

Preface

It is not an exaggeration to say that virtually every substantive point made in this book relies on the concept of *minimal content*. 'Minimal content' is a technical term. It represents the subject of an agent's intentional state *as the agent conceives it*. Minimal content is a subjective, first-person, narrow concept. It does not presuppose any phenomenal features (chapter 1). Nevertheless, when we examine phenomenality we find that a variant concept of minimal content is similarly fundamental for an adequate analysis of the phenomenal. I call this narrow concept *phenomenal minimal content*. This concept individuates the phenomenal aspect of the perception *as the agent perceives it* (chapter 3). Minimal content and phenomenal minimal content have the same logic. Though both require consciousness, only the latter involves phenomenal features. Minimal content is the foundation for my theory of mind and language.

Any being that has states with minimal content is able to have non-inferential knowledge of it; she has a very narrowly circumscribed privileged access to her minimal content (chapters 1 and 2). Such special access results from the fact that minimal content is not simply a function of how things are; it is a function of how the thinker conceives things—minimal content is *constituted* by the agent. It is a first-person, individualist, or internalist notion. It is a substantive sense of narrow content, one distinct from any other in the literature. Since minimal content itself is not some sort of ontological being but a concept introduced to make sense of, analyze, and relate issues in the study of mind and language, it is not heavily burdened with problematic metaphysical baggage. It does not, for example, turn on troublesome concepts such as "the nature of the mental" or "the essence of mind."

The concept of minimal content is also fundamental for certain concepts that I deploy in the treatment of the topics of meaning and reference. In

chapter 8 I introduce *intended reference*, a first-person concept derived from minimal content. The application of this concept is undertaken in the context of Quine's theses of the Indeterminacy of Translation and Inscrutability of Reference, though general results about meaning and reference are obtained. I mention here, though without argument, that I think the concept of intended reference has obvious and unifying applications to a number of other specific issues in the philosophy of language, often recasting them in a new light. I hope a reading of chapter 8 will make this clear. Some examples of such applications are to issues concerning rule following, Donnellan's referential/attributive distinction, and Kripke's puzzle about belief, among others. Thus, if my arguments are correct, minimal content plays a pivotal, unifying, and foundational role in both the philosophy of mind and the philosophy of language.

It is important to realize that I do not contend that minimal content is itself sufficient content for the tasks at hand. A second sense of content is also required for an adequate theory of mind: *objective content*. It is a wide, strictly third-person concept that indicates the subject an objective observer of the agent would ascribe as the subject of the agent's intentional or phenomenal state (chapter 1). When we turn from mind to language, the narrow concept of intended referent must also be supplemented with the wide concept of *objective referent*. The role of this concept relative to language is similar to that of objective content relative to mind (chapter 8). Still, the new narrow concepts introduced and issues associated with them occupy the bulk of my discussion.

The central theses of this book are as follows:

- A new *non*-phenomenal narrow concept of minimal content is required to understand mind and language.
- A strictly third-person methodology in the philosophical study of the mind and language is untenable; it must be supplemented with a first-person, subjective methodology. The augmented methodology is, nevertheless, objective.
- Consciousness—without phenomenality—is as strongly implicated in intentionality as in phenomenal states.

Beyond what I have already said about the first thesis, I argue that an agent constitutes minimal content, and that this act results in a unique intentional state: the *Fundamental Intentional State* (chapter 1). All other

intentional states presuppose this special intentional state; its logic differs from all others.

In regard to the second thesis, I demonstrate that any *strictly* third-person methodology in the philosophical study of mind or language fails to identify minimal content and, in consequence, I argue (especially in chapters 2, 5, 7, and 8, though the point is made in various ways throughout), suffers from a number of fundamental and debilitating limitations that can be corrected only by the incorporation of a first-person methodology. I argue further that a methodology augmented in this way yields objective results, despite its incorporation of a first-person methodology. Therefore, an objective understanding of the subjective is possible with this expanded methodology (chapters 1, 3, and 5).

There is a further point regarding the second thesis, one that is also related to the third. Though some others emphasize the importance of first-person methodologies, they typically restrict its application to phenomenal states. This has resulted in a misleading partitioning of the problems of phenomenality (qualia) and the problems of intentionality into two distinct categories. The acceptance of this taxonomy is abetted by the all-too-common belief that phenomenal states have subjective aspects and involve consciousness but intentional states do not. On my view, the latter part of this is an illusion. Arguments for this are presented in chapters 1–3.

There are others who also reject the partitioning just indicated. These philosophers have expanded the application of the first-person perspective to intentional states by arguing that these too have certain phenomenal features—“phenomenal intentionality.” I argue in chapter 3 that this is the wrong way to implicate consciousness in intentionality. My theory is importantly different from this approach, as well. Whereas on my theory consciousness is as crucial to intentionality as it is to phenomenality, my theory implicates consciousness in intentionality independent of phenomenal features (chapters 1 and 3).

One important reason that has led philosophers to adopt either of the approaches described and rejected in the previous two paragraphs is the almost universal tendency, even among widely divergent theorists of mind, to conflate consciousness and subjectivity with phenomenal experience. Of course it is true that phenomenal experience is subjective, and certainly it is often conscious, but my point is that intentionality implies subjectivity and consciousness without phenomenal aspects.

The tendency just described has contributed to the failure to recognize a different “explanatory gap problem” than the usual one. Of the two broad problem areas in the philosophy of mind—intentionality and phenomenality (qualia)—it is the latter that is typically viewed as posing the “hard problem” for consciousness. The very idea of the “hard problem” of consciousness is miscast, however, when it is restricted to problems concerning phenomenal states (qualia). I argue that the hard question, properly framed, is broader in scope. In short, there is an explanatory gap problem for both phenomenal and intentional states. My theory provides a framework that goes some significant distance in closing both gaps in a similar way (chapters 3–5, especially 4).

The failure to adequately recognize that there is a hard problem for intentionality is related to a certain common view regarding representation. It is widely believed by philosophers and cognitive scientists of almost every persuasion that there are unconscious representations. In chapter 5 I argue for an account of representation which has the radical consequence that representation itself requires consciousness: There are no unconscious representations. If I am right about this, to the extent that any explanation of intentionality must utilize the concept of representation, this provides a basis for another argument to the conclusion that intentionality requires non-phenomenal consciousness.

Other problems that are widely viewed as applying exclusively to phenomenality are also extended to intentionality. Specifically, corresponding to the problems of inverted and absent qualia is the problem of inverted and absent (non-phenomenal) minimal content. Whereas strictly third-person methodologies simply conjecture that these are phenomenal possibilities (a conjecture that some dispute), on my theory they are verifiably possible outcomes with regard to inverted and absent minimal content; moreover, such outcomes are on occasion not only verifiable but actual (chapter 1). Nevertheless, with my augmented methodology, there are grounds for holding that we can make objective claims regarding both another’s minimal contents and another’s qualia (chapter 3).

Various scientific identities (e.g., heat = kinetic energy of molecules) are often touted as models for some sort of reduction of the mental to the physical. Although I hold (in chapters 3 and 4 especially, but also in chapter 5) that the *having* of certain brain states is what constitutes a conscious state, the traditional identities are inadequate models to explain the

relations between the mental and the physical (as are those models that depend on some sort of supervenience). I examine the traditional identity claims in both science and the philosophy of mind in detail, and I evaluate them in a novel way that reveals the inadequacies I have alleged. My analysis is based on an independently argued for systematic ambiguity in sensory terms. These results also imply a different way of evaluating disputes between “objectivists” and “subjectivists” regarding color and other sensory modalities. Yet another outcome of this line of reasoning reconciles Wilfred Sellars’s manifest and scientific images and also reconciles Arthur Eddington’s “two tables” (chapter 6)

In addition to the above, I argue for a number of negative results. A widely accepted externalist attempt to explain privileged access fails. Higher-order theories of intentionality are false. The motivation for and the plausibility of such theories is an artifact of applying a strictly third-person methodology. Functionalism is false. It can accommodate neither minimal content nor a limited privileged access to minimal content. Putnam’s Twin-Earth thought experiment does not establish that thought content is wide. (All these negative results are argued for in chapter 2.) Burge’s arthritis thought experiment is challenged in a new way, one that does not rely on a “reinterpretation strategy.” That experiment does not, after all, support anti-individualism (chapter 7). I show that Quine’s reading of his own thesis of indeterminacy of translation is vacuous, and, given his reading, that his explicit attempts to rescue reference from nonsense fail. (Minimal content via the concept of intended reference provides the basis for a non-vacuous reading of the Indeterminacy of Translation, while also rescuing reference from nonsense; minimal content thereby provides a basis for determinate meaning and reference, as already indicated above.) I show Quine’s realism to be incoherent with the rest of his view. In chapter 9 I argue that ontological issues, in their traditional guise, should be abandoned.

Early in this preface I said that the concept of minimal content does not depend on “the nature of the mental.” This point is important and relates to the conclusion just stated. Throughout the book I eschew ontological questions. I do so because I think such questions are groundless, even meaningless (chapter 9). I also think they distract us from making progress on substantive issues. (I illustrate the latter throughout the book, but chapter 6 may provide the clearest illustration.) Though I am concerned with the

phenomena that come under the headings 'mental' and 'physical', and with how these phenomena are related to one another, I do not view this as some ontological venture. I view my task as showing how the concept of minimal content provides the means to unify a number of important statements regarding mind, body, and language—statements that most philosophers, regardless of their "ontological positions," would accept—and to resolve a number of problems that acceptance of those statements generate. I would like my theory, particularly the concept of minimal content, to be judged by how successfully and extensively it does this: To what extent does the deployment of minimal content advance our understanding of the phenomena we call 'mental' and 'physical' and of the relations between them? What light does minimal content shed on problems in the philosophy of language? The injection of ontological considerations in the discussion of such questions only serves to obfuscate the associated issues with irrelevancies. I believe that advances in the understanding of such issues can and should be made without recourse to ontology.

I have made many substantive and unorthodox claims regarding what I purport to establish in what follows. Skepticism regarding my success is understandable, indeed called for. The courage to make so many ambitious claims has been fortified by many years of labor directed at nursing the arguments in support of them. The task of determining whether I have succeeded now falls to you, my not too gentle (I trust) reader. I invite and welcome your efforts.