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Guest Editors' Introduction

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Guest Editors' Introduction

Rasmus Thybo Jensen^a and Dermot Moran^b

This special issue of the IJPS focuses on *intentionality*, the problem of the 'aboutness' of our mental states and occurrence, of our beliefs, desires, hopes, perceptions, actions, etc. The current discussion of intentionality emerged historically with Franz Brentano whose groundbreaking work in descriptive psychology inspired both the so called Continental philosophy (certainly, phenomenology) and recent analytic philosophy (beginning with Roderick M. Chisholm). In keeping with the tradition of the IJPS the papers in this Special Issue approach intentionality from a number of different philosophical perspectives. The topic of intentionality is one that both unites and divides the different traditions. The issue of whether intentionality can be naturalized has been a major topic in analytical philosophy of mind, whereas this issue has often been assumed settled in the negative by authors working in the tradition of Husserlian phenomenology. Hence Merleau-Ponty writes in *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945): "How significance and intentionality could come to dwell in molecular edifices or masses of cells is a thing that can never be made comprehensible, and here Cartesianism is right".¹ But the staunch anti-reductionist approach to intentionality found in phenomenological thinkers such as Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, also find its counterpart in the analytical tradition (cf. for instance Sellars, Davidson, Strawson, McDowell and Searle). The investigation of intentionality is crucial for our understanding of ourselves as conscious beings in a natural world and how we conceive of intentionality will have ramifications for our basic understanding of our embodied and social nature.

We should not forget that the topic of intentionality did not first appear on the philosophical arena at the time when Husserl and Frege made their groundbreaking contributions. As recent years' scholarship has demonstrated the concept of intentionality has a rich pre-history in classical, medieval and modern philosophy. This growing interest in the historical roots of present day discussions is reflected in a number of the

papers in this volume, which demonstrate how excavating these roots can bring new and to some extent critical light on widespread assumptions.

Moran, in his overview of the modern debates on intentionality, points out how both Brentano and Husserl engaged with Anselm's proof of God when thinking about intentionality. Furthermore he shows how Gaunilo, one of Anselm's contemporary critics, anticipated Twardowski's distinction between the content and the object of an intentional act and Frege's distinction between the sense and the reference of a word. Moran argues that the phenomenological approach to intentionality, with its focus on the transcendent 'excess' of the intended object (i.e. the object apprehended as having more profiles than are in fact presented in the act) against the backdrop of the 'world' to which the intentional act and object belong, effectively sidesteps many of the current worries about the nature of the intentional relation or ontological concerns about the intentional object.

In his contribution Klima returns to a number of medieval thinkers in particular Aquinas and Buridan, not merely with the purpose of unravelling the historical roots of the modern debates but also with a critical intent. Klima argues that in Aquinas' and Buridan's analysis of *intentional being* or *esse intentionale*, we find good reasons to question Brentano's thesis that intentionality is exclusively a characteristic of the mental. In addition he argues that these medieval thinkers give us the resources to avoid that the possibility of thinking about non-existent object becomes mysterious.

The general issue of how to think about our thinking about non-existent objects is the topic of both Kroon's and Voltolini's paper. Kroon presents a positive reconstruction of Brentano's mature views on intentionality by drawing on recent pretence theory versions of fictionalism. Presenting his reading as an alternative to Crane's more pessimistic reading of Brentano's contribution to the solution of the problem of non-existent objects, Kroon argues that by reading Brentano as on the brink of articulating what would in effect have been a pretence theory we also become able to see how there is far more continuity between his early and later view than often recognized. In his paper Voltolini's engages head-on with Crane's intentionalism and presents a different alternative than the one offered by Kroon. Voltolini agrees with Crane (and with Kroon's reconstructed Brentano) that qua intentional object something cannot be said to have a metaphysical nature, but against Crane he argues that the question of whether something that is thought of has a metaphysical nature should not be reduced to the issue of whether the object in question exists or not: some non-existent object do possess a metaphysical nature of their own. Though Voltolini's account might at a first glance appear to be an attempt at rehabilitating Meinong's view on ontology, he makes it clear that there are in facts

distinctive differences. In his paper Jorgensen presents a challenge to anyone who is interested in a positive reconstruction of Meinong's theory of intentionality. Jorgensen argues that Meinong was committed to a version of descriptivism and he then proceeds to raise a number of Kripkean challenges to this view. After considering some possible Meinongian responses to the challenges, Jorgensen concludes that the challenge of how to avoid that Meinong's version of descriptivism leaves us with an indeterminacy problem still stands.

In his contribution Marbach focuses on the issue of fictional intentionality which was also discussed in Kroon's and Voltolini's papers. Marbach approach is thoroughly phenomenological in the Husserlian sense; his aim is to determine the specificity of acts of imagination by recourse to the mode of givenness of the intentional object of such acts. Marbach begins his paper by stating his commitment to the phenomenological method as developed by Husserl including the phenomenological reduction and the epoché. These methodological tools, in particular the epoché, are the topic of Alweiss' paper. Alweiss argues that it is a common misunderstanding that Husserl's epoché is tantamount to a mere turning one's back on skeptical worries by bracketing all questions that pertain to the existence of intentional objects. On the contrary, she argues, Husserl's epoché should be understood as involving a sophisticated immanent critique of Humean skepticism, that, as Marbach also emphasizes, shows the absurdity of the skeptic's distinction between the world as it appears to us and the world in itself. In her defense of Husserl's response to scepticism Alweiss draws on a comparison with P. F. Strawson's direct realism. In his paper Jensen also engages in a comparative enterprise, this time between two authors heavily inspired by Husserl and Strawson respectively, namely Merleau-Ponty and McDowell.

With this volume we hope to have shown how the topic of intentionality presents authors from different traditions and with different approaches a unique opportunity to find common ground for discussion. A common ground that will not only make criticism of alternative approaches possible but also, as it gets explored in more detail, make for a better understanding of one's own position in a larger intellectual landscape.

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Note

- 1 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), p. 351.