we have a formula, and a case comes along in which it disagrees with our heads? Shall we then use our heads? I would say, yes—provided the psychological situation is as clear as a broken leg; otherwise, very, very seldom.

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REFERENCES

APPENDIX

Intentionality and the Mental

Introduction by Wilfrid Sellars

The traditional mind-body problem is, as Herbert Feigl has amply demonstrated in his contribution to this volume, a veritable tangle of tangles. At first sight but one of the ‘problems of philosophy,’ it soon turns out, as one picks at it, to be nothing more nor less than the philosophical enterprise as a whole. Yet if, to the close-up view of the philosopher at work, it soon becomes a bewildering crisscross of threads leading in all directions, it is possible to discern, on standing off, a number of distinguishable regions which, though but vaguely defined, provide relatively independent access to the whole. It is in this spirit that Feigl distinguishes, early in his essay, some of the major component perplexities which go to make up this ‘world knot.’ It is only after drawing these distinctions, and indicating the general strategy with which he would approach the others, that he settles down to a painstaking analysis of the relation of what might be called ‘sensory consciousness’ (sensations, images, tickles, itchies, etc.) to the body and, in particular, to the central nervous system.

Now it is not to be doubted that the task of clarifying conceptual puzzles concerning the status of sensory consciousness in the various frameworks (ordinary discourse, molar ‘psychophysics,’ the unified micro-theory of human behavior which, in outline, we can already dimly discern) in which it appears, is one of the most difficult and intriguing in philosophy. That it is often thought to be simple is but one more expression of the simplistic empiricism which flourished in the thirties and, having made their contribution, are fading from the scene. On the other hand, as Feigl has emphasized, this task is, after all, but one strand in the world knot; and no collection of essays on philosophical topics pertaining to psychology can hope to be balanced, let alone complete, without some exploration of the other strands.

Of these other strands there are many, and most of them are well represented in the first two volumes of this series. There is, however, one major strand which, of central concern to the philosopher who wishes to locate the aims and methods of scientific psychology in the totality of discourse about ‘docile organisms,’ has received relatively short shrift—not because its importance was overlooked, but because it played a less controversial role in Center discussions than the more immediate issues of concept formation and theory construction in scientific psychology itself. This strand is known traditionally as the problem of ‘intentionality,’ that is to say, the problem of interpreting the status of the reference to objects and states of affairs, actual or possible, past, present or future, which is involved in the very meaning of the ‘mentalist’ vocabulary of everyday life. Believing, desiring, intending, loving, hating, reasoning, approving—and, indeed, all characteristically human states and dispositions above the level of mere sensory consciousness—cannot be explicated without encountering such reference or aboutness. It lurks in such notions as that of ‘behavioral’ (as contrasted with ‘geographical’) environment, and in the non-technical use of such terms as ‘goal,’ ‘anticipatory,’ and ‘expectancy’ which have become technical terms in behavioristically oriented psychology. And while in their technical use
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they may be explicitly introduced in terms of observables pertaining to overt behavior which no more contain the notion of reference or aboutness than do the observables of, say, physical theory, the problem remains of the relation between concepts so constructed and the mentalistic vocabulary with which the enterprise began.

This problem is, perhaps, best put in terms of a concrete example. Someone correctly and truly says, using the language of everyday life, “Jones believes that there is a round table in the room” (“There is a round table in his immediate behavioral environment’); and a (somewhat idealized) psychologist, using concepts which have been aseptically introduced on a basis of concepts pertaining to overt behavior, describes Jones by formulating the sentence “S is in behavioral state ¥4.” In some sense the psychologist is describing the same situation as is his common-sense counterpart. Now the situation as described by the latter includes aboutness or reference. Does the situation as described by the psychologist also include aboutness or reference? If so, it can only be because aboutness or reference is constructable out of the aseptic primitives to which he has restricted himself (together, of course, with the resources of logics and mathematics). If not, would it not (perhaps) follow that behavioristically oriented psychology leaves something out of its picture of what human beings are; that at most it describes the bodily correlates of mental states and dispositions, which latter would constitute a unique set of facts accessible only to introspection and beyond the scope of intersubjective science?

Now, I think that all psychologists who have reflected on mentalistic discourse to the deliberately contrived language of scientific psychology have had their hunches on this matter. These hunches have been built around two themes: (1) behavioristically oriented psychology is not doomed to give an incomplete picture of the human animal (at least as far as the ‘higher processes’ are concerned—the other fellow’s tickles have caused more trouble); (2) the key to the behavioristic account of the ‘higher processes’ is verbal behavior. But these hunches, sound though they may be, and effective though they may be as dykes behind which to go about the journeyman task of building scientific psychology, do not answer the questions which must be faced now that the building has risen high enough to permit a view of the landscape outside.

It is clear that before one can hope to answer the question, ‘Is behavioristics doomed to leave something out of its picture of the human animal, something which is included in the picture painted by ordinary mentalistic discourse?’ he must have arrived at an understanding of the descriptive force of this mentalistic vocabulary. The simplest account, unfortunately incorrect, would be that mentalistic terms in ordinary usage are used, albeit with an open texture and an informal reliance on the context of utterance more suitable to practical than to theoretical purposes, out of behavioral primitives. If so, the language of behavioristics would simply be ‘more of the same’ and there could be no question of its leaving reference or aboutness out of its picture of human behavior.

But if the ‘simplest account’—that of Philosophical Behaviorism—won’t do, then the problem exists in all its urgency. And there are not wanting those who insist that the only alternative to Philosophical Behaviorism is the view, as we put it, that a behavioristically oriented psychology can at most describe the bodily correlates of mental states and dispositions. (That this ‘at most’ would represent a magnificent achievement, nobody, of course, would deny.)

In my essay “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind,” printed in the first volume of this series, I sought to answer these questions, though in little space, and as but one part of a far more complex argument. I offered an account of the logic of ordinary mentalistic discourse designed to show in exactly what sense it includes something (namely reference or aboutness) in its picture of human beings which is not to be found in the language of behavioristics. On the assumption that success in interpreting the force of such a basic mentalistic statement as “It suddenly occurred to Jones that he was alone,” or, in general, statements of the form “S had the thought that p,” would provide the key to the understanding of such more complicated mental states and dispositions as believing, desiring, approving, and being self-centered, I attempted to explicate the status, in the mentalistic framework, of certain basic episodes which I called ‘thoughts’ (§§46–47).

Roughly my argument consisted of four stages. In the first I began by arguing (§§53–54) for the legitimacy of theoretical concepts in behavioristic psychology, and then (§56) suggested that our pre-scientific or common sense concepts of “inner” (mental) episodes began as something analogous to theoretical concepts introduced to explain certain forms of observable behavior. In the second (§§50–51) I explored the force of statements of the form illustrated by “‘Rot!’ (in German) means red” and argued that these statements, instead of describing words as standing in ‘the meaning relation’ to things, do not describe at all, but simply translate. In the third I characterized (§§51–52) the role of models in theory construction, and then (§§56–58) argued that it is a mode of discourse built around this translating rubric, in short semantical discourse, discourse about ‘the meaning of a word’, ‘the truth of a statement’, etc., which functioned as the model in the pre-scientific genesis of our everyday mentalistic framework. In the fourth and final stage I argued (§59) that though the framework of thoughts began as a ‘theory’ and was used as theories are used, it subsequently acquired, in a manner the general principle of which is readily understood, a reporting role.

I concluded by claiming that “this story helps us understand that concepts pertaining to such inner episodes as thoughts are primarily and essentially intersubjective, as intersubjective as the concept of a positron, and that the reporting role of these concepts—the fact that each of us has a privileged access to his thoughts—constitutes a dimension of the use of these concepts which is built on and presupposes this intersubjective status . . . . It also makes clear that the ‘privacy’ of ‘inner episodes’ is not an absolute privacy. For if it recognizes that these concepts have a reporting use in which one is not drawing inferences from behavioral evidence, it nevertheless insists that the fact that overt behavior is evidence for these episodes is built into the very logic of these concepts, just as the fact that the observable behavior of gasses is evidence for molecular episodes is built into the very logic of molecule talk” (pp. 320–321).

As soon as the page proof was available, I sent a copy of this essay to Professor Roderick Chisholm, who has long shared my interest in the problem of intentionality, and has written penetratingly on the subject, though from a more conservative point of view. I was anxious to learn if this new twist to my argument would convince him of the essential soundness of my approach, as my previous papers on the topic had not. His friendly remarks encouraged me to make a further try for agreement, and the end result was the correspondence which is printed at the end of this Appendix, and is its raison d’etre. There was at the time no thought of publication, and it was only some months after the last of the letters had been written, when the present volume was already being prepared for the press, that the possibility was broached. Once the project was underway, Professor Chisholm kindly consented to edit his recent Aristotelian Society paper on ‘Sentences about Believing’ for republication as a background for his side of the controversy.

NOTES

1 Pp. 370ff of the present volume.
Appendix

Sentences about Believing by Roderick M. Chisholm

1. “I can look for him when he is not there, but not hang him when he is not there.” The first of these activities, Brentano would have said, is intentional; it may take as its object something which does not exist. But the second activity is “merely physical”; it cannot be performed unless its object is there to work with. “Intentionality,” he thought, provides us with a mark of what is psychological.

I shall try to reformulate Brentano’s suggestion by describing one of the ways in which we need to use language when we talk about certain psychological states and events. I shall refer to this use as the “intentional use” of language. It is a kind of use we can avoid when we talk about non-psychological states and events.

In the interests of a philosophy contrary to that of Brentano, many philosophers and psychologists have tried to show, in effect, how we can avoid intentional language when we wish to talk about psychology. I shall discuss some of these attempts in so far as they relate to the sorts of things we wish to be able to say about believing. I believe that these attempts have so far been unsuccessful. And I think that this fact may provide some reason for saying, with Brentano, that “intentionality” is a mark of what is psychological.

2. In order to formulate criteria by means of which we can identify the “intentional” use of language, let us classify sentences as simple and compound. For our purposes I think it will be enough to say that a compound sentence is one composed from two or more sentences by means of propositional connectives, such as “and”, “or”, “if-then”, “although”, and “because”. A simple sentence is one which is not compound. Examples of simple sentences are “He is thinking of the Dnieper Dam,” “She is looking for a suitable husband for her daughter,” “Their car lacks a spare wheel,” and “He believes that it will rain.” I shall formulate three criteria for saying that simple declarative sentences are intentional, or are used intentionally.

(a) A simple declarative sentence is intentional if it uses a substantival expression—a name or a description—in such a way that neither the sentence nor its contradictory implies either that there is or that there isn’t anything to which the substantival expression truly applies. The first two examples above are intentional by this criterion. When we say that a man is thinking of the Dnieper Dam, we do not imply either that there is or that there isn’t such a dam; similarly when we deny that he is thinking of it. When we say that a lady is looking for a suitable husband for her daughter, we do not commit ourselves to saying that her daughter will, or that she will not, have a suitable husband; and similarly when we deny that the lady is looking for one. But the next sentence in our list of examples—“Their car lacks a spare wheel”—is not intentional. It is true that, if we affirm this sentence, we do not commit ourselves to saying either that there are or that there are not any spare wheels. But if we deny the sentence, affirming “Their car does not lack a spare wheel,” then we imply that there is a spare wheel somewhere.

(b) We may describe a second type of intentional use by reference to simple sentences the principal verb of which takes as its object a phrase containing a subordinate verb. The subordinate verb may follow immediately upon the principal verb, as in “He is contemplating killing himself”; it may occur in a complete clause, as in “He believes it will rain”; it may occur in an infinitive, as in “He wishes to speak”; or it may occur in participial form, as in “He accused John of stealing the money” and “He asked John’s brother to testify against him.” I shall say that such a simple declarative sentence is intentional if neither the sentence nor its contradictory implies either that the phrase following the principal verb is true or that it is false. “He is contemplating killing himself” is intentional, according to this second criterion, because neither it nor its denial implies either that he does or that he doesn’t kill himself; similarly with our other examples. But “He prevented John from stealing the money” is not intentional, because it implies that John did not steal the money. And “He knows how to swim” is not intentional, because its denial implies that he isn’t swimming.

Sometimes people use substantial expressions in place of the kind of phrases I have just been talking about. Instead of saying, “I want the strike to be called off,” they may say, “The strike’s being called off is what I want.” The latter sentence could be said to be intentional according to our first criterion, for neither the sentence nor its contradictory implies either that “there is such a thing as” the strike’s being called off, or that there isn’t—that is to say, neither implies that the strike will be, or that it will not be, called off.

Many intentional sentences of our first type may be rewritten in such a way that they become instances of our second type. Instead of saying “I would like a glass of water,” one may say “I would like to have a glass of water.” And instead of saying “He is looking for the Fountain of Youth,” one may say “He is trying to find the Fountain of Youth.” But some sentences of the first type seem to resist such transformation into the second type; for example, “I was thinking about you yesterday.”

(c) If we make use of Frege’s concept of “indirect reference,” which is, of course, closely related to that of “intentionality,” we can add another important class of sentence to our list of those which are intentional. “Indirect reference” may be defined, without using the characteristic terms of Frege’s theory of meaning, in the following way: a name (or description) of a certain thing has an indirect reference in a sentence if its replacement by a different name (or description) of that thing results in a sentence whose truth-value may differ from that of the original sentence. It is useful to interpret this criterion in such a way that we can say of those names (or descriptions), such as “the Fountain of Youth” and “a building half again as tall as the Empire State”, which don’t apply to anything, that they are all names of the same thing. Let us add, then, that a simple declarative sentence is intentional if it contains a name (or description) which has an indirect reference in that sentence. We can now say of certain cognitive sentences—sentences which use words such as “know”, “remember”, “see”, “perceive”, in one familiar way—that they, too, are intentional. I may see that Albert is here and Albert may be the man who will win the prize; but I do not now see that the man who will win the prize is here. And we all remember that although George IV knew that Scott was the author of Marmion he did not know that Scott was the author of Waverley.

(d) With respect to the intentionality of compound sentences—sentences constructed by means of propositional connectives from two or more sentences—it is enough to say this: a compound declarative sentence is intentional if and only if one or more of its component sentences is intentional. “I will be gratified if I learn that Albert wins the prize” is intentional, because the if-clause is intentional. But “The career of Ponce de Leon would have been most remarkable if he had found the Fountain of Youth” is not intentional, because neither of its components is intentional. (In order that this final criterion be applicable to sentences in the subjunctive, we should, of course, interpret it to mean a compound declarative sentence is intentional if and only if one or more of the component sentences of its indicative version is intentional.)

3. We may now formulate a thesis resembling that of Brentano by referring to intentional language. Let us say (1) that we do not need to use intentional language when we describe non-psychological, or “physical,” phenomena; we can express all that we know, or believe, about such phenomena in language which is not intentional. And let us say (2) that, when we wish to describe certain psychological phenomena—in particular, when we wish to describe thinking, believing, perceiving, seeing, knowing, wanting, hoping and the like—either (a) we must use language which
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is intentional or (b) we must use a vocabulary which we do not need to use when
we describe non-psychological, or “physical,” phenomena.

I shall discuss this linguistic version of Brentano’s thesis with reference to sentences
about believing. I do not pretend to be able to show that it is true in its application
to believing. But I think that there are serious difficulties, underestimated by many
philosophers, which stand in the way of showing that it is false.

I wish to emphasize that my question does not concern “subsistence” or “the
being of objects which don’t exist.” Philosophers may ask whether it is possible to
think about unicorns if there are no unicorns for us to think about. They may also
ask whether you and I can believe “the same thing” if there is no proposition or
objective toward which each of our beliefs is directed. But I am not raising these
questions. Possibly the feeling that the intentional use of language commits us to
the assumption that there are such entities is one motive for seeking to avoid such
use. But I wish to ask only whether we can avoid such use and at the same time
say all that we want to be able to say about believing.

4. The first part of our thesis states that we do not need to use intentional lan-
guage when we describe non-psychological, or “physical,” phenomena. I do not
believe that this statement presents any serious difficulty. It is true that we do some-
times use intentional sentences in non-psychological contexts. The following sentences,
for example, are all intentional, according to our criteria, but none of them
describe anything we would want to call “psychological”: “The patient will be
immune from the effects of any new epidemics” and “It is difficult to assemble a
prefabricated house.” But these sentences are not examples counter to our thesis. Any-
one who understands the language can readily transform them into conditionals which
are not intentional. (A compound sentence, it should be recalled, is intentional only
if it has a component which is intentional.) Instead of using intentional sentences, we
could have said, “If there should be any new epidemics, the patient would not be
affected by them” and “If anyone were to assemble a prefabricated house, he would
have difficulties.” (Perhaps the last sentence should be rendered as “If anyone were
to try to assemble a prefabricated house, he would have difficulties.” In this version
the sentence is intentional, once again, but since it contains the verb “to try” it can
no longer be said to be non-psychological.)

I believe that any other ostensibly non-psychological sentence which is intentional
can be transformed, in an equally obvious way, into a sentence conforming to our
version of Brentano’s thesis. That is to say, it will become a sentence of one of two
possible types: either (a) it will be no longer intentional or (b) it will be explicitly
psychological. Sentences about probability may be intentional, but, depending upon
one’s conception of probability, they may be transformed either into the first or into
the second type. If I say “It is probable that there is life on Venus,” neither my
sentence nor its denial implies either that there is life on Venus or that there is not.
According to one familiar interpretation of probability, my sentence can be trans-
formed into a non-intentional sentence about frequencies—sentences telling about
places where there is life and places where there isn’t and comparing Venus with such
places, etc. According to another interpretation, my sentence can be transformed into
a psychological statement about believing—e.g., “It is reasonable for us to believe
that there is life on Venus.” Intentional sentences about tendencies and purposes in
nature may be treated similarly. If we say, non-intentionally, “The purpose of the
liver is to secrete bile,” we may mean, psychologically, that the Creator made the liver
so that it would secrete bile, or we may mean, non-intentionally, that in most live
animals having livers the liver does do this work and that when it does not the
animal is unhealthy.

There are people who like to ascribe beliefs, perceptions, plans, desires, and the
like to robots and computing machinery. A computing machine might be said to
believe, truly, that 7 and 5 are 12; when it is out of order, it may be said to make

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mistakes and possibly to believe, falsely, that 7 and 5 are 11. But such sentences,
once again, are readily transformed into other sentences, usually conditional, which
are no longer intentional. If a man says that the machine believes 7 and 5 to be 11,
he may mean merely that, if the keys marked “7” and “5” are pressed, the machine
will produce a slip on which “11” is marked. Other intentional sentences about the
attitudes of machines may be more complex, but I’m sure that, if they have been
given any meaning by those who use them, they can be readily transformed into
sentences which are not intentional. Indeed the ease with which robot sentences may be
made either intentional or non-intentional may be one ground, or cause, for believing
that sentences about the attitudes of human beings may readily be transformed in
ways counter to our version of Brentano’s thesis.

It should be noted, with respect to those universal sentences of physics which have
no “existential import,” that they are not intentional. It is true that the sentence,
“All moving bodies not acted upon by external forces continue in a state of uniform
motion in a straight line,” does not imply either that there are, or that there are not,
such bodies. But its contradictory implies that there are such bodies.

5. The second part of our version of Brentano’s thesis states that, when we wish to
describe anyone’s believing, seeing, knowing, wanting, and the like, either (a) we
must use language which is intentional or (b) we must use a vocabulary we don’t
need when we talk about non-philosophical facts.

Perhaps the most instructive way of looking at our thesis is to contrast it with one
which is slightly different. It has often been said, in recent years, that “the language
of physical things” is adequate for the description of psychological phenomena—this
language being any language whose vocabulary and rules are adequate for the descrip-
tion of non-psychological phenomena. If we do not need intentional language for
describing physical things, then this counter-theory—the thesis that the language of
physical things is adequate for the description of psychological phenomena—would
imply that we do not need intentional language for the description of psychological
phenomena.

The easiest way to construct a non-intentional language for psychology is to tele-
scope nouns and verbs. Finding a psychological verb, say “expects,” and its gram-
matical object, say “food,” we may manufacture a technical term by combining the
two. We may say that the rat is “food-expectant” or that he “has a food-expectancy.”
Russell once proposed that, instead of saying “I perceive a cat,” we say “I am cat-
perceipient,” and Professor Ryle has described a man seeing a thimble by saying that
the man “is having a visual sensation in a thimble-seeing frame of mind.” Sentences
about thinking, believing, desiring, and the like could readily be transformed in sim-
ilar ways. But this way of avoiding intentional language has one serious limitation.
If we wish to tell anyone what our technical terms mean, we must use intentional
language again. Russell did not propose a definition of his technical term “cat-perceipient”
in familiar non-intentional terms; he told us, in effect, that we should call a person
“cat-perceipient” whenever the person takes something to be a cat. Our version of
Brentano’s thesis implies that, if we dispense with intentional language in talking about
perceiving, believing, and expecting, we must use a vocabulary we don’t need
to use when we talk about non-psychological facts. The terms “food-expectancy,”
thimble-seeing frame of mind,” and “cat-perceipient” illustrate such a vocabulary.

I shall comment upon three general methods philosophers and psychologists have
used in their attempts to provide “physical” translations of belief sentences. The first
of these methods makes use of the concepts of “specific response” and “appropriate
behavior”; references to these concepts appeared in the writings of the American “New
Realists” and can still be found in the works of some psychologists. The second
method refers to “verbal behavior”; its clearest statement is to be found in Professor
Ayer’s Thinking and Meaning. The third refers to a peculiar type of “fulfillment” or
“satisfaction”; its classic statement is William James’ so-called pragmatic theory of
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truth. I shall try to show that, if we interpret these various methods as attempts to show that our version of Brentano’s thesis is false, then we can say that they are inadequate. I believe that the last of these methods—the one which refers to “fulfillment” or “satisfaction”—is the one which has the best chance of success.

6. When psychologists talk about the behavior of animals, they sometimes find it convenient to describe certain types of response in terms of the stimuli with which such responses are usually associated. A bird’s “nesting responses” might be defined by reference to what the bird does in the presence of its nest and on no other occasions. A man’s “rain responses,” similarly, might be defined in terms of what he does when and only when he is in the rain. I believe we may say that some of the American “New Realists” assumed that, for every object of which a man can be said ever to be conscious, there is some response he makes when and only when he is in the presence of that object—some response which is specific to that object. And they felt that the specific response vocabulary—“rain response”, “fire response”, “cat response”—provided a way of describing belief and the other types of phenomena Brentano would have called “intentional.” This “specific response theory” is presupposed in some recent accounts of “sign behavior.”

I think Brentano would have said that, if smoke is a sign to me of fire, then my perception of smoke causes me to believe that there is a fire. But if we have a specific response vocabulary available, we might say this: smoke is a sign to me of fire provided smoke calls up my fire responses. We might then say, more generally, that S is a sign of E for O provided only S calls up O’s E-responses. But what would O’s E-responses be?

What would a man’s fire responses be? If smoke alone can call up his fire responses—as it may when it serves as a sign of fire—we can no longer say that his fire responses are the ways he behaves when and only when he is stimulated by fire. For we want to be able to say that he can make these responses in the presence of smoke and not of fire. Should we modify our conception of “fire response”, then, and say that a man’s fire responses are responses which are like those—which are similar to those—he makes when stimulated by fire? This would be saying too much, for in some respects every response he makes is like those he makes in the presence of fire. All of his responses, for example, are alike in being the result of neural and physiological events. But we don’t want to say that all of the man’s responses are fire responses. It is not enough, therefore, to say that a man’s fire responses are similar to those he makes, or would make, in the presence of fire; we must also specify the respect in which they are similar. But no one, I believe, has been able to do this.

The problem isn’t altered if we say that a man’s fire responses constitute some part of those responses he makes in the presence of fire. More generally, the problem isn’t altered if we introduce this definition: S is a sign of E provided only that S calls up part of the behavior that E calls up. It is not enough to say that the sign and the object call up some of the same behavior. The books in this room are not a sign to me of the books in that room, but the books in the two rooms call up some of the same behavior. And it is too much to say that S calls up all of the behavior that E calls up—that the sign evokes all of the responses that the subject makes to the object. The bell is a sign of food to the dog, but the dog, as we know, needn’t eat the bell.

We might try to avoid our difficulties by introducing qualifications of another sort in our definition of sign. Charles E. Osgood proposes the following definition in the chapter entitled “Language Behavior,” in Method and Theory in Experimental Psychology (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1953): “A pattern of stimulation which is not the object is a sign of the object if it evokes in an organism a mediating reaction, this (a) being some fractional part of the total behavior elicited by the object and (b) producing distinctive self-stimulation that mediates responses which would not occur without the previous association of nonobject and object patterns of stimula-

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tion” (p. 696). The second qualification in this definition—the requirement that there must have been a “previous association of nonobject and object” and hence that the thing signified must at least once have been experienced by the subject provides a restriction we haven’t yet considered. But this restriction introduces a new set of difficulties. I have never seen a tornado, an igloo, or the Queen of England. According to the present definition, therefore, nothing can signify to me that a tornado is approaching, that there are igloos somewhere, or that the Queen of England is about to arrive. Hence the definition leaves one of the principal functions of signs and language unprovided for.

We may summarize the difficulties such definitions involve by reference to our attempt to define what a man’s “fire responses” might be—those responses which, according to the present type of definition, are evoked by anything that serves as a sign of fire, and by reference to which we had hoped to define beliefs about fires. No matter how we formulate our definition of “fire responses”, we find that our definition has one or another of these three defects: (1) a man’s fire responses become responses that only fire can call up—in which case the presence of smoke alone will not call them up; (2) his fire responses become responses he sometimes makes when he doesn’t take anything to be a sign of fire, when he doesn’t believe that anything is on fire; or (3) our definitions will make use of intentional language.

The “appropriate action” terminology is a variant of the “specific response” terminology. Psychologists sometimes say that, if the bell is a sign of food, then the bell calls up responses appropriate to food. And one might say, more generally, that a man believes a proposition p provided only he behaves, or is disposed to behave, in a way that is “appropriate to p,” or “appropriate to p’s being true.” But unless we can find a way of defining “appropriate”, this way of talking is intentional by our criteria. When we affirm, or when we deny, “The knight is acting in a way that is appropriate to the presence of dragons,” we do not imply either that there are, or that there are not, any dragons.

7. In the second type of definition we refer to the “verbal behavior” in which we would ordinarily take to be symptomatic of belief. This time we try to describe a man’s belief—his believing—in terms of his actual uses of words or his dispositions to use words in various ways.

Let us consider a man who believes that the Missouri River has its source in the northern part of Montana. In saying that he believes this, we do not mean to imply that he is actually doing anything; we mean to say that, if the occasion arose, he would do certain things which he would not do if he did not believe that the Missouri had its source in northern Montana. This fact may be put briefly by saying that when we ascribe a belief to a man we are ascribing a certain set of dispositions to him. What, then, are these dispositions? According to the present suggestion, the man is disposed to use language in ways in which he wouldn’t use it if he didn’t have the belief. In its simplest form, the suggestion is this: if someone were to ask the man “Where is the source of the Missouri River?” the man would reply by uttering the words, “In the Northern part of Montana”; if someone were to ask him to name the rivers having their sources in the northern part of Montana, he would utter, among other things, the word “Missouri”; if someone were to ask “Does the Missouri arise in northern Montana?” he would say “Yes”; and so on.

We should note that this type of definition, unlike the others, is not obviously applicable to the beliefs of animals. Sometimes we like to say such things as “The dog believes he’s going to be punished” and “Now the rat thinks he’s going to be fed.” But if we accept the present type of definition, we cannot say these things (unless we are prepared to construe such conditions as “If the rat could speak English, he’d now say ‘I am about to be fed’.”). I do not know whether this limitation—the fact that the definition does not seem to allow us to ascribe beliefs to animals—should be counted as an advantage, or as a disadvantage, of the verbal
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behavior" definition. In any case, the definition involves a number of difficulties of detail and a general difficulty of principle.

The if-then sentences I have used as illustrations describe the ways in which our believer would answer certain questions. But surely we must qualify these sentences by adding that the believer has no desire to deceive the man who is questioning him. To the question "Where is the source of the Missouri?" he will reply by saying "In northern Montana"—provided he wants to tell the truth. But the provision brings us back to statements which are intentional. If we say "The man wants to tell the truth" we do not imply, of course, either that he does or that he does not tell the truth; similarly, if we assert the contradictory. And when we say "He wants to tell the truth"—or, what comes to the same thing, "He doesn’t want to lie"—we mean, I suppose, he doesn’t want to say anything he believes to be false. Perhaps we should also add that he has no objection to his questioner knowing what it is that he believes about the Missouri.

We should also add that the man speaks English and that he does not misunderstand the questions that are put to him. This means, among other things, that he should not take the other man to be saying something other than what he is saying. If he took the other man to be saying "Where is the source of the Mississippi" instead of "Where is the source of the Missouri" he might reply by saying "In Minnesota" and not by saying "In Montana." It would seem essential to add, then, that he must not believe the other man to be asking anything other than "Where is the source of the Missouri?"

Again, if the man does not speak English, it may be that he will not reply by uttering any of the words discussed above. To accommodate this possibility, we might qualify our if-then statements in some such way as this: "If someone were to ask the man a question which, for him, had the same meaning as ‘Where is the source of the Missouri?’ has for us, then he would reply by uttering an expression which, for him, has the same meaning as ‘In the northern part of Montana’ has for us." Or we might qualify our original if-then statements by adding this provision to the antecedents: "and if the man speaks English". When this qualification is spelled out, then, like the previous one, it will contain some reference to the meanings of words—some reference to the ways in which the man uses, applies, or interprets words and sentences. These references to the meanings of words and sentences—to their use, application, or interpretation—take us to the difficulty of principle involved in this linguistic interpretation of believing.

The sentences we use to describe the meanings and uses of words are ordinarily intentional. If I say, "The German word Riese means giant," I don’t mean to imply, of course, either that there are giants or that there aren’t any giants; similarly, if I deny the sentence. If we think of a word as a class of sounds or of designs, we may be tempted to say, at first consideration, that intentional sentences about the meanings and uses of words are examples which run counter to our general thesis about intentional sentences. For here we have sentences which seem to be concerned, not with anyone’s thoughts, beliefs, or desires, but rather with the properties of certain patterns of marks and noises. But we must remind ourselves that such sentences are elliptical. If I say, of the noises and marks constituting the German word Riese, that they mean giant, I mean something like this: "When people in Germany talk about giants, they use the word Riese to stand for giants, or to refer to giants." To avoid talking about things which don’t exist, we might use the expression "gigantic" (interpreting it in its literal sense) and say: "People in Germany would call a thing ein Riese if and only if the thing were gigantic." And to make sure that the expression "to call a thing ein Riese" does not suggest anything mentalistic, we might replace it by a more complex expression about noises and marks. "To say ‘A man calls a thing ein Riese’ is to say that, in the presence of the thing, he would make the noise, or the mark, ein Riese."

INTENTIONALITY AND THE MENTAL

Let us ignore all of the difficulties of detail listed above and let us assume, for simplicity, that our speakers have a childlike desire to call things as frequently as possible by their conventional names. Let us even assume that everything having a name is at hand waiting to be called. Is it true that people in Germany would call a thing ein Riese—in the present sense of “to call”—if and only if the thing were gigantic?

If the German were in the presence of a giant and took it to be something else—say, a tower or a monument—he would not call it ein Riese. Hence we cannot say that, if a thing were a giant, he would call it ein Riese. If he were in the presence of a tower or a monument and took the thing to be a giant, then he would call the tower or the monument ein Riese. And therefore we cannot say he would call a thing ein Riese only if the thing were a giant.

Our sentences "The German word Riese means giant" does not mean merely that people Germans—however we may qualify them with respect to their desires—would call a thing ein Riese if and only if the thing were gigantic. It means at least this much more—that they would call a thing by this name if and only if they took the thing to be gigantic or believed it to be gigantic or knew it to be gigantic. And, in general, when we use the intentional location, "People use such and such a word to mean so-and-so," part of what we mean to say is that people use that word when they wish to express or convey something they know or believe—or perceive or take—with respect to so-and-so.

I think we can say, then, that, even if we can describe a man’s believing in terms of language, his actual use of language or his dispositions to use language in certain ways, we cannot describe his use of language, or his dispositions to use language in those ways, unless we refer to what he believes, or knows, or perceives.

The "verbal behavior" approach, then, involves difficulties essentially like those we encountered with the "specific response" theory. In trying to define "fire response", it will be recalled, we had to choose among definitions having at least one of three possible defects. We now seem to find that, no matter how we try to define that behavior which is to constitute "using the word Riese to mean giant," our definition will have one of these three undesirable consequences: (1) we will be unable to say that German speaking people ever mistake anything for a giant and call something which is not a giant ein Riese; (2) we will be unable to say that German speaking people ever mistake something else for a giant and refuse to call a giant ein Riese; or (3) our definition will make use of intentional language.

The final approach I shall examine involves similar difficulties.

8. One of the basic points in the grammar of our talk about states of consciousness, as Professor Findlay has observed, is that such states always stand opposed to other states which will "carry them out" or "fulfil" them. The final approach to belief sentences I would like to discuss is one based upon this conception of fulfilment. I believe that, if we are to succeed in showing that Brentano was wrong, our hope lies here.

Let us consider a lady who reaches for the teakettle, expecting to find it full. We can say of her that she has a "motor set" which would be disrupted or frustrated if the teakettle turns out to be empty and which would be fulfilled or satisfied if the teakettle turns out to be full. In saying that the empty teakettle would disrupt or frustrate a "motor set", I am thinking of the disequilibration which might result from her lifting it; at the very least, she would be startled or surprised. But in saying that her set would be fulfilled or satisfied if the teakettle turns out to be full, I am not thinking of a positive state which serves as the contrary of disruption or frustration. Russell has introduced the terms "yes-feeling" and "quite-so feeling" in this context and would say, I think, that if the teakettle were full the lady would have a quite-so feeling. Perhaps she would have such a feeling if her expectation had just been challenged—if someone had said, just before she lifted the teakettle, "I think you’re mis-
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taken in thinking there’s water in that thing.” And perhaps expectation always involves a kind of tension, which is relieved, or consummated, by the presence of its object. But we will be on surer ground if we describe the requisite fulfilment or satisfaction, in negative terms. To say that a full teakettle would cause fulfilment, or satisfaction, is merely to say that, unlike an empty teakettle, it would not cause disruption or frustration. The kind of “satisfaction” we can attribute to successful expectation, then, is quite different from the kind we can attribute to successful strivings or “springs of action.”

Our example suggests the possibility of this kind of definition: “S expects that E will occur within a certain period” means that S is in a bodily state which would be frustrated, or disrupted, if and only if E were not to occur within that period. Or, if we prefer the term “fulfil”, we may say that S is in a bodily state which would be fulfilled if and only if E were to occur within that period. And then we could define “believes” in a similar way, or perhaps define “believes” in terms of “being-disposed-to-expect.”

I would like to remark, in passing, that in this type of definition we have what I am sure are the essentials of William James’ so-called pragmatic theory of truth—a conception which has been seriously misunderstood, both in Great Britain and in America. Although James used the terms “fulfil” and “fulfilment,” he preferred “satisfy” and “satisfaction”. In his terms, our suggested definition of “believing” would read: “S believes that E will occur within a certain period” means that S is in a bodily state which would be satisfied if and only if E were to occur within that period. If we say that S’s belief is true, that he is correct in thinking that E will occur within that period, then we imply, as James well knew, that E is going to occur in that period—and hence that S’s belief will be satisfied. If we say that S’s belief is false, we imply that E is not going to occur—and hence that S’s belief will not be satisfied. And all of this implies that the man’s belief is true if and only if he is in a state which is going to be satisfied. But unfortunately James’ readers interpreted “satisfy” in its more usual sense, in which it is applicable to strivings and desires rather than to believings.

Our definitions, as they stand, are much too simple; they cannot be applied, in any plausible way, to those situations for which we ordinarily use the words “believe”, “take”, and “expect”. Let us consider, briefly, the difficulties involved in applying our definition of “believe” to one of James’ own examples.

How should we re-express the statement “James believes there are tigers in India”? Obviously it would not be enough to say merely, “James is in a state which would be satisfied if and only if there are tigers in India, or which would be disrupted if and only if there are no tigers in India.” We should say at least this much more: “James is in a state such that, if he were to go to India, the state would be satisfied if and only if there are tigers there.” What if James went to India with no thought of tigers and with no desire to look for any? If his visit were brief and he happened not to run across any tigers, then the satisfaction, or disruption, would not occur in the manner required by the definition. More important, what if he came upon tigers and took them to be lions? Or if he were to go to Africa, believing himself to be in India—or to India, believing himself to be in Africa?

I think it is apparent that the definition cannot be applied to the example unless we introduce a number of intentional qualifications into the definiens. Comparable difficulties seem to stand in the way of applying the terms of this type of definition in any of those cases we would ordinarily call instances of believing. Yet this type of definition may have an advantage the others do not have. It may be that there are simple situations, ordinarily described as “beliefs” or “expectations”, which can be adequately described, non-intentionally, by reference to fulfilment, or satisfaction, and disruption, or surprise. Perhaps the entire meaning of such a statement as “The dog expects to be beaten” or “The baby expects to be fed” can be conveyed in this manner. And perhaps “satisfaction” or “surprise” can be so interpreted that our ordinary beliefs can be defined in terms of “being disposed to have” a kind of expectation which is definable by reference to “satisfaction” or “surprise”. And if all of these suppositions are true then we may yet be able to interpret belief sentences in a way which is contrary to the present version of Brentano’s thesis. But, I believe, we aren’t able to do so now.

9. The philosophers and psychologists I have been talking about seem to have felt that they were trying to do something important—that it would be philosophically significant if they could show that belief sentences can be rewritten in an adequate language which is not intentional, or at least that it would be significant to show that Brentano was wrong. Let us suppose for a moment that we cannot rewrite belief sentences in a way which is contrary to our linguistic version of Brentano’s thesis. What would be the significance of this fact? I feel that this question is itself philosophically significant, but I am not prepared to answer it. I do want to suggest, however, that the two answers which are most likely to suggest themselves are not satisfactory.

I think that, if our linguistic thesis about intentionality is true, then the followers of Brentano would have a right to take some comfort in this fact. But if someone were to say that this linguistic fact indicates that there is a ghost in the machine I would feel sure that his answer to our question is mistaken. (And it would be important to remind him that belief sentences, as well as other intentional sentences, seem to be applicable to animals.)

What if someone were to tell us, on the other hand, that intentional sentences about believing and the like don’t really say anything and that, in consequence, the hypothetical fact we are considering may have no philosophical significance? He might say something like this to us: “The intentional sentences of ordinary language have many important tasks; we may use the ones about believing and the like to give vent to our feelings, to influence the behavior of other people, and to perform many other functions which psychologists can tell us about. But such sentences are not factual; they are not descriptive; they don’t say things about the world in the way in which certain non-psychological sentences say things about the world.” I do not feel that this answer, as it stands, would be very helpful. For we would not be able to evaluate it unless the man also (1) gave some meaning to his technical philosophical expressions, “factual”, “descriptive”, and “they don’t say things about the world”, and (2) had some way of showing that, although these expressions can be applied to the use of certain non-psychological sentences, they cannot be applied to the use of those psychological sentences which are intentional.

Or suppose something like this were suggested: “Intentional sentences do not say of the world what at first thought we tend to think they say of the world. They are, rather, to be grouped with such sentences as ‘The average carpenter has 2.7 children,’ ‘Charity is an essential part of our obligations,’ and ‘Heaven forbid,’ in that their uses, or performances, differ in very fundamental ways from other sentences having the same grammatical form. We need not assume, with respect to the words which make sentences intentional, such words as ‘believe’, ‘desire’, ‘choose’, ‘mean’, ‘refer’, and ‘signify’, that they stand for a peculiar kind of property, characteristic, or relation. For we need not assume that they stand for properties, characteristics, or relations at all.” We could ask the philosopher taking such a stand to give us a positive account of the uses of these words which would be an adequate account and which would show us that Brentano was mistaken. But I do not believe that anyone has yet been able to provide such an account.

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"This criterion must be so interpreted that it will apply to sentences wherein the verb phrases following the principal verb are infinitive, prepositional, or participial phrases; hence it must make sense to speak of such phrases as being true or false. When I say of the phrase, following the main verb of “He accused John of stealing the money,” that it is true, I mean, of course, that John stole the money. More generally, when I say of such a sentence that the phrase following the principal verb is true, or that it is false, my statement may be interpreted as applying to that new sentence which is like the phrase in question, except that the verb appearing in infinitive or participial form in the phrase is the principal verb of the new sentence. I should add a qualification about tenses, but I do not believe that my failure to do so is serious. It should be noted, that, in English, when the subject of an infinitive or of a participle is the same as that of the principal verb, we do not repeat the subject; although we say “I want John to go,” we do not say “I want me to go” or “John wants himself to go.” When I say, then, that the last two words of “I want to go” are true, my statement should be interpreted as applying to “I shall go.”

By adopting Frege’s theory of meaning—or his terminology—we could make this criterion do the work of our first two. But I have made use of the first two in order that no one will be tempted to confuse what I want to say with what Frege had to say about meaning. The three criteria overlap to a considerable extent.

4 If E is a sentence obtained merely by putting the identity sign between two names or descriptions of the same thing, if A is a sentence using one of these names or descriptions, if B is like A except that where A uses the one name or description B uses the other, then the one name or description may be said to have an indirect reference in A provided the conjunction of A and E does not imply B.

5 Certain sentences describing relations of comparison (e.g. "Some lizards look like dragons") do not fit into exceptions to (1). Strictly speaking, then, (1) should read: “we do not need any intentional sentences, other than those describing relations of comparison, when we describe non-psychological phenomena.”


8 If we say that smoke signifies fire to O provided only that, as a result of the smoke, “there is a fire in O’s ‘behavioral environment,’” or “there is a fire for O,” and if we interpret the words in the quotations in the way in which psychologists have tended to interpret them, our language is intentional.

9 R. B. Braithwaite, in “Belief and Action,” (Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary vol. XX, p. 10), suggests that a man may be said to believe a proposition p provided this condition obtains: “If at a time when an occasion arises relevant to p, his springs of action are s, he will perform an action which is such that, if p is true, it will tend to fulfill s, and which is such that, if p is false, it will not tend to satisfy s.” But the definition needs qualifications in order to exclude those people who, believing the true proposition p that there are people who can reach the summit of Mt. Everest, and having the desire s to reach the summit themselves, have yet acted in a way which has not tended to satisfy s. Moreover, if we are to use such a definition to show that Brentano was wrong, we must provide a non-intentional definition of the present use of “wish”, “desire”, or “spring of action”.

10 See Alonzo Church’s “On Carnap’s Analysis of Statements of Assertion and Belief,” Analysis, Vol. 10 (1950).


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that $p$”) for the latter is a cousin of “believing that $p$” and like the latter has a dispositional force.

A-3. Thought episodes are essentially characterized by the categories of intentionality.

A-4. Thought episodes, to repeat, are not speech episodes. They are expressed by speech episodes.

A-5. In one sense of “because”, statements are meaningful utterances because they express thoughts. In one sense of “because”, Jones’ statement, $s$, means that $p$, because $s$ expresses Jones’ thought that $p$.

So far I have been highlighting those aspects of my view which, I take it, are most congenial to your own ways of thinking. It is in the following points, if anywhere, that our differences are to be found.

A-6. Although statements mean states of affairs because they express thoughts which are about states of affairs, this because is not the because of analysis. Notice as something to keep in mind that physical objects move because the sub-atomic particles which make them up move; yet obviously the idea that physical objects move is not to be analysed in terms of the idea that sub-atomic particles move.

A-7. Thoughts, of course, are not theoretical entities. We have direct (non-inferential) knowledge, on occasion, of what we are thinking, just as we have direct (non-inferential) knowledge of such non-theoretical states of affairs as the bouncings of tennis balls.

A-8. Yet if thoughts are not theoretical entities, it is because they are more than merely theoretical entities.

A-9. In my essay I picture the framework of thoughts as one which was developed “once upon a time” as a theory to make intelligible the fact that silent behavior could be as effective as behavior which was (as we should say) thought through out loud step by step.

A-10. But though we initially used the framework merely as a theory, we came to be able to describe ourselves as having such and such thoughts without having to infer that we had them from the evidence of our overt, publicly accessible behavior.

A-11. The model for the theory is overt speech. Thoughts are construed as “inner speech”—i.e., as episodes which are (roughly) as like overt speech as something which is not overt speech can be.

A-12. The argument presumes that the metalinguistic vocabulary in which we talk about linguistic episodes can be analysed in terms which do not presuppose the framework of mental acts; in particular, that

“...” means $p$

is not to be analysed as

“...” expresses $t$ and $t$ is about $p$

where $t$ is a thought.

A-13. For my claim is that the categories of intentionality are nothing more nor less than the metalinguistic categories in terms of which we talk epistemically about overt speech as they appear in the framework of thoughts construed on the model of overt speech.

A-14. Thus I have tried to show in a number of papers—most successfully, I believe, in these lectures—that the role of

“...” means ...

can be accounted for without analysing this form in terms of mental acts.

Sincerely,

Wilfrid Sellars

INTENTIONALITY AND THE MENTAL

Dear Sellars:

Thanks very much indeed for your letter of August 3, and for the clear statement of the essentials of your position. I think I can locate fairly well now the point at which we diverge.

I certainly have no quarrel with your first five points, and I can accept A-7 and A-8. As for A-6 and A-10 that follow A-5, acceptability of these seems to depend upon A-12. If you could persuade me of A-12, perhaps you could persuade me of the rest.

I know that you have written at length about the thesis of paragraph A-12, but I do not think you have satisfied what my demands would be. In order to show that

“...” means $p$

is not to be analysed as

“...” expresses $t$ and $t$ is about $p$

your metalinguistic vocabulary must contain only locutions (1) which, according to the criteria of my Aristotelian Society paper, are not intentional and (2) which can be defined in physicalistic terms. This is the point we would have to argue at length, for I believe you must introduce some term which, if it means anything at all, will refer to what you call thoughts. This term could be disguised by calling it “a primitive term of semantics” or “a primitive term of pragmatics”, or something of that sort, but this would only be to concede that, when we analyze the kind of meaning that is involved in natural language, we need some concept we do not need in physics or in “behavioristics.” Until you can succeed in doing what Carnap tried to do in the Philosophical Studies paper I criticized last year (namely, to analyze the semantics or pragmatics of natural language in the physicalistic vocabulary of a behavioral psychology, with no undefined semantical terms and no reference to thoughts), I think I will remain unconvinced of your view about intentionality.

Perhaps you will agree that if one rejects your paragraph A-12, then it is not unreasonable for him also to reject what you say on the bottom of page 319 of the lectures: “It must not be forgotten that the semantical characterization of overt verbal episodes is the primary use of semantical terms, and that overt linguistic events as semantically characterized are the model for the inner episodes introduced by the theory:” ...

Cordially yours,

Roderick M. Chisholm

Dear Chisholm:

... we have communicated so well so far, that I cannot forbear to make one more try for complete understanding (if not agreement).

You write, “... I believe you must introduce some term which, if it means anything at all, will refer to what you call thoughts. This term could be disguised by calling it ‘a primitive term of semantics’, ‘a primitive term of pragmatics’, or something of the sort, but this would only be to concede that, when we analyse the kind of meaning that is involved in natural language, we need some concept we do not need in physics or in ‘behavioristics.’” Now I certainly agree that semantical statements about statements in natural languages, i.e., statements in actual use, cannot be constructed out of the resources of behavioristics. I have insisted on this in a number of papers (e.g., “A Semantical Solution ...”), and, most recently in my essay for the Carnap volume and my London lectures. I quite agree that one additional expression must be taken as primitive, specifically “means” or “designates” with its context “...” means ...

What I have emphasized, however, is that although “means” is in a grammatical sense a “relation word,” it is no more to be assimilated to words for descriptive relations...
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than is “ought,” and that though it is a “descriptive” predicate if one means by “descriptive” that it is not a logical term nor constructible out of such, it is not in any more interesting (or usual) sense a descriptive term.

I think that I have made these points most effectively in the Lectures, pp. 291–293, and 310. I mention them only because, since they are in a section which occurs much earlier than the section on thoughts which has been the subject of our correspondence to date, you may not have noticed them.

I am also sending under separate cover a mimeograph of my Carnap paper, which discusses at length, pp. 30ff, the point about the irreducibility of “designates” to the concepts of formal logic.

Cordially yours,

Wilfrid Sellars

August 24, 1956

Dear Sellars:

The philosophic question which separates us is, in your terms, the question whether (1) “...” means p is to be analysed as

(2) “...” expresses t and t is about p.

I would urge that the first is to be analysed in terms of the second, but you would urge the converse. But we are in agreement, I take it, that we need a semantical (or intentional) term which is not needed in physics.

How are we to decide whether (1) is to be analysed in terms of (2), or conversely? If the question were merely of constructing a language, the answer would depend merely upon which would give us the neatest language. But if we take the first course, analysing the meaning of noises and marks by reference to the thoughts that living things have, the “intentionalist” will say: “Living things have a funny kind of characteristic that ordinary physical things don’t have.” If we take the second course, there could be a “linguist” who could say with equal justification, “Marks and noises have a funny kind of characteristic that living things and other physical things don’t have.”

Where does the funny characteristic belong? (Surely, it doesn’t make one whit of difference to urge that it doesn’t stand for a “descriptive relation.” Brentano said substantially the same thing, incidentally, about the ostensible relation of “thinking about,” etc.) Should we say there is a funny characteristic (i.e., a characteristic which would not be labelled by any physicalistic adjective) which belongs to living things—or that there is one which belongs to certain noises and marks?

When the question is put this way, I should think, the plausible answer is that it’s the living things that are peculiar, not the noises and marks. I believe it was your colleague Hosper who proposed this useful figure: that whereas both thoughts and words have meaning, just as both the sun and the moon send light to us, the meaning of the words is related to the meaning of the thoughts just as the light of the moon is related to that of the sun. Extinguish the living things and the noises and marks wouldn’t shine any more. But if you extinguish the noises and marks, people can still think about things (but not so well, of course). Surely it would be unfounded psychological dogma to say that infants, mutes, and animals cannot have beliefs and desires until they are able to use language.

In saying “There is a characteristic...” in paragraph 2 above, I don’t mean to say, of course, that there are abstract entities.

I don’t expect you to agree with all the above. But do you agree that the issue described in paragraph one is an important one and that there is no easy way to settle it...?

Cordially yours,

Roderick M. Chisholm

INTENTIONALITY AND THE MENTAL

August 31, 1956

Dear Chisholm:

Your latest letter, like the preceding ones, raises exactly the right questions to carry the discussion forward. (The points made in a fruitful philosophical discussion must, so to speak, be “bite size.”) Let me take them up in order.

1. The contrast you draw between the “intentionalist” and the “linguist” is, in an essential respect, misleading. You write: “... if we take the first course, analyzing the meaning of noises and marks by reference to the thoughts that living things have, the ‘intentionalist’ will say: ‘Living things have a funny kind of characteristic that ordinary physical things don’t have.’ If we take the second course, there could be a ‘linguist’ who could say with equal justification, ‘Marks and noises have a funny kind of characteristic that living things and other physical things don’t have.’

“Where does the funny characteristic belong?...” This is misleading because (although I am sure you did not mean to do so) it evokes a picture of the “linguist” as tracing the aboutness of thoughts to characteristics which marks and noises can have as marks and noises (e.g., serial order, composition out of more elementary marks and noises belonging to certain mutually exclusive classes, etc.). But while these “sign design” characteristics of marks and noises make it possible for them to function as expressions in a language, they do not, of course, constitute this functioning. Marks and noises are, in a primary sense, linguistic expressions only as “nonparrotingly” produced by a language-using animal.

2. Thus the “linguist” no less than the “intentionalist” will say that (certain) living things are able to produce marks and noises of which it can correctly be said that they refer to such and such and say such and such, whereas “ordinary physical things” are not. The problem, therefore, is not (as you put it), “Should we say that there is a funny characteristic (i.e., a characteristic which would not be labelled by any physicalistic adjective) which belongs to living things—or that there is one which belongs to certain noises and marks?” but rather, granted that the primary mode of existence of a language is in meaningful verbal performances by animals that can think, desire, intend, wish, infer, etc., etc., and granted (a) that these verbal performances mean such and such, and (b) that the mental acts which they express are about such and such, how are these concepts—all of which pertain to certain living things rather than “ordinary physical things”—to be explicated.

3. What persuades you that the “means” of “...” means...

must stand for a characteristic, even if a “funny” one? If, like Brentano, you conclude (rightly) that it is only ostensively a relation, must it therefore be a characteristic of some other kind, perhaps a kind all its own? (Perhaps you would prefer to say that it is means-p rather than means simpliciter which, in the case of propositions is the characteristic.) I am not, of course, denying that the term “characteristic” can, with a certain initial plausibility, be extended to cover it. I do, however, claim that to use “characteristic” in such an extended way is to blur essential distinctions; but more of this in a moment.

I would be the last person to say that “the meaning of a term is its use,” for there is no sense of “use” which analyses the relevant sense of “means.” Yet this W-nian maxim embodies an important insight, and, used with caution, is a valuable tool. Suppose there were an expression which, though it clearly didn’t designate an item belonging to one of your other ontological categories, you were reluctant to speak of as standing for a characteristic, though you granted that it played a systematic or ruleful role in discourse. What about “yes” as in “yes, it is raining.” Suppose “yes” always occurred in the context “yes, p.” Could we not even here make a meaningful use of the rubric “...” means...? Thus

“Ja, p” means yes, p

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and

"Ja" means yes.

(I take it that you would not be tempted to say that yes is a characteristic of propositions.) But if "yes" doesn't stand for a characteristic, the fact that

"x bedeutet y" means x means y

is not a conclusive reason for supposing that means is a characteristic. To be sure, from

"Bedeutet" means means

we can infer that

There is something (i.e., means) which "bedeutet" means. But that means is, in this broadest of senses, a 'something' tells us precious little indeed, for in this sense yes is a something too!

Where E is any expression in L, whatever its role, and E' is the translation of E in English, then we can properly say both

E (in L) means ---

and

There is something, namely ---, which E means,

where what goes in the place held by '---' is the English expression named by 'E'', thus,

There is something, namely I shall, which "Ich werde" (in German) means

and

There is something, namely this which "dieser (diese, dieses)" (in German) means.

(In this last example, of course, the context brackets 'this' so that it is not playing its "pointing" role, though the semantical rubric mobilizes its pointing role in its own way.)

4. You write: "... the meaning of the words is related to the meaning of the thoughts just as the light of the moon is related to that of the sun. Extinguish the living things and the noises and marks wouldn't shine any more. But if you extinguish the noises and marks, people can still think about things (but not so well, of course)."

Now I agree, of course, that marks in books and noises made by phonographs 'have meaning' only by virtue of their relation to 'living' verbal episodes in which language is the direct expression of thought (e.g., conversation, writing on a blackboard.) And, as I have emphasized in an earlier letter (3 August), I agree that 'living' verbal episodes are meaningful because they express thoughts. Our difference concerns the analysis of this 'because'.

Let me have another try at making the essential points. I have argued that it is in principle possible to conceive of the characteristic forms of semantical discourse being used by a people who have not yet arrived at the idea that there are such things as thoughts. They think, but they don't know that they think. Their use of language is meaningful because it is the expression of thoughts, but they don't know that it is the expression of thoughts; that is to say, they don't know that overt speech is the culmination of inner episodes of a kind which we conceive of as thoughts.

(Compare them, for a moment, with a people who have, as yet, no theoretical concepts in terms of which to give theoretical explanations of the observable behavior of physical objects. They are, nevertheless, able to explain particular events by means of that general knowledge which is embodied in dispositional concepts pertaining to thing kinds.)

Now, in order to communicate, such a people would, of course, have to appreciate both the norms which, by specifying what may not be said without withdrawing what, delimit the syntactical or 'intra-linguistic' structure of the language, as well as such facts as that, ceteris paribus, a person who says "This is green" is in the presence of a green object, and a person who says "I shall do A" proceeds to do it. This understanding springs from the routines by which the language is learned and passed on from generation to generation by "social inheritance." It constitutes their mastery of the language.

If you grant that they could get this far without having arrived at the concept of a thought (though, of course, not without thinking), the crucial question arises, Could they come to make use of semantical discourse while remaining untouched by the idea that overt verbal behavior is the culmination of inner episodes, let alone that it is the expression of thoughts? To this question my answer is 'Yes.'

In your first letter you expressed agreement "with much of what I have to say about the 'myth of the given.'" Well, of a piece with my rejection of this myth is my contention that before these people could come to know noninferentially (by 'introspection') that they have thoughts, they must first construct the concept of what it is to be a thought. Thus, while I agree with you that the rubric

"... means ---

is not constructible in Rylean terms ('Behaviorese,' I have called it), I also insist that it is not to be analysed in terms of

"... expresses t, and t is about ---

My solution is that "... means ---" is the core of a unique mode of discourse which is as distinct from the description and explanation of empirical fact, as is the language of prescription and justification.

I have probably lost you somewhere along the line. But, if not, from this point on the argument is clear. To put it in a way which artificially separates into stages a single line of conceptual development, thoughts began by being conceived of as theoretical episodes on the analogy of overt verbal behavior ('inner speech'). Men came, however, in a manner which I pictured in my Jonesean myth, to be able to say what they are thinking without having to draw theoretical inferences from their own publicly observable behavior. They now not only think, but know that they think; and can not only infer the thoughts of others, but have direct (non-inferential) knowledge of what is going on in their own minds.

5. You write: "Surely it would be unfounded psychological dogma to say that infants, mutes, and animals cannot have beliefs, and desires until they are able to use language." Here I shall limit myself to a few brief points:

(a) Since I do not define thoughts in terms of overt verbal behavior, and grant that thought episodes occur without overt linguistic expression, there is, on my view, no contradiction in the idea of a being which thinks, yet has no language to serve as the overt expression of his thoughts.

(b) Not only do the subtle adjustments which animals make to their environment tempt us to say that they do what they do because they believe this, desire that, expect such and such, etc.; we are able to explain their behavior by ascribing to them these beliefs, desires, expectations, etc. But, and this is a key point, we invariably find ourselves qualifying these explanations in terms which would amount, in the case of a human subject, to the admission that he wasn't really thinking, believing, desiring, etc. For in the explanation of animal behavior the mentalistic framework is used as a model or analogy which is modified and restricted to fit the phenomena to be explained. It is as though we started out to explain the behavior of macroscopic objects, in particular, gases, by saying that they are made up of minute bouncing billiard balls, and found ourselves forced to add, "but, of course ..."

(c) The use of the mentalistic framework as the point of departure for the explanation of animal behavior can be characterized as the approach "from the top down." Recent experimental psychology has been attempting an approach "from the bottom up," and while it is still barely underway, it has been made manifestly clear that discrimination is a far more elementary phenomenon than classification, and that
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6. You write: "I don't expect you to agree with all the above." If I write "ditto," I am putting it mildly. On the other hand, though I don't agree with some of the things you say, I have attempted to make it clear that I do agree with a great deal of what you say, more than you might think possible, while remaining on my side of the fence.

Cordially,
WILFRED SELLARS

P.S. This really started out to be a letter.

SEPTEMBER 12, 1956

DEAR SELLARS:

Thanks for your latest letter which I have enjoyed reading. I think the differences between us now seem to boil down to two points, both rather difficult to argue about.

First, we are apparently in some disagreement about what is meant by such terms as "analysis" and "explication." Consider the following sentences:

(B-1) The meaning of thoughts is to be analysed in terms of the meaning of language, and not conversely.

(B-2) Language is meaningful because it is the expression of thoughts—of thoughts which are about something.

(B-3) The people in your fable "come to make use of semantical discourse while remaining untouched by the idea that overt verbal behavior is the culmination of inner episodes, let alone that it is the expression of thoughts."

When I first wrote you I took (B-1) to be inconsistent with (B-2), but you affirm both (B-1) and (B-2). And apparently you take (B-3) to imply (B-1), but I accept (B-3) and deny (B-1).

Perhaps we could do better if we resolved not to use such technical terms as "analysis" and "explication." What would (B-1) come to then?

The second point of disagreement between us lies in the fact that I am more skeptical than you are about the content of such "solutions" as the one you propose on page 4. "My solution is that '... means ...' is the core of the unique mode of discourse which is distinct from the description and explanation of empirical fact as is the language of prescription and justification." I am inclined to feel that the technical philosophical term "descriptive" is one which is very much over-used, and I am not sure I can attach much meaning to it. Indeed I would be inclined to say that if the locution "Such and such a sentence is not descriptive" means anything at all, it means that the sentence in question (like "Do not cross the street" and "Would that the roses were blooming") is neither true nor false. But the sentence "'Hund' means dog in German" is a sentence which is true. And anyone who denied it would be making a mistake—in the same sense, it seems to me, that he would be making a mistake if he said "Berlin is part of Warsaw." Hence it does not illuminate any of my problems to say that the sentence is not descriptive or that it embodies a unique mode of discourse.

But I hope we haven't reached an impasse quite yet.

Cordially yours,
R. M. CHISHOLM

SEPTEMBER 19, 1956

DEAR CHISHOLM:

Many thanks for your letter of September 12 which, as usual, brings things back to a sharp focus. I shall take up the two points to which, as you see it, our differences "boil down" in the order in which you state them.

You ask what your sentence (B-1) would come to "if we resolved not to use such technical terms as 'analysis' and 'explication'." Good. I quite agree that these terms are dangerous unless carefully watched. "Analysis" now covers everything from defini-

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I am beginning, however, to touch on topics which presuppose agreement on more fundamental issues (though the above may be useful as giving a more definite picture of the direction of my thought.) So back to your questions! Before this interruption I was making the point that I could not accept sentence (B-1) without qualifying it so radically that the term "analysis" would have to be stretched to the breaking point. In effect, then, we both deny (B-1). I, however, am prepared to accept a "first admission" of (B-1). You, I take it, are not. Or are you? (See below.)

Again, though we both accept (B-2) as a sentence, I accept it only if the "because" it contains is (roughly) the "because" of theoretical explanation, whereas you have interpreted it as the "because" of analysis. How, then, will you interpret your acceptance of (B-2) now that we have "resolved not to use such technical terms as 'analysis' and 'explication'?" The sense in which I accept (B-2), on the other hand, is part and parcel of the sense in which I accept (B-1).

This brings me to the heart of the first part of this letter. In your letter of August 12 you wrote, "I certainly have no quarrel with your first five points, and I can accept A-7 and A-8. As for A-6 and points that follow A-8, acceptability of these seems to depend upon A-12. If you could persuade me of A-12, perhaps you could persuade me of the rest." The question I wish to raise is this. You now write that you accept (B-3). You wrote on August 12 that if I could persuade you of A-12 perhaps I could persuade you of the rest. But doesn't (B-3) entail A-12?

I turn now to "the second point of disagreement between us." Let me say right at the beginning that I share your mistrust of "solutions" of philosophical puzzles which simply find a new category for the expressions which raise them. It is because I believe that what I propose amounts to something more than this that I have ventured to call it a solution.

Perhaps the most important thing that needs to be said is that I not only admit

I have never questioned that

'Hund' means dog in German

is true in what, for our purposes, is exactly the same sense as

Berlin is part of Warsaw

would be if the facts of geography were somewhat different.

"'Hund' means dog in German" is true \iff 'Hund' means dog in German

just as

"Berlin is part of Warsaw" is true \iff Berlin is part of Warsaw.

There is just no issue between us on this point. When I have said that semantical statements convey descriptive information but do not assert it, I have not meant to imply that semantical statements only convey and do not assert. They make semantical assertions. Nor is "convey", as I have used it, a synonym for "evince" or "express" as emotivists have used this term. I have certainly not wished to assimilate semantical statements to ejaculations or symptoms.

It might be worth noting at this point that, as I see it, it is just as proper to say of statements of the form "Jones ought to do A" that they are true, as it is to say this of mathematical, geographical or semantical statements. This, of course, does not preclude me from calling attention to important differences in the 'logics' of these statements.

I quite agree, then, that it is no more a solution of our problem simply to say that semantical statements are "unique," than it would be a solution of the corresponding problem in ethics simply to say that prescriptive statements are "unique." What is needed is a painstaking exploration of statements belonging to various (prima facie) families, with a view to discovering specific similarities and differences in the ways in which they behave. Only after this has been done can the claim that a certain family of statements is, in a certain respect, unique, be anything more than a promis-
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sory note. But while I would be the last to say that the account I have given of semantical and mentalistic statements is more than a beginning, I do think that it is a beginning, and that I have paid at least the first installment on the note.

I also agree that the term “descriptive” is of little help. Once the “journeyman” task (to use Ayer’s expression) is well under way, it may be possible to give a precise meaning to this technical term. (Presumably this technical use would show some measure of continuity with our ordinary use of “describe”.) I made an attempt along this line in my Carnap paper, though I am not very proud of it. On the other hand, as philosophers use the term today, it means little that is definite apart from the logician’s contrast of “descriptive expression” with “logical expression” (on this use “ought” would be a descriptive term!) and the moral philosopher’s contrast of “descriptive” with “prescriptive”. According to both these uses, “S means p” would be a descriptive statement.

It is, then, the ordinary force of “describe”, or something very like it, on which I have wished to draw when I have said that “‘Hund’ means dog in German” is not a descriptive assertion. I have wished to say that there is an important sense in which this statement does not describe the role of “Hund” in the German language, though it implies such a description.

(Remote parallel: When I express the intention of doing A, I am not predicting that I will do A, yet there is a sense in which the expression of the intention implies the corresponding prediction.)

Well, then, what is the business of such statements as “‘Hund’ means dog in German”? I wish I could add to my previous attempts with which you are already familiar, but I can’t, unless it be the following negative point. It is tempting (though it clearly won’t do) to suppose that

S₁: “Hund” means dog in German

really makes the same statement as

S₂: “Hund” plays in German the same role as “dog” plays in English.

If so, it would describe the role of “Hund” as

Tom resembles (in relevant respects) Dick
describes Tom. But a simple use of Church’s translation test makes it clear that S₁ and S₂ are not equivalent. We who use “dog” (as an English word) use S₁ to explain to another user of “dog” the role of “Hund” in German, by holding out to him, so to speak, as an exhibit the word which plays the corresponding role in English, our language. And while a person could not correctly be said to have understood S₁, unless given that he uses the word “dog,” he knows that S₁ is true if and only if S₂ is true, nevertheless he can clearly know that S₂ is true without having that piece of knowledge the proper expression of which is “‘Hund’ means dog in German.” For he may know that S₂ is true without “having learned the word ‘dog’.”

(Parallel: A person may know that Tom resembles (in relevant respects) Dick, without knowing what either Tom or Dick is like.)

Well, once again what turned out to be a short, clear-cut letter has gotten out of hand. Writing it has been helpful to me in clearing up some of my own ideas. I hope you find it of some use.

Cordially yours,

Wilfrid Sellars

October 3, 1956

DEAR SELLARS:

Excuse the delay in replying to your letter of September 19th.

I have the feeling that perhaps we should start again, for in formulating a reply to your letter I find that we are in danger of an impasse. You conclude the first part of your letter by asking “But doesn’t B-3 entail A-12?” Since one of these sentences contains the technical term “analysis” which we decided to avoid, this question needs reformulation. I would not have said that B-3 entails A-12; hence we are using “analysis” in different ways. And, with respect to the second part of your letter, my natural temptation would be to say that the business of the sentence “‘Hund’ means dog in German” where “German” is used to designate the language spoken by German people, is to tell us that German speaking people use the word “Hund” to express their thoughts about dogs. But saying this, of course, would not get us very far.

I think that everything I want to say is expressible in the following seven sentences:

(C-1) Thoughts (i.e., beliefs, desires, etc.) are intentional—they are about something.

(C-2) Linguistic entities (sentences, etc.) are also intentional.

(C-3) Nothing else is intentional.

(C-4) Thoughts would be intentional even if there were no linguistic entities. (This is a sentence about psychology. I concede that if we had no language, our thoughts would be considerably more crude than they are.)

(C-5) But if there were no thoughts, linguistic entities would not be intentional. (If there were no people, then the mark or noise “Hund”—if somehow occasionally it got produced—would not mean dog.)

(C-6) Hence thoughts are a “source of intentional—i.e., nothing would be intentional were it not for the fact that thoughts are intentional (When I used “because” in an earlier letter I meant it this way; I did not intend it, as you assumed, to be the “because” of analysis.)

(C-7) Hence—and this would be Brentano’s thesis—thoughts are peculiar in that they have an important characteristic which nothing else in the world has—namely, the characteristic described in C-6.

Hospers’ sun-moon analogy holds in all of this. For if we forget about stars and meteors, the above sentences will hold if “thoughts” is replaced by “sun”, “linguistic entities” is replaced by “moon”, and “are intentional” is replaced by “is a source of light.”

Conceivably a man who was very well informed about the moon and knew very little about the sun could be helped in understanding the sun by learning of its resemblance to the moon. Such a man would be like the man of your fable. But the fact that there could be such a man, it seems to me, has no bearing upon the important astronomical truth expressed by C-7. And hence your fable, as I interpret it, does not lead me to question the truth of C-7.

Is there any hope now of our ever seeing eye to eye?

With best wishes,

R. M. CHISHOLM

October 19, 1956

DEAR CHISHOLM:

I admit that in the very letter in which I was agreeing that we should try to say what we want to say without relying on the technical term “analysis”, I relied on this term to settle a point when I asked “But doesn’t B-3 entail A-12?” I think you will agree, however, that if the point could have been settled in the framework of our earlier letters, we would be that much further along. We would now be trying to determine how matters stood when the point was restated without the use of this technical term. Although things haven’t worked out that way, a word about the background of my argument may be useful.

I think that in my first letter I was so using the term “analysis” that to say that
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X is to be analysed in terms of Y entails that it would be incorrect to say of anyone that he had the concept of X but lacked the concept of Y. (The converse entailment does not seem to hold.) Thus, when, in A-12, I denied that "..." means p

is to be analysed as

"..." expresses t, and t is about p

I intended, in effect, to deny that the fact that a person lacked the concept of a statement's expressing the thought that p would be a conclusive reason against supposing him to have the concept of a statement's meaning that p. And if that part of A-12, the negative part, which begins "in particular..." and which says all that I wanted to say in advancing A-12, is interpreted in this manner, surely it is entailed by B-3. For what, in effect, does B-3 say? Let me try the following paraphrase:

It is conceivable that people might have made semantical statements about one another's overt verbal behavior before they had arrived at the idea that there are such things as thoughts of which overt verbal behavior is the expression.

Thus, as I saw it, the fact that you formulated and accepted B-3, taken together with your earlier statement that if I could persuade you of A-12 perhaps I could persuade you of the rest, gave good grounds for hoping that we might be approaching a substantial measure of agreement.

But even if we leave A-12 aside and stick with B-3, I think I can make my point. For once B-3 is granted, what alternatives are left for an account of the relation of the framework of thoughts and their aboutness to the framework of semantical statements about linguistic episodes? Clearly it rules out the classical account according to which to say a statement is to mean that p is simple. It is a concise way of saying that the statement expresses the thought that p. One alternative, the alternative to which you seem to be committed, can be put—rather bluntly, to be sure—as follows:

To say of a verbal performance that it is to attribute to the performance a certain property, namely the property of meaning that p, and hence the generic property of meaning something. It is conceivable that a person might have come to recognize this property of verbal performances of their own and those of others, without realizing that there are such things as thoughts (not that they haven't been thinking all along), just as they might have come to recognize the moon's property of being luminous without having discovered the sun. Subsequently they (introspectively) notice thoughts and, on examining them, discover that they have in common the property of being about something. Comparing this property with that of meaning something, they discover that they are, if not the same property, at least properties of the same sort, in that being about something (in the case of thoughts) and meaning something (in the case of linguistic expressions) are alike ways of being intentional. They then establish that verbal expressions have the property of meaning something, and hence of being intentional, only if they stand in a certain relation to thoughts, whereas thoughts can have the property of being about something, and hence of being intentional, regardless of any relation they have to verbal expressions (though they also establish that thoughts above a certain level of crudity do not occur unless the thinker has learned a language capable of expressing them.) They conclude that thoughts are the source of intentionality.

I have put this alternative as bluntly as I have because I want to hammer away on the theme that the traditional puzzles about intentionality arise, in large measure, from the presupposition that because statements of the form "S means p" are often true, they must be capable of being gripped by such philosophical wrenches as "property", "relation", "attribute", "describe", etc. For given this presupposition one will either say (assuming that one doesn't fall into the trap of philosophical behaviorism) that in the sense in which to be a bachelor is to be an unmarried man, or to be an uncle of is to be the brother of a parent of,

for a verbal performance to mean something is for it to be the expression of a thought which is about that something,

or one will say, as in effect you do, not in your seven sentences, to be sure, but in that "eighth sentence" which is your commentary on the other seven, that the being about something of thoughts and the meaning something of verbal performances are similar properties (both ways of being intentional) not, however, by virtue of anything like the above, but rather by virtue of being, if not the same property, then two properties which stand to one another much as the luminosity of the sun to the luminosity of the moon.

You see, it isn't so much that I disagree with your seven sentences, for I can use each of them separately, with varying degrees of discomfort, to say something which needs to be said. (I think we would both have reservations about C-3, but none that is relevant to our problem.) It is rather that I am unhappy about the force they acquire in the over-all framework in which you put them.

What is the second alternative left open by B-3? It is, needless to say, the one I have been trying to recommend. It enables me to say so many of the things you want to say, that I can't help feeling at times that there must be some happy formulation which, if only I could hit upon it, would convince you. At other times I realize that our failure to agree may spring from a more radical difference in our general philosophical outlooks than appears to exist. If so, I doubt very much that the trouble lies in the area of "synonymy", "analysis" and such fashionable perplexities. Unless I am very much mistaken, it lies in the area of "fact", "property", "describe" and their kindred. A discussion of "ought" would provide a test case, but I hesitate to start that here. I will, however, send you (without obligation, as merchants say) a copy of a forthcoming paper of mine on the subject. It would be interesting to see how you react to it.

As for your remark that "[your] natural temptation would be to say that the business of the sentence "'Hund' means dog in German" ... is to tell us that German speaking people use this word 'Hund' to express their thoughts about dogs," I quite agree (a) that the sentence does tell us this, and (b) that to say that the business of the sentence is to tell us this is, as you imply, to espouse a certain philosophical interpretation of the sentence, and hence prejudice the question at issue between us. What catches my eye, however, is the fact that the philosophical interpretation which seems to be implicit in your "natural temptation" is none other than what I have called the "classical account," i.e., that for a verbal performance to mean something is for it to be the expression of a thought which is about that something. But this interpretation is incompatible with B-3, which you accept.

Now I grant, indeed insist, that there is a very intimate relation between "Hund" means dog in German" and "Statements involving the word 'Hund' made by German speaking people express thoughts about dogs." Although my piece of historical—pre-historical—fiction expresses my conviction that semantical sentences could play their characteristic role even if those who used them lacked the framework of thoughts, I would not for one moment wish to deny that as we use these sentences there is a legitimate sense in which "'x makes meaningful assertions" logically implies "'x has thoughts." An example from another area may illuminate this point. As people once used the word "water", "x is a piece of water" clearly did not imply "'x consists of molecules of H2O", but as chemist Jones (1937) uses the word "water", even in every-
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sodes are the culmination of causal chains initiated by thoughts—it is this fact which makes it sensible to envisage the identification of thoughts in their descriptive character with neuro-physiological episodes in the central nervous system, in that sense of “identify” which we have in mind when we speak of the identification of chemical episodes with certain complex episodes involving nuclear particles.

Well, I don’t know that we are any further along towards agreement than we were last August. I hope, however, that I have succeeded in clearing up some points about my interpretation of intentionality. And let me be the first to say that my present account, inadequate though it may be, is a substantial improvement over the gropings of my earlier papers. I can only plead that if they are looked at from the present vantage point, they seem to reach out for formulations which elude them.

Cordially,

Wilfrid Sellars

November 19, 1956

DEAR SELLARS:

I find very little to disagree with in your last letter (dated, I fear, October 19th). Most of what I wanted to say was in the points made in my previous letter, which you assent to. I think there is only one matter left.

I do concede your statement B-3, especially in the paraphrase you gave it in your last letter; that is, I concede that it is conceivable that people might make semantical statements about one another’s verbal behavior before arriving at the conception that there are such things as thoughts; and I also concede that, given your account of analysis (“to say that X is to be analyzed in terms of Y entails that it would be incorrect to say of anyone that he had the concept of X but lacked the concept of Y”), your statement A-12 follows. There is no point, so far as our present questions are concerned, in debating about the proper use of the technical term “analysis”; but I would note that, given this definition of “analysis”, possibly we cannot say that Russell’s definition of “cardinal number” is an analysis.

The only point I wish to make is this. The “paradox of analysis” reminds us that it is conceivable that people might have referred to certain things as “cubes” before they had arrived at the idea that there is anything having six sides. And, to borrow the example which Hempel borrowed from Neurath (see Peig-Sellars, page 380), it is conceivable that people might have referred to the fact that watches run well before they had arrived at the idea that there is a sun which bears certain relations of motion to the earth, etc., and I am inclined to feel that the sense in which I have conceded your statement B-3 is this “paradox-of-analysis” sense. If the people of your myth were to give just a little bit of thought to the semantical statements they make, wouldn’t they then see that these semantical statements entail statements about the thoughts of the people whose language is being discussed?

With best wishes,

R. M. CHISHOLM

NOTES

3 The following paragraphs have been renumbered A-1, A-2, etc., in order to avoid confusion and permit ready reference. A similar procedure has been followed in the case of subsequent groups of numbered paragraphs or sentences.
4 The nature and role of theories and models in behavioristic psychology is discussed in §§55–55 of “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind” (referred to, hereafter, as EPM).
Appendix

* "... once our fictitious ancestor, Jones, has developed the theory that overt behavioral expression is the expression of thoughts, and taught his compatriots to make use of the theory in interpreting each other's behavior, it is but a short step to the use of this language in self-description. Thus, when Tom, watching Dick, has behavioral evidence which warrants the use of the sentence (in the language of the theory) "Dick is thinking 'p'" (or "Dick is thinking that p"), Dick, using the same behavioral evidence, can say, in the language of the theory, "I am thinking 'p'" (or "I am thinking that p"). And it now turns out—need it have?—that Dick can be trained to give reasonably reliable self-descriptions, using the language of the theory, without having to observe his overt behavior. Jones brings this about, roughly, by applauding utterances by Dick of "I am thinking that p" when the behavioral evidence strongly supports the theoretical statement "Dick is thinking that p"; and by frowning on utterances of "I am thinking that p" when the evidence does not support this theoretical statement. Our ancestors begin to speak of the privileged access each of us has to his own thoughts. What began as a language with a purely theoretical use has gained a reporting role." EPM, p. 320.

* See the distinction between the model around which a theory is built, and the 'commentary' on the model in EPM, §§ 51 and 57.

* See EPM, Part VI, "The Logic of Means," also §80 of my essay "Counterfactuals, Dispositions and the Causal Modalities," in this volume; see also below, pp. 525ff and pp. 530ff in this volume.

* See note 1 above.


* See note 2 above.


* See note 12 above.

* "... once we give up the idea that we begin our sojourn in this world with any—even a vague, fragmentary, and undiscriminating—awareness of the logical space of particulars, kinds, facts, and resemblances, and recognize that even such 'simple' concepts as those of color are the fruit of a long process of publicly reinforced responses to public objects (including verbal performances) in public situations, ... we ... recognize that instead of coming to have a concept of something because we have already noticed a sort of thing, to have the ability to notice a sort of thing is already to have the concept of that sort of thing, and cannot account for it" (EPM, p. 306).

* See EPM, p. 320, quoted above in note 5.

* P. 524 above.

* P. 525 above.

* In other words, one must distinguish two dimensions in the role played by semantical statements about overt linguistic performances as models for the concept of thoughts as episodes having aboutness or reference: (a) the dimension involving the semantical form itself, "S means p" being the model for "T is about p"; (b) the dimension in which the verbal-behavioral facts implied by semantical statements about overt linguistic performances are the model for the factual or descriptive character of mental episodes, their relationship in the causal order to one another and to overt behavior.

It is the descriptive structure of mental episodes which, as was written above, "we (reasonably) expect to interpret in terms of neurophysiological connections, as we have succeeded in interpreting the 'atoms', 'molecules', etc. of early chemical theory in terms of contemporary physical theory." For a discussion of the logic of this 'interpretation' or 'fusion,' as it is sometimes called, see EPM, §§55, 58 and 40-41; also §§7-50 of my essay in this volume, particularly §49. For a reprise of the above analysis of the sense in which thoughts are really neurophysiological states of affairs, an analysis which defends the substance of the naturalistic-materialistic tradition while avoiding the mixing of categories characteristic of earlier formulations, see below, p. 536.

= P. 523 above.

= Ibid.

= "Imperatives, Intentions and the Logic of 'Ought'," Methodos, 8, 1956. See also §§77-78 of my essay in this volume.

= I now (March 1957) find it somewhat misleading (though not, as I am using these terms, incorrect) to say that statements as to what a person is thinking about do not describe, but, rather, imply a description of the person. This, however, is not because I reject any aspect of the above analysis, but because I am more conscious of the extent to which my use of the term "describe" is a technical use which departs, in certain respects, from ordinary usage. For the sort of thing I have in mind, see the discussion in §§78-79 of my essay in the present volume of the sense in which the world can 'in principle' be described without the use of either prescriptive or modal expressions. It is in a parallel sense that I would wish to maintain that the world can 'in principle' be described without mentioning either the meaning of expressions or the aboutness of thoughts.