

Philosophical Posthumanism and Intentionality

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Abstract

In this paper I defend the importance of Daniel Dennett’s “intentional stance” for Philosophical Posthumanism vis-à-vis humanism. After first establishing the role of intentionality in humanism, I move to a critique of that role from the perspective of both ontology and the history of scientific explanation. Rendering intentionality deeply problematic for humanism, thereby acting in support of Philosophical Posthumanism, I argue that this critique may ultimately be too strong for Philosophical Posthumanism itself. This is because it leads to eliminativism and reductionism. I conclude by arguing that Philosophical Posthumanism needs the more inclusive approach to intentionality found in Dennett’s intentional stance. It does so, but only on a pragmatic interpretation. Without that interpretation, Dennett’s work, and thus its application to Philosophical Posthumanism, falls victim to the very same critique levelled against intentionality in relation to humanism.

Keywords: *Intentionality; Intentional stance; Philosophical Posthumanism; Dennett*

Introduction

Understanding ‘man’ as unique and exceptional, in the way humanism has long maintained that ‘he’ is, would be impossible without attributing to ‘him’ intentionality (i.e., the aboutness of the mental, Dennett, 1987, 271). If philosophical posthumanism (PPH) is to transcend humanism—becoming in the process fully a post-humanism—the critique of intentionality, especially as part of some “special and distinct feature of human beings,” must be a priority (Ferrando, 2019, 22; Norman, 2004, 61). It is to this critique that I turn here.

First, I outline the central importance of intentionality to humanism. Second, I present a critique of intentionality from an ontological perspective as well as one based upon the history of scientific explanation, each of which problematizes the role intentionality plays in humanism. Third, I defend an approach to intentionality for PPH based upon the work of Daniel Dennett. I defend this approach for two reasons. It avoids the pitfalls facing the ontological and historical critiques of intentionality. It creates greater synergy between the critique of intentionality and PPH. I end by arguing that Dennett’s view of intentionality works for PPH, but only when given a pragmatic interpretation. Without that pragmatic interpretation, Dennett’s view would simply recreate for PPH all of the problems related to intentionality that confront humanism.

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Humanism and intentionality

Humanism, of which PPH is attempting to be ‘post,’ may seem hard to define. One reason is that, as a leading contemporary humanist argues, “There is no humanist creed, no set of beliefs to which every humanist must subscribe” (Norman, 2004, 24). Another, and closely related, is that humanism comes in a number of different varieties (e.g. Renaissance humanism, cultural humanism, religious humanism, secular humanism, etc.), and has a number of different aspects (e.g. epistemic, metaphysical, ethical, political, pedagogical, etc.). However, as ecumenical, diverse, and without ‘dogma’ as humanism might be, or at least strive to be, the centrality of intentionality to humanism is quite clear (The Amsterdam Declaration of 2002).² Two transitively related necessary conditions establish this point.

The first condition follows from the various ways in which humanists—and non-humanists for that matter—have attempted to distinguish ‘man’ or ‘the human.’ Take, for example, what follows from this “minimum statement” of humanism, one accepted by “humanist organizations in over forty countries” (Copson, 2015, 6):

Humanism is a democratic and ethical life stance, which affirms that human beings have the right and responsibility to give meaning and shape to their own lives. It stands for the building of a more humane society through an ethic based on human and other natural values in the spirit of reason and free inquiry through human capabilities. (Bylaw 1.2 of the 2015 International Humanist and Ethical Union Bylaws).³

While starting with humanism as an ethical and political outlook, Bylaw 1.2 goes on to establish that according to a wide sample of humanists their ethical and political outlook is ultimately grounded upon “The spirit of reason and free inquiry through human capabilities.” With such ‘human capabilities’ clearly involving, at a minimum, our exercise of free choice and reason, understanding the nature, source, and commitments belief in these human capabilities entails has led to a great deal of disagreement among humanists. For instance, in regards to their source we find the question that has split religious from secular humanists. To the religious humanist, unsurprisingly human capabilities have, and arguably must have, their source in the divine (della Mirandola, 1956). Whereas to ‘secular humanists,’ who now constitute the majority of humanists—secular humanists often look suspiciously upon religious humanists as even qualifying for being ‘humanists’ (Copson, 2015, 24-28; Norman, 2004, 15-17)—these human capabilities find their source solely in the natural.⁴ But setting aside the intramural debates that follow from the humanist commitment to belief in the existence and importance of these human capabilities—not to mention their impact on the taxonomy of humanism—one central humanist tenet remains beyond dispute: humans have the ability to develop an ethical, just, and meaningful life *in virtue of the capabilities that distinguish*

² For the Amsterdam Declaration of 2002, please see <https://humanists.international/what-is-humanism/the-amsterdam-declaration/>

³ For the full set of bylaws, please see <https://humanists.international/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/IHEU-Bylaws-Internal-Rules-General-Assembly-Regulations-and-Membership-and-Dues-Regulations-as-amended-May-2016.pdf>

⁴ The International Humanist and Ethical Union makes clear just how dominant secular humanism currently is in the lines that immediately follow the above cited passage from their Bylaw 1.2: “[Humanism] is not theistic, and it does not accept supernatural views of reality” (my edit). For an interesting discussion of a materialist, naturalist, scientific account of how our human “capabilities” might have evolved through natural selection, or even “emerged” through a process of natural “design,” see Robert Wright, *The Evolution of God* (2009), pp. 400-405, and Daniel Dennett’s *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea* (1996) “Chapter Six: Threads of Actuality in Design Space.”



them as human. Which provokes, returning us now to the first necessary condition referenced above, an important question (especially important for us): what conditions are necessary for humans to have these capabilities? The answer to which, regarding one necessary condition in particular, is made quite clear by humanists. That necessary condition is consciousness:

One reason why consciousness is important is that it is a precondition of our capacity to *appraise* our own mental states, that is our ability to stand back from them and think about them and evaluate them. We need to do this, for instance, in order to make rational decisions (Norman, 2004, 58).

Directly connecting ‘human capabilities’ such as the exercise of free choice and reason, or as Norman combines them ‘rational decisions,’ to consciousness, Norman’s point is that the humanist commitment to certain unique ‘human capabilities’ clearly brings with it a prior commitment to the existence and possession by humans of consciousness. Without consciousness, it just would not be possible for humans to engage in the sort of reflective processes, and rely upon the ‘human thought,’ that make humans uniquely who and what they are (Einstein, 1993, 13).⁵ And were a humanist to define these distinctly ‘human capabilities’ differently than just the exercise of free choice and reason, the necessity of consciousness would still hold. Take the possible use by a humanist of Cassirer who argues “instead of defining man as an *animal rationale*, we should define him as an *animal symbolicum*” (1953, 44). Employed by Cassirer to differentiate “animal processes of practical imagination and intelligence” from distinctively human “symbolic imagination and intelligence” (see footnote 4), such “symbolic imagination and intelligence” would again require, at a minimum, the consciousness to which Norman refers above (1953, 52). It would, because a higher order level of symbolic abstraction would demand consciousness given such abstraction is clearly meant by Cassirer to have reason, and therefore consciousness, as a proper part (the *animal symbolicum* is an extension of the *animal rationale* for Cassirer). Thus, whether it is reason and free will—by far and away the most popular choice among humanists as Bylaw 1.2 makes clear—symbolic imagination and intelligence, or something else besides (possibly a closely allied notion to reason like cognition, Harari, 2015), for humanism *both* “The term ‘humanism’ appears to imply the recognition of something special and distinctive about human beings,” and what that something special and distinctive is has consciousness as a necessary condition (Norman, 2004, 61).⁶

Hardly sufficient to make humans special and distinct, or to return to the terms used in the opening line of this paper, unique and exceptional, for humanists consciousness is nonetheless necessary. And with this we are brought to the second and transitively related necessary condition connecting humanism to intentionality. The *locus classicus* for which is Brentano:

⁵ For those who might protest that some animals have both the precondition for intelligence, consciousness, and intelligence itself, thereby undermining any claims to there being something special and distinct about humans, most humanists would agree that animal consciousness and intelligence, if it exists, is so *quantitatively* different from the human that it is *qualitatively* different from the human (Dennett 1996, 370-371). As Norman concludes not just about the ability to engage in rational assessment and self-reflection but consciousness itself: “The process of *consciousness*, we might say, is distinctively human” (2004, 58). For a more full discussion of how humanists see humans as special in relation to other animals, see “What does it mean to be a humanist?” <https://humanists.international/what-is-humanism/>

⁶ Of course, it still might be logically possible for some existent or future humanist view to maintain that what makes humans special and distinct does not have consciousness as a necessary condition. But, this view, if it exists or comes to exist, would certainly be a minority opinion vis-à-vis historical as well as contemporary humanism. And, based upon my research, I see no reason to believe that such a view does now, or will ever, find voice.

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. This intentional in-existence is characteristic exclusively of mental phenomena. No physical phenomenon exhibits anything like it. We could, therefore, define mental phenomena by saying that they are those phenomena which contain an object intentionally within themselves (Brentano, 1995, 88-89).

What distinguishes the mental from the physical, according to Brentano, is not some underlying ‘substance.’ It is that the mental *always* has a ‘content’ or an ‘object.’ Unlike physical phenomenon, mental phenomenon are, as it has been so often put and as we put it earlier following Dennett, “about” something. Harkening back to the “Scholastics of the Middle Ages” (Brentano, 1995, 88), if not to the much earlier Parmenidean claim that it is impossible to think about nothing, for Brentano it is intentionality, and intentionality alone, that demarcates the mental. ‘Directedness’ *towards* something, something not fully present in thought itself, is at thought’s heart. And this includes, *ab initio*, consciousness. It includes consciousness because to be conscious is always to be conscious *of something*. Consciousness is never simply consciousness, but, like every mental state, consciousness always has an object. Which, therefore, means that consciousness has as a necessary condition intentionality. Like consciousness is a necessary (but not sufficient) condition for what distinguishes ‘man’ according to the humanist tradition discussed above, so too intentionality is a necessary (but not sufficient) condition for consciousness to that same tradition as Brentano lays bare. While it might be possible to have intentionality without consciousness, it is certainly *not* possible to have consciousness without intentionality.⁷

The central importance of intentionality for humanism is now clear. Given the common use by humanists of free choice and reason to make ‘the human’ unique and exceptional, and that consciousness is a necessary condition for free choice and reason, then consciousness is necessary for what makes ‘the human’ unique and exceptional. In turn, if intentionality is necessary for consciousness, by transitivity, intentionality is necessary for free choice and reason. The result is that what has long defined for humanism the unique and exceptional nature of ‘the human’ has intentionality as a necessary condition.

Why intentionality over consciousness?

In light of the essential role intentionality plays for humanism, the importance of critiquing intentionality to PPH is now obvious. Should intentionality be unable to play this role, humanism’s claim to the unique and exceptional nature of ‘the human’ would be weakened if not undermined. It would because those problems that confront intentionality would also thereby confront humanism. And this, in turn, would leave PPH poised to offer and uphold a post-humanism. In fact, it would do more. It would show that PPH is itself, in some measure, necessary. If it is not possible to make sense of one of the necessary conditions for humanism, then something besides humanism must take its place. That something is PPH.

⁷ For an exploration of the possibility of intentionality without consciousness, see the discussion of “natural meaning” in Grice (1989). As to the possibility of consciousness without intentionality, in fact, the denial of any necessary connection between consciousness and intentionality, see Searle on the meaning of “oP” (1983, 2-3). Suffice it to say, the claim that the transitive relation holds between intentionality and humanism is not impacted by Searle’s point unless his idiosyncratic usage of certain terms, and questionable interpretation of certain psychological states (e.g. that some depressive states have no intentionality), are accepted.



But why not focus PPH on the critique of the more logically proximate necessary condition for humanism? Why not focus PPH on a critique of consciousness? Consciousness has certainly garnered far more attention in the history of philosophy than has intentionality. From at least the time of Descartes' cogito, debate surrounding the existence, nature, and importance of consciousness has been central to philosophy (especially in the West). So much so has this been the case that famed pragmatist Richard Rorty identifies concern for "consciousness" or our "Glassy Essence" (Rorty, 1979, 51-52) as the central, common element tying together the "Descartes-Locke-Kant tradition" (Rorty, 1979, 8-9). And more recently, consciousness has taken center stage in philosophy and allied subjects like cognitive science and cognitive psychology to the extent that it has spawned what might best be described as a cottage industry; according to some, the subject of consciousness or "mind" has gone so far as to replace the long-standing primacy accorded to language by philosophy throughout the 20th century (Williamson, 2004). From Dennett's attempt to "explain consciousness" (Dennett, 1991)—which Searle argues is more a denial than an explanation (Dennett and Searle, 1995)—to Chalmers claim that nearly everyone engaged in debate about consciousness has failed to appreciate its "hard problem" (Chalmers, 1996, xii-xiii, 95-106), the hot button issue of consciousness has been and remains at the forefront of philosophy and broader intellectual life. Even humanism, as per our above discussion, is no exception, with PPH getting in on the act as well. Robert Pepperell's laudable effort to critique the brain obsession that grips most contemporary discussion of consciousness in his excellent *The Posthuman Condition: Consciousness beyond the brain*, displays how central the concern over consciousness is, including to those seeking its radical reformulation. Why, then, not continue in this tradition? Why not keep PPH, especially in its critique of humanism, focused on consciousness?

The reason is that the topic of consciousness is the victim of its own success. Like the move away from the philosophically ubiquitous yet troubled "experience" and toward language in the "linguistic turn" (Rorty, 1993, 2007), the move here away from consciousness and toward intentionality is a move away from what has become so popular yet contended that, at the same time, it has become almost meaningless. To take but one example, it is not by accident that Pepperell feels the need, in just the second paragraph of the opening chapter of *The Posthuman Condition*, to define the term consciousness before turning to its reconsideration vis-à-vis PPH. A definition he offers while readily admitting he is adding it to a host of others that are all "controversial" to varying degrees (Pepperell, 2003, 13). And, as this implies, Pepperell is not alone in feeling the need to make this elucidatory or definitional effort. The attempt to clarify if not define "consciousness," prior to debate about its existence or import, is made forcefully for humanism by Norman, who, echoing Pepperell, nonetheless readily admits at the very beginning of his attempt that "Consciousness is another rather slippery term" (2004, 58). While definitional issues also sit at the heart of the hotly discussed and debated question of whether consciousness must be considered from the standpoint of the first person, phenomenological perspective of "what it is like," the third person, "objective" perspective of empirical science, or some combination thereof (Dreyfus, 1982; Husserl, 2001; Nagel, 1974, 435). To put this succinctly, a turn toward intentionality and away from consciousness is a way for PPH to move beyond a topic that now breeds as much confusion as clarity.

This is not to say that intentionality is without its own definitional difficulties. It is also not to say that the excellent work done on consciousness, especially from the standpoint of PPH by

Pepperell and others, has been for naught (as we will see). It is to say that by turning to the more logically primary category of intentionality, PPH adds a dimension to its critical work on humanism. A dimension that helps PPH augment argument by adding to work that has bravely ventured into the thorny, inconclusive debate(s) surrounding consciousness.

Intentionality and ontology

We can frame our discussion of intentionality, and what might be troubling about intentionality, with the opening of Hilary Putnam's *Reason, Truth and History*:

An ant is crawling on a patch of sand. As it crawls, it traces a line in the sand. By pure chance the line that it traces curves and recrosses itself in such a way that it ends up looking like a recognizable caricature of Winston Churchill. Has the ant traced a picture of Winston Churchill, a picture that *depicts* Churchill?

Most people would say, on a little reflection, that it has not. The ant, after all, has never seen Churchill, or even a picture of Churchill, and it had no intention of depicting Churchill. It simply traced a line (and even *that* was unintentional), a line that *we* can 'see as' a picture of Churchill.

We can express this by saying that the line is not 'in itself' a representation of anything rather than anything else (Putnam, 1981, 1, his italics).

A line in the sand that *looks like* Winston Churchill. A cloud formation that *looks like* the nation of Italy. A burnt piece of toast that *looks like* the Virgin Mary. A set of marks on a cliff that *looks like* an alien language. None of these transcend the realm of 'pure chance' or mere coincidence and *actually* looks like or represents anything according to Putnam. They do not, until one element is added. That element is already present in his construction of the scene: "what is necessary for representation, or what is mainly necessary for representation, is *intention*" (Putnam, 1981, 2, his italics).

Putnam here focuses our attention on the typical role accorded intentionality. He also points us in the direction of its central difficulty. At the intersection of fields as diverse as literary criticism (Barthes, 1977), philosophy of language (Quine, 1960), and legal theory (Hart, 1968)—not to mention psychology and philosophy of mind—intentionality has long been the hope for ground of all conceptual, symbolic, and behavioral clarity. Want to know what a word "means"? Want to know why "she did it"? Want to know to how a given law "applies"? Uncover the intention behind the utterance, act, or piece of legislation and the answer is at hand. But this leads immediately to the search for the origins of the intentional. We are forced to ask, in the face of any particular intention, what made that intention possible? Where did it come from? What are its origins?⁸

It is easy enough for an individual or group to endow via intentionality any object or event with meaning. To make it into a sign or a text. All that needs to happen is to baptize the object or event, turning it from a mere object or event into something representational (Kripke,

⁸ Here we see that the more common meaning of intention, i.e. purposeful behavior, might be conflated with the more technical philosophical meaning, i.e. the aboutness relation. But clearly the philosophical meaning is the primary concern because without the aboutness relation the notion of purposeful behavior is impossible. For this reason, among others, Putnam, Searle, and Dennett, not to mention Brentano, make the aboutness relation their focus.



1980, 96-97). For instance, say “Hey, those lines in the sand over there look like a picture of Winston Churchill,” and, voilà, lines in the sand have come to represent Churchill! But such a baptismal act, and all other forms of representation or meaning that might follow upon such baptismal acts (e.g., natural language), are examples of what Searle calls “derived intentionality” (Searle, 1983, 27). The directedness or aboutness of the sign or behavior is derived from the thoughts that gave rise to that sign or behavior. Baptism, to stick with this one example, works as a way to endow meaning via intentionality only if some account can be given of the ‘intrinsic’ intentionality of the thoughts that made any given act of baptism possible (Searle, 1983, vii). An ontology of intrinsically intentional objects is thus called for. An ontology of objects that in their very nature simultaneously *are* and *are about* other objects. Without such objects there is simply no way to say how, and from what, any instance of derived intentionality was, in fact, derived.

But what types of objects could have this dual quality? What types of objects in and of themselves both *are* and *are about* other objects? What types of objects inherently represent? There would seem to be only two possible candidates: physical objects or non-physical objects. And, arriving now at a, if not the, central difficulty facing intentionality—one that challenges the transitive relation relied upon by humanism—neither alternative seems viable.

Brentano himself points to the difficulty with the first. As we saw above, following his account of how intentionality distinguishes the mental, Brentano concludes: “No physical phenomenon exhibits anything like it.” Given this, to try to claim intrinsically intentional objects are, ultimately, physical objects, is to commit a category mistake. In fact, it is to do more. It is to fall into self-contradiction.

If the intentional is, by definition, not physical (as Brentano implies if not asserts), to claim that the intentional is physical is to claim that the intentional both is and is not physical. A blatant contradiction if ever there was one. And, according to Searle, it is to avoid such contradiction, while holding to the scientifically ‘respectable’ view that the world is entirely physical (i.e. physicalism or materialism), that so much effort has been spent to get rid of the intentional and mental more broadly as an ontological category: “unless some way was found to eliminate mental phenomena [...] we would be left with dualism and an apparently insoluble mind-body problem” (Churchland, 1981; Stich, 1983; Searle, 1983, ix). Though on first reading Brentano’s understanding of intentionality might appear to bring no necessary ontological commitments, upon further consideration such substance neutrality seems impossible. Construed as Brentano construes it, intentionality leads inexorably to dualism.

Which brings us to the second candidate for intrinsically intentional objects. Intrinsically intentional objects are non-physical. A view that avoids the fire of category mistake and self-contradiction only by climbing back into the frying pan of the mind-body problem. Much like Descartes’ cogito placed the issue of consciousness at the center of philosophy for centuries, his attempt to explain how the mind ‘fits in’ to a universe that he, along with all early-modern physics, was describing increasingly in purely physical terms, landed him and all subsequent philosophy in one of the most notorious philosophical problems of all time. Part and parcel of Plato’s problem of explaining how the abstract, non-spatio-temporal world of The Forms could interact with the concrete, spatio-temporal world of physical objects and events, Descartes’ or any attempt to explain ‘the mind’ via some sort of substance dualism ends up metaphysically troubled. Worse yet in the current context, it fails to explain intentionality.

Assume for a moment some workable account of how the non-physical mind interacts with the physical body. This still leaves wanting an account of how mental images represent. As we saw on that oddly lined beach in Putnam's original scenario, mere resemblance between two objects (i.e. lined sand and Winston Churchill) has nothing to do with representation until intentionality is added. And it doesn't make a difference whether that resemblance relation exists between two or more physical objects, two or more non-physical objects, or some combination of physical and non-physical objects. Which could lead to some still further level of intentionality being invoked to explain how mental images 'represent.' Or, mental images could simply be claimed to have some form of 'mysterious' or 'magical' intrinsic representation (Putnam, 1981, 2-5). But the former leads to an obvious infinite regress, while the latter explains the vague by appeal to the obscure.

Intentionality and the history of scientific explanation

The attempt to understand intentionality via some account of intrinsically intentional objects confronts a number of problems. Not only do such objects run afoul of metaphysical difficulties, chief among them the mind-body problem, but they fail to explain the aboutness relation that is at the heart of the intentional. A result, returning now to the transitive relation discussed above, that would seem exactly what PPH is looking for. Without a viable account of intentionality, a necessary condition for consciousness is absent. And with that necessary condition for consciousness absent, so too is absent what is necessary to make humans unique and exceptional (e.g. free choice and reason, symbolic imagination and intelligence, etc.), as humanists clearly believe humans are. The consequence would thus seem to be that transcending humanism becomes necessary, making way for PPH.

And this *is* the consequence, except for one concern. Attempting to transcend humanism in this way embroils PPH in a series of disputes neither easily resolved nor avoided. For one, PPH would have to engage those who challenge Brentano by claiming that the physical can, at one and the same time, have the properties of the physical and the properties of the intentional. This is the so-called biological naturalism found in Searle (1983), and more famously the property dualism developed in work such as Donald Davidson's notoriously complex and challenging anomalous monism (1980, 1984). PPH would also be forced to address those who have admitted to the persistence of the metaphysical and other difficulties confronting intrinsic intentionality, rejecting solutions like those offered by Searle or Davidson, only to opt for a new mysterianism. The view that intrinsic intentionality, as well as qualia, first-person subjectivity, and nearly all mental phenomena are beyond our human epistemic boundaries (Dennett, 1991b, 10) and must remain ever a mystery (McGinn, 1991; Pinker, 1997; Chomsky, 2011). And maybe most troubling of all, PPH would have to defend against both these groups, and likely others, its resolution to the long-standing debate between materialism and idealism (Pepperell, 2003, 32-34). This includes the speculative object-oriented ontology and new materialism sitting at the heart of much PPH metaphysics (Ferrando, 2019, 158). Views that often rely heavily on highly-contested physical theory (e.g. string theory, Ferrando, 2019, 166-170) or philosophical interpretations of more established theory (e.g. quantum theory, Pepperell, 2003, 33-34), and, thus, are open not only to conceptual but empirical refutation.

While hardly dispositive, considering the existence of these problems does not preclude their successful treatment by PPH, they are nonetheless reason enough to critically engage



intentionality using another approach. An approach that focuses our attention equally on the challenges facing the transitive relationship underpinning humanism, but one that does not rely upon a critique of intentionality as viewed from an ontological perspective. And the first step in this approach brings us back to Descartes and early-modern physics.

In ‘Mediation IV’ of his watershed *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Descartes asserts “[f]or this reason alone the entire class of causes which people customarily derive from a thing’s ‘end,’ I judge to be utterly useless in physics.” (1998, 82). Educated as a good Aristotelian, Descartes originally accepted, like most “natural philosophers” of his and preceding ages in Europe, that the weight of natural explanation must be borne by the famous fourth of Aristotle’s four causes. Though the ‘efficient,’ ‘material,’ and ‘formal’ causes had their place, it was in the fourth and ‘final’ cause that the *purpose* of natural objects and events was found and thus the *reason* for those objects and events being the way they were and not another way. But as Descartes’ thinking evolved, and indeed the thinking of all early-modern physics, it was exactly this Aristotelian explanatory desideratum that was called into question. Not just called into question, over time it became the conventional wisdom of physicists that this desideratum itself was an, if not the, impediment to a further, more complete, understanding of the physical world. The harsh tone of ‘utterly useless’ in the above passage clearly conveys the growing belief, of Descartes as well as physicists more generally, that Aristotle’s view of scientific explanation was getting in the way of scientific progress.

The search for ends, purposes, and reasons was thus abandoned in physics. And along with that abandonment, as a proper part, so too was abandoned the search for what we have been calling, following Searle, ‘intrinsic intentionality.’ To give up on viewing nature as purposeful—or at least it was not the role of science to uncover nature’s purposes—was to give up on design in nature. But it was also to give up on the belief that any object or event is intrinsically about another object or event. Objects and events are certainly causally connected, via one or more of the first three of Aristotle’s four causes, but that doesn’t mean objects or events are ever directed toward other objects or events. Intention, in its meaning *both* as an expression of what someone or something wants *and* as the directedness of objects or events towards other objects and events, now had no role in physics. Objects and events *are*, but they are never inherently *about* other objects or events. A conclusion that would over time famously (or infamously depending on one’s perspective) come to dominate sciences well beyond the confines of physics in the early-modern era, one science in particular.

Known now to have been delayed for publication across several decades, Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* was so delayed because Darwin knew he was doing for biology what had been done for physics centuries before (with unfortunate consequences for Galileo in the earlier case). The theory of evolution by natural selection was, in essence, the end of purposes and thus intentionality in nature *in general*. And more to the point in the current context, it was the end of purposes and intentionality in that part of nature many had long considered unique and exceptional: ‘man.’ If ‘man’ was a part of the biological order Darwin was explaining without appeal to final causes or ends, and thus purposes and intentionality, it was clear that in ‘his’ entirety ‘man’ too could, and in fact must (on pain of inconsistency), be accounted for without any appeal to final causes or ends and thus purposes and intentionality (as Darwin later concluded, at least for human biology, in *The Descent of Man*). A result, returning us again to the transitive relation, that would clearly undermine any claims to the unique and exceptional status of ‘man.’ In fact, Darwin had done more. He had created a dilemma for all

supporters of the special status of ‘man.’ Supporters in particular of what have come to be called, and what we have been calling, humanism.

To uphold humanism would now either require: 1) rejecting Darwin and hence science itself (including all physics since at least the 17th century); or 2) offering a scientifically ‘respectable’ account of how ‘man’ achieves a special exemption from science’s abandonment of purposes and intentionality in nature. Additionally, especially for those embracing the second horn, some explanation was required to show how the supporters of humanism were not engaged in post-hoc reasoning or rank rationalization. Scientifically supported belief in the existence of intentionality in ‘man’ was clearly not leading, through similarly supported belief in the existence of consciousness in ‘man,’ to humanism. Rather, humanism was being *assumed*, leading to the quest for an ad hoc exception to the eclipse of purposes and intentionality from all physical, and with Darwin biological, theory. Belief in human exceptionalism was, it seemed, driving the search for a special exemption from the natural order on the part of humanity, not the opposite. Post hoc reasoning that could easily be seen as motivated more than a little, as Dennett suggests in his “Seven Fs” as well as his discussion of resistance to Darwin “dangerous idea,” by the “f” for “fear” (Dennett, 2012, 92). Fear especially of what he calls “nihilism” (Dennett, 1996, 18-19).

The intentional stance and PPH

Unlike the earlier ontological critique of intentionality, this historical critique does not embroil PPH in a succession of largely intractable metaphysical debates. At best, those challenging this historical critique are going to have to call into question the now centuries old move away from the appeal to final causes in science. It will be incumbent upon them to cast doubt on the nature of scientific explanation as it is now, and has long been, understood and practiced. At worst, those challenging this historical critique are going to have embrace the first horn of the above dilemma that follows upon Darwin’s work. They will have to call into question the very epistemic status of science itself. A questioning not of any specific part of scientific explanation or method, but of the entire scientific enterprise. In the process this would mean throwing the scientific baby out with the anti-intentional, anti-Aristotelian bath water in a way that most, other than the deeply, traditionally, religiously committed, would abjure.

We thus find ourselves *once again* in possession of what PPH would seem to be looking for. The critique of intentionality from the perspective of the history of scientific explanation puts PPH in position to question the transitive relation outlined before. In so doing it makes possible the transcendence of humanism by showing that humanism has laid the groundwork for a view that can be built upon and beyond its shortcomings. That view is PPH.

And, as in the previous ontological case, this *is* what PPH is looking for, except for one concern. Attempting to transcend humanism in this way raises an uncomfortable question: has the critique of intentionality gone too far, gone too far even for PPH? To transcend humanism using this historically-based critique of intentionality would appear to commit PPH to the denial of intentionality *in its entirety* (especially when conjoined with the earlier ontological critique). With that, PPH would seem to find itself the uncomfortable bedfellow of a scientism that seeks to move beyond folk psychology in favor of a rather barren physicalism/materialism (Dennett 1987, 7). The sort of physicalism/materialism that calls into question some of our most cherished ethical and political beliefs and has found support from, among others, Stephen Stich (1983) and Paul and Patricia Churchland (1998)—though its



long history is outlined well by Gilbert Ryle (2009) and is traceable at least to Laplace's determinism. To go this historical route, in other words, would not lead to the transcendence of humanism but to *its outright denial*, and with that bring a commitment to reductionism, among other things, that most who support PPH would not want to make (Ferrando, 2019, 168-170).

Like the concerns facing the earlier ontological critique, this concern facing the historical critique gives us not just pause, but reason to critically engage intentionality using yet another approach. And at the center of this now third approach is the recognition that rather than attempting to rid us of intentionality, what PPH *should really be looking* for is a way to keep intentionality. Keep intentionality while 1) not embroiling PPH in metaphysical quandaries such as the mind-body problem, 2) not forcing PPH to deny science in some fashion, and 3) allowing it to challenge the transitive relation. A way that is found not in *eliminating* intentionality but in *expanding* it beyond the limited range it is given by humanism. Expanding it as does Daniel Dennett with his famed "intentional stance."

Eponymously named for the stance itself, in *The Intentional Stance* Dennett offers a defense of intentionality as a property of objects or events based upon whether they are what he calls "intentional systems" (Dennett, 1991, ix). An intentional system is one where the prediction of that system's behavior is made easier and more efficient via the attribution to that system of intentional states such as beliefs, hopes, desires, etc. (i.e. the assumption of 'rational' agency, Dennett, 1987, 17). The third of three stances, one that can be added to the "physical stance" (i.e., explanation based upon underlying physical law) and the "design stance" (i.e. explanation based upon the assumption of a system's design), the reason to add the "intentional stance" is that some systems are so complex that the other two stances become cumbersome and unwieldy. While the physical stance might work well to explain the functioning of a thermostat or molecule, and the design stance the functioning of a computer or kidney—the thermostat and computer are among Dennett's favorite examples [1991, 16-17])—the "functioning" or behavior of a human being simply outstrips what is possible with either the physical or design stance. And though the intentional stance fails to provide the predictive precision of the other two stances, especially the physical stance, it nonetheless makes available certain "patterns" that the other two stances miss (Dennett, 1987, 37). In the process it leads to much more efficient and effective levels of prediction and control; however, according to Dennett, no matter how efficient and effective there is no necessity to the use of the intentional or any other stance at any level—e.g., a computer might just as well be described by the physical or intentional stance as opposed to design stance given certain behaviors. But independent of what considerations might be brought to bear on what stance is appropriate when, the intentional stance makes intentionality a feature of the world that not only helps with prediction and control but with prediction and control across that part of the world that is our central concern: ourselves. It also, as an added benefit, achieves the Herculean task of marrying the three strategies of scientific explanation we encountered in our preceding discussion, especially in relation to human behavior. Three strategies that have long been viewed as competitive (even in this paper) but which, via the intentional stance, can be made cooperative. The first strategy is the highly predictive but often cumbersome (to say the least) reductive, eliminative materialism like that championed by the aforementioned 'Churchlands.' The second strategy is the manageable but hard to generalize (beyond biology) Aristotelian or now neo-Aristotelian appeal to purpose and design that has found limited favor in work like Richard Dawkins' *The Selfish Gene* (1976) and much greater favor in recent

discussions of evolutionary theory (Grafen, 2003, Thompson, 2008). And the third strategy is the tried but often not true (that is, often not predictive and accurate) common sense or folk psychology practiced by, and largely favored by, well, most if not all of us.

Placing value on a plurality of standpoints, like PPH's perspectivism (Ferrando, 2019, 151), the importance of Dennett's intentional stance in relation to PPH vis-à-vis humanism is clear. It allows PPH to achieve all three of the above stated goals. It avoids metaphysical quandaries by making intentionality a function of the complexity of a system not some underlying substance. It is commensurate with scientific reasoning; in fact, it embodies various forms of scientific reasoning (i.e. the three strategies just discussed). And, most importantly, it allows PPH to challenge the transitive relation outlined above in a non-eliminative fashion. It does, because, on Dennett's view, intentionality exists, only it is not restricted to human beings but is a property of many systems well beyond the human. With the result that there is nothing *at all* unique or exceptional about human beings in their possession of intentionality. Human beings are just one among many systems where the use of the physical or design stance to explain their behavior is not apt. Hence, the basis for any claim to the special status of "the human" in virtue of the human possession of the rarified property of intentionality, the very status upheld by humanism in terms of the transitive relation outlined earlier, is undercut. As such, PPH and its transcendence of the belief in the special status of 'the human' becomes a, and maybe *the*, sound alternative.

A use for the useful

Through this application of Dennett's intentional stance to the transitive relationship underlying humanism, it becomes possible to call that transitive relationship into question and thus open up space for PPH. There seems no way to maintain, with intentionality understood as Dennett understands it, the unique and exceptional status of 'the human.' And this is so without the pitfalls of the ontological and historical critiques of intentionality which, in the end, embroil debate over intentionality in metaphysical quandaries and eliminates intentionality in its entirety (along with much of great import to boot). The result is that PPH not only becomes more viable but, as was suggested before, necessary.

However, we must recognize that Dennett's understanding of intentionality, and the resultant critique it makes possible, only holds if so too do two connected conditions (we need not concern ourselves here with whether or not they are necessary conditions).

The first condition is that humanism is denied the response that 'the human' remains special because humans possesses what all other intentional systems do not: consciousness, rationality, free will, symbolic imagination and intelligence, or the like. As we already saw, supporters of humanism need not argue that intentionality alone makes human beings unique and exceptional. Intentionality has always been a *necessary* but never a *sufficient* condition for the position of humanism. As such, the supporters of humanism could easily accept Dennett's intentional stance but then defend the special status of "the human" not in terms of humanity's unique possession of intentionality but rather humanity's unique possession of intentionality *plus* consciousness, rationality, etc.

The second is that the intentional stance should not be given a 'realist' interpretation. An interpretation where intentionality is claimed to be an 'objective truth' about systems (the interpretation that Dennett himself favors, Dennett, 1987, 37). If intentionality is given such



a realist interpretation, it will fail 1) from the preceding section by dredging up all the ontological issues addressed in our discussion of possible intentional objects and the history of scientific explanation. Once again a question such as “Is intentionality a *real* property of systems or just a *mere* projection?” would become live. And with that, our use of the intentional stance would hardly advance debate surrounding humanism as that debate would return to the metaphysical where it has long languished.

It is here that what was only briefly mentioned in the introduction comes to the fore. Conjoin pragmatism, the replacement of the concern over the truth of beliefs, theories, etc. by concern over the usefulness of practices (Solymosi, 2013; Koopman, 2014), with our application of Dennett’s intentional stance, and both these conditions can be upheld.

The first, denying to humanism the appeal to consciousness, rationality, etc. as the unique feature(s) of ‘the human,’ has already been addressed to some extent above. As we saw there, debate over the existence and nature of the necessary condition for rationality (and free will, symbolic imagination and intelligence, etc.), that is consciousness, has been raging since at least the time of Descartes and has made little headway. Not even the meaning of the term itself has come close to being settled. Thus, any appeal to consciousness *en route* to claims about the special possession by humans of rationality, free will, symbolic imagination and intelligence or what have you, the claims at the very heart of humanism, is likely to be a non-starter.

More importantly, in an interesting moment of synergy between what we have recommended here about intentionality and Pepperell’s aforementioned treatment of consciousness, what we have recommended here *lends support for* what Pepperell has recommended about consciousness. Namely, that like intentionality, rather than consciousness being eliminated or restricted only to humans, *it too* should be expanded. Expanded beyond the human brain into the human body, and beyond the human body ‘out there’ into non-human nature (Pepperell, 2003, 33). One could argue, in fact, that given the logical relationship between intentionality and consciousness, our case regarding intentionality lends vital support for Pepperell’s regarding consciousness: if intentionality is not unique to human beings, that counts as evidence that *neither* is consciousness. They are both a ‘property’ of many things. And, with that, the basis is firmly established not only for a PPH inclusionary democracy of intentionality and consciousness but of rationality, free will, symbolic imagination and intelligence, etc. After all, if the restrictive, exclusionary humanist hierarchy of the necessary conditions for what makes human beings unique and exceptional does not hold, there is scant reason to believe that it would hold for what humanist’s believe makes human beings unique and exceptional themselves.

We are now brought to the second condition. We are, because without it our PPH understanding of intentionality, Pepperell’s of consciousness, and the extension of both to call into question the humanist views of human uniqueness and exceptionalism, will find themselves once again drawn into intractable metaphysics. Inevitably debate will break out about whether or not intentionality, consciousness, etc., are “really” in humans as well as in the non-human world? Are these ‘facts’ to be discovered or are they mere attributions made as ‘we’ find convenient?

It is here where pragmatism becomes not just vital but urgent. Pragmatism upholds the second condition (and thus the first) because it allows the entire issue of realism in relation to the

intentional stance (and by extension Pepperell's treatment of consciousness) to be circumvented. Where Dennett wants to avoid seeing intentionality as a "useful fiction" (Dennett, 1987, 37), the pragmatist can agree with Dennett's desire but avoid the entire debate over realism simply by having no concern for the question of "fiction" vs. "non-fiction." What difference does it make, so asks the pragmatist, whether or not intentionality is a "real" property of systems? It certainly is useful to speak about systems in that way. What could the saying "And intentionality is *not a fiction but is really there!*" add? Simply put, pragmatism allows us to see that between a useful fiction and a useful non-fiction, the important element is what they share (i.e. usefulness) not what they do not.

Conclusion

This does leave wanting a full-throated defense both of my interpretation of pragmatism and of pragmatism itself. But that defense is outside our range here and must be addressed elsewhere. Similarly, an investigation of Dennett's resistance to a pragmatic interpretation of his work must occur if our use of it is to be sustained. But that too must wait for another time.⁹ Suffice it to say, our pragmatic ending ultimately shifts the question away from whether humanism or PPH get intentionality, consciousness, reason, free will, etc., 'right.' It shifts it to the question of which views of intentionality, consciousness, etc., are, more useful? A question that I would argue can only be answered in favor of PPH given that long-standing humanism has now in so many ways, some discussed here, played itself out. However, this too, like those issues just mentioned, must wait to be addressed at another time and place.

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⁹ The exchange between Dennett and Rorty in *Synthese*, 53(2), 323-348 and 349-356 and elsewhere is helpful but not conclusive.



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