely intelligible how propositions might be constituted out of *qualia*.

But Pitt's view of propositions is more psychologicistic – he says that propositional contents are instantiated in the mind, and these instantiations are thoughts.<sup>21</sup> If phenomenal qualities are also instanced in the mind, then one can begin to see how one might construct thought-episodes out of such qualities – though we are owed an account of these qualities, or at least a description. Pitt's forthcoming book will no doubt provide this.

What I am sceptical about in this picture is not so much the idea that contents are instantiated as thoughts – though I would not put it this way myself – but the idea that there are phenomenal properties which can be identified independently of what they represent (their intentional objects) and the way it is represented (their contents). Colours, for example, strike us as out there in the world, as properties of the surfaces of material objects.

Maybe this is not the actual truth about colour, but it is the phenomenological truth – this is how things seem. And I claim that this phenomenal truth seems to be a representational truth. Our conscious states of mind represent the colours out there. And what applies to colour applies to the other properties of which we are aware. This, in brief, is the reason why I think the phenomenal and the intentional are so intertwined that the prospects of identifying sufficiently independent phenomenal properties are rather dim.

## Acknowledgements

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> F. MASROUR, *Revisiting Phenomenal Intentionality*, in: «Rivista Internazionale di Filosofia e Psicolo-

gia», vol. VII, n. 1, 2016, pp. 99-107, here p. 101.

<sup>2</sup> See T. CRANE, *Elements of Mind. An Introduction to the Philosophy of Mind*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2001, pp. 1-33.

<sup>3</sup> F. MASROUR, *Revisiting Phenomenal Intentionality*, cit., p. 102.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>5</sup> *Ivi*, p. 103.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>7</sup> See J.R. SEARLE, *Intentionality. An Essay in Philosophy of Mind*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1983.

<sup>8</sup> See T. CRANE, *The Objects of Thought*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2013, pp. 89-117.

<sup>9</sup> See K. FARKAS, *The Subject's Point of View*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2008.

<sup>10</sup> T. CRANE, *Aspects of Psychologism*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA) 2014, p. 55; A. PATERNOSTER, *Is Intentionality Real Enough?*, in: «Rivista Internazionale di Filosofia e Psicologia», vol. VII, n. 1, 2016, pp. 108-116, here p. 111.

<sup>11</sup> T. CRANE, *Aspects of Psychologism*, cit., p. 50.

<sup>12</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 58-59.

<sup>13</sup> See L. WITTGENSTEIN, *Philosophical Investigations*, Blackwell, Oxford 1953.

<sup>14</sup> A. PATERNOSTER, *Is Intentionality Real Enough?*, cit., here p. 113.

<sup>15</sup> *Ivi*, p. 114.

<sup>16</sup> P. PERCONTI, *The Psychologizing of the Psychological and the Return to Common Sense*, in: «Rivista Internazionale di Filosofia e Psicologia», vol. VII, n. 1, 2016, pp. 116-120, here p. 118.

<sup>17</sup> See D. PITT, *Intentional Psychologism*, in: «Philosophical Studies», vol. CXLVI, n. 1, 2009, pp. 117-138.

<sup>18</sup> D. PITT, *Conscious Belief*, in: «Rivista Internazionale di Filosofia e Psicologia», vol. VII, n. 1, 2016, pp. 121-126, here p. 125.

<sup>19</sup> *Ivi*, p. 124.

<sup>20</sup> See U. KRIEGLER (ed.), (2013) *Phenomenal Intentionality*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2013.

<sup>21</sup> On this topic, compare P. HANKS, *Propositional Content*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2015. Hanks argues that propositions can be identified with types of judgement-acts.