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IS AFFECTIVE INTENTIONALITY NECESSARILY IRRELEVANT IN SOCIAL COGNITION?

abstract

The aim of this work is to understand the meaning and the extent of “affective intentionality”, to discover whether or not it is analogous to other concepts of intentionality and if it can play a role in social cognition.

I will compare Searle’s conception of intentionality, in particular affective intentionality, with Scheler’s concept of sympathy. The reason for this is that I believe the comparison shows that it is not always necessary to presuppose something to have affective intentionality.

keywords

Collective affective intentionality, Max Scheler, sympathy, fellow-feeling

1. Introduction

The aim of this work is to understand the meaning and the extent of “affective intentionality”, to discover whether or not it is analogous to other concepts of intentionality and if it can play a role in social cognition. To achieve these ultimate goals, I will consider, first, Searle’s conception of intentionality in general¹ and, then, of affective intentionality in particular. Secondly, I will expound a few questions that are to guide the entire work. Then, I will take into account four preliminary considerations, that are to specify the object of this research.

Afterwards, I will present Scheler’s position on affective intentional states by displaying the four types of affective intentionality he identifies. The reason for this last step is that I believe Scheler’s account can provide further insight to answer the questions that will emerged throughout the paper.

2. Searle on Intentionality

Intentional states are always about, or refer to, something. Intending, in the ordinary sense in which I intend to go to the movies, is just one type of intentional state among many others such as belief, desire, hope, and fear. [...] I said that intentionality is a name for the directedness or aboutness of mental states (Searle 2010, 25-26).

Searle takes into consideration different types of intentionality. The examples refer to beliefs, desires, hopes and fears, or, in other words, cognitive, conative or practical intentionality, and emotional or affective intentional states².

Searle’s idea is that emotions are actual intentional states, but that they are different from other types of intentionality because they need to be based on something else: an emotion always presupposes a belief or a desire.

¹ For a general account of “intentionality” see P. Jacob, (2010), “Intentionality”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2010 Edition)*, E. N. Zalta (ed.).

² To make just a brief and operative distinction, we can say that “belief” refers to “the attitude we have, roughly, whenever we take something to be the case or regard it as true” (Schwitzgebel 2010). It has the aim of representing what the world looks like (world-to-mind direction of causation). A “desire” is a disposition to make something happen (a mind-to-world direction of causation). Emotions are defined by the fact that they are responses to stimuli that trigger bodily states and have a motivational power (de Sousa 2010). According to the well-known Schachter-Singer theory (Schachter and Singer 1962), there are two components of an emotion: bodily arousal and cognitive factors. Emotions make us feel the world (feeling the world and representing it are two very different ways of relating to it). Much more can be said to distinguish these three concepts, but it is not the aim of this work to do it.

If I am proud that I have a big nose or I am ashamed that I have a big nose, in both cases the fact that I have a big nose is simply taken for granted. That is, it is not the aim of the intentional state to represent the fact that I have a big nose (mind-to-world ↓), nor is it its aim to bring it about that I have a big nose (world-to-mind ↑). In these states we simply presuppose that I have a big nose. [...] a fit is presupposed and the emotion of pride or shame would be inappropriate or misdirected if I did not have a big nose (Searle 2010, 29).

In Searle's account, emotions seem to be some sort of second level intentional states: I am not saying that I have or that I want to have a big nose, I simply presuppose one of these states and feel in a certain way about it. This does not mean that they are not intentional (i.e. "it is not the aim of the intentional state to represent [...], nor [...] to bring about").

3. Two Questions

My aim in this paper is to understand whether or not it is necessary to ground affective intentionality on another kind of intentionality. If Searle neglects affective intentionality's role in the construction of human civilization because of its dependence on something else, then maybe showing that this dependency is not necessary could restore the similarity between different types of intentionality and could give the affective a role in social cognition.

Thus, the questions are:

- *Firstly, is it necessary to distinguish between affective intentionality, on the one hand, and cognitive and practical intentionality, on the other?*
- *Secondly, can we be sure that affective intentionality always presupposes something else? Or is it possible to imagine a specific type of affective intentional state that is as original as a belief or a desire?*

4. Four Preliminary Steps

To answer the questions we have addressed above and to understand the relevance and utility, within this work, of Scheler's account, we need to take some preliminary steps that will make the path clearer. The aim is to narrow the sense of affective intentionality that is relevant to us, in order to provide an example as required by the last question. The aim of this paragraph, therefore, is to look for a type of affective intentionality that doesn't need any presupposition, and to analyze the possible relations between *this* kind of affective intentionality and collectivity, enabling us to comprehend the role of affective intentional states in social cognition³.

³ I am not claiming that every emotion is necessarily collective: we do have private emotions, but they are not the kind of emotions I am investigating. My aim is to find a type of affective intentionality (that is just one among many) that can be useful to connect it to collectivity.

4.1 A Subjective and an Objective Pole

The first step towards understanding how we can relate affective intentionality and collectivity, is to underline the necessity of both a subjective and an objective pole. As we have seen with Searle's definition (Searle 2010, 25), an *object* is always required in order to have an intentional state.

If the object is necessary, so must be the origin of that intentionality: the subject.

The concept of "positionality" serves two purposes: firstly, it helps us to understand what kind of experience is required for a person to have an intentional state; secondly, it introduces us to the phenomenological tradition that is to be central in this work.

4.2 Positionality

The phenomenology approach suggests a further distinction between *the object* of the intentional state and *the act* itself.

Every mental phenomenon is characterized by [...] the intentional (or mental) inexistence of an object, and that we might call, though not wholly unambiguously, reference to a content, direction toward an object [...]. Every mental phenomenon includes something in it as an object, although not always in the same way (Brentano 1874, 88).

Besides obvious continuity with Searle, what I believe Brentano, and the following phenomenological tradition, strongly stresses is the necessity of another variable in order to understand how and why different intentional states can subsist. What makes a perception different from a desire cannot be internal to its object, especially when we admit that I can either have a perception of an apple or a desire for it. The difference, thus, cannot be within the object, it must lay somewhere else.

Phenomenology suggests identifying this difference with the concepts of "act" and "positionality":

Unlike events, that happen, and states, that take place, acts are made, they always imply something that the person does, and in this sense she is involved "as a subject". [...] Acts always imply taking stands. This essential property is the one that we will call, with Husserl, positionality. Every act, strictly speaking, implies taking a stand (yes-no) in relation to an object given in experience and the corresponding state. [...] Positionality is the specific property of people's "intentional experience" (De Monticelli 2009, 186-187, translation mine).

This idea of *taking stands* solves the problem that arises through the subsistence of different intentional acts that cannot simply be reduced to a problem of different contents, as we have just noticed.

The act itself can be seen as the specific way in which the subject takes a stand in relation to that particular object at that particular time and within that particular context. The concept of “positionality” refers to the fact that the *person* is in a concrete and contingent position in relation to the specific object she has to deal with.

4.3 A Three- Variables Model

Proceeding in our aim to understand how affective intentionality can be related to collectivity, we come upon the third condition which is the *necessity for other subjects*⁴. In order to deal with collective intentionality (in a broad sense) we need to take into consideration more than one isolated subject⁵. This third step moves us from Searle’s definition to a different one: the kind of emotions considered are no longer “hope and fear”, but those feelings that involve (at least) two subjects, such as sympathy⁶. If, for example, *I sympathize with someone’s pain* (or joy), my object is twofold: the content of his feeling and he himself as a subject.

So, in order to understand the possibility of collective affective intentionality, we need to move from a two-variables model of intentional states (with a subjective and an objective pole only) to a three-variables one (with at least two subjects and an object).

4.4 Inter- Subjective, Collective and Social Intentionality

The last thing we have to consider is another distinction within the concept of collective intentionality in its broad sense: we can have inter-subjective, collective and social intentionality⁷.

In order to understand the differences between these, I will take into

4 This condition does not have to be met in every act of affective intentionality; it is merely useful to our goal of narrowing the relevant sense of intentionality for this work. It is necessary to understand collective affective intentional states; it is unnecessary for private emotions (that can be nonetheless intentional).

5 “So far, we have considered only individual intentionality which would be expressed in sentences in the first-person singular such as “I believe” or “I want”. [...] We will consider first-person plural forms of intentionality as in sentences of the form “We are doing such and such”, “We intend to do such and such”, “We believe such and such”. I call all of these sorts of cases “collective intentionality” [...]” (Searle 2010, 43). In the next paragraph we will see a more precise characterization of this concept.

6 This does not mean that “sympathy” is the only kind of affective intentional state, but just that it is of the right kind for our purposes: it deals with collectivity.

7 This distinction can be crossed with that of cognitive, practical and affective intentionality providing nine possible combinations of them.

account two works by Francesca De Vecchi (De Vecchi 201a; De Vecchi 2011b). Since I will not be able to discuss this issue in depth, I will merely consider a few of the many things outlined therein.

In particular, I will take the following points as defining the differences between these three categories:

- *The role of the second subject;*
- *The direction of intentionality (i.e. what is considered the object?);*
- *The possibility of a sub-personal, unconscious level⁸.*

As concerns *inter-subjective* intentionality, the subject regards the other person involved as the object of his own emotional state and it is directed to her. Moreover, it is possible to have a *sub-personal* level of intentionality: a person can be directed towards another even though she is not conscious of her own direction.

In *collective* intentionality (in its narrow sense) the second subject is seen as a *partner* in a collaborative operation towards a common object. Therefore, the direction is the object of the shared intentionality. At this stage, *sub-personal* intentionality is still possible, e.g. driving on a highway is a collaborative enterprise of which the subjects are not necessarily constantly aware.

Things change when we consider social intentional states. These take the second person as an *addressee* or a *counterpart* of the act, and are *double-directed*: towards this second person and towards the object. At this level, it is impossible to have an unconscious intentional state because agency and authorship are always needed and these necessarily involve awareness.

These last step will be extremely useful to understand certain aspects of Scheler's distinctions.

5. Scheler's Account In the book *The Nature of Sympathy*, Scheler provides an account of what we might call collective affective intentionality in the sense that has emerged from the preliminary steps we have just gone through. At the beginning of his work, he distinguishes between four facts of affective intentionality:

⁸ This idea of a sub-personal level of intentionality should be deepened in order to understand how it is possible for human beings to have unconscious intentional states and to define it more precisely. For the purposes of this work, I will use them as if they were synonyms.

1. *Immediate community of feeling, e.g. of one and the same sorrow, “with someone”.*
2. *Fellow-feeling “about something”; rejoicing in his joy and commiseration with his sorrow.*
3. *Mere emotional infection.*
4. *True emotional identification (Scheler 1923, 12).*

Further explanations and examples will be useful to understand what these concepts really mean and why they are interesting here.

5.1 Community of Feeling

As concerns the first type of affective intentional state, Scheler’s example is that of

two parents [who] stand beside the dead body of a beloved child. They share the “same” sorrow, the “same” anguish (Scheler 1923, 12).

In this example we have two subjects and a content of their emotional state: the *same* sorrow, the *same* anguish⁹. The relation between the two subjects is that of *partners* in a specific situation: they do not have each other as their immediate object. Their intentionality is primarily directed towards their child, not towards each other. They may acknowledge the presence of the other parent, but this has not a direct influence on the feeling of sorrow itself; it could, at most, change its intensity, not its type.

Summing up, the two subjects share the object (the child) and feel the same way about him (the *same* sorrow, the *same* anguish), which is the content of their state. They can be seen merely as partners since the mother is not the object of the father’s feeling nor his addressee (he does not expect a reaction from her), and *vice versa*. They share the object and the type of feeling. It is also possible to have a sub-personal level of this experience of community: it is not unusual for someone in an overwhelming situation such as the one described by Scheler not to be fully conscious of what is going on, but still have a sense of sorrow and an unconscious sharing of it. So, this is a case of collective intentionality.

5.2 Fellow-Feeling

Fellow-feeling is the central category among those analyzed by Scheler, and is the most important to understand the possibility of a type of collective affective intentionality which does not need to presuppose something else.

⁹ The content of an emotion is its type, the kind of emotion it is. It differs from the object of an emotion since the latter is the thing in the world that triggers an emotional reaction.

All fellow-feeling involves intentional reference to the feeling of joy or sorrow to the other person's experience. It points this way simply qua feeling - there is no need of any prior judgement or intimation [...]; nor does it arise only upon sight of the other's grief (Scheler 1923, 13).

Before considering the features of this experience, two things are worth noticing in this quote. The first regards the fact that Scheler himself talks about an “intentional reference”; and the second has to do with the fact that he considers this kind of affective intentional state something that doesn't need any prior judgment, intimation or the sight of the other's emotion reflected in his facial expression. These two points provide us with an alternative view of affective intentionality that can be at least compared to that emerging from Searle's account.

When I sympathize with someone else's pain (or joy), I can be directed both towards the other person and towards the content of her emotion. In this first case, fellow-feeling is an example of *social intentionality*: it has two directions and it expects a reaction from the other person, who is considered an addressee or a counterpart. No sub-personal level is thus possible: both the other person and I need to be conscious of what kind of experience we are going through for a proper case of social intentionality.

If this is not the case, then probably fellow-feeling is not at its complete stage and we have a case of *inter-subjective intentionality*. At this level, sub-personal intentionality is possible: the subject is not conscious of his emotional state and he has not taken a stand about it, but he can still have unconscious and instinctive reactions to the other's emotions. In this second hypothesis, the other subject is merely the object of my commiseration or the cause of my rejoicing, therefore not properly a subject. And I am merely directed towards him as an object.

Scheler's example of emotional infection is the following:

5.3 Emotional Infection

We all know how the cheerful atmosphere in a “pub” or at a party may “infect” the newcomers (Scheler 1923, 15).

What happens in a situation like the one depicted in Scheler's words is that the emotion passes from one subject to another without any consciousness of the passage in any of the individuals involved. The relationship is totally *sub-personal*. Starting from this, it is obvious that emotional infection

cannot be a form of social intentionality, as we have said that, to have social intentional states, we need authorship and agency: in a word, consciousness. The alternative, thus, is between inter-subjective and collective intentionality. Since the second person involved is not the object to which the intentional state is directed, this means that we are facing an unconscious collective intentional state and not an inter-subjective one. The object of the contagion is the emotion itself, not the other person.

Emotional identification is, in a sense, the highest level of contagion possible. Not only the origin of the emotion is unknown, but the subjects themselves become indistinguishable. Scheler provides several examples of this, but I will just consider one here.

5.4 Emotional Identification

Genuine identification is [...] present where the relationship between a hypnotist and his subject is not just a temporary one [...], but becomes a stable and permanent state (Scheler 1923, 20).

Emotional identification is thus *sub-personal* like emotional infection and is a particular example of *collective* intentionality because there is no distinction between subjects, and so the second one cannot be either the addressee or the object.

Subjects cease to be distinguishable persons in order to merge in an indistinct flow.

In Scheler's intentions, emotional identification should be the vital, almost biological basis of every other kind of affective intentionality. It represents the original presence of the "us" within the "I": it is the primeval basis of all these kind of acts. That is, this identification is a return to a *cosmos-vital* stage when, ontogenetically and phylogenetically, subjects were not distinct individuals, but one and the same vital community.

The essential character of human consciousness is such that the community is in some such sense implicit in every individual, and that man is not only part of society, but that society and the social bond are an essential bond of himself (Scheler 1923, 229)¹⁰.

To reach a conclusion, we need to see if we have been able to answer the

¹⁰ We can easily relate this to: "As long as we respect the basic facts we have to acknowledge that all human intentionality exists only in individual human brains. [...] There isn't any other place for intentionality to be except in human brains (Searle 2010, 44)".

6.
Answers to
the Questions

questions that were asked at the beginning of this work.

Our second question dealt with whether or not it was necessary to presuppose something in order to have affective intentionality. Scheler helps us with his definition of fellow-feeling: “it points this way simply *qua* feeling - there is no need of any prior judgement or intimation [...]; nor does it arise only upon sight of the other’s grief” (Scheler 1923, 13).

Even though this is not the *demonstration* of the fact that all affective intentional states can exist without a presupposition, it shows that at least *some of them* can and, thus, it demonstrates that it is not always necessary to presuppose something else to have affective intentionality.

If this is true, then we can also answer the first question, which referred to the possibility of a greater similarity between affective intentionality, on the one hand, and cognitive and practical ones, on the other. If the presupposition is not necessary, then the three kinds of intentionality can be much more closer and we might doubt about the irrelevance of affective intentionality in the construction of the social reality.

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