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Comment on Ausonio Marras: Intentionality and Physicalism: a Resolvable Dispute (*Analyse & Kritik* 1/80)

Abstract: Contrary to Marras: (1) the third of Chisholm's Intentional criteria of sentences about mental states and events succeeds in highlighting an intuitive feature of Intentionality. (2) If there is such a thing as modality, it resides either in the way we speak of things or in the things, regardless of the way we speak of them. If the latter, modal sentences fail to satisfy Chisholm's criterion for mentalistic sentences; and if the former, modal sentences turn out to be mentalistic sentences. So either way – if either the latter or the former – modal sentences fail to provide a counterexample to Chisholm's claim that his criterion picks out only mentalistic sentences. (3) Functionalism doesn't enable physicalism to accommodate Intentional states and events, because functionalism rejects a traditional tenet of physicalism.

I.

Within a small compass Professor Marras provides an admirably clear and generally balanced account of the place of Intentionality¹ and physicalism in recent analytical philosophical debate. I should like here, however, to express a few reservations about his account. First, contrary to Marras, I believe that the third of Chisholm's (1957) Intentional criteria of sentences about mental phenomena succeeds in highlighting an intuitive feature of Intentionality, i.e. mental directedness towards an object or content.² I may see that a man who needs a shave is scowling at me, while not seeing that a man with a bald spot at the back of his head is scowling at me – even though the man who needs a shave does have a bald spot – for the simple reason that the man is a stranger to me, and I can't see the back of his head. This humdrum example reminds us of the fact that perceptual and other states of mind are never directed towards things *simpliciter* but only under this or that *aspect* of the thing. Chisholm's third criterion simply reflects this fact at the linguistic level: We can transform

(1) Morick sees that the man who needs a shave is scowling at him.

which is *ex hypothesi* true into the falsehood

(2) Morick sees that the man with a bald spot on the back of his head is scowling at him.

by replacing the phrase "the man who needs a shave" with "the man who has a bald spot on the back of his head". Chisholm's criterion judges (1) and (2) Intentional and hence mental in subject matter, which accords not only with our intuition

that their subject matter is mental, but also highlights a feature of these sentences that makes them mentalistic.

Second, contrary to Marras, I believe that modal sentences fail to provide counterexamples to Chisholm's criterion. I shall deal with this modality objection by concentrating on necessity claims, since possibility, impossibility, and contingency can be eliminatively defined in terms of necessity.

Marras neglects to mention that there are leading analytic philosophers, e.g. W.V. Quine, who believe that we should eliminate modal concepts and sentences, because they are too obscure and confused to be part of serious science. If so, this "dissolves" Marras' modality objection to Chisholm's criterion.

As for believers in necessity, some hold that it resides in things, regardless of the way we speak of them, whereas other believers hold that necessity resides in the way we speak of things, and not in the things themselves. As we shall see Marras is trapped in a dilemma: if the first group is right about necessity, modal sentences fail to satisfy Chisholm's criterion and hence fail to provide counterexamples to Chisholm's claim that any sentence that satisfies his criterion has a mentalistic subject matter; and if the second group is right about necessity, then — as I shall explain — Marras' judgment "Surely, modal sentences do not belong to the field of psychology" is false. So, either way, Chisholm's criterion easily accommodates the possibility of there being genuine modal claims within serious science. I realize that this is a highly compressed paragraph and shall now try to unpack the points it contains.

Some even among those analytic philosophers who believe in the legitimacy of modal sentences would deny that modal sentences satisfy Chisholm's criterion. For they believe that necessity resides in things, regardless of the way we speak about them. For instance, if they are right

(3) Necessarily $9 > 7$

remains true under any codesignative replacement of "9" (and/or "7"). If this view of modal sentences is correct, necessarily 9 by any name or designation, or with no designation whatever, exceeds 7. A unique trait of 9, namely succeeding 8, is, it is maintained, essential to 9, and so are traits that follow from it, such as exceeding 7; on the other hand other unique traits of 9, such as numbering the planets, are merely accidental rather than essential, and in no way undermine the fact that necessarily 9 exceeds 7. Hence no codesignative replacement for "9" in (3) will produce a sentence that differs in truth value from (3).

There are analytic philosophers who believe in the legitimacy of modal notions and sentences but who disagree with the position just outlined. For they believe that necessity and the other modalities reside in the way we speak of things and not in the things we speak about. It is clear from what he says that Marras belongs to this subgroup of philosophers. As they see it "Necessarily . . ." is a semantical predicate that attributes analyticity to the sentences that follow it. Given this view of necessity, (3) may be paraphrased as

(3') " $9 > 7$ " is analytic.

If this view of necessity claims is true, then (3) satisfies Chisholm's criterion. If, however, this view of necessity claims is true, then Marras' claim that "modal sentences do not belong to psychology" is false.

I said that Marras belongs to a subgroup of philosophers who take "Necessarily . . ." as a semantical predicate that is attributed to sentences. Actually, that was short for: "Necessarily . . ." is a semantical predicate attributed to *sentences* (types or tokens), or to the *statements* that sentences can be used to make, or to the *propositions* that sentences express. That is, the subject of necessity claims, according to the view Marras holds, is one or more of these three things.

Obviously, sentences and statements must employ words, and by definition "word" requires reference to speech (see, e.g., *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*). In turn "speech", except in the trivial sense of parroting, is defined by reference to *understanding*, which is a mentalistic concept. Your making noises counts as speaking, in the central, non-parroting sense, only if you understand what those noises mean. Furthermore, your noisemaking counts as speaking only if (as H. P. Grice has emphasized) you have certain *intentions*, another mentalistic notion. Consequently, necessity claims have a mentalistic subject matter if the subjects of these claims are sentences and/or statements.

Moreover, if the subjects of these claims are propositions, these claims have a mentalistic subject matter. In philosophical usage, a proposition is the meaning of a declarative sentence in use. For example, uttered at one time "It is raining" can express a true proposition, and uttered at another time this sentence can express a different, false proposition. Now propositions are best taken as synonymy classes of sentences. But sentences, as I have noted, are mentalistic. How can this view of propositions be correct? Surely, e.g., the Pythagorean theorem was true before there were people and sentences? The answer to this is that although the attribution of truth to a proposition is timeless, i.e. not relative to a particular time, a proposition's existence depends on the existence of some language or other in which the proposition can be expressed. As Wittgenstein insisted, the meaning or intension of an expression is its use; e.g., the proposition *It is raining* may be identified with the class of expressions (e.g., the German "Es regnet" and the French "Il pleut") that play essentially the same role that the sentence "It is raining" plays in English.

To summarize, contrary to Marras, the third of Chisholm's 1957 Intentional criteria of sentences about mental phenomena is both intuitive and unthreatened by the possibility that there may be modal sentences that satisfy Chisholm's criterion. Those, like Marras, who believe that there are such modal sentences hold that the subjects of modal claims are sentences, statements and/or propositions. I have tried to show that each of these candidates for the subject of modal claims are mind-dependent, albeit objective entities (they are cultural products).

Incidentally, the fact that some quotational contexts satisfy Chisholm's criterion for sentences that have a mentalistic subject matter is okay, since words and the things people say are what are quoted. As I have noted *words* and *what people say* are concepts that make essential reference to mental states and events. Naturally these observations hold good for anomalous quotational claims like "Giorgione was so-called because of his size".

II.

Marras misleadingly suggests that functionalism enables physicalism neatly to accommodate Intentional states and events. The suggestion is misleading because functionalism rejects a traditional tenet of physicalism, namely the tenet that if we are completely physical in our make up (no ethereal soul stuff), then all genuine explanations of what we do and undergo must be physical. If the functionalist theory of mind is correct, however, our mental life is explainable precisely in terms of our particular *program*, which is an *abstract* trait of ours, rather than a physico-chemical trait of human beings. Marras points out that the physicalist has come around to admitting that the Intentional idiom is indispensable to explanations of our mental functioning. To this I want simply to add that such explanations are *autonomous* in the sense that if, e.g., Martians fit those explanations, we can understand their mental life and their behavior regardless of their physico-chemical microstructure.

Notes

- 1 I capitalize the first letter of the word "intentionality" whenever that word is used in what Marras calls its technical sense (mental directedness to an object or content), as opposed to its ordinary sense (purposefulness).
- 2 I shall work with what I take to be a more precise version of what Chisholm intended in formulating his third (1957) criterion: a sentence is Intentional if it contains a proper noun or definite descriptive phrase such that, by replacing this noun or phrase with a codesignative expression, it is possible to alter the truth value of the sentence.

Bibliography

Chisholm, R.M. (1957), *Perceiving: A Philosophical Study*, Ithaca, N.Y.