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THE THREE DIMENSIONS OF INTENTIONALITY*

Abstract. The issue of intentionality was posed anew in philosophy by Franz Brentano. However, it was Brentano himself who indicated that the source of intentionality-related problems dates back to Classical Antiquity and the Middle Ages. The search for the original traces of this issue in the history of philosophy has led me to conclude that intentionality as an inalienable characteristic of consciousness is characterized by three-dimensionality, which is expressed in *theoria*, *praxis* and *poiesis*. Contemporary research focuses primarily on cognitive intentionality, examining in particular either the very subject-object relation or the immanent (intentional) object, in-existing in psychical experience (in the acts of consciousness). And yet, intentionality is a basic feature of the whole consciousness-anchored (mental) life of a human being. It determines the whole consciousness-based activity of the subject in abstract theorizing, practice and production. Therefore, it manifests itself as a mode of being of a conscious (mental) entity, i.e. an entity partially constituted by intentional content, relationality, reference, directionality, openness and conscious awareness, as well as determining the meaning and the creation of purely intentional beings. Intentionality is revealed as a primary factor in the awakening of consciousness, through the building (constituting) of conscious experiences that are poietic, practical and theoretical. Each of these three ways of categorizing the nature of experience, however, indicates only the predominant aspect of a given experience, for strictly speaking experiences are determined by all three aspects. Intentionality and – consequently – all conscious experience, are thus characterized by three-dimensions: cognitive, activistic and productive. Any act of consciousness is always a form of activity that is informed by its cognitive aspect and produces something transcendent with regard to itself. The recognition of the three-dimensional nature of intentionality allows us to understand the human being and the dilemmas concerning his actions, knowledge and creativity.

Keywords: intentionality; mind; consciousness; action; creativity; cognition

1. Introduction. 2. Comments about Brentano's position on intentionality. 3. Intention as a way to realization of the mind. 4. Signs of intention. 5. The three dimensions of intention. 6. Conclusions.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The analysis of intentionality as a characteristic of the mind and mental life reveals its three-dimensional nature, and thus the three dimensions of intentionality (or intention), i.e. its productive, activist and cognitive character¹. To justify this thesis, I will first refer to the description of the awakening of the mind, i.e. the realization of its potentiality, which is achieved through its intention (intentionality) characterized by openness and creativity. Subsequently, I will discuss the different ways in which it manifests itself, the in which its openness and creativity is manifested to varying degrees. In the next part, I will demonstrate the three dimensions of intention (intentionality) in the three basic activities of mental being, which are action itself, cognition and production. However, I will open with a few comments about Franz Brentano's position on intentionality.

2. COMMENTS ABOUT BRENTANO'S POSITION ON INTENTIONALITY

It is quite commonly believed that the issue of intentionality of contemporary philosophy was introduced again into debate by Brentano. The quintessence of his approach to intentionality is reflected in the following passage from the *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt*, namely: "Every mental phenomenon is characterized by what the Scholastics of the Middle Ages called the intentional (or mental) inexistence of an object, and what we might call, though not wholly unambiguously, reference to a content, direction toward an object (which is not to be understood here as meaning a thing), or immanent objectivity"².

This sentence was the starting point for later research on intentionality – sometimes only heuristic, inspiring, sometimes critical or criticized for its inadequacy, and sometimes normative, setting the

1 My book *Odstłanianie intencjonalności*, Liberi Libri, Warszawa 2013, is dedicated to this problem. This article includes modified and somewhat clarified research results presented therein, being a kind of errata to the aforementioned monograph.

2 F. Brentano, *Psychologia z empirycznego punktu widzenia*, transl. W. Galewicz, PWN, Warszawa 1990, 126.

framework for the understanding of intentionality, with these three ways of using the Brentano approach to intentionality were and still are not clearly distinguished but rather intertwined.

The quoted passage draws attention to the duality of intentionality and identifies the direction of the mental (conscious) entity to a certain object with the interaction of the subject matter content in the mental (conscious) experience. As far as I know, this ambiguity of the above thesis was never explained by Brentano. However – and this should be noted and emphasized – intentionality was not a primary subject of consideration for him. He did not put forward a relatively concise and complete concept of intentionality. It would be more accurate to say that he merely pointed to it as a moment to distinguish between mental and physical phenomena and to separate the former from the universe of possible subjects of cognition as the proper subject of psychological research, which in his time became more and more significant, the shape of which was then being discussed and which was to emancipate it from philosophy, then again – to become a kind of primary philosophy³. Brentano himself, who together with William James contributed to the crystallization of the concept of psychology as an independent scientific discipline, believed that psychology is rooted, if not in all philosophy, at least in its important disciplines, and in science⁴. Therefore, Brentano's views on intentionality should be construed in the context of the search for the *differentia specifica* of the subject of psychological research, which are psychological phenomena⁵.

3 Cf. J. Pieter, *Historia psychologii*, PWN, Warszawa 1974², 133–166; R. Stachowski, *Historia psychologii: od Wundta do czasów najnowszych*, in: *Psychologia. Podręcznik akademicki. Podstawy psychologii*, ed. J. Strelau, Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne, Sopot 1999, 25–66; Idem, *Historia współczesnej myśli psychologicznej – od Wundta do czasów najnowszych*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, Warszawa 2004.

4 F. Brentano, *Psychologia z empirycznego punktu widzenia*, op. cit., 30–40; cf. A. Chrudzimski, *Psychologia jako podstawa filozofii. Szaleństwo czy metoda?*, (http://www.academia.edu/10101311/Psychologia_jako_podstawa_filozofii._Szalestwo%20czy%20metoda_Psychology_as_a_basis_for_philosophy._Method_-_or_madness), [accessed on: 08/2015].

5 By applying the term “phenomenon” Brentano pushed aside the metaphysical deci-

Although Brentano limited his own concept of intentionality, also in his later statements, to the two manifestations mentioned above: including in itself a specific object and directing to a specific object, he broadened it by indicating the scholastic (including Aquinas) origin of the term and the presence of the problem of intentionality in the philosophy of Aristotle, Philo of Alexandria or Saint Augustine⁶. Expanding the indicated scope of research to the whole history of philosophy and looking for traces of intentionality not only in scholastic but also Greek philosophy, and then in modern and contemporary philosophy, intention or intentionality is revealed as an essential characteristic of the mind or consciousness (I apply these terms interchangeably here), and even of the mind as their property, without which the mind, consciousness or mind would not be what they are. If we consider consciousness to be a way of being a mental entity (not just human beings, although we focus our attention on them), then at the same time the way of being a mental entity is intention or intentionality. Thus, the mental entity exists as an actualizing self in intention-based experiences and by being a real being, thanks to them, it constitutes itself as an intentional being.

At this point, an important distinction must be made in line with Roman Ingarden's views, already mentioned by me, which is in fact also known to Polish researchers. Namely, he proposed to call intention-based what contains intention (an act of consciousness), and intentional what is indicated or produced by such acts (the object of the act)⁷. With this distinction in mind, intentionality would therefore be a way of existence, state, property or quality of an object that we can say is "intentional" because it is in relation to the intention of a certain act of consciousness or conscious experience. Intention, on the other hand, would be the way of existence and the property of conscious experience, and in particular of an act, and this experience

sions concerning the spiritual substance (soul), whose incidence is psychological experience, while maintaining the experimental starting point of psychology.

6 Cf. F. Brentano, *Psychologia z empirycznego punktu widzenia*, op. cit., 126–127.

7 Cf. R. Ingarden, *Spór o istnienie świata*, vol. 2, *Ontologia formalna*, part 1: *Forma i istota*, PWN, Warszawa 1987³, 180.

or act – as it will be discussed – as built in and through consciousness, being intention-based would be at the same time intentional.

With this in mind, I believe that intention is not only a distinguishing feature of some conscious experiences, namely acts, but it is a property of all experiences, including actless ones, although one should distinguish between an indistinct intention that is unclear, typical of states of consciousness and actless experiences, and an explicit intention that is typical of acts. Intention in this sense would therefore also be a property of the mind and the way it functions, and further on, it would be a property of the mental being, i.e. also man, and the property of his functioning, thus both the mind and the mental being too, being a real being, becomes somehow also an intentional being.

3. INTENTION AS A WAY TO REALIZATION OF THE MIND

Without entering into the debate on problems broadly discussed nowadays concerning the mind, including its nature, regardless of naturalistic or anti-naturalistic solutions, in my⁸ analyses, I understand the mind as a basis for specific events or behaviours, which we call conscious or mental experiences. Its property, without which it would not be itself, i.e. the mind, and further, the property of a being endowed with it, is the intention which is inseparable from consciousness as an intention-based or intentional way of being a mental being or mental and corporeal being.

Treating the above statements only as an introduction, it should be noted that the mind, as a kind of potentiality, actualizes itself, i.e. it realizes itself as intention-based and intentional. This realization of the potentiality of the mind is what I call an awakening, because the mind, being the mind, is revealed first of all to itself “waking up” from the unconscious as its actually unintentional state.

8 Cf. J. Bremer, *Wprowadzenie do filozofii umysłu*, WAM, Kraków 2010; *Analityczna metafizyka umysłu. Najnowsze kontrowersje*, eds. M. Miłkowski, R. Poczobut, Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN, Warszawa 2008; U. Żegleń, *Filozofia umysłu. Dyskusja z naturalistycznymi koncepcjami umysłu*, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2003.

The awakening of the mind makes it conscious of itself as much as it is actualized in the Aristotelian sense, as much as it is realized in its experiences⁹. The mind, striving for its perfection by its nature, that is, becoming more and more conscious, awakens, manifesting itself as intention-based and intentional¹⁰. The awakening of the mind is its, i.e. characteristic to it, action, which consists in opening up to itself while getting to know itself. Only my mind is present at the awakening, without the horizon of previous experiences, internalized knowledge or previously acquired information.

The mind, waking up, thanks to its intention, shapes itself, in a way creates itself and at the same time gets to know itself, becoming its own intentional creation. More be more precise, it creates and learns its own acts in the Aristotelian sense, its own realizations, that is – its own experiences. The awakening of the mind is becoming more and more conscious of oneself: realizing one's own experiences, and this realization brings one's own experiences out of the dark or sheds more and more light on them. This is possible thanks to the openness of the conscious mind, first to itself, which involves an intention that has not yet developed a clear thematic intent, but – one could say – is characterized by a fuzzy intent. Then the mind, as the subject of its own experiences, begins to orient itself in their stream, in the stream of related experiences, still undefined and difficult to define unambiguously. One could say that at this level of life, whether intention-based or intentional, or pragmatic, the mind as the subject of the conscious self is aware of its own flow of conscious experiences and – also non-thematically – of its own existence as their subject. Both the stream of conscious experiences

9 Given the peripatetic combination of potentiality and actuality (*potentia et actus*), or as Stefan Swieżawski proposed – of potential and realization, these experiences can be called acts, which should not be confused with his phenomenological understanding of this term.

10 The constitution of consciousness, described by Edmund Husserl, is in fact an awakening of consciousness – cf. E. Husserl, *Medytacje kartezjańskie, z dodaniem uwag krytycznych Romana Ingardena*, transl. A. Wajs, PWN, Warszawa 1982; Idem, *Wykłady z fenomenologii wewnętrznej świadomości czasu*, transl. J. Sidorek, PWN, Warszawa 1989.

as a specific whole, as well as each of its individual phases, each conscious experience, appearing in the stream, is the very flow, the happening of something that, as an experience, appears in the crevice of the present and leaves it immediately, keeping its place in the stream of experiences forever, even though it continues to move away from “now”. Our consciousness, flowing through the present, constantly leaves the present and falls into the past, and at the same time is constantly and unceasingly open to what is just appearing (the retention and potential structure), to new experiences. The consciousness cannot stop time, nor can it close itself off from the future. By realizing the flow of consciousness, the mental entity of this flow becomes aware of its sense: the sense of individual, passing through experiences, and the sense of content, carried by these experiences.

It should be noted here that the awakening consciousness is initially experienced impersonally, and the subject as the fulfilment of the experience is revealed only in the actual consciousness. The consciousness does not bring the subject into being, it is the subject that is the existential basis of consciousness¹¹. It goes beyond actual experiences and lasts despite them. Nevertheless, the subject, as the existential basis of both the whole stream and individual experiences, reveals itself in these experiences precisely as their existential basis, and the more so, the clearer the moment of intent in them. Each experience, and in particular each actual experience, fulfilled by the subject, leaves a double trace in it and thus shapes it, building in it an internal horizon of meaning, setting out successive intentional references, and giving the subject competencies (virtues) in the constitution of new actual experiences¹².

Then, although not necessarily in the sense of time, the mental entity of conscious experiences (conscious entity) realizes its own openness to the outside world, the transcendent one, in which it happens

11 Speaking in the language of Ingarden, every conscious experience is existentially dependent on the stream of consciousness as a whole and on the presence of other experiences and on the subject who fulfils these experiences.

12 Here I would like to draw attention to the classical virtue theory and the distinction between dianoetic and moral (character) virtues.

to be and in which it begins to orient itself. Thanks to the openness of the subject, this world, in a way that is mysterious for the subject at this stage, enters its consciousness, fills it with its meaning, its content, and at the same time constantly manifests its transcendence. At this level, intention reveals itself as a purely passive reception of the content that finds the conscious entity, in a way finds it and enters the pure immanent world of its experiences, and sometimes even brutally invades it, despite the opposition of the said entity. And when something in the horizon of consciousness is particularly pronounced, whether in the external world or in the consciousness itself, it causes a clear, actual direction to this something as an object of special interest. Whether this directing will take place and what it will be directed at, and how it will be directed, depends on the conscious entity, who has to “prepare” for a specific reference to the object, for some reason interesting. The subject must therefore establish a corresponding act of consciousness that will determine not only the object of the intention-based reference, but also the manner (quality) of that reference. The subject, by constituting an act of consciousness of a certain kind, determines whether it will focus exclusively on the quality of its action, whether it will aim at a cognitive approach to its object, or to produce a transcendent object in relation to itself. Whether one wants to explore, act or produce and how one wants to explore, act or produce depends on the way one relates to the object and the result achieved. The intention of consciousness is therefore responsible not only for the directedness towards this and not another object, but also for the way in which this object is referred to, that is to say, for the constitution of an act of consciousness that is appropriate to the intended purpose, which for this reason is itself intentional, and (to varying degrees) for the result of the act being fulfilled, that is, for the intentional production of this act.

4. SIGNS OF INTENTION

The analysis of the awakening of the mind to consciousness reveals two sides of intention: openness and production, which are a mani-

festation of the passive-active character of intention, with openness conditioning to some extent the production.

At the lowest level of mental activity, i.e. its realization, the intention manifests itself as an openness of the mind to itself, i.e. as self-consciousness, with neither a clear view of the conscious entity nor a doubling of the subject and object. At the same time, it is easy for one to realize oneself and what one is realizing. This realization differs in the degree of saturation with consciousness: from the dark, barely noticeable, to the fully enlightened, which Ingarden called “the intuition of existence”¹³.

This simple awareness of these edifying experiences gives rise to yet another manifestation of intention: a leaning towards something yet unknown. One can speak here of an empty consciousness of the object, being – at a higher level – a manifestation of the openness of intention. It enables an act of directing towards an intention-based, selected object, which for this reason is intentional, although in a different sense of this term: whether as actually (really or ideally) existing (e.g. in case of learning something), or only as possible (in case of searching for something or producing it). Intention as directedness towards something is also defined as aiming at something. Directing or aiming is a moment that activates the mind or consciousness, whether potentially as an opportunity to direct towards the object, or as an actual directing towards or aiming at it. Thus, the constitutive power of intention, manifesting itself in constituting acts of consciousness as intention-based, becomes apparent.

In contrast to an act of directing towards or aiming at an object, which may be empty, an intent reference – another manifestation of intention – demands the existence of a reference object. This does not mean, however, that the object has to be real. In the act of referencing, the absence of a real or ideal reference end is replaced by a purely intentional one, so that what the act presumes and the alleged object overlap.

Next – referring to something creates a relation of the subject to a transcendent object or to a purely intentional object, including

13 Cf. R. Ingarden, *U podstaw teorii poznania*, PWN, Warszawa 1971, 368–380.

the immanent content of the object. Intentional relationships built by intention are not real in line with classical understanding. They do not happen outside the thought or without the participation of thought (consciousness) or the thinking entity. The thinking entity is necessary for the existence of an intentional relationship, which does not mean that it is revealed directly in each such relationship. However, there does not have to be a transcendent object that one thinks about, but even then, there is a content of thinking that one does think about. A particular intentional relationship is the relationship of identity when the subject and object of the relationship overlap, when a thought, when thinking, thinks of itself.

Intention also manifests itself in the use of specific subject matter content. Thus, mental or conscious experiences are not contentless, but always contain specific content: they are experiences full of meaning. An extreme case of the in-existing content is the experience itself – when the content of the experience is identical to the experience, as is the case with the experience of kindness, the content of which is simply kindness, not having a clear reference to anything, with the experience of aversion, the content of which is a reluctance not directed to any object, the experience of opening without opening to something specific, etc.

On the other hand, the peak of intention-based activity of the mental entity is the production of purely intentional objects, which, speaking in the language of Ingarden, are produced by acts of consciousness¹⁴. They are immanent to these acts, although sometimes – as in the case of works of art, designs of buildings or various devices, as well as moral acts – they are incarnated in various ways, gaining a stronger existential basis in a given material. A variant of this manifestation of intention is to influence something that consists in such an act of a subject that in an already existing object causes some change, and so somewhat produces it.

The manifestations of intention presented here have been arranged from the barely discernible to the most expressive and build

14 R. Ingarden, *O dziele literackim. Badania z pogranicza ontologii, teorii języka i filozofii kultury*, transl. M. Turowicz, PWN, Warszawa 1988, 179–247.

on each other, resulting in intentional products – from experiences themselves to purely intentional objects.

5. THE THREE DIMENSIONS OF INTENTION

Bearing in mind what has already been said, the specific experience reveals that intention is always three-dimensional. Aristotle distinguished three types of activity of the soul as a mental entity: theoretical cognition, action and production, and with their purpose in mind, he clearly separated them. The purpose of theoretical knowledge (*theorein*) is to gain knowledge about a subject. The aim of action (*praxis*) is action itself. The purpose of production (*poiesis*) is to produce a transcendental work. In cognition, the subject takes the form of the object being learned, while in the case of action, the subject gives shape to the action itself (i.e. its form, which derives from the thought). Similarly, in the case of producing, the product takes the form¹⁵ in and from the soul of its producer because – according to Aristotle – art is the giving of forms¹⁶. Meanwhile, it appears that all activity of the mind is an activity in which cognition and production are inscribed, and intention as a property of the mind always reveals its three-dimensionality as action, cognition and production, with one of the moments mentioned here stands out, allowing to distinguish – as Aristotle did – production (*poiesis*), action (*praxis*) and cognition (*theory*). Let us therefore look at how the three-dimensionality of intention mentioned here is revealed in the acts of production, action and cognition.

Experiencing oneself as a subject of creative or productive activity, one experiences first of all that one creates or produces something. In the case of production, the product one intends to produce, is producing or has produced, obscures one's own activity and focuses one's attention on oneself. This is understandable because the purpose of a productive activity is the goodness and perfection of the product, not the perfection

15 Arystoteles, *Metafizyka*, 1032b, in: Idem, *Dzieła wszystkie*, vol. 2, transl. K. Leśniak, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2003.

16 Ibid, 1034a, 1996, 1110a 15n, 112a–b.

of the productive activity, and even more so, that of the actor. However, the existence of a product and its perfection depends on the perfection of the act of production and a reliable knowledge of what is to be produced as realizable and of one's own production capabilities. The essence of the productive activity is to "bring in" (a kind of embodiment) of an idea or concept, created in the mind of the creator or producer, into a specific material and thus perpetuating this idea in it. The production of an object starts with the creation of an idea or concept of a specific artefact and ends with the production of an artefact according to the conceived idea. The artefact produced in this way is a purely intentional object, although it is often incorporated into a stronger basis of being. In this sense, the creative activity of the mental entity is also the product of conscious experiences themselves, including – in particular – conscious acts, through which the mental entity shapes itself, language as a specific system of conventional signs, as well as the social structures or the laws that shape these structures. One could therefore say that the whole human world is an intentional world: either produced by intentionality, or modified by it, or adapted by it, which is nowadays expressed in the conviction that there are no more areas on the earth that would not be directly or indirectly touched by the human hand.

The intentional product is also one's action, one's act as an *actus humanus*¹⁷, because the fact that one acts and how one acts depends on one's consciousness, and the shape of what it does depends on how the action is shaped. When talking about practical action, we have in mind the action itself, whose perfection is its primary goal. It can be said that an action first of all produces itself according to an idea that is subject to cognition, and the achievement of its intended goal depends on how it is shaped. This applies to both spontaneous and planned actions, with the intended objective not necessarily coinciding with the objective actually achieved. The act, being a product of consciousness, often has its stronger existential foundation in specific corporeal behaviours, which find their extension in various types of tools, which are artefacts.

17 Cf. J. Krokos, *Sumienie jako poznanie. Fenomenologiczne dopełnienie Tomaszowej nauki o sumieniu*, Wydawnictwo UKSW, Warszawa 2004, 132–134.

Cognition, on the other hand, is a special kind of activity that aims at gaining knowledge of a certain subject, knowledge being a specific, intentional product of cognition. The specificity of cognition lies in the fact that – as Aristotle said – the subject, in its own way, wants to accept the object being cognized, which indicates an intention to open the mind to the found object. Cognition produces knowledge, but not an object of cognition that stands as somehow existing, which is revealed by the fact that it is the object itself that stimulates the cognizing entity to draw attention to itself. The intention of openness of the cognizing entity to an object is a condition of its cognition. It belongs to a mental entity and therefore it cannot be deprived of it. The cognitive result, however, depends on the types of cognitive acts that the mental entity represents and the reliability of their realization.

Thus, any activity of the mental entity which is always permeated by intention, is a unity of action, production and cognition. This is because the production of some material or mental object requires undertaking actions, which will allow this object to be produced, and this in turn requires learning about this object as possible to produce, as well as actions, which will allow to achieve this result. In turn, the constitution of the act demands to know its purpose and the means to achieve it, and the product of the act is the act itself and its result. Cognition, on the other hand, is itself a kind of act, which aims at knowledge as its product, and the condition for its achievement is its reliable fulfilment. This makes all productive, practical and cognitive intentions converge, revealing the richness of the intention and intentionality of life of the mental entity, which has three dimensions, with one of them often dominating others in a particular act, which makes it possible to distinguish between action, production and cognition, without denying their three-dimensionality.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The three-dimensional nature of intention shown here has its translation into the practical life of the mental beings that we all are. Man has always lived an intention-based life, acting, producing and cognizing,

and sometimes he has constituted his actions in a particular way, emphasizing one of the above three moments of intention. Morality, scientific cognition, production and art are the areas of human existence that grew out of the intention-based human life. As intention-based entities who realize themselves in and through their intention- and intentionality-based experiences, and who are always three-dimensional, we also live in the present real world, which in its essence remains invariable as a transcendence insensitive to our acts of intention. On the other hand, our intentional world is changing, nowadays – mainly through the unification of our intentional material products (the same devices we can meet and buy all over the world, in the same arranged markets) and through the unification of our intentional spiritual products (ideas, theories, interpretations). And because we feel better in the world of our intentional creations than in the world of nature, because the latter, the world of nature, which is actually the primary world, is still mysterious to us, and getting to know it requires effort and competence, while the former, actually secondary, precisely because it is a purely intentional world, is fully understandable to us, we close ourselves in it¹⁸. We are open to it, it is of interest to us, and we relate to it, and it is the world that shapes us more than the autonomous reality that is the real world. This makes us live in a largely ideologized world today. Therefore, one has to constantly reflect on one's own conscious life, which is always three-dimensional, and which determines and defines action, cognition and production, so as not to be deceived by the intentional world, which, being the creation of man, sometimes imitates and obscures the world of nature.

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¹⁸ Cf. R. Ingarden, *Książeczka o człowieku*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 1972, 25–39.

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