

Is Intentional Ascription Intrinsically Normative?

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In a short article called “Mid-Term Examination: Compare and Contrast” that epitomizes and concludes his book *The Intentional Stance*, D. C. Dennett (1987) provides a sketch of what he views as an emerging Interpretivist consensus in the philosophy of mind. The gist is that Brentano’s thesis is true (the intentional is irreducible to the physical) and that it follows from the truth of Brentano’s thesis that:

strictly speaking, ontologically speaking, there are no such things as beliefs, desires, or other intentional phenomena. But the intentional idioms are “practically indispensable,” and we should see what we can do to make sense of their employment in what Quine called an “essentially dramatic” idiom.... Not just brute facts, then but an element of interpretation...must be recognized in any use of the intentional vocabulary. (Dennett, 1987, p. 342)¹²

In this context, “making sense of” the prevalence of the intentional idiom is not explaining why it should be indispensable if there are no beliefs or desires for it to refer to. Nor is it specifying the truth conditions of intentional attribution inevitably involves “an element of interpretation.” The discussion that follows treats these two papers together.

According to Dennett, there are two schools of Interpretivism, two ways in which one might reveal the element of interpretation in content ascription. These are Projectivism and Normativism:

Here two chief rivals have seemed to emerge: one or another Normative Principle, according to which one should attribute to a creature the propositional attitudes it “ought to have” given its circumstances, and one or another Projective Principle, according to which one should attribute to a creature the propositional attitudes one supposed one would have oneself in those circumstances. (Dennett, 1987, pp.342f)

The Normative Principles will be our main concern; they include such “principles of charity” as that *most of* the beliefs ascribed to a creature are true (*a fortiori* , that most of them are coherent) and thus imply the holist thesis that there can be content attribution only where there is **multiplicity** of beliefs. Before we turn to Normativism, however, we will briefly discuss the Projectivist alternative.

1 Projectivism

Projectivism can be construed as proposing a first approximation to a theory of the logical form of belief sentences (for discussion, see Stich, 1983). Roughly, “John believes that it’s raining” is equivalent, in Smith’s mouth, to “John is in the state that would normally cause me (Smith) to say that it’s raining.”¹³ It is notoriously difficult for

this sort of account of belief ascription to get the details right (for example, there are problems about paraphrasing sentences that contain indexicals in complements to verbs of propositional attitude); but, for present purposes, we can put these relatively technical issues to one side. We want to suggest just two main criticisms of the Projectivist story.

First, Projectivism seems hopelessly unable to construe sentences that existentially quantify over the contents of propositional attitudes (as opposed to sentences that actually cite their contents). Consider the following kind of case: Smith's three-year-old hears him prattling on about the analytic/synthetic distinction, and it occurs to the child that Smith must have some beliefs about this distinction that he, the child, does not understand and could not express. On the present analysis, this thought – which intuition might plausibly take to be true – is self-contradictory, since it entails both that Smith is in some state that would normally lead the three-year-old to say that...blah, blah, blah, analytic/synthetic, blah, blah, blah...; and that there is no such state.

Or consider you and your Twin-earth twin *after* you have noticed that what he calls "water" isn't H₂O, and hence that the belief he expresses by uttering the form of words "water is wet" isn't the belief that water is wet. (For the original Twin examples, see Putnam, 1975). Perhaps you would like to say that there is nevertheless some or other belief that your twin uses that formula to express. But how can you say this, knowing, as you do, that the belief he expresses isn't one that it's possible for *you* to entertain? (According to the standard story, you can entertain the belief that your twin uses the form of words "water is wet" to express only if you are casually connected to XYZ – which, by assumption, you aren't.)

So you can't coherently believe that there is something that your twin means by what he says when he utters "water is wet." It would make *no sense* for you to believe this, given the Projectivist analysis of belief ascriptions. Turnabout is fair play, of course; your twin can use the same considerations to exempt himself from thinking that there is anything *you* were to find this consequence of Projectivism offensive.

These aren't merely technical difficulties. The problem is that, if the Projectivist account of the (putative) interpretive element in belief attribution is right, then what *you* can believe depends on what *your interpreter* can say. But if anything is metaphysically independent of anything, surely your repertoire of potential beliefs is independent of anybody else's repertoire of potential speech acts. There is, no doubt, an "element of interpretation" in talk about mountains; where does the mountain end and the valley begin, after all? But only a megalomaniac could suppose that whether there are mountains depends on whether he can say that there are.

The second objection is that Projectivism can't explain the putative "element of interpretation" in intentional ascription; on the contrary, Projectivism must *presuppose* it in order to count as a species of Interpretivism.

Consider the following line of inquiry. Why isn't the Projectivist actually a *Realist* about the intentional, albeit a Realist who disagrees with the usual assumptions about the polyadicity of propositional attitude predicates? That is, why isn't a Projectivist just a Realist who thinks that believing (and the like) is a *four*-place relation (between a creature, its mental state, and the propositional object of its mental state, and an interpreter), as opposed to the more conventional view that it's a three-place relation (between a creature, its mental state, and the propositional object of its mental state)? Notice that, *so far*, there is no incompatibility between Realism and this view of the polyadicity of intentional ascriptions.¹⁴

Relativizing intentional ascriptions to an interpreter doesn't, *in and of itself*, impugn their objectivity. For, *prima facie*, there is a fact of the matter about whether John is in the sort of state that would normally cause Smith to say that it is raining; and if he is, then, according to the Projectivist analysis, Smith's claim that John believes that it's raining is just straightforwardly *true*.¹⁵

The obvious reply would be that there is no fact of the matter – that it is a question for interpretation – as to whether the state that John is in is the same state (is a token of the same state type) as the one that normally causes Smith to say that it's raining. (Or, equivalently for these purposes, there is no fact of the matter – it's a question for interpretation – whether what John does when he's in that state is to count as saying what Smith does when Smith utters the form of words "it's raining.") This does make Projectivism a species of Interpretivism; but it also gives up on the idea that intentional ascriptions are interpretive *because* they are projective. On the contrary, what we've just seen is that the order of analysis must go the other way around: only when it is given an Interpretivist reading does Projectivism fail to represent attitude ascriptions as fully factual. But then, *a fortiori*, it can't be that the Projectivist analysis *per se* accounts for the "element of interpretation" in intentional ascription.

So much for the discussion of Projectivism. We turn now to the consideration of Normativism, the other form Interpretivism can take according to "Mid-Term Examination."

2 Normativism

Normativism is the claim that the attitudes that an interpreter attributes to a creature are constrained by the requirement that, in general, the creature should be represented as having the beliefs it ought to have and the desires whose satisfaction would be in its interest. There are, presumably, two sorts of reasons for supposing that Normativism is a species of Interpretivism. For one thing, by definition, Normativists believe that some of the constitutive principles of content attribution are *normative*; and, at least on some views of what normativity amounts to, this would all by itself suffice to make such attributions not fully factual. Secondly, as we understand Dennett, it is central to his argument for Interpretivism that (at least some of) the normative principles constitutive

of content assignment are idealized and heuristic; that they are *not* really satisfied by flesh and blood intentional systems. It is because the conditions for intentional ascription require that we treat fallible creatures as *if* they were fully rational that “an element of interpretation” enters in when intentional states are ascribed.

We propose to question both the argument from Normativism to Interpretivism and the argument that Normative principles are inextricably involved in content attribution. First, however, *which* normative Principles? Consider the following:

1. *The truth principle*: Necessarily, intentional ascriptions represent a creature's beliefs as mostly true (by the interpreter's lights).
2. *The coherence principle*: Necessarily, intentional ascriptions represent a creature's beliefs as mostly coherent (by the Interpreter's lights).
3. *The closure principle*: Necessarily, if a creature is represented as believing *p*, and *p* entails *q*, then the creature must be represented as believing *q*.
4. *The probity principle*: Necessarily, intentional systems mostly desire what it would be good for them to have.

Our reading is that Dennett endorses (1) and (2). Dennett also endorses (3) as an appropriate idealization governing intentional ascription (see Dennett, 1978, p.11; 1987, p. 21 and pp.94-5). However, Dennett's argument for (3) serves equally well as an argument for (2); and the latter is clearly the weaker and more plausible option. Similarly, Dennett's argument for (1) also serves as an argument for (4), a principle that he explicitly endorses. Having said all this, it simplifies the exposition to ignore these distinctions except where they matter. We propose henceforth to do so.

Dennett's Evolutionary argument for the Truth Principle

What shows that content ascription is required to represent intentional systems as believers (/tellers) of truths? Dennett proposes an evolutionary argument; or, at least, he seems to:

Suppose we travel to a distant planet and find it inhabited by things moving about its surface, multiplying, decaying, apparently reacting to events in the environment, but otherwise as unlike human beings as you please. Can we make intentional predictions and explanations of their behavior? If we have reason to suppose that a process of natural selection has been in effect, then we can be assured that the populations we observe have been selected in virtue of their design: they will respond to at least some of the more common event-types in this environment in ways that are normally appropriate. (Dennett, 1978 p. 8)

Dennett later adds that:

There is no point in ascribing beliefs to a system unless the beliefs ascribed are in general appropriate to the environment, and the system responds appropriately to the beliefs. An eccentric expression of this would be: the capacity to believe would have no survival value unless it were a capacity to believe truths. (Dennett, 1978, p. 17)

Let's, for the moment, ignore the caveat "eccentric;" we'll presently come back to it. Suppose that the doctrine is simply that, on one hand, since our cognitive capacities are evolved, they must have been selected and, on the other hand, only a cognitive system that generally endorses truths would *be* selected since no other kind of cognitive system would have survival value. So, all of this being the case, the truth principle must hold of our beliefs.

The evolutionary assumptions required to run this sort of argument are, in our view, very dubious; that a system is selected does not require that all of its subsystems have survival value; some of them may be vestigial.¹⁶ That a disposition to believe mostly truths is *ipso facto* at a competitive advantage with respect to any and every capacity to believe mostly falsehoods is, in fact, not obvious (for discussion, see Stich, 1990); and so forth. However, let's put these issues to one side. For, even if the empirical assumptions of the evolutionary argument were impeccable, it doesn't appear to yield either of the conclusions that Dennett wants. What Dennett wants is that Normativism should entail Interpretivism, and that principles like (1) and (4) should be *necessary* (they should hold of intentional systems as such). It is, to put it mildly, not obvious that either consequence follows from the evolutionary story.

Problems with Dennett's Evolutionary argument for the Truth Principle

It would look to be matter of fact whether a creature has an evolutionary history; and it would also look to be a matter of fact whether part of the evolutionary story about the creature is that it is at competitive advantage in virtue of the character of its cognitive capacities. But if these are matters of fact, and if being selected for one's cognitive capacities is, as Dennett apparently maintains, at least a *sufficient* condition for being mostly a believer of truths,¹⁷ then it would seem to be a matter of fact – and not a matter of interpretation – whether *we* are believers of mostly truths. Epistemologists should be able to settle the issue of skepticism once and for all by consulting the fossil record.

It is, in short, puzzling how Dennett thinks an appeal to the Darwinian theory – which is, after all, a causal story about the *mechanisms of speciation* – could reveal an "element of interpretation" in content ascription. Interpretivism is, *inter alia*, the view that, strictly speaking we *doesn't really have* can't help it much in its struggle for survival. It is for exactly this reason that, unlike Dennett, most people who take an evolutionary line on intentionality are correspondingly Realist (not to say reductionist) about content (Millikan and Dretske are two examples). *Qua* Darwinists, they suppose that there's a matter of fact about what selection history of selection. So they are required to suppose also that organisms can't be selected for believing truths unless they *do* believe truths.

Dennett himself is, apparently, sensitive to this sort of point; it's the burden of the caveat "eccentric" in the passage quoted above, which proceeds as follows.

An eccentric expression of [the evolutionary argument for principle (1)] would be: the capacity to believe would have no survival value unless it were a capacity to believe truths. What is eccentric and potentially misleading about this is that it hints at the picture of a species “trying on” a faculty giving rise to beliefs most of which were false, having its inutility demonstrated, and abandoning it. A species might “experiment” by mutation in any number of inefficacious systems precisely because of their defects, their nonrationality, and hence a false belief system is a conceptual impossibility. (Dennett, 1978, p. 17)

It's not clear to us what Dennett takes to be the bottom line; but it looks as though it may not be evolution after all he sees as underwriting the truth principle. Maybe Dennett's position is that it's just analytic that a creature's beliefs are mostly true (a system of mostly false propositional attitudes wouldn't “deserve to be called a belief system”).

On this reading, Dennett's defense of the claim that principle (1) is constitutive of belief attribution is just that it follows from our concept of belief that beliefs are mostly true. The up side of this sort of strategy is that it gives the opponent so little room to maneuver. The down side is the danger that the best you get is Pyrrhic victory. Suppose it is analytic of *belief* that no creature has any beliefs unless it has mostly true beliefs (or mostly rational beliefs, or whatever). Very well, then; if the propositional attitudes we've got are mostly not true, it follows that they aren't beliefs. But so what? It doesn't follow that they aren't propositional attitudes or that we aren't intentional systems. Perhaps what we've got are *shmeliefs* – propositional attitudes exactly like beliefs in their functional roles, their qualitative contents (if any), and their satisfaction conditions, except that they are *not* analytically constrained by the principles of charity. To make the case worse, it might be supposed that it is nomologically necessary that shmeliefs are mostly true (mostly rational, or whatever); you might tell the very Darwinian story Dennett does, according to which natural selection would prefer creatures with mostly true shmeliefs to creatures with mostly false ones. Then, *ceteris paribus*, the *only* difference between a creature's having beliefs and its having shmeliefs would be that, in the latter case, there are logically possible worlds in which what the creature has are mostly false, and in the former case there aren't. It might thus be really *quite* difficult to tell beliefs and shmeliefs apart.⁷

What Dennett needs to avoid this reply is an argument that shmeliefs are conceptually (or metaphysically) impossible; in particular, that a state can't be *intentional* (can't have conditions of semantic evaluation) unless it satisfies the charity principles. This argument is surely *not* provided by the claim that “beliefs are mostly true” is analytic.

In some of his recent papers (see especially “Intentional Systems in Cognitive Ethology: the ‘Panglossian Paradigm’ Defended” and “Evolution, Error, and Intentionality” both reprinted in Dennett, 1987), Dennett offers a rather different line of thought that may be intended to meet this sort of criticism of his Darwinian argument for principle (1). Apparently the idea is the while, on the one hand, it is indeed the biological function of cognitive mechanisms to fix true beliefs (so a system of false beliefs is an evolutionary impossibility, so the truth principle must be true), yet, on the other hand ascriptions of biological function themselves involve adopting the intentional

stance *towards the evolutionary process* (towards “Mother Nature,” as Dennett likes to say) and must therefore exhibit “an element of interpretation” which our ascriptions of intentional states to creatures other than Mother Nature then inherit. Although “attributions of intentional states to us cannot be sustained ... without appeal to assumptions about ‘what Mother Nature had in mind’” (Dennett, 1987, p. 320). So, apparently, the hermeneutic status of intentional ascriptions (to Mother Nature). We wouldn’t want to insist that this story is circular; but nor would we want to insist that it’s not.

In any event, we find it very puzzling. For one thing, there’s the point we made above, which does seem to us pretty decisive. If there *are* no beliefs and desires, then, *a fortiori*, there can’t be anything that beliefs and desires perform. No doubt interpretation can do a lot – hermeneutics is everywhere these days. Maybe interpretation can somehow determine teleology or selectional history (though with such friends Darwin doesn’t need enemies). But surely interpretation can’t bestow a teleology or a selectional history *on things that don’t exist*. That there is nothing that the unicorn’s horn was selected for *follows from* there not having been any unicorns; there is no place for interpretation to insert a wedge, because there are no unicorns (*a fortiori*, no unicorn horns) for an interpreter to take a stance towards. It’s one thing to claim that what is text; it’s a bit much to claim that what isn’t is too.

Secondly, we’re not really clear what the doctrine of interpretivism in biology is supposed to amount to. One would have thought that either evolutionary biology does have entailments of the form “(trait) *t* was selected for performing (function) *f*,” or it doesn’t. In either case, it’s hard to see how our adopting the intentional stance towards evolution (or towards Mother Nature) is supposed to help. It’s mysterious, in biology as elsewhere, either how you could make facts out of stances, or how stances could make facts disappear.

Perhaps an analogy will clarify the situation. Suppose it’s suggested that the ecological function of forest cover is to prevent the erosion of topsoil; that, according to the suggestion, is what forest cover is *for*. (You can imagine the claim being spelled out by reference to counterfactuals, among which “no forest cover → no topsoil” would presumably be prominent.) Well, either ecology does underwrite a notion of function or it doesn’t. If it does, then it’s just a matter of fact what forest cover is for; but if it doesn’t, we can’t improve the situation by adopting the “intentional stance” towards erosion.

No doubt we could tell a fairy – tale according to which Father Erosion wants to wash away the topsoil and the Tree Fairy wants to stop him. This might be useful for mnemonic purposes, or to amuse small children. But, surely, our telling this story (or not telling it) can’t be what determines whether there are ecological functions. If ecology doesn’t have consequences of the form “the function of *x* is *f*” *independently* of the story about Father Erosion and the Tree Fairy, then there straightforwardly *isn’t* anything that forest cover is for; if it does, then there straightforwardly is something that forest cover is for. Either way, our decision to adopt the intentional stance towards

erosion affects the ontological status of ecological functions *not one whit*. How could it? It is *stance independent*, after all, that there is no Father Erosion. So adding the story of our ecology can't increase the number of claims that our ecology warrants (a true proposition cojoined with a false one warrants only the inferences that the true proposition does). But if the story about Father Erosion doesn't legitimize interpretivism about functions in biology?⁸

See how the gods punish Instrumentalism: refuse to distinguish theories from fables, and soon you can't distinguish fables from theories. The moral still seems to be that if intentional ascription is to be understood in terms of evolutionary explanation, then it's an empirical rather than a conceptual question whether the truth principle holds. (We, of course, reserve the right to assert this hypothetical and deny its antecedent.)

Dennett's argument for the Closure Principle

Preliminary note: if you have an argument that a creature's beliefs are mostly true, of course, you have an argument that they are mostly coherent; so the satisfaction of principle (1) entails the satisfaction of principle (2). The satisfaction of principle (1) does *not*, however, entail the satisfaction of principle (3) will do equally well as an argument for (2), and we will assume that he intends that it cover both.

Dennett's argument for the closure principle goes like this:

The assumption that something is an intentional system is the assumption that it is rational; that is, one gets nowhere with the assumption that entity x has beliefs p, q, r, \dots unless one also supposes that x believes what follows from p, q, r, \dots ; otherwise there is no way of ruling out the prediction that x will, in the face of its beliefs p, q, r, \dots do something utterly stupid, and, if we cannot rule out *that* prediction, we will have acquired no predictive power at all. (Dennett, 1978, pp, 10-11)

(Notice that the argument goes through equally well to show that an intentional system that believes p must not also believe $\neg p$; in effect, for the coherence principle.) We take this passage to intend a transcendental argument according to which the closure principle is presupposed by the very possibility of making intentional predictions. Accordingly, *the argument fails there is any way to warrant intentional predictions without presupposing closure*.

Much of what needs to be said about Dennett's argument for closure has already been remarked upon in the literature (see Fodor, 1981; Stich, 1981; and "Making Sense of Ourselves" in Dennett, 1987). For example, it seems unclear that anything like *perfect* closure (/coherence) is needed to meet the requirement that *some* predictive power be generated by belief/desire ascriptions.⁹ We'd get *some* predictive value out of belief ascription even if it only worked, say, 87 percent of the time that a creature that believes ($p \rightarrow q$ and p) believes q . But if getting predictive power from belief/desire psychology doesn't really depend on assuming *flawless* rationality, then perhaps there is, as a matter of fact, enough closure (/coherence) around to make intentional

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ascription predictive. In which case, intentional ascription would rest upon rationality assumptions that are (not merely heuristic but) *true*. In which case, how would Normativism argue for Interpretivism?

Also, it seems just not to be true that successful prediction “from the intentional stance” always requires that we assume rationality. There are, for example, lots of cases in which we successfully predict someone’s behavior on the assumption that he will *not* notice some consequence of his beliefs and desires. (The chess player who is reliably a sucker for a knight fork, and the like). It may be argued that such predictive successes can operate only “against a background” of presumed rationality; but this does need to *argued* and we have, as yet, no hint as to how the argument would go. Clearly, we must have (what Dennett’s account doesn’t give us) *some* story about how the prediction of counter-rational behavior is even *possible*. Maybe it will turn out that the strategies that underlie predictive successes in these apparently exceptional cases will prove to be perfectly general when they are properly analyzed – hence that appeals to charity are never *essential* to intentional prediction. Let’s, therefore, actually consider such cases.

Everybody knows that the Moon reliably looks larger when it’s seen as being on the horizon. It *may* be that this phenomenon has a “cognitive” explanation in terms of (unconscious) judgements, inferences and the like; but also it may be that it hasn’t. The psychologists themselves aren’t sure. Clearly, in any event, nobody has detailed knowledge of the presumed underlying inferences, so nobody knows how much closure and coherence they do (or don’t) actually exhibit. Yet we confidently predict that we and our friends and relations (and, for that matter, absolute strangers) will be subject to the illusion. And surely this is a prediction “from the intentional stance;” it’s ineliminably committed to intentional contexts like “looks to be...when seen as...” How, then, are such predictions possible?

The question answers itself; the phenomenon is that the Moon *reliably* looks larger when it’s on the horizon. The generalization is lawlike in that it is confirmed by its instances, supports counterfactuals, and so forth. And, given access to a *law* that relates the apparent size of the Moon to its apparent position, we don’t need to appeal to principles of rationality to predict that if Smith sees the Moon as on the horizon, then he will see it as oversized.

Similarly for the guy who is suckered by knight forks. Heaven knows why he keeps falling for them; there’s clearly *something* wrong with the way he plans his moves. But we don’t have to know *what* is wrong, or *how much* is wrong – in particular, we don’t have to know whether, or to what extent, his planning is rational – in order to predict that he’ll fall for our traps; all we have to know is that his disposition to get suckered is reliable.

The long and short would seem to be that you can predict behavior from the intentional stance without committing yourself on closure and coherence *so long as there are lawful connections between the subject’s behaviors and his intentional states*.

We've been illustrating this point by examples of illusions and incapacabilities, but in fact it is entirely general. If there is a law that makes being in intentional state A nomologically sufficient for being in intentional (and/or behavioral) state B, then, given the knowledge that a creature *is* in state A, you can predict that it will (come to) be in state B, *whether or not the transition from A to B is rational*. The upshot is that the argument that infers charity from the presuppositions for intentional prediction *fails because it begs the question there being intentional laws*.¹⁰

Of course many philosophers who think that charity constrains intentional ascription *a priori* doubt that there *are* intentional laws. We have nothing to say against their doubting this except that they are in need of argument, and that, whatever this argument is, it mustn't itself depend on assuming that charity is constitutive of intentional ascription (as does, for example, the famous argument that Davidson, 1980, gives). In the present context, that assumption would be merely question-begging.

Here's another way to put the point. At first thought, it seems perfectly natural to suppose that if rational processes do enter into the intentional etiology of a creature's behavior – if, for example, decision-theoretic calculations bridge the gap an action, on the other – then a prediction that runs from premises about the creature's intentional states to conclusions about its behavioral outcomes must postulate that these rational processes transpire. But I don't need to postulate the newsboy's decision-theoretic rationality in order to predict the arrival of tomorrow's copy from the intentional stance. All I need is that his intention to deliver the paper is reliable and that, *ceteris paribus*, people reliably do what they intend to do.¹¹

As a matter of fact, in this sort of case the argument typically goes the other way around. It's only *because* I have independent evidence that the newsboy reliably brings the paper that I'm prepared to infer that, probably, there is some decision-theoretic calculation according to which it is rational for him to do so; in fact, I've never actually inquired into his motives. *Pace* Dennett, rationality assumptions typically don't enter as presuppositions of intentional predictions, but rather as part of the story we tell when we start to wonder what mental processes could underlie the reliable intentional generalizations by which everyone's experience tells him that behavior is subsumed.

We want to emphasize that we aren't denying that the mental processes that mediate the production of behavior are typically rational; or that, if you want to *reconstruct the etiology* of behavior, you must explicate these rational processes. Our point is just that you don't, in general, have to reconstruct the etiology of phenomena in order to predict them.¹² The question "what do you need to assume to get a true theory of the etiology of Xs?" and the question "what do you need to assume to get true predictions about Xs?" needn't have the same sorts of answers. But if this is so, then the possibility of intentional etiology processes actually were fully rational. *A fortiori*, the possibility of intentional prediction doesn't have to depend on *counterfactual*

assumptions of rationality. As long as there are intentional laws, and as long as the guy who is doing the predicting has access to the intentional laws that control the behaviors he is trying to predict, people are free to be as crazy as they like, compatible with their behavior being predictable from the intentional stance.

3 Summary and Conclusion

Here's where we take it that things stand. Dennett's argument against Intentional Realism depends on his argument for Interpretivism. His argument for Interpretivism depends on showing that either Normativism or Projectivism (or both) are true; but since Projectivism is hopeless, the argument depends, *de facto*, on showing that Normativism is true. Dennett's argument for Normativism depends, in turn, on the argument for charity, in effect, for principle (1). His argument for charity is either evolutionary or it's a transcendental argument about the conditions that have to be satisfied for behavioral prediction from the intentional stance to be possible. But the evolutionary argument yields the wrong conclusion (it makes the relation between interpretation and charity *contingent*) and the transcendental argument begs the question against intentional laws.

For all that has been shown so far, one might as well be an atomistic Intentional Realist, the putative emerging Interpretivist consensus in the philosophy of mind to the contrary notwithstanding.

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NOTES

¹ Among those Dennett lists as *not* party to the putative emerging consensus are Anscombe, Burge, Chisholm, Fodor, Geach, Kripke, and Searle. He might have added Barwise and Perry, Dretske, McGinn, Millikan, Stalnaker, Papineau, and many others. We are reminded of Peter de Vries' joke about the woman who was stark naked except for her clothes.

² *Qua* species of Interpretivism, Projectivism is not a reductionist program; remember that Interpretivists accept Brentano's thesis. So there is no principled objection to a construal of "believes that" that makes essential use of semantical notions like "says that." One can imagine a reductionist (hence, of course, not Dennett) embracing an analysis in which *uttering replaces saying that*. So, "John believes that it's raining" in Smith's mouth comes out equivalent to something like "John is in the state that would normally cause me (Smith) to utter 'it's raining'." The points we're about to make generally hold for both kinds of Projectivism analysis, as far as we can tell.

³ For a kind of Intentional Realism that takes a similarly eccentric view of the polyadicity of attitude sentences, see Fodor (1990a).

⁴ One might argue that this sort of relativization of intentional ascriptions would nevertheless make them unfit for purposes of scientific explanation. But, *prima facie*, that would be a different claim from Interpretivism; the latter would follow only on the tendentious assumption that the facts that can figure in

scientific explanation are the only facts there are. It is instinctive, in this respect, to compare Dennett's treatment of Projectivism with Stich's (1983). The conclusion Stich derives from the Projectivist account of attitude attribution are scrupulously methodological, *not* ontological.

⁵ Beware the fallacy *post hoc, ergo, propter hoc*. Pace Dennett, it just isn't true that if we find a creature that has a selectional history and an intentional structure, we can assume straight off that its intentional structure was designed by its selectional history. Consider: "Sheep are stupid; sheep are selected; so sheep are selected for their stupidity." (For discussion of this sort of case, see Gould and Lewontin, 1979). To make his argument for charity even begin to run, Dennett would have to restrict it to intentional systems whose selection depended on the truth of their beliefs. (We know of no argument that people are such creatures.)

⁶ We're not sure whether Dennett considers it also to be a *necessary* condition. If he does, then we are presumably all at risk that a Kuhnian revolution in macrobiology will show that none of us has a mind.

⁷ There was a time when even a respectable philosopher might have sought to establish that we have beliefs (and not shmeliefs) by appeal to a paradigm case argument. But not, we trust, any more.

⁸ One way to answer this question is to bite the bullet and go Instrumentalist about Darwin. In "Intentional Systems in Cognitive Ethology: the 'Panglossian Paradigm' Defended," Dennett says that: "adaptationism and mentalism (intentional system theory) are not *theories* in one traditional sense. They are stances or strategies that serve to organize data, explain interrelations and generate questions to ask Nature. Were they theories in the 'classical' mold, the objection that they are question begging or irrefutable would be fatal" (Dennett, 1987, p. 265). So far as we can make out, Dennett's argument for these surprising claims is just that vacuous, *ad hoc*, or question begging adaptionist (/mentalist) explanations can always be devised if the data prove recalcitrant. By that standard, however, *no* theories count as being "in the 'classical' mold," physical theories included. That a theory permits of *ad hoc* defense can't be enough to make it just a stance, since if it did, all theories would be just stances.

⁹ The most predictivity could conceivably require is that if an agent believes *p*, and $p \rightarrow q$, and believes that *q* is relevant to the success of his plans, then the agent believes *q*. This is clearly still far too strong to be realistic; but at least it's weaker than the closure principle.

¹⁰ Notice, in passing, that Brentano's thesis does not imply that there are no intentional laws; Brentano tells us only that if there are intentional laws, then they must be irreducible.

¹¹ If there are intentional laws they are surely *ceteris paribus* laws; special science laws generally are. For a recent discussion, see Schiffer (1987) and Fodor (1990b).

¹² We take this to be *patently* true. Sailors reliably predict that the wind will blow south west in fair weather in the summer on the Atlantic Coast of the US. Few of them have any idea of why it works that way. (We used to know, but we've forgotten.)

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