

Elements of Mind

An Introduction to the Philosophy of Mind

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Mind

1. Philosophy of mind and the study of mental phenomena

We have ways of thinking about ourselves which are not scientific in the strict sense of that word. We think of ourselves as conscious, rational creatures, with an outlook or perspective on the world and with needs, commitments, emotions, and values. A part of this view which we have of ourselves is a conception of what these phenomena, the *mental phenomena*, are. This conception is vague in places, and in places perhaps confused; but it is nonetheless pervasive and apparently common, in its broad outlines, to many human cultures at different times.

When I say that this conception is not scientific, all I mean is this: if it is knowledge at all, it is not specialist knowledge. It is not knowledge which requires specific training or a particular degree of intelligence or learning. It is rather something which we inevitably learn as we learn a language, come to understand others, and as we mature within a human society or culture. Some philosophers call this conception 'folk psychology', often intending a contrast with a more scientific psychology. I would like to avoid some of the connotations of the word 'folk' (the connotations the word has in 'folk music' or 'folk dancing'), so I refrain from using this term; nonetheless, what the term refers to certainly exists.

We also have a conception of ourselves and our place in the world which is scientific in any sense of the word. Under this conception, we think of ourselves as organisms, members of a certain species, with an evolutionary history and a biological nature. Our bodies are made up of organs, cells, molecules, and atoms, and various scientific theories describe these things in all their complexity. This scientific knowledge is specialized knowledge; to grasp it requires significant intelligence and extensive (and expensive) education; it is not common to all human cultures or societies, though many of the facts it discovers are true of the members of these societies.

One question which has preoccupied philosophers is this: what is the relationship between these two ways of thinking? Frank Jackson once described his philosophical interests in the following terms: we think we know a lot

about ourselves and about the world; science tells us a lot about ourselves and about the world; to what extent is what science tells us compatible with what we think we know?¹ This expresses particularly clearly the framework within which many questions in contemporary philosophy of mind are asked: is the scientific view compatible with our ordinary non-scientific beliefs? Or, does it correct these beliefs? But to what extent can science correct these ordinary beliefs? Could science show, for example, that there is no such thing as thought? If not, why not? If so, how should we conceive of ourselves?

These are important questions, which have been at the centre of philosophical debate for much of the last century. But there is a prior question: what is the content of this non-scientific view of ourselves? What does it mean to have a conception of ourselves as rational, conscious agents with a perspective on the world? To what do we commit ourselves in saying this? Answering these questions is one of the traditional concerns of the philosophy of mind. To have an adequate account of our mental self-conception is surely a precondition for being able to answer fully the questions posed above about the relation between this self-conception and our scientific knowledge.

Some philosophers have claimed that our conception of the mind has no unity or essence; that it is a relatively disorderly collection of ideas which have no unifying thread binding them together.² I disagree with these claims. I shall argue that our conception of the mind is unified by the idea of *intentionality*, the mind's directedness on its objects. Intentionality is the distinctive mark of all and only mental phenomena. This is a thesis whose origins may be found, in various forms, in Aristotle, the scholastic philosophers of the Middle Ages, Descartes, and Brentano and his students and followers in the twentieth century. It is sometimes called 'Brentano's thesis', and I shall use this term, though I do not intend this to imply that I am accepting Brentano's philosophy as a whole, or even the precise details of his understanding of intentionality.

In recent analytical philosophy Brentano's thesis is widely rejected, largely for the reason that it cannot accommodate the phenomena of consciousness. I think this objection to Brentano's thesis is mistaken, since I think that the conception of consciousness which it assumes is mistaken. In the rest of this chapter I present a general account of intentionality, and in Chapter 3 I present an intentionalist conception of consciousness. Chapters 4 and 5 draw on these accounts of intentionality and consciousness to provide accounts of thought and perception. Chapter 2 locates these problems relative to the contemporary mind-body problem.

There may be a suspicion at the outset that Brentano's thesis is vacuous without an independent understanding of 'mental'. How are we to tell whether Brentano's thesis is true without being able, in some way, to 'com-

pare' the mental things with the intentional things and 'discover' that every mental thing is an intentional thing and vice versa? Yet without an independent understanding of 'mental' (independent, that is, of the idea of intentionality) this procedure is either vacuous (since 'mental' means the same as 'intentional') or impossible (since we have no idea what the mental is in the first place).

This criticism presupposes that we do not have a rough-and-ready idea of what a *mind* is, which can be sharpened into a more refined philosophical account by employing the idea of intentionality. It is as if any investigation into the essence of our idea of mind, or the mark of the mental, had to start from the assumption that we were in the dark about what we mean when we talk about 'minds' or 'mentality' or 'subjectivity', and that the mark of the mental would be given in the form of an explicit definition of the term 'mind'. But we are not in this position; and if we were, we would not be able to recognize whether any such definition were true. Rather, as with many areas of philosophy, we already have a rough conception of our subject-matter; what we are looking for is not an explicit definition, but a description of the mental phenomena which is sufficiently clear and detailed for us to recognize it as a description of the thing of which we have this conception.

An analogy of Daniel Dennett's may help to make this strategy clearer. Dennett draws the analogy between Brentano's thesis and Church's thesis in the foundations of mathematics. Church's thesis says that every effective procedure or algorithm can be performed by a Turing machine. The idea of an algorithm is just the idea of a step-by-step recipe for solving a mathematical problem; the idea of a Turing machine is the idea of a device which can reduce the application of any such recipe to its simplest mechanical stages. Church's thesis employs the somewhat vague idea of an effective procedure, and sharpens it by means of the more precise idea of a Turing machine. As Dennett says, 'it provides a very useful reduction of a fuzzy-but-useful mathematical notion to a crisply defined notion of apparently equivalent scope and greater power'.³

No one could hope that the idea of intentionality could render the idea of the mental as precise as the notion of a Turing machine renders the idea of an effective procedure. As we shall see, the idea of intentionality is in places intractable, and in some places vague. But it is not part of this strategy to claim that all rough ideas can be sharpened to the same degree. We must let the nature of the phenomena be our guide to how far to go, and not impose constraining and distorting assumptions upon them.

2. Perspectives and points of view

Among all the living things there are, we distinguish between those which are merely alive and those which have minds—thinking or conscious beings. A daffodil is merely an organic thing; a person has consciousness and the ability to think. What is the basis behind this distinction? What does it consist in? I shall claim that, in its broadest outline, the answer to the question is simple; the hard part is saying precisely what this answer amounts to. What the daffodil lacks and the ‘minded’ creature has is a *point of view on things* or (as I shall mostly say) a *perspective*. The minded creature is one *for which* things are a certain way: the way they are from that creature’s perspective. A lump of rock has no such perspective, the daffodil has no such perspective. We might express this by saying that a minded creature is *one which has a world*: its world. Its having a perspective consists in its having a world. Having a world is something different from there simply being a world. It is true of the rock or the daffodil that it is part of the world; but it is not true that they have a world. A creature with a perspective has a world. But to say that a creature with a perspective *has* a world is not to say that each creature with a perspective has a different world. Perspectives can be perspectives on one and the same world. But at the moment we are interested in the idea of a perspective, and not so much in the idea of a world.

The use I am going to make of the concept of a perspective is to some extent metaphorical, and to some extent vague. One dominant literal use of the word ‘perspective’ is in connection with pictorial representation. But I extend here the idea to apply to the standpoint or the position of a *person* or *subject*: the ‘place’ from which they ‘see’ things. Here ‘place’, ‘standpoint’, ‘position’, and ‘see’ are strictly speaking metaphorical; but no one will sincerely deny that they understand these metaphorical uses.

The situation is the same with the phrase ‘point of view’. Taken literally, a point of view may be thought of as a point (or location in space) from which something is viewed. But although this is part of what I mean by ‘point of view’ in this context, it is not all I mean. ‘Point of view’ has also come to mean *opinion* or *belief*, and this dead metaphor is closer to the meaning which my use of ‘perspective’ is trying to express. However, having a perspective is not having a belief. When I talk of perspectives, I do not mean that a perspective *is* a state of mind; it is meant to be a *condition* for being in a state of mind. As well as being metaphorical, I said that the idea of a perspective is vague. By ‘vague’ I don’t mean *woolly* or *unclear*, but vague in the philosophical sense: an expression is vague when its application does not have sharp boundaries. Which creatures in the world have perspectives and which do not? Is there a sharp division between these two classes of things? It is hard to say. The

reason it is hard may be because reality is vague and there is no fact of the matter about where perspectives begin and end; or it may be because there is a fact of the matter, there is a sharp boundary, but we cannot know where it is.⁴ Do fish have a perspective on their world? Some would say so. Does a bacterium? Surely not. So where is the line to be drawn? Does a shrimp have a perspective? Some might say yes, some say no. What settles it? Here we confront the vagueness of the idea of a perspective. I do not need to solve this problem here, so long as any vagueness in the idea of a perspective is matched by a vagueness in the idea of mind: the extent to which we wonder whether a shrimp has a perspective is the extent to which we wonder whether the shrimp has a mind.

A sceptic may wonder at this point how we can *ever* know that a shrimp has or hasn't got a mind or a perspective. The question—how do we know whether something has got a mind?—is a good question. But it is not relevant here. It may be relevant in other contexts: for instance, a debate about whether it is wrong to eat oysters alive may turn on whether they can feel anything, and therefore whether there is anything like the oyster's perspective. Someone who denied this might deny it because they couldn't make sense of the idea of the oyster's perspective. The sceptic's worry is that this debate is irresolvable because we can never know enough (in the right kind of way) about oysters to know whether they have a perspective. Therefore, we will never be able to know the answer to our question, as far as oysters are concerned.

But although this question about knowledge may (or may not) be relevant to the question of what we should eat, our question is more fundamental: *what is it* that we are wondering about when we wonder whether something has a mind? The sceptical question—how do we know whether anything has a mind?—is not one which we must answer before we answer this question. I could raise the question, how do I know (*really* know) that you have a mind? After all, the only things I ever see are the movements of your body, all I ever hear are sounds. I never (it could be said) see or hear your *thoughts* or your *perspective*. If a perspective is something hidden behind your behaviour, then what assurance do I have that even the rock does not have a perspective?⁵

These questions have their place; but their place is not in the answer to the question about the nature of mind. For the sceptical question takes for granted that we have some idea what a perspective is; and then asks whether we really know that others have *this*. Perhaps this question rests upon deep misunderstandings—about knowledge, or about perspectives—but we will not know this until we know something about what a perspective is. How should we start?

The starting point should be that we do as a matter of fact draw a distinction—sceptical questions aside—between those living things which clearly do have a perspective, and those which clearly don't. There are unclear

cases in the middle, but as I observed above, the extent to which we are unclear about whether these cases are cases of *minds* parallels exactly our unclarity about whether they are cases of something having a *perspective*. Does this mean that ‘mind’ and ‘perspective’ are practically synonyms, and so no real illumination can be cast on the concept of mind by talking about perspectives? No. Starting with the idea of a perspective, I claim, we can begin to introduce the idea which unifies all the phenomena of mind, and forms the basic subject-matter of the philosophy of mind. This is the idea of *intentionality*, the traditional technical term for the mind’s ‘directedness upon its objects’. Intentionality, I claim, is what is common to all phenomena we call mental.

3. Perspectives and their objects

As I just noted, when I say that having a mind is having a perspective, I am using the word *perspective* in an extended, metaphorical sense. To get a better grip on this metaphorical sense of perspective, consider first its literal use. The techniques of perspective drawing provide a way of representing (say) a three-dimensional scene on a two-dimensional surface. For our interests, two features of this kind of pictorial representation are notable.

First, the picture is a picture *of* things; the perspective in the picture is thus a perspective *on* things other than the perspective itself. To say that there is a certain perspective in the picture is to say that *things* are presented in a certain way: the picture’s being a perspective drawing is a matter of the things represented standing in a certain represented relation to the point at which they are viewed. There is a distinction, then, between the perspective itself and the things presented within, or in, or from that perspective.

Second, the things in the picture are presented in a *certain way*. Some surfaces are visible, some are not; things are seen as having certain patterns of shadows and illumination. This is a consequence of the fact that a drawing contains, implicitly, the point of view itself from which things are seen. The perspective drawing is not a ‘view from nowhere’ (to use Thomas Nagel’s phrase); rather, it is a view from a certain place and certain time. Rather than being a view from nowhere, our drawing might be a view from *nowhere*.⁶ So this means that certain things are included in the picture, and certain things are excluded. (A. W. Moore uses the term ‘perspectival’ in a similar way when he says that an outlook is perspectival iff (if and only if) there is some other possible outlook that it excludes.⁷) I will express this exclusion by saying that the picture essentially presents things under a certain *aspect*. ‘Aspect’ is used here in a general way, to mark out any property or feature of the things presented which is evident in the presentation.

These two features of perspectives—that a perspective is a perspective on things, and that from a perspective, things are presented under a certain aspect—are part of what gives the point to talking about the mind in terms of a perspective. The first feature brings out the simple but important truth that in a state of mind, such as a thought, experience, or desire, something is presented, there is something which the state of mind is directed at. As Brentano put it, ‘in the idea, something is conceived, in judgement something is accepted or rejected, in love, loved, in hate, hated, in desire, desired; and so on’.⁸ We can express this by saying that states of mind have *objects*. This is the heart of the idea of intentionality: for a state of mind to have intentionality, it must have, or be ‘directed’ on, an object.

The idea of intentionality also contains the second feature of a perspective, its necessary partiality or ‘aspectual’ character. Mental states such as thoughts and desires present things in the world in certain ways: an experience of a boat in the harbour presents the boat by presenting one side of the boat, with certain colours, certain shadows. The boat might seem to be a seaworthy vessel, but in fact be full of holes—this fact need not be presented in the experience. The kind man who taught you Latin may not present himself to you as the spy he really is; the spy whom you meet on the secret mission may not present himself as the kindly Latin teacher he really is.

I introduced the idea of perspective through its literal (and therefore visual) use. But this is not because I am only concerned here with how things are presented visually, or visual presentations. In the sense which shall concern us here, presentations may be (for example) presentations of sounds, which are experienced as independent of the experiencing of them. Or, a presentation can be merely the phenomenon of thinking about something. Thinking about something may involve imagining it, visualizing it in memory, or having words running through one’s mind. (We shall also need the idea of unconscious presentations, but I shall postpone discussion of this until §21.) Presentation from a perspective in my sense is not supposed to be essentially visual.

The two features we have uncovered in this reflection on the idea of a perspective are: first, the fact that presentations must be presentations of something; and second, the fact that they present these things under a certain aspect. I shall call the first feature *directedness* and the second feature (following John Searle⁹) *aspectual shape*. Then I can express Brentano’s thesis as follows: all and only mental phenomena exhibit directedness and aspectual shape.

This is a somewhat abstract and general definition of mind or mental phenomena. By talking in terms of ‘phenomena’ I mean to express two things. First, the category of phenomena is a broad category which encompasses anything which goes on mentally in a person’s life (or the life of any minded

creature who is not a person). So I am not restricting myself only to mental *events* or only to mental *states*. I am attempting to cover all mental goings-on and conditions (for more on states, events, etc., see §10). Second, I mean ‘phenomenon’ in the sense of an *appearance*. We are talking here about the appearance of mind, how minds seem to those who have them. Hence, most of the rest of this book will in a sense be an exercise in *phenomenology*, the theory (the ‘-ology’) of the phenomena or the appearances. Sometimes the word ‘phenomenology’ is reserved for a particular kind of theory of phenomena, deriving from Edmund Husserl.¹⁰ Husserl thought that the way to study the phenomena of mind was to ‘bracket’ the reality outside the mind, and investigate things only as they appear, where this involved no commitment to there being any such things. This technique of bracketing is a specific approach to the theory of appearances, and is not required by the mere idea of such a theory. When I say that this book is an exercise in phenomenology, I mean the word in the general sense, and not in Husserl’s more specific sense. I shall use the term *intentionalism* for the view that all mental phenomena exhibit intentionality. Intentionalism is controversial. Many philosophers reject it on the grounds that there obviously are states which are indisputably states of mind, but involve no perspective in the sense just explained. Some philosophers think that certain kinds of bodily sensations, like pains, involve no directedness nor aspectual shape. Others think that there are certain emotional states or moods which have no directedness (being unhappy, say, but not about anything in particular). These philosophers would deny that the answer to the question—what is the essence of our idea of mind?—is exhausted by talking about the perspective or point of view of the creature in question. Even once we have granted the facts about the perspective of a creature, we still have not said everything about the conscious life of the creature. Naturally, I reject this view, but the reasons for the rejection must wait until Chapter 3. Here I merely state what the thesis of intentionalism is; its defence will emerge. The first thing to do in explaining the thesis is to give a brief sketch of the origins of the idea of intentionality.

4. The origins of the concepts of intentionality and intension

The term ‘intentionality’ has a long and complex history, not all of which is relevant to our concerns in this book. But a glance at the origins of this somewhat unusual term will help illuminate its utility.

The Scholastic philosophers of the Middle Ages were interested in the logical structure of concepts. The term ‘*intentio*’ was employed as a technical

term for a concept or notion. Like much Scholastic terminology, the term originates from Aristotle's philosophy. Aristotle had used the word *noema* (concept) for what is before the mind in thought. Through the Arabic commentators on Aristotle, this word was translated into the Arabic terms which the Scholastics themselves translated as *intentio*, *intentiones* (plural), and *intentionale* (adjective). 'Intentio' literally means a tension or stretching (from the verb *intendere*, to stretch). G. E. M. Anscombe once claimed that the word 'intentio' was chosen because of an analogy between stretching or aiming one's bow at something (*intendere arcum in*), and 'stretching' or aiming one's mind at something (*intendere anima in*).¹¹ Hence *intentio* as the noun derived from intending in this sense: the *intentio* is the concept which is the 'object' of a state of mind, in the sense that it is what is aimed at by the mind, or 'before the mind' in thought. This word has survived into contemporary English in the phrase, 'to all intents and purposes'. Here the idea of an intent is the idea of what was meant.

We will not go far wrong if we think of an *intentio* as a concept. But it is useful to distinguish two senses of the word 'concept'. In the logical sense a concept is thought of as an abstraction, an abstract entity. Concepts in the logical sense are what logical relations hold between. In the psychological sense, a concept is a component of a state of mind. (I don't mean to imply that this was a distinction which was clearly drawn in the Middle Ages; it is one which we can draw now, looking back.) Many Scholastic philosophers were very interested in concepts in the logical sense; as they conceived it, in the abstract relations between *intentiones* or intentions. First intentions were concepts which applied to particular objects, whereas second intentions were concepts which applied to first intentions. Some Scholastic philosophers thought that second intentions were the subject-matter of logic.

Others, notably St Thomas Aquinas, were interested in concepts in (what we can now call) the psychological sense. Aquinas developed Aristotle's theory of sense-perception, according to which the mind takes on the 'form' of the perceived object, into an account of thinking in general. Aquinas's view was that what makes your thought of a goat a thought of a goat was the very same thing that makes a goat a goat: namely, the occurrence of the form of a goat. But the form of goat is instantiated in your mind in a different way from the way it is instantiated in an actual goat: in an actual goat, the form has *esse naturale* (natural existence), while in the thought of a goat, the form has *esse intentionale* (intentional existence).¹²

Related to the idea of an *intentio* is the idea of an object. Readers of Descartes's *Meditations* are sometimes puzzled by the distinction he makes in the Third Meditation between 'formal' and 'objective' reality. When Descartes argued that a cause must have as much reality as its effects, he applied this principle to ideas by distinguishing the *formal reality* of the cause of an idea

from the idea's *objective reality*. Formal reality is just what we would call today *reality*; but objective reality is (perhaps rather confusingly) the content of the idea, considered as an idea. The objective reality of the idea of a dog consists in the fact that it is about dogs; thus the objective reality of an idea is its intentionality: the characteristics it has as a representation of something.

After the Scholastic period the term 'intentionality' fell into a certain disrepute, as did many terms arising from Aristotelian philosophy. In *Leviathan*, Hobbes scathingly dismissed the idea that the concept of intentionality is needed to give an account of the beginnings of language:

and so by succession of time, so much language might be gotten, as [Adam] had found use for, though not so copious, as an orator or philosopher had need of. For I do not find anything in the Scripture, out of which, directly or by consequence can be gathered, that *Adam* was taught the names of all figures, numbers, measures, colours, sounds, fancies, relations; much less the names of words and speech, such as *general, special, affirmative, negative, interrogative, optative, infinitive*, all of which are useful; and least of all, of *entity, intentionality, quiddity*, and other insignificant words of the school.¹³

Logic, however, survived the demise of the terminology of intentionality; but logicians also introduced some terminology which is strikingly similar to that terminology, so similar that it might be confused with it. In the seventeenth-century *Logic: or The Art of Thinking* (the 'Port Royal Logic') a distinction was made between the *extension* and the *comprehension* of a term. The extension of a term is the set or class of things to which the term applies—we can think of it as the set of things over which the term 'extends'. So the extension of the term 'marsupial' is the set of all marsupials: kangaroos, wallabies, wombats, and so on. The comprehension of a term is, as the label suggests, what is understood by someone who grasps it. Thus the comprehension of the term 'marsupial' may be something like *creature that suckles its young and keeps newborns in a pouch*.

Leibniz made use of this distinction, but introduced the term 'intension' as a variant of 'comprehension', thus providing an elegant counterpart for the term 'extension':

When I say *Every man is an animal* I mean that all the men are included amongst all the animals; but at the same time I mean that the idea of animal is included in the idea of man. 'Animal' comprises more individuals than 'man' does, but 'man' comprises more ideas or more attributes: one has more instances, the other more degrees of reality; one has the greater extension, the other the greater intension.¹⁴

Leibniz puts the point vividly: the more is in the extension, the less is in the intension, and vice versa. In other words, the more general a term is—the larger its extension, or the set of things to which it applies—the less specific

the intension has to be; and the more specific the intension, the smaller the extension.

The contrast made here between intension and extension survived into twentieth-century logic, although it is not formulated in the way Leibniz did. These days the terms ‘intensional’ and ‘extensional’ are normally applied to languages (or contexts within a language), or to the logics which study these languages or contexts. (The following brief exposition will not be news to those familiar with philosophy of language, and may be skipped.) A context is extensional when it is one in which the following principles of inference apply (where ‘a’ and ‘b’ are singular terms):

Substitution of co-referring terms

From ‘... a ...’ and ‘a = b’ infer ‘... b ...’

(For example: from ‘Vladimir is taller than George Orwell’ and ‘George Orwell = Eric Blair’ infer ‘Vladimir is taller than Eric Blair’.)

Existential generalization

From ‘... a ...’, infer ‘ $\exists x...$ x ...’

(For example: from ‘George Orwell is shorter than Vladimir’ infer ‘There is someone who is shorter than Vladimir’.)

An intensional context is one where one or both of these principles is not generally valid or truth-preserving. For example: the sentence ‘Dorothy believes that Vladimir is taller than George Orwell’ is an intensional context, since together with ‘George Orwell = Eric Blair’ it does not entail ‘Dorothy believes that Vladimir is taller than Eric Blair’. The first two sentences could be true while the third is false (if Dorothy does not believe that George Orwell = Eric Blair). Intuitively, the way to understand the distinction is to see extensional contexts as those where truth or falsehood depends solely on the extensions of the expressions involved (hence the above principles), and intensional contexts as those where truth or falsehood depends on the way the extensions are conceived.

Frege’s famous theory of sense and reference is an attempt to account for the logical and semantic properties of certain intensional contexts. Frege distinguished the *reference* of an expression, what it refers to, from its *sense*, the ‘mode of presentation’ of the reference. In our example, the same reference (the man, Orwell) is presented in two ways, by the sense associated with the expression ‘George Orwell’, and by the sense associated with the expression ‘Eric Blair’. Now, since Frege’s discussion in ‘On sense and reference’, such psychological contexts have been at the focus of many discussions of

intensionality. But it is important to emphasize that contexts other than psychological contexts are intensional. (For example, the inference from ‘the number of coins in my pocket is five’ and ‘five is necessarily odd’ to ‘the number of coins in my pocket is necessarily odd’ is invalid, because ‘... necessarily ...’ creates an intensional context.) The general feature of intensional contexts is that their logical properties (e.g. whether they allow the validity of inferences) are sensitive to the ways in which things are described (e.g., picked out as ‘George Orwell’ or as ‘five’). Insofar as the truth of sentences, and their logical properties, are determined only by the extensions of the expressions in question, then logic does not need to take account of the way in which the extensions are picked out, the intensions of these expressions. Logics which attempt to display the logical properties of intensional contexts are called intensional logics.

When the terminology of intentionality was reintroduced by Brentano in his 1879 book *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, there was no mention of intension and extension. Brentano’s concern in this book was to distinguish the newly emerging science of psychology from physiology on the one hand, and philosophy on the other. He made this distinction not in terms of the different methods of these disciplines, but in terms of their different subject-matters. The subject-matter of physiology was the body, while the subject-matter of philosophy included questions such as the immortality of the soul, and so on. Psychology’s subject-matter, by contrast, was mental phenomena, and the difference between mental phenomena and physical phenomena was that mental phenomena exhibited ‘what the Scholastics of the Middle Ages’ called ‘the intentional inexistence’ of an object.¹⁵ Mental phenomena are intentional, they have objects. So the link with the Scholastic idea of *esse intentionale* is made explicitly.

But Brentano did not characterize intentionality in terms of the intensionality of psychological contexts. It is somewhat mysterious, then, that when R. M. Chisholm introduced Brentano’s ideas to English-speaking philosophy in the 1950s, he defined intentionality in terms of criteria of intensionality.¹⁶ And when Quine, in his *Word and Object* (1960), talked about Brentano’s thesis of the ‘irreducibility of the intentional’, he was talking about the irreducibility of intensional language to extensional language, not Brentano’s claim that mental phenomena are irreducibly intentional.¹⁷ And as we saw above, the ideas of intentionality and intensionality are distinct, and have distinct origins.

This conflation of the distinct ideas of intentionality and intensionality is perhaps more understandable given Quine’s method of ‘semantic ascent’, which asks us to investigate phenomena by investigating the language we use to speak about phenomena. But nonetheless, the conflation has given rise to nothing but confusion, and we need to be absolutely clear about this at the beginning of our enquiry. For it is plain, despite what Chisholm says, that

intensionality cannot be a criterion or sufficient condition of the presence of intentionality. Regardless of whether intentionality is the mark of the mental, there are intensional contexts which are nothing to do with intentionality.¹⁸

When I said above that I was defending Brentano's thesis, I did not mean that I was defending the idea that intentional phenomena are irreducible to physical phenomena (this is what some mean by the 'irreducibility of the intentional'¹⁹). I am defending the thesis that all mental phenomena are intentional. This thesis is distinct from the thesis that intentional phenomena are irreducible to physical phenomena, since one could hold the former without holding the latter. This would be so, for example, if one held that all mental phenomena were physical, but what made them mental was their intentionality. (For more on reduction, see §15.)

5. Directedness and intentional objects

So it is very important to distinguish clearly between intentionality and intensionality. It would be wrong, however, to think that the ideas of intension and intensionality have nothing to do with the mind.²⁰ After all, part of the point of these ideas is to explain aspects of reasoning: to explain how concepts (in the logical sense) should relate to one another. But it would be hard to see the point of an investigation into how concepts (in this sense) relate to one another unless it had something to do with the relations between concepts in the psychological sense. Reasoning is something which is done by thinkers, by reasoners; so it would surely be strange if the ingredients of reason had nothing to do with the ingredients of thought.

The link between intensions and intentionality will be appreciated as we develop further the ideas of directedness and aspectual shape. I shall claim that, in broad outline, the intensionality of the ingredients of reason is the logical expression or reflection of these two ideas. To argue for this, I will first say something about directedness, and in the next section I will discuss aspectual shape.

Directedness is the idea that intentional states have objects. The object of an intentional state is often called an 'intentional object'. But what is an intentional object? It is sometimes asked: is an intentional object something in the mind, something in the world outside the mind, or something 'in between', an intermediary between the mind and the world? In response to this sort of question, John Searle says:

an Intentional object is just an object like any other; it has no peculiar ontological status at all. To call something an Intentional object is just to say that it is what some intentional state is about. Thus, for example, if Bill admires President Carter, then the Intentional

object of his admiration is President Carter, the actual man and not some shadowy intermediate entity between Hill and the man.²¹

Searle is surely right that there is no intuitive case for there being ‘shadowy intermediaries’ between thinkers and the things they are thinking about. When I remember President Carter, my thought goes—as it were—straight to Carter himself. I do not first think about some non-physical ‘stand-in’ for Carter, and then move on to the man. (Things are more complex in the case of perception: see §41.) But nonetheless, there are two problems with Searle’s claim that intentional objects are just ‘ordinary objects’. Concentration on these problems will bring out what should be meant by the phrase ‘intentional object’.

First, there is a tension between the claim that an intentional object is just ‘what some intentional state is about’ and the claim that intentional objects are objects in the ordinary sense—if objects in this sense are things like houses, people, tables, and chairs. For there seem to be many kinds of entity which can be the things I am thinking about, none of which are objects in the ordinary sense. I can think about the First World War—but this is an event, not an object. If I am thinking about Newton’s second law of motion, I am thinking about the relation between force, mass, and acceleration—but these are physical quantities or properties, not objects. In these and many other cases, the natural answer to the question ‘what are you thinking about?’ does not pick out an object in the ordinary sense.²²

However, perhaps Searle does not mean *object* in the ordinary sense—the sense in which events and properties are not objects. Perhaps he just means ‘existing entity’; if so, properties and events are objects in this sense. But this gives rise to the second problem with his claim that intentional objects are ordinary objects. It is an undeniable fact that some intentional states can be about things which do not exist. That is, one can think about, desire, wish for, or anticipate things which do not exist. And if someone is thinking about something which does not exist, then obviously the *intentional object* of their thought—thus defined as *what they are thinking about*—does not exist. But non-existent entities are not shadowy, intermediate entities: they are not entities at all! (This claim has been denied by some philosophers; their denial will be discussed further in §7.) So, on the face of it, the following claims are in tension:

Intentional objects are the objects of intentional states (e.g. the object of a thought is what a thought is about);

Intentional objects are ordinary objects (e.g. people, chairs, tables, etc.);

Some intentional objects do not exist (e.g. one can think about Pegasus, or Santa Claus, etc.).

These claims jointly imply that some ordinary objects do not exist. But clearly this is not what Searle intended.

What is the solution to this puzzle? I think it is correct to say that some intentional objects do not exist. So, for reasons to be given below, I think we should keep Searle's equation of 'intentional object' with 'object of intentional state' but deny that intentional objects are ordinary objects in any sense.

This claim seems paradoxical. If Carter is the object of my thought, then Carter is an intentional object. But Carter is an ordinary kind of object—a person—so how can *this* intentional object, at least, not be an object in any sense? To remove the (understandable) sense of paradox from the claim, we must first say something about the idea of an object. In §7 we will apply this way of thinking to the question of thought about the non-existent.

A very common use of the word 'object' is in phrases like 'physical object' or 'material object'. But there are many contexts in philosophy and elsewhere where we use the idea of an object in a different way. For instance, a question in the philosophy of mathematics is whether numbers are objects. This debate would be impossible to understand if the only sense we could make of the word 'object' is the sense it has in the phrase 'physical object'—since of course numbers are not physical objects. Sometimes numbers are called 'abstract objects', intended to suggest that they are not 'concrete', where concreteness is sometimes explained in terms of existence in space-time.²³ This conception of an abstract object, like our conception of a physical object, is what we might call a *substantial* conception of an object. It is a metaphysical theory that there are these kinds of objects, with this kind of nature. This use of the term 'object' is not a pun or a homonym of its use in the phrase 'physical object': on many views, what makes abstract objects *objects* is (e.g.) that they are particulars, the referents of singular terms, or the values of variables bound by first-order quantifiers—things they have in common with physical objects. (Then something more has to be said about what makes them abstract—but we need not worry about this here.)

This substantial conception of an object—the conception of a kind of object having a certain nature—can be contrasted with another kind of conception, which we could call the *schematic* idea of an object. This is the kind of idea we find expressed in phrases like 'object of attention'. An object of attention 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'. Another example of a schematic idea of an object is the grammatical idea. Transitive verbs are verbs which take objects. This is a claim which we find easy enough to understand when learning grammar; but to understand it we do not need to have a substantial conception of what an object, in this sense, is. All we need to know is that the object is something which plays a certain role in the sentence. The object of the sentence 'Vladimir

ate the banana' is the banana, the object of the sentence 'the directors threw a party' is a party, and the object of the sentence 'Anna and Bert made a verbal agreement' is a verbal agreement; but there should be no puzzlement about the idea that the grammatical category *object* contains such things as bananas, parties, and verbal agreements. A grammatical object is whatever stands in the relevant relation to a transitive verb. The object of a sentence is an object in the schematic, rather than the substantial, sense.

Now it is possible to hold that intentional objects are a substantial kind of object—this is presumably the kind of view that Searle is alluding to when he talks of shadowy intermediaries. One could say, for instance, that the objects of our thoughts—what we are thinking about—are *ideas in our minds*, or *representations in our heads*, and then go on to give a substantial account of what ideas or representations are. But Searle is right to dismiss these views at the outset. When we think *about* ideas, then ideas are the objects of our thought, but when we think about people (say), there is no reason to suppose that we think about them by *thinking about* ideas (though having ideas may be part of the story of what enables us to think about them: see §8). This much of what Searle says is quite correct.

But my main point here is that to deny that intentional objects are shadowy intermediaries does not imply that intentional objects are objects in the ordinary sense. The first point I made against Searle was that, unlike the category of 'objects in the ordinary sense', the category of 'things thought about' has no chance of being a metaphysically unified category: objects of thought are not just particulars, not just properties, and not just events. And the second point I made was that 'object' cannot just mean 'existing entity', since some intentional objects do not exist. To these two considerations we can add the familiar point that intentional objects can be indeterminate. As G. E. M. Anscombe puts it: 'I can think of a man without thinking of a man of any particular height; I cannot hit a man without hitting a man of any particular height, because there is no such thing as a man of no particular height.'²⁴ So 'the man' thought about is, in a sense, 'indeterminate': he is 'no particular man', or in Russell's (unintentionally comic) phrase, an 'ambiguous man'.²⁵ Some intentional objects, then, are indeterminate in this sense; but no ordinary objects are indeterminate. So rather than introduce a class of objects which includes real events and properties, indeterminate entities, and things which do not exist, we should conclude that intentional objects, unlike abstract objects, *have no nature of their own*. The idea of an intentional object is a schematic idea of an object, not a substantial idea. Further clarification of this view comes from J. J. Valberg's observation that we can sensibly replace the word 'object' with the word 'thing' in the phrase 'physical object'; but we cannot do likewise with the word when it occurs in the phrases 'object of experience', 'object of attention', or 'intentional object'.²⁶

We can say the same about the grammatical idea of the *direct object* of a transitive verb. 'Object' here does not mean *thing*. 'direct thing' makes no sense. What I mean when I say that an intentional object is not a kind of object is the same kind of thing as what is meant by saying that a *grammatical object* is not a kind of object. This comparison, between the direct object of a transitive verb and the intentional object of a state of mind, was originally made in a classic paper by Anscombe.²⁷ Unlike Anscombe, however, I do not say that an intentional object *is* a kind of grammatical object, or that the idea of an intentional object is a purely grammatical idea. I think that intentional objects and grammatical objects are both objects in the schematic sense, but the first is not explained in terms of the second. The idea of an intentional object is a phenomenological idea, not a grammatical one. It is an idea which emerges in the process of reflecting on what mental life is like. The connection between the ideas is this: there is a perfectly legitimate use of the word 'object' according to which to be an object of this kind is not *ipso facto* to be an entity of any kind, where an entity is something which has a nature.

What is it, then, for something to be an intentional object? The answer I shall give is simple, and at first sight uninformative: it is to be that upon which the mind is directed when in an intentional state. In the case of thought, for instance, the intentional object of your thought is what is given in a (correct) answer to the question, 'what are you thinking about?' Likewise, the intentional object of a desire is the thing desired, the intentional object of a wish is the thing wished for—and so on. This formulation is not intended to imply that there can only ever be *one* answer to the question. One could be thinking about the Iran—Iraq war, and the answer to the question, 'what are you thinking about?' could be 'the war' or 'Iran' or 'Iraq'. If one gave all three answers, it would be pointless to keep pushing the question, 'yes, but which one are you *really* thinking about?' There is no reason to suppose that there is only ever one intentional object of a state of mind.

One of my reasons for denying that intentional objects form a kind of object is that I take seriously the proposition that some intentional objects do not exist. This proposition entails that there is no category of intentional objects: for all members of a given category of things exist. This conclusion assumes Quine's conception of existence, according to which the idea of a thing (something) and the idea of existence are two sides of the same coin. To be a thing (to be something) is to exist: so strictly speaking the phrase *things which do not exist* is an oxymoron.²⁸ For there are no things which do not exist: 'there are' is a form of words which we use to express existence. (Here I merely state the Quinean view, rather than argue for it. We will return to the matter in §7 below.) This point provides a link with the concept of intensionality. One of the marks of intensionality is failure of existential generalization: from 'Vladimir believes that Pegasus flies' we cannot infer 'There is something x

such that Vladimir believes x flies'. I see this logical feature as a product of the fact that intentional states can be about things which do not exist.

However, this feature—failure of existential generalization—is not an uncontroversial feature of all reports of intentional states, if intentionality is just directedness on something. For it appears that some reports of intentional states do license existential generalizations. Perhaps the simplest case is the case of knowledge: if I know Vladimir, then he must exist. If Vladimir is a mere figment of my imagination, then I cannot know him. But this case is controversial, since it is controversial whether knowledge itself is a state of mind, or a composite state involving a thought about something, plus its existence. Similar claims (on both sides) have been made, though, for reports of seeing: some claim that 'A sees B' does entail 'There is an x such that A sees x '. Other cases are reports of certain object-directed emotions: 'A loves B' (arguably) entails 'There is an x such that A loves x '; and certain kinds of belief-reports: 'A believes, of B, that he is a spy' entails 'There is an x such that x is believed by A to be a spy'.²⁹

One could conclude from this that there are two kinds of intentional state, those whose ascriptions license existential generalization, and those whose ascriptions don't. In other words, there are two kinds of directedness, the intensional and the extensional. Or one could conclude that there are not two kinds of directedness, but that there are two ways of *reporting* directedness, the intensional way and the extensional way. The phenomenon of directedness can be described in various ways, but this does not necessarily require a distinction between kinds of directedness. As will become apparent, I favour this latter view. But we will return to the details of this difficult question in §35.

6. Aspectual shape and intentional content

The second feature of intentionality is the idea of aspectual shape. This is a term which I take from Searle to express an idea which should be familiar from other areas of philosophy. The term is useful because it is free from some of the acquired connotations of some other terms used for the same or a similar phenomenon.

The basic idea of aspectual shape is very simple: in any intentional state, the objects on which the mind is directed are presented in a certain way. Suppose that you are thinking of St Petersburg—with its elegant baroque buildings and its harsh climate. You are thinking about it in a particular way: maybe you are visualizing it in the imagination, on the basis of pictures you have seen or on the basis of experience. Or maybe you are just thinking about it as *St Petersburg*—that is, a thought which you would express by using the name 'St

Petersburg'. You may just think to yourself, 'Vladimir is in St Petersburg; I wonder what the weather is like there?' When you think about St Petersburg as St Petersburg, the aspectual shape of your thought is different from when you think about St Petersburg as Leningrad, or when you think of it while listening to Shostakovich's *Leningrad Symphony*. Similarly, when you visually perceive St Petersburg, you see it from some particular place, in certain particular conditions of illumination, and so on. You see it under a certain aspect. Your experience, like your thought, has a certain aspectual shape.

These truisms are just ways of expressing the simple idea that one cannot think of something without thinking of it in some way. This is related to Frege's idea of *sense*. As we saw above (§4) Frege distinguished between the reference of an expression and its sense. The sense he called the *mode of presentation* of the reference, the way the reference is presented. St Petersburg is presented in a different way when referred to by the name 'St Petersburg' than it is when referred to by the name 'Leningrad'. Some commentators on Frege have spelled out the idea of a mode of presentation in terms of the idea of a 'way of thinking' of the reference of a word. Thus Gareth Evans:

Frege's idea was that it is a property of a singular term in a public language that, in order to understand utterances containing it, one must not only think of a particular object, its reference, but one must think of that object *in a particular way*. that is, every competent user of the language who understands the utterance will think of the object in the same way.³⁰

Sense, on this view, is a way of thinking of reference. The reference is thought about under some aspect. To say that something is presented under an aspect is not to say that the aspect itself is what is presented. The aspect is the *mode* of presentation (to use Frege's term) of the reference. So it is not as if one is presented with a reference (a real existing thing) by *first* being presented with an aspect. This would make one's access to the references of one's words 'mediated' by access to the aspects; but we have already rejected (§5) the obscure idea that there are such intermediaries in thought. As Evans says,

The fact that one is thinking about an object in a particular way can no more warrant the conclusion that one is not thinking of the object in the most direct possible fashion, than the fact that one is giving something *in a particular way* warrants the view that one's giving is somehow indirect.³¹

One can of course turn one's attention to the aspects under which things are given. Suppose you see a familiar person watching you in a strange way. You can perhaps turn your attention to the way in which they are watching you. The *way* then becomes the object of your attention, and it too has an aspectual shape.

So, at its most general, the idea of aspectual shape is just the idea that there is no such thing as a thought about, or an awareness of, an object *as such*—that there is no such thing as what we might call ‘bare’ presentation of an object. Indeed, the idea scarcely makes sense. I can illustrate this with a comment on a famous analogy of Frege’s. In his essay ‘On sense and reference’, Frege uses an analogy to distinguish between the sense of a term, its reference, and the idea associated with the term:

Somebody observes the moon through a telescope. I compare the Moon itself to the reference; 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 experience. The optical image in the telescope is indeed one-sided and dependent upon the standpoint of observation; but it is still objective, inasmuch as it can be used by several observers. At any rate it could be arranged for several to use it simultaneously. But each one would have his own retinal image.³²

Frege’s main point here is to distinguish the sense of a word from ideas in the minds of speakers. For him, ideas are subjective and private, while senses, though partial and perspectival, are objective and public: this is his ‘anti-psychologism’ about sense. The analogy makes this point nicely. But when it comes to the relation between sense and reference, the analogy could mislead. For one might be tempted to think that there is a more ‘direct’ way of getting at *the Moon itself*, a ‘pure reference’ unmediated by the telescope—after all, one can step aside from the telescope and look at the moon with the naked eye! The thesis of aspectual shape is that, where states of mind are concerned, there is no such thing as a pure reference. All mental access to objects is ‘one-sided and dependent on a standpoint’: in the terms of the analogy, the naked eye is just another standpoint. (Here I aim only to draw attention to a possible confusion in understanding the analogy; of course Frege himself did not think in this way.)

Frege’s theory of sense is an attempt to give an account of the aspectual shape involved in grasping the meanings of words. But although I am following Frege in some respects, I do not want to restrict myself to his terminology in describing the phenomenon of aspectual shape. For Frege’s theory involves taking stands on certain issues which it would be well to leave open for the time being: for instance, his anti-psychologism noted above, his view that sense ‘is not something subjective ... it does not therefore belong to psychology’.³³ Also, Frege has no place for the idea of an intentional object in the sense in which I am using this term. At this stage, we are trying to characterize the phenomena to be explained and understood; it would be wrong to describe the phenomenon of aspectual shape in a way that makes certain accounts of it impossible.

However, this connection with Frege's theory of sense shows a clear link between the idea of aspectual shape and the idea of intensionality. A state of mind's having aspectual shape is a matter of its partial presentation of a thing. therefore, if in reporting an intentional state we want to report how things are from the subject's perspective, we need to convey this partiality. If I believe Napoleon died on St Helena, then a report which attempts to capture my view of things can report it in this way. A report that says I believe that Josephine's sometime husband died on St Helena, or that Napoleon died on an island in the Atlantic Ocean, might not capture my way of seeing things, since I might believe that Napoleon died in this place without believing that he was married to Josephine, or while having the false belief that St Helena was in the Mediterranean. Hence belief-reports are often intensional: when the aim is to capture the subject's perspective, whether the belief-report is a good one depends on the way it describes the objects of the belief. Hence not all descriptions of the objects involved are equally good for this purpose: substitution of co-referring expressions in a belief report do not always preserve the truth-value of the report. And likewise for reports of other intentional states.

What counts as capturing the subject's perspective in any particular case can be a difficult matter. And it is clear that there are reports of intentional states which do not aim to capture the subject's perspective and yet still can be true: it is true that Oedipus wanted to marry his mother, although he would not have put it that way himself. The conclusion I would draw from this is not that there are two kinds of intentional state, the intensional and the extensional, but (as with the discussion of directedness in §5) that there are two ways of *reporting* or *ascribing* intentional states, the intensional and the extensional. The intensional ascriptions of intentional states are those which are sensitive to the subject's own perspective. (We will return to this question in §35.)

So the link between intentionality, our subject, and intensionality, the logical concept, is complex. The heart of this link may be expressed as follows: when ascriptions of mental states are intensional, this is a reflection of, or an expression of, their intentionality. The failure of existential generalization is an expression of the fact that the objects of some intentional states do not exist; the failure of substitutivity is an expression of the aspectual shape of intentional states. But not all ascriptions of intentional states are intensional. This is because: (a) some ascriptions of intentional states are not made unless the objects of those states exist; and (b) some ascriptions of intentional states serve purposes other than to capture how things are from the subject's perspective. Intensionality is not, then, a necessary condition for the ascription of an intentional state. (Nor is it sufficient, for the reasons given in §4.) But it does not follow from this that there are intentional states which lack aspectual shape.³⁴

7. The problem of intentionality

So far, I have outlined the origins of the ideas of intentionality and intensionality, and described what I take to be the connection between them. I have also expounded the thesis that all intentional states have objects and aspectual shape but that intentional objects are not objects in the ordinary sense. I gave three reasons for saying that intentional objects are not objects in this sense: intentional objects can be entities of many metaphysical kinds, they can be indeterminate, and some of them do not exist. But saying this does not mean that intentional objects are objects in a *non-ordinary* sense (as abstract objects like numbers might be). Instead, I said that ‘object’ in ‘intentional object’ should be understood in what I called a *schematic*, rather than a *substantial* way, following Anscombe’s analogy with the grammatical use of ‘object’. The object of a sentence is not, as such, a certain kind of entity, and the object of a thought is not, as such, a certain kind of entity. If we were dividing the things in the world up into metaphysical kinds we might list the properties, relations, physical objects, abstract objects, events, processes ... but we would not need to mention, in addition, the intentional objects.

But what should we say about the case where someone is thinking about something, say President Carter, that does exist? Shouldn’t we then say that Carter is the intentional object of my thought, and that he is something real, so there is at least such a thing as the class of intentional objects which are real. So aren’t *some* intentional objects things (e.g. Carter)? What can I mean, then, by saying that intentional objects are not things? The short answer to this is that what makes Carter an intentional object is the fact that he is the object of my thought; and this is not something distinctive of *Carter*, but only of *Carter-as-thought-about*, and *Carter-as-thought-about* cannot be an entity in the same way as Carter is. Carter would be what he is regardless of whether he is thought about by me.³⁵

So: I express the idea that intentional states can concern things which do not exist by saying that some intentional objects do not exist. Perhaps I could have talked in another way: I could have said, with Searle, that all intentional objects exist, but 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*. Intentionality, it is often said, is ‘aboutness’: but what is the thought that *Pegasus flies* about, if the thought has no intentional object? If we say ‘well, it is about something, but that thing does not exist’, we do not avoid the problem, we restate it. (Likewise with the answer: ‘the thought contains a Pegasus-representation’, to which the obvious response is: we knew *that!*) My alternative strategy, outlined in §5 above, is to keep the slogan ‘some intentional objects do not exist’, but interpret the phrase ‘intentional object’ in the

way suggested. The reason behind this is that we need the idea of an intentional object as much as we need the idea of *a thing thought about* or the idea of an *object of thought*. Since I don't see how we should do without these ideas, I don't see how we should do without the idea of an intentional object.

If some intentional objects do not exist, then as I said in §5, there is no such thing as the class of all intentional objects, since all members of a given class exist. It follows from this that not all intentional states are relations to intentional objects, since the existence of a relation entails the existence of what it relates (its *relata*). If Vladimir is taller than Ivan, then the relation *x is taller than y* holds between Vladimir and Ivan; therefore they must both exist. This seems obvious. We might hesitate when thinking about examples from fiction—it is true that Desdemona loves Othello, even though neither Desdemona nor Othello really exist. But this puzzle is best solved by treating statements about fictional characters as disguised statements about the fiction itself. Thus 'Desdemona loves Othello' must surely be understood as something like 'In Shakespeare's *Othello*, Desdemona loves Othello'.³⁶ Putting this kind of thing to one side, it seems an undeniable fact that if a relation relates any two things A and B, then A and B must exist.

This indicates the general way to formulate a persistent and traditional problem, which I shall call the problem of intentionality.³⁷ (Other things have been called the problem of intentionality; I will have something to say about them later.) Concentrating here on the case of thinking about an object—analogueous things can be said about desire, hope, and other intentional states—this problem of intentionality can be expressed as the conflict between three propositions:

- (1) All thoughts are relations between thinkers and the things which they are about.
- (2) Relations entail the existence of their relata.
- (3) Some thoughts are about things which do not exist.

It is clear that (1)–(3) cannot be true together. So one of these propositions must be denied. I claimed above that (1) must be denied. To defend this claim, I must show why (2) and (3) are undeniable.

It seems to me that (3) is a proposition which is not really up for dispute. We can think about unicorns, phlogiston, Pegasus, Vulcan, the Golden Mountain, the fountain of youth (which are merely contingent non-existents), as well as necessary non-existents like the round square and the greatest prime number. Perhaps these thoughts are not very frequent, surely they are exceptions to the rule. But the thoughts certainly exist, and so a solution to the problem which denies (3) would have little to be said for it; it would not be solving the problem but avoiding it by denying a manifest fact.

(We should not, of course, say that our thoughts are really about the *idea* of

Pegasus or the *idea* of phlogiston. This is a confusion. Debates about whether phlogiston exists are not debates about whether the idea of phlogiston exists. The idea of phlogiston certainly exists! Therefore, thoughts about phlogiston are not *ipso facto* thoughts about the idea of phlogiston.³⁸ A more striking example: a debate about the existence of God is not normally a debate about whether the idea of God exists.)

But what should be said about (2)? It seems on the face of it obvious that if two things are related, then they exist. But this has been disputed. For it has been argued that since we are prepared to say things like ‘there are lots of things which do not exist: for example, Pegasus’, then we are actually committed to there being non-existent objects. On this view, some objects exist while others do not, just as some objects are red and others are not. This view, therefore, rejects Quine’s account of existence, according to which there are no things which do not exist. As I said above, for Quine, ‘There are Fs’ and ‘Fs exist’ say the same thing. Those who believe in non-existent objects deny this, since they are prepared to quantify (say ‘There are ...’) over things which do not exist. Among all the things that there are, some exist and some do not. So although a relation might entail that its relata *are*, or are *real*, it does not thereby entail that they *exist*: (2) is therefore false.

What should we make of this view? It certainly solves our problem of intentionality in a very elegant and simple way. By appealing to an ontology of non-existent objects, we can preserve the idea that every intentional state is a relation to a real object while still maintaining that we can think about things which do not exist (since $\text{real} \neq \text{existent}$). And it is certainly true that ‘there are many things which do not exist’ is an intelligible thing to say (haven’t I just said that some intentional objects do not exist?). Moreover, as noted above (§5), we should not restrict the use of the term ‘object’ simply to talk about physical objects, at least not if we can make sense of the ideas of (say) mental or abstract objects. So perhaps we can allow non-existent objects too?

Yet despite its agreeably quick way with our problem, I find the view impossible to believe. Russell once said: ‘Logic, I should maintain, must no more admit a unicorn than zoology can; for logic is concerned with the real world just as truly as zoology, though with its more abstract and general features.’³⁹ The same is true of other parts of philosophy. But how should we respond to the view that certain objects exist and others do not, if not by simply denying it? It does not help here to appeal to the Russell–Quine view that ‘exists’ is not a first-level predicate but a quantifier; for one thing, this is another way of expressing what is at issue; and for another, the view that ‘exists’ is never a predicate is not plausible.⁴⁰ So somehow we have to get our minds around the idea that not all objects exist; some do not. Presumably all these objects are real, so the real divides into the existent and the non-existent. It sounds then as if we ought to be able to distinguish these two kinds of object from each

other. But what distinguishes them? A unicorn has a horn and four legs, and a tail. A rhinoceros has a horn, four legs and a tail. The rhino exists and the unicorn does not. What does this further difference amount to? There seem to be two possibilities. Either existence is a primitive property, inexplicable in other terms, which some things have and others lack. Or there is some analysis of existence, and the idea of existence can be spelt out in other terms. Neither possibility is very promising. If existence is a primitive property, then how can it be explained to us what it is to deny existence to something real, if we do not already understand the distinction? But if existence is explained in terms of some property F—say, for example, location in space-time—then the view that some real things do not exist seems only a terminological variation of the view that some existing things do not have property F (e.g. do not exist in space-time).

These points merely shift the burden of argument; they do not refute the view that there are non-existent objects. As far as I know, there is no knock-down plausible refutation of this view.⁴¹ But the view is hard to understand and seems to stipulate an answer to our problem of intentionality where more detailed investigation is what is needed. I admit that I cannot refute the view to my satisfaction; but nonetheless I reject it.

But haven't I said that some intentional objects do not exist? So am I not in the same boat as those who deny (2)? No. As should be clear by now, the question misunderstands what I mean by 'intentional object'. For when I say 'some intentional objects do not exist', I do not mean that there are some real, but non-existent, intentional objects. Rather, I mean that there are intentional states which can be truly described as being 'about Pegasus', 'about unicorns', etc.—and it is not the case that there is anything corresponding to these quoted words. The words have no reference: there are no unicorns, and no Pegasus. Nothing: not a non-existent but real thing, just nothing. This is what I mean when I talk about 'intentional objects which do not exist' and 'thoughts about the non-existent'.

Yet the question may be pressed: why talk about intentional objects in these cases at all, if there is no real thing which one is thinking about? My reason is this. There are many thoughts about non-existent objects, and not all of them are of exactly the same type. A thought about Pegasus is a different kind of thought from a thought about Zeus. Yet neither Zeus nor Pegasus exists; both Zeus and Pegasus are nothing. So the fact that there is no real thing (nothing) to which these thoughts refer does not mean that the thoughts are the same: one is about Pegasus, the other is about Zeus. (It is all very well to say that the thoughts involve different *ideas* or different *representations*; this just raises the question, what makes the ideas or representations different?) I use the idea of an intentional object to express this difference. The intentional object of a subject S's thought is given by an answer to the question 'what is S thinking

about?'. The answer 'Zeus' is (in this case) a better answer than the answer 'nothing'. This is what makes Zeus the intentional object of S's thought. So long as we do not think of intentional objects as a kind of object, there should be no confusion introduced by this way of talking.

We can put the matter in another way. The problem of intentionality presents a dilemma about the idea of an *object of thought* or an *intentional object*. Given that there can be objects of thought which do not exist, are these objects real? If they are, then we can say that all thoughts are relations to their objects, but at the price of accepting the reality of non-existent objects. But if they are not, then 'they' are nothing, so thoughts cannot consist in relations to them; so how do we distinguish apparently different thoughts about nothing? My attempt to steer between the horns of this dilemma involves appealing to the understanding of 'intentional object' given in §5. An intentional object is not a kind of object, but rather the intentional object of a thought T is what is given in answer to the question 'what is T about?' If this question has an answer, then the thought has an intentional object. If the answer refers to some existent thing, then the intentional object is something real: perhaps an object in the more normal sense—a material or physical object—or perhaps a place, or a property or an event. To say that an intentional object is real is to say that the phrase which gives the intentional object has a reference. It is not to say, for example, that one set of things (the set of intentional objects) shares a member with another set of things (the set of real things).

If this is right, then it will already be obvious why (1) is false: for relations must relate real things, yet the intentional object of a thought is not a real thing. After all, intentional objects are not, as such, things (§5). So of course any adequate solution to the problem of intentionality should begin by denying (1): all intentional states are relations to things they are about. This must be agreed by everyone who holds (2) and (3). For the case of thought:

NOT-(1): Not all thoughts are relations between thinkers and the things they are about.

But to say this is not to say that *no* thoughts involve relations to real existing things; it is just to say that not all of them do. So the next question is: even if there are thoughts which do not involve relations to real things, are there any thoughts which *do* involve relations to real things? To answer *yes* is to say that thoughts fall into two categories: those which are relations to existing objects on which they are directed, and those which are not. To answer *no* is to hold that no thoughts involve relations to the real things they are about. To introduce some terminology which will be helpful later: the first view is the view that some thoughts are *broad*; the second view is the view that all thoughts are *narrow*. Then, generally speaking, we can say that the doctrine of *externalism*

in the philosophy of mind is the doctrine that intentional states are broad; the doctrine of *internalism* is the doctrine that intentional states are narrow.

There are many different varieties of externalism, depending on how many (and which) kinds of thoughts the doctrine holds to be broad. If a mental state *S* is broad, then the existence of *S* entails the existence of its object. To take an extreme example: if knowledge is a mental state, then knowledge is a broad mental state: if I know that Caesar crossed the Rubicon, then Caesar and the Rubicon exist. Knowledge is a *factive* state: being in this state entails that the content of the state expresses a truth.⁴² As we saw above (§5), seeing is a somewhat more debated example of a broad mental state: but if seeing is, as some claim, *factive*, then if I saw Caesar cross the Rubicon, Caesar and the Rubicon exist. Another kind of putative example of a broad mental state is thought about a perceived object, which one might express by using a sentence of the form ‘that *F* is *G*’, containing the demonstrative pronoun ‘that’. Some have argued that one cannot be in such a state of mind unless the thing referred to by ‘that *F*’ exists. Still another view is the view that certain kinds of thought metaphysically depend on causal relations between thinker and object; since causation is a relation, these thoughts must be broad.

The internalist view of thought does not, of course, deny thoughts are often about real things. But it does deny that being in an intentional state always entails the existence of the thing it is about. A thought is narrow when its existence does not entail the existence of its objects. So thoughts about non-existent objects are on the face of it narrow, but according to an internalist, so are thoughts like *that apple looks tasty*, thought while looking at an apple in front of one. According to an internalist, this thought does not entail the existence of that apple; the thought could exist even if the apple didn’t. This is what is meant by saying that the thought is not a relation to the apple.

As this example shows, to make sense of narrow thoughts, we have to make sense of at least two ideas: (a) that there could be a thought even if there is no real thing thought about; and (b) that the existence of the thinker and the apple does not entail the existence of a relation, *thinking*, between them. The internalist will say that we have already begun to make sense of (a) when we denied (1) above. And (b) is unproblematic so long as we accept that it cannot suffice in general for an arbitrary relation to exist between *A* and *B* that *A* and *B* exist. Consider the causal relation: no one should think that a causal relation exists between *A* and *B* simply when *A* and *B* exist. So a thinker can exist, the thing thought about can exist, and yet thinking may not be a relation to that thing. For if thinking about something were a relation to it, then the thought could not exist in the absence of the object: the object is essential to the thought. This means that internalism must distinguish between whether a real thing *is* the object of a thought, and whether the existence of that thing is *essential* to the thought. If one could have had the thought *S* in the possible

absence of its object, then S is not a broad thought. But this does not imply, as I have explained things, that the actual thought has no object.

The dispute between the externalist and internalist views of thought will be discussed further in §§36–7. The aim of this section has simply been to explain what solution to the problem of intentionality we must recommend. As I mentioned above, sometimes something else is called the problem of intentionality: the problem of giving an account of intentionality in physicalist or naturalist terms.⁴⁵ This is a problem that assumes the truth of physicalism, whereas my problem is more general: it is a problem whether or not physicalism is true. (For physicalism, see §§12–15.)

My problem of intentionality is the problem of thought about the non-existent. I have to admit that no solution to this difficult problem is entirely satisfactory. I have been considering three. The first denies that such thought is possible; the second holds that it is only possible if there is a realm of ‘non-existent objects’. And the third denies that all intentional states are relations to real things. I argued that this solution arises naturally out of the idea that all intentional states have intentional objects, plus the particular way I am understanding the term ‘intentional object’. I said that one gives the intentional object of a state of mind by giving an answer to the question ‘what is the state of mind directed on?’ But what does it mean to ‘give’ the intentional object? This requires that we return to the idea of intentional content.

8. The structure of intentionality

I have introduced a number of pieces of terminology—presentation, directedness, intentional object, aspectual shape, intentional content, and intentionalism. Here is a summary of how I intend these ideas to be related. In an intentional state, something is presented to the mind. So any intentional state is a presentation. What is presented is called an intentional object; for a state of mind to have an intentional object is for it to be directed on that object. So, insofar as a state of mind is directed, it has an intentional object. The intentional object of a thought is given in the answer to the question ‘what is your thought about?/what is your thought directed on?’ For a state of mind to have aspectual shape is for it to present its object in a certain way. And so, insofar as the state of mind has aspectual shape, then it has intentional content. The intentional content of a thought is given in an answer to the questions ‘what are you thinking?/what is in your mind?’ Since, according to intentionalism, all mental states have directedness and aspectual shape, then all mental states have an intentional object and intentional content.

It will help if I compare what I have just said to the famous and often-quoted passage from Brentano’s *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*:

Every mental phenomenon is characterized by what the scholastics of the Middle Ages referred to as the intentional ... inexistence of the mental, and what we, although with not quite unambiguous expressions, would call relation to a content, direction upon an object ... or immanent objectivity.⁴⁴

On the face of it, this passage suggests that ‘intentional inexistence’, ‘relation to a content’, ‘direction upon an object’, and ‘immanent objectivity’ are all ways of saying the same thing; and I think this is the right interpretation. By ‘intentional inexistence’ Brentano means the existence of the intentional object *in* the state of mind itself. This does not mean that everything we think about is in our minds in the sense of being a mental entity, but rather that the object individuates the state of mind: different intentional object, different state of mind. (In itself, this does not mean that the intentional object need not exist; but that is another question.⁴⁵) The terminology of ‘immanent objectivity’ derives from the Cartesian idea of ‘objective reality’ (see above §4): the state’s having an object is immanent (i.e. not transcendent) in the state itself. And Brentano did not distinguish between the relation to a content and the direction upon an object. All of these phrases are just ways of expressing the fact that mental states have intentional objects. The main point of this passage is to insist that all mental phenomena have this feature: this is Brentano’s thesis, the characteristic thesis of intentionalism, the thesis to be defended in this book. (There are of course differences between Brentano’s metaphysical assumptions and the assumptions I am making. But we can ignore these for the purposes of stating this thesis.)

Brentano’s student Twardowski, however, did distinguish between direction on an object and relation to a content, and I shall follow him in this.⁴⁶ I expressed my version of this distinction above by saying that an intentional state has an intentional object (or objects), and the way (or ways) that the object is presented is the intentional content of the state. ‘Intentional object’ is defined in terms of directedness, and ‘intentional content’ is defined in terms of aspectual shape. I need this distinction because neither directedness nor aspectual shape on their own is enough to characterize what I mean by the subject’s perspective on the world. Directedness on an object alone is not enough because there are many ways a mind can be directed on the same intentional object. And aspectual shape alone cannot define intentionality, since an aspect is by definition the aspect under which an intentional object (the object of thought) is presented.

The following question arises. When an intentional state is ascribed to a thinker, does the ascription specify the intentional object, or the intentional content? As we shall see, this is ultimately a confused question. If one tries to put into words what the intentional object of one’s state of mind is, one

cannot do this without doing it in some particular way. An analogy with Frege's theory of sense and reference might help make this clear. Discussing Frege's theory, Dummett says that 'in saying what the reference [of an expression] is, we have to choose a particular way of saying this'.⁴⁷ This means that one cannot use some words to give the intentional object of one's state of mind without also *ipso facto* giving the content of one's state of mind. If, in response to the question of what I am thinking about, I reply 'that charming restaurant in Capri', then the object of my thought is the restaurant in question, and the phrase 'that charming restaurant in Capri' gives the content of my state of mind. One consequence of this is that when describing an intentional state, one does not have to go on to mention the intentional object if one has already given the content of the state: since doing the second is a way of doing the first. When I am thinking about the charming restaurant in Capri, I can give the intentional object of my thought by stating its content: 'that charming restaurant in Capri'.⁴⁸

This does not mean that the idea of an intentional object is redundant; for there are many ways in which one may be thinking about the same thing, and hence many contents associated with the same object. But how do we answer the question of when two thoughts have the same intentional object? As noted, it is not necessary that the object be presented in the same way. 'Bratislava' and 'Pozsony' are two names for the same city. Someone could be thinking of Bratislava as Bratislava, and someone else thinking of it as Pozsony. The fact that they are thinking of the same thing is fairly easy to establish in this case, since we know how to establish the truth of the identity statement 'Bratislava = Pozsony'. But what about when the intentional object does not exist? P. T. Geach famously discussed a story in which a number of villagers attributed various evil deeds to a (non-existent) witch. What determines whether the villagers are thinking of 'the same' witch? Geach calls this the problem of 'intentional identity':

we have intentional identity when a number of people, or one person on different occasions, have attitudes with a common focus, whether or not there actually is something at that focus.⁴⁹

Plausible as this view is, the question now turns into a question about what constitutes a 'common focus'. It seems to me that there is no reason to think that there will always be a fact of the matter about whether two thinkers are focusing on the same intentional object when that object does not exist. For without a real object to give us an independent criterion, all we have to go on is sameness of words used. But this need not be worrying, since there is nothing in our ordinary way of understanding thoughts which requires definite answers in these kinds of case. Indeed, one of the distinguishing marks of the case when the object of thought exists is that we are entitled to think there

is an answer to questions of this kind; when an intentional object does not exist, then we should not necessarily expect an answer.

I claim, then, that we need both the idea of an intentional object and the idea of intentional content. My use of the word ‘content’ here is somewhat more general than the standard use in contemporary philosophy. For I have said that something like *that charming restaurant in Capri* or *St Petersburg* can be the content of my thought. Orthodox usage tends to insist that content must be *propositional*, where a proposition is something that is capable of being true or false. *St Petersburg* is not true or false, and neither is a restaurant. What is true or false is something that is expressed by a whole sentence and is reported as the content of intentional states such as beliefs. A belief is generally the *belief that p*, where *p* is replaced by a sentence; I shall say that the sentence expresses a proposition. States of mind which have propositional contents are called *propositional attitudes*. An orthodox view is that all intentional states are propositional attitudes (see §§33–4); thus, this view must reconstrue my examples of thinking about an object in propositional terms. To be thinking about *St Petersburg* must be reconstrued as a thought of something like the form, *St Petersburg is F*.

I agree that the contents of many intentional states are propositional, where this just means that they are assessable as true or false. But I reject the view that *all* content is propositional. I will defend this rejection in §§24 and 34; but for the time being let me just record my opinion that there are many everyday examples of psychological states whose content we do describe in non-propositional terms—loving or hating someone, or contemplating/thinking about an object are paradigm examples. I intend to take this view at face value for the time being.

This being said, let me return to the main theme. Although giving the content of an intentional state is a way of giving its object, giving the content of an intentional state does not wholly *individuate* that state—that is, distinguish it from all others. For I may imagine that little restaurant in Capri, and I may remember it. These states of mind are different, but their contents are the same. To distinguish these states, we need to mention the different ways in which I relate to this content: by memory and by imagination. From what I said at the beginning of this section, the following abstract structure of intentionality suggests itself:

Subject—Directedness/Presentation—Object/Content

There are three terms in this structure. The nature of the subject is not something which is within the scope of this book (strange as that may sound). Object and content I have already explained. Directedness is the converse of presentation: if *X* is directed on *Y*, *Y* is presented to *X*. What the point about memory and imagination shows is that we need to distinguish

between different kinds of presentation or directedness. I will borrow another term from Searle and call these different *intentional modes*. (They should not be confused with Frege's 'modes of presentation', which fall on the 'content' side of the above structure. To avoid confusion, and because this book is not about Frege's semantics, I will not mention Frege's term 'mode of presentation' again in this book.)

Now since, as I argued above, we do not need to mention the intentional object *in addition* if we mention the intentional content, then we can re-describe the general structure of an intentional state as follows:

Subject—Intentional Mode—Content

This is the general structure of intentionality which I shall be assuming in this book. Intentional modes are the relations one stands in to the contents of one's intentional states. Obvious examples are belief, hope, and the other propositional attitudes (I could have used the word 'attitude' rather than 'mode', but this might have the confusing connotation that all intentional states are propositional attitudes: a doctrine I reject). Desire, thought, intention, perception, love, fear, regret, pity—these are all intentional modes. My aim here is just to characterize the general structure of an intentional state. The simple idea is that a person's intentional state is individuated by two things: the intentional mode and the intentional content. And, as I have said, the intentional content fixes the intentional object, what the intentional state is about. So, to fix a subject's intentional state, one needs to fix the mode and the content.

This general structure has the form of a relation: subjects are related to contents by means of intentional modes. It turns out, then, that intentionality does have a relational structure after all: but we should think of it, not in terms of relations to 'objects of thought', but in terms of relations to contents. There is nothing puzzling in the idea that a state might seem to be a relation to one kind of thing, but turn out to be a relation to another kind of thing. For example, one might initially take the dispositional property of solubility in water to be a relation to its manifestations (dissolvings), but then reject this idea on the grounds that something could be soluble even if nothing had ever dissolved. But one could also say that water-solubility is nonetheless a relation to the thing in which something dissolves; viz., water. (I do not believe this view of dispositions, but the example is for illustration only.)

What does it mean to say that intentional states are relations to intentional contents but not to intentional objects? The relevant point is this: the content of the state must always exist, but the object of the state need not exist. My argument for this claim is as follows. The intentional object of a thought is the thing the thought is about. Some intentional objects do not exist. So although there is always an answer to the question, 'what is your thought about?',

sometimes it makes sense to say that what you are thinking about is, strictly speaking, nothing: one's thought is like a fired arrow with no target. It makes some sense for the subject to say something like 'I was thinking about Pegasus, but Pegasus does not exist, so in a sense my thought was about nothing!' But it makes no sense to say this about the *content* of a thought. Whether or not the object of a thought exists, it cannot be the case that a thought has no *content*, that its content is nothing. There is a sense in which a thought can be about nothing: one's mind can be directed, as it were, to a certain location where there is nothing there (as Geach says, there is nothing 'at the focus of one's attitudes'). But there is *no* sense in which the content of a thought can be nothing. We can put the point in terms of a distinction between what someone is *thinking about* and what someone is *thinking*. And let us say that while the object of a thought is what one is thinking about, the content of a thought is what one is thinking. Then my point is that while there is a sense in which one may be thinking, and yet thinking *about* nothing, there is no sense in which one may be thinking, and yet *thinking* nothing. This is a consequence of the fact that thoughts (and other intentional states) are relations to their contents.

This claim about intentional content captures the truth behind the confused response to the problem of intentionality mentioned above (§7): 'in a sense Pegasus exists, because the idea of Pegasus exists!' The obvious response to this is that the idea of Napoleon is not what your Napoleon-thoughts are about; so why should the idea of Pegasus be what your Pegasus-thoughts are about? But this does not mean that 'ideas' have no role to play; it's just that they cannot be intentional objects. If there are ideas, then it makes sense to say that they can be (*contra* Frege) the contents of one's thoughts, even if they are not the objects. In discussing the intentional attitude of worshipping, where the object of worship Y does not exist, Anscombe says:

It will not be right to say that X worshipped an idea. It is rather than the subject's having an idea is what is needed to give the proposition [that X worshipped Y] a chance of being true.⁵⁰

What ideas in this sense are, and what intentional content is, and how they are related to intentional modes, shall occupy us in the rest of this book.