

A HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION TO PHENOMENOLOGY

Seppo Sajama and Matti Kamppinen

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SEPPO SAJAMA AND MATTI KAMPPINEN



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Seppo Sajama and Matti Kamppinen

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Preface

This book is ultimately based on a course of lectures delivered by Seppo Sajama at the University of Turku in 1983. Matti Kamppinen was among the audience and it was his idea that the material should be published in book form. With the financial support of the Academy of Finland, we finally managed to arrange the haphazard lecture-notes into a book with some internal coherence and order.

One of our aims was to show that the problems that phenomenology deals with are not so queer and esoteric as one might think after reading phenomenologists of the old school, i.e. first and second generation pupils of Husserl. Therefore we wanted to show that many other philosophers who certainly cannot be called phenomenologists, e.g. Thomas Reid and Aquinas, held views that could be characterised as phenomenological. In calling their views phenomenological we mean merely that they described mental experiences from the standpoint of the experiencer himself. (Of course, we could not deal with all the philosophers who have said something of phenomenological interest.)

We were not so excited about many aspects of Husserl's philosophy which the orthodox phenomenologists take to be of primary interest, especially his complicated philosophical methodology with its various reductions. We laid the main emphasis on his theory of intentionality or of mental reference. In this decision we were deeply influenced by the writings of Føllesdal, Hintikka, Smith and McIntyre.

In order to give an adequate background to the Husserlian Content Theory of intentionality, we wanted to introduce Twardowski and Meinong as representatives of the competing Object Theory to the reader. The orthodox phenomenologists, who hold that phenomenology is more or less the same thing as the philosophy of Edmund Husserl and his pupils, would no doubt protest against calling Twardowski and Meinong phenomenologists at all. We, on the contrary, believe that there would be something very arbitrary in such a delimitation of the scope of 'phenomenology'.

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the Research and Documentation Center for Austrian Philosophy (Graz) and its staff for their kind co-operation.

We express our warm thanks to our colleagues at the Universities of Turku, Helsinki, Graz, Ljubljana and Zadar whose critical comments have helped us to avoid many mistakes. Last but not least, we are deeply indebted to Dr Barry Smith who revised our English and, above all, gave us many invaluable pieces of advice concerning the penultimate version of this book, which we tried to follow. The blunders in this ultimate version cannot be attributed to him.

Seppo Sajama
Matti Kamppinen
Turku

Part One

History of Content Theory

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Introduction

THE AIM OF THIS BOOK

Our aim in this book is to reconstruct the historical development of an idea. This idea is the Content Theory of intentionality (CT for short).

INTENTIONALITY

By ‘intentionality’ we mean the ability of the human mind to refer to objects outside itself. To put it bluntly, our view is that all mental states that contain in themselves a “picture” of an external object are intentional. (In medieval Latin, the word *intentio* meant, among other things, picture or idea.) When I see a cat I have a “picture” of the cat in my mind; when I wish it wouldn’t rain tomorrow I have in my mind a “picture” of tomorrow’s unwelcome rain and so on.

The scare quotes employed round the word ‘picture’ indicate that the word must not be taken too literally. Mental pictures (henceforward we shall use the term without quotes as a technical term) are of course not always as clear and distinct as photographs. If, for example, I *see* a cat, then the picture I have is clearer and richer in details than the picture that I shall have tomorrow when I remember my having seen the cat, not to mention the picture that is aroused in my mind by a story somebody tells about some cat which I have never seen.

The intentionality of the human mind is, then, its capacity to receive pictures from the external world and also to create new

pictures of its own (as is the case when I wish that it would not rain tomorrow).

It is important not to confuse this sense of the words 'intentionality' and 'intentional' with a more common use of the 'intentional' as a synonym for 'done on purpose'. When we say that a mental state (e.g. my seeing a cat) is intentional, we do not mean that this mental state is brought about on purpose. We mean only that the mental state contains a picture of its object in the sense defined above. Both mental states brought about on purpose (e.g. when we purposefully call up in memory somebody's name) and those occurring fortuitously are intentional in our present sense of this term: they contain a picture of their object.

There is also an alternative way of characterising intentionality. Instead of saying that intentional mental states contain a picture of their object, one could also say that intentional mental states are *directed* to their objects. For instance, when I see a cat, my act of seeing is directed to the cat; when I remember that I will have to visit the dentist tomorrow, my act of remembering is directed to this visit, and so on.

These two ways of characterising intentionality are equivalent, we shall argue, because a mental state can be directed to its object only if it contains a picture of it. Therefore it can be said that if a mental state contains a picture of an object it is, by the same token, directed to that object.

All mental acts of seeing, hearing, remembering, hoping, fearing, etc., contain a picture of the object seen, heard, remembered, hoped, feared, etc. Thus, it would seem, at least provisionally, that all mental acts are intentional.

MENTAL ACTS

When we use the term 'mental act' as a synonym of 'mental experience' or 'mental event' we do not suggest that the word 'act' implies any sort of *activity*. The opposite of the word 'act' used in this sense is not passivity but *potentiality*. Thus the term 'mental act' means a mental state that has been actualised in the mind, that is, a mental state that is present to consciousness. In addition to mental *acts* there are also non-actualised, merely potential, mental *states*. Thus for example everybody remembers his own name and address, but these pieces of

information are very seldom present to the mind; they are merely in store, ready to be actualised when needed. Thus the term 'mental state' is the general term covering both mental acts (occurrent mental states) and non-actualised (dispositional) mental states. As regards intentionality, there is no difference whatever between mental acts and non-actualised mental states: both are intentional precisely in the same sense. We shall therefore refer in what follows to mental acts, or even just to acts, though what we say will hold true also, *mutatis mutandis*, of non-actualised mental states as well.

THE STRUCTURE AND INDIVIDUATION OF MENTAL ACTS

To individuate something means to show what that thing is or which thing it is. When a thing is distinguished by a subject from all other things, it is already individuated. However, not all acts of distinguishing are acts of individuating. For example, even if one is able to distinguish roses from other flowers, one may still be unable to say to which particular variety of rose an individual rose belongs, let alone which individual rose it is.

Thus 'individuation' may mean either pointing out to which special class an individual belongs or pointing out which individual it is. The former sort of individuation is of course less stringent than the latter. We may call these two forms of individuation loose and strict individuation, respectively.

Material objects can be individuated (either strictly or loosely) in two different ways, either qualitatively, by describing the object so precisely that the description applies to only one object, or spatio-temporally, by indicating the unique location of the object in space and time. (In practice, both of these methods are used simultaneously, e.g. when saying 'That tall man with a black hat over there.')

The individuation of mental acts is a rather more difficult task. Here, too, there are two basic methods of individuation. One may either state whose act it is and when it occurs, or one may describe the act so precisely that the description applies to one act only. This latter method of individuation is philosophically more interesting. We may call it the *qualitative method of individuation*.

It is clear that qualitative individuation in regard to mental acts very rarely meets the standards of strict individuation, for it

is very difficult to describe an act by using general terms in such a way that one could be sure that this description applies to a single mental act alone. However, at least in theory there is no reason why such an individuating description could not be given to each act if one were prepared to take the trouble of describing one's act accurately enough.

But what are the properties of mental acts by means of which they are individuated, i.e. distinguished from one another? Before answering this question, it is useful to notice that intentionality is the common characteristic of mental acts and states that distinguishes them from other things: only mental states can include pictures of their objects, only mental states can be directed to their objects in our sense. Thus the stones at the bottom of the sea do not contain any pictures nor are they directed to anything.

It could be objected that there are non-mental things that quite literally *are* pictures, e.g. photographs, paintings and so on. To this we can only reply that it takes a human being to *interpret* them as pictures, i.e. as *signs* of something other than themselves. And a human being is a being with intentional states. He imposes an intentional interpretation on the 'dead matter' of photographs and paintings.

There are, however, many different ways of being directed to one and the same object: one may see a cat, or remember it, or love it, or hate it, and so on; or one may fear or hope or just consider the possibility that it will rain tomorrow, and so on. Or one's mind may be directed to different objects in one and the same way, e.g. one may *see* a cat, *see* a tree, *see* a cow, *see* a house and so on.

Simplifying the matter a little, we can say that a mental act has been individuated qualitatively when (1) we know to what object it is directed and (2) we know in what way it is directed thereto. In other words, we have qualitatively individuated a mental act when we have shown (1) its *object* and (2) its *psychological mode* (or attitude).

The structure of psychological sentences (i.e. sentences describing psychological states and acts) reflects the difference between mode and object in that the verb of the sentence indicates the former and the grammatical object of the sentence indicates the latter. Consider, for example, the sentences:

- (1) Peter *is afraid of* snakes

- (2) Peter *is afraid* that it will rain tomorrow
- (3) Peter *believes* that it will rain tomorrow
- (4) Peter *sees* snakes

where in each case the verb, expressing mode, is italicised. Notice that the object may be either propositional (i.e. expressible by a that-clause, as in cases (2) and (3)) or it may be non-propositional (i.e. expressible by a nominal expression, as in cases (1) and (4)).

We repeat: the object of a mental act does not suffice to individuate the act; one has to know the psychological mode (or attitude), too. If we know only that the object of Peter's mental act is the rain of tomorrow, we do not know the whole truth about his mental act: we do not know whether he wishes for it, is averse to it, or just believes, disinterestedly, that it will come.

When, however, we know both the mode and the object, then we have at least loosely individuated the mental act. More properly: we have individuated the *type* of the mental act. If we further know *whose* mental act it is, then we can be said to have *strictly* individuated the mental act, i.e. to have picked out the particular act itself. It should be noted however that this individuation is not purely qualitative since it has recourse to the person who is the bearer of the act in question, and clearly the bearer of the act is not a property thereof.

THE OBJECT THEORY OF INTENTIONALITY

OT and CT defined

There are two competing theories of intentionality: the Content Theory (CT) and the Object Theory (OT). Their main disagreement concerns their respective proposals as to the manner of individuating mental acts.

According to OT, mental acts are to be individuated by their psychological mode and their *object*. According to CT, mental acts are to be individuated by their psychological mode and their *content*. The content is, roughly, to be identified with what we referred to above as the picture that is contained in the mental act.

Since both parties accept the role of psychological mode in the individuation of mental acts, we have nothing further to add

on this point. We shall concentrate in what follows rather on the roles of the content and the object in the individuation of mental acts.

One could say, as a first approximation, that the difference between CT and OT consists in the fact that CT individuates mental acts by merely *intramental* means, without going outside the mind, while OT typically resorts to *extramental* entities in this job, since, at first sight, contents are intramental whereas objects are extramental.

Difficulties of OT

OT holds that all mental acts can be individuated by means of their objects (together with their psychological modes). This theory leads to difficulties when it tries to account for such special mental acts as misperceptions and hallucinations, for at least the latter, by definition, do not have extramental objects. And if somebody mistakenly perceives a dog to be a sheep, his perception cannot be individuated by its real object (the dog) because the person himself believes that he perceives a sheep. To give an exact account of the experience, one has to take the point of view of the person who has the experience. And from that point of view, the animal perceived is a sheep, not a dog. But as this sheep does not exist, it is difficult to see how the act could be individuated by it.

It is difficult to account also for imagination in terms of OT. Thus, if somebody imagines a centaur, then he imagines something that does not exist. But how can an experience be individuated by means of an object that does not exist? This would be as difficult as driving nails into a plank by means of a non-existent hammer.

At any rate, OT must give different accounts of veridical and non-veridical acts. For instance, the perception of the sun is individuated by its object, a certain existent heavenly body, whereas the imagining of a centaur must be individuated either by a non-existent centaur or by the intramental picture of a centaur (as in CT). But then, no matter which alternative is chosen, the account given of imagination will differ greatly from the account given of the perception of the sun.

It is true that OT can account perfectly well for veridical perceptions; if, however, one adopts the viewpoint of OT, one

thereby loses all possibility of accounting adequately for misperception, hallucination, imagination, expectation and many other acts that typically lack existing objects. By the same token, OT has lost the possibility of saying something general about *all* kinds of mental acts.

Of course the object theorist could argue, for example, that when one imagines a centaur, then the object of one's imagination is a centaur, but a non-existent one. We shall have occasion in the chapters that follow to examine a number of attempts along these lines on the part of the proponents of OT.

The theses of OT

OT can be summed up in the form of two theses:

- (OT1) A mental act is intentional if and only if it has an object.
- (OT2) The act is individuated by its object.

(OT1) is the fundamental thesis of OT. (OT2) is a methodological corollary of (OT1), for if (OT1) is true, then (OT2) is a natural answer to the question how mental acts are individuated. Yet (OT2) does not tell us whether the object is intramental or extramental; it leaves both possibilities open.

THE CONTENT THEORY OF INTENTIONALITY

The theses of CT

According to CT, mental acts are individuated by means of their contents (together with the relevant psychological modes). But what kind of entities are these contents? Above we said, as a first approximation, that contents are the pictures contained in mental acts.

This characterisation will do for our present purposes, but in the following chapters we shall see that it must be modified. However, there is one important thing that must be remembered about contents: *a mental act is directed not to its content but, via its content, to its object.*