

TITLE:

Direction of fit: an essay about intentionality and free will from an externalist point of view.

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Abstract:

This paper aims to review some features of the concept of *intentionality* and *free will* regarding its connections with *direction of fit*. Firstly, the notion of intentionality and its main characteristics according to Searle (1983) and García-Carpintero (1996) are analysed. Secondly, and considering the previous analysis, Searle and Dennett's notion of free will is reviewed and discussed. As part of this discussion, and regarding the role of direction of fit, some passages from Kenny's *The Metaphysics of Mind*¹ are reviewed in order to criticize Searle's conception of free will.

Introduction:

Traditionally, intentionality is described in two different ways. On the one hand the concept refers to the relation between mind and states of issues in the world, on the other, it refers to the relation between the mind and its objects, regardless of the links between these with empirical facts.

In this sense, in the light of the previous distinction, according to Locke's conception, certain mind's contents cannot refer to things outside of the mind. In relation to *ideas of reflection*, the author says that these can be understood as *being such only as the mind gets by reflecting on its own operations within itself*². In this sense, the objects to which the mind is directed are the ideas of reflection, which exist only in the mind, and in order to know them, only attention is needed³.

¹ Kenny, A. *The Metaphysics of Mind*. Oxford University Press. New York. 1992.

² Locke, J. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Hackett. Cambridge. 1996. L. II, C I, § 4, pp. 34

³ Ibid. L. II, C. I, § 8, pp. 38

However, according to Locke's view, other mental contents such as *sensation ideas*⁴ can be related with the world. In this regard, Locke says that the mind *furnishes the understanding*⁵ with that kind of ideas that come from experience.

In relation to this, it can then be said that mental contents can be described from an internalist or an externalist point of view. The internalist view shows mental contents only from a subjective perspective, that is, regardless of its links with experience and considering only what they show in the mind. In contrast, according to an externalist point of view, mental contents describe world features through language in order to show a state of affairs that exist independently of us.

For example, and considering the distinction above, from an externalist perspective, in his *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein shows the following:

The agreement, the harmony of thought and reality consist in this: if I say falsely that something is *red*, then, for all that, it isn't red. And when I want to explain the word "red" to someone, in the sentence "That is not red" I do it by pointing to something red⁶.

What the quotation above shows, is language's ability to link objects with thoughts. Moreover, according to Wittgenstein it is almost impossible to understand language and thought beyond behaviour. Thus, Wittgenstein is suggesting a conception of language intimately associated with behavioural dispositions and capacities, which enable us to recognize and communicate things and situations that exist separately from us.

In this sense, according to Wittgenstein, mental contents are understood in terms of their capacity to refer to something in the world. Thus, the term intentionality can be used to make reference to certain kinds of thoughts about the world, that is, to make reference to states of affairs considered objective.

⁴ Ibid. 34

⁵ Ibid. 34

⁶ Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*. Blackwell. Oxford. 1958. § 429, pp. 127-128

In consequence, on the one hand intentionality is related with thought and its own contents, independently of its reference in the world; on the other, considering Wittgenstein's view, intentionality is described considering the relation between thought and the world.

1. - Intentionality and Objectivity.

Considering an externalist point of view, Searle describes intentionality as a relation between mental states (e.g. desires, beliefs, emotions), and objects and circumstances to which these particular states make reference. In this sense, the main feature of intentionality is to be able to make reference to something other than thought. This ability to connect intentional states with things and situations in the world is specified by a *direction of fit*⁷.

According to this, direction of fit expresses the adjustment of thoughts, insofar as they can be considered as intentional states, with things and circumstances in the world. This adjustment can be only expressed by language and behaviour.

In this regard, and in order to explain the relationship between language, behaviour and intentionality, Searle says:

Meaning exists only where there is a distinction between Intentional content and the form of its externalization, and to ask for the meaning is to ask for an Intentional content that goes with the form of externalization.⁸

A specific belief connects itself with appropriate forms of behaviour, which is in turn guided by that belief, and the belief is committed to adjust to things as they go on to show themselves. Thus, the cognitive role of belief is inseparable from the possibility of adjusting mental contents to the circumstances and events that surround us. The couple belief-behaviour, being constitutive for both terms, makes evident that belief, and generally intentional content, exteriorizes itself by behaviour as well as by language.

⁷ Searle, J. *Intentionality*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. 1983, pp. 5-6.

⁸ Ibid. pp.28.

In order to explain the notion of intentional beliefs as not limited to belief, Searle says:

Because intentional states are capable of referring to objects and states of affairs in the world beyond themselves, they must have some sort of content that determines this reference, and indeed we need to distinguish the content of the state from the type of state that it is. Thus I can believe that it will rain, hope that it will rain, fear that it will rain, or desire that it will rain. In each case there is the same content, that it will rain, but that content relates to the world in different psychological modes: belief, fear, hope desire, etc.⁹

In all these forms, intentionality seems to target to what is commonly called objectivity, that is, a state of affairs that occurs independently from us, that is hoped, or feared, or considered as a possible state of affairs and which may subsist independently among them. In this sense, intentionality makes a link between the subjective and the objective. However, the meaning of objectivity should be clarified.

In this regard, García-Carpintero points out a description of what could be called objectivity in an intentional states context, saying:

My perception, which propositional content I express with the statement "There is a red sphere in front of me", is an intentional state, a state which represents the world, the external situation, as if being in a certain way (that is, containing a sphere of a certain size and colour, situated in a certain place in space, relative to the position my body occupies). The intentional object of my perception is a certain objective occurrence. It is in the virtue of the existence or non-existence of this occurrence that my perception can be correct or incorrect, true or false¹⁰.

⁹ Searle, J. *Mind: a brief introduction*. Oxford University Press. New York. 2004, pp.166.

¹⁰ "Mi percepción, cuyo contenido proposicional expreso con el enunciado 'hay una esfera roja ante mí', es un estado intencional, un estado que representa el mundo, la situación externa, como siendo de un cierto modo (a saber, conteniendo una esfera de un cierto tamaño y un cierto color situada en cierto lugar del espacio relativamente a la posición que mi cuerpo ocupa). El objeto intencional de mi percepción es un cierto acaecimiento objetivo; es en virtud de la existencia o no existencia de este acaecimiento que mi percepción puede ser correcta o incorrecta, verdadera o falsa". García-Carpintero. M. *Las palabras, las ideas y las cosas*. Ariel. Barcelona. 1996, pp. 60. (Our translation)

García-Carpintero agrees that intentionality refers to a state of issues that happen in the world regardless of our consciousness. Considering this view, the mind is linked to the world from general estimates that include, as we may say in Searle's term, a direction of fit oriented to things occurring. In this sense, the objectivity implied by intentionality is linked with the notion of *objective occurrence* by the author.

García-Carpintero says that this kind of occurrence would be understood following four properties, namely intersubjectivity, substantivity, physicality and normativity.¹¹

These four properties show the following features: firstly, as a phenomenon, an objectivity occurrence must be experienced by others and not by me only. Secondly, it does not need a perceptor to happen. Thirdly, every objective occurrence is susceptible of being in a broad sense measured. Fourthly an objective occurrence should be compared with past and future facts.

Regarding the features showed above, Searle's concept of intentionality could be associated with García-Carpintero's definition of *objective occurrence*, where García-Carpintero's view allows a more specific understanding of the meaning of objectivity in the frame of the discussion about intentionality.

In this brief approach to Searle's intentionality concept, a relation between subjectivity and world, through meaningful contents called intentional is shown. In this sense, mental events can be intentional, and they would be understood as such, if they are addressed to the world and can be externalized by behaviour.

Therefore, the concept of intentionality is apt to articulate the constant relation between objectivity and subjectivity. Thus, this concept can be useful in order to narrow the gap between thought and the world.

1.2. - Free will from Dennett's and Searle's point of view.

Searle does not forget to remark that as intentional, thought is related to the world by perception. That is, there is a permanent connection between the

¹¹ Ibid, pp. 62.

perception of states of issues in the world and thought. So far, the author has only considered the direction of fit regarding cognitive activities; that is, focusing on the adjustment of mental contents to the way things are in the world. Thus, according with this view, the direction of fit is described only in one way: mind has to adjust itself to things. However, considering not cognition, but rather action, the direction of fit seem to describe a different kind of adjustment, because in the case of action, it is intended to succeed in adjusting things to subjective conceptions. This view will be the more prominent, as action is seen as not being merely the result of pre-determined conditions.

In this context, some perspectives seem to deny the possibility of free will. According to determinism, facts assumed as antecedents could explain consequent facts, and therefore nothing in the world can happen spontaneously. In this regard *every event that occurs must be explained by causally sufficient conditions*¹²

The belief stated above, even if it assumes some kind of moral determinism, seems completely opposed to the idea that any rational decision should be spontaneous. In opposition to this determinist point of view Searle expresses the following:

We have the experience of making up our mind to do something and then doing it. It is part of conscious experiences that we experience the causes of our decisions and actions, in the form of reasons for those decisions and actions, as not sufficient to force the actual decisions and actions¹³.

Thus, according to Searle's view, a voluntary action has two different characteristics: a reason for acting, that is, reasons about how and what should be considered previously in order to do something; and the action itself. Considering these two aspects, Searle is pointing out the gap between reasons to act and acting effectively. In this sense, free will consists in the possibility to cross that gap spontaneously¹⁴.

¹² Searle, J. *Mind: a brief introduction*. Oxford University Press. New York. 2004, pp. 219

¹³ *Ibid*, pp. 216-217

¹⁴ "Think of what is like to decide which candidate to vote in an election, or even which item to choose from a menu in a restaurant, and you will see that there is a characteristic experience of

As stated above, from Searle's perspective, the belief in free will is opposed to determinism because the former is based in spontaneity and the latter denies it. As a result it seems hard to explain the meaning of the belief in free will, because the objects included in that belief are situated in a world determined by physical laws. However, is it possible to justify a notion of free will from another point of view?

One option would be to consider the compatibilist idea that free will is possible in a determined world, because, according to compatibilism, free will does not mean *freedom* as a radical self-enactment out of nothing¹⁵. From a compatibilist point of view, free will is always related to a variety of cognitive, psychological, emotional and physical causes that are always present in the decision making process.

According with that view, it is possible to conceive free will in a universe determined by physical laws because, at the end, freedom is not absolute, meaning that it is possible to make assessments about preferences only in the structured context of ongoing life. In this regard, Dennett says that *unless we can find a way of making a responsible self out of initially non-responsible choices, so that there is a gradual acquisition of responsibility by the individual, we will be stuck with an unpalatable alternative*¹⁶.

Following the quotation above, the idea of free will make sense because every single person is conceived as a potentially responsible being beforehand. For this reason, in some contexts, the compatibilist idea is commonly accepted because, according with that view, moral agents behave according to reasons and based on the belief that they are responsible.

However, as Dennett records, there is a level in which our reactions, including the emergence of thoughts, cannot be considered as responsible

making up your mind. And it is part of this experience that you have a sense of alternative choices open to you. There is, in short, a gap between the causes of your decisions and actions in the form of reasons, and the actual making of the decision, and the performance of the actions. Voluntary decision making and acting contrast with perceiving in that, in the case of decision making and acting, there is a gap between the causes of the phenomenon in the form of reasons for decision or action; whereas in perception there is no such gap". Ibid. pp. 217.

¹⁵ Dennett, D. *The Elbow Room: The Varieties of Free Will Worth Wanting*. Clarendon Press. Oxford. 1984. Chapter 4. *Self-Made Selves*. In this chapter Dennett discusses the possibility to understand the meaning of compatibilism among Sartre's theory of freedom and soft-determinist theories.

¹⁶ Ibid, pp. 84.

doings. On the ground of this sub-personal level, we acquire by reflection and control a capacity to be answerable to people and to ourselves. But that does not satisfy Searle. According to him, compatibilism cannot explain the belief in free will; but rather, it hides an ontological problem in order to justify the need for moral concepts. In this regard Searle criticises compatibilism saying that:

Compatibilism makes a logical point about the concepts of “free” and “determined” and points out, correctly, that there is a use of these concepts according to which to say that an action is free is not, so far, to raise any questions about whether or not it was determined in the sense of having antecedently sufficient casual conditions. But once that logical point is accepted, there is still a factual, empirical question left over. *Is it the case that for every human action that ever occurred in the past, is occurring now, or ever will occur, the action was caused by antecedently sufficient conditions?* (...) Compatibilism does not answer or even address this problem of free will. The theory simply assumes that we are determined (...) The question, to repeat, is whether for every human action (including the act of deciding) that has ever been performed or ever will be performed, the antecedent causes sufficient to determine that that action and no other action could have been performed¹⁷.

In consequence, according to compatibilism, it is possible to explain some conditions and logical consequences of using moral concepts. Nevertheless, considering Searle’s opinion shown in the quotation above, it seems that compatibilism faces an ontological problem because, in line with Searle’s view, it seems impossible to understand the meaning of free will in a universe ruled by physical laws.

According to Searle’s view, compatibilism cannot explain the meaning of the belief in free will because in attempting to do so it presupposes a moral concept of responsibility that ends up being what it is actually trying to explain.

However, considering Searle’s critics against compatibilism, it seems like his view is based in the idea that both the mind and the intentional states can

¹⁷ Searle, J. *Mind: a brief introduction*. Oxford University Press. New York. 2004, pp. 222-223

be understood, to some extent, as distant from the objects and the world and not as being a part of it.

In relation to Searle's view, in which the gap between decision and action is always present, the practical direction of fit is unique: things have to be put in accordance with mind. As an intentional state, however the belief in free will assumes our capacity to decide aptly, to do the right and fitting thing, fitting not just to our will, but also to the world and to ourselves as part of the world. However, in Searle's view, it is impossible to bestow free will with *this* direction of fit because the gap between reason and action makes impossible to consider any kind of adjustment from mind to world in decision. In consequence, only actions conceived as a result of a deliberating decision process can reveal a direction of fit which gives its due to an objective point of view.

As a result, on the one hand, Searle's view seems strongly subjective and on the other hand it seems to rely on the power of certainties of consciousness that deny the role of rational behaviour and other objective features that reveal the role of a worldly direction of fit of the practical intentional states. For this reason, in order to explain the relation between free will and objective features of that direction of fit it is necessary to review the role of fitting behaviour in the idea of free will.

1.3. - Free will from an externalist point of view: another critique of Searle's view.

As part of the discussion about how the belief in free will could be interpreted regarding the role of direction of fit, Kenny says:

Intentional action presupposes language in the same way as self-consciousness presupposes language. Animals, lacking language, may yet have simple thoughts; Fido may think that there is a bone buried beneath the bush. But unless Fido has a language he cannot have the thought *that he is thinking that* there is a bone buried beneath the bush. For there is nothing in his behavioural repertoire to express the difference between the two thoughts 'There is a bone buried beneath the bush' and 'I am thinking that there is a bone buried beneath the bush'. Similarly, Fido may scratch to get at the bone, and his scratching manifests his desire to get at the bone; but there is nothing within his repertoire

to express that he is *scratching because* he wants to get at the bone (...) All this not meant to deny that animals may be conscious of their goals (...) But animals are not conscious of their goals *as goals*.¹⁸

Firstly, Kenny says that the problem of the belief in free will does not rely merely in subjective certainty, as Searle stated, but rather, in a real ability to recognize the mode of our own behaviour associated with what we believe is a voluntary act. That is, involves also the ability to recognize the external factors from which we get an idea about the meaning of a particular doing¹⁹.

Secondly, Kenny disagrees with Searle's view because he does not accept that the belief in free will is based on a subjective certainty about the distance between reasons for acting and the action itself. The important thing is to know a goal *as one's goal*. We do not attribute free-will to Fido because he cannot recognize the search of its bone as part of a general goal. In this sense, in the case of humans, language and behaviour can express the meaning of our goals in the context of a general aim, in which each specific task is inserted and has an acknowledgeable sense.

Moreover, according to Kenny the belief in free will would be based in an objective certainty, measurable from an external view (according with García-Carpintero's notion of objectivity) because human beings possess the ability to express beliefs, purposes, aims and goals through language and therefore, are able to revise their own behaviour. According to this, from the ability to recognize the relationship between behaviour and goals from an objective point of view the direction of fit can be understood.

In this sense, the belief that Peter's behaviour shows his idea of free will and Fido's does not, can be based on that kind of factual certainty. Thus, Peter is explaining his goals through language and behaviour and that is the way to perceive multiple directions of fit between his purposes and his actions, his aims between themselves, and the means to reach them.

In this sense, Kenny says that:

¹⁸Kenny, A. *The Metaphysics of Mind*. Oxford University Press. New York. 1992, pp. 39

¹⁹ On this regard, Putnam is pointing out to his "semantic externalism" and some of its features such as others speaker opinion and environmental facts. Putnam H. *The Threefold Cord*. Columbia University Press. New York. 1999. Chapter II. Lecture III *Psychophysical Correlation*, pp,119-120

What humans have and what animals lack is the ability to perform acts as *answering to a certain linguistic description* (...) volition, in the case of human beings, is a estate of mind which is defined by the linguistic description of the action or state of affairs which would fulfil it²⁰.

Then, as a consequence of Kenny's view, particular behaviours can be understood as part of the adjustment with general goals. Moreover, behaviour and language are completely associated, and only in considering what they show, is that is possible to know the meaning of the belief in free will.

In this sense, and reconsidering the role of responsibility, from Kenny's point of view it is possible to re-examine our goals following external demands as a way to find an adjustment between reasons and actions, that is, showing directions of fit in which practice and cognition go together.

Therefore, following Kenny's view, the private world, enclosed in its own, does not bring any clue about the meaning of free will, despite our strongest certainties. Thus, in order to bring an explanation about the meaning of free will it is necessary to have a general idea about the meaning of objectivity, because only from this notion is it possible to understand the meanings of direction of fit.

In its most general terms, regarding the perspectives stated above, it is possible to conceive direction of fit as being double; that is, from world to mind, and from mind to world. These two ways of adjustment are always related and constantly determine goals and purposes.

In consequence, as a way to adjust mind's concerns with world conditions, the direction of fit regards the need to reconsider and redefine goals in order to reveal their factibility, the relevant priorities and world's demands as well as our own. This adjustment shows that direction of fit cannot be understood in a simple way.

To summarize, according to Kenny's view, the base of the belief in free will does not come from a subjective certainty or an introspective process, as Searle mentions, but rather, from the ability to link behaviour not less than belief

²⁰ Kenny, A. *The Metaphysics of Mind*. Oxford University Press. New York. 1992, pp. 40

in social interaction with estimates about states of affairs. That is, intentionality, far from explaining only the meaning of mental contents from within itself, is constantly related to the world, and in this sense, it is not just from consciousness from which we learn the meaning of our cognition and of our goals.

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