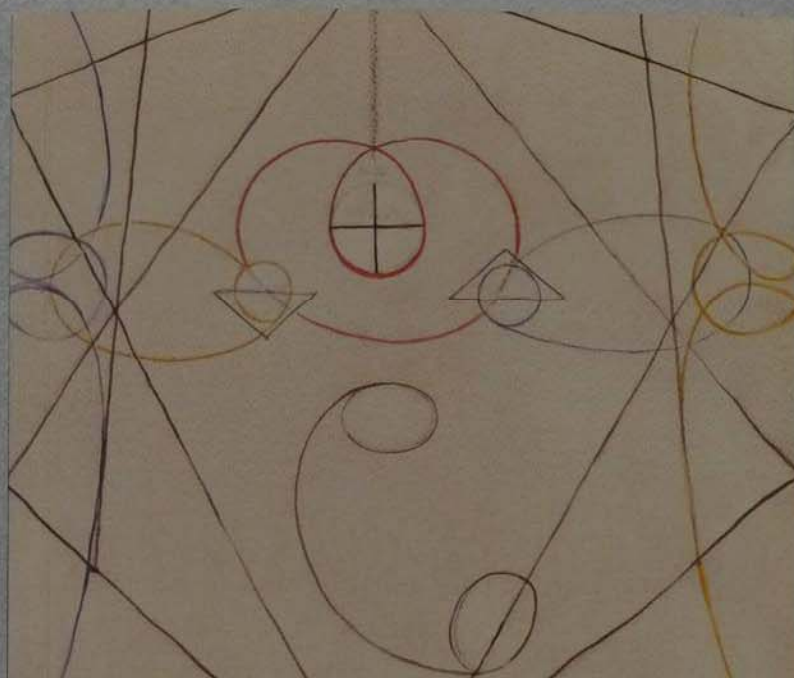


Reference, Intentionality, and Purely Intentional Objects

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The thoughts I am going to share with you in this talk, are thoughts I started to think a long time ago when I was working on my master thesis. In a more mature form, I expressed them in my doctoral dissertation *Reference and Intentionality*, which was published as a book in 1992.

Translated to Chinese by Professor Zhang Jianjun and his assistants at Nanjing University, it was published by Nanjing University Press last year.



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Reference and Intentionality

指称与意向性

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Two ways of relating intentionally to the environment

There seems to be an important difference between (1a) and (1b) on the one hand and (2a) and (2b) on the other:

(1a) Peter believes that someone has stolen his bicycle.

(1b) Ralph believes that someone is a spy.

– Belief *de dicto*.

(2a) There is someone Peter believes has stolen his bicycle.

(2b) There is someone Ralph believes is a spy.

– Belief *de re*.

Why is the *de re/de dicto* distinction important?

The distinction is important for the way we experience our environment and ourselves as part of that environment.

Phenomenologically, an environment typically contains some known objects, some perceived objects, and many unknown and unperceived objects which are even so present. Perceived objects may be known or unknown.

If there is no distinction between known and unknown, it will be difficult to find one's way around.

When your bicycle is stolen, it makes a difference that you have a suspect.

It seems that the difference can be made clear by the following paraphrases, using some logical notation:

(1a') Peter believes that $\exists x(x \text{ has stolen his bicycle})$.

(1b') Ralph believes that $\exists x(x \text{ is a spy})$.

(2a') $\exists x(\text{Peter believes that } x \text{ has stolen his bicycle})$.

(2b') $\exists x(\text{Ralph believes that } x \text{ is a spy})$.

However, in (2a') and (2b'), we quantify into an attitude context, and that is, to quote Quine, “a dubious business”.

There are two big obstacles to making sense of belief *de re* and quantification into belief and other attitude contexts

One obstacle is that the principle of substitutivity of coreferential terms seems to break down in such contexts, as was pointed out by Quine with an instructive example:

- 1) Ralph believes that the man in brown hat is a spy.
- 2) Ralph does not believe that B. J. Ortcutt is a spy.
- 3) The man in brown hat = B. J. Ortcutt.

How can we say, in the light of this example, that there is something (somebody) Ralph believes *de re* of that it is a spy? Who could that possibly be?

I discuss the problem of substitutivity in my book, and propose a solution to it. In this talk, however, I shall not go into it.

Instead I shall discuss the other big obstacle there is to making sense of quantification into belief contexts.

The second obstacle to making sense of quantifying in is that the object an attitude like belief is directed at, may not exist.
Some call this “the problem of reference failure”.

One example:

Danny believes that Santa Claus will bring him gifts on Christmas Eve. He also believes that he has met Santa Claus in person. But Santa Claus does not exist.

Another example: A businessman thought he had one secretary, but in reality there were two twin sisters who shared the job between them. They were so similar that the man never detected the difference, and he only saw one at a time as long as the illusion lasted. The person he believed was his secretary actually did not exist.

There is always a danger that the object an attitude is directed at does not exist. Brentano and his students were fully aware of that.

There is an easy way out of this problem:

The easy way out, and the only way out, I think, is to recognize objects that do not exist as entities we can even so refer to and quantify over.

Alexius Meinong, student of Brentano, proposed this as the solution.

Meinong has for a long time had a very bad reputation, and Quine spoke with a certain contempt about “the Meinongian jungle”. I think it all started with the unreasonable accusations Bertrand Russell made against him in his paper “On Denoting”. If you believe what Russell says there, you will come to believe that Meinong’s theory is absurd.

Meinong’s theory is not absurd, and it is my impression that more and more philosophers understand that today. Even so, it has its weaknesses, and because of that, my theory differs from Meinong’s.

On Meinongian theories, existence is a property that can be combined with other properties so that

- we can talk about non-existing people, for instance, and
- the connection between the predicate of existence and the existential quantifier is broken.

The theory I shall argue for does not have these undesirable implications.

Two theories of proper names and reference

As a preparation for the solution I am going to propose, I shall first introduce two different conceptions of proper names and reference and explain the difference between them.

One is *descriptivism*. On this conception proper names are seen as similar to definite descriptions. Descriptivists think that a proper name always has a descriptive content by which the name's referent is picked out.

The rival conception is *direct reference theory*. On this conception, proper names are seen as devised for *direct reference*. Direct reference is often thought of as a causal connection between name and referent. My view is different: I see direct reference as an intentional relation.

Many direct reference theorists also see demonstratives and other indexicals as directly referential terms. I shall not discuss this view in my talk today, but limit my discussion to proper names.

What is the descriptive content of a proper name?

Frege was a pioneer descriptivist. He is famous for his distinction between *Sinn* (sense) and *Bedeutung* (reference).

The Sinn of a proper name is a (complex) definite description, and the name's Bedeutung (if it has one) is determined by the Sinn.

On Frege's conception "Aristotle" might be understood as short for the following composite description;

"the ancient Greek philosopher who was Alexander's teacher and Plato's most famous student, and who authored many important works that are still much studied today".

Russell held a similar view of what he talked about as 'ordinary proper names'. He suggests that "Homer" as the name of an ancient Greek epic poet could be understood as short for the definite description "the author of the Homeric works" (or "the author of the Odyssey and the Iliad").

There are many problems with an analysis like that. For example, on Russell's paraphrase, the sentence "Homer authored the Odyssey, but not the Iliad" is rendered self-contradictory.

Quine, however, argues that we need not formulate a definite description of this kind to replace the name with. We can just introduce the verb "aristotelize" in the sense of being Aristotle, and talk about Aristotle as "the aristotelizer". In Quine's view, our use of the name "Aristotle" to refer to something presupposes a primary use of the name as part of the predicate "... is Aristotle".

Definite descriptions are contextually eliminable

Russell argued (1905) that definite descriptions can be eliminated in context.

For example the sentence

The present queen of the United Kingdom has reigned for 63 years

can apparently be reduced to

There is one and only one person who is present queen of the United Kingdom, and that person has reigned for 63 years.

In this way the definite description “the present queen of the United Kingdom” is eliminated.

On the view that proper names are definite descriptions, proper names will be contextually eliminable too.

Take the following example:

“Aristotle rejected the Platonic theory of forms.”

Then replace the proper name “Aristotle” with the Quinean artificial description “the aristotelizer” to get:

“The aristotelizer rejected the Platonic theory of forms.”

Finally eliminate the description “the aristotelizer” along Russell’s lines. This gives us:

“There is one and only one aristotelizer, and he rejected the Platonic theory of forms.”

In this way the proper name “Aristotle” is eliminated.

“The new theory of reference”

In the years around 1970, an important shift occurred within theory of reference. For a long time descriptivism had ruled, but now people started to see proper names as directly referential, and thus as fundamentally different from eliminable definite descriptions.

The first publication of a direct reference theory was probably Keith Donnellan's paper “Reference and Definite Descriptions” (1966) where he made the claim that there is a directly referential use of definite descriptions beside what he calls their “attributive” use, the one analyzed by Russell.

Rigid designators

In 1970 Saul Kripke gave several talks at universities in the USA and in Europe.

He argued that proper names, unlike most definite descriptions, are rigid designators, naming the same object in every possible world.

He also argued that proper names have no descriptive content.

This paved the way for a view of proper names as directly referential.

Direct reference theory replaced descriptivism as the dominant view. It has been dominant for more than 40 years now.

What it looks like from a descriptivist point of view when the object a belief is directed at does not exist:

“Peter believes that Marianne is his secretary” can apparently be analyzed both *de re* as

(1) “There is one and only one object that [fits the Marianne-description] and is such that Peter believes it is his secretary”

and *de dicto* as

(2) “Peter believes that there is one and only one object that [fits the Marianne-description], and that object is his secretary”.

“Marianne does not exist” is analyzed as

“There is not one and only one object that [fits the Marianne-description].

The upshot is that if Marianne does not exist, then, on a descriptivist analysis, (1) must be false, but (2) may be true.

On descriptivism, belief *de re* is reduced to
belief *de dicto*

On the descriptivist view, we can only quantify into a
belief context on the condition that the object the
belief is about exist.

Insofar as it is an empirical question whether the
object exists, there is no a priori way of discerning *de*
re beliefs from *de dicto* ones.

What it looks like from the point of view of mainstream direct reference theory when the object a belief is directed at does not exist:

In “Peter believes that Marianne is his secretary”, “Marianne” is a proper name, and proper names are seen as directly referential. Insofar as the belief report is reliable, the belief can then only be analyzed as being *de re* from the direct reference point of view.

But giving an analysis of the negative singular existential statement “Marianne does not exist” is almost impossible for mainstream direct reference theory, because a proper name is supposed to have no descriptive content whatsoever, its sense being its reference, and when it has no reference, it is meaningless, and it renders the sentence it is part of meaningless too.

On mainstream direct reference theory, singular existentials should either be true or meaningless, never false.

But it is a fact that an existential like “Marianne exists” is commonly regarded as false when the referent of the name does not exist.

Now, how can we explain this?

To solve the problem of singular existentials where the singular term is a name that is supposed to refer directly, we shall first make the following observation:

That a name refers directly means that it picks out the object a statement is about without attributing anything to it, that is, that the name makes no contribution to the predicative content of the statement.

It does not mean that there is no condition which goes hand in hand with the name (in a particular use) and which only the name's referent can satisfy.

As I see it, there has to be a condition of this kind for a name to refer at all.

We shall return to this, but not before I have introduced some new concepts and distinctions.

Doxastic and other intentional objects

I call an entity that happens to be the object of an intentional act or attitude an *intentional object*.

This is quite common, but some think of the intentional object as intermediary between the attitude and a real object when there is one. In my terminology, the intentional object is identical to the real object when there is one.

So when I am thinking about a person, that person is an intentional object in virtue of my intentional act. When I love someone, the person I love is an intentional object in virtue of my intentional attitude.

As a special case, when I believe something about a person, that person is a *doxastic object* in virtue of my belief.

All doxastic objects are intentional objects.

All intentional objects have an identity as intentional objects.

Doxastic and other intentional predicates and properties

A construction like “John believes that ... is a professor” is a *doxastic predicate*. It expresses the *doxastic property* of being believed by John to be a professor. It is also an intentional predicate since belief is an intentional attitude.

“John wishes that ... will be a professor” is an intentional predicate, but not a doxastic predicate.

Also predicates that supervene on simpler intentional predicates, like “... is popular”, are intentional

An object is intentional if and only if some intentional predicate is true of it. And, as a special case, an object is doxastic if and only if some doxastic predicate is true of it.

IMPORTANT WARNING:

There are intentional/doxastic predicates and intentional/doxastic objects if and only if quantification into intentional/doxastic contexts makes sense.

Talking about “John believes that ... is a professor” as a *predicate* only makes sense if “ $\exists x$ (John believes that x is a professor)” makes sense. And quantifying into the belief context only makes sense if “John believes that ... is a professor” can be regarded as a predicate.

IMPORTANT DIGRESSION:

Artifacts are intentional objects (if there are intentional objects in the first place).

Predicates like “... is a work of art”, “... is a flag” and “... is a temple” are intentional because they supervene on predicates that are clearly intentional, like “... is admired by ...”, “... is respected by ...”, and “... is regarded by ... as a place of worship”.

(This has been argued by Roman Ingarden.)

Purely intentional objects: a solution to the problem of reference failure

An intentional object that can be identified only by its intentional properties, I call a *purely intentional object*.

Santa Claus is an example. He has no identifying 'natural' properties, but can be identified by the beliefs and so on there are about him.

Santa Claus has an identity, and that should be enough for him to be something we can refer to and quantify over even though he does not exist.

Recognizing purely doxastic and other purely intentional objects will solve the problem of reference failure: If there are purely doxastic objects, there is never a danger of reference failure.

Are artifacts *purely intentional* objects?

Roman Ingarden claims about artifacts not only that they are intentional objects, but that they are all artifacts *purely intentional*.

He argues that even though an artifact like a flag has a material substratum, the cloth it is made from, it is not identical with its material substratum, and that it can only be identified by its intentional properties.

If Ingarden is right, some purely intentional objects exist, like works of art, flags, and temples, and some purely intentional objects, like fictional characters, do not exist. This is my reason for introducing the concept of purely doxastic objects. Like fictional characters, they do not exist.

Purely doxastic objects do not exist, but what exactly does that mean?

We have observed already that a reference-determining condition, a condition only the name's referent can satisfy, may go hand in hand with the name in a particular directly referential use. Now this observation will become useful.

I think that when we use a proper name, α , to refer directly to an object, a , we must possess criteria for identifying a as the referent of α . Satisfying these criteria is a sufficient, but not a necessary condition for being the referent. Call this condition " C^α " Only a can satisfy C^α , and a exists if and only if it does satisfy C^α . If a does not satisfy C^α , a is a purely doxastic object.

This may seem to come close to the descriptivist theory of singular existentials. The difference is that on descriptivism, C^α will be a sufficient *and* necessary condition. On my theory, C^α is only a sufficient condition.

On both theories, “ α exists” is true if and only if there is one and only one object C^α is true of. On my theory, this is the case if and only if C^α is true of a .

On descriptivism, because C^α is both a sufficient and a necessary condition, “ a is F ” is true if and only if there is one and only one object C^α is true of, and that object is F .

In this way the proper name “ α ” is reduced to the eliminable definite description “the object C^α is true of”.

On my theory, because C^α is only a sufficient condition, we cannot make this reduction. If α does not exist, α is a purely doxastic object. It can even so be referred to and quantified over.

Conclusion

We have seen that there are two big obstacles to making sense of quantification into belief contexts.

In this talk I have discussed only one of them: what some call the problem of possible reference failure. The problem is that the object a belief is directed at may not exist. I have argued that this does not mean that that the object cannot be referred to and quantified over. My solution is to recognize purely intentional objects. This solution does not have the disadvantages of Meinongian theories.