

# Проблема інтенціональності в аналітичній філософії

Теодор Негру

Факультет філософії та соціо-політичних наук, Ясський  
університет ім. А.Й. Кузи, РУМУНІЯ,  
вул. П'ятра-Неамт, 22 Декембрі, бл. В2, Sc. С, кв. 46,  
E-mail: theonegru@yahoo.com

У статті автор здійснив спробу продемонструвати, як поняття інтенціональності розглядалося в аналітичній традиції філософії. Відтоді, як Brentano визначив інтенціональність як ознаку розумового стану, його послідовники розвинули ідею інтенціональності двоюко. З одного боку, феноменологічна традиція, яку розвинув Едмунд Гуссерль, дотримується вчення Brentano, оскільки вважає інтенціональність психологічним явищем, яке реалізується в будь-якій людській діяльності, зокрема, у мовній. З іншого боку, інтенціональність отримала нову інтерпретацію, коли філософію почали розглядати з аналітичних позицій. У цьому контексті такі філософи як Frege, Russell та Chomsky розглядали мовну референційність як теорію значення, в якій головною проблемою є співвідношення між значенням виразу, його мовною формою та референтом, якого такий вираз позначає.

Лінгвістичному підходові до інтенціональності було протиставлено натуралістичні теорії, які визначають пріоритет натуралістичних методів або намагаються продемонструвати, що фізичні системи також мають інтенціональні риси. Так, Серль виступав проти розвитку теорії трансцендентної інтенціональності, яка знаходиться поза природним світом, натомість пропагуючи ідею натуралізації інтенціональності, трактуючи її з біологічного погляду. Фодор розглядає інтенціональність з позицій комп'ютерного аналізу і насамперед звертає увагу на репрезентаційну властивість мозку. Будь-яку когнітивну систему, яка виконує функцію відображення зовнішніх речей і діє відповідно до формальних правил, можна вважати інтенціональною. Деннетт тлумачить інтенціональність у рамках когнітивної етіології, яка має на меті з'ясувати когнітивну здатність системи з урахуванням її природного середовища.

Translated by Polyglot Translation Bureau  
<http://www.polyglot-lviv.com>

# The Problem of Intentionality in Analytic Philosophy

Teodor Negru

Faculty of Philosophy and Social-Political Sciences, Al. I.  
Cuza University of Iasi, ROMANIA, Piatra-Neamt,  
str. 22 Decembrie, bl. B2, Sc. C, Ap. 46,  
E-mail: theonegru@yahoo.com

*In this paper I intend to show how the idea of intentionality has been discussed in analytic tradition of philosophy. In philosophy of language, intentionality has been understood as being related with the problem of referentiality. In this context, referentiality was approached as a theory of the meaning where the issue is the relationship between the meaning of an expression, its linguistic form, and the referent such phrase expression refers to. However, philosophy of mind give intentionality a naturalistic account, trying to explain it from the point of view of science. But at this attempts to naturalize intentionality stressed the difficulties of understanding this phenomenon from the point of view of natural science.*

**Keywords** – intentionality, analytic philosophy, philosophy of mind, philosophy of language, naturalisation.

## I. Introduction

As a rule, intentionality is construed as the characteristic of the mind to be oriented toward something or to represent something. As Gertrude E. M. Anscombe states, the term originates in the Latin word *intentio* which derives from the verb *intendere*, suggesting the analogy between the act of aiming at something with an arrow (*intendere arcum*) and the orientation of the consciousness toward knowing an object (*intendere anima in*) (see Anscombe, 1965, p. 34). Intentionality should not be mistaken for the feature to be intentional that some phenomena or acts have. Intentions are a special type of intentional states. This means that not all intentional states are intentional as well; our perceptions or emotions, despite their intentional character (are orientate toward a specific object), they may as well not have an intentional character, meaning that they can also occur involuntarily.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the issue of intentionality was brought to light again by Franz Brentano (1838-1917), who claims that this feature pertains to all mental states.

*“Every mental phenomenon is characterized by what the Scholastics of the Middle Ages called the intentional (or mental) inexistence of an object, and what we might call, though not wholly unambiguously, reference to a content, direction toward an object (which is not to be understood here as meaning a thing), or immanent objectivity. Every mental phenomenon includes something as object within itself, although they do not do so in the same way. In presentation, something is presented, in judgement something is affirmed or denied, in love loved, in hate hated, in desire desired and so on. This intentional in-existence is characteristic exclusively of mental phenomena. No physical phenomena exhibit anything like it. We can, therefore, define mental phenomena by saying*

that they are those phenomena which contain an object intentionally within themselves.” (Brentano, 1995, pp. 88-89)

Brentano’s conception relies on two theses: the former claims that physical phenomena do not have intentionality, whereas the latter determines intentionality as a distinctive feature of the mental state. Pursuant to the former thesis, within the research of intentionality we cannot use scientific instruments which study the physical world, while pursuant to the latter, any mental state corresponds to an object either real or ‘inexistent’ – that is which exists only in the mind of the subject.

Brentano’s conception reveals that the referential idea is an essential component of intentionality that means that “the discourse as well as the thought are about something and something that is not the discourse or the thought are related.” (Benoist, p.8)

Hence, the psychological thesis, which reduces the object of knowledge to thinking, is obsolete as it supports the idea that any thought has either a mental object or a real one, which is independent from the act of perceiving it.

## II. Intentionality in philosophy of language

Brentano’s followers gave two meanings to the referent. On the one hand, the phenomenological tradition developed by Edmund Husserl, remains true to Brentano as it considers intentionality a psychological phenomenon involved in all human activities, including the linguistic ones. On the other hand, intentionality was given a new interpretation when philosophy started to be approached from the analytical perspective. In this context, referentiality was approached from the perspective of language as a theory of the meaning where the issue is the relationship between the meaning of an expression, its linguistic form, and the referent such phrase expression refers to.

Gottlob Frege (1848-1945) approached the referentiality from the angle of the interest in constructing a perfect discourse from the logical viewpoint, which should lay unequivocally at the basis of mathematics. In his article “On Sense and Reference” (see Geach, pp. 56-79), Frege contested the theory which claims that a direct referent is sufficient to understand a term. Claiming that the knowledge of a word is reduced to the knowledge of its signifier encounters many difficulties. Hence, according to this theory the identity relation “ $a = b$ ” contains more factual information than the expression “ $a = a$ ”.

To illustrate this inconvenient, Frege chooses two words – i.e. “Phosphorus” and “Hesperus,” deemed to refer to two different celestial objects, the Morning Star and the Evening Star, respectively. The observations of Roman astronomers proved that the two names refer to the same planet, Venus. In this case, according to the theory of the direct referent, the sentence ‘Phosphorus is Hesperus’ expresses a truth discovered empirically and the sentence ‘Phosphorus is Phosphorus’ would be a logical, trivial truth, with no relation whatsoever with experience.

Another difficulty is encountered when the topic debated is the substitution of co-referential terms in the case of propositional attitudes, i.e. of the sentences stating convictions. In such case, the issue starts from the idea that co-referential phrases may inter-substitute in sentences without changing the value of truth of such sentence. But, if the sentence ‘John thinks that Hesperus is Hesperus’ is true, the sentence ‘John thinks that Hesperus is Phosphorus’ does not necessarily have the same value of truth as may not know this identity.

Consequently, Frege said, we must give up the idea that meaning is the same thing with the referent and we should make a clear-cut distinction between sense (*Sinn*) and reference (*Bedeutung*). Reference is the object that a name, an expression refers to (e.g. the reference of the term Hesperus is the planet Venus). Sense is the specific way we understand the object referred to. Therefore, each expression has a certain reference determined by its associated sense which means that, if two expressions have the same sense, they have reference the same reference (the reciprocal of such thesis is not valid). The distinction Frege made helps us understand why in the context of sentence attitude we cannot substitute one term by another one having the same reference, but a different meaning, without altering the sentence value of truth.

Frege’s theory developed with a view to constructing a formal discourse encounters some difficulty when there is a need to explain how the relation of reference should be thought in the case of a term whose object is not real. To Frege, if a sentence contains an empty term, then the entire sentence is empty, which means that it does not have a value of truth and that it can play no role in a theoretical construction. Nonetheless, as there is a sense associated to such term and other people understand what we mean when we use it in reasoning, Frege must answer the question: to which referent does this sense refer? His solution is to choose an arbitrary referent. Still the issue has not been solved as any referent has certain features which change the value of truth of the sentence so as we need to identify the criterion laying at the basis of our choice.

An answer to the issue of ‘imaginary existences’ was offered by Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), who gave up Frege’s distinction between sense and reference. In the descriptive theory he created, the British philosopher shows that sentences with empty terms seem to have a meaning due to their grammatical form (as it is similar to the subject-predicate-type of sentence), suggesting thus a logically correct form. We should also take into account that the logical form of a sentence, such as ‘Scott is the author of Waverly’ is, in fact, a conjunction of statements, of which the former is existential (there is someone named Scott). The analysis of the finite description play the role of separating the content of the description (expressed by the sentence function *x has the feature y*), from the referential function of description (*There is an x ...*). Due to the same reason, the sentence ‘The current king of France is bold’ is false as the sentence analysis demonstrates that the statement expressing the referential component, i.e. ‘there is at least one person who is the king of France’ is false (see Russell, p. 479).

An important component of the description theory is the distinction between name and description. Hence, if the name implies a referent, such name gains meaning by relating to such referent, the description does not need a referent to exist as it gains its significance from the relations among the meaning of the component words. Therefore, it is important not to substitute a name by a description creating thus the illusion of a referent in the case of 'imaginary existences' (to Russell, expressions as Cerberus, Pegasus or Centaur are not names, but descriptions such as 'three-headed dog', 'flying horse', etc.).

Using logical – linguistic instruments developed by Frege and Russell, Roderick Chisholm (1916-1999) will offer a new theory of intentionality. Hence, he tried to determine the criterion we could use to identify intentional sentences specific to psychology. Starting from this point, he offers a rephrasing of Brentano's two theses, where the stress lays on the logical features of language used when we talk about mental states.

*"Let us say (1) that we do not need to use intentional sentences when we describe nonpsychological phenomena; we can express all of our beliefs about what is merely «physical» in sentences which are not intentional. But (2) when we wish to describe perceiving, assuming, believing, knowing, wanting, hoping, and other such attitudes, then either (a) we must use sentences which are intentional or (b) we must use terms we do not need to use when we describe nonpsychological phenomena."* (Chisholm, 2002, pp. 485-486)

Describing intentional acts as 'sentence attitudes,' that is relations between a person and a sentence related to verbs such as *to believe, to wish, to want*, Chisholm shows that psychic phenomena cannot be described without intentional statements.

## II. Intentionality in philosophy of mind

The linguistic approach of intentionality was contested by the naturalistic theories, which determine the priority of naturalistic methods and try to demonstrate that physical systems have intentional features as well. John Searle (1932- ) shows within the 'biological naturalism' theory that those logical features contained in language describing mental phenomena do not apply to mental states proper. Consequently, language intentionality is one and it refers only to language, whereas mental states intentionality is something else as it refers to the content of mental states and to their being object-oriented. In order to distinguish between the two, two types of intentionality were discussed: an original one (or intrinsic) and a derived one. The derived intentionality is the one that can be explained by means of the terms of other intentionality. For instance, language is considered to have intentionality derived from the intentionality of the intentions and conventions set by the users, i.e. the intentionality of mental states. Hence, the issue of the linguistic criterion of intentionality could be solved, should one consider that language has secondary degree intentionality and that one should look for and identify the original intentionality of the mind underneath.

Therefore, to better understand the nature of intentionality, Searle starts from its resemblance with the speech acts. Firstly, one of the structural resemblances between the intentional states and the speech acts would be that operated at the level of both between the sentence type and content. As each speech act has a certain illocutionary force (expresses an order, ascertains something, questions, etc.) by means of which it can express the same sentence content, similarly, intentional states express the same sentence content in different psychological modes (e.g. hope, fear, beliefs, etc.).

Secondly, the speech acts and intentional states resemble in what Searle calls "directions of fit". Hence, with respect to beliefs we can say that they have a direction of fit from mind-to-world, and similarly to assertions, they may be true or false. Intentions and wishes have a direction of fit from world-to-mind and, similar to promise and orders, they may be satisfied or not. Yet, there is another category of intentional states, which contains joy and sadness, which, similar to thanks and apologies, have no direction of fit.

Thirdly, each illocutionary stance expresses a certain intentional state, which becomes the condition of this type of discourse. Hence, assertion expresses a belief, promise expresses an intention, orders express a wish, etc. Finally yet importantly, we can discuss, with respect to both stances of discourse and to intentional states, the conditions of satisfaction. A sentence, similarly to a belief, may be true or false; an order, similarly to a wish, may be observed or not, etc. In each case, the conditions of satisfaction are determined by the consistency between the sentence content and the world, given by the overlapping direction.

These four resemblances help make up a picture of intentionality, because *"every intentional state consists of a representative content in a certain psychological mode. intentional states represent objects and states of affairs in the same sense that speech acts represents objects and states of affairs (though, to respect, they do it by different means in a different way). [...] we can say that Intentional states with a propositional content and a direction of fit represent their various conditions of satisfaction in the same sense that speech acts with a propositional content and a direction of fit represent their conditions of satisfaction."* (Searle, 1983, p. 11)

Starting from this point, Searle opposed to developing a theory of a transcendent intentionality placed beyond the natural world, pursuing instead to naturalize intentionality by approaching it from the biological viewpoint. Turning intentionality into a biological phenomenon does not make its nature clearer. It continues to remain a mystery for Searle. Regarding this issue as Searle does, he wants to fight the computational approaches of the mind. Actually, Searle considers that mind's resemblance to artificial intelligence can work up to a certain point, i.e. up to discussing intentionality. Hence, while human mind is endowed with an intrinsic, constitutive intentionality, artificial intelligence has a derived intentionality resulting from the programmer's inputs.

In the computational variant, intentionality is analyzed starting from the mind representational feature. Any cognitive system having functions in the representation of exterior things and operating according to formal rules is construed as intentional.

Jerry Fodor developed such a conception in many of his works where he discusses a “language of thinking” which consists of a set of symbols playing the role of representing phenomena, governed by a set of rules (syntax) which determines the operations performed by these representations. The operation of thinking is seen as the movement of such symbols according to existing rules within various registers. To support the existence of such an inner language, Fodor argues that, on the one hand, even organisms that lack a natural language are able to perform intelligent meaningful acts due to the internal capacity to operate with representations. On the other hand, he claims that this is due to the fact that one learns a natural language by hypothesizing and trials operate in a primary language.

Thus, Fodor finds that it the duty of psychology to research into the formal structures of the inner language with a view to explaining human behavior leaving aside the research into modalities where mental representations are connected to external objects. According to some authors, the issue of intentionality is thus partially approached as mental representations are construed as offering information on certain characteristics of the outer world to which they a causally connected, leaving aside the non-existing intentional objects or the fact that connection between mental and exterior is likely to be wrong.

Daniel Dennett’s theory is a construction from a quite different approach asserting that whenever we characterize a system in terms of wish or beliefs, we adopt an intentional stance whether such system is natural or artificial.

“*Intentional stance is the strategy of interpreting the behaviour of an entity (person, animal, artefact, anything) approaching it as if it were a rational agent which determined «the choice of actions», considering its beliefs and wishes [...] Intentional stance is the attitude or approach we usually adopt when facing others. Consequently, adopting an intentional attitude when facing something seems to be a deliberate antropomorphisation of such thing.*” (Dennett, 1997, p. 38)

Thus, Dennett underlines the explicative value of intentional stance to the extent where he adopts an instrumentalist stand where intentionality is not necessarily a real feature of systems but merely a framework within which we explain certain behaviors and get certain data from which we could not get otherwise.

To Dennett, there are three ways of explaining a system: physical, projective, and intentional. The physical stance relies on physics-law-based predictions: knowing the physical organization of things and the laws governing such organisms we can give an appreciation on any material entity’s behavior. The project stance implies that

an object or a living being will behave as they were designed to operate. The intentional stance is considered a subspecies of the project stance to the extent that we assume that the system it tries to explain behaves like an intelligent agent, endowed with certain wishes and beliefs according to which it will act. Therefore, the risk of explaining intentional systems is greater as they do not fully rely on strict laws, thus, by means of the intentional stance new theoretical data are provided with concern to the relationship of that organism with its environment, the data it obtains and the acts it is prone to. This is why Dennett suggested cognitive etiology as a science specific to intentional stance. In his opinion, cognitive etiology aims at identifying the cognitive capacity of a system while considering the natural environment it dwells.

## Conclusion

According to the philosophy of mind, intentionality is a complex characteristic of mind, which cannot be reduced just to his referential component. In the same time, all attempts to naturalize intentionality stressed the difficulties of understanding this phenomenon from the point of view of natural science.

*ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: This paper was made within the project “Developing the Innovation Capacity and Improving the Impact of Research through Post-doctoral Programmes”, supported by the Sectorial Operational Programme Human Resources Development, under the number POSDRU/89/1.5/S/49944.*

## References

- [1] Anscombe, G. E. M.: „*The Intentionality of Sensation: A Grammatical Feature*” in R.J. Butler (ed.) *Analytical Philosophy: Second Series* . Blackwell, Oxford, 1965
- [2] Benoit, Jocelyn: “*Theories of Reference in Both Early Phenomenology and Early Analytic Philosophy*”, in Jocelyn Benoit (ed.), *Towards New Logics and Semantics*, Keio University Press, Keio, 2006
- [3] Brentano, Franz C., *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, Routledge, London, 1995
- [4] Chisholm, Roderick M.: “*Intentional Inexistence*” in David Chalmers (ed.), *Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2002, pp. 485-486.
- [5] Dennett, Daniel C., *Kinds of Minds: Toward an Understanding of Consciousness*, Basic Books, 1997
- [6] Geach, Peter and Max Black, *Translations from the Philosophical Writing of Gottlob Frege*, Philosophical Library, New York, 1952
- [7] Russell, Bertrand, *On Denoting*, Mind, New Series, Vol. 14, No. 56 (Oct. 1905), pp. 479 - 493
- [8] Searle, John, *Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1983