

GHOLAM REZA A'AWANI

INTENTIONALITY IN HUSSERL AND MULLA SADRA

One of the main problems in modern philosophy, especially in the phenomenological movement, is the problem of intentionality. It was first proposed by Brentano as the characteristic feature of mental phenomena and later developed and completed by his student Edmund Husserl, who made it a fully-fledged philosophical theory. Even if the theory of intentionality is sometimes traced back to medieval authors such as Thomas Aquinas, Alexander Hales, Duns Scotus and others, the Islamic contribution to the problem is rarely acknowledged and, even when mentioned, it is cursorily dismissed as peripheral and insignificant.

The significance of Islamic philosophy with respect to the problem of intentionality is twofold. First, one can consider the problem with a view to the influence it has exerted in the mainstream current of the Western philosophy up to the modern era.¹ Second, one can trace the issue from its early inception in Islamic philosophy down to its later developments, especially in the Transcendent Theosophy of Mullā Sadrā. It is our aim in this paper to cast a cursory glance at the problem of intentionality and shed some light on the discussion of intentionality in Mullā Sadrā, which, so far as I know, has not been made the subject of a deep and serious study.

The word 'intentionality' is derived from the Latin infinitive '*intendere*' (to point to, to be directed in toward, to mean, to aim at). The idea is very significant in Stoic and neo-Platonic philosophy. The idea of '*eutonia*' is a central conception in Stoic thought in which the ruling faculty "*to hegemonikon*" is the vehicle or the bearer of "*Tonos*". The Stoic philosopher, Seneca, rendered, '*tonos*' and '*eutonia*' as '*intentio*' into Latin and described it as "*motus animi*."²

The word '*intentio*' is widely used in the Latin translations of the works of Muslim philosophers, especially Avicenna. In the Latin translation of his works, '*intentio*' is often used as a rendering of the Arabic word '*ma'na*' (meaning). It is used more than hundred times in the book of Metaphysics of *Shifa*. '*Intentio*' is moreover used rarely for the rendition of some other Arabic words such as '*gharad*' (purpose), '*maqsud*' (aim, something aimed at), '*qasd*' (intent, purpose). We also frequently find the following Latin expressions: '*finis intentus*' (*al-ghayah al-maqsudah*); '*intendere*' (*ana*); '*intendere dicere*,' '*intendo dicere*' (*ana, aani*);

intendere (arada), 'intentio generandi' (al-inayah), 'intentio non-esendi' (al-ma'na al-adami), 'intentus' (al-maqsud), 'Ex intentione' (bi-l-qasd); 'Intendens' (qasid), 'agens secundum intentionem suam' (al-fa'il al-qasid).³

In Avicenna, other than the directedness of the mind towards the object and the presence of the formal reality of things in the mind as an intelligible reality, intentionality has an additional meaning with respect to Divine agency in the world. According to Avicenna, God is *fa'il bi-l-Inayah*, that is He creates the world through *intentio generandi* (al-Inayah) or through generating intentionality. Everything is present in Divine Knowledge, and through sheer intentional causality God brings things into existence. Human intentionality is different from Divine intentionality in that the latter is existentiating, creative and infinite. Unlike human intentionality, God's intentional creation of one thing does not preclude that of all other things.⁴

Among the scholastic philosophers of the thirteenth century, 'intention' is almost synonymous with '*conceptus*,' i.e., the intelligible content of an idea, abstracted from objects, which makes an intelligible comprehension of them possible. It is also synonymous with '*species intelligibilis*' and '*species impressa*.' Contrariwise, it can also designate the formal principle of the intelligible content of cognitive acts. Thomas Aquinas, for example, makes a distinction between that with which we know (*id quo cognoscimus* = *species intelligibilis*), on the one hand, and what we know (*id quod cognoscimus* = *verbum mentis*, *conceptio intellecta*, that is the intentional content) on the other. *Intentio intellecta* is "that which the intellect, in itself conceives of the intelligible things (*id quod intellectus in se ipso concipit de re intellecta*)."⁵ Thomas, like many other scholastics, sets *ens (esse) intentionalis* against *ens (ess) realis*. Also very significant is the distinction that he makes between *intentio prima formalis* and *intentio secunda formalis*, a distinction going back to Avicenna which can be traced down to Husserl, on the one hand, and Mullā Sadrā on the other.

According to Aquinas, the first formal intention is the direct act of the intellect, which directly perceives its object (*Prima intentio formalis, est actus intellectus directus, id est, quo objectum suum percipit directe*). The second formal intention is the reflexive act of the intellect, by which through the act of reflection, through the act of reflection, we know something else (*secundo intentio formalis est actus intellectus reflexus, id est quo aliquid per replexionem cognoscimus*). The first and second formal intentions are set against the first and second objective intentions. The first objective intention is everything that is every object outside our intellect, which we know by the direct act (*Prima intentio obiectiva est omne id, quod per actum directum cognoscitur*). The second objective intention, on the other hand, is all that we know by the reflective act of the mind (*secunda intentio obiectiva est omne id, quod per actum reflexum intellectus cognoscitur*).

It is Brentano, the youngest brother of Eudemus and Theophrastus, and the most beloved by the father, as he calls and appraises himself,⁵ who revived the problem of intentionality in the nineteenth century. Trying to locate the locus of truth and untruth, Brentano came to the conclusion that it could not be found in physical substances and processes, but in the mind and mental phenomena. Things cannot be characterized as true or false. Rather, it is the totality of conscious or mental phenomena which can be qualified as such. We can, Brentano maintained, group

mental phenomena under a single generic class. If they are united in a single class we can ask about their essential distinguishing feature that differentiates them from the rest of phenomena. Brentano found such an essential feature in intentionality. Conscious phenomena are intentional, that is they refer, are related or directed toward something outside the mind. Any awareness is an awareness of some object. Physical or material objects, on the other hand, are not intentional in that they are what they are and as such are not related to, nor indicate, anything. Brentano, moreover, made the further important statement that the *relata* of consciousness may be non-existent. When, for example, I imagine a unicorn, it no doubt exists in my mind without having any reference to something in the outside world. Therefore, when I imagine something, it might have no analogue in the external world and might only refer to the image in my mind. It has, in other words, pure intentional existence. To be true, non-intentional objects must have a referent in the external world. Brentano, by emphasizing intentionality as a characteristic feature of mental phenomena, brought about a decisive change in the analysis of the contents of consciousness and paved the way for his student, Edmund Husserl.⁶

According to Husserl, phenomenology as a philosophical theory of consciousness, is simply a theory of intentionality. For him, intentionality expresses the fundamental property of consciousness and all phenomenological problems are related to it. In *Ideas*, he defines intentionality as "the peculiarity of experiences; to be conscious of something." Thus, intentionality is often characterized as the "directedness" of consciousness. In the *Logical Investigations*, Husserl writes that intentional experiences have the peculiarity of relating in various ways to presented objects. An object is 'meant' (*gemeint*) or 'aimed at' (*abgezielt*) in them. Each intentional act, such as perceiving, judging, hoping, wishing and so on, 'aims at' or is 'directed towards' something.⁷ Husserl, again, refers to mental phenomena, which are intentional, as "acts of consciousness" or simply as "acts," which is a shorthand for "intentional phenomena." He shunned the term 'mental phenomenon' and wrote instead, of "intentional experiences." He used the adjective 'intentional' named the essence common to the class of experiences that he wished to mark off, the distinctive quality of intention, of relating to what is objective. As a briefer expression, he turned to the term 'act.'

Husserl excludes from the notion of "act" any "extra-experiential" or non-phenomenological elements. By the "act of consciousness," Husserl means just the component of the intentional experience that the subject can discern when "reflecting" on his experience, excluding all the empirical facts about the intended object. This fact is all too important to remember, especially with respect to perception. In ordinary usage, perceptual notions encompass ingredients that Husserl would not include in his theory of perception. When, for example, I say that "I see a lantern," I might be referring to my visual experience "of" something, or I might be alluding to the physical or causal relation between the subject of experience and the perceived object. In this case, 'see' refers to some extra-experiential component, related to the physical side of perception. Here 'see' is used objectively and non-phenomenologically and refers to the physical relationship existing between me and the lantern.

Asian Migrants and Education

The Tensions of Education in Immigrant Societies and
Among Migrant Groups

Charney, M.W.; Yeoh, B.; Tong Chee Kiong (Eds.)

2003, XX, 224 p., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-1-4020-1336-2