

Is There a Non-Psychological Intentionality?

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In a celebrated paper, Martin and Pfeiffer (1986) drew some intriguing analogies between intentional states and non-psychological dispositional states, and challenged philosophers to better articulate the demarcation line between the intentional and the non-intentional. U.T. Place (1996) and George Molnar (2003) took this line of thought further, arguing that it is literally true that non-psychological dispositional states manifest intentionality and, consequently, that we should re-conceive intentionality as the mark of the dispositional, rather than as the mark of the mental. Although the thesis of ‘physical intentionality’ (as it came to be called) does not enjoy widespread acceptance it poses an interesting challenge which ought to be addressed. If the traditional conception of intentionality as an unmistakably psychological phenomenon is to be defended we need to be able to explain what sets genuine intentional states *apart* from their non-psychological analogs. Moreover, the analogy itself – the fact that we *do* find intriguing formal similarities between genuine intentional states and non-psychological dispositional states – calls for an explanation. Are these analogies genuine? And if so, what is the metaphysical lesson to be learned?

In this paper I defend the traditional, psychological view of intentionality, yet I do so from a non-traditional perspective. I argue that the key for a proper demarcation of the intentional from the non-intentional lies with the phenomenon of *autonomous agency*, whose analysis is sorely missed in traditional discussions of intentionality, and that the failure to put the finger on the significance of this issue lies equally with critics of physical intentionality (such as Bird 2007) as it does with its defenders. At the same time, I conclude by suggesting that there *is* an important lesson to be learned from the formal similarity between intentional states and non-psychological dispositional states: it is only against the ontological background of a “world of dispositions” that the emergence of intentionality becomes intelligible.