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Non-Propositional Attitudes

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Abstract

Intentionality, or the power of minds to be about, to represent, or to stand for things, remains central in the philosophy of mind. But the study of intentionality in the analytic tradition has been dominated by discussions of propositional attitudes such as belief, desire, and visual perception. There are, however, intentional states that aren't obviously propositional attitudes. For example, Indiana Jones fears snakes, Antony loves Cleopatra, and Jane hates the monster under her bed. The present paper explores such mental states in an introductory but opinionated way.

Intentionality, the power of minds to be about, to represent, or to stand for things, remains central in the philosophy of mind. In fact, questions about intentionality are perhaps more pressing than ever since many philosophers now hold that phenomenology and intentionality are intimately connected.¹ But the study of intentionality in the analytic tradition has been dominated by discussions of propositional attitudes such as belief, desire, and visual perception.² For example, discussing intentionality at a very general level, one finds remarks such as the following:

In one formulation, the problem of intentionality is presented as concerning a particular class of properties, intentional properties. Intentional properties are those properties expressed by predicates formed from verbs of propositional attitudes. (Stoljar 1996: 161)

The phenomenon of intentionality suggests that attitudes are essentially relational in nature: they involve relations to the propositions at which they are directed. (Perry 1994: 387–8)

There are, however, intentional states that aren't obviously propositional attitudes. For example, Indiana Jones fears snakes, Antony loves Cleopatra, and Jane hates the monster under her bed. Despite being an important part of our mental lives, such states have received relatively little philosophical attention. Without careful examination of such states, our philosophical understanding of the mind and of intentionality more generally is at best incomplete. The present paper explores non-propositional attitudes in an introductory but opinionated way that might serve as a helpful point of departure for future research. I first offer some intuitive remarks about the class of states in question and draw a range of distinctions aimed to precisify them further. Next, in Section 2, I offer a couple of key reasons why non-propositional attitudes have been neglected by philosophers. In Section 3, I briefly consider some of the most promising positive proposals one might offer for non-propositional attitudes. Finally, I close the paper by offering some suggestions for the way ahead.

1. Characterizing Non-propositional Attitudes

Indiana Jones fears snakes; Antony loves Cleopatra; Jane hates the monster under her bed; John likes the color red. Such states are intentional; they have aboutness; they are directed at things. In fact, the oft cited passage from Brentano includes cases of the sort under question:

Every mental phenomenon includes something as object within itself, although they do not all do so in the same way. In presentation something is presented, in judgement something is affirmed or denied, in love loved, in hate hated, in desire desired and so on (1874: 88–89).

The more widely discussed propositional attitudes have aboutness as well. Jones's belief that the artifact belongs in the museum is about the artifact and the museum. On one plausible view, the proposition that the artifact belongs in a museum is itself about the artifact and the museum, and by being appropriately related to that proposition, one is in a state about the artifact and the museum.³ Non-propositional attitudes, on the other hand, are intentional mental states that are about things but not in virtue of relating subjects to propositions concerning those things. Suppose Jones likes the artifact. His liking is directed at or about the artifact, but if it is indeed a non-propositional attitude, it is not the case that Jones's mental state is about the artifact in virtue of being related to a proposition that is itself about the artifact. As we will see below (Section 3), when it comes to giving a positive account, there are various options open.

It is perhaps helpful to continue contrasting non-propositional attitudes with propositional attitudes, since the latter are more familiar. One important point of contrast between them involves predication. Notice that states such as belief and other propositional attitudes are canonically ascribed with complete sentences in the object position of the verb, e.g. 'John believes that grass is green'. When one, say, loves that grass is green or believes that grass is green, one takes grass to have a certain property, to wit, greenness. In some sense, one predicates greenness of grass. Non-propositional attitudes, on the other hand, seem to make reference to objects, kinds, properties, and so on without predicating anything of them. When one loves Sally, one's mental state is about Sally, and there seems to be no predicative element present. Perhaps another example is helpful: I can think of a number, say the number seven, and not think anything more about it; I can simply bring the number to mind.⁴

There is a related and equally important point that concerns evaluability and content.⁵ Although there is plenty of disagreement concerning the nature of propositional attitudes, it is relatively widely agreed that whatever else can be said about them, they are mental states that have propositional content and hence are evaluable for truth, accuracy, satisfaction, and so on. Very often, the various types of evaluability are accounted for, at bottom, in terms of truth.⁶ Beliefs are true or false depending on the truth-value of their propositional contents, perceptual experiences are accurate or inaccurate depending on the truth-value of their propositional contents, desires are satisfied or frustrated depending on the truth-value of their propositional contents, and so on. Notice, however, that when we turn to states such as loving Cleopatra, fearing snakes, or liking the color red, it's far less clear that they are evaluable for truth, accuracy, satisfaction, or so on. For example, suppose that John loves Bill. When is John's love accurate? When is it true or satisfied? Such questions seem misplaced. Accuracy, truth, and satisfaction don't seem to apply to the non-propositional attitudes the way they do to belief, desire, and other propositional states.⁷

Noticing this contrast concerning evaluability is important for at least two reasons. First, it allows us to make sense of non-propositional attitudes that are about propositions. Second, it differentiates the class of attitudes in which we are presently interested from other kinds of intentional states that one might be tempted to call 'non-propositional'. Let us take these points in turn, for getting clear on them leads to a more precise understanding of what non-propositional attitudes are and are not.

I.1. NON-PROPOSITIONAL ATTITUDES ABOUT PROPOSITIONS

It is tempting to simply say that non-propositional attitudes are intentional mental states that are about non-propositional things. Although this may very often be true, we need to be a bit

more careful, since it seems possible to have a proposition as the object of a non-propositional attitude.^{8,9} Allow me to explain and draw out the importance of this point.

I might have a favorite proposition: the proposition that two is prime, say. I like that proposition. If one were a realist about propositions but extremely pathological or very confused about what might cause one harm, it seems possible to fear a proposition. So, one can be in states that certainly seem to be non-propositional but which happen to be about propositions. Even if we suppose propositions are abstract objects, we can hold onto this point. It is relatively uncontroversial that we can be in mental states about abstract objects such as numbers. I can believe that two is prime, for example. I can also think of the number two or like the number two. The same goes for a proposition. So some non-propositional attitudes can be directed at propositions. But can we make sense of this?

We can. Recall that whereas propositional attitudes have propositional content and are hence evaluable for truth, accuracy, or satisfaction, non-propositional attitudes do not seem to be. And this fact doesn't change when one is in a non-propositional state about a proposition. If I like the proposition that two is prime, this state is no more evaluable for truth, accuracy, or satisfaction than my state of liking John.

But why pay close attention to these odd states? Although non-propositional states about propositions may be rare, non-normal, or whatever, their possibility is illuminating. In light of the possibility, we had better not say that non-propositional attitudes are intentional states that are about non-propositional things.¹⁰ Instead, we should say, as I did above, that non-propositional attitudes (unlike propositional attitudes) are intentional mental states that are about things not in virtue of relating a subject to a proposition(s) concerning those things. Furthermore, in light of the possibility of a non-propositional state about a proposition, we should draw a terminological distinction between the content and object of an intentional state. We may identify the object of an attitude *V* by asking, 'What is *V*-ed?' When one hopes that the meeting ends early, what she hopes is that the meeting ends early. If one fears the meeting, what she fears is the meeting. Both propositional and non-propositional attitudes have objects in this sense. Indeed, propositional and non-propositional attitudes can both have a proposition as their object, as we saw. In common cases, the object of a non-propositional attitude is a non-propositional thing such as a concrete object, a kind, or a property, but not always. But only propositional attitudes have content. Content is what accounts for an attitude's evaluability – its being true, accurate, or satisfied.¹¹ When one, say, believes that *p*, the belief is true just in case *p* is true. If one hopes that *p*, one's hope is satisfied just in case *p* is true. To put things in more general terms, let us say that for any token attitude *V*, *V* is a propositional attitude just in case for any subject *S* and proposition *p* such that *S* *V*'s *p*, if *p* were true, then things would be as *S* *V*'s them to be. For instance, when one believes that *p*, if *p* were true, things would be as one believes them to be. If one hopes that *p*, if *p* were true, things would be as one hopes them to be, and so on. When one, say, likes the proposition that *p*, it's not the case that if *p* were true things would be as one likes them to be, so we aren't forced to say that liking the proposition that *p* is a propositional attitude. Rather, it is a non-propositional attitude with a propositional object. So although non-propositional attitudes with propositional objects are odd cases, reflection upon them yields helpful points of comparison and clarity. Propositional attitudes have truth-evaluable content but non-propositional attitudes do not.

1.2. AVOIDING CONFUSION – OTHER USES OF 'NON-PROPOSITIONAL'

Before proceeding, it is helpful to distinguish the kind of attitudes here at issue from some others that appear in the literature and might reasonably be called 'non-propositional'. The

following two examples are not non-propositional attitudes in the sense intended in the present paper.

Motivated by *de se* attitudes, David Lewis (1979) has argued that the contents of attitudes such as belief should be understood as properties rather than propositions. But the properties are complex, and they yield evaluability that, for present purposes, is hardly different than what one finds with truth-evaluable propositions; that's why one should be comfortable calling them 'contents'. If I believe that John is the messy shopper, then (according to Lewis) what I believe is the property of being such that John is the messy shopper. A second example can be found in the work of Tyler Burge (1977). He has argued that *de re* attitudes have open sentences as their contents. Open sentences aren't propositions, nor do they express them. But the attitudes, once placed in a context, are evaluable for accuracy or satisfaction. For my purposes, this is sufficient to count them as propositional (or at least not non-propositional in the sense at issue). Recall, as we are using the term, non-propositional attitudes have objects and aboutness but lack content.

2. Neglect

I've claimed that non-propositional attitudes have been neglected in the analytic tradition. In the present section, I wish to consider why. There are very likely a range of reasons. One reason may stem from the belief that non-propositional attitudes can be reduced to propositional ones. I think there is very good reason to doubt that the reduction can be sustained, but that issue won't be taken up here. A number of recent papers have forcefully argued that such a reduction fails.¹² The present paper builds on the assumption that non-propositional attitudes are not reducible to the propositional. But even under that assumption, we might wonder why non-propositional attitudes have been neglected. I will explore two reasons that I think are especially interesting and important in some detail. The first is a bit of speculative history, but it is worth seeing how a certain set of (very questionable) assumptions allows one to ignore the non-propositional attitudes. The second consideration directly concerns the metaphysics of intentional states and pushes one to become wary of dealing in non-propositional attitudes at all.

2.1. NEGLECT BY SEMANTICS

Quine's (1956) 'Quantifiers and Propositional Attitudes' is one of the most important discussions of intentionality in the analytic tradition.¹³ That paper set the stage for many discussions about singular thought, substitution, and quantification. Interestingly, the paper also pushed non-propositional attitudes aside.

Quine's interest was in attitude ascriptions, and his paper featured the now famous story of Ralph and his beliefs about Ortcutt, a man who Ralph has seen in very different circumstances. In one circumstance, we are inclined to say that Ralph believes Ortcutt is a spy, but in the other, we are inclined to say that Ralph believes that Ortcutt is not a spy. But put Ortcutt and Ralph aside. What some readers might not recall is that Quine's discussion starts not with belief but with hunting and wanting. 'Ctesias is hunting unicorns', 'Ernest is hunting lions', and 'I want a sloop' are the opening examples. Quine is quick to point out that these sentences admit of an ambiguity, which he labels the relational/notional ambiguity. Take, for example, 'I want a sloop.' The relational reading is brought out by, 'I want a sloop, namely the HMS Resolution.' The notional reading is brought out by, 'I want a sloop, any sloop that will get me home will do.' One of Quine's aims in the paper is to offer adequate logical representations of sentences that feature such ambiguities. He notices that the relational cases pose a problem and much of the discussion then focuses on Ralph's relational beliefs. Of present interest, however, are

the notional readings and especially those in the non-belief examples. These are of special interest here because the attempt to capture the notional readings along with a certain commitment Quine makes concerning the treatment of quantifiers can quickly lead one to think that all attitude ascriptions are propositional attitude ascriptions. Though ascriptions of attitudes aren't the final word, they are a common and important starting position in the philosophy of mind, so if all of the relevant ascriptions (even the ones that look on their face as if they ascribe non-propositional attitudes) are in fact propositional attitude ascriptions, it's easy to see why attention would be focused only on propositional attitudes.

Two of Quine's commitments are crucial. First, Quine was explicitly in favor of Russell's (1905) treatment of quantified phrases such as 'an F' and 'the F'. Recall that Russell argued that quantified phrases do not contribute denotations to propositions. Rather, they are incomplete symbols that combine with predicates and can be shown to involve first order quantification upon analysis. For instance, 'A man sings' is understood as follows: $\exists x$ (x is a man & x sings). Second, Quine believed (as many philosophers still do) that the notional/relational ambiguity introduced above is a scope ambiguity, in particular that the relevant noun-phrases take narrow scope in notional readings ('I want a sloop') and wide scope in relational readings ('There is a sloop such that I want it'). But notice that an important complication arises when these two commitments are taken together. Start with the following formalization of the ambiguous English sentence 'I want a sloop':

1. $\exists x$ (x is a sloop & I want x).

Quine himself, arguing that we cannot quantify into intensional contexts, ultimately gives up this formalization, but what is important for now is that (quantifying-in aside) this formal representation captures only the relational reading.¹⁴ 1 entails that there is a particular x that I want. The notional reading would be better captured by placing the quantifier inside of the attitude verb (i.e. "in narrow scope"). Unfortunately, this isn't as straightforward as we might have hoped:

2. I want ($\exists x$ (x is a sloop)).

This translates to 'I want that there is a sloop', which clearly isn't equivalent to the notional reading of 'I want a sloop'. Matters are even worse if we consider the notional reading of 'I want something', for in that case, there seems to be no sensible way to so much as complete the first-order formalization as the following is ill formed: I want ($\exists x$). Because the bound variable requires a predicate (and this should set off some alarm bells in light of the point made earlier concerning predication) and since we cannot move the quantifier into wide position (else we are back to a relational reading), we are stuck.

Quine suggests that additional material is needed; something like 'I want that I have a sloop':

3. I want ($\exists x$ (x is a sloop & I have x)).

This not only seems to better capture the meaning of 'I want a sloop' (read notionally) but also allows one to make light work of the notional reading of 'I want something':

4. I want ($\exists x$ (I have x)).

If one is wedded to treating quantified phrases in terms of first-order quantifiers, it is hard to see how else to proceed. And if we do proceed this way, we have taken what might have looked like a good candidate for a non-propositional attitude ascription ('I want a sloop') and transformed it into an ascription with a propositional complement ('I want that I have a sloop').

If one buys into this picture, it is easy to motivate a broader extension. For example, 'Lois wants Superman' does not obviously feature quantification, but notice that names such as 'Superman' can be replaced with quantified phrases to yield grammatical sentences. Unless one thinks that the attitude of wanting, say, Superman is relevantly distinct from wanting a Kryptonian, it looks like we must treat the complement of the verb as a sentence yet again – 'to want' has been pegged as the type of verb that combines with sentences.¹⁵

Many linguists and philosophers of language now resist Quine's commitments. In particular, many semanticists reject translating natural language into a first-order language before running a semantic computation. Montague's (1969, 1970(a,b), 1973) seminal semantic work allows one, via functional application, to stay much closer to the surface syntax and hence to resist sentential expansions of the sort Quine advocated. In particular, contemporary theorists working on 'intensional transitive verbs' such as 'to fear' and 'to want' have come to appreciate that quantified noun-phrases needn't introduce a sentence into one's semantic computation.¹⁶ Recall, part of what lead to a sentence in the complement position was the translation into a quantified first-order sentence that required a predicate. On Montague's approach, via functional application rules and the assignment of types, one may take intensional transitive verbs to be of a type that combines with appropriately typed names and quantifiers. Rather than introducing a sentence, the quantifiers are assigned semantic values such as properties or properties of properties.¹⁷ An exploration of those details must be left for a separate occasion. The point of present interest is that one of the most important, early discussions of intentionality took a form that allowed philosophers to ignore non-propositional attitudes and focus all of their attention on propositional attitudes. No doubt many philosophers of language and mind are now sensitive to the more recent discussions of intensional transitive verbs, but when one looks at contemporary discussions of intentionality, it is clear that the momentum in favor of the propositional attitudes hasn't significantly let up.

2.2. NEGLECT MOTIVATED BY EMPTINESS

A second reason for failing to attend seriously to the non-propositional attitudes rests in the belief that on pain of paradox or absurdity, the most fundamental attitudes must be propositional attitudes. Even if we depart from Quine and grant that there are true attitude ascriptions that in general have things other than sentences that express propositions appearing in object position, we might reasonably ask whether such ascriptions depend for their truth most fundamentally on propositional attitudes.

But why start down this path? Why think that propositional attitudes are more fundamental than non-propositional attitudes? One important reason centers around 'empty' attitudes: fearing Sherlock Holmes, loving the fountain of youth, hating Pegasus, and so on. A.N. Prior (1971) poses a troubling puzzle for the proponent of non-propositional attitudes:

- (a) S's V-ing o constitutes a relation between S and o when o exists, but (b) not when o doesn't; but
- (c) S's V-ing o is the same sort of thing whether o exists or not. Something plainly has to be given up here; what will it be? (130).¹⁸

Take fearing Sally as a specific instance. If Sally exists and Jones fears Sally, it seems natural to say that what Jones's fear is a relation to Sally. If Sally doesn't exist, it follows trivially that Jones's fear isn't a relation to Sally, for there is no Sally. But what Jones's fearing Sally *is* insensitive to the existential status of Sally. In fact, whether Sally exists or not, Jones's fear may be causally efficacious; it may interact with his beliefs, desires, and other states and influence his planning and overt behavior. If Jones believes that Sally is in the other room

and he fears Sally (all else equal), we should expect Jones to intend to avoid the other room. Again, this is independent of whether Sally exists or not. But of course we cannot hold that one thing both is and isn't a relation.

So, on first pass, the states appear paradoxical – they look to be both relations and not relations. An easy way out of the paradox is to find suitable relata for every attitude, and a forthcoming suggestion is to posit non-existent objects ('Meinongian objects', for example). Many philosophers find this suggestion mysterious and to be avoided if not downright nonsensical. David Lewis offers a helpful example of this line of thought:

If I hear the patter of little feet around the house, I expect Bruce. [But] I might expect a cat but no particular cat. What I expect then seems to be a Meinongian incomplete cat. [...] The case of expecting a cat shows one advantage of our policy of uniformly assigning propositional objects. If we do not need a Meinongian incomplete cat as object of this attitude, then we dodge the problem of saying what manner of strange cat that might be. That problem (and others like it) may be worth dodging, even if not beyond hope of solution. (Lewis 1979: 513–4) (emphasis added).¹⁹

Rather than falling into paradox or dealing in mystery, we should treat all attitudes as propositional, the thought goes.²⁰

But how do propositions help? Aren't there problems about empty names and empty terms for propositions too? Indeed there are, but notice that if all attitudes are relations to propositions, then as long as we are comfortable with 'empty' propositions of some sort, then we have relata for every attitude. One must still face the problem of empty propositions,²¹ but the attitudes themselves can be put on sure footing: they are relations to propositions.²² Call the thesis that fundamentally all attitudes are propositional attitudes 'propositionalism'.

So, the argument under consideration runs:

- P1. Any good account of the attitudes in question must solve Prior's Puzzle.
- P2. The only solutions are manifestly false ones and propositionalism.
- P3. So, propositionalism is true.

I think we should not be persuaded at this juncture. First, it is unclear that we can capture non-propositional attitude facts (our target) in terms of propositional attitude facts, as I mentioned at the outset of Section 2. The arguments for capturing the apparently non-propositional in terms of the propositional are scant, and the arguments against such a move are growing.²³ Second, a number of theorists (see below) have advanced nuanced and sophisticated views concerning non-existent objects that may well escape the traditional worries, so the 'manifestly false' bit in P2 is certainly questionable. Third, there are obvious alternative entities besides non-existent objects, so when one is forced to pick between propositions and non-existent things, one has been offered a false dichotomy. In the next section, I explore some alternatives in a bit more detail, though as noted earlier, the main aim of this paper is to raise awareness of a certain neglected class of intentional states. I shall set the modest goal of introducing some forthcoming ways that one might aim to satisfy Prior's Puzzle without falling back on propositionalism.

3. Some Positive Accounts

Besides being an interesting puzzle and an important source of motivation for the neglect of the non-propositional attitudes, Prior's Puzzle serves as a helpful guide when formulating a positive account. A good account of the non-propositional attitudes should solve the puzzle.

Let's gather some non-propositional options. We might simply embrace the ontology of non-existent objects, we might find an alternative proxy entity in the empty cases (such as a concept or a certain kind of abstract object), or we might deny relationality in some or all cases. (My own preferred view is something of a hybrid of the last two of these options, and I will return to the suggestion below.)

Most philosophers find non-existent objects unpalatable, but that attitude certainly isn't universal. McGinn (2000), Priest (2005), and Routley (1980) are a few noteworthy proponents of the view that there are things that don't exist.²⁴ Their views aim to make acceptable and non-contradictory the claim 'there are things that don't exist'. Further, against famous complaints by Quine (1948), they aim to provide acceptable individuation conditions for non-existent entities. This cannot be the place for a detailed discussion of the views, but it is certainly important to see that positing non-existent objects may be far less mysterious than is often supposed. If phrases such as 'a cat' and 'Pegasus' do indeed refer to things, then the cases in Prior's puzzle that looked to be non-relational are in fact relational after all.

Non-existent objects are but one option when it comes to finding relata. For example, a number of philosophers concerned with characters of fiction and myth have argued that names such as 'Holmes' and 'Pegasus' refer to existing entities but abstract ones.²⁵ Such a view receives independent support, especially in the face of non-attitude sentences such as 'Anna Karenina was more intelligent than Emma Bovary'. It's hard to see how to make sense of such sentences without taking seriously the existence of fictional characters.²⁶ Further, most philosophers, even those wary of non-existent objects, are happy enough to posit abstract objects. The proponent of non-propositional attitudes can help him or herself to this strategy when faced with Prior's Puzzle – in the empty cases, the objects of the attitudes are abstracta.

Proxy entities abound. Zimmerman, following Montague (1973), holds that what I've called non-propositional attitudes are relations to properties.²⁷ Modifications of this view are also found in the work of Moltmann (1997) and Richard (2001), who argue via linguistic considerations for properties of properties as the relata of the attitudes picked out by intensional transitive verbs. As long we can find properties in the empty cases, we have no trouble solving Prior's Puzzle.

A closely related view to the property view (indeed, on some accounts it may be a terminological variant) looks to representational entities for help. I noted above that one plausible propositionalist strategy says that propositions have primary aboutness and the attitudes are simply relations to propositions. But one can doubt that the non-propositional attitudes are to be captured in propositional attitude terms and nevertheless take advantage of a similar move. For example, we might replace propositions with concepts, senses, modes of presentation, or some other sub-propositional representations. On such a view, the attitudes in question are relations to representations, which in turn are about the world. Some representations are empty (such as the name 'Sherlock Holmes'), and hard questions about empty names will need to be settled, but the attitudes are put on sure footing: they are relations to concepts, senses, or whatever. (I'll just use 'concept' as a catch all for these options from here on out.)²⁸

Both the property view and concept view face a serious problem. Prior himself (rightly in my opinion) points out that it is odd to take the object of, say, fear to be a concept. What one fears in usual cases is a person or an ordinary object, not a concept.²⁹ And a similar worry seems to arise for theorists who look to properties or properties of properties – when one fears Sally she fears a person, not a property.³⁰ If part of the motivation for the concept/property view is that the best semantics for our attitude ascriptions tells us that the semantic value of 'S' (say, John) stands in the semantic value of 'V' (say, the liking relation) to the

semantic value of ‘o’ (say, the property of being Pegasus or the concept expressed by ‘Pegasus’), then it is hard to see how we haven’t offered up the wrong object of the attitude.³¹ (Recall, we identify the object by asking ‘what is V-ed?’.) Perhaps this worry can be handled, but on the face of things, there appears to be a challenge.

I’m inclined to avoid positing non-existent objects and abstract fictional characters. Further, I think that the property and concept views deliver strange objects of the attitudes in question, but have quite a lot going for them otherwise. My preferred view bears similarities to the concept view but aims to repair the wrong object worry.

Prior’s statement of (a) suggests that S’s V-ing o simply is a relation, a direct relation, between S and o when o exists. When o doesn’t exist, this position tempts one towards Meinongianism or some other reification of the non-existent. But one might suggest that in V-ing o, S is related to o but not directly by the V-relation. (a) could, for example, be replaced with the less loaded (a’):

(a’) S’s V-ing o relates S and o when o exists.

This is very much in line with the concept view. But having seen the problem of positing the wrong object, we should take V-ing o to require a distinct relation (V*):

(REP) S V’s o iff S stands in the V* relation to an o-representation.³²

The exact details of being an o-representation will be complicated in familiar ways that correspond to the options concerning propositional attitudes.³³ Presently, we need only that an o-representation must be about only o.^{34,35} We can then engage in arguments over how best to individuate the representations (empty ones included, of course), but that is usefully separated out as a distinct question from Prior’s.

V* is a relation holding between a subject and a representation, and its introduction is motivated by its theoretical benefits. It isn’t a relation that is named by a folk-psychological concept. Rather, it is a relation discovered once one considers the metaphysical structure of the non-propositional attitudes and faces up to puzzling cases. Further, the suggestion is compatible with a range of theories of mind. One might identify V*-ing with a type of brain activity, characterize it behaviorally, or characterize it functionally. And one needn’t be a materialist; V* may be an irreducible mental state for all that is said here. At a very general level, we might simply hold that one V*’s a representation just in case one is disposed to employ the representation in certain ways. The typical dispositions will plausibly differ for each attitude – the relation underlying liking (call it ‘likes*’) will differ from the relation underlying hating (call it ‘hates*’).³⁶

It is worth highlighting that substitutions for ‘V’ do not themselves pick out relations on this view, and this (I believe) is as it should be. If I like Pegasus, it is not the case that there is a thing such that I like it, and so I cannot stand in ‘the liking relation’ to it. What it is to like something is to stand in a different relation (the likes* relation) to a representation, but there is no such thing as ‘the liking relation’, ‘the loving relation’, and so on. There can’t be if we can like things that don’t exist. Rather, an attitude of the sort in question is a complex state that one is in just in case one stands in a certain relation (likes*, loves*, and so on) to an appropriate representation.

That’s a sketch of the kind of view I prefer. There is one more view I wish to consider. It takes this last thought (the thought that there is no fearing-relation or liking-relation) even further by denying that intentional states are relational in any sense. Such a position has recently been held by Kriegel (2007, 2011), Mendelovici (manuscript), and Pitt (2009). On

this view, intentionality isn't a matter of standing in a relation to something. Rather, it is a matter of instantiating a monadic representational property.³⁷ When one, say, fears Holmes, he represents in a Holmes-way.^{38,39}

The monadic theory faces noteworthy pressure.⁴⁰ The view doesn't obviously make sense of what we might call shared attitudes. I can fear Holmes and so can you. When we do, we fear the same thing. On a relational view, this fact is accommodated by making appeal to an entity to which we are both related and generalizing accordingly. For instance, on the representationalist view I prefer, appeal is made to the o-representations that one fear*s. For the abstract object theorist, appeal is made to an abstract fictional character both individuals fear, and so on. On first glance, the monadic view appears to lack resources to account for the fact that we fear the same thing since the states seem to lack the complexity that allows one to home in on the relation and thing related to. Because of considerations like this one, many theorists interested in intentionality have resisted monadic theories.

Theorists who have recently aimed to revive monadic theories try to address this problem. Mendelovici and Kreigel, for example, appeal to second-order properties. Representing Holmes is a matter of instantiating an intentional property, but we can also pick out the class of those instantiations: the property of being the property of representing Holmes. According to Mendelovici and Kreigel, shared attitudes can be accounted for in terms of such second order properties. And perhaps they would offer a similar explanation of what Sally and James have in common when Sally fears Pegasus and James fears Smarty Jones. On the face of things, the monadic view has it that Sally is in one state, the state of fearing-Pegasus, and James is in a completely distinct state, that of fearing-Smarty-Jones. But perhaps the desired similarity could be captured in terms of having the property of instantiating a representational property that is a fearing. This suggestion (and indeed the monadic suggestion in its contemporary form) is relatively young and deserves further attention.

4. Conclusion

I had three main goals in this paper. First, I attempted to characterize non-propositional attitudes in a way that distinguishes them from propositional attitudes (and to the extent possible, in a theory neutral way). It was suggested that although all intentional states have aboutness, propositional attitudes have content and hence are evaluable for truth, accuracy, or satisfaction. Non-propositional attitudes, on the other hand, are not evaluable for truth, accuracy or satisfaction. Further, whereas the aboutness of propositional attitudes is mediated by propositions (i.e. sentence-like representations), the aboutness of non-propositional attitudes is either (i) mediated by sub-propositional concepts or modes of presentation (i.e. word-like representations to which one is related or which are non-relationally instantiated), or (ii) direct relations to abstract or non-existent entities. In short, non-propositional attitudes are intentional mental states that are about things but not in virtue of relating subjects to propositions concerning those things. Second, I considered some of the reasons that non-propositional attitudes have been neglected by philosophers. It was argued that the common reasons one might find for avoiding non-propositional attitudes are unconvincing. Third, I explored some promising positive accounts of non-propositional attitudes.

There are, it seems to me, many ways one might further the research on this topic, but I wish to close by mentioning a couple that stand out (including some possible applications). At the outset of Section 2, I noted that there are compelling arguments for the position that there are irreducibly non-propositional attitudes, and I built off of that assumption. I find those arguments convincing, but I believe that more work can be done on that front by both the opponent and the proponent of irreducibly non-propositional attitudes. Second, the

positive accounts surveyed in Section 3 were left underdeveloped. A more detailed treatment of any of those views would constitute interesting research. Third, I suspect there are many reasons beyond the two given above for why it is that philosophers have shied away from non-propositional attitudes. It would be valuable to have those reasons clearly exposed, for much of the shyness is implicit. Finally, there are likely many interesting applications of non-propositional attitudes. For example, it would be interesting to consider whether knowledge by acquaintance, the attitude of attention, or seemingly non-propositional experiential states such as seeing, hearing, tasting, or smelling an object might be (irreducibly) non-propositional. Many discussions in the literature have aimed to account for such states in propositional attitude terms.

Short Biography

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Notes

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¹ The nature of the connection is up for debate. For example, on one hand, there are intentionalists about experience who aim to account for the nature of experiences in terms of intentional facts. See especially Byrne (2001), Dretske (1997, 2003), Lycan (1996), Pautz (2009, 2010), Siegel (2010), Thau (2002), and Tye (1995, 2000). On the other hand, there are 'phenomenal intentionality' theorists who argue that intentionality should be explained in terms of phenomenology. See especially Horgan and Tienson (2002) and Kriegal (2011).

² Byrne (2001) explicitly argues that perceptual experience is a propositional attitude. Crane (2009) argues that although experience is representational, the contents of experience aren't propositional.

³ The view is common, but see Bealer (1993) for a helpful defense.

⁴ A lack of predication does not rule out loving, liking, fearing, and so on something 'in a way' or 'under' a mode of presentation or a concept. One might love, say, Superman under the concept or mode SUPERMAN. This needn't come in the form of predicating a property (e.g. the property of being Superman) of an object. One might take concepts or modes to be, for example, mental particulars that one uses. I might deploy the concept SUPERMAN (rather than the concept CLARK KENT) and thereby think of Superman for example. This is distinct from getting an object in mind and predicating a property of it – being Superman, say. This is an important thought since we may want to allow that non-propositional attitudes individuate more finely than reference without collapsing them into attitudes that predicate properties of objects, i.e. propositional attitudes. Unless we individuate the mental states finely in at least some cases, it will be difficult to make sense of why (for example) Lex Luther runs away when he believes Superman is present but not when he believes that Clark Kent is present. A forthcoming answer appeals to the fact that he fears Superman but not Clark Kent. On the present suggestion, it is the mode or concept of the object and its fine individuation that accounts for the fine grainedness of the non-propositional state – no predicate is necessary.

⁵ Truth and predication are generally taken to be intimately intertwined. The status of non-propositional attitudes with respect to predication and evaluability is likely related in important ways. The details of this connection must be set aside in the present paper. See Davidson (2005) for a recent discussion of truth and predication.

⁶ See Crane (2009) for dissent in the case of perception.

⁷ This is not to say that a non-propositional state cannot be justified or had for a reason. I might love Sally because I believe she is kind and intelligent, but this is distinct from saying that my love itself is evaluable in the relevant sense. Relatedly, if it is true (and I doubt it is) that someone cannot, say, love something unless one loves something about it, it doesn't follow that what it is to love something is to love something about it. Rather, it might simply be that one state (say, loving Sally) depends in some way on the other (say, loving that Sally is so-and-so). Providing a reason might be such a relation, though of course, we might sometimes love, like, fear, and so on things for no reason at all.

⁸ It's also worth mentioning a common mistake (see the quote from Pery above, for instance) concerning propositional attitudes. Propositional attitudes are not (normally) about propositions. One can of course have propositional attitudes about propositions (I believe that the proposition that two is even is true), but my belief that grass is green is about grass and greenness, not a proposition. It might be, as noted above, that being in a propositional state about, say, grass, requires

that one stand in a relation to a proposition concerning grass, but it isn't the aboutness relation that holds between the subject and the proposition in that case. In light of this, we certainly shouldn't characterize non-propositional attitudes as attitudes about non-propositional things, else most propositional attitudes would be predicted to be non-propositional!⁹ It's also a real question whether attitudes are relations, and we will return to that issue in Section 3.

¹⁰ And indeed, we learn a lesson about propositional attitudes here – they cannot simply be characterized as relations to propositions. We need to say more about the relation such that a state is a propositional attitude rather than a non-propositional one.

¹¹ See Siegel (2010, 2011) for a helpful discussion of contentfulness.

¹² See Ben-Yami (1997), Crane (2001), Grzankowski (forthcoming), Merricks (2009), and Montague (2007) for a defense of the position that there are irreducible non-propositional attitudes.

¹³ See also Quine (1960).

¹⁴ See Kaplan (1968) for an important discussion of quantifying-in.

¹⁵ See Lewis (1970) for a helpful discussion.

¹⁶ There are contemporary theorists such as Larson, et al. (1997) and Larson (2002) who hold that the best semantics for the attitude sentences under question reveal hidden sentential structure in the object position. The view doesn't require a translation into a first-order language as advocated by Quine. Rather, the view aims to show that there is hidden, syntactic material in the ordinary English. Although such a view is plausible in a limited number of cases (e.g. 'to want' and 'to need'), the view lacks motivation in many other instances (e.g. 'to like', 'to love', 'to hate', 'to fear') and often seems to get things wrong. For arguments against this approach, see Forbes (2006), Partee (1974), and Szabó (2003, 2005). See Forbes 2000 for a semantics for 'objectual attitudes' that starts from the non-sententialist position concerning intensional transitive verb constructions.

¹⁷ See Motlmann (1997), Richard (2001), and Zimmerman (1993). See Forbes (2006) for an alternative approach to intensional transitives in terms of events. See also Barwise and Cooper (1981) for a contemporary treatment of quantified noun phrases.

¹⁸ Prior discusses thinking-of in particular rather than V-ing (and uses the notation 'X's thinking of Y'), but the challenge extends more generally.

¹⁹ 'Non-specific' objects raise interesting problems of their own, but for present purposes, the point is that much like the names 'Holmes', 'Pegasus', and so on, there are no objects answering to the object-phrases, and so we are faced with a problem of emptiness.

²⁰ See Ben-Yami (1997) and Sainsbury (2010a) for further discussion.

²¹ 'Fregeans' about propositions have a relatively easy time accounting for 'empty' propositions since most think that empty names have senses. 'Russellians' about propositions have a harder time. Braun (1993) argues that Russellians should adopt 'gappy' propositions to cover the empty cases. See Everett (2003) and Mousavian (2011) for further discussion of gappy propositions.

²² Although Prior wasn't himself an advocate of propositions, his own solution is a close cousin of this one with a nominalist bent.

²³ Cf. note 12 above.

²⁴ See van Inwagen (2008) for critical discussion.

²⁵ For example, van Inwagen (2003), Salmon (1998), and Thomason (2003).

²⁶ Sainsbury (2010b) offers a detailed discussion of this issue and surrounding issues concerning fiction and fictional characters.

²⁷ Recall from Section 1.2 that Lewis also advocates a property view. There is an important difference that can now be brought out in terms of content and object. Whereas Lewis takes attitudes to have contents characterized in terms of certain complex properties, Zimmerman's view is better seen as positing properties as the objects of the attitudes under question.

²⁸ I'm thinking of these representations as mental particulars, but I see no in principle bar on thinking of them as abstracta. By treating them as abstracta, there is a challenge for those who wish to offer a materialist-friendly account, but presently issues concerning materialism aren't at issue.

²⁹ Of course, if one is persuaded that it is possible to be in a non-propositional state about a proposition, then one should be just as comfortable saying that one can be in a non-propositional state about a concept. On the concept view, however, one is in a state about the concept by being related to a concept of that concept. Once again, the thing, say, feared looks to be the wrong thing – a concept of the concept under question rather than the concept itself.

³⁰ It is worth noting that a similar problem arises for propositional attitudes: It might be true that I fear that it will rain tomorrow (a propositional attitude) but not true that I fear the proposition that it will rain tomorrow. If one holds that 'fears' picks out a relation, it is hard to see how to differentiate these states. The discussion above concerning non-propositional attitudes that are about propositions can be brought in to help at this juncture. In one case, the proposition is the content of the state. In the other, it is the object of the state. See King (2002) and Forbes (2010) for a detailed discussion of the problem as well as solutions at the linguistic level. Either solution would pair well with (and indeed benefit from) the metaphysical discussion above. See Grzankowski (manuscript) for a discussion of some important differences between the problem posed by the concept view and the related puzzle about propositions.

³¹ Forbes (2006) also makes this point against the property theorists.

³² The suggestion bears similarity to Frege's (1893) account of reference. According to Frege, S refers to o only if S grasps a sense of o (for him, a description of o). That is, one must stand in a distinct relation to an entity that does not depend on o for its own existence. See Kaplan (1977) for a helpful discussion.

³³ Suppose we take o-representations to be representations that refer to what they are about. We might then consider whether they refer 'directly' or 'by description', or perhaps in some other way – see Stanley (1997). Well known debates concerning description, reference, and other forms of aboutness would have to be addressed to complete that view. The intention presently is to offer a view at a level of abstraction that is compatible with many alternatives. One advantage of taking o-representations to refer to things is that the distinction offered above between having a propositional content and having a proposition as object can be captured as follows: attitudes with a propositional content relate subjects to representations that express those contents; attitudes with a proposition as object relate subjects to representations that refer to propositions.

³⁴ I take seriously the claim that representations can exist and have aboutness even when there isn't something they are about. Intuitive examples include depicting unicorns and talking about Holmes. This is part of the reason I prefer the locutions 'o-representation' and 'about o' over 'representation of o'. O-representations are representations of o when o exists.

³⁵ The job of 'only' is to ward off any worries based on the fact that propositions concerning o may be said to be about o, for recall that we are treating the attitudes in question as irreducibly non-propositional. Any proposition to the effect that o is F will be about not only o but also F.

³⁶ A well-known and related idea can be found in the representationalist theories of propositional attitudes. Cf. Field (1978) and Fodor (1975, 1994).

³⁷ There is perhaps a middle view: when objects exist, one stands in ordinary relations to them; when there is no object, adopt a non-relational view.

³⁸ This view bears similarity to the adverbial accounts of perception offered by Chisholm, (1957), Ducasse (1942), and Sellars (1975). As Mendelovici notes, the monadic theorists now in question take their view to extend to mental representation in general.

³⁹ It is worth noting that representationalists could help themselves to the monadic theory at a certain juncture. The representationalist posits a relation to a representational thing such as a concept, a proposition, a name-like representation, or whatever to account for the nature of the attitude, but its intentionality is then an open question and could be filled out in non-relational terms. For example, one might try to offer a non-relational account of what it is for a proposition or a concept to be about the world.

⁴⁰ See Fodor (1983) and Schiffer (2003) for more detailed cases against non-relational views.

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