Critical Notices

Thought and Object: Essays on Intentionality. Edited by ANDREW WOODFIELD. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982. Pp. xi, 316.

This important collection contains six papers on overlapping topics, all dealing in one way or another with the notion of *content* of psychological states, especially as the notion of content bears on the possibility of a scientific psychology. Three of the papers (those by Daniel Dennett, Stephen Stich, and Andrew Woodfield) emerged from a Philosophy of Mind Workshop held at Bristol University in 1978; the other three papers (those by Kent Bach, Tyler Burge, and Colin McGinn) were commissioned for this volume.

Although the articles are representative of current research on so-called propositional attitudes, the collection is by no means introductory (nor was it intended to be). Rather, it contributes to an ongoing discussion that is by now quite mature. Prominent in the background of most of the papers presented here is Hilary Putnam's 1975 "The Meaning of 'Meaning'" (reprinted in his *Philosophical Papers Vol. II*, 1975); a reader would also be well-advised to be familiar with articles appearing in the intervening years by, e.g., Hartry Field, Jerry Fodor, Daniel Dennett, Tyler Burge, Stephen Schiffer, John Perry, David Kaplan, David Lewis, Robert Stalnaker, and William G. Lycan, among others. *Thought and Object* contains an extensive bibliography useful to anyone working in the field.

Among the topics addressed in these essays, one that stands out is the issue of methodological solipsism. Methodological solipsism (the term in its current use begins with Putnam) depends on distinguishing psychological states "in wide sense" from psychological states "in the narrow sense." As Putnam made the distinction, psychological states in the narrow sense do not presuppose the existence of anything other than the individual whose states they are. Such narrow psychological states may be characterized semantically in terms of conceptual content, but not in terms of reference and truth. On this construal, psychological states in the narrow sense are taken to be independent of the physical and social context of the subject. Call the view that narrow states so construed should be the objects of scientific psychology 'weak MS'.

On the other hand, there is an even narrower approach to psychological states, stemming from consideration of Fodor's 1980 "Methodological Solipsism Considered as a Research Strategy" (reprinted in his *Representations*, 1981). According to this narrower approach, narrow psychological states are individuated solely by their computational, formal or "syntactical" properties. On this construal, psychological states in the narrow sense are taken to be independent of conceptual content altogether. Call the view that narrow states so construed should be the objects of scientific psychology 'strong MS.'

I shall try to locate the views of the contributors to *Thought and Object* with respect to weak MS and strong MS. Dennett and Bach take positions favorable to weak MS; Stich and Woodfield take positions favorable to strong MS. The positions of McGinn and Burge may be construed as critical of both weak and strong MS.

I

In "Beyond Belief," the lead essay, which occupies almost one third of the volume, Dennett takes psychological states in the narrow sense to be the "organismic contribution to the fixation of propositional attitudes," that is, what is left "when we subtract facts about context or embedding from the determining whole" (p. 19). Attempts to characterize the organismic contribution in terms of propositional attitudes seem doomed; arguments by Putnam, Perry, and Kaplan indicate that the organism cannot "contribute" semantic properties of propositions such as truth and reference. On the other hand, attempts by, e.g., Field, to characterize organismic contribution in terms of sentential attitudes, cut too fine: they require that states be syntactically characterized, but "syntactic twinhood" is not required for identity of organismic contribution. So Dennett proposes an intermediate view in terms of "notional worlds" to characterize psychological states in the narrow sense.

A notional world is, roughly, a theorist's construction of the world-as-represented by a particular believer. It is a model that contains everything that the subject believes in. The resulting notional attitude psychology is a kind of "hetero-phenomenology," the ultimate fruit of which "would be an exhaustive description of that person's notional world, complete with its mistaken identities, chimeras and personal bogeymen, factual errors and distortions" (p. 44).

Although the subject's notional world is supervenient upon his internal constitution, a notional attitude cannot be characterized in purely syntactical terms. Dennett advocates his concept of notional attitude as a counterpart in psychology to Kaplan's concept of character in natural language. Indeed, Dennett even uses the formula, reminiscent of Kaplan: "notional attitude + environment → propositional attitude" (p. 52). If psychological attitudes in the narrow sense are notional attitudes, individuated partly by their representational properties, the resulting notional attitude psychology is a form of weak MS.

In "*De Re* Belief and Methodological Solipsism," Bach aims to give an account of an exemplary kind of *de re* belief (viz., perceptual belief), which both allows perceptual belief to be irreducible to descriptive belief and reconciles such perceptual belief with (weak) methodological solipsism. He dismisses strong MS as too strong: "for surely formally distinct representations can be semantically identical, e.g., 'Water is thinner than blood' and 'Blood is thicker than water'" (p. 126). His task, then, is to show how a belief (such as one expressed by a sincere assertion of "That is a cup") can be understood as genuinely *de re*, and yet as having content that presupposes the existence of nothing beyond the subject whose belief it is.

If it is to be reconciled with weak MS, *de re* belief cannot be understood as a relation between a person and a special kind of proposition having the *res* as part of its content. Instead of including the *res* in the content, Bach includes a nondescriptive mode of presentation, which, by analogy with indexical expressions in a language, "functions as a mental indexical" (p. 135), and which "contextually determines the object of the belief" (p. 137). So content of a *de re* belief includes two elements: a predicative element and a mode of presentation. Since the mode of presentation may be nondescrip-

tive, e.g., it may be a percept, *de re* beliefs are not reducible to descriptive beliefs.

Bach thus takes an intermediate position between, on the one hand, Burge, who holds *de re* belief to be irreducible, but who takes the predicative element to exhaust content, and on the other hand, Schiffer, who holds *de re* belief (about objects other than oneself and the present time) to be reducible to descriptive belief by means of descriptive modes of presentation. In compliance with the demands of weak MS, one may have the same perceptual belief by virtue of being in the same perceptual state whether one is hallucinating or actually perceiving a physical object; this is so because perceptual states are individuated by ways the perceiver is "appeared to." Thus, although the actual character (and existence) of the object are crucial to the truth of a perceptual belief, they do not figure in a specification of the content of the belief. It remains to be seen whether or not such an adverbial approach to individuating perceptual states can avoid problems raised by, e.g., Albert Casullo in "Adverbial Theories of Sensing and the Many-Property Problem" (read at the Eastern Division APA meeting, December, 1982). This is not the place to pursue the question of whether or not Bach's account of *de re* belief is satisfactory, but if it is, then it seems that irreducible *de re* belief is compatible with weak MS.

II

One way to support strong MS would be to argue that the notion of content cannot be made scientifically respectable, and hence has no place in a scientific psychology. Stich and Woodfield both take this approach.

In "On the Ascription of Content," Stich's project is "to explain how it is possible to identify a belief by specifying its contents" (p. 160). It soon turns out that the "cognitive mechanism underlying our intuitions about content" (p. 185) does not yield stable ascriptions.

Stich offers an analysis of 'John believes that snow is white' on the model of Davidson's treatment of indirect discourse. Assuming that my belief that snow is white is content-identical with John's belief that snow is white (and assuming for the moment an adequate notion of content-identity, according to which two beliefs, say, John's and a robot's, may be content-identical even though they are not of the same physical type), the analysis of my ascription of 'John believes that snow is white' is roughly as follows: John is in the belief state content-identical to the one I would be in if I were in the belief-state that would typically cause my assertion of that: Snow is white.

The first-person formulation is no accident: "The basic theme in my account of content ascription is that when we attribute a belief to a person by specifying its content, we are identifying the belief by associating it with a possible belief-state of our own" (p. 173). On this understanding of our "folk psychology," if you were the only person in the world, it would seem that you could have no "contentful" psychological states. Such would not seem to be a consequence of our folk psychology.

In his explication, Stich replaces the notion of content-identity with the more relaxed one of content-similarity, and he willingly accepts the resulting vagueness of ascriptions of content. He explains the vagueness, which makes the notion of content a poor candidate for any scientific psychology, by what

he calls the "pragmatic sensitivity of belief-attributions" (p. 178). He argues that, in general, judgments of similarity depend on the "pragmatic surround." Stich distinguishes four dimensions along which belief-states are judged to be similar: functional similarity, ideological similarity, causal convergence and social setting. The latter two, as Stich points out, violate the strictures of (even weak) MS.

On the view offered by Stich, ascriptions of content do not even have determinate truth-conditions. Such a view raises profound questions that cannot be settled within the scope of a review. Suffice it to say here that if Stich is right about our ascriptions of content, then he is also right that the notion of content is unsuitable for any scientific psychology; the appeal of strong MS at this point is that it promises a scientific psychology that eschews content from the beginning.

In "On Specifying the Contents of Thoughts," Woodfield is concerned with the possibility of a scientific taxonomy of specification of thought-contents. He argues that even if content is understood "solipsistically," i.e., even if psychological states in the narrow sense are understood along lines of weak MS, content does not lend itself to classification suitable for science. Before proposing his method of specification of content, Woodfield surveys limitations on the method of specifying contents in *oratio obliqua*.

In his discussion of one of the limitations on the method of specifying contents in *oratio obliqua*, Woodfield misconstrues Castañeda's work on making and ascribing indexical reference. For example, Woodfield claims that Castañeda's quasi-indicators fail to capture the difference between first-person reference (by means of, e.g., 'I') and third-person demonstrative reference to oneself (by means of, e.g., 'she' or 'he'); but Castañeda explicitly rules out attribution of third-person demonstrative reference by quasi-indicators. Moreover, if the sentence 'S thinks he is making a mess' attributes to S a third-person demonstrative reference to himself, Castañeda would not say that the occurrence of 'he' there is opaque. It is an ordinary indicator, not a quasi-indicator at all; and according to Castañeda, ordinary indicators in *oratio obliqua* always have wide scope. (Cf., Castañeda's "Indicators and Quasi-Indicators," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 1967; esp. pp. 89-93.)

On Woodfield's view, contents are to be modelled on sentence-intensions. A psychological state of S has content only if it "occupies a position in a network of states whose characteristic interrelations in S *qua reasoner* are matched by the logico-semantic relations between the sentences of a language" (pp. 279-80). So relative to a global modelling of S on a language L, the content of S's thought is identified as the intension of a sentence in L.

From this perspective, to ascribe content to S in *oratio obliqua* is to exploit one's own language as a modelling language for S. In contrast to this "first-order psychological" stance, the sophisticated ascriber may take a "second-order" stance that "makes it *explicit* that the thought-content is being identified in terms of an analogue" (p. 282). Instead of specifying content by re-expressing it (as in 'S thinks that snow is white'), the theorist taking a second-order stance describes content without re-expressing it (as in 'Within the model of S that my language provides, the content of S's thought is the intension of "Snow is white"'). Such analogical descriptions, however, are not useful for science. Any classification of content is relative to a model;

models are "incommensurable"; and there is "no single model that is best for all subjects" (p. 293). Thus, there is no single best taxonomy of contents that could serve as a basis for a scientific psychology.

Nevertheless, Woodfield remains optimistic about the prospects for a scientific psychology that does not appeal to content of psychological states: "Being real, the states and their intrasystemic functional roles are in principle describable directly, without the intermediary of a model. For strictly scientific purposes, literal descriptions are better describers of internal reality than analogical descriptions" (p. 294). At this point, perhaps the prudent course is to wait and see what literal descriptions are produced and whether or not they can serve the goals of prediction and explanation.

III

The other two contributors, Burge and McGinn, offer demurrers to methodological solipsism of both forms.

In "The Structure of Content," McGinn offers a view of content, according to which weak MS is half right. McGinn considers the content of a belief (or a sentence) to be "inherently a hybrid of conceptually disparate elements" (p. 211). On this view, belief contents have semantic properties of reference and truth as well as causal properties; methodological solipsism is accordingly deemed inadequate as a full theory of content since psychological states in the narrow sense do not "fix" reference or truth.

In view of recent arguments by, e.g., Perry in "The Problem of the Essential Indexical " (Noûs, 1979), it is surprising that McGinn so easily assumes that the two separable components of belief that he isolates are in harmony. Early on, McGinn notes that we "get different and potentially conflicting standards of individuation — and hence different conceptions of what a belief essentially is — according as we concentrate on one or other component of content" (p. 211). But then he goes on as if the only difficulty were to remember to give each kind of feature its due. The problem, amply illustrated in recent years, is that taking each kind of feature at face value may lead to contradiction. (In "De Re Belief in Action" (Philosophical Review, 1982), I explore this problem in detail.) Simply to insist that a full theory of belief content must take into account both semantic and causal components does not solve the problem. So it seems to me that McGinn does not furnish a convincing argument against weak or strong MS.

In "Other Bodies," Burge's approach differs from that of the contributors'. Continuing the discussion he began in "Individualism and the Mental " (Midwest Studies in Philosophy, Vol. IV: Studies in Metaphysics, 1979), Burge reaffirms a line of argument that goes roughly as follows: crucial for characterizing a person's mental states are the obliquely occurring expressions in attributions of attitudes; mental states, individuated by those obliquely occurring expressions, cannot be understood in terms of purely non-intentional, functional, or individualistic features without regard for the subject's social and physical environment (p. 99). Arguments in both Burge's articles tell against the functionalists' idea that psychological states in the narrow sense supervene upon the subject's internal physical constitution; intentional mental phenomena cannot be understood in terms of the individual.

Burge considers Putnam's Twin-earth thought-experiment to new effect. Suppose that what Twin-earthians call 'water' is a substance XYZ instead of H_2O. Putnam's point was that what Twin-earthians call 'water' is not water, but something else; so we English speakers should not translate their use of 'water' as 'water', but as something else, say 'twater.' Burge argues that Putnam's point affects "*oblique* occurrences in 'that'-clauses that provide the contents of their mental states and events" (p. 101). We may not attribute to Twin-Adam the same *de dicto* belief that we attribute to Earth-Adam when we say that Earth-Adam believes that water is drinkable. What Twin-Adam believes is that twater is drinkable. That is, Earth-Adam's and Twin-Adam's beliefs have different contents while "every feature of their non-intentionally and individualistically described physical, behavioral, dispositional, and phenomenal histories remains the same" (p. 102). (Putnam did not see the implications of his argument in part because he took terms like 'water' to be indexical. Burge makes a strong case that they are not.)

Since the conditions for individuating even purely *de dicto* attitudes "make essential reference to the nature of entities in their environment or to the actions and attitudes of others in the community" (p. 113), even those purely *de dicto* attitudes presuppose the existence of entities other than the subject of the attitudes.

So, if we take weak MS, as we have been taking it, to require psychological states individuated without presupposing the existence of any entity other than the subject, Burge's point can be applied as follows: narrow psychological states in the sense required for weak MS are too narrow to admit of content at all. If Burge is right, then a supporter of methodological solipsism is driven to strong MS; for any psychological state individuated by content presupposes "complex reference to entities other than the individual." The choice at hand is this: either pursue strong MS — which, I take it, Burge would consider barren — or give up the individualistic conception of the mental altogether.

Although *Thought and Object* does not solve the problems surrounding intentionality, it does advance the debate. There are many other topics of abiding interest that are discussed at length — most notably the question of a distinction between *de re* and *de dicto* belief — that have not been considered here. This volume is recommended for anyone interested in current work in the philosophy of mind.

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Emotion. WILLIAM LYONS. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980. Pp. xiv, 230.
The Classical Theories.

In their eagerness to show that they are capable of tackling a problem afresh, philosophers often treat previous literature cavalierly. This book is an exception. William Lyons, who has read psychologists as well as philosophers, is keen to be also read by them. Perhaps partly with that end in view, he begins with something like a Review of the Literature — a genre not very familiar in philosophy. It is pithy and useful. He summarizes the gist of and the main