

COMMENTS ON DIBRELL'S "PERSONS AND THE INTENTIONAL STANCE"  
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I. DIBRELL vs. DENNETT

Daniel Dennett claims that a necessary condition for being a person is being the object of an intentional stance: i.e., being such that "states of consciousness are attributed, or ... psychological or mental or intentional predicates are ascribed" to one (Dennett 1978: 269). Furthermore, such attributions and ascriptions need not be true--that is, the entity in question need not "really have beliefs and desires" (Dennett 1978: 7). All that is required is that they can be "treat[ed] ... as if ... [they] had beliefs and desires ..." (Dennett 1978: 8; my emphasis).

Professor Dibrell claims that this "analysis of personhood is not plausible if the ascription of psychological states ... is only this sort of 'as if' ascription" (Dibrell 1984: 1), and, furthermore, that the "aspect of commonsense psychology eliminated by Dennett's interpretation of the intentional stance [--really having intentional properties--] is ... necessary for the conditions of personhood" (p. 3).

Surely, being the object of an intentional stance is a necessary condition for personhood. We may also grant that Dennett's five other conditions are necessary. What Dibrell claims is that these six are not the only necessary conditions, that a seventh condition--really having intentionality--(or at

least stronger versions of Dennett's first four conditions) is necessary. That is, Dibrell's objection is that Dennett's six conditions are not jointly sufficient for personhood.

Now, Dennett does not claim that they are. But let us suppose that he did. Dibrell, to make his case, must show that really having intentionality is also necessary. Thus, under this supposition, we have Dennett claiming that as-if intentionality, as distinct from real intentionality, is all that is needed in a set of jointly sufficient criteria. And we have Dibrell claiming that real intentionality, as distinct from as-if intentionality, is needed.

I claim: first, that Dibrell offers at best a weak argument for his position; second, that an argument can be given for something like his position; but, third, that this position is consistent with Dennett's (though Dennett might not think so).

## II. DIBRELL'S POSITION

Let me begin by raising two small objections to Dibrell's analysis of Dennett. First, Dibrell's interpretation (p. 1) of Dennett's sixth condition is incorrect: Being a second-order volitional system is part of the explication of Dennett's fourth condition--the condition of reciprocity; it is not equivalent to the sixth condition of having a special sort of self-consciousness (Dennett 1978: 273).

Second, Dibrell claims that "Dennett's way of protecting personhood [from the march of science] is to argue that beliefs and desires have an existence only as explanatory fictions" (p. 4; my emphasis). This is too strong. Dennett only argues--and

only needs to argue--that beliefs and desires don't need an existence other than as explanatory fictions.

Now, Dibrell's positive theory appears to be his reformulation of Dennett's second and third conditions (pp. 4-5).[1] But Dibrell's new condition (3) seems to be merely an elaboration of Dennett's. So the major change is the replacement of condition (2): the substitution of real intentionality for as-if intentionality.

What, then, is Dibrell's argument for his condition (2)? I don't think he has one. He does claim that "at least in one's own case ... viewing oneself as intending and believing ... involves viewing one's desires and one's intentions as causally efficacious" (p. 6). That is, in the first-person case, as-if intentionality implies real intentionality. Let me call this the First-Person Thesis. Dibrell gives us no reason for believing the First-Person Thesis. Moreover, even if it is true, it would not help him, for all it shows is that really having intentionality is necessary for first-personhood, not that it is necessary for personhood in general.

Dibrell says that the First-Person Thesis is Dennett's view (and, hence, that Dennett is inconsistent). But it's not clear from the lengthy quote on pp. 5-6 that this is Dennett's view, as opposed to a view that he discusses. And the quote can be interpreted, not as arguing for really having intentionality, but as arguing for an intentional (as opposed to a non-intentional) stance in the first-person case.

Dibrell argues that Dennett cannot "be consistent with his

intentional-stance psychology and introduce the causal assumption at any level of the personhood analysis" (p. 7; my emphasis). His argument is that the First-Person Thesis presents a dilemma for Dennett: Either (a) we view ourselves as really having intentionality but others as if having intentionality, or (b) we view both ourselves and others as having real intentionality. Horn (a) of this dilemma is Dennett's view, which Dibrell says violates the fourth condition (reciprocity); horn (b) is Dibrell's view.

As for (a), it does not violate reciprocity, since reciprocity merely requires that others treat us as if intentional. However, (a) is arguably false. Following Marvin Minsky's arguments in his essay, "Matter, Mind, and Models" (Minsky 1965), to attribute intentionality to, so to speak, oneself is really to attribute it to one's model of oneself--to "oneself-as-other". Hence, such an attribution is logically on a par with one's attributions of intentionality to others, but the parity can be at what we might call the as-if level, rather than the real-intentionality level. Thus, we are not forced to take horn (b).

In other words, since Dibrell has not offered any argument for the First-Person Thesis, there remains a third option: (c) we view neither ourselves nor others as really having, but only as if having, intentionality. As a matter of fact, I hold that as-if intentionality is equivalent to real intentionality, so (b) and (c) can be conflated. I'll return to this later. But note that, at the very least, the parity at this level is consistent

with the quote from Dennett on p. 7, so that Dibrell's reading of this passage as "clearly" suggesting that real intentionality "is ... provided by conditions (5) and (6)" (p. 7) is incorrect.

To sum up my critique of Dibrell: The closest he comes to an argument for the necessity of really having intentionality is to point out an inconsistency between the First-Person Thesis and Dennett's intentional-stance psychology. But this does not show the necessity, nor is there an inconsistency, nor is there an argument for the First-Person Thesis.

### III. AN ALTERNATIVE

Let me now turn briefly to a view that can make room for both Dennett's and Dibrell's insights.

Dennett's claim that attributions of beliefs do not imply the existence of actual beliefs can be illuminated by an analogy with the computer-science notion of an abstract data type and its implementation. Consider a program that implements a stack (an abstract data type) by an array. An analogue to Dennett's claim about beliefs and the intentional stance would be that attributions of stack-like behavior to the program do not imply that the program actually contains a stack. This is true, since the array, which implements a stack, may have features that a stack lacks (such as the ability to be randomly accessed) and conversely (arrays are of necessity finite, whereas stacks are normally infinite). However, the Dennett-like claim is false in the sense that an array that implements a stack is indeed a stack in the only way that anything (anything concrete) can be a stack. (One answer to the question "What is it like to be a stack?" is:

what it is like to be an array that is implementing a stack.)

Similarly, Dennett is right in claiming that attributions of beliefs do not imply the actual existence of beliefs if he means that whatever it is in the system that allows us to take the intentional stance is not necessarily what our abstract notion of a belief is. However, whatever it is in the system that allows us to take the intentional stance is indeed intentional in the only way that anything can be intentional, and Dennett is wrong if he denies this.

Let me be a bit more precise. Consider (1) treating an entity (such as a computer or a person) as if it had intentionality, (2) an entity's (such as a computer's) simulating intentionality, and (3) an entity's (such as a person's) actually having intentionality. Normally, treating an entity as if it were F is independent of its actually being F, and both Dennett and Dibrell agree to this when F is intentionality.

But I believe that intentionality is special in that these two are not independent: In order for it to be possible for an entity to be treated as if it were intentional, it must simulate intentionality. That is, it must be as-if intentional. But intentionality is special in that anything that simulates it thereby actually has it. Now this, of course, requires argument (in particular, a refutation of Searle's Chinese Room argument). But if the argument can be made, as I believe it can, then Dennett's intentional stance is indeed all that's needed, since Dibrell's real intentionality is a necessary consequence of Dennett's as-if intentionality. Not only can we have our cake, but we have to eat it, too.

## NOTE

1. With an attendant change in condition (4), because of its reference to (3).

## REFERENCES

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