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## **INTENTIONALITY IN KANT AND WITTGENSTEIN**

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How is thought about and experience of a world possible? This has been the framing question of the present work and it is generally understood as the problem of intentionality. The more specific problem dealt with has been whether or not intentionality has an internal structure that can be made explicit through science, particularly cognitive science. In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Immanuel Kant outlines an internal, mental structure that, when imposed on our sensory data, makes thought about and experience of a world possible, which can be viewed as highly anticipatory of modern cognitive science. On the other hand, there are a number of philosophers who have it that the structure of intentionality cannot be made explicit nor can it be understood within science, notably Ludwig Wittgenstein. His later view is that the structure of intentionality can only be made sense of within the context of a shared, public language. If this is the case then it seems as if cognitive science ought to move on to a different problem. Exploration of the views of these two notable philosophers is critical if we are to come to a decision about the particular problem of the structure of intentionality, as well as the more general problem of intentionality. I have tried, in the present work, to make a case similar to that of Wittgenstein whereby all we have to do is look at the practices within our community of speakers to see the structure of intentionality.

As a unique feature of our existence, humans have an inner mental life which is characterized by various kinds of states. Broadly speaking, we call these states thoughts, but they can be and are further parsed into a number of different and more descriptive states, i.e. beliefs, desires, intentions, fears, hopes, and so on. So, one of my mental states may be my fear that my car may not start in the morning.

A further feature of mental states is the fact that they have content, that is, they are always about or directed at something. This 'aboutness' relation is called 'intentionality' and it is characterized by intentional content. This is not to be confused with intending that something come to pass, for example, my intention that I go to work in the morning. This intention exhibits, but is not, intentionality. Intentionality is a feature common among our mental states and their 'directedness' or 'aboutness.' So, in the previous examples, the intentional content of my fear was that my car possibly does not start and the content of my intention was that I go to work in the morning.

At first gloss this may seem unproblematic because the world and our thoughts about it are already structured and contentful. For instance when I perceive a flat surface under my feet that seems to have an oddly shaped lump sticking up out of it, I know that I am perceiving a table which is setting upon the floor. But here questions arise. How does it come to pass that I think of the table and the floor as distinct? That is, how do thoughts come to intend the world in the way that they do? How does something, a mental state, which is principally an inner phenomenon, get together, in the way it does, with something, the world, which is principally an external phenomena? How does something in my head pick out something outside of my head?

This is precisely the problem the 18<sup>th</sup> century German philosopher Immanuel Kant is concerned with in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. He asks, how is thought about and experience of a world possible? Past replies to this question came from two very different camps; the rationalist, exemplified by the 17<sup>th</sup> century French philosopher Rene Descartes, and the empiricist, exemplified by the 17<sup>th</sup> century Scottish philosopher David Hume. I will begin with Descartes' treatment and then Hume's treatment of the problem of intentionality. I will show how Kant responds to problems Descartes and Hume raise. Finally, I will show how the 20<sup>th</sup> century Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein responds to a problem in Kant, a problem he inherits from Descartes and Hume.

For Descartes, the mind and its contents were immune from doubt. We may be skeptical about whether there is a world that our thoughts mirror but not about whether we have thoughts. We have direct, non-inferential access to the mind and its contents whereas access to the world, is indirect and mediated by our intentional consciousness, by mental contents. In the *Meditations* Descartes argues this by appeal to the possibility that he is dreaming and by appeal to a piece of wax.<sup>1</sup> He is immediately and non-inferentially aware of his experience and his thoughts about it; for example, that it is experience of a piece of wax that endures through changes from a candle to a molten puddle. But, says Descartes, this experience is consistent with dreaming about the wax rather than perceiving an existing piece of wax. That his experience is experience of a physical world, rather than a dreamt world, is not something immediately or directly known by attending carefully to what goes on in consciousness. Moreover that the wax is thought about as one object that endures through change is not something settled by appeal to experience. That experience is also consistent with thinking about the wax as two distinct objects at different moments in time. So, Descartes could not by appeal to

experience explain why he thought about his piece of wax as a single object that endured through change and as an object that existed in a spatial world and not merely in a dream world.

Descartes thinks that either intentional content, an idea, is derived from experience or it is built into the structure of the mind, it is innate. Since it is not derived from experience it must be innate. He thinks innate ideas are implanted in the mind by God. Simple innate ideas can be combined to produce more complex ideas.<sup>2</sup> So, for example, I have the idea of a house, which is built up from the innate ideas of size, shape, and color. The content of these derivative ideas is drawn from the content of the original ideas on which they are based.

To summarize, according to Descartes, the mind is already populated by innate ideas. So, when we have a perception of an object in the world innate ideas determine how we understand the object. We apply the concept wax properly to a piece of wax in the world because we have an idea of wax already built into our mind. Descartes does not want to deny the empirical world, he simply thinks it insufficient to produce ideas. We must draw the content of ideas not from experience but from the innate structure of the mind.

This is the paradigmatic rationalist account of intentionality. Now let's take a look at the opposing, empiricist viewpoint, drawn from David Hume. The empiricist Hume says that experience is everything and that the mind is simply a tool for receiving, manipulating and storing sensory information, impressions. This sensory information can be drawn from both internal sense (e.g. the sensations of pain or hunger) or external sense (e.g. seeing a tree or hearing a saxophone).<sup>3</sup>

For Hume, ideas are mere copies of impressions. Impressions are more lively, vivacious and distinct than ideas but they are not different in kind from ideas. So, when I see the bright green leaves on a tree, feel hungry, or love someone, I am having impressions. There is nothing, no content in ideas that is not found in impressions. This contrasts with Descartes who thought the content of ideas, their intentional content, could not be derived from sensory impressions, since the impressions were consistent with different ideas, different intentionality.

Beliefs about the world are founded, says Hume, on the relation of cause and effect. So, for example, my belief that there is a barn in the yard is the result not of the impressions but of the association of, for example, visual impressions and tactile impressions. It is this association among impressions that provides resource for the idea to be about a barn in the yard and not simply an imagined or hallucinated barn.<sup>4</sup> Visual impressions of Descartes' wax as tall and cylindrical is associated with tactile impressions of its size and shape. So, I think of it as something that exists in space and not something imagined or hallucinated.

For Hume, we can say that all of the form and content of our ideas is drawn from experience. He thinks that there is enough form and sufficient content in experience to make sense of it without appeal to anything further in the mind. He thinks that explanation of intentionality, of the intentional content of ideas comes to an end by drawing attention to the sensory character of experience, however one is left wondering where experience got its form? Where, for example, does the experience of Descartes' candle get the structure such that the tall and cylindrical object is understood to be experience of the same thing that is later a little puddle. On the other hand and against

Descartes, one wonders how his innate idea of wax, an idea having only form, lacking any sensory content, could come to be applicable to, be about a sensible world.

For Descartes, innate ideas give shape to our sensory information, but why do they shape it in the way that they do? They have no sensory content that would help and any sensory information can be variously understood. Why, then, does an innate idea of wax organize the wax as a tall candle and the wax as a molten puddle into a single object, rather than organize the sensory data into two discrete objects? Why does the innate idea of a table not include part of the floor? Since the idea is pure form, there seems to be nothing to preclude the wax being two objects or the table and the floor being one object. Descartes gives us form but not content.

By contrast, Hume, though he thinks he has given us both form and content, has just given us content. His problem is the converse of Descartes'. For Hume sensory experience is all we have to work with, that is, we just have impressions. But we need to know how they give rise to ideas, how they get formed.

It is these two problems that lead Kant to say in the opening paragraphs of *The Critique of Pure Reason*, "Intuitions without concepts are blind and concepts without intuitions are empty."<sup>5</sup> To make use of the terminology used thus far, content without form is indeterminate and form without content is empty. So, Descartes' innate ideas are empty forms and Hume's impressions are unformed content.

Recognizing these problems, Kant begins his account with the supposition that in order to properly account for intentionality we must have both form and content. Further, the form must be distinct from the content and vice versa, otherwise we have only content, like Hume, or form, like Descartes.

To accomplish this, Kant thinks there must be categories of the understanding which give form to the objects of our thoughts and sensibility which provides content to the categories.<sup>6</sup> But now we have the following problem, how is it that the categories of the understanding and sensibility get together, in the way that they do? For Kant, this is the task of what he calls the schema. The schema brings the categories and sensibility together by incorporating elements of both.<sup>7</sup>

To put this into clearer view, let's look at an example. I am having the impression of a barn in the yard. In order for my thoughts to be about, to intend, the barn, my sensibility must be affected by the barn. Further the impressions given in sensibility must fit under a concept, a category. But now the impression and the concept must be brought together in order for there to be a thought about the barn, a thought with the intentional content, 'a barn in the yard.' For Kant then, intentionality is a product of the formalizing activity of the mind being imposed on a world of formless content. And these must be brought together. What Kant calls the schema performs this role.

There is a problem with this account however. It arises in Kant's discussion of the schema. The problem is this; it seems as if what Kant has done is simply incorporate the categories and impressions given in sensibility into a single entity, a schema. The initial problem found with Descartes was how to get content or conditions of application from ideas without any sensory content. The problem with Hume was how to get form for sensory impressions when alternative forms, alternative ways of understanding are consistent with those impressions. Kant tries to overcome the problem by simply incorporating both elements, form and sensory impression, into a single item, a schema. This is similar to the following. Suppose one has two objects, A and B, and one needs to

fit them together. Puzzled about how they might fit together one then proposes that a third object, C, be imagined which is a combination of A and B. Clearly, this yields no understanding about how A and B get together, so we need a different account.

Wittgenstein tries, in his *Philosophical Investigations*, to answer Kant's problem by appeal to behavior, importantly, linguistic behavior. It is here that Wittgenstein thinks that form and content come together, however they are better described as the horizontal and vertical dimensions of language, respectively.<sup>8</sup>

The horizontal dimension of language expresses the form of a thing. For example, "Red is the name of a color," or "Red, like all colors, is the visual aspect of shape." These statements and the verbal expression of them, exhibit what kind of thing 'red' is. These statements tell us the form of the concept red. On the other hand, the vertical dimension of language expresses how a thing is applied to the world. So saying, "The fire engine is red," or "The apple is red," that is, applying red to the fire engine or the apple, give the vertical dimension. These actions exhibit how red is applied to objects of experience.

This distinction in language solves Kant's problem in the following way. Kant had two distinct things that he needed to bring together. Wittgenstein simply has two different abstractions from the same activity, linguistic behavior.<sup>9</sup> We do things like sort things into different colors. We say things like 'The apple is red.' These activities can be understood only if they have both a horizontal and a vertical dimension. So now we see there are no longer two different things, form and content, that need to be brought together, simply one activity with two dimensions.

Endnotes:

1. Arieu, Roger and Eric Watkins (Eds.), *Modern Philosophy, An Anthology of Primary Sources*, Hackett Publishing, Inc., 1998, pgs. 32-33.
2. Arieu, Roger and Eric Watkins (Eds.), *Modern Philosophy, An Anthology of Primary Sources*, Hackett Publishing, Inc., 1998, pg. 37.
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5. Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Cambridge University Press, 1998. pgs. 193-194.
6. Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Cambridge University Press, 1998. pgs. 210-214.
7. Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Cambridge University Press, 1998. pgs. 271-277.
8. This way of talking about Wittgenstein's view is drawn from Hubert Schwyzer's *The Unity of Understanding*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1990.
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