

# Intentionality and the Substance of the Self

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When I was first contacted about contributing to this session, the thought expressed to me was that it might be good to do something to promote dialogue between Continental and Analytic temperaments within the Society of Christian Philosophers. That was a welcome idea to me, because my work has for the most part paid no attention to that division and has more or less wandered around wherever things seemed interesting. So I selected a topic that might draw something from both sides, that has significant ontological interest, and that also has an obvious bearing upon matters of concern for Christian thinkers, past and present.

I want to talk about *what a spiritual (I would also say "personal") substance might be like*. For brevity's sake, I shall refer to this kind of substance as a "self," and also as a "person." So the idea I shall be working toward is that the self is a substance, and that its substance or "make up" consists primarily of intentional properties or states (specific "ofnesses" and "aboutnesses" of various kinds) in massive quantities, interwoven in characteristic ways to make up the life of one person. I shall assume that a person or self is something that has the characteristics standardly thought of in connection with substances. With a topic such as this, there are land mines in every direction, and even if I were intelligent enough to disarm them—which I am not—I could not do so on this occasion. So I shall just strike out across country, pursuing my goal of (hopefully) making a little sense of spiritual substance in terms of intentional properties (Intentionality) and their interweavings. I shall say very little about the much discussed problems regarding substance as such, which afflict physical substance just as much as the spiritual. I think John Locke made a solid point in stating that, from the viewpoint of substance in general, spiritual substances are at least as intelligible as material substances.

Intentional properties are properties of events of a certain kind, which we usually think of as "mental." These events have been called "mental acts" by various philosophers. Events are, of course, individuals; and a standard way of thinking about mental events (by Kant, Husserl, G. E. Moore, etc.) is to regard them as being 'located' in time (they exhibit the usual temporal relations), but not in space (not above, next to, far from, etc. any other thing, and especially not those that have some such relations). Those events which are mental acts have intentional properties, and, as is well-known, some philosophers have used intentional properties as a necessary and sufficient condition of the mental.

Intentional properties can be illustrated by someone seeing Charles crossing that street, remembering that Charles crossed that street, hoping that Charles will succeed in getting across that street, and concluding that Charles is just coming from the Club as he is crossing the street. Each of these acts or events have the property of being of or about Charles. (I think of a property as a respect in which two or more entities can differ or resemble (be "the same"), and a relation as a respect in which things taken in pairs, triplets, etc. can differ or be the same as other pairs, triplets, etc.) All of the "conscious events" or "acts of consciousness" just mentioned are about Charles, have that property in common, though, beyond that, they are "about him" in different ways, both with respect to how he is represented, in some of the cases, and with respect to the "propositional" attitude taken toward him and his activities. These other differences between them seem to be dependent upon the shared property of being of or about Charles. Other mental

acts by the same or other person are of or about other things altogether, though they may also be similar or the same as the ones listed with respect to "mode of representation" (crossing that street) or the attitudes of perception, belief, hope, etc. I am hoping that all of this will be pretty familiar. It has to be accommodated in some way by everyone who undertakes a philosophy of mind.

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Now in trying to understand and fill out the unity and substance of the self, one has to be sure to hold to the mental acts themselves, and to how they go together to form the larger wholes of mental life, up to the level of the whole person or self. Certainly these mental acts have a physical and a social context. But how the acts relate to each other in such simple cases as a memory, a purpose, or a logical inference cannot, in my opinion, be captured by features of those contexts. That, at least, is my highly contested claim. Especially, one can never understand the unity of the experiences that make up the self if he or she only takes into consideration the objects of mental acts, whether conceived in the Empiricist style of David Hume, or in the more "common sense" approach of ordinary sense perceptions of mid-sized objects in the physical environment.

In the famous passage by Hume in which he purports to be able to find only "perceptions" in "what I call myself," he only considers objects, his perceptions, and not acts: "For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception. When my perceptions are remov'd for any time, as by sound sleep; so long am I insensible of *myself*, and may truly be said not to exist. And were all my perceptions remov'd by death, and cou'd I neither think, nor feel, nor see, nor love, nor hate after the dissolution of my body, I shou'd be entirely annihilated, nor do I conceive what is further requisite to make me a perfect non-entity."

Certainly it is very likely true that if I "cou'd neither think, nor feel, nor see, nor love, nor hate"—you will note here that he reverts to what is ordinarily regarded as acts—"I shou'd be entirely annihilated." But one has to pay attention to what in this passage remains unexplainable given the truth of its central thesis, that in the flow of human consciousness there are only "perceptions"—that is, objects of certain kinds. There is, first of all, the awareness-of which goes with each "object." The term "perception" primarily refers, in the English language of Hume's day or ours, to a kind of consciousness-of, not to an object of which there is consciousness, as in Hume's peculiar use. Without the consciousness-of there is no object (no "perception" in his sense) for there is nothing which is directed upon anything in the peculiar way that makes it an ob-ject. (from the Latin *obicere*, "to throw in the way of".) He speaks of "when my perceptions are remov'd." But what can that mean for him other than "when I am not conscious of them (the perceptions)"?

The clause, "I always stumble on some particular perception or other" is similarly difficult to make any sense of. What he is doing here ("stumbling upon") is surely not the same as having the perceptions, for he could have them, apparently, without doing that. One has the perceptions in the normal experience of the world without "stumbling on" them as he does when he "enters most intimately into what he calls himself." Entering most intimately is a special kind of approach to his perceptions, not another perception. In general, awareness of a perception is not another perception, that is, another "object." And, if it were, then it would have to have the same kind of disconnection from its "object" as prevails (according to Hume) between all objects. It is hard to see how that could be true of consciousness-of an object and the object upon which it is directed, as Hume sets things up. What happens in Hume, as Gustav Bergmann used to point out, is that the "act" of consciousness, the mental act or intentionality, is simply dropped, omitted. There is no "ofness" nor "aboutness" for Hume—at least not officially. We might say

we have no "impression" of it and hence no "idea."

Hume's remarks about sleep and death are puzzling in a number of ways. What evidence he could possibly have that, when asleep or dead, the stream of perceptions which, he says, make him up ceases to continue, is quite unclear, to say the least. It couldn't be inductive, unless he had experiences of being asleep and without perceptions. He may be simply drawing that conclusion from an assumption that he would not be conscious while asleep, and that the existence of the stream depends upon his consciousness of it. But if his consciousness is the stream, he has deduced a triviality or asserted a tautology. On the other hand, that he has no consciousness or perceptions while he sleeps might be made out as an empirical claim, without too much of a stretch, if it were possible to establish that he was asleep at certain times and there were no memories from that period of time. We would have to add the assumption that there would be memories if he were "having" impressions while asleep.

But he surely has no grounds at all for saying that the stream of perceptions, with some modifications no doubt, could not continue after dissolution of the body. We who live perhaps see the body of the deceased as it disintegrates. That body was, for the deceased (as it is for us, with appropriate modifications for point of view), if Hume is right, just a series or set of perceptions of a certain kind. If they cease for the individual at death, Hume still would have no reason, on his own grounds, to think that the sequence of "perceptions"—that is, "myself"—of which they were a part must cease. (And why should they not leave behind a system of more or less vivid memory perceptions?) For all he knows that sequence could continue forever, with modifications of various kinds. He certainly has no empirical evidence to the contrary. He tries to keep us focused upon his denial of "something simple and continu'd" as present in the self. But, even if we give him that—and there is no need, apart from his peculiar assumptions about "impressions" and "ideas"—a lot of troublesome questions remain for him to deal with. The lack of something simple *and* continued is, strictly considered, beside the point of continued existence of the person beyond bodily death in any sense in which Hume allows there is a person or self at all.

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H. H. Price has in fact given us a description of what that continuation of the Humean sequence beyond "death" might be like. He is replying to the charge, by philosophers such as C. D. Broad, Anthony Flew, and John Hospers, that life after death is inconceivable, and therefore logically incoherent, and therefore impossible—or just outright nonsense. In his lecture, "Survival and the Idea of 'Another World'," Price sets out to conceive a "Next World" and to give a logically coherent description of it. This he thinks, if successful, would show that continued existence beyond bodily death is at least possible (pp. 23-24), though he is careful to emphasize that it does not show it to be actual.

"My suggestion," he says, "is that the Next World, if there be one, might be a world of mental images.... (T)here is nothing imaginary about a mental image. It is an actual entity, as real as anything can be.... The Next World, as I am trying to conceive of it, is an imagy world, but not on that account an imaginary one." (p. 25) In due course he points out that such a world is one not all that different from what many philosophers (Berkeley, Hume, Kant, Schopenhauer, modern day phenomenologists and logical constructionists, for example) have taken the real one to be right now.

Price's lecture is quite ingenious, and he dutifully takes up various obvious questions about his imagy world, such as self-identity, communications between persons in such a world, and the effects of the character we have formed here and must take with us (if "we" are still to be "us" once we get there) upon how our life would go in that Next World. But his Empiricist tendencies manifest themselves strongly in his failure to deal with consciousness-of or intentionality or

mental acts in the existence and organization of the images. He does little better than Hume in this regard. Though images are certainly real in some sense, they are not just objects that float free on their own, bumping into one another and associating in various ways. They require mental acts, a consciousness-of, interwoven with other mental acts of various kinds and degrees, to make up a life running parallel with the images and whatever else might turn up as objects. The images themselves do not make a life, even in Price's "Next World." Thinkers of strong Empiricist inclinations just have a difficult-to-impossible time coming to terms with intentionality or consciousness-of or thought-about. (On the Analytical side, the burden of this task is shifted over to "meaning," semantic content, and so forth.)

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This is illustrated in a deeply instructive way by G. E. Moore, in his paper, "The Refutation of Idealism." In this paper Moore carefully works the sensation of blue into two aspects: the object, blue, and the awareness-of that is, within the sensation, directed upon blue. Thus he does justice to something about our conscious experiences that Hume certainly, and Price possibly, does not take into consideration at all. He considers, in a lengthy discussion, that in the total sensation of blue, blue might even be a property of the awareness. But, he says, whether or not that is true, so that when I have a sensation of blue my consciousness is blue (I have a blue awareness), introspection does not allow us to decide. But that is unimportant, according to him, "...for introspection does enable me to decide that something else is also true: namely, that I am aware of blue, and by this I mean that my awareness has to blue a quite different and distinct relation. It is possible, I admit, that my awareness is blue as well as being of blue; but what I am quite sure of is that it is of blue; that it has to blue the simple and unique relation the existence of which alone justifies us in distinguishing knowledge of a thing from the thing known, indeed in distinguishing mind from matter. And this result I may express by saying that what is called the content of a sensation is in very truth what I originally called it—the sensation's object." (p. 26)

Now clearly, what Hume and (perhaps) Price did not get, Moore got. But what is of interest for our present purposes is how little he was able to make of his discovery of "consciousness-of," awareness, the "mental act," and intentionality. He says: "...though philosophers have recognized that something distinct is meant by consciousness, they have never yet had a clear conception of what that something is. They have not been able to hold it and blue before their minds and compare them, in the same way in which they can compare blue and green. And this for the reason I gave above: namely that the moment we try to fix our attention upon consciousness and to see what distinctly it is, it seems to vanish: it seems as if we had before us a mere emptiness. When we try to introspect the sensation of blue, all we can see is the blue: the other element is as if it were diaphanous. Yet it can be distinguished if we look attentively enough, and if we know there is something to look for. My main object in this paragraph has been to try to make the reader see it; but I fear I shall have succeeded very ill." (p. 25, cp. p. 20)

Moore was sure at the time (1903) that he was onto something very important with vast implications. He spells out in some detail, in his paper, what they were. But he had no idea of how to go forward with a systematic elaboration of what he had found. It is fascinating to try to unravel what was actually going on when he and Hume examined their experiences; and, I think, a careful (phenomenological) analysis of what was going on in the types of reflexive experiences they concerned themselves with, and of what led them to make the reports they did make, would prove very rewarding. With specific reference to Moore, he makes the claim that philosophers have not been able to hold the consciousness-of and the blue "before their minds to compare them, in the same way in which they can compare blue and green. I think there is something to what he says, but it mainly has to do with comparison itself, its types and its limitations, not with the peculiarities of of-blueness. Blue and green are comparable under a common genus. But comparing an intentional 'relation' of ofness or aboutness to a color, if it is possible to make any sense of it at all, is not like that. (Here, now, we are comparing comparisons!) It is more like trying to compare a trumpet blast to a fig, or the number 248 to molasses. There is simply no

substantive framework within which they fall that allows us to bring their characteristics over against each other to see their similarities and their contrasts.

The appropriate comparison to begin to grasp what "consciousness-of" or intentionality is would be to compare mental acts of certain types to other mental acts, of those and of other types. Stay within the genus. Compare a sensation of blue to an imaging of blue, to a remembering of blue, to a judgment about blue, to a revulsion at blue, to a comparing of a certain (shade of) blue with other blues, and with other colors, in imagination or in perception, and so forth. You keep the "object" steady, as in these cases, and vary other features of the mental acts and of the intentions or "meanings" directed upon it. Then, to proceed further with the investigation, one must vary the objects and hold steady other aspects of the acts directed upon them. One goes through the whole range of possible variations of mental acts and their objects. In this way the complex and rich nature of intentionality, and of the corresponding mental acts of all types, with their intentional properties, can be made to stand out before the reflexive consciousness, and systematic descriptions can be developed. That is exactly the mode of research developed by Edmund Husserl. He eventually called it "Phenomenology," and held that the overall theme of Phenomenology is intentionality. But intentionality under his method of comparison turned out to be anything but the wispy, ungraspable, isolated and unarticulated "awareness" that Moore could not get his mind around. Rather, it is a highly complicated and tightly structured genus that, through its manifold and multi-leveled specifications, governs the entire field of mental acts, and determines how they come together to form larger mental units (hearing a symphony, mastering entomology, becoming an accomplished artist or performer) up to and including the mental life of the individual human being. Fundamental to his elaborations of this genus is his articulation of the basic components and structures of mental acts, of the simplest kind as well as of the most complicated. This rudimentary analysis is most clearly done in his Vth "Logical Investigation," though the II<sup>nd</sup> and III<sup>rd</sup> "Investigations" are also essential to it. But the simplest mental acts never stand alone, as they might in an Atomistic tradition. They are always caught up in more extensive sequences of acts and in acts of "higher order"—acts containing other acts as essential parts or suppositions—that come together in various ways to constitute, eventually, the processes and attainments that characterize or make up the life some person actually lives over time in his or her world.

Now when one takes up the works of Edmund Husserl, what he or she will be looking at are descriptions of the properties and sub-components of mental acts of First Order (those not containing mental acts as proper parts), and of how they come together in the formation of higher order acts, as well as in the life off an "ego" in its natural, social and ideal (in Plato's sense) surroundings. For example, his *Philosophy of Arithmetic* is largely given to an account of how representations of sense perceptible groups or "totalities" arise, and then representations of groups or "sets" which are not sense perceptible—even infinite sets. This is a prerequisite to any understanding arithmetical knowledge, his earliest topic of research. Perhaps the most famous (but much misunderstood) passage from Husserl is his description of "The Natural Standpoint," of what it is like to be naturally directed upon the ordinary world of human existence as we live in it. (*Ideas I*, §§27-30) Then chapters two through four of the Third Section of this book (§§ 76-127) are devoted to elaborating, on the basis of comparative variation under reflexion, the "General Structures" of consciousness-of: that is, characteristics which are true of every mental act, of whatever kind or level. The Fourth Section of this book deals with how mental acts come together with their objects, in some cases, in such a way that the existence of the object is guaranteed. That provides what he calls the Phenomenology of Reason. He titles that Fourth Section "Reason and Actuality." It is a general account of the substance or make-up of knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) that partially reworks and extends the account of knowledge as "fulfillment" or verification given in the VI<sup>th</sup> "Logical Investigation."

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The same general type of project is afoot—but now as a description of the general structures of

human existence (*Da – Sein*, "There Being"—Heidegger's version of intentionality) in Heidegger's *Being and Time*. Also in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, and in Merleau-Ponty's *The Phenomenology of Perception*, and in Gadamer's *Truth and Method*. These and similar well known works by other well known "Continental" authors share the project of specifying the intentionality-substance of the self or person in its world or worlds. Often this is carried out upon quite different methodological assumptions than those of Husserl and of others in this group, of course, and with significant differences in results. Analytical philosophy, from Frege to the present, has had to deal with the same general set of issues about "objects" and how we "have" them, but in its case this must be done in terms of language and reference, concepts, propositional attitudes, semantic content, and so forth. However different from "Continental" approaches it may look, the basic issues surrounding the nature of "ofness" and "aboutness" (Intentionality) and how they relate to, and relate us to, "objects" remain much the same. But the "Analytical" approach does seem to me to carry with it the severe problems concerning the "substance" of the self endemic to Empiricism. It certainly gives no "substance" or "make-up" to the self or to semantic content, and deals with the self only in terms of concepts and meanings that refer to or apply to it. No "direct access" to the self and its properties is claimed by it, as is claimed by Husserl and some of his offshoots.

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Husserl's method with, and understanding of, mental acts makes it possible, I think, to speak in a helpful manner of the substantiality of the self. It lends the self or personality a rich and intelligible structure that can be studied and given systematic exposition. A substance is always of a certain kind. It consists of a unity of a certain range of parts and qualities, at times and developing through time. It receives and gives off causal influences, and it takes on abilities and dispositions as a result of experiences undergone and actions taken in specific types of environments. Its independence, made so much of in the philosophical traditions, need not be absolute, but a matter of a certain high degree, in contrast to "dependent particulars" (modes, tropes) and perhaps universals, which supposedly cannot exist outside a true substance. Otherwise one is driven to a monism like Spinoza's, whose definition of substance ("what is in itself, and is conceived through itself—that of which a conception can be formed independently of any other conception") ironically also exactly fits each of Hume's "perceptions."

Of course the insistence that there must be much more to consciousness-of or the mental than the passing parade of objects is not new with Husserl. Most familiar in this regard are the "synthesizing" principles of unity in Kant and (quite differently) in Hegel. But these interpretations of consciousness-of seem, in the end, as oblivious to intentionality as was Hume's, and even more so than Moore's. The Kantian picture of a few necessary structures imposed, somehow, upon the "manifold of sensations" to make "objects" present to us was regarded by Husserl and his students as an unwarranted "impoverishment of the a priori," and, moreover, as a mere hypothesis about procedures and connections forever hidden from view. Comparatively bringing the full range of possible mental acts (with their peculiar ofnesses and aboutnesses), and of their interweavings in the formations of larger units of consciousness-of and of life, before reflexive insight yields, Husserl discovered, a vast range of synthetic or "*materiale*" a priori connections, open to "eidetic" or "essence" insight, that ultimately define the peculiar structure of the individual self, and of its orientation toward its social world and its life-world. This is the realm of what he calls "transcendental subjectivity," which is neither "transcendental" nor "subjective" in the senses customarily associated with those terms—and especially not the Kantian senses. This realm Husserl described, in one of his rare poetic moments, as "the trackless wilds of a new continent" into which he had only made the beginnings of an exploration. In this realm one discovers the intentionality-substance of the self or person.

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What I have tried to do here is to give a general impression of the make-up of a spiritual or personal substance. A spiritual substance would be an individual entity consisting of mental acts of various kinds, with their typical "objects," properties, parts, and combinations. The path to understanding spiritual substances must be careful, systematic description, utilizing comparison under variation as referred to above, of the substructures and essential characteristics of all mental acts as such, and of how mental acts come together to form more complicated acts or mental and life processes, from verification of the truth of a particular thought or belief—"I left my keys in the car."—to fulfilling a life-long vow to a mate or a child or mastering an operatic repertoire.

Issues of the dependence (in some degree or in some respects) or independence of spiritual or personal substances seem to me to require prior elaboration of what a spiritual substance would be like. The logical order here is commonly disregarded. Similarly, or even more so, in discussions of mind/brain identity. What exactly is it that is claimed to be identical with the brain or some of its states or states of the central nervous system? To claim that a pain is identical with an activity in a certain part of the brain seems to make sense, at least in part because we think we know what a pain is—less so with being in pain, to be sure. But what about the identity of a great scientist's mastery of his field, with all that that involves of research vision and execution, logical interconnectedness, purposeful thought over long periods of time, memory, theoretical interpretations, discouragement, failure, success, hopefulness and joy. ("Noetic unity" must be conceived broadly enough to take in most of this, if one is to be realistic.) What about the identity of that living totality with states and processes of the brain and body? Here is a problem with which any claim to identity must come to terms. Just the logical relations in, the logical governance of, such a mastery seem to me to defeat the identity project. One would have to reduce the logical cogency of a thought process, strung out across years of work in some cases, to features of the brain or central nervous system.

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The moral dimensions of life pose similar demands on the substance of the self. They require the drawing together of massive dimensions of the self, if not of the self as a whole. The morally significant act is an act of the whole person. This is well illustrated by the moral act of forgiveness. It seems to me that forgiveness is best understood as a choice to resume relationships, in the light of good to be realized, after some violation of moral trust that has had significant harmful effects on those who are doing the forgiving. It is decided, by the one who forgives, that the good to be realized by resumption of the relationships—by no means saying the relationships are to be just the same as before the violation—is not to be sacrificed to the gratifications of resentment and retaliation.

Forgiveness is not a tiny, inward act which a discrete effort of will brings forth in response to specific types of occasions. Rather, it is part or product of an overall orientation of lives of a certain kind, which is "there" before any occasion or whether or not any occasion ever arises. The media spokespeople and various public officials expressed amazement at how forgiveness functioned in the Amish community after the recent schoolhouse slayings. But that was the "natural," though not the inevitable or unalloyed, response of the people involved. The intentionality structures of thought, historical understanding, feeling, and evaluation around which their consciousness and life were organized, support and issue in forgiveness in relevant situations. The people in that community thought about and approached forgiveness from within the framework of the intentional structures of their particular kind of life and world. Forgiveness requires a substantial self, incorporating subtly nuanced and dynamically organized long-term dispositions of thought, feeling and valuation into a character embracing all essential dimensions of the self. (If it hasn't got to your body yet, it has a ways to go.) To cultivate forgiveness as a

part of human life, if it means anything at all, is to cultivate an overall character of the sort that can do forgiveness, and, when in good shape, can do it at a walk. It is better when one does not have to do this in a particularly self-conscious manner, but any sensible way is better than none at all. "The quality of mercy is not strained," wrote a profound soul. Likewise for forgiveness. A forgiving *person* will not understand what all the fuss is about. What else would one do? Like the "righteous gentiles" that put themselves in mortal danger to save their Jewish neighbors. Was there, given who they were, anything else to be done?