

**WEEK 4** ANSWER TO QUESTION 2

STEP 4.7 ASK MARK

OK. Question two. I'm interested that Mark says, a number of times, that intentionality is toward something in the outside world, that the outside world is where needs can be met. But might we not also have an intention to modify our own actions or our own thoughts if we feel that they're causing us pain? That is, can our intentionality sometimes be towards our own, and perhaps, inner world?

So I'm going to answer that question, but I also want to attach to it some comments about this word, intentionality, because I notice that it's causing some confusion, or some concern of, what exactly does this word refer to? Probably, part of the confusion arises from the fact that I'm using the word in two different ways, and I'm doing so deliberately. The colloquial meaning of the word, intentionality, is the same as volition. It's will, it's intentions. What is motivating my behaviour?

Intentionality refers, in this colloquial sense, to much the same thing as motivation. But the other meaning of the word is the technical philosophical meaning of the word. And this arises from the philosophy of Franz Brentano. Brentano said that the defining feature of the mind is intentionality. And what he was referring to was the fact that you cannot have a mental state unless the mental state is about something.

And in philosophy, intentionality is the technical term for what, in slightly bad English, could be also called aboutness. Intentionality of the mental refers to the fact that the mental is always about something. It's the aboutness of the mental. That's a kind of strange concept so let me just unpack that little bit.

What Brentano's referring to is, that you cannot say, I am thinking, and not be able to say what you're thinking about. A thought, it necessarily, intrinsically, must have an object, a content. And that's the aboutness of the thought. That's what the thought is intending towards, to choose to use this more technical phraseology.

You can't say I'm remembering without saying what you're remembering. What is the memory about? What is the content of the memory? What is the object of the memory? This is what Brentano was getting at.

So why I'm linking these two concepts is for the following, actually, quite straightforward reason. I'm saying that mental cognitive processes do indeed always have a content.

There's always an object of the thought or an object of the memory. And this is for a very good reason. It's because we have to intend towards objects in the external world if we're going to survive and reproduce.

So this is the same old point coming up again. It's that it's not just so that mental states are always about some thing. It's that mental states serve a biological purpose. Mental states are there to help us to meet our needs, and our needs can only be met in the outside world by things. And so, our mental states are always about things, because we're always intending toward things also in the colloquial sense of the word, in the motivational sense of the word. We are motivated to have mental states about things.

And so I'm trying to link the technical philosophical concept of aboutness, which was Brentano's concept, with what we now know about how the brain works, in terms of its deeper motivational upper brain stem and limbic mechanisms, which are what gets the machinery of the mind going in the first place. And there, as with so much of this course, I'd like to draw your attention to the fact that, implicit in what I've said, is these two aspects of the mind.

The one is the representational content, which is corticothalamic and relates to the external world, and the other is the emotional oomph that drives the engine, and that relates to the state of the internal world. And the affective, the emotional driving energetic force is to be separated from the qualitative content representational cognition which has to do with corticothalamic processes. Intentionality has everything to do with the former, the affects attaching to, intending toward the representations. This is how it all works. This is how it has to work.

So intentionality, that's the concept. Now the question asked here is, well, does intentionality have to always relate to the outside world? What about the internal world of cognitions and representations, thoughts, and memories, and whatnot?

I hope it's clear from what I've said. That always, when we intend toward the outside world, we're intending to our representations of the outside world. The corticothalamic part of the brain represents the outside world, not only in perception, but also in memory, and also in cognition.

So the sorts of mental processes that our questioner is asking about, where you're, in fact, motivated to do something about your memories or your thoughts is, in fact, not really fundamentally different from intentionality in relation to actual external objects. So I agree with the questioner. Yes, indeed. Intentionality includes also internalised representations of the external world. They're there, in fact, to guide us, to help us.

They're kind of an emissary from the external world. They're the mediator between the actual objects in the external world and the needs and affects coming from within us. It's through cognition that we learn how to best meet our needs in the outside world. These are not, in my way of thinking, I would think in, surely, in all of our way of thinking. I

don't see how, in other words, it could be otherwise than that cognitive representations of the outside world are there for that purpose.

So I hope I've been able to clarify a little bit about the meaning of the term, intentionality, at the same time as I hope I've been able to address that second question.



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