

WEEK 4 – ASK MARK, QUESTION 2

I now move on to the second question. It goes like this. In philosophy, intentionality means the about-ness or directedness of consciousness. Thus, a belief is intentional, as is a perception or a memory. But you moved quickly from this core meaning to talking of intentionality as motivated seeking. Could you please clarify why you are linking intentionality to motivation and seeking?

Yes, I can. And let me first of all explain to those learners who are not philosophically inclined that the philosophical, technical meaning of the word intentionality is equivalent to the, sort of, non-word, about-ness. Intentionality in Brentano, Franz Brentano, who introduced this idea, Brentano's claim was the one and only property of the mental. What defines something as mental is that it is intentional, and what he means is that mental states are always about something.

So to refer to the question that was asked, you can't have a belief without saying what your belief is, what is the content of that belief. I believe... You can't just say, I believe. The question arises, you believe what? What do you believe? You can't say, I am thinking, without saying what you are thinking. In fact, you can't think without the thinking being about something, and likewise, you can't perceive without the perception being about something. You can't remember without the memory being about something. And it's this property, this directedness toward a thing derived from *intensio*, in the Latin. This is what intentionality or about-ness means philosophically speaking.

Now, the questioner asked, why do I move on from that to motivated seeking, and the answer is the following. When Brentano says, or when philosophers say that mental states are intentional, I want to know why. Why should mental states be intentional? What does it mean when we say they're intentional mechanistically? What does it tell us about what this fundamental property of the mental really is? And, as you know, my approach is to say, well, let's look at it from the neurological point of view. Let's see what this intentionality is all about when we look at how it's generated mechanistically in the brain.

00:02:36

And what we find is that intentional states are... or mental states are directed toward objects because mental states are intentional in the colloquial sense of the word. That is to say, they are motivated. We only have thoughts because there are demands upon our mind to perform work. Those demands come from our embodiedness. We have needs, and those needs are why... can only be met in the outside world, by the way. And that is why our mental states, which represent our needs in the form of feelings, intend toward objects, intend toward things. It's because it's only in those things that we can meet our needs.

So I'm saying – answering my rhetorical question, why are mental states intentional – I'm saying that mental states have to intend toward objects because that's what they're there for. Mental states, mental work is there to enable us to satisfy our needs in the outside world. That is the very job of the mind.

And so these upper brainstem structures which are fundamentally connected to the state of the body intend toward representational images of the outside world because that's where the needs of the body can be met.

00:04:02

Now, again, of course, I know I'm speaking in a very reductionistic way, because that's how science works. You're trying to reduce things down to the most basic of mechanisms. That doesn't mean that all that we do all day long is think about our needs and how we can meet them in the outside world, but I'll tell you what, that is the fundamental structure of all of our mental activity. That's why we have mental activity at all.

So the anatomy of these mind-producing mechanisms reflects the function of those mind-producing mechanisms. The affects tend... intend toward ideas, and by ideas I mean all representations – perceptual representations, that is to say images of the here and now state of the outside world, but then also filtering those through our memory, through our... through what we've learned from experience about the outside world, which is where our beliefs come from about how do I meet my needs in the world, how does the world work. We are only interested in how the world works because that's where we can satisfy our... the demands, the problems that our feelings pose for us all the time.

00:05:11

So I hope that clarifies why I jump from the philosophical, technical, narrow definition of intentionality or about-ness to this more general meaning of intentionality, related as it is to motivation, to will, to desire, to spontaneity, to initiative, etc. Okay. The point is that without that, you don't have a mind.



Mark Solms, 2016

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).