

Intentionality as Intentional Inexistence

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Abstract

One of Mark Textor's main aims in *Brentano's Mind* is to refute Brentano's claim that intentionality - the capacity our mental acts have for being *of*, *about*, or *directed on* something - is the mark of the mental. I defend the view that Brentano analysed intentionality in terms of intentional inexistence (and so wasn't an intentionality primitivist as Textor suggests). And I argue that we can regard intentionality as being the mark of the mental, but only if we give a non-relational analysis of the idea of intentional inexistence. Textor objects to an analysis of intentionality in terms of intentional inexistence for failing to account for the relationship between the object our mental act is directed on, and the 'immanent' or 'inexistent' object which all mental acts contain. I claim that this problem doesn't arise if the object our mental act is directed on *just is* the immanent/ inexistent object. I argue that Brentano (at least sometimes) seems to identify the two. I then offer my own view of intentionality according to which our mental acts are directed on immanent/ inexistent objects, and that 'directedness' should be understood non-relationally.

1. Introduction

'Intentionality' is the term used to describe the capacity our mental acts have for being *of*, *about*, or *directed on* something.¹ Brentano claimed that all and only mental acts have intentionality, and this idea, that intentionality is the mark of the mental, is therefore known as 'Brentano's thesis'. Mark Textor's aim in the first part of his rewarding and stimulating book is to refute Brentano's thesis. Whether we try to offer an analysis of intentionality in independent terms, or whether we are intentionality primitivists (as Textor argues Brentano was), we cannot identify intentionality as being the mark of the mental. (In the second part of the book, along with a defence of Brentano's theory of consciousness, Textor describes and argues for an alternative mark of the mental which develops from Husserl's writings.) My aim in this paper is to provide a critique of Textor's argument against intentionality being the mark

¹ Following Brentano and Textor I'll talk about mental acts rather than mental states.

of the mental, while pointing to an analysis of intentionality which supports the idea that it deserves this distinction.²

Any theory of intentionality is going to need to take a stand on the precise nature of the ‘something’ on which our mental acts are directed. Brentano employed the terms ‘intentional inexistence’ and ‘immanent objectivity’ to convey his idea that mental acts have objects within themselves, and one of the things we need to explain is what is meant here by ‘object’. While Textor criticises Brentano’s analysis of intentionality as intentional inexistence (Textor 2017: 49-50) I aim to defend this account of intentionality and will offer a characterisation of intentional inexistence as a non-relational feature of mental acts. This will require a very particular analysis of immanent objects, and what we mean when we say that mental acts are about or directed on something.

The idea that intentionality can be understood non-relationally is a minority yet burgeoning view in contemporary philosophy of mind. (Crane 2013, Kriegel 2011, Mendelovici 2018) Uriah Kriegel has argued that only a non-relational conception of intentionality can provide an analysis of our mental acts which is compatible with a physicalist metaphysics - something which is viewed as particularly desirable in contemporary philosophy of mind. (Kriegel 2008) While I fully agree with him on this, I want to discuss a different reason for endorsing a non-relational analysis of intentionality. I will argue that the claim that intentionality is the mark of the mental can only be defended if intentionality is understood non-relationally.

2. Defining Intentionality

Textor’s case against intentionality being the mark of the mental is laid out in chapters two and three. In chapter two he discusses various ways of explaining intentionality in independent terms; as involving correctness conditions, aspectual shape or linguistic intentionality. I won’t focus for too long on this; for the most part, I am in complete agreement with Textor’s arguments. However, I wonder whether the proponent of the aspectual shape theory might find it relatively straightforward to respond to Textor’s three challenges to their account. (Textor 2017: 68-9)

On this view, intentionality is defined as the unique capacity our mental acts have for being directed at something via an aspect, or mode of presentation, or through adopting a

² I contrast ‘mental’ with ‘non-mental’ rather than with ‘physical’ so as to leave open the possibility that physicalism is true.

particular standpoint towards it. (Crane 2001) First, Textor says we can imagine a being (God for example) who is able to grasp an object in its entirety without having to access it through a particular mode of presentation. Their mental life wouldn't be constrained by the necessity of experiencing everything only partially in the way the aspectual shape theory demands. As it happens, I find it very difficult to imagine a mental life of this kind. But if the aspectual shape theorist does want to allow for its possibility, they can continue to defend the idea that such a being would approach things through aspects or modes of presentation, it's just that they would experience all the aspects at once.

Textor's second objection is that we can be aware of our own mental acts without approaching them through an aspect or mode of presentation. While this is true, the proponent of the aspect view can draw upon Brentano's theory that a single mental act is directed both at an object and also at itself. (Textor provides an instructive and illuminating discussion of this aspect of Brentano's philosophy in chapters 4 and 5.) This theory makes available the following response: although our awareness of our mental act doesn't itself have a mode of presentation, since the mental act of awareness is identical to an act directed at an object which does have a mode of presentation, no mental act occurs without a mode of presentation. In other words, it would be false to claim that a mental act can occur which is entirely free of aspects or modes of presentation.

In response to the third objection, that a machine which measures the lengths of the sides of two-dimensional shapes seems capable of representing under modes of presentation (since it can pick out equilateral but not equiangular triangles) and would therefore qualify as having intentionality, the aspectual shape theorist can simply deny that the machine truly represents. Recall, on this view intentionality is defined as the unique capacity our mental acts have for being directed at something via an aspect, or mode of presentation, or through adopting a particular standpoint towards it. Even if we want to grant that the machine is in some sense dealing in aspects or modes of presentation, it is not clear how it qualifies as being *directed* towards the shapes it sorts. This response doesn't defuse the objection against the aspect view entirely, but it does shift the burden of proof onto the opponent.

Having made these rather cursory remarks on behalf of the aspect theorist, I should explain that I don't think we should define intentionality in the way the aspectual shape view advises. However, this isn't because I dispute the idea that intentionality involves mental acts being directed at or about objects via aspects or modes of presentation, I just think that we can define intentionality purely in terms of directionality or aboutness, which in turn can be defined

in terms of intentional inexistence. In what remains I will argue that intentional inexistence is fundamental to intentionality, and explains why intentionality is the mark of the mental.

3. Intentionality as Inexistence

Textor argues in chapter three that Brentano was a primitivist about intentionality and that his talk of ‘immanent objects’ and ‘intentional inexistence’ was designed to help us identify this distinctive feature of our mental acts, but wasn’t intended to be an analysis of the nature of intentionality.

According to Brentano, his own talk of a ‘non-comparative relation’ or ‘immanent object’ points our attention to the right feature of examples of intentionality, but does not explain it.’ (Textor 2017: 73)

It is unclear to me whether Brentano really was a primitivist about intentionality. Although Textor demonstrates convincingly that Brentano believed that understanding what intentionality is requires one to have experienced mental acts oneself, that doesn’t seem to be enough to make him a primitivist. To illustrate, one could be a reductionist in the mind-body debate, and think that an experience just is (is identical to) neural firings, but could also hold that one needs to instantiate the neural firings to know what the experience is like. I remain open to the idea that Brentano did, at least at some stage in this thinking, deploy the notion of intentional inexistence to serve as an analysis of the nature of intentionality. Of course, it may well be that Brentano was a primitivist about intentional inexistence, but since one could think that mental acts have intentionality without having any truck with the idea of in-existent objects (see, for example, Tye 1995, Dretske 1995, indeed most contemporary representationalists) that would be another matter.

In any case, I plan in this section to defend an account of intentionality understood as intentional inexistence, and in the next section I will provide an analysis of how we should construe intentional inexistence. This analysis will explain why we should consider intentionality to be the mark of the mental. Although the theory I put forward makes no claims of being fully aligned with Brentano’s views, I will begin with a point of agreement: Brentano’s description of intentional inexistence as fundamental to understanding intentionality as the mark of the mental.

Every mental phenomenon is characterized by what the Scholastics of the Middle Ages called the intentional (or mental) inexistence of an object, and what we would call, though not wholly unambiguously, reference to a content, direction towards an object (which is not to be understood here as meaning a real thing [*eine Realität*]), or immanent objectivity. (Brentano (1874) 1995: 68 (translation modified by Textor))

My reading of this well-known quotation diverges from Textor's, since he argues that the passage contains *three* distinct ways of characterising intentionality qua distinctive feature of the mental:

All and only mental phenomena:

- (i) have a relation to a content;
- (ii) are directed towards an object that may not be real;
- (iii) have an immanent object. (Textor 2017: 47)

On the contrary; I think the section of the passage from which Textor derives these three statements should be read as describing three ways of saying the same thing – three ways of clarifying the nature of intentional inexistence. After all, Brentano says we can understand intentional inexistence as reference to a content, direction toward an object *or* immanent objectivity. If we were meant to take these as three different features of intentionality, then we would expect the 'or' to be an 'and'.

Crucially, Brentano says the object is 'not to be understood here as meaning a real thing', not, as Textor construes it, an object which *may not* be real. This interpretation implies that the object is sometimes real, and that Brentano is advocating an account on which our mental acts are sometimes directed on real objects. Besides seeming to conflict quite conspicuously with Brentano's statement in this passage, Textor's reading also implies that the object our mental acts are directed on (when the object is real) is a mind-independent object – one which is external to the mental act. This would mean that the object the act is directed on cannot be the same thing as the immanent object, since the latter is within or internal to the mental act. This reading of Brentano permits Textor to object to an analysis of intentionality in terms of intentional inexistence by saying that Brentano fails to explain both the distinction between the immanent object and the object the act is directed on, and the relation between them (Textor 2017: 54). Of course, this is only a failing if these 'objects' really are distinct. Let's consider in more detail Brentano's own position on the matter.

Textor argues that Brentano didn't (and didn't ever) identify the immanent object with the object the act is directed on. I'm not convinced that this is true. Textor appeals to a letter Brentano wrote to Anton Marty in which he denies that he ever identified the immanent object with the 'vorgestelltes Objekt', which Textor translates as 'presented object'. (In the edition edited by Chisholm, which I'll quote from shortly, this is translated as 'object of thought'.) It is clear that Textor identifies the 'vorgestelltes Objekt' ('presented object') with the object the act is directed on. His section 2.4 is titled: 'The Foolishness of Equating Immanent Object and Presented Object' and it begins: 'The problem with [the idea that the immanent object is the object the act is directed on] is that Brentano himself emphatically denied ever having held it'. (Textor 2017: 50)

Now, if it was true that Brentano also identified the vorgestelltes Objekt with the object the act is directed on, then Textor would be right that Brentano claims never to have identified the immanent object with the object the act is directed on. After all, Brentano does say in the Marty letter: 'But it has not been my view that the immanent object = 'presented object' (vorgestelltes Objekt). (Textor 2017: 50) However, the letter to Marty makes it clear that Brentano didn't think that the vorgestelltes Objekt was the object the act is directed on. This means that by denying that the immanent object is the vorgestelltes Objekt, Brentano is *not* denying that the immanent object is the object the act is directed on. The previous quotation continues thus: 'What we think about is *the object* or *thing* and not the "object of thought" (vorgestelltes Objekt)' (Brentano (1930) 2010: 52) In the original: 'Die Vorstellung hat nicht "vorgestelltes Ding", sondern "das Ding" [...] zum Objekt.' (Brentano 1930: 88) If we assume that the object the act is directed on is the object we think about, then here Brentano is denying that the object the act is directed on is the vorgestelltes Objekt (Textor's 'presented object').

What is more, there are other passages in this letter that suggest that in fact it is the immanent object that is the object of our thought: 'If, in our thought, we contemplate a horse, our thought has as its immanent object – not a contemplated horse, but a horse. And strictly speaking only the horse – not the contemplated horse – can be called an object.' (Brentano (1930) 2010: 52) In the original: 'die Vorstellung eines Pferdes nicht "vorgestelltes Pferd", sondern "Pferd" zum (immanenten, d. h. allein eigentlich Objekt zu nennenden) Objekt.' (Brentano 1930: 88) As I mentioned above, Textor criticises Brentano's analysis of intentionality as intentional inexistence for failing to explain the relation between the immanent object and the object the act is directed on. I have suggested that (at least at this stage of his

thought) Brentano identified the two. (Also see Smith (1995)) This would mean, very simply, that Brentano doesn't encounter this problem after all.³

Putting aside the question of whether this was Brentano's view, I suggest that we should identify the immanent object with the object the act is directed on. If we don't do this, and instead say that mental acts are directed at or about objects external to our minds, then we encounter the classic problem of non-existent objects. (See Kriegel 2007) Since our mental acts could only be directed at (or about) real, mind-independent objects in cases where a relevant mind-independent object exists, we would need a different way of explaining what they are directed at (or about) in the cases where no real, mind-independent object exists. It seems to me that any way of solving this problem is going to result in a disjunctive account of intentionality, and an overdetermination problem.

Let's begin with the disjunctivism problem. In cases where a relevant mind-independent object exists - we can call this the default case - intentionality will, on the view under discussion, consist in a relation to that object. Both the person undergoing the mental act and the mind-independent object exist, so the default case is unproblematic. However, in cases where we don't have a relevant mind-independent object (hallucinations, thoughts about Santa Claus or the tooth fairy) we cannot say that intentionality consists in a relation to a real, mind-independent object. Four options are available. We can say that these mental acts are: (i) relations to mind-dependent objects, (ii) relations to unreal objects of the Meinongian variety (Meinong (1904) 1960, Parsons 1980), (iii) relations to nothing, or (iv) entirely non-relational. There are well-known problems with all of these options, which I won't elaborate on here.⁴

³ Of course, more can be said on these issues given the metaphysical position Brentano held at this time. See Tim Crane's 2006 where he argues that for Brentano, the ordinary objects we experience around us and take to be mind-independent are in fact just 'signs of something real' which result from our causal interaction with whatever really does exist in the mind-independent world. We cannot experience (and so have only an indistinct knowledge of) what really does exist independently of the mind. (Crane 2006) Although a horse is the immanent object of our thought or perception of a horse, strictly speaking, this is a mind-dependent appearance that just seems to be a mind-independent entity.

⁴ The main worries with (i) and (ii) are that such entities are rather obscure and commit us to a metaphysically suspicious ontology. (iii) is logically impossible since for a relation to exist its relata have to exist. (Interestingly, in his later writings Brentano seemed to advocate this position. For discussion see Taieb 2017) The worry with (iv) is that hallucinations, and intentional mental acts more generally, seem to be relational. I don't think this is a serious problem and I will defend a non-relational view of all mental acts in the next section. Frederick Kroon defends a version of (iv) based on fictionalism which aims to deal with this objection. (Kroon 2013)

The problem I want to point to - the disjunctivism problem - stems from the fact that whichever option we go for, intentionality looks to be a very different kind of thing in hallucination cases from intentionality in the default case. In (i), (ii) and (iii) intentionality consists in a relation to a completely different sort of object from the ordinary, mind-independent variety (a mental object, an unreal object, nothing at all) and in (iv) intentionality isn't relational at all. It would be beyond the scope of this paper to marshal an argument against disjunctive accounts in general, but a definition of intentionality that can accommodate all intentional mental acts would be preferable, particularly if intentionality is going to be the mark of the mental.

Opting for a disjunctive account of intentionality will also give rise to an overdetermination problem. To illustrate this, suppose that we opt for (i) and say that hallucinations or thoughts about the tooth fairy are relations to mind-dependent objects. Assuming that a relation to a mind-dependent object is sufficient for accounting for these mental acts, then it should also be sufficient for accounting for the intentionality of the default case. In other words, what work is the real, mind-independent object doing in the default case if a relation to a mind-dependent object is all that is needed for the mental act in question? For these reasons I endorse the view that the immanent object is the object the act is directed on in all cases. In the next section I'll explain my version of this view in more detail. But first I want to deal with one possible objection.

My claim that we can identify the immanent object with the object the act is directed on and thus escape Textor's objection that such a view fails to make clear the relationship between them could perhaps appear somewhat disingenuous. The fact that the object the act is directed on turns out to be immanent to the act itself (in a sense to be fully specified later on) brings with it a host of further problems. Since I am assuming (as Brentano also did) that there is a mind-independent world out there even if our mental acts aren't directed on it, there needs to be some explanation of the relation between them. I won't be able to deal with this subject comprehensively in this paper, and in a sense it falls outside its remit - the relation in question isn't an intentional relation after all - but I can at least suggest the outline of a response to the challenge. Indeed, my thinking on this takes its cue from Brentano's theory of physical phenomena as 'signs of something real, which, through its causal activity, produces presentations of them' (Brentano (1874) 1995: 19). Very briefly, although our mental acts aren't directed on the mind-independent world in the sense of having mind-independent entities as their intentional objects, our mental acts are the result of our entering into causal interactions with the mind-independent world. In the case of perception, the causal interaction with mind-independent entities is directly responsible for the experiences we have. A more complicated

(yet still causal) story needs to be told when it comes to other kinds of mental act.⁵ We can even stipulate a derivative sense of ‘directed on’ so that our mental acts which are, strictly speaking, about or directed on their immanent objects can count as being directed on the world in some sense by being caused in the right way.⁶

4. Intentional inexistence understood non-rationally

There are two ways we can unpack the idea of a mental act containing an object within itself, and both require an extension of our ordinary notion of ‘object’ (which probably involves the idea of a mind-independent entity instantiating properties such as shape, size, location, colour and so on). The first is to hold that the mental act consists in the experiencer standing in a two-place relation to a mental object. Brentano can be read as proposing a view like this. (See Crane 2006) Regardless of whether this was Brentano’s position, I don’t think it is a view we should adopt. Recall, my aim is to provide an account of intentional inexistence which supports the claim that intentionality is the mark of the mental, and it’s not clear whether analysing intentional inexistence in terms of a relation to mental objects allows us to do this. The claim is that all and only mental acts have intentionality, and so counter-examples to the thesis can either be mental acts that don’t seem intentional, or non-mental systems which do seem intentional. The theory that all mental acts involve a relation to a mental object faces potential counter-examples of both kinds.

I have already mentioned that acknowledging the existence of mental objects would inevitably take us away from our ordinary understanding of objects qua mind-independent entities. Interestingly though, the problem with the standard conception of mental objects is

⁵ In his *Essay*, Locke provides an argument from the best explanation in response to the expected epistemological objection, that we have no reason for postulating an external world if our experiences are never (strictly speaking) about it. Locke appealed to certain features of our experiences (the involuntary nature of our perceptual experiences, their coherence and continuity and so on) and argued that our causally interacting with a mind-independent world best explains these features. (Locke (1689) 1975)

⁶ Instead of appealing to a derivative sense of ‘directed on’, we could simply use the term ‘reference’. Hamid Taieb argues very convincingly that Brentano distinguished between intentionality and reference. (Taieb 2017) Tim Crane also makes this distinction. (Crane 2013) All mental acts are intentionally directed towards something, and mental acts whose objects exist in mind-independent reality also refer to those objects. Brentano seemed to ground reference in a kind of similarity between the mental act and the real, mind-independent object. (See Taieb 2017 for an interesting discussion of Brentano’s view.) I would suggest, although I won’t argue for the claim here, that it will prove more profitable to appeal to causation to explain the relation between our mental acts and the mind-independent world.

that it doesn't take us far enough away from our ordinary conception of an object. Take sense-data for example. They are probably the best known examples of mental objects, and according to the standard view, they are thought to have the properties we perceive them as having. If we have a perceptual experience of a tomato, regardless of whether there is an actual tomato causing our experience, we'll be aware of *something* which really is red and round and a certain size. (Jackson 1977, Price 1950, Robinson 1994) Now, if mental objects can have colour properties, shape properties, size properties and so on, then despite some clear differences, our conception of them is actually very similar to our conception of ordinary mind-independent objects.

This generates a problem: some mental acts don't seem to be defined by their having objects at all, even if we expand our notion of object to include mental objects as well as mind-independent ones.⁷ This particular problem doesn't arise for the sense-data theory in philosophy of perception, since our perceptual experiences do seem to involve relations to objects. However, the view under consideration is that all mental acts involve a relation to a mental object, so we only need to find one kind of mental act for which this doesn't hold to have a counter-example. Moods like general euphoria or depression are frequently cited as fitting the bill here; they don't seem to have objects.

Perhaps there is a way of resisting this claim. After all, it's never the case that we *just* experience depression, or a general sense of euphoria; we are always perceiving or thinking and these mental acts will seem to have objects. Therefore, the proponent of the view that intentional inexistence involves relations to mental objects can argue that our mental life always involves relations to objects, but in the case of moods the object (whatever it is we are perceiving or thinking about) isn't sufficient for determining the nature of this particular mental act. The idea that moods borrow their objects from underlying acts of perceiving or thinking makes this move similar to the response given by some contemporary representationalists to this worry. Mental episodes of depression (for example) are said to be directed at the world

⁷ There are lots of other well-known problems with sense-data and mental objects more generally. Epistemological concerns include the so-called 'veil of perception' problem – the worry that the mind-independent world is entirely unknowable since we are only ever directly aware of mind-dependent entities. Another problem concerns the location of mental objects. If they have the properties they seem to have, then they should be located where they seem to be. However, it is difficult to make sense of the idea of a mental object being located anywhere, and even if we put this issue aside, the mental object seems to be located at the very same place as the physical object we are supposing to have caused the experience. And of course, for physicalist philosophers, such entities are completely unacceptable.

which is experienced as being colourless, grey and uninspiring. (Crane 1998) The difference is that the object of depression (the world) does determine the nature of the mood, although it only does this through our attributing to it certain properties – being grey and uninspiring for example. (The idea that moods are directed at the world also forms part of Michael Tye’s account. (Tye 2002))

The challenge that moods present to the mental object view isn’t, therefore, decisive. Indeed, Textor doesn’t make use of this argumentative strategy in his attack on the claim that intentionality is the mark of the mental. (Textor 2017: 3) However, the view is also threatened by counter-examples of the second kind. There doesn’t seem to be a good way of ruling out intentional relations between non-mental entities and mental objects. The sense-data theory usually allows some sort of causal relationship between sense-data and the mind-independent objects that are thought to give rise to our perceptual experiences. The fact that we experience redness and roundness is due in part to our entering into a causal relation with a mind-independent tomato. Now, this was a helpful move insofar as it provided a best explanation argument for the existence of a mind-independent world beyond the ‘veil’ imposed by the mental objects acting as intermediaries, but it does involve physical, non-mental entities standing in relations to mental objects. Of course, they might not stand in the ‘right’ sort of relation to qualify as being intentionally directed towards these mental objects, but specifying what the right sort of relation is will be very difficult. Simply stating that only minds can be intentionally directed towards mental objects is to beg the question, and defining intentionality in terms of the relation minds stand in towards mental objects, and then appealing to that very relation to explain intentionality yields a circularity problem. Ultimately, the mental object view doesn’t provide us with an explanation of why standing in a relation to a mental object should make mental acts intentional. Beyond just stipulating that intentionality is a matter of mental acts being related to mental objects, we seem to be no closer to understanding why this should be the case, and why only mental acts are special in this way.

Let’s move on, then, to the other option. We can also understand intentional inexistence non-relationally. On this view, mental acts do not constitutively involve relations to anything at all (neither mind-independent nor mind-dependent objects). Uriah Kriegel (2011) and Angela Mendelovici (2018) have developed non-relational accounts of intentionality; indeed, Kriegel argues that Brentano adopted this position in his later writings. (Kriegel 2016) On the view I support, instead of thinking of the immanent object as something we stand in a relation to (which will require a substantive notion of ‘object’) we should think of the immanent object in a much broader sense - as providing a characterisation of the (non-relational) mental act

using object terms. And so, mental acts have immanent objects, not in the substantive sense of containing actual objects within themselves, but in the sense that they have a characterisation which makes use of object terms.⁸

The characterisations of our mental acts utilise object terms because our mental acts seem to be relational, even though they are not in fact relational. Indeed, many of our mental acts can be characterised as seeming to consist in relations to mind-independent objects, where ‘object’ is understood in the standard sense. Perceptual experiences are the paradigmatic example: we will describe our perceptual experience of a tomato as being *about* or *directed at* or *of* a tomato, for example. However, the intentionality of our perceptual experience does not consist in our standing in a relation to an actual tomato (although in the default case there will be a *causal* relation to a tomato) it consists in seeming to involve a relation to a tomato. The intentionality of mental acts is constituted by their seeming to involve relations while being entirely non-relational. This is how I suggest we should understand intentional inexistence.

Extending our notion of ‘object’ in this way goes some way towards addressing Textor’s criticisms of the idea that all mental acts are directed towards objects. (Textor 2017: 77-84) Of course, his discussion focuses on whether this idea can be explained with the tools Brentano has at his disposal, and it’s true that the examples Brentano provides us with tend to use a standard notion of object. This makes it difficult to understand how (say) the judgment that some men are wise, or fearing that it will rain can be said to have objects. (Textor 2017: 78-9) However, if we don’t construe ‘having an object’ in a way which involves a conception of the ‘object’ as an actual particular (either mind-independent or mind-dependent), and instead think of the immanent object as providing a characterisation of the mental act utilising object terms, then our task isn’t quite so difficult. After all, on this view, our mental acts don’t actually stand in relations to the entities they seem to involve relations to. It’s therefore not so worrying if our mental acts seem to involve relations to concepts, propositions, vague or indeterminate entities, or indeed unicorns and tooth fairies.

There are a number of significant benefits to analysing intentionality non-rationally, but the one that is most relevant to my present aim is that a non-relational analysis of intentionality explains why intentionality is the mark of the mental. It is much harder to produce

⁸ This is just a sketch of the theory I endorse. I provide more detail and address potential objections in Gow (MS). I discuss the idea of a non-relational mental act seeming to be relational in Gow 2016.

a potential counter-example to this claim when intentionality is given a non-relational analysis. That is, it is difficult to come up with an example either of a mental act that doesn't qualify as intentional, or a non-mental system that does. The central feature of this theory is that it uses a very liberal interpretation of the term 'object'. It is easier to see why all mental acts have intentionality when we're not restricted by thinking of the object in the rigid, substantive way common to the other theories of intentionality we have looked at. By characterising intentional inexistence in terms of mental acts having immanent objects, where the immanent object simply provides a characterisation or description of the act utilising object terms, an alternative account of seemingly objectless mental acts becomes available. While moods aren't relations (or even apparent relations) to objects understood in the ordinary sense of object, they can be characterised as seeming to involve relations to *something*. Moods seem to involve the subject being related to the feeling of the mood itself - one is aware of one's depression. So it is the feeling of depression or similarly, the feeling of elation, which characterises these mental acts.

The most interesting benefit of the non-relational view is its avoidance of counter-examples of the other kind. Unlike the relational construal of intentional inexistence, the non-relational conception not only specifies that non-mental systems don't have intentionality, it explains *why* they don't (and couldn't). Quite simply, intentional inexistence or immanent objectivity involves a mental act seeming to be relational, while in fact being entirely non-relational. Seeming to be relational involves *seeming* and this requires consciousness. Only mental acts can be conscious, and so only mental acts can have intentionality. Brentano wanted to say that all mental acts are conscious, and an analysis according to which intentionality is non-relational while seeming to be relational lends support to this idea. Of course, an obvious objection arises at this point: why shouldn't we identify consciousness as being the mark of the mental? There's a sense in which I am happy to concede this point since on the view sketched above, consciousness and intentionality will always go together. However, intentionality - intentional inexistence - is explanatorily prior. Intentional inexistence best captures the nature of our conscious mental lives.

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