

## I. Two kinds of reports

1. Logic and philosophy of language are showing a fresh interest in the theoretical debate on the so-called intentional attitudes which was started by Brentano and taken up, among others, by Meinong and Husserl. In the light of the prevailing concern with the issues of quantification theory, it is no wonder that the point which has drawn the greatest critical attention is the assumption of non-existent objects in the domain of discourse. In fact there is a widespread tendency to consider the ontological status of these objects as the most serious problem which afflicts theories of intentionality.

I think that this is only a part of the story. So my present purpose is to show that, when the notion of intentionality is at issue, one of the major questions concerns, more dramatically, the role to assign to the concrete (or *existent*) objects of everyday experience.

2. To begin with, let us imagine a common perceptual situation where two subjects, *s* and *t*, are looking at a perfectly round disk *d* from different points of view. Because of this difference of location *s* sees it as really round, *t* as elliptical.

Here is a first *way* of reporting the situation. A third person, say the observer N, could state quite naturally:

(1) *s* and *t* see the same thing.

To justify his statement he could simply remark: it is *that* particular disk over there which is seen by both subjects. If one of them perceives it as elliptical, that concerns *how* he perceives it, not the *fact* that he perceives it. (Or, in a slightly more sophisticated turn of speech: *what* we say *t* perceives is not a simple function of the features of his subjective experience.)

But there is a second *way* of reporting the same perceptual event, suggested by an attitude which seems to be likewise rooted in our untutored use of language. (If anybody objected to this assumption, I should limit

myself to reply that, for the time being, we have only to record the existence of this use, postponing the discussion of its theoretical acceptability.) This time a fourth subject, the observer F, could state:

(2) *s* and *t* do not see the same thing.

In his turn, this new character of our story could put forward his reasons. Probably the core of his argument is the following remark: a thing can't be at the same time round and elliptical; so, if *s* sees something round and *t* something elliptical, there is at least one sense in which I am justified in saying that they do *not* see the same thing.

On the other hand, (2) is not so harmless as it seems to be. In fact it is plausible to think that by uttering it F does not mean that *s* sees *something* (i.e., just that round disk over there) whilst *t* sees *nothing* (since actually there is no elliptical object to see). What he intends to state is something stronger than (2), something which entails it but is not entailed by it; that is:

(3) *s* and *t* see different things.

This innocent wording is actually the starting point of a lot of problems.

3. Here is the first difficulty, which can be summarized in the following objection, raised by N. Let us suppose, say N, that we accept tentatively the way of talking used by F, according to which *s* and *t* see different things. In the case of *s* there is no problem in determining what is the thing he sees: it is of course that particular *physical* object before him, i.e. the round disk *d*. But what about *t*? In his perceptual field there is no physical object which meets the requirement of being elliptical. So if we want to state at any price that *t* sees something different from what is seen by *s*, we are obliged to say that the object of his perception is not a physical object. What on earth is it? We begin suspecting that F is preparing the ground for some mentalistic trick...

On the other hand, N is not exceedingly worried about the apparent naturalness of (2) and (3). Someone has taught him that many philosophical misunderstandings arise when language “goes on holiday”, so that he prepares to face these linguistic expressions with a sharp razor. (2) and (3), he says, are misleading, and must be examined through the lenses of analysis. In particular, the reason why F is inclined to accept the truth of (3) lies in his propensity to accept not only the truth of

(4)  $s$  sees a round object

but also the truth of

(5)  $t$  sees an elliptical object.

So, continues N, only under the assumption of the truth of something like (5), can F maintain that (1) leads to paradoxical outcomes.

And he is right, since the argument put forward by F would be essentially the following. Let  $d$  be the disk at issue. If we follow N in giving up other possible candidates, says F, then only  $d$  can be the intended referent of the noun phrase which stems from (5), i.e. the noun phrase ‘the elliptical object that  $t$  sees’. On the other hand,  $d$  is *likewise* the (obvious) intended referent of the noun phrase which stems from (4), i.e. the noun phrase ‘the round object that  $s$  sees’. In short, what we have is the following identity:

(6) The round object that  $s$  sees = the elliptical object that  $t$  sees =  $d$ .

This is the paradox suggested by F with respect to the thesis that only physical objects can be the *relata* of perceptual relations. You remember, in fact, that the question he raised from the start was: how can any thing be at the same time round and elliptical? Is it not better to accept the idea that we have here to do with two (kinds of) objects?

But according to N the source of this perverse kind of thinking is the acceptance of (5) *as it is*. And what he can do is to supply a more harmless “translation” of that sentence. For example something like this:

(5')  $t$  sees an object as elliptical.

The alleged paradox invoked by F is now removed since, instead of (6), we have something much less puzzling, that is:

(6') The object that  $s$  sees as round = the object that  $t$  sees as elliptical =  $d$ .

By virtue of this rephrasing N has a comforting sensation of taking away a weapon from the hands of his opponent.

So, says N, there is no need of dubious entities, besides physical objects, to serve as the *relata* of perceptual relations. ‘To see’ has only a veridical use; the non-veridical one can be paraphrased somehow or other:  $t$  believes that  $t$  sees an elliptical object,  $t$  seems to  $t$  to see an elliptical object (Montague), etc.

But there is surely something suspicious in this maneuver. The fact is that the main step in the treatment proposed by N lay in rephrasing (5) as (5'). As a consequence, the noun phrase we obtain finally is not ‘the elliptical object that  $t$  sees’, but ‘the object that  $t$  sees as elliptical’. In intuitive terms, we could say that the trick lay in binding the occurrence of the adjective ‘elliptical’ to the destiny of the verb, not of the noun. On the other hand such a move would be obviously unjustified in the case of a common extensional verb. Of course nobody would think of rephrasing in the way we have just seen a sentence like

(7)  $t$  eats a green apple

in order to get rid of the quite harmless noun phrase ‘the green apple that  $t$  eats’ in favor of ‘the apple that  $t$  eats as green’. But there is no significant difference in structure between (5) and (7). Moreover, in the “veridical” case illustrated by (4), there seems to be no reason to refrain from associating it (also) to the noun phrase ‘the round object that  $s$  sees’, so that, when we deal with a verb like ‘to see’, we have anyway to choose between competing alternatives of logical translation.

N could reply that there is no harm in it, because it is not the first time that ordinary language (or its surface form, at least) involves structural complications when we reflect on the implications of the acts it describes or expresses. But what is at issue here is not a simple fact of linguistic intuitions. To be aware of that, let us reflect for a moment on the main conceptual feature of the reduction procedure adopted by N. It lay essentially in observing things *from the outside* with respect to the perceptual experience of  $t$ . The substitutive logical structure suggested by N is something like

(8)  $t$  sees  $x$  as ...

where ‘ $x$ ’ ranges over physical objects. This translation schema admits in every case only a reference to

entities of this kind. But what about situations where *no* physical object (in the common, naive conception used here) in the perceptual fields of *t* can play that role, i.e. situations where there is nothing about which we can say: look, that thing over there is the object which *t* sees as... (Of course, if we say that there is no single (physical) object which fulfils this requirement we do not mean that there is no physical basis – e.g. a set of flashing spots – for perception. But this distinction would deserve an investigation of its own.)

This is, for example, the case of the stroboscopic movement studied by Wertheimer, where, strictly speaking, we cannot refer to any given physical object, but only to luminous stimuli which are presented in stroboscopic alternation; or the case of holographic images, where the observed three-dimensional object has no physical correspondent; or the case of Kanizsa's triangle (see Figure 1).

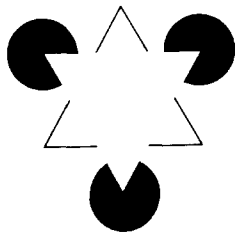



Fig. 1.

This example shows clearly that there are cases where it is quite natural to identify what a subject *s* “sees” not with anything “physical” in his perceptual field, but with something which can be justified only in terms of his direct experience. But what distinguishes this situation from others adduced to illustrate infringements of the “veridical” character of perceptual verbs is that we do not have here a case of illusion or hallucination; we have here nothing idiosyncratic or subject-dependent. The white triangle is not “imagined” (as we imagine, for example, a snake on the basis of a sinuous line: ). It is truly *seen*, because we can't avoid seeing it. The psychologist emphasizes here that the perceptual presence of the triangle is *imposed* with a coercitivity which can be due only to specific *laws*: what he calls a grammar of vision.

The triangle seen by *s* is not a physical triangle. But undoubtedly it is something *publicly observable*, in virtue of the perceptual rules the different subjects share. Thus there is a genuine sense in which a noun

phrase like ‘a white triangle’ can occur as the direct object of the verb ‘to see’ without referring to the existence of a single physical object: there is a genuine sense in which a definite description like ‘the white triangle that *s* sees’ can refer *only* to something phenomenal or “intentional”.

In short:

(a) There are situations where some perceptual features of which a subject *s* has experience cannot be ascribed to any physical object (which corresponds to these features) in the visual field of *s*: nevertheless *s* refers them to a perceptual unit *f* which is singularly perceived. (Kanizsa's triangle.)

(b) The existence of this perceptual unit *f* is *imposed* by the internal necessity of the global configuration. (So we can speak of the *intersubjective* reference, e.g., of the phrase ‘the triangle that *s* sees’.)

(c) However, because of point (a), we can't speak of the “physical” existence of this unit.

On the other hand, situations of this kind reconstruct in a pure way, in laboratory or in textbook illustrations, phenomena which are not at all unusual in our common perception and, what is more, can be experienced intersubjectively. But if we adopted the restrictive criteria proposed by the observer *N*, we could *not* say that *s* sees a white triangle; the following statement, for example, would be more appropriate: *s* believes that he sees a white triangle. But in this way, if we are really interested in describing what is happening to our subject, we lose the fidelity of our report: to see and to believe to see are irremediably different events.

## II. Objects in the world, objects in the mind

4. By concentrating on the peculiarity of some idioms, so far I have tried to reconstruct, in intuitive terms, a problem which is quite familiar to many philosophers: what are we willing to recognize as an object (or a relatum) of a mental act? The above argument, concerning perception, can in fact be re-proposed, with suitable modifications, for other acts. Our problem is essentially the following: there is a quite natural use of the verbs expressing mental attitudes (i.e. the use illustrated by (1)) according to which physical objects are the obvious candidates for playing the role of relata of those relations, supposing that the term ‘relation’ is in order here. But there is

another use, i.e., the use illustrated by sentences (2)–(3), which makes that choice questionable. The logical issues raised by this story are well known. Applicability of standard inference principles is used as a criterion of this distinction.

For example, in the case of the *first* kind of report (associated, perhaps improperly, with the traditional notion of *de re* sentences), the contexts determined by the verbs at issue seem to safeguard the following principles:

- (a) **existential generalization:**  $A^{t/x} \supset \exists xA$ . For example: if  $s$  thinks of  $t$ , then there is something which  $s$  thinks of.
- (b) **interchangeability:**  $(A \ \& \ (t = t')) \supset A^{t'/t}$ . For example: if  $s$  thinks of  $t$  and  $t$  is  $t'$ , then  $s$  thinks of  $t'$ .

The idea is that, if we refrain from accounting for the peculiarities of the cognitive state of the subject  $s$ , a mental act can be conceived as something which, in suitable circumstances, determines a *genuine relation* between the subject and a (physical) object. In this case, the above principles seem to hold unrestrictedly.

On the contrary, the *second* kind of report is characterized, among other things, by the possible failure of those principles. Why? Here is a rough account of the relevance of this failure for the problem we are dealing with. As for principle (a), there are some remarks in the first edition of Brentano's *Principles* which set us on the right path. The starting point is his distinction between "mental" and "physical" phenomena. Let us consider a "physical" relation as for example stroking: from Brentano's standpoint, if it is true that Max strokes a fox-terrier, then there must *exist* a particular fox-terrier which is the second relatum of that relation. But the existence of this dog is obviously independent of the existence of the relation at issue: its being is, so to speak, external with respect to the relation itself. Now, if we consider mental attitudes like thinking, seeking, etc., then, says Brentano, we have to do with a rather peculiar kind of relation or quasi-relation. In fact, in this case one of the two relata may not exist: its being is not capable of being isolated from the relation itself. It can be true that  $s$  desires such and such a fox-terrier even if this dog does not exist (here is a very simple example of the failure of principle (a)): after all he might have in mind just an ideal type, or confuse different individuals and so on. This time, the object (the second relatum) of the

relation does not exist, in Brentano's words, "outside" the relation itself. It has a purely internal kind of existence which Brentano, by referring to the Scholastic terminology, qualifies as *intentional*.

So there is a sense, in his first approach to this problem, according to which the (possible) non-existence of the so-called intentional object is connected with its *dependence* on the relation at issue. And this is the first point I'll try to illustrate briefly. A second, related point will concern rather the connection between the concept of the (possible) non-existence of the object with the concept of its *incompleteness*.

(i) We have just seen that, if we accept Brentano's remarks on this point, there are cases where it is not possible to *characterize* (e.g. via descriptions) the object of a mental act independently of the act itself, that is, apart from the features the subject  $s$  has actually in mind. On the contrary, in the case of "physical" relations, if for example  $s$  strokes a fox-terrier, this dog must have a certain weight, dappling, height, etc. These properties (or, more reasonably, some sets of these properties) can be used to set up definite descriptions which identify uniquely the object at issue. Now each of these descriptions is as good as any other to designate the dog which is stroked: and this is precisely the intuitive content of principle (b), if  $t$  and  $t'$  are descriptions. But saying that the different ways of presenting our object are perfectly interchangeable is not very far from saying that this object can be considered *independently* of the relation at issue. And, from Brentano's point of view, that constitutes a necessary prerequisite for the ascription of existence. So, via the notion of "independence", we can see a first way of connecting the notion of the characterizability of an object (involved, intuitively speaking, in principle (b)) and the notion of its existence (involved in principle (a)).

(ii) Coming back to Brentano's dichotomy between physical and mental events, there is another essential feature to emphasize in the case of the object of a physical relation. This object, in fact, is determinable with respect to *every* property (apart from category mistakes): which shows its *completeness*. But this too is a prerequisite for the ascription of existence. An assumption which seems to be an integral part of our conceptual framework, in this rational reconstruction, is that any object in the world can *in principle* be characterized exhaustively, even if we have of course

only a partial knowledge of it. Now, as we said, principle (b) has to do, intuitively, with relations among different ways of designating or “presenting” objects (among descriptions, in particular). So, by following these hints, it is possible to pick out a connection between the question of the ways of designation and the question of the *independence* and *completeness* of objects (in the case of genuine physical relations): independence entails that there are no restrictions about *which* descriptions (or, in general, ways of designation or presentation) can be used, and completeness entails that there are no restrictions about *how many* descriptions can be used. (In fact the number of descriptions which identify uniquely any object is a function of the number of properties it has.)

So, according to this first presentation of the issue, objects of mental relations *can* sometimes lack independence and completeness in the above sense. (As for the dependence on the cognitive content of the relation, consider the failure of principle (b): for example, if *s* wants to get to know the chief of state, he does not necessarily want to get to know the chief of the army, even if they are the same person. As for incompleteness, it is quite plausible that, if *s* wants a fox-terrier, he does not necessarily want it with such and such dappling, height, etc.). But, as we will see, our problem will be: *must* these alleged objects always lack independence and completeness? More exactly: even if a particular physical thing (i.e. something which does not lack these properties) can be associated with a certain mental act as the object it is about, are we obliged, in any case, to distinguish it in principle from the “intentional” object which, by its mental nature, is anyway dependent and incomplete in the above sense?

5. In the last section I have tacitly enlarged the circle of the examples: from perceiving I have passed to other mental acts. And I did this on purpose. In fact my main concern here is to show that, whether or not we admit the legitimacy of the “non-veridical” use of a perceptual verb like ‘to see’, the problem of a possible reference to entities which are not physical objects in the above sense comes up in general terms. But, as I said earlier, my main concern here is not the question of non-existent objects as such, which is only an aspect of the more general problem of intentionality. Rather, I’ll examine a theoretical attitude which rests on taking seriously the nature of all the idioms of

natural language we have seen, instead of paraphrasing them away. In fact the choice of this path is perhaps one of the reasons (not the only one, of course) which determined the debate on the *intentional* nature of mental acts and on the features of their “objects”. To focus on our central theoretical problem we do not need here particular exegetical subtleties. So we can start from a common stereotype: in this sense the intentional character of mental acts is essentially identified with their *referential* character. Whenever there is a (genuine) act of perception, imagination, desire, etc., there is an object *towards* which this act is directed. Now, this apparently naive wording brings us back to our opening discussion between N and F, since this “object” which is every time perceived, imagined, etc., need not exist in reality (need not be a physical object, according to the above terminology). In conformity with the tradition, let us call this peculiar kind of relation an *intentional* relation and let us call its (second) relatum an *intentional* object.

Actually, to present this move as a simple terminological decision is theoretically misleading. We have to cope with a real problem here. The point is that the idea of intentionality is commonly associated with the idea of a *genuine relation* between a first object (that is, the subject who perceives, imagines, etc.) and a second one (the intentional object, precisely). But, on the ground of such an assumption, what role is reserved, in the whole story, for those things we have so far called *physical* objects, that is, the concrete individuals of our familiar environment? More exactly, the question can be expressed in the following way:

(a) a mental act such as perceiving, imagining, etc., determines a genuine (intentional) relation between the subject *s* of that act and “something” towards which it is directed (i.e. what *s* would describe in terms of his experience);

(b) in many cases this intentional object may not exist in reality (in the sense that no physical thing fits the properties which *s* experiences in reference to a single object);

(c) since, as specified in (a), what characterizes a mental act is the presence, *always*, of an intentional object and since, as specified in (b), this object may *sometimes* not exist (whereas existence is a property of physical objects), it follows that in general the notion of an intentional object, qua relatum of a mental relation, is to be distinguished from the notion of a physical object.

### III. From ontology to phenomenology

6. Our problem is, so to speak, a problem of splitting. At the end of the story we have in hand *two* notions of object. Are we then obliged, accordingly, to acknowledge two distinct classes of objects? I am convinced that this is one of the major questions which classical theories of intentionality had to cope with. If I could take the liberty of some incautious historical remarks, I should say that, with respect to the above argument, the “second” Brentano questioned the point (a), by challenging the legitimacy of that use of the term ‘relation’ (in a strict sense), whilst Meinong concentrated his critical attention on the point (b), coming to a more sophisticated view of the concept of existence (too sophisticated, for his critics). But, as I said, I do not mean to engage myself in an attempt of exegetical reconstruction. Rather I intend to refer to a different outcome, which is in my opinion characteristic of Husserl’s phenomenology, particularly on the ground of the analysis expounded in *Ideen I*. Apart from the soundness of the historical reference, I think that the theoretical paradigm which will emerge is something interesting for its own sake.

Let us go back for a moment to the point (c) of the above argument. A first way of escaping the splitting of entities which seems to follow from it lies in taking it, so to speak, as it stands. (c), says Husserl, does *not* compel us to admit that, in the case of a “non-veridical” act (such as perceiving something which no physical object corresponds to, or thinking of a non-existing thing, and so on), we are in presence of the *merely* intentional object, whilst in the case of a “veridical” act there would be *two* objects: the intentional one *and* the physical one. In both cases the relatum of the relation at issue is anyway the intentional object. What we have to add is simply that, in the latter kind of situation, this object is *nothing but* the physical object itself, while in the former kind of situation it is something non-existent. So we have always to do with only one object: the so-called intentional object. The only difference is that in some cases it exists, i.e. it *coincides* with the relevant physical object, whilst in other cases it does not exist. But there is nothing surprising about that, for there is of course no reason to impose existence as a requirement which objects of mental acts have to meet. On the other hand, Husserl adds, it is likewise true that, when this requirement is fulfilled, what the mental act is

directed to is quite simply the concrete, physical object: there is no duplicate, so to speak, in the head of the subject, which would be the intentional pendant of the physical object. Ideas, representations, images, etc., have been invoked, from time to time, to play that role. But, for example, thinking of somebody is of course something different from thinking of an idea of him. If *s* thinks of *t*, we have simply to say, according to Husserl, that this concrete person *t* of our real world *is* the intentional object of his thinking.

I believe that this is the core of the criticism that, in the 11th paragraph of the *Fifth Logical Investigation*, Husserl addresses the definition of intentional object as something *immanent* to consciousness (or in-existent in it). It is true that we could question the way in which Husserl interprets the well-known page where Brentano tries to show the intentional character of mental acts: it is an interpretation that Brentano himself subsequently rejected, for example in a letter to Marty where he rejected similar objections raised by Höfler. But this is not the point. For our purposes we can neglect the question of the legitimacy of that criticism with respect to Brentano’s real intentions. So let us dwell for an instant on the following paradigmatic passage of Husserl’s text: ‘Everyone will admit that the intentional object of a representation *is the same* as the actual object which is possibly given as external to it, and that it is absurd to distinguish between them’. (Italics mine.) Now my question is: is it really so obvious that we can simply identify these two objects in all those (“veridical”) cases where a physical object is really grasped?

7. The point is that there is a tension, here, between two different requirements. On the one hand, Husserl intends to reject the idea of two different things, coordinated in some way. The deep purpose of his argument is to show that, to avoid paradoxical and counter-intuitive situations, we have to withhold any *autonomous* ontological status for the so-called intentional objects. This is a theoretical requirement which characterizes in an essential way the very beginning of his philosophical program. On the other hand, I do not see how this conceptual framework can consistently justify the above-mentioned allusion to the (possible) *identity* between physical object and intentional object. If, for example in a veridical case of perception, the intentional object *is* a physical object, then we are entitled, at least in some favorable situation of this

kind, to conceive it as something *real*, with a peculiar ontological status.

It is my feeling that this latter feature of Husserl's argument, illustrated by the passage of the *Investigations* at issue, is a vestige of naive realism with respect to the consistent fulfillment of the phenomenological program. We will see shortly what will be a more consistent outcome on this point. But first I would like to reflect for a moment on the difficulties raised by the statement concerning the (possible) identity between our two kinds of objects.

*First difficulty.* Let us admit that, in some successful situations, the intentional object *is* nothing but a concrete individual of our environment: for example, this sheet of paper on which I was writing a moment ago and which I am now thinking of, by attributing some property to it. On the other hand, our old Pegasus is for Husserl *likewise* entitled to get the status of object of thought. Both of them, we are told, are the relata of an intentional relation. But the point is that this is also the *only* thing they have in common. What I mean here is that, if we dwell for a moment on the philosophical jargon at issue, we find that in the expression 'intentional object' only the adjective is used in a significant way, whereas the noun seems to play simply an auxiliary role. Is there any sense in saying, for example, that this sheet of paper and Pegasus have the property of being objects *as well as* the property of being intentional? In fact the only reason why we could state that both of them are "objects" is, quite simply, that both of them are relata *of an intentional* relation. But what is then the autonomous theoretical significance of such a notion of object? Is it not preferable to concentrate upon what makes an *act* intentional? More drastically: is there any sense in speaking of a relation if it is not possible to characterize autonomously both the relata?

With respect to the classical theories of intentionality (but without any reference to phenomenology), Prior picked out a similar kind of difficulty. In his own words: '(a) X's thinking of Y constitutes a relation between X and Y when Y exists, but (b) not when y doesn't; but (c) X's thinking of Y is the same sort of thing whether Y exists or not. Something plainly has to be given up here, what will it be?'

*Second difficulty.* Here is a second kind of problems, which is connected, once more, with our initial example. As you remember, *t* sees an elliptical object, though in reality there is a round object in his

visual field. But if we take literally Husserl's remarks on the possible identity between intentional object and physical object, we are induced to say that the round disk *is* the intentional object of *t*'s perception. It is the only reasonable candidate for this role among the *physical* objects at hand. But this conclusion seems to conflict with one of the main purposes the notion of intentional object has to fulfil: to account for the "internal" modalities of a mental act. In fact, the experience of *t* is the apprehension of something elliptical, and it is only from the outside – looking, so to speak, at the things as such – that we can say that the round disk is the intentional object of *t*'s perception.

8. I think that this kind of difficulty determines a terminological change in the new presentation of the problem of intentionality we find in *Ideen I*. And I am likewise convinced that, at the bottom of this terminological change, we can discern a conceptual change. The fundamental idea (based on the notion of a *phenomenological reduction*, which is an important acquisition of *Ideen I* with respect to the *Logical Investigations*), is that from a *strictly phenomenological* point of view there is no need to refer to the (really) existent object which, in "veridical" cases, is what the mental act is about. So there is no need to raise the problem of the relation between this object and the so-called intentional object. We have here two notions which, so to speak, depend on distinct theoretical (and cognitive) attitudes and do not entail the splitting of our ontology.

The fact is that in *Ideen I* there is a clear tendency to leave out the expression (and the notion) 'intentional object'. The key term is now 'noema', which has to do with the cognitive content of the mental act *as it* is characterized in the subject's experience. For example: whenever I think of a certain man, say President Pertini, there is a unitary content of my act which is connected with the fact that I think of a man with such and such properties. In this sense we can say that the content of my thinking is *autonomously describable*: the question whether we can associate with it, in reality, any "physical" object has no relevance from this (phenomenological) point of view. And, in this sense again, we would say something absurd if, adapting to the new terminology the argument contained in the passage of the *Investigations I* mentioned above, we stated that Pertini, i.e. the con-

crete man who is familiar to all Italians, *is* the noema (or, more accurately, the bearer of the multiple qualitative “determinations” contained in the noema) correlated with my thinking, just as he was said, in that argument, to be the intentional object of my thinking. The ontological question is now radically separated from the phenomenological one. When we investigate the structure of the mental act as such, all we have to do is to isolate a unitary core of determinations (which can be expressed in language as a cluster of descriptions): that is, those determinations which enable me to say, when I *reflect* on my act, that I am thinking of *such and such* a thing. Actually Husserl’s notion of noema is of course much more complicated, but all we need here is a reference to the “fundamental component” of the noema: the *sense* (*Sinn*) as a way of presenting what a mental act is directed to. (It is an idea which some recent semantic solutions seem somehow to take up: consider, for example, the way Montague treats the *de dicto* reading of a sentence like ‘*s* wants a fox-terrier’: that is, as a relation between the subject *s* and a set of *properties*, or, more exactly, a property of properties.)

9. In the light of the separation, in principle, of the ontological question from the descriptive purpose which characterizes the phenomenological program, we could say: the noema is a mere theoretical or functional entity, something we isolate *by analysis* when we assume a *phenomenological attitude*. It is, briefly, something we get through reflection, by envisaging the act itself (and, in particular, by speaking of it).

Yet, as subjects who think, perceive, etc., in everyday life we are concerned with what we call, quite naturally, the “objects” of these acts (persons, houses, trees, and so on): we do not concern ourselves with their “ways of presentation” as such. It is perhaps in some cases of doubt (‘Is it really X I am seeing?’) that, so to speak, we withdraw our gaze from *what* we are seeing to envisage *how* we are seeing. But more commonly the naive assumption of objects of reference is one of the features which characterize what, in the phenomenological jargon, is termed the *natural attitude*.

Passing to the *phenomenological attitude* requires, among other things, the suspension of this assumption. Our theoretical interest is directed no longer towards objects (in the naive sense of the words), but towards the essential “determinations” of the mental

acts and their correlates, i.e., precisely, the noemata.

So we have hinted at two different (though not inconsistent) cognitive attitudes and, in the light of this, we can now return to our initial problem. In the course of the discussion, this problem resolved itself into these three distinct questions:

(a) Are we to acknowledge the legitimacy of *both* styles of *report* of mental events, as illustrated by (1) and (2) respectively?

(b) If we are, aren’t we entitled to speak of two different kinds of *acts* (in the subject), depending on whether or not we acknowledge genuine individuals as their objects?

(c) Considering cognitive situations where there is no proper reference to physical objects, are we to admit a peculiar kind of objects (the so-called intentional objects), besides the familiar things of our everyday experience?

As for (a), a reply has already been sketched. By referring to the dichotomy between natural attitude and phenomenological attitude, two different approaches, with respect to a mental act of a subject *s*, have been recognized as possible for an observer *X*. And they seem to correspond to two different kinds of *report* in language: two kinds that the familiar dichotomies (as *de re/de dicto*, transparent/opaque, etc.) have tried to capture (though sometimes in a confused way). Let us go back, for a moment, to the different arguments which the two observers *N* and *F* presented at the beginning of our story to justify their respective reports. Now, it is not difficult to conceive these arguments, which refer to two different *cognitive attitudes*, as possible justifications, in general, of *de re* and *de dicto* sentences respectively. My thesis is therefore the following: the very possibility of the distinction between *de re* and *de dicto reports* arises from the tension between two different epistemic perspectives: the perspective of the observer, who reports a certain mental event, and the perspective of the subject himself of this event. The first point of view characterizes, as it were, the external and neutral observer: external, since he observes the course of the event from the outside; and neutral, since, precisely in virtue of his outside position, he can rely on ways of identifying objects which need not coincide with the ways the subject himself can rely on.

But let us imagine an interesting idealization, which can shed some light on the connection between the *de re/de dicto* distinction, the cognitive attitudes



and the principle of interchangeability. Let us suppose that our observer – like Leibniz’s God – has at his disposal *every* possible way of identifying the object of the mental act at issue. For him, thanks to this omniscience, all the (infinitely many) descriptions which fit the object are *equally capable* of denoting this object (a perceptual object, for example). And since it is *this* individual which is spoken of, it is quite indifferent whether or not, in order to designate it, the speaker-observer uses denoting phrases which the subject *s* too could acknowledge as expressions identifying that object. We might say: the point of view of the observer, in this idealization, is the point of view of *reality*. And it is precisely this point of view that we sometimes assume in the “natural” attitude, when we are reporting, for example, the perception of a subject *s*. In his perceiving a certain individual, *s* is bound to a particular perspective: he sees it laterally, or frontally, and so on. But the outside observer, when he has to identify that individual (by means of a certain definite description, for example) is *not* bound to that perspective: in some sense, the ideal limit point he tends to is a situation where the different ways of identifying objects (in perceptual terms, or conceptual terms, etc.) are quite interchangeable. What he is interested in is the individual as such; he is not interested in the cognitive modalities according to which *s* grasps it.

But the opposite attitude is possible too. If the aim of the report is to reconstruct what the subject *s* has really “in mind”, then his perceptual (or, in general, cognitive) perspective becomes of course relevant. Interchangeability of ways of identifying a given individual is not guaranteed by the simple fact that each of them identifies it uniquely “in reality”. As a “non-neutral” observer, the reporter has to take into account the conceptual tools which characterize, from the *inside*, the cognitive space of the subject. But in the case of this kind of report (and, from a theoretical point of view, in the case of the “phenomenological” attitude) nothing forces us to seek a “mental” pendant of the physical object (if any), or to seek for any intermediate entity. In fact the reference to this physical object is suspended here, and what is at issue is simply the internal structure of the subject’s act itself: the set of qualitative determinations which constitute the central core of Husserl’s notion of noema.

So there is a simple moral to draw from these remarks: the epistemological justification for the

alternative between *de re* and *de dicto* reports does *not* rely on an *ontological* distinction between different sorts of “objects” which must constitute the relata of intentional relations. It relies rather on the distinction between different cognitive frameworks of the subjects involved in the report (a distinction which seems to parallel, on a naive level, to the alternative between natural and phenomenological attitude established by Husserl on a theoretical level). For example, in the case of perception, if everyone perceived anything from *every* point of view, the problem of that distinction would make no sense: the principle of interchangeability for different ways of denoting the same object would hold unrestrictedly and the very idea of “opacity” would lose significance.

But, coming now to question (b), we saw that the most consistent presentation of the phenomenological theory of intentionality (beginning from *Ideen I*) entitles us, strictly, to refer only to two different cognitive approaches, for an observer X, to the mental act of a subject *s* (or to refer only to two styles of report in language): not to two different kinds of *acts* in the subject *s*, which should correspond to that distinction. (Even if other distinctions are of course possible with respect to the acts themselves: for example the distinction between thinking about individuals and thinking about something purely general, which is often confused with the distinction between transparency and opacity.) In short, what is peculiar to this view is the fact that the “external” observer of an intentional act (or the speaker who reports that act, in linguistic terms) becomes a chief character in our stories about mental events, thanks to the possibility of picking out different cognitive modalities in referring to that act. So it is not hasty to say that this view seems to be in contrast with a well established trend in some recent developments of logic and philosophy of language, where a major question concerns which different kinds of *acts* correspond, in the subject *s*, to the two different kinds of *reports*. (This is the reason why the acts themselves are classified according to the *de re/de dicto* distinction.) The fact is that, in our opening example, there is only *one* mental act in the case of the subject *t*, who is acquainted with a particular thing in the world (so that we should acknowledge here the presence of an act *de re*, following the above misleading classification). Nevertheless, the ideal debate between the two observers N and F showed that it is possible to justify

*both* their respective styles of report (i.e., in particular, the statement *de dicto*) on the ground of their different cognitive attitudes.

From these remarks there seems to follow implicitly a reply to the question (c) too. To make it explicit let us return for a moment to the starting example, where our subject *t* sees a round disk as elliptical. As you remember, the observer F did not hesitate to report that situation for example by resorting to a sentence like

(5) *t* sees an elliptical object

whilst the main objection raised by the observer N to this kind of report was that in that way unwelcome guests are introduced into our ontology. But, as we have just seen, this is not an unavoidable outcome of the acknowledgement of the legitimacy of (5), provided that we take seriously the principle which seems to justify, from a theoretical point of view, the *de dicto* or opaque report. This principle could be summed up in the following terms: let us refrain from wondering what can be associated *from the outside* with *t*'s perceptual act, and let us look instead at the unitary cognitive content which is associated with the *internal* structure of that act. Here, then, there is no question of adding another kind of objects to our familiar ontology: what we have to do is simply to acknowledge that the assumption of a phenomenological attitude is, so to speak, indifferent to that point. In short: what we need to account for the intentional nature of mental acts is not the splitting of the ontology we must presuppose. What we need is simply the acknowledgement of two different cognitive approaches that, before being theoretically picked out by the phenomenological analysis, seem already to operate on a more intuitive level: the level, I mean, of the untutored use of language.

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