

Intentionality, Point of View, and the Role of the Interpreter

Brian Ball



Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/phenomenology/854>

ISSN: 2239-4028

Publisher

Rosenberg & Sellier

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 June 2022

Number of pages: 92-102

ISSN: 2280-7853

Electronic reference

Brian Ball, "Intentionality, Point of View, and the Role of the Interpreter", *Phenomenology and Mind* [Online], 22 | 2022, Online since 01 August 2022, connection on 27 February 2023. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/phenomenology/854>



Creative Commons - Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International - CC BY-NC-ND 4.0
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

BRIAN BALL

New College of the Humanities

brian.ball@nchlondon.ac.uk

INTENTIONALITY, POINT OF VIEW, AND THE ROLE OF THE INTERPRETER

abstract

The three main approaches to the metaphysics of intentionality can arguably be subjected to analysis in terms of grammatical point of view: the approach of the (internalist) phenomenal intentionality programme (plus productivism about linguistic content) may be regarded as first-personal; interpretationism, perhaps, as second-personal; and (reductive externalist) causal information theories (including teleosemantics) as third-personal. After making this plausible, the current paper focusses on the role of the interpreter (if any) in interpretationism. It argues that, despite some considerations from the publicity of meaning potentially suggesting the contrary, radical interpretation is not subject to epistemic constraint; nor should the interpretationist appeal to the idiosyncratic interests of actual interpreters, thereby rendering the approach irremediably relativistic. Instead, an appeal to the pure form of interestedness is all that is involved; this supports a methodologically non-reductive outlook on intentionality.

keywords

Interpretation; Second-Person; Interest-Relativity; Reductionism; Methodology

1. Introduction What role does subjectivity play in determining intentional content? Some will say none: intentionality, on their view, can be characterized from a thoroughly objective, third-person perspective. Nevertheless, in what follows, I will distinguish two ways in which subjectivity might be thought to have a role – one first-personal, the other second-personal. I will then focus on the (arguably less explored) second-personal approach, considering further refinements of the role of the subject. The upshot will be that, on the best version of this approach, subjectivity is methodologically, but not metaphysically, involved in content determination.

2. Intentionality and Grammatical Point of View There are broadly three perspectives on intentionality in the philosophy of mind, namely (cf. Pautz, forthcoming) those of: the (internalist) phenomenal intentionality programme; interpretationism; and (reductive externalist) causal-information theories. Can they be subjected to an analysis in terms of differences in grammatical point of view – first, second, and third personal respectively?

The phenomenal intentionality programme builds on Nagel's (1974) work suggesting that experience has a *subjective* character – there is something it is like *for the subject* to undergo a conscious mental episode. It then develops this observation into a theoretical account that grounds intentionality, not just for sense perception, but also for moods and the emotions, and even (through an exploration of 'cognitive phenomenology') for thought (cf. Montague, 2010). In particular, the suggestion is that through phenomenological investigation – a paradigmatically first-personal method – the qualitative characters of various subjective experiences (i.e. what it is like for a subject to undergo them) can be discerned; that these will be found to involve, or supply, accuracy conditions – i.e. a certain sort of intentional content; and that this applies even in the case of 'cognitive experiences' (Pautz, forthcoming). While some theorists (e.g. Tye, 1995) embrace intentionalism about phenomenal consciousness, taking the (independently fixed) representational character of an experience to determine its qualitative character (due to its own transparency), advocates of phenomenal intentionality (e.g. Horgan & Tienson, 2002) see the connection here running in the opposite direction, with (subject) internally determined experiential qualities fixing a kind of narrow content, which can then be supplemented with appropriate causal connections to fix wide content. In this way, all intentional mental content is metaphysically grounded in (internally determined) phenomenal intentionality.

According to interpretationism, by contrast, a subject's intentional mental states are

metaphysically determined as those attributed in a correct interpretation (Williams, 2020). Such an approach – dubbed ‘best systems theory’ by Pautz (forthcoming) – is characterized by its reliance on the global, or holistic constraints of rationality (Davidson, 1970): the correct attributions of attitudes are charitable, rationalizing the subject’s actions in light of the circumstances in which they find themselves (cf. Lewis, 1974). On at least some formulations of the view, however, (correct) attributions of attitudes are (those) made by idealized interpreters – characters who might be thought to introduce a second-person perspective into the picture (see below).

Finally, causal-informational approaches attempt to reduce mental intentionality to certain sorts of (non-accidental, lawlike, or counterfactual supporting) correlations between (internal) states of the subject and those of her (external) environment. Such approaches may be thought to embody the ‘third-person world view’ (Kemp, 2012, p. 2) of natural science – Nagel’s (1989) utterly objective ‘view from nowhere’.

What about the intentionality of language? Simchen (2017) distinguishes two approaches to metasemantics – that is, “the metaphysics of semantic endowment” (2017, p. 75): productivism, on which (referential and truth-conditional) content is fixed by “conditions surrounding the production” (2017, p. 175) of linguistic utterances; and interpretationism, on which what is relevant are “conditions surrounding the interpretive consumption or reception of such items (e.g. facilitation of good explanations of speakers’ verbal behavior)” (2017, p. 175). Arguably, the speaker’s, or producer’s perspective can be considered that of the first person, and the hearer’s, or consumer’s that of the second person. Finally, while Simchen does not consider such views, teleosemantic approaches to linguistic intentionality (such as that of Millikan, 1984) emphasize the roles of both producers and consumers in fixing content and may therefore suggest a third-person perspective, that of a (scientific) bystander observing and objectively characterizing interactions between two other parties (speaker and hearer). These various approaches to linguistic intentionality might well be supplemented with corresponding approaches to intentional mental content. For instance, though Simchen does not explicitly discuss this, Grice’s (1989) intentionalist approach to the metaphysics of meaning is productivist in character – and so on the present suggestion (speaker-oriented and) first-personal; and it might be grafted onto the theoretical outlook of the phenomenal intentionality programme to yield a thorough-going first-personal perspective on the metaphysics of intentionality, both mental and linguistic. This grafting need not be entirely artificial either: for it might be thought that a speaker’s communicative intentions are accessible to her, from her own perspective; and their contents might be taken to be determined by, or at least grounded in, their qualitative characters. Indeed, this was arguably Locke’s view in the (1690/1975) *Essay*, on which a speaker is able to (intentionally) “use these [articulate] sounds” – i.e. words – and “make them stand as marks for the ideas within his own mind” (III.i.2). “Words, in their primary or immediate signification”, Locke therefore wrote, “stand for nothing but the ideas in the mind of him who uses them”. And of course, by ‘idea’ Locke meant “whatsoever is the [immediate] object of the understanding when a man thinks” – so something to which one has first-personal access. Finally, what an idea is about (and so any associated word’s secondary signification) is determined by a relation – either resemblance (for ideas of primary qualities) or causation (in the case of ideas of secondary qualities) – that it stands in thanks to its intrinsic, qualitative features, just as advocates of the phenomenal intentionality programme maintain.¹

1 Humpty Dumpty also embraces intentionalism about meaning – though a notoriously extreme version of it. “When I use a word”, he says, “it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less”. “The question”, as Alice rightly

Something similar might be said in relation to the second and third-personal approaches. For instance, a unified interpretationist approach might be expected, securing both mental and linguistic intentionality (cf. Davidson, 1973). And as Lepore and Ludwig note (in discussing Davidson): “[t]he project of radical interpretation” – which lies at the basis of interpretationism – “is the project of interpreting *another* speaker from evidence that does not presuppose any knowledge of the meanings of his terms or any detailed knowledge of his propositional attitudes” (2005, p. 151, my emphasis). This suggests a central role for a second-person perspective lying at the heart of such an interpretationist approach – indeed, one which, on Kemp’s estimation, requires the interpreter ultimately to (subjectively) “judge outright what a person refers to or means” (2012, p. 2). Finally, and perhaps most obviously, third-personal, causal-informational theories have been applied not only to the case of thought, but also to that of language – indeed, teleosemantic theories are of precisely this character.²

I will not seek to determine, in this paper, whether this grammatically-based taxonomy of views is ultimately correct, or defensible. For instance, it might be objected that Gricean intentionalism is utterly third-personal, and productivism more generally objective/scientific in outlook.³ Or that it can be incorporated into an interpretationist perspective.⁴ Or again that the subjective contribution of the (radical) interpreter is ultimately first rather than second-personal.⁵ I will not explore these possibilities further here. Nor will I consider each of the views outlined above in detail to determine which is to be embraced.⁶ Rather, my principal aim in what follows will be to explore the interpretationist perspective, in an attempt to characterize the role of the interpreter in radical (content fixing) interpretation. In this way, I hope to provide some evidence that there is, at least potentially, a distinctively second-personal role for subjectivity in the determination of intentional content.

3. Radical Interpretation and Epistemic Constraint

Davidson (1973) introduced the problem of radical interpretation, asking what an observer of linguistic activity could know that would enable her to interpret a speaker’s utterances – in short, what evidence would suffice to enable her to interpret him. The interpretive task in question was assumed to be undertaken under the radical circumstances in which the interpreter could draw on no prior knowledge of the speaker’s language or attitudes. As Williams (2020) stresses, Davidson’s problem has its origins in Quine’s work (e.g. Quine, 1960): but Quine focussed on translation undertaken in the radical circumstances imagined above – the activity of producing a mapping from the expressions of one language to those of another (intuitively – though not on Quine’s account – those that are synonymous with them);

notes in response, “is... whether you *can* make words mean so many different things” (Carroll, 2005, p. 128, italics original). Gricean productivism might be thought to be a more constrained version of Humpty Dumpty’s, or at least Locke’s, view – one on which what one can reasonably intend to mean depends in part on what one knows about what others will reasonably expect.

2 Millikan (1984) stresses that it is a virtue of her approach that it is equally applicable in both areas, without regarding either mental or linguistic intentionality as derivative on the other.

3 This will arguably be so if external aspects of the speech context, rather than introspectively accessible features of speaker’s intentions, are given a prominent role.

4 See Ball (forthcoming) for discussion.

5 Perhaps this is what Kemp ultimately thinks: “[t]he bottom line is that the intuition or semantical judgement of the interpreter cannot be removed from the loop, and thus the theory fails to measure up to the standards of impersonal science” (Kemp, 2012, p. 10).

6 I do not have much sympathy for the phenomenal intentionality programme – and in particular, for its internalist commitments – but I will not here seek to justify my distaste. (I note, however, that I am more sympathetic to the representationalist account of the connection between phenomenology and intentionality mooted above. This may give some indication of the direction such a justification might take.)

Davidson, by contrast, considered interpretation, a process that targets a single language (though it may be undertaken in another), aiming to render its expressions and speakers intelligible.

On Davidson's articulation the problem has an epistemological bent – it is concerned with the evidence an interpreter can rely on in radical circumstances. Moreover, it is, on the face of it, concerned only with the interpretation of speakers of a language. (It turns out that those are the only agents with attitudes on Davidson's view.) But Lewis (1974) reformulated the problem, generalizing it in such a way as to apply to non-linguistic agents, and making clear that it is ultimately metaphysical in character: how do the physical facts determine the intentional facts about meanings (if any) and attitudes? He also offered a different solution to the problem – though one that continued to emphasize the importance of principles requiring charity in interpretation, and an attempt to regard agents as rational. (Indeed, these commonalities between the two theorists might be regarded as definitive of interpretationist approaches to intentionality more generally – together they amount to the need to regard the fixation of intentional content as subject to the global constraints of rationality, broadly construed, as in Davidson 1970.)

We can ignore some of the differences between Davidson and Lewis (e.g. over the applicability of interpretationism to non-linguistic agents).⁷ The question we are interested in here is, are there any reasons why an answer to the metaphysical question (posed by Lewis) must advert to epistemological considerations (as on Davidson's formulation)? Gluer (2018) argues that, for Davidson, there is: roughly, meaning is communicated, hence publicly knowable; and so the evidence required to know what is meant must be available to the ordinary (not omniscient) interpreter. As exegesis, this may well be right: but Williamson (2007) criticizes Davidson for embracing both verificationism (in the form of the idea that a subject cannot have attitudes unless we, as interpreters, can have evidence that she does), and constructivism (here the idea is that a subject cannot be attributed attitudes unless specific ones can be attributed); like Lewis (and Williams), he sees no (subjective) role for the interpreter in (his own) interpretationism.

To my mind, the proposal that (radical) interpretation is subject to significant epistemic constraints is problematically at odds with confirmation holism. The line between what can be known by direct observation vs more theoretical reflection is vague, and perhaps subject-relative – but once we allow that background knowledge might play a role in helping the interpreter to determine meaning (which we should), it seems there is no principled limit to which facts are relevant. For instance, we would not want to fail to interpret bees – or, if science fiction is allowed, creatures as much like us as possible, but with visual systems like those of bees – as having perceptions and beliefs whose contents is specified in terms of ultraviolet colours, simply because we are unable to detect ultraviolet light with our unaided eyes! But once we allow our (theoretical, not 'ordinary') knowledge of optics into the interpretive base, it seems we should admit that no possible evidence is out of bounds.⁸

7 Another question that is of interest concerns the relative influence of Sellars (1956) on these theorists (and Dennett, to be discussed below). According to De Vries (2020, section 5.1), Sellars held that attributing a thought to someone "locates the relevant state of the person 'in the logical space of reasons'", but also that it "effectively attributes to that person as well a behavioral control system that is so structured that something analogous to theoretical and practical inference goes on within it" – in other words, it is true of them only if they have a certain functional organization. And as Weatherston (2016) points out, Lewis was a (reductive) functionalist – including about the attitudes. Davidson (1970) was not.

8 This might still leave some truths out of bounds – e.g. the truth that no one knows that p (cf. Williamson, 2000). But such truths aren't physical in character.

4. A Pragmatic Role for the Interpreter?

There is no role for epistemic constraint in interpretationist approaches to the metaphysics of intentionality – or so I have argued. Might there nonetheless be some other form of subjectivity involved in the attribution of attitudes and meanings? Arguably Dennett (1978) sees a pragmatic role for the interpreter: attributing attitudes (upon adopting the intentional stance) is useful to those with particular interests (as well as limited knowledge).⁹ Discussing Dennett’s views, Williams says:

Read as a piece of metaphysics, an appeal to an interpreter’s projects and beliefs would be bizarre. Truths about each individual’s beliefs would obtain only relative to another’s perspective, and those perspectives would be constituted in part by the others’ attitudes, generating a morass of circularities (2020, p. xix).

In short, Williams’ worry is that Dennett’s account of attitude ascriptions is premised on relativism and leads to circularity – when understood as constitutive of what it is to have those attitudes. Williams takes this as a reason to read Dennett as merely concerned with the practice of attributing attitudes, and not with the metaphysics of the attitudes themselves. This reading of Dennett strikes me as mistaken – though I will not pursue this exegetical matter here.¹⁰ Instead, let us ask, how serious is the relativism worry? (We will return to the circularity worry below.)

To address this issue, it may be worth noting what problems the appeal to an interpreter and her interests might be thought to alleviate. Lewis (1983), recall, appeals to a distinction between (relatively) natural properties and others (that are less natural), with the perfectly natural properties being those discovered by physics; and he suggests (in Lewis, 1984) that naturalness constrains interpretation, determining which worldly features are eligible to act as intentional contents of mental states and linguistic items. But the contents of our thoughts and meanings of our expressions are rarely physically natural, so this constraint does too little to fix appropriate interpretations (Williams, 2007; Hawthorne, 2007). Indeed, this is part of Chomsky’s objection to the discipline of semantics – it cannot be scientific because meanings are scientifically heterogenous. We may say that water is H₂O, but the stuff in the sea has plenty of other chemicals in it – far more so than the stuff in our teacup, which we refuse to call ‘water’. According to Chomsky, “whether something is water depends on special human interests and concerns” (1995, p. 22). And yet, ‘water’ means *water* and ‘tea’ means *tea*.¹¹ Arguably, then, if we can interpret the words of others, it is because we share interests with them. Detecting tea, for instance, may have more to do with caring about (or being interested in) it than anything else (such as our epistemic capacities). And yet according to Wittgenstein (1953), “if a lion could speak, we could not understand him”. Why not? Primarily, I take it, because lions have different interests than we do. We cannot be (fully and appropriately) sensitive to what lions are up to (with their radically different form of life). Lions’ interests diverge from our own. And yet, if there is a divergence of interests between subject and interpreter, surely the correct interpretation is one that is sensitive to the (feline) subject’s

⁹ Thus, there is a pragmatic (rather than epistemic) role for the interpreter if conditions and states such as needs, desires, and interests, which have the world-to-mind direction of fit (Anscombe, 2000) – as opposed to doxastic and epistemic states (with the opposite direction of fit) – are regarded as central to the interpretive process.

¹⁰ Cf. Dennett (1981), where it is stressed, in effect, that useful attributions of belief are true, and Dennett (1991), where the patterns recognized by these attributions are taken to be real. Some aspects of Zawidski’s interesting (2015) engagement with Dennett’s work that may be pertinent are also discussed below.

¹¹ Another potential illustration of the issue comes from the BBC Comedy sketch, “What makes soup soup?”. Arguably the answer is something about our interests. Certainly soup is not a natural kind.

interests, not the (human) interpreter's! This suggests that relativism may indeed be a worry in explicating the metaphysics of intentionality in terms of a process of interpretation that takes into account the idiosyncratic interests of the interpreter.

Interestingly, Hawthorne (2007) suggests a quite different role for the interpreter's interests – one that does not appear to fall prey to this concern. He notes that agents in general have interests. Suppose, then, that (for some proposition p) a given (arbitrary) agent is interested in whether p . As Hawthorne notes, by minimal logical reasoning, it follows that they are interested in whether it is true that p . Thus, all agents have an interest in the truth. Hawthorne suggests that this fact can help to secure a role for the notion of truth, which is central to the (radical) interpretation that determines the contents of a given subject's attitudes. Thus, it is not insofar as interpreters are epistemically constrained subjects, but rather because they are interested agents, that they have a key role to play in interpretation – and yet, this is not a reason in itself to expect any subject or interest relativity in correct interpretation.

As I read him, Hawthorne is suggesting that a certain pragmatism lies at the heart of interpretationism. But it is (as a Kantian might say) the pure form of agency as such that determines a role for the (idealized, omniscient) interpreter on Hawthorne's understanding of interpretationism. And this in turn suggests an anti-reductionist outlook: the (omniscient) interpreter needs to come at the task of interpretation in a way that is sensitive to high-level features like truth, and truth-conditional content, not just the low-level properties that are discerned by the natural sciences. In short, then, pragmatism need not yield relativism; but it does point away from reductionism – in effect, embracing the 'circularity' Williams regards as problematic.

It will be worth considering objections to the foregoing reasoning, as the replies may help to clarify the position being described.

A first objection construes the above line of thought (attributed to Hawthorne) as involving the following key steps: first, we note that interpreters are agents, and so have interests; second, we conclude that they therefore have an interest in the truth; third, we infer that they wield the concept of truth; fourth, we acknowledge that this concept plays a key role in interpretation; and finally, fifth, we conclude that interpreters therefore have a role to play in content fixing, radical interpretation. The objection is then pressed that the move from the second to third steps is unsupported – that agents have an interest in the truth does not guarantee that they are in a position to deploy the concept of truth.¹²

It will not do to respond by reconstruing the original argument along the following, simpler lines: agents have an interest in the truth; so it is appropriate to interpret them using the concept of truth (rather than lower level physical notions). The problem is that, even if it is successful, this route to the conclusion that truth has a role to play in interpretation passes via the interests of the interpreted, not those of the interpreter – and it therefore fails to secure a role for the latter in radical interpretation.

A consideration of Zawidzki's (2015) elaboration of Dennett's interpretationism may help us to see a way forward. According to Zawidzki, natural selection helps to secure the legitimacy of the interpretation of systems in intentional terms, on Dennett's approach, in two steps. First, it favours systems that reproduce efficiently, and so can be regarded as pursuing goals by effective means – or, in other words, as intentional systems; and thus, it helps to secure the existence of many such systems. Second, it ensures that systems that engage in interpretation

5. Objections, Replies, Clarifications

¹² Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pressing this concern so clearly.

in this way are tracking real (rather than spurious) patterns – for otherwise it would not be advantageous for them to do so! (One might add that, in certain sorts of situations – e.g. those in which a fight or flight reaction seems appropriate – such ordinary, naturally occurring interpreters may be inclined to make their attributions of attitudes second-personal, seeking to answer the question, what are you doing/going to do?)

Does this line of thought provide a reason to think interpreters will, after all, wield the concept of truth, given their interest in doing so (so that the transition from the second to the third step above is vindicated)? Better, I think, to reconstrue the (original) argument as ensuring the *appropriateness* of interpretation that attributes attitudes (and speech acts) with truth-conditional contents (where this involves both an element of accuracy and an element of utility – or, as Hawthorne says, significance). In other words, we move directly from the thought that interpreters have an interest in the truth, to the thought that it is therefore appropriate for them to employ truth-conditional contents in interpretation (whether or not they have the concept of truth). This then allows us to draw the further conclusion that there is a pragmatic role for the interpreter in radical interpretation.

This raises a further question. Does the response given here conflict with what was said previously about relativism and/or the divergence of interests between us and lions? This would be ironic, as Zawidski develops the above line of thought as a way of furthering Dennett’s response to the relativism charge. Nevertheless, we can ask, to what extent does interpretation serve a kind of coordination function (between interpreter and interpreted)? Is it key that the contents attributed are in some sense shared between interpreter and interpreted, thereby reintroducing idiosyncrasy in the interpreter’s perspective? A consideration of some remarks of Tollefsen’s will, I believe, prove illuminating on this point – and at the same time bolster the case that the role of the subject in interpretation is genuinely second-personal. The short answer, though, is that it does not: all that must be shared between interpreter and interpreted is sensitivity to the truth.

Tollefsen (2015) suggests that when, as interpreters, we adopt Dennett’s intentional stance, we endeavour to discern reasons the agent *has* which both explain and justify her actions. Accordingly, not just any reasons will do – they must be ones that make her action intelligible *from her own point of view* and not just ours. She writes: “an action (including an utterance) will be intelligible to us – in the relevant sense – only if it makes sense *to us* that it made sense *to the agent* that she did what she did. This reflective constraint guides us in our interpretive endeavours” (p. 100, emphasis original).

This articulation of the reflective constraint certainly sounds as though two parties are essentially involved in interpretation on Tollefsen’s view: the reasons attributed to the agent must justify the action, both to the interpreter *and* for the interpreted. As Tollefsen herself puts it, “we must assume that the agent shares our norms of rationality” (p. 100); and “our practice of interpretation involves the positing of an *alternative point of view*” (p. 100, my emphasis). In other words, it takes two to tango... and to interpret. The interpreter, it appears, must adopt a second-personal point of view on this account.

It is therefore somewhat surprising to see Tollefsen say:

I am introducing here what others have called a *first-person* point of view.... [W]e need not associate this point of view with consciousness.... A rational point of view... is a perspective and one that can be adopted by other agents. When we make sense of others, we often project ourselves into their rational point of view in order to be able to better provide reasons that are intelligible in the way that the reflective constraint requires (p. 100, emphasis original).

The point here about the nature of a point of view (involving rationality, or sapience, rather than, say, sentience) is well-taken; what is a little surprising is to see it described as first-personal.

It is worth remarking, however, that Tollefsen herself does not describe the perspective in this way in the passage cited: she says that *others* have so described it; this of course leaves open that she herself would not. But regardless of whether she would, it remains the case that the reflective constraint, as articulated, makes it clear that interpretation involves two distinct perspectives (not one or three). Not only that, there is perhaps a case to be made that in assuming shared norms of rationality, interpretation becomes inherently interactional – the interpreter opens themselves up to the possibility that they will need to revise their standards of rationality (e.g. their logic) in light of evidence that the interpreted’s standards are preferable. This is not something that occurs in straightforward, third-personal observation and theory building.

Be all of this as it may, the key point here as regards the objection that idiosyncrasy, and with it relativism, has been reintroduced is that it is not contents *per se* that are assumed to be shared, but a kind of sensitivity to truth. This is not relative – if it were, it could not induce the interpreter to adjust their standards!

If relativism is not a concern, what about circularity? Zawidzki thinks that this (third) worry can be addressed roughly as follows. Intentional systems are those that exhibit a certain kind of behavioural pattern. Which kind? The one that is discerned by a certain naturally occurring sort of system recognized in developmental psychology. When the pattern in one system is discerned by another (of the kind developmental psychologists study), the second system is itself engaged in an intentional act. This appears to introduce the threat of circularity: we are saying which systems are intentional systems by appeal to the notion of an intentional system! But ultimately, the fact that interpretation (of the kind recognized by developmental psychologists) is appealed to when saying which sort of behavioural pattern is at issue simply means that the behaviour of the interpreting system itself also exhibits a pattern that can be discerned by systems that engage in interpretation (so understood). “In other words”, says Zawidzki, “the intentional stance is recursively applicable” (2015, p. 603). This precludes discerning the patterns in question at a lower level of analysis – but “ontologically, there are just behavioral patterns and dispositions” (2015, p. 603). In this sense, interpretationism suggests a methodological anti-reductionism, but does not require any metaphysical additions to a naturalistic ontology.

Finally, a fourth objection is simply that the argument given above against epistemic constraint in interpretation was too quick. In response, let me say the following by way of clarification. It may be the case that the explanandum of radical interpretation is subject to epistemic constraint: roughly speaking, what is to be explained is (high-level) observable behaviour (characterized non-intentionally). What is *not* subject to epistemic constraint, in my view, is the explanans: any facts whatsoever can be drawn on in constructing and confirming hypotheses about which attitudes and meanings serve to explain the observable behavior. (Of course, in order to receive an explanation in terms of attitudes and behavior, the behavior itself may need to be redescribed in intentional terms.) This gives us a clear sense in which interpreters are, by their very nature, epistemically limited, interested agents, without imposing any epistemic constraint on radical interpretation itself.

I have suggested (following Hawthorne) that there may well be a pragmatic role for the interpreter in interpretationism – and that this in turn precludes a full-blown reduction of intentionality (to physics). It is worth stressing, however, that the issue of reductionism is ultimately a methodological one. What is being claimed here is that (radical) interpretation is

6. Conclusion: An Anti-Reductionist Methodology

(perhaps unsurprisingly) a hermeneutic, or meaning-seeking endeavour (not an investigation into features of the causal order as such). This leaves an (ideologically) irreducible role for (arguably second-personal¹³) subjectivity in its practice. It is not being claimed, however, that the metaphysics of intentionality requires any fundamental addition to the furniture of the physical universe – supervenience or grounding claims relating the physical to the intentional may well be true!¹⁴ And of course, I have not embraced interpretationism here – I have only sought to clarify it, finding a role for the interpreter’s perspective.

REFERENCES

- Anscombe, E. (2000). *Intention*. 2nd edition, Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press.
- Avramides, A. (2020). Other Minds. In E. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2020 Edition), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2020/entries/other-minds/>.
- Ball, B. (forthcoming). Thought and Talk About Iterated Attitudes. In M. Hinton & P. Stalmaszczyk (eds.), *Philosophical Approaches to Meaning and Communication*. Bern: Peter Lang.
- Carroll, L. (2005). *Alice through the Looking Glass*. London: Walker Books.
- Chomsky, N. (1995). Language and Nature. *Mind*, 104 (413): 1-61.
- Davidson, D. (1970). Mental Events. In L. Foster & J.W. Swanson (eds.), *Experience and Theory*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 79-101; reprinted in D. Davidson (2001), *Essays on Actions and Events*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Davidson, D. (1973). Radical Interpretation. *Dialectica*, 3-4: 313-328.
- Dennett, D. (1978). *Brainstorms: Philosophical Essays on Mind and Psychology*. Montgomery (VT): Bradford Books.
- Dennett, D. (1981). True Believers: The Intentional Strategy and Why It Works. In A.F. Heath (ed.), *Scientific Explanation*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 150-167.
- Dennett, D. (1991). Real Patterns. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 88(1): 27-51.
- Glüer, K. (2018). Interpretation and the Interpreter: On the Role of the Interpreter in Davidsonian Foundational Semantics. In D. Ball & B. Rabern (eds.), *The Science of Meaning: Essays on the Metatheory of Natural Language Semantics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 226-252.
- Grice, P. (1989). *Studies in the Way of Words*. Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press.
- Hawthorne, J. (2007). Crazyiness and Metasemantics. *The Philosophical Review*, 116 (3): 427-440.
- Horgan, T., Tienson, J. (2002). The Intentionality of Phenomenology and the Phenomenology of Intentionality. In D. Chalmers (ed.), *Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 520-33.
- Kearns, S., Magidor, O. (2012). Semantic Sovereignty. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 85(2): 322-350.
- Kemp, G. (2012). *Quine versus Davidson: Truth, Reference, and Meaning*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lepore, E., Ludwig, K. (2005). *Donald Davidson: Meaning, Truth, Language, and Reality*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Lewis, D. (1974). Radical Interpretation. *Synthese*, 27(3/4): 331-344.

¹³ As indicated above, it is somewhat unclear whether this characterization can ultimately be upheld. For instance, Avramides (2020) helpfully discusses (descriptive) approaches to the problem of other minds, distinguishing the third personal theory theory, not only from the first personal simulation theory, but also from approaches that emphasize second-personal interaction. Yet, for all that has been said here, the interpreter need not engage in any interactions with the subject of interpretation.

¹⁴ In other words, Kearns and Magidor’s (2012) thesis of ‘semantic sovereignty’ (according to which the intentional facts are metaphysically independent of the physical facts) need not hold just because reductionism fails.

- Lewis, D. (1983). New Work for a Theory of Universals. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 61(4): 343-377.
- Lewis, D. (1984). Putnam's Paradox, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 62(3): 221-236.
- Locke, J. (1975). *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by P. Nidditch, Oxford: Oxford University Press. (Original work published in 1690).
- Millikan, R. (1984). *Language, Thought, and Other Biological Categories New Foundations for Realism*. Cambridge (MA): MIT Press.
- Montague, M. (2010). Recent Work on Intentionality. *Analysis*, 70(4): 765-782.
- Nagel, T. (1974). What is it Like to Be a Bat? *The Philosophical Review*, 83(4): 435-450.
- Nagel, T. (1989). *The View from Nowhere*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pautz, A. (forthcoming). Consciousness Meets Lewisian Interpretation Theory. In U. Kriegel (ed.), *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Mind*, vol. 1.
- Quine, W.V.O. (1960). *Word and Object*. Cambridge (MA): MIT Press.
- Sellars, W. (1956). Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind. *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, 1: 253-329.
- Simchen, O. (2017). Metasemantics and Singular Reference. *Nous*, 51(1): 175-195.
- Tollefsen, D.P. (2015). *Groups as Agents*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Tye, M. (1995). *Ten Problems of Consciousness*. Cambridge (MA): MIT Press.
- Williams, J.R.G. (2007). Eligibility and Inscrutability. *The Philosophical Review*, 116(3): 361-399.
- Williams, J.R.G. (2020). *The Metaphysics of Representation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Williamson, T. (2000). *Knowledge and Its Limits*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Williamson, T. (2007). *The Philosophy of Philosophy*. Hoboken (NJ): Wiley-Blackwell.
- Wittgenstein, L. (1953). *Philosophical Investigations*. Hoboken (NJ): Wiley-Blackwell.
- Zawidzki, T.W. (2015). Dennett's Strategy for Naturalizing Intentionality: An Innovative Play at Second Base. *Philosophia*, 43(3): 593-609.