

Why the Mark of the Dispositional is not the Mark of the Intentional

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Abstract In this paper, first of all, I will try to show that Crane’s attempt at facing Nes’ criticism of his two original criteria for intentionality (of reference), directedness and aspectual shape, does not work. Hence, in order to dispense with Nes’ counterexample given in terms of dispositions, there is no need to strengthen such criteria by appealing to representationality. Moreover, I will stress that such criteria are perfectly fine when properly meant in mental *viz* phenomenological terms that appeal to the possible non-existence and the possible apparent aspectuality of the object of a thought, its intentional object. For once they are so meant, dispositions clearly lack them.

Keywords (Reference) intentionality. Dispositions. Directedness. Aspectual shape. Intentional object. Possible nonexistence. Possible apparent aspectuality.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Dispositions Do Not Threaten the Traditional Mark of Intentionality. – 3 Why the Traditional Mark Works. – 4 Conclusion.



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1 Introduction

In 2008 Crane replies to an attack (Nes 2008) to his claim that the mental features of directedness plus aspectual shape constitute the mark of the intentional (Crane 2001). This attack appeals to the idea that dispositions satisfy the very same criteria. Crane says that Nes' attack does not actually work (Crane 2008). For, according to him, in allegedly catching the mark of the dispositional, the attack basically ends up providing allegedly necessary and jointly sufficient conditions yet of the different linguistic phenomenon of *intensionality*. For this reason, he adds, it is not surprising that sophisticating the linguistic versions of such criteria by appealing to hyperintensionality or further linguistic machineries does not work either, as Nes himself stressed. Since however such linguistic versions may appear as counterparts of his two mental criteria, he finally tries to strengthen such criteria by appealing to representationality as a further necessary and (along with the other two) jointly sufficient condition of intentionality.

In this paper, first of all, I will try to show that such a strengthening does not work. Moreover, I will stress that the two original criteria provided by Crane are perfectly fine when properly meant in mental terms that appeal to the possible nonexistence and the possible apparent aspectuality of the object of a thought, its intentional object. For once they are so meant, dispositions clearly lack them. In this respect, the linguistic approach to such issues that I gave in Voltolini (2005), which appeals to existential unloadedness and pseudo-opacity, yields merely the adequate linguistic counterparts of such mental criteria.

The architecture of this paper is the following. In section 1, I will try to show why neither Nes' attack to Crane's criteria nor Crane's strengthening of them work. In section 2 I will try to show how Crane's original criteria work when appropriately meant in mental terms. Section 3 concludes.

2 Dispositions Do Not Threaten the Traditional Mark of Intentionality

According to Crane (2001, 2013), objectual intentionality or *intentionality of reference*, the property for an intentional state, a *thought*, to be about something, must be distinguished from *intentionality of content*, the property for a thought to have a content that determines

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its satisfaction conditions (Kim 1996), since the former is more basic than the latter. By actually focusing on intentionality of reference,¹ Crane says further, as a property of mental states intentionality is characterized by two features that are its necessary and jointly sufficient conditions; namely, *directedness* – the fact that thoughts may be both about something that exists and about something that does not exist – and *aspectual shape* – the fact that what one thinks about presents itself under a perspective, or an aspect. If intentionality is further taken, *à la* Brentano (1874), as the mark of the mental – the claim that all and only mental states are intentional – as Crane also wishes, then directedness and aspectual shape constitute that mark as well. For the purposes of this paper, following Crane himself (2008, 215), I can however put this further issue aside (for my skepticism on the claim, cf. Voltolini 2013b).

Recently, Nes (2008) has maintained that such criteria do not provide jointly sufficient conditions of intentionality. For even dispositions satisfy them: they have both directedness and aspectual shape. In Nes' own example, take the disposition to attract a metal pretzel. Says Nes,

[e]ven if there are no metal pretzels, something may be disposed to attract a metal pretzel. And even if the extension of “metal pretzel” is the same as the extension of “passion for shrimp-flavoured ice-cream”, i.e. the empty set, the true report:

(1) The ball is disposed to attract a metal pretzel

is not equivalent to:

(2) The ball is disposed to attract a passion for shrimp-flavoured ice-cream. (2008, 209; sentence numbering changed)

By paraphrasing Place (1996),² one might say that in looking for the mark of the intentional, one has actually found the mark of the dispositional. Yet as Crane himself stresses (2008, 216), there is an easy way for him to rule out the counterexample, which in point of fact was already presented in similar terms by Martin, Pfeifer (1986). If, as Nes actually does, we consider dispositions in terms of their linguistic reports, it is easy to see why such reports do not provide jointly

¹ Intentionality of content is indeed characterized not only by directedness and aspectual shape, but also by the fact that – as Fodor (1987) puts it – representations can be true as well as false, or in other terms, intentional states have the content they have independently of whether the satisfaction conditions determined by that content are indeed satisfied.

² Even though for him things are actually more complicated. See the following footnote.

sufficient conditions of intentionality. For, as many people along with Crane himself (2001) have underlined (starting from Kneale 1968 and Searle 1983), the linguistic phenomena that feature such reports, i.e. failure of existential generalization on the one hand and failure of substitutivity *salva veritate* on the other hand, are no criteria for singling out the genuine linguistic counterparts of intentional states; namely, adequate reports of such states, *intentional reports*. Instead, they constitute a mark of the more general linguistic phenomenon of *intensionality*, which affects dispositional reports just as modal or nomic statements, *intensional contexts* in general.³ As a result, comments Crane, it is no surprise that Nes is right in holding that even linguistic refinements of the above features, such as those involving hyperintensionality or what Nes calls Russellian meanings (the contribution to the structured Russellian propositions expressed by the sentences in which the relevant terms figure) (2008, 213), do not work either.

So far, so good. Yet these considerations notwithstanding, Crane wants to take this counterexample seriously. Probably because he feels that, even if it is stated in improperly linguistic terms, it may indirectly undermine his two aforementioned mental criteria for intentionality, directedness and aspectual shape, as being jointly insufficient as well. For, he says, “in broad outline, the intensionality of the ingredients of reason is the logical expression or reflection of these two ideas” (2001, 13). In this respect, he adds a further condition to his two criteria of intentionality, i.e. *representationality*. For “a representation can represent something that does not exist, and [...] when something is represented it is represented under some aspect or other” (2008, 216), while dispositions do not represent the phenomena manifesting them.

One may however wonder whether appealing to representationality, as Crane does, really helps. For on the one hand, talking of representation is just another way of cashing out the idea that intentional states, in their being the kind of states they are (hence, in their having a certain *mode*), are about something or have a content (Searle 1983, 12). Thus, speaking of intentional or of representational states basically amounts to the same thing. This is shown by the linguistic facts that, in talking about content, people often indifferently labels it *intentional* or *representational* content, and that, in describing the philosophical position that takes all mental states to be intentional states, people often indifferently refer to it as *intentionalism* or *representationalism*. So meant, representationality can hardly work as

³ Place (1996) puts forward an intermediate position. For even if he states that the genuine criteria for intentionality are actually the mark of the dispositional, he rules out aspectual shape as contributing, once linguistically conceived, to mark intensionality instead.

a further criterion of intentionality.⁴ On the other hand, by talking of representation one may mean the more specific idea that thoughts are relations to representations, to be understood as the physical vehicles (typically located in one's brain) that are endowed either with aboutness or with content. Yet it would be hard to appeal to this more fine-grained conception of representation. For it would amount to take as a criterion of intentionality what in point of fact constitutes just the tenet of a specific theory of thoughts, the so-called representational theory of mind, a version of the classical computational theory of mind (cf. e.g. Fodor 1981). For one may well hold that a thought is qualified by directedness and aspectual shape without espousing the further idea that it is so qualified in virtue of its standing in a (typically computational) relation with a representational yet physical vehicle having those features.

Perhaps there are further ways of cashing out what for Crane representationality amounts to. At the very beginning of his book (2001), he says that having a mind, in its being basically featured by intentionality, amounts to having a point of view on the world (Crane 2001, 4-6). Yet appealing to the idea of a point of view is hardly useful in this context. For either it is just another way of pointing out that thoughts have aspectual shape, and therefore it does not mobilize any further feature of intentionality, or it is something that hardly qualifies thoughts *as such*, whether it further appeals to the idea that objects or contents of a thought are *presented* to the thought's subject (McGinn 1997), an idea that properly applies just to perceptual experiences, or it appeals to the similar idea that *experiential* thoughts are, or involve, representations *for* a subject (Kriegel 2013), an idea that rules out unconscious thoughts.

3 Why the Traditional Mark Works

In point of fact, if one reflects on what the traditional marks of intentionality, directedness and aspectual shape, actually amount to from a straightforwardly mental point of view, one can better understand why dispositions are no counterexample to them. For in having such features, thoughts are not qualified by mental counterparts of the linguistic features of intensional contexts, failure of existential generalization and failure of substitutivity *salva veritate*, which instead adequately apply to dispositional reports as *bona fide* cases of intensional contexts. Instead, directedness and aspectual shape are other mental features; namely, the *possible nonexistence* of the ob-

⁴ Even more problematically, for Martin and Pfeifer even dispositions represent in this sense (1986, 541). For other criticisms to Crane on this point, cf. Raimondi, unpublished.

ject of a thought, its *intentional object* as the tradition has labeled it, and its *possible apparent aspectuality*. In their turn, so meant these features are linguistically matched by corresponding linguistic features, let me call them *existential unloadedness* and *pseudo-opacity*, which properly apply just to intentional reports, as I said elsewhere (Voltolini 2005).

Let me start from directedness. Appearances notwithstanding, directedness is not the mental fact that there may be no object for a thought. Instead, it is the mental fact that the object of a thought may exist just as may not exist: the *possible nonexistence* of the intentional object. By contrast, dispositions are not qualified by directedness so meant. Granted, dispositions may be individuated, if not in a *metaphysical* at least in a weaker *epistemic* sense, in terms of their possible manifestations. For example, fragility is the capacity for something *to be broken*, which if it does not metaphysically *depend* on this possible manifestation,⁵ at least it is epistemically *identified* by means of it. Yet a disposition is such that it may have no object *at all* with which such a possible manifestation is related. *Pace* Nes (2008), this is not the same as what would be a proper directedness for dispositions, if there were any (which is not the case); namely, the idea that they may have an existent as well as a nonexistent object. On behalf of the dispositionalist, one may reply that such an object of a disposition is *the possible manifestation itself*: a possible event is what the disposition is directed upon (Martin, Pfeifer 1986; Place 1996).⁶ Yet again, insofar as there may be no object at all the possible manifestation is related with, this possible event is just a generic, not a singular item, as the object an intentional state is directed upon is instead taken⁷ to be. This difference is linguistically captured by their distinct kinds of reports, the intentional vs the dispositional reports.

Let me clarify this point by means of examples. Sean Connery may think of Nicola Sturgeon, the present Scottish First Minister that ac-

⁵ This dependence can be further meant either in a weaker modal, existential, sense, or in a stronger essentialist, ontological, sense. For more on these senses cf. e.g. Fine 1995.

⁶ For a metaphysical, strong, sense of individuation of dispositions in terms of their possible manifestations, cf. e.g. Bird 2007. By specifying what Martin and Pfeifer (1986) maintain, Place (1996) instead claims that a further criterion that contribute to single out dispositionality is the weaker epistemic identification of something in terms of its object; precisely, its possible manifestation. Crane himself flirts with this idea when he says that dispositions are individuated, in a weak, non ontologically committal sense, by their possible manifestations, just as thoughts are individuated, in the very same sense, by intentional objects (forthcoming; 2001, 25-6). Yet not even this weak epistemically individuating sense of directedness captures the sense of directedness that is involved in the criterion for intentionality. For this latter sense is not epistemic, but phenomenological (if not also ontological), as we will see later: it (possibly correctly) looks to one that one's state is about something independently of whether it actually exists.

⁷ Or even *felt*: see later.

tually exists, just as he may think of Nessie, the alleged Loch Ness monster that actually does not exist. In both cases, *there is something*, namely Nicola and Nessie respectively, Sean thinks about; yet simply, in the second case, unlike the first case, that very something does not exist. This is linguistically captured not by the idea that a sentence like:

(3) Sean thinks of Nessie (who does not exist)

elicits no existential generalization, as is traditionally said (e.g. Smith, McIntyre 1982; Searle 1983; and even Crane himself 2001), but rather (see Sainsbury 2018, and even Crane himself 2013) by the fact that it elicits a particular, nonexistentially loaded, quantification. Indeed, from (3) one can validly infer:

(4) Hence, there is something, namely Nessie, Sean thinks about (who does not exist).

Clearly enough, the validity of this inference shows that in the above case there is no failure of existential generalization. For what is rather involved is a particular generalization existentially unloaded – *existential unloadedness*, for short (McGinn 2000, 2004).⁸ For it ranges upon an overall domain of individuals independently of whether they exist or not. While in the dispositional case, existential generalization fails *tout court*. For, to come back to Nes' example:

(1) The ball is disposed to attract a metal pretzel

(5) Hence, there is a metal pretzel the ball is disposed to attract

is an invalid inference, even if “there is” is given a non-existentially loaded reading. Indeed, there is no metal pretzel, even in an existentially unloaded sense, the ball is disposed to attract. Granted, in extensional contexts the description “a metal pretzel” actually denotes the empty set. Yet in (1) it has a merely possible denotation, but it actually denotes no actually nonexistent item, not even a possible indi-

⁸ Note that in order to account for this situation there is no need to resort *à la* Priest (2016) to two different ‘existential’ quantifying items respectively meant by different expressions, an existential (“there exists”) and a particular (“some”) one. For, in trying to capture the linguistic counterpart of the possible nonexistence of the intentional object, one may say that precisely the same kind of inference mobilizing just the very same quantifier holds from “Sam thinks of Nicole (who exists)” to “There is someone, namely Nicole, Sam thinks of (who exists)”. Simply in this case, one may contextually use the very same quantifier *restrictedly*, as ranging over just the subdomain of existents. For more about this see Voltolini 2018.

vidual. For it is indeterminate what that possible denotation amounts to, as Kaplan (1973, 505-8; 1989, 609) originally stressed by raising the problem of the insufficient specificity for an actually unsatisfied description to single out a certain possible *denotatum*. Consider a possible world *w* that contains a metal pretzel (to be attracted by the relevant ball) and a possible world *w'* that contains a metal pretzel (to be attracted by such a ball) as well. Are such possible metal pretzels the same thing or not? There is no fact of the matter as to how this question could be answered.⁹ As a result, the step from the *de dicto* reading conveyed by (1) to the *de re* reading stated by (5) is illegitimate.¹⁰ Clearly enough, in fact, unlike (3) no plausible existential generalization of any sort generalization, not even a particular one existentially unloaded, does come out of the infinitival expression “to attract a metal pretzel” occurring in (1).¹¹

Ditto for aspectual shape. Appearances notwithstanding, aspectual shape is not the mental fact that it is indeterminate whether two thoughts are about the same object, but it is the mental fact that two thoughts are about different intentional objects that may further appear as aspects of the very same thing: the *possible apparent aspectuality* of the intentional object. By contrast, dispositions are not qualified by aspectual shape so meant. For dispositions are such that it is indeterminate whether an object a possible manifestation is related with is the same as another object the manifestation is related with. This is not the same as what would be a proper aspectual shape for dispositions if there were any (which is not the case); namely, the idea that there are different objects such possible manifestations are related with. Nor would resorting to the possible manifestations themselves fare any better: simply, a mere indetermination in their identity would arise as well. Again, this difference is linguistically captured by their distinct kinds of reports, the intentional vs the dispositional reports.

Again, let me rely on examples. Oedipus may entertain a certain thought with respect to a certain intentional object, call it “Jocasta”, yet fail to entertain the same kind of thought with respect to *another* intentional object, call it “Mummy”, even if both objects may further

⁹ I take that the indeterminacy in question is metaphysical. Yet nothing would change if it were semantical, i.e. it involved a conceptual failure in the description of the relevant possible world. At any rate, clearly enough it is not epistemic, i.e. it has nothing to do with a failure in identification.

¹⁰ Cf. Smith, McIntyre (1982, 30-3), who precisely tie this failure of existential generalization (which is for me the only genuine failure that there is) to the illegitimacy of passing from a *de dicto* to a *de re* reading of the relevant sentence. Unfortunately, they connect this illegitimacy with an unnecessary distinction between indefinite and definite intentions.

¹¹ As Place himself (1996, 104) implicitly acknowledges.

appear as aspects of the same thing, Jocasta-aka-Mummy. Sticking to reports of objectual intentional states (but the same result would be obtained if one mobilized reports of propositional intentional states), this is linguistically captured by the fact that (*pace* Freud) the true:

(6) Oedipus craves for Jocasta

is matched by the false:

(7) Oedipus craves for Mummy.

For in such contexts, the ordinarily coreferring names “Jocasta” and “Mummy” respectively refer to different intentional objects that may further appear as aspects of one and the same thing, Jocasta-aka-Mummy. Thus, as Frege (1892) originally captured,¹² in (6)-(7) there is no failure of substitutivity *salva veritate*. For there is no referential *opacity*, but just *pseudo-opacity* (Voltolini 2005). Indeed appearances notwithstanding, the names do not corefer there, for instead they refer to different intentional objects, respectively named there “Jocasta” and “Mummy”. While in the dispositional case, there is such a failure *viz* proper referential opacity. Suppose one goes back to:¹³

(1) The ball is disposed to attract a metal pretzel.

(2) The ball is disposed to attract a passion for shrimp-flavoured ice-cream.

Granted, in extensional contexts the two descriptions “a metal pretzel” and “a passion for shrimp-flavoured ice-cream” actually code-note the empty set. Yet unlike what happens in (6)-(7), in (1)-(2) such descriptions do not actually denote *different* (actually nonexistent) objects; they merely have possible denotations of which is indeterminate whether they are identical. Indeed, it is indeterminate whether there is just one *attractable* metal pretzel across unactual possible worlds as well as whether there is just one *passion-attractable* shrimp-flavoured ice-cream across such worlds, hence whether they

¹² Actually, Frege was committed to a metaphysical picture of intentional objects as *Sinne*, i.e. abstract objects of a certain kind. Yet this is irrelevant for my present purposes (see later).

¹³ This can be better seen in Martin and Pfeifer’s example, where the two dispositional reports respectively involve two definite descriptions, “the only pink object O at L” and “the only object M of mass f at L” (1986, 533), which in extensional contexts actually denote the same thing, but in such reports differ in their possible indeterminate denotations.

are identical.¹⁴ As a further result, it is indeterminate as well whether to the two infinitival expressions “to attract a metal pretzel” and “to attract a passion for shrimp-flavoured ice-cream” single out different possible events. All in all, the fact that (1) has a certain truth-value is no guarantee for (2), which turns out from the mere substitution of the first description with the actually codenoting (in extensional contexts) second description, to have the same truth-value.¹⁵

At this point, however, one may wonder what makes it the case that the above characterizations of directedness and aspectual shape are *mental* characterizations. In response, note that, in so mobilizing the notion of an intentional object as involved both in directedness and aspectual shape adequately meant, I have not relied on any metaphysical characterization of such objects, nor have I ontologically committed to them. Instead, by following Crane (2001, 2013) and Woodling (2016a, 2016b), I have simply stuck to the *phenomenological* characterization of such objects, as is captured by the three following theses:

a) every intentional state is about an intentional object, i.e. there is an intentional object for any intentional state independently of whether it exists;

b) taken as such, whether or not it exists, an intentional object is a schematic object, i.e. it is an object that has no particular metaphysical nature insofar as it is thought of;

c) taken as such, whether or not it exists, an intentional object is a phenomenological object, i.e. an object for the subject of the intentional state: more precisely, it is what that subject takes (or even *feels*) that state to be about.

According to these theses, on the one hand, in the first example above Nessie is the object of Sean’s thought, even if it does not exist. On the other hand, in the second example, Jocasta and Mummy are the two different intentional objects of Oedipus’ relevant thoughts, insofar as for a long while Oedipus has not recognized that they further appear as aspects of one and the same thing, Jocasta-aka-Mummy.

¹⁴ See fn. 9.

¹⁵ Both Martin, Pfeifer (1986) and Place (1996) appeal to a further criterion that traces back to Anscombe (1965), the so-called indeterminacy of the intentional object, in order to again hold that also this criterion contributes to single out dispositionality, not intentionality. Yet the only plausible sense in which the criterion qualifies intentional objects, which is *epistemic* – namely, the idea that the subject of an intentional state *may not know* of certain properties whether they are possessed or not by a certain intentional object – does not qualify dispositions.

This is what tragically reveals itself to be the case when Oedipus finally discovers that Jocasta is the same as Mummy.¹⁶

Granted, it is an utterly different issue to settle *what* intentional objects metaphysically really are, and whether *there* really *are* such objects from an ontological point of view. Personally on the one hand, as I stressed elsewhere (cf. e.g. Voltolini 2013a), I believe with Crane (2001, 2013) that out of their being thought of, intentional objects are metaphysically various. *Pace* Crane, on the other hand, I also believe that the answer as to the issue of whether there really are, ontologically speaking, such metaphysically various intentional objects, depends on the issue of whether we are already ontologically committed to objects of the respective metaphysical kind. Sometimes, the answer to this question is typically positive – e.g. when intentional objects are *concreta* – yet some other times we are uncertain on what is the right answer to it – e.g. when intentional objects are *facta* – and some further times the answer is typically negative – e.g. when intentional objects are *impossibilia*. Yet someone else may have utterly different both metaphysical and ontological convictions on these issues.

Fortunately enough, however, in order to settle the issue of whether directedness and aspectual shape are necessary and jointly sufficient conditions of intentionality (of reference), we do not have to enter into these metaphysical and ontological controversies. For even if phenomenology is the last guide *neither* to metaphysics *nor* to ontology, directedness and aspectual shape must still qualify intentionality, by mobilizing the proper metaphysico-ontological counterparts of intentional objects, whatever they are. Thus, meaning such features phenomenologically, as above, is enough in order for them to work as the mark of the intentional, not of the dispositional.¹⁷

¹⁶ For more about this (in particular, why the weak sameness relation between different intentional objects is not the same as the strong identity relation between an object and itself, an idea originally defended brilliantly by Castañeda 1989), cf. e.g. Voltolini 2016.

¹⁷ If one claims that metaphysically, intentionality amounts to the essential thought-object relation of *constitution*, as I do (cf. Sacchi, Voltolini 2012; Voltolini 2015), the idea that directedness and aspectual shape must be phenomenologically meant as I have just done is further corroborated. Incidentally, this claim does not reintroduce the issue of distinguishing intentionality from dispositionality from the rear door. For even if one appeals to the strong metaphysical sense of individuation as ontological dependence in order to understand the relation between dispositions and their possible manifestations (see fnn. 5-6), the constitution relation holding between a thought and its object (or content) is even stronger than that. For, unlike possible manifestations of a disposition, the object is an *essential part* of its thought. Yet for this paper's purposes I can leave these matters aside.

4 Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to show that, when properly meant, i.e. phenomenologically, as involving intentional objects that may not exist and may further appear as aspects of other things, Crane's criteria of intentionality (notably, reference intentionality), directedness and aspectual shape, resist Nes' counterexamples appealing to dispositions. Thus, in order to find the mark of the intentional we do not need to resort to a further alleged yet unclear feature of intentionality, representationality, as Crane instead thinks.

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