I suppose that sooner or later the physicists will complete the catalogue they’ve been compiling of the ultimate and irreducible properties of things. When they do, the likes of spin, charm, and charge will perhaps appear upon their list. But aboutness surely won’t; intentional simplicity simply doesn’t go that deep. It’s hard to see, in the face of this consideration, how one can be a Realist about intentionality without also being, to some extent or other, a Reductionist. If the semantic and the intentional are real properties of things, it must be in virtue of their identity with (or maybe their supervenience on?) properties that are themselves neither intentional nor semantic. If aboutness is real, it must really be something else.

And, indeed, the deepest motivation for intentional irrealism derives . . . from a certain ontological intuition: that there is no place for intentional categories in a physicalist view of the world; that the intentional can’t be naturalized (Jerry Fodor 1987, p. 97).

If only physicalistic properties and relations exist, then reference, to exist, must be a physicalist relation – but then the problem . . . is an overabundance of ‘candidates’. There are an infinite number of admissible reference relations. . . . If one of these were the relation of reference, then that fact would itself be an ultimate metaphysical fact of a very strange kind.

What would make such a fact strange is that we have built a certain neutrality, a certain mindlessness, into our very notion of Nature. Nature is supposed to have no interests, intentions, or point of view. Given that this is right, how could one admissible reference-relation be metaphysically singled out?

It is this same mindlessness of Nature that makes the action-guiding predicates ‘is right’ and ‘is a justified belief’ seem ‘queer’. If one physicalistic property P were identical with moral rightness or with epistemological justification, that would be ‘queer’ – queer for precisely the same reason that it would be ‘queer’ if reference were a physicalistic relation. It would be as if Nature itself had values, in the moral case, or referential intentions, in the semantical case (Hilary Putnam 1981, p. 211).

To say that a certain person desired to do A, thought it his duty to do B but was forced to do C, is not to describe him as one might describe a scientific specimen. One does, indeed, describe him, but one does something more. And it is this something more which is the irreducible core of the framework of persons.

In what does this something more consist?... [T]o recognize a featherless biped or dolphin or Martian as a person is to think of oneself and it as belonging to a community.

... Thus the conceptual framework of persons is the framework in which we think of one another as sharing the community intentions which provide the ambience of principles and standards (above all, those which make meaningful discourse and rationality itself possible) within which we live our own individual lives. ... [T]he conceptual framework of persons is not something that needs to be reconciled with the scientific image, but rather something to be joined to it (Wilfrid Sellars 1963, pp. 39–40).

1. INTRODUCTION

I will argue for three principal claims in this paper. First, philosophers who seek to integrate the semantic and the intentional into a naturalistic metaphysical worldview need to address a task that they have thus far largely failed even to notice: the task of explaining inter-level connections between the physical and the intentional in a naturalistically acceptable way. Second, there are serious reasons to think that this task cannot be carried out in a way that would vindicate realism about intentionality. Third, there is much to be said for a naturalistic approach to intentionality that has not been on the menu of options in recent philosophy; I call this approach, which is irrealist but not eliminativist, preservative irrealism.

I will here assume that the right overall metaphysical worldview is some form of metaphysical naturalism. I certainly think this assumption needs justification, rather than deserving the status of unjustified axiom; and I think it can be given strong justification. But that is a subject for another occasion.

I will also assume that there is a mind-independent, discourse-independent, world – a world of the sort whose existence is denied by philosophers who advocate global metaphysical irrealism (e.g., Putnam 1981, 1983; Rorty 1979, 1982; Goodman 1978; Dummett 1975, 1976). This too I regard as an assumption that should be, and can be, justified; but again, that is a subject for another occasion (cf. Horgan 1991, section 4).
I take the naturalist outlook in philosophy to be at bottom a metaphysical view about the nature of what exists. The vague, pre-theoretic idea the philosophical naturalist attempts to articulate and defend is that everything – including any particulars, events, facts, properties, etc. – is part of the natural world that science investigates.

Naturalist programs in philosophy are attempts to accommodate various kinds of discourse – e.g., moral discourse, mental discourse, mathematical discourse, semantic discourse – within a naturalistic worldview. (I speak of accommodating discourse in order to allow for irrealist modes of accommodation; more on this presently.) One dimension of naturalistic accommodation may be called external: given that one’s broader metaphysical and epistemological commitments are naturalistic, the task is to square the given mode of discourse with those commitments. Metaphysically, this means construing the discourse in a manner that eschews the positing of any objects, properties, or other entities that are naturalistically ‘queer’. Epistemologically, it means giving a construal that allows an account of how humans, qua physico-chemical organisms, can acquire knowledge pertaining to the relevant domain.

Another dimension of naturalistic accommodation may be called internal: the task is to give an account of the discourse that comports with certain important features of that discourse as ordinarily employed. For instance, the discourse might purport to be fact-stating, and it might be “ontologically committed” to certain kinds of objects, properties, or other sorts of entities.

Ideally, one should work toward some mode of accommodation that works well in both the external and the internal aspects. Of course, there is no guarantee that one’s efforts will satisfy both aims at once; success with one aspect sometimes might have to be purchased at the expense of the other. But when it comes time to assess various competing attempts at accommodation, any view that does better overall than its rivals at the total, two-part task should be judged the more adequate view. (Philosophical methodology involves the pursuit of wide reflective equilibrium.)
3. ACCOMMODATION PROGRAMS IN META-ETHICS

Let me turn briefly to meta-ethics, as groundwork for what I will say below about intentionality. In 20th century meta-ethics there have been two broad kinds of naturalist accommodation projects: realist and irrealist. Naturalist realists have typically held (i) that there are genuine moral facts and properties; and (ii) that these are identical to certain facts and properties also characterizable in non-moral terms. Some naturalist realists have held that moral sentences are actually synonymous with declarative sentences in non-moral, naturalistic, vocabulary. Herbert Spencer is an example of a philosophical thinker whose position is usually cited (e.g., by Moore 1903, ch. 2) as being of this kind; Spencer evidently held that ‘good’ is synonymous with something like ‘highly evolved’. A currently popular brand of realism, which Mark Timmons and I have elsewhere (Horgan and Timmons 1991, 1992a, 1992b) called “new-wave moral realism,” is exemplified by recent meta-ethical work by philosophers like Brink (1989), Boyd (1988), Railton (1986), and Sturgeon (1984). They hold that moral sentences express facts expressible in naturalistic language, and that moral properties are a species of natural properties. They deny, however, that moral sentences are synonymous with naturalistic sentences. They draw heavily on relatively recent work in philosophy of language, notably Putnam’s (1975) and Kripke’s (1980) writings on natural kind terms.

The dominant kind of metaphysically naturalist meta-ethical position in this century, however, has been moral irrealism. The so-called “non-cognitivism” of Ayer (1952), Stevenson (1946), and Hare (1952) has been especially influential. On such a view, moral sentences are held to be synonymous – or approximately synonymous – with non-moral, non-declarative sentences such as imperatives. (The “norm-expressivist” position concerning moral and epistemic discourse currently advocated by Allan Gibbard (1990) is also a version of non-cognitivism.) J. L. Mackie (1977) espoused a different kind of naturalist irrealism. Mackie held (i) that ordinary moral statements purport to express facts of an irreducibly normative kind, involving special properties that have “to-be-pursuedness” built into them, but (ii) that there are no such facts or properties.
Both kinds of moral naturalism do well, *prima facie*, with the external dimension of naturalistic accommodation; for, neither kind posits *non-natural* moral facts or properties. On the other hand, both kinds encounter *prima facie* problems with the internal dimension. Naturalist moral realism has difficulty accommodating the fact that moral *discourse* seems to be intrinsically action-guiding, to have “to-be-pursuedness” built into it. Naturalist moral irrealism has difficulty accommodating what Gibbard calls the “objective pretensions” of moral discourse: moral sentences purport to be fact-stating, and seem to have content that goes beyond mere attitude-expressing or command-giving content; and they are commonly thought to be *true* or *false*.

But although naturalistic meta-ethical views all face demanding internal-accommodation problems of one sort or another, external considerations meanwhile continue to exert a powerful influence on philosophical thought about matters moral. Few of us who call ourselves metaphysical naturalists are willing to posit a realm of *sui generis*, irreducible, moral facts and properties. As Mackie has rightly stressed, such putative facts and properties seem just intolerably *queer*, from the perspective of a naturalistic worldview. (G. E. Moore, famously, *did* posit irreducible moral properties. But he regarded himself as thereby repudiating a purely naturalistic metaphysics, and has been so regarded by others.)

My principal concern in this paper is the naturalistic accommodation of intentionality-involving discourse; this includes both semantic discourse and discourse about intentional mental states. But there are several reasons why I think it is important and useful to keep in mind the kinds of naturalistic accommodation strategies that have been pursued in meta-ethics. First, we do well to appreciate that there is such a thing as an *irrealist* accommodation program; accommodating a given mode of discourse does not necessarily mean including, within one’s ontology, entities answering to the apparent ontological commitments of that discourse.

Second, and closely related, is the fact that these irrealist programs are indeed *accommodation* programs, rather than *elimination* programs. (An elimination program repudiates not merely the ontology to which a given mode of discourse seems committed, but also the discourse itself.)
Whether or not it’s true that there are no atheists in foxholes, it is true that there are no eliminativists in meta-ethics — not in the analytic tradition, anyway. (I leave aside recent continental philosophy, about which I know little. But my impression is that Nietzsche considered it good to get “beyond good and evil,” and that Foucault considered bad the things he called “dangerous.” It is much easier to stop using the words ‘good’ and ‘bad’ than to stop making moral judgments.) Meta-ethical irrealists never claim that moral discourse is eliminable, or illegitimate, or replaceable by some naturalistic successor-discourse. Even Mackie, who holds that all affirmative moral statements are false because they are ontologically committed to non-moral facts and properties that do not exist, never suggests eliminating moral discourse; on the contrary, after setting forth his irrealist meta-ethical position in chapter 1 of Mackie (1977), he devotes the rest of the book to formulating and defending a specified normative ethical theory! Meta-ethical irrealists are invariably preservative irrealists, not eliminative irrealists.

Third is a fact about a kind of naturalist accommodation program one does not find in meta-ethics: viz., a position asserting that (i) there are irreducible, sui generis, moral properties that have-to-be-pursuedness built into them, (ii) these properties are supervenient on natural properties, and (iii) such supervenience renders the properties naturalistically kosher. There is a very good reason why one does not encounter such a position: viz., the utter implausibility of claim (iii). If the supervening properties and facts are themselves metaphysically queer from a naturalistic perspective, then so are the supervenience connections supposedly linking natural facts and properties to higher-level ones. Putative non-analytic, necessary, inter-level connections don't remove the queerness of the higher-level facts and properties, but actually compound it. Mackie was making essentially this point, I take it, in the following well known passage:

What is the connection between the natural fact that an action is a piece of deliberate cruelty — say, causing pain just for fun — and the moral fact that it is wrong? It cannot be an entailment, a logical or semantic necessity. Yet it is not merely that the two features occur together. The wrongness must somehow be ‘consequential’ or ‘supervenient’: it is wrong because it is a piece of deliberate cruelty. But just what in the world is signified by this ‘because’? (Mackie 1977, p. 44)
Moore, in fact, held that moral properties are supervenient on non-moral ones (although he did not use the word 'supervenient'); cf. Moore (1922, p. 261). But as already notes, Moore’s position is a non-naturalist metaphysic of morals, as he himself rightly said it was. As he realized, non-natural moral properties do not become naturalistically kosher merely by being supervenient on natural ones. The lesson is clear: Be wary of philosophers who brandish supervenience as the alleged key to naturalistic accommodation.

4. REALISM ABOUT INTENTIONALITY: THE REAL TASK OF NATURALISTIC ACCOMMODATION

Consider the passage from Jerry Fodor that opens this paper. In order to be both a metaphysical naturalist and a realist about the semantical and the intentional, he observes, one has to hold that intentional properties and facts are located in the natural order. Semantic and intentional properties need to be identical with certain natural properties, or at least supervenient on them. “Naturalizing,” for Fodor and for many other contemporary philosophers, is the project of giving a tractable specification, in nonintentional and nonsemantic vocabulary, of what is involved in a state’s being an intentional state with a specific content. Tractability is my own term; and the demand for it is implicit in his and others’ writings, rather than being on the surface. Roughly, a tractable specification is a relatively compact, relatively non-baroque, nondisjunctive, cognitively surveyable, formulation of sufficient conditions (for some philosophers, sufficient and necessary conditions). On Fodor’s own story, the most fundamental locus for intentional and semantic properties is the system of language-like mental representations posited by computational cognitive science:

[I]t’s the interpretation of the primitive nonlogical vocabulary of Mentalese that’s at the bottom of the pile according to the present view. Correspondingly, we would have largely solved the naturalization problem for a propositional-attitude psychology if we were to say, in nonintentional and nonsemantic idiom, what it is for a primitive symbol of Mentalese to have a certain interpretation in a certain context. (Fodor 1987, p. 98)

In recent years Fodor has put forward a series of proposed formulations of putative naturalistic sufficient conditions for Mentalese reference;
and other philosophers like Fred Dretske and Ruth Millikan have offered related proposals for a naturalist, realist, construal of mental intentionality.

What I will say here about such proposals will not turn on their details, but will be more general in scope. For the moment, let us assume that the proposals are to be wedded to a metaphysics of supervenience, rather than type-identity: semantic and intentional properties are supervenient on natural properties, and the “naturalizing” account specifies the supervenience relations. (Later we will consider what happens if these proposals are instead wedded to a metaphysics of property-identity.) I will make two preliminary points, and then get to the central point I want to focus on in this section.

First preliminary point: The thesis that semantic and intentional properties supervene on natural properties does not entail the existence of naturalistic sufficient conditions of the sort that Fodor and others seek to provide. For, things might be like this: although the intentional is supervenient upon the nonintentional, in general there is no way to tractably specify the nonsemantic, nonintentional, conditions that suffice for intentional phenomena. Although a physical supervenience base might always exist for any manifestation of aboutness, in general any adequate nonintentional, nonsemantic characterization of the supervenience base might be enormously baroque and complex. Perhaps, for instance, the supervenience base for the intentional content of a token thought (or token utterance, or token inscription) generally involves a good-sized chunk of spacetime extending well beyond the cognizer’s own body and well beyond the time at which the token thought occurs; perhaps it involves a rather gargantuan number of physico-chemical goings-on within that extended spatio-temporal region; and perhaps there isn’t any simple way to describe, in nonintentional and nonsemantic vocabulary, all the relevant aspects of this hugely complex supervenience base. Perhaps, in addition, the supervenience of the intentional on the nonintentional is largely a holistic matter – with the intentionality of thoughts, utterances, and inscriptions supervening not individually (one token at a time), but rather collectively, as part of the correct global intentional interpretation of a cognizer – or perhaps of the cognizer’s whole community or whole species. In short, it
might be that the search for tractably specifiable, cognitively surveyable, nonintentional and nonsemantic sufficient conditions for intentionality is utterly hopeless – and yet that the intentional supervenes upon the nonintentional nonetheless.

Second preliminary point: There are a variety of reasons for being sceptical about the very possibility of providing the kinds of tractably specifiable naturalistic conditions for intentionality that Fodor and others seek to provide. For one thing, there is no particular reason to expect such conditions, given that supervenience itself does not presuppose them. Moreover, proposals of this kind usually end up susceptible to counterexamples of one sort or another; inductive evidence based on past failures both in this arena and in other philosophical arenas where attempts at reductive analyses have been pursued, is that there always will be counterexamples to such proposals. In addition, it seems fairly likely that human semantic and intentional concepts, like most other human concepts, don’t have cleanly delineable necessary and sufficient conditions at all, not even vague ones; this general claim about the structure of human concepts is strongly suggested by work in cognitive science on concepts and categories by Eleanor Rosch and others (Rosch 1973, 1975, 1978; Rips 1975; Smith and Medin 1981). (These kinds of considerations are adumbrated at greater length in Stich (1992), Tye (1992), and Stich and Laurence (forthcoming).)

This brings me to the central point I want to emphasize. Return once again to the epigraph passage from Fodor, in which he emphasizes that aboutness will not be in the physicists’ eventual catalogue of the ultimate properties of things. In some sense of ‘ultimate’, he is surely right. Moreover, for anyone who professes to hold what Fodor calls a “physicalistic view of the world,” the non-ultimacy of intentionality should not be construed as merely a matter of supervenience upon the nonintentional. For, if certain inter-level supervenience facts are themselves sui generis and unexplainable, then the supervening properties will thereby qualify for inclusion on the list of ultimate and irreducible properties of things – supervenience notwithstanding. (From a physicalist/naturalist perspective, one reason to reject G. E. Moore’s meta-ethical position is his claim that there are certain synthetic necessary truths, of the form “Anything with natural property N is intrinsically valuable,”
that are utterly unexplainable and thus are metaphysically rock-bottom.)
So metaphysical physicalism/naturalism should not merely assert that
the intentional supervenes upon the nonintentional; it should also assert
that inter-level supervenience facts are (at least in principle) explain-
able, rather than being themselves included among the fundamental,
unexplainable, facts about the world.

Too little philosophical attention, it seems to me, has been directed at
exploring what kinds of explanations might be possible for inter-level
supervenience relations, and what kinds of criteria such explanations
should meet. Philosophical views (particularly those that are purportedly
physicalistic) that invoke supervenience without explaining it are
thereby deficient – which makes for a lot of deficiency in recent philoso-
phy. Recent naturalistic programs in the philosophy of mind have been
too stringent in one respect, and too lax in another. On one hand, it is
excessive to insist on tractably specifiable sufficient conditions for inten-
tionality; but on the other hand, it is not kosher to invoke supervenience
relations unless they are subject to naturalistically acceptable modes of
explanation. So some rethinking of programs is called for, especially
for those who seek a philosophical account that accommodates inten-
tionality within the natural order described by physical science.

For a realist about intentionality, the key task involves two inter-
related components. First is to characterize some mode (or modes) of
potential explanation for inter-level supervenience facts, and to argue
that it is a naturally acceptable mode of explanation. Second is
to make a case for the claim that such explanations are possible (at
least in principle) for physical/intentional supervenience facts. Prima
facie, this project looks pretty much orthogonal to the sort of “natu-
ralizing” that Fodor and others have been pursuing. On the one hand,
success at their project would not constitute a naturalistic explanation of
physical/intentional supervenience facts; rather, it would only constitute
a specification (or partial specification) of the facts that need explaining.
On the other hand, it also seems possible that things could turn out this
way: although (i) there are no tractably specifiable nonsemantic and
nonintentional sufficient conditions for intentional mental states (or for
intentionality or public languages), nevertheless (ii) the supervenience
of the intentional on the physical is indeed susceptible, in principle, to naturalistically acceptable modes of explanation.

It is worth dwelling for a moment on the interrelations between the two respective parts of the philosophical project just sketched, and on the resulting challenges. The first part is the characterizing of a naturalistically acceptable mode(s) of explanation. Here the problem is to limit the explanatory format(s) to explanatory resources that are kosher in context, rather than allowing the use of explanatory resources which in effect beg the explanatory question being asked; I will call this the standpoint problem. For instance, presumably it would not be kosher, in giving a naturalistic explanation of physical/intentional supervenience relations, to appeal to facts about people's beliefs or their intentions.

The second part is arguing that there exist suitably naturalistic explanations for physical/intentional supervenience relations. Here the problem is make plausible the contention that the available explanatory resources are rich enough to do the work required of them; I will call this the resource problem. Needless to say, the standpoint problem and the resource problem are directly intertwined: the more austere the explanatory resources, the worse the prospects for handling the resource problem; the more opulent the resources, the worse the prospects for handling the standpoint problem.

As I said, very little philosophical attention has been directed to the two-part task I have been describing here. One main point I want to emphasize in this paper is that much more attention should be given to it. The kind of supervenience that would serve the needs of naturalistic accommodation is naturalistically explainable supervenience. The existence of tractably specifiable sufficient conditions, of the sort sought by Fodor and others, is neither necessary nor sufficient for naturalistically explainable supervenience. So metaphysical naturalists who want to be realists about intentionality should redirect their attention to this issue. (For more on this, see Horgan 1993.)

So far I have been discussing the kind of naturalist realism that does not identify intentional and natural properties, but says instead that the former are supervenient on the latter. What about type/type identity theories? Virtually everything I have said carries over to them, mutatis mutandis. In particular, a problem still arises about how to
explain inter-level connections in a naturalistically acceptable way – although now the key questions are about inter-level linkages between terms and/or concepts. In virtue of what, one wants to know, does such-and-such physical relation, rather than various other candidate physical relations, count as the relation picked out by our term ‘reference’, and by the concept that term expresses? As Hilary Putnam in particular has emphasized, there are bound to be innumerable physical relations that are candidate reference-relations, each of which meets any operative “observational constraints” and also renders all the same sentences true (at every possible world). So if only one of these eligible physical relations counts as the right or intended reference relation, there had better be a naturalistically acceptable explanation of this fact. The really crucial accommodation task, for someone who holds that intentionality is identical to some physical relation, is to argue that such an explanation can be given.

5. DOUBTS ABOUT REALIST ACCOMMODATION

Elsewhere I have addressed the problem of giving naturalistic explanations of supervenience relations, first by myself (Horgan 1984) and then in collaboration with Mark Timmons (Horgan and Timmons 1992a). These papers propose a general format for explaining supervenience relations that goes roughly as follows: Certain families of higher-level properties (e.g., intentional mental properties) are jointly subject, as families, to certain semantic/conceptual constraints on their instantiability. Such constraints might include, for instance, the requirement that certain ceteris paribus generalizations (e.g., the most platitudinous ceteris paribus generalization of “folk psychology”) must come out true – or by and large true, anyway – whenever those properties are instantiated. Specific supervenience facts would be explainable if it would be possible in principle to show why all the semantic/conceptual constraints governing a family of higher-level properties are collectively satisfied by a family of lower-level realizing properties. (Timmons and I call such explanations ‘semantic constraint satisfaction explanations’, or SCS explanations.)
A guiding intuition behind the proposal of SCS explanations is this: “In explaining supervenience relations, we ought to be able to allow ourselves semantic/conceptual constraints governing higher-level terms and concepts; for, it is only insofar as higher-level discourse has determinate meaning that we can even ask sensibly which higher-level statements are true given a specification of the truths of physics.” But it now looks to me as though the SCS mode of explanation runs into serious troubles with both the standpoint problem and resource problem.

Concerning the standpoint problem, one big worry is that semantic constraints on human discourse are themselves determined in part by certain facts about the intentional mental states of language users – for instance, communicative intentions, intentions to refer, and the like. Thus, appealing to semantic/conceptual constraints in explaining physical/intentional supervenience relations seems to presuppose determinate intentional states of language-users, which seems not to be explanatorily kosher. (One way out of the worry, perhaps, would be to try regarding the explanatory resources not as facts about human terms and concepts, but rather as non-linguistic facts about the essences of higher-level properties. But now the concern arises that such facts themselves may not be naturalistically kosher.)

Concerning the resource problem, one big worry is that the sorts of constraints envisioned in SCS just are not rich enough to yield determinacy of physical/intentional supervenience relations. This problem is made especially vivid by Quine (1960, 1969) and Putnam (1981), who argue that theoretical and observational constraints grossly underdetermine any objective reference-relation between words and objects, or between neural/mental representations and objects. Arguably, there will be lots of mappings of words to objects that preserve all the constraints and yield all the same truths.

I do not want to assert here, flatly and definitively, that these kinds of problems cannot be overcome. Rather, I want to stress two principal morals of the discussion so far. First, it is time for philosophers to address the question whether naturalistically acceptable explanations can be given for supervenience relations generally, and for physical/intentional supervenience relations in particular. As yet, they have largely failed to see it as a problem, whereas in fact it ought to be quite central for
those who profess to be both metaphysical naturalists and realists about intentionality. Second, once one does address the question squarely, one finds that there are powerful prima facie reasons for believing, or at least strongly suspecting, that putatively objective, putatively determinate, physical/intentional supervenience relations cannot be explained in any naturalistically acceptable way.

Once again, these observations are virtually all applicable, mutatis mutandis, to a metaphysical position asserting that intentional properties are identical with certain physical properties rather than supervenient on them. It is very hard to see what would count, what could count, as a naturalistically acceptable explanation of the putative fact that such-and-such physical relation, rather than all the numerous other physical relations that meet all observational and theoretical constraints governing the term ‘reference’, counts as the genuine article, the real reference relation. My second epigraph quotation, from Hilary Putnam, nicely evokes the explanatory problem facing type-identity versions of naturalist intentional realism.

Although it is too soon to give up all hope that there can be naturalistically acceptable explanations of inter-level connections between physical and intentional properties, I think the prospects currently look rather bleak. So I think it is time for metaphysical naturalists to begin exploring a different approach to the accommodation of intentionality: preservative irrealism.

6. PRESERVATIVE IRREALISM

One way to be a naturalistic irrealist about intentionality, of course, is to be an eliminativist: give up the attempt at accommodation, and maintain that our intentional terms and categories ought to be eliminated and replaced. I myself find this suggestion untenable, not the least because of the hopeless-looking pragmatic paradoxes it evidently encounters. Intentional notions, including in particular those of “folk psychology,” appear to be utterly unavoidable, utterly indispensable, and hence ineliminable. Although I am prepared to argue at greater
length that eliminativism is not viable, I will not attempt to do so here; instead I will simply assume it.

It is very important to appreciate, however, that one can embrace intentional irrealism on naturalist grounds without embracing eliminativism about intentional discourse. One can seek to preserve and accommodate the discourse, rather than seeking to eliminate it. In this section I will sketch a version of preservation irrealism that I think deserves to be explored and developed.

6.1. Burdens of Irrealist Accommodation

As with other kinds of irrealist accommodation projects (e.g., those in meta-ethics), much of the philosophical burden involves internal aspects of accommodation, rather than external ones. A viable preservative irrealism ought to do adequate justice to facts like these:

(1) People ordinarily take many attributions involving intentionality to be true. The attributions include statements attributing semantic properties like meaning, reference, and truth itself; and also statements ascribing intentional mental states to persons.

(2) People believe that, ordinary vagueness aside, our sentences and our states of mind have determinate intentional properties, rather than being radically indeterminate in semantic content.

(3) People believe that the instantiation of intentional properties, in language and in thought, is an objective matter; it is not something that is determined, for instance, by the beliefs or attitudes of the person attributing the intentional properties.

(4) People believe that intentional mental properties are causal properties that figure in genuine causal explanations, and hence that token intentional mental states are causally efficacious qua mental.
In addition (and this is no easy task), a successful preservative irrealism would have to be conceptually stable; it must have the conceptual resources to avoid debilitating pragmatic paradoxes or outright logical inconsistencies.

6.2. Contextual Semantics

What the prospects are for an irrealist accommodation of intentionality depends, in good measure, on how one construes truth. Elsewhere (Horgan 1986a, 1986b, 1991) I have proposed and defended an approach to semantics, and to questions of language/world relations, that is intermediate between two prevalent orientations in recent philosophy – between (i) a position viewing truth as direct correspondence between language and the mind-independent, discourse-independent, world; and (ii) a position viewing truth as radically epistemic (as warranted assertibility, or “ideal” warranted assertibility). (The latter view often is wedded to global metaphysical irrealism, according to which there is no such thing as a discourse-independent, mind-independent, world at all.) These views might be called, respectively, referential semantics and pragmatist semantics (or, referentialism and pragmatism).

I first called this proposed intermediate position “language-game semantics,” later “psychologistic semantics,” but I no longer like either name. More recently Mark Timmons and I (Horgan and Timmons 1993; Timmons forthcoming) have called it contextual semantics, the name I will employ here. In briefly articulating it, and for related expository purposes below, I will borrow from Putnam the device of capitalizing terms and phrases like ‘object’, ‘property’, and ‘the world’; this makes it unambiguously clear that I mean to be talking about denizens of the mind-independent, discourse-independent, world – the world whose existence is denied by global irrealists.

The most fundamental theses of contextual semantics are the following: (1) Truth is correct assertibility. (2) Contrary to pragmatism, truth is not radically epistemic; for, correct assertibility is distinct from warranted assertibility, and even from “ideal” warranted assertibility. (3) Standards for correct assertibility are not monolithic within a language; instead they vary somewhat from one context to another, depending
upon the specific purposes our discourse is serving at the time. (Standards can vary not only from one mode of discourse to another, but also within a given mode of discourse.) (4) Contrary to global metaphysical irrealism, correct assertibility is ordinarily a joint product of two factors: (i) the contextually operative assertibility norms; and how things actually are in the WORLD. Yet (5) contrary to referentialism, our discourse often employs standards of correct assertibility under which a sentence can count as correctly assertible (i.e., as true) even if there are no OBJECTS or PROPERTIES in the WORLD answering to the sentence’s singular terms, unnegated quantifier expressions, or predicates.

On this view, there is a whole spectrum of ways that a sentence’s correct assertibility can depend upon THE WORLD. At one end of the spectrum are sentences whose assertibility norms, in a given context of usage, coincide with those laid down by referentialism; under these norms a sentence is true only if some unique constituent of THE WORLD answers to each of its singular terms, and at least one such entity answers to each of its unnegated existential-quantifier expressions. (Below I will call these maximally strict assertibility norms.) At the other end of the spectrum are sentences whose governing assertibility norms, in a given context, are such that those sentences are sanctioned as correctly assertible by the norms alone, independently of how things are with THE WORLD. (Sentences of pure mathematics are plausible candidates for this status.) And various intermediate positions are occupied by sentences whose correct assertibility, in a given context, does depend in part on how things are with THE WORLD, but where this dependence does not consist in direct correspondence between (i) the referential apparatus of the sentence (its singular terms, quantifiers, and predicates), and (ii) OBJECTS or PROPERTIES in THE WORLD.

As a plausible example of a statement that would ordinarily be governed by assertibility norms falling at an intermediate point in the spectrum just described, consider:

(B) Beethoven’s fifth symphony has four movements.

The correct assertibility of (B) probably does not require that there be some ENTITY answering to the term ‘Beethoven’s fifth symphony’, and
also answering to the predicate ‘has four movements’. Rather, under the operative assertibility norms, (B) is probably correctly assertible (i.e., true) by virtue of other, more indirect, connections between the sentence and THE WORLD. Especially germane is the behavior by Beethoven that we could call “composing his fifth symphony.” But a considerably wider range of goings-on is relevant too: in particular, Beethoven’s earlier behavior in virtue of which his later behavior counts as composing his fifth symphony; and also a broad range of human practices in virtue of which such behavior counts as “composing a symphony” in the first place.

If contextual semantics is right, so that truth is intimately bound up with assertibility norms, then meaning too is intimately bound up with these norms. Intuitively and pre-theoretically, meaning is what combines with how THE WORLD is to yield truth. Thus, if truth is correct assertibility under operative assertibility norms, then the role of meaning is played by the assertibility norms themselves. So matters of meaning are matters of operative assertibility norms.

6.3. Irrealist Accommodation via Contextual Semantics

Among the advantages of this general approach to semantics are the potential resources it provides for accommodating various forms of discourse within a naturalistic worldview. In particular, it greatly expands the possibilities for irrealist accommodation. Take sentences like (B), for example. Evidently, an adequate semantics for sentences like (B) should be semantically nonreductionist; for, no plausible-looking way of systematically paraphrasing such sentences (“regimenting” them, in Quine’s phrase) into a more austere idiom is even remotely in sight. If the notion of truth works in the way just characterized, then even though semantic reductionism evidently is not tenable, we can still accommodate symphony discourse as literally true, and can accommodate assertions like (B) as knowable, without being forced to populate THE WORLD with SYMPHONY TYPES.

On the other hand, if we try construing (B) in terms of referentialism, and also accept that (B) is true, then we must try accommodating SYMPHONY TYPES, tokenable by concrete performance-events, within
a naturalistic metaphysics; and we must face the correlative task of accommodating them in a manner that allows for genuine knowledge about such ENTITIES. This is no small task, especially since there will be strong theoretical pressure to consign these putative, abstract, ENTITIES to Plato’s non-spatio-temporal HEAVEN – which in turn will seriously exacerbate the task of giving a naturalistically acceptable account of how humans can know about them (and can refer to them).

So if contextual semantics is right, then prospects for an irrealist accommodation of intentionality look much brighter and promising than they do relative to referential semantics. For, the general perspective on language/WORLD relations embodied in contextual semantics can now be brought to bear on discourse about matters intentional itself – semantic discourse included. I will now set forth, in fairly staccato fashion, the broad outlines of how I think such a story might go.

First, ordinary statements about matters semantic and intentional can be true (correctly assertible), without there being any semantic or intentional FACTS. Although the correct assertibility of intentional statements will indeed depend upon how things are with the WORLD, the relevant dependence need not be direct language/WORLD correspondence. Rather, the assertibility norms that govern semantic discourse and mentalistic discourse, in ordinary contexts of usage, will render intentional statements correctly assertible by virtue of considerably less direct linkages to the WORLD than the kind of linkages required under referentialism. Thus, just as

(B) Beethoven’s fifth symphony has four movements

can be true (in ordinary contexts, under operative assertibility norms) even if there are no SYMPHONIES, so likewise statements like the following can be true (in ordinary contexts, under operative assertibility norms governing semantic discourse and mentalistic discourse), even if there are not intentional FACTS, either semantic or mentalistic:

(T) That Beethoven’s fifth symphony has four movements is true.

(G) ‘George Bush’ refers to George Bush.
320

TERENCE HORGAN

(Z) Zoe Baird is thinking about the illegal alien she hired as a nanny.

The same goes for ‘fact’-talk:

(F) That Beethoven’s fifth symphony has four movements is a fact.

Second, this first point applies, reflexively, to talk about assertibility norms and about truth. Although there are assertibility norms, there are no ASSERTIBILITY NORMS. Although various statements are correctly assertible, there is no such thing as CORRECT ASSERTIBILITY. Although there is intentionality, there is no INTENTIONALITY. Talk of norms, like all talk, is itself governed by contextually operative assertibility norms; and the norms that ordinarily operate, when we use such talk, are not maximally strict norms.

Third, there are multiple stances we can and do adopt as language-users, depending on which semantic norms we are accepting in any given context. Some of these stances will be relatively more “detached” stances than others, and some more “engaged.” The more detached the stance, the closer are the operative assertibility norms to maximal strictness.

Fourth, when we reflect philosophically on humans as physico-chemical systems or as featherless bipeds, it becomes appropriate to adopt a relatively detached stance in which natural-science modes of discourse are regarded as non-problematic, but semantic and intentional-mental modes of discourse get called into question. From within this highly rarefied perspective, the idea that aboutness or reference could be part of the Natural order begins to look intolerably queer – a queerness well expressed by Putnam in my second opening epigraph. What is correctly assertible, under the contextually operative assertibility norms, are remarks like this: “There is no such thing as aboutness in Nature; humans, being parts of nature, are just highly complex organisms, emitting lots of vocal noises and moving around in highly complex ways.”

Fifth, in the vast majority of discourse contexts, people think and talk from within a much more engaged stance, which means that the contextually operative semantic norms governing correct assertibility
are less strict. Indeed, as language-using, communitarian, creatures we must inevitably go about the business of life from a highly engaged normative stance—a personal stance, one might call it—in which semantic norms, moral norms, and norms of rationally all come into play and are intimately interconnected. To regard humans as persons involves (among other things) construing them as having intentional mental states with determinate content; construing their behavior not merely as raw motion but as intentional action; construing their vocal noises as speech acts with determinate semantic content; and ascribing them moral rights and duties. Ordinarily, the contextually operative semantic norms will be ones appropriate to this personal stance: they will work in such a way that our semantic and intentional attributions are often correctly assertible (i.e., true). Thus, since there is no such thing as INTENTIONALITY, severely austere semantic norms, norms in which the contextually variable parameters are at or near maximal strictness, are not at all typical in human discourse; they are very much the exception.

Sixth, there are obvious psychological limits in the extent to which humans can adopt highly detached stances, even when they step back from the business of life and engage in theoretical or philosophical reflection. Indeed, there is an inevitable cognitive instability, a kind of conceptual schizophrenia, that sets in. On one hand, we take up a stance whereby we regard humans as complex organisms, their vocal output as noise, and their inner goings-on as physico-chemical; humans, so regarded, do not “act and judge from within stances,” because they do not perform actions or make judgments at all. On the other hand, even in so regarding ourselves and others we are still taking a stance; we are still thinking, and still talking.

Seventh, in light of the preceding considerations, the irrealist accommodation of intentionality is not, and cannot be, a straightforward matter of reconciling the Naturalistic image of humankind with what Sellars called the Manifest image. Direct reconciliation is unattainable, because intentionality cannot be located within the Naturalistic image. There is no single setting of the contextually variable parameters in semantic assertibility norms—no single score in the language game—under which the claims of both images are true (i.e., correctly assertible). Instead,
irrealist accommodation it is a matter of joining the two images: showing how they can co-exist in our overall conceptual scheme without being directly compatible, without being directly incompatible either, and without either one being mistaken or dispensable. The key to this, I am suggesting, lies in the workings of the contextual parameters in assertibility norms. In certain rarified contexts of inquiry in which the parameters are closer than usual to maximal strictness, statements like ‘There is intentionality’ and ‘There are norms’ are false; correct assertibility requires quite direct correspondence with language and THE WORLD, and nothing in THE WORLD answers directly to ‘intentionality’ or ‘norm’. But in the vast majority of more ordinary contexts, the contextual parameters are such that those statements are true; the way things are with THE WORLD suffices, under the operative norms, for correct assertibility. (Recall again statements about Beethoven’s fifth symphony.) To put it, once again, in a single statement whose schizophrenic structure reflects the situation: There is intentionality but no INTENTIONALITY; there are norms but no NORMS; there are language and thought but no LANGUAGE or THOUGHT.

In sum, it appears that contextual semantics holds out considerable promise for underwriting a version of preservative irrealism about intentionality that goes a long way toward meeting the burdens of accommodation described in section 6.1. Concerning items (1)–(4) of section 6.1, the leading idea is that THE WORLD, together with operative assertibility norms, typically combine to render statements about the semantic and the intentional correctly assertible, i.e., true. Given the norms, it is often a determinate and objective matter which such statements are true and which are not; i.e., the norms plus the WORLD jointly yield determinate correct assertibility. And, although I have not discussed this here, I think it is also plausible that under contextually operative assertibility norms, mentalistic causal and causal-explanatory claims are frequently true too; there can be mental causation without MENTAL CAUSATION. (Also, there is evidently an important difference between semantic and intentional-mental statements on one hand, and moral statements on the other: viz., that the former, but not the latter, typically get determinate assertibility status solely on the basis of semantic assertibility-norms plus THE WORLD. Moral statements
generally acquire determinate assertibility status only within a doubly engaged perspective in which one accepts not only the semantic norms governing one's discourse, but certain moral norms as well; cf. Horgan and Timmons 1993.)

What about conceptual stability? Obviously, preservative irrealism cannot claim to offer the simplest kind of conceptual stability, the kind in which internal conceptual tensions are all resolved and all components of the position get directly reconciled with one another. But preservative irrealism perhaps exhibits a more subtle kind of conceptual stability even so. The matter is complex and in need of further investigation, but the sort of stability we might expect would be a dynamic "conceptual equilibrium" rather than a static one: different parts of the overall philosophical story would inevitably get told under different operative assertibility norms, with this oscillation through "norm space" being explicitly acknowledged within the story itself. (My alternating use of capitalized and uncapsalized expressions in this paper, for instance, has been a way of explicitly flagging such score-changes in the language game.)

6.4. Why This Kind of Preservative Irrealism Is Not Instrumentalism

It is not instrumentalism because it asserts that statements attributing semantic and intentional properties, even statements ascribing causal/explanatory efficacy to such properties, are (in ordinary assertion contexts, under the assertibility norms operative in those contexts) true.

It is also not a philosophical position that proscribes the use of intentional notions in cognitive science or the other special sciences. On the contrary, the position can allow that in many scientific contexts (and not only in everyday contexts), the operative assertibility norms are less than maximally strict; hence it can also allow that in some scientific contexts, the operative assertibility norms permit the attribution of semantic and intentional content.

Even physics appears to be governed by assertibility norms that are less than maximally strict – if only because of the extent to which the laws of physics quantify over abstract entities like numbers and infinite-dimensional vectors. What sort of ONTOLOGY to adopt, if one
subscribes both to metaphysical naturalism and to contextual semantics, is a complex matter that I have begun to address elsewhere (Horgan 1986a, 1986b, 1991, 1994). Here I will just say this: although assertibility norms do perhaps become stricter, for the most part, as one “drops levels” in the direction of fundamental physics, I suspect that it is rare indeed to encounter assertibility norms under which true statements may only quantify over what there really IS.

NOTE

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