

Original Intentionality and Misrepresentation

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Abstract

The ability of a cognitive system to misrepresent presupposes that the intentionality the system exhibits is original or intrinsic rather than derivative. This is true especially when we are talking about human intentionality, because, on the naturalistic representationalism proposed separately by Dretske, Fordor, and Papineau, the fixation of representational content is prior to what counts as a case of misrepresentation and has to be done in a non-derivative way.

Dennett, however, rejects the claim that human intentionality is original or intrinsic via his, as I call them, “Argument From Functional Re-ascription” and “Argument From Selfish Genes.” He argues that human intentionality is derivative either because of the possibility of re-ascribing functions to human intentionality is derivative either because of the possibility of re-ascribing functions to human cognitive systems or because of the reason that human beings derive their intentionality from the intentionality of our selfish genes. He thus argues that what are taken to be cases of misrepresentation might be dismissed and become cases of veridical representation.

This essay first presents what human original intentionality is by a brief survey of Searle’s and Dretske’s theories, since Dennett takes their views as his main target. His two arguments are then examined. With regard to the Argument From Functional Reascription, I argue that we stick to the survival principle (natural teleology) which is a major factor in the fixation of representational content in the naturalistic representationalism, even if we come to cases in which functional ascriptions are teleologically equivalent. With regard to the Argument From Selfish Genes, I examine three possible defences for the view that genes have intentionality from which human intentionality is derivable. I argue that none of the three defences work. I thus reject Dennett and defend the view that human intentionality is original or intrinsic and that the way the naturalistic representationalism explains misrepresentation is not affected.