

## SUSTAINING ACTUALISM

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In “Naturalism, Actualism, and Ontology” (1998), James Tomberlin’s challenges actualists to show how

(1) Ponce de Leon searched for the fountain of youth

can be true without Ponce de Leon being related to some nonactual individual. I responded in “Putting Metaphysics First” (1998b) by drawing on the representational theory of the mind (“RTM”) and the Quinean view that sentences like (1), involving intentional verbs, are similar to propositional attitude ascriptions. In “How Not to be an Actualist” (this volume) Tomberlin takes me to be parsing the opaquely construed (1) as

(1\*) Ponce de Leon searched for the mental token with the meaning of purportedly referring by the mode of ‘fountain of youth’,

thus identifying *searching for* with a relation that holds between agents and mental tokens. Tomberlin’s objection then is, in effect, that just as (1) is true even though the *object* that its definite description purports to refer to is nonactual, we can, as he ingeniously shows, come up with a sentence along the lines of (1\*) that is true even though the *mental token* its definite description purports to refer to is nonactual. (His example concerns *wanting to study* not *searching for*, but that is of no significance.) So we have not really answered his challenge: all we have done is turn the problem of apparently searching for a nonactual object into the problem of apparently searching for a nonactual mental token.

Tomberlin has misinterpreted me in two ways. First, my view is that (1) is made true by Ponce de Leon being in a functional relation to *a* mental token—not *the* mental token—with the meaning of purportedly referring by the mode of ‘fountain of youth’. Second, and more important, I do not identify the functional relation in question with the relation of *searching for* (p. 500–1). Indeed,

the view that *searching for* is a relation between agents and mental tokens seems implausible if not absurd. Surely when I search for my pen, even in the opaque sense, I am not searching for a mental token! So (1\*) is not my parsing of (1), Tomberlin's objection fails, and actualism is sustained.

Still, his objection has made two things apparent. First, I should have been more explicit that my view was not the identity-of-relation view he criticizes. My claim that it is "doubtless inappropriate to *call*...[the functional relation] "the searching relation" (p. 501) is too weak. If it *were* appropriate to call it "the searching relation" then it would *be* the searching relation and then the view would be open to Tomberlin's objection. Second, since *searching for* is not the functional relation, what is it? This is an interesting question that RTM needs to address.

The question generalizes. If we reject the identity-of-relation view for *searching for* then presumably we must also reject it for propositional attitudes, given the claimed similarity between sentences involving intentional verbs and propositional attitude ascriptions. So we must dismiss the view that *believing* is a functional relation between agents and mental tokens. Of course, the identity view does not seem as implausible for *believing* as it does for *searching for* but it surely does for other propositional attitudes. Thus it is just as implausible to think that when I expect that the Yankees will win I am expecting a mental token as it is that when I search for Mary I am searching for a mental token; or, indeed, as it is that when I expect Mary I am expecting a mental token. It seems then that we should reject the identity-of-relations view for attitudes. Then RTM needs to say what the attitudes are.

At the core of my RTM view is the claim that the psychological reality underlying the truth of (the opaquely construed) (1) is: Ponce de Leon stands in a certain functional relation to a mental token with a certain meaning. Analogously, the psychological reality underlying the truth of

(2) Ralph believes that Ortcutt is a spy

is: Ralph stands in a certain functional relation to a mental token with a certain meaning.<sup>1</sup> Call the former relation "*S*" and the former meaning "*MI*"; call the latter relation "*B*" and the latter meaning "*M2*". So:

(1S) Ponce de Leon *Ss* an *MI* token

(2B) Ralph *Bs* an *M2* token.

What has (1S) got to do with (1), and (2B), with (2)? More generally, what have the facts according to RTM got to do with what we ordinarily ascribe to the mind with the likes of (1) and (2)? I think that the actualist has to choose between three answers.

1. One answer takes *searching for* and *believing* to be relations to intentional objects that hold *in virtue of* relations to mental tokens. So, (1) asserts

that Ponce de Leon searches for a certain intentional object, <the fountain of youth>. He does so in virtue of (1S). (2) asserts that Ralph believes a certain intentional object, the proposition <Ortcutt is a spy>. He does so in virtue of (2B). This is neat but it raises three worries.

First, the answer is committed to intentional objects. What are they? Obviously we cannot claim that they are merely *possible* objects, for that would abandon actualism. The usual view is that they are actual objects but abstract, outside space and time. But many of us think that such objects are “creatures of darkness.” Second it is unclear, to say the least, *how* a person’s relation to such an abstract object can hold in virtue of a relation to a mental token. Third, the answer demands that transparent ascriptions be treated very differently from opaque ones. If (1) is to be true, it must be opaque. But sentences containing intentional verbs can be transparent. Consider, for example,

(3) Bob searched for his missing daughter.

This can be construed transparently so that it would not be true if Bob had no daughter and could be true whatever the description under which he sought his daughter. The natural thing to say is that the transparent (3) ascribes a relation between Bob and his daughter. Yet, on the answer we are considering, the opaque (3) ascribes a relation between Bob and an intentional object. Transparent ascriptions must of course be different from opaque ones but this difference seems too great to be plausibly explained.

2. I prefer an answer that denies that ‘searching for’ and ‘believing’ are simply relative terms and that *searching for* and *believing* are relations. Rather, we should think of (1S) and (2B) as paraphrases for (1) and (2) respectively, paraphrases that demonstrate the dual function of ‘searching for’ and ‘believing’ (cf. Quine 1960: 154). One function is to specify the appropriate relation, *S* or *B*, and is therefore the function of a relative term. But the other function is that of a quantifier, “supplying the indefiniteness” of ‘an *M1* token’ and ‘an *M2* token’.<sup>2</sup> The meanings *M1* and *M2* are, of course, specified by ‘the fountain of youth’ and ‘that Ortcutt is a spy’, respectively.

From this perspective, although it is appropriate enough to ask about the natures of *S* and *B*, it is not appropriate to ask about the natures of *searching for* and *believing*. Asking that reflects the mistaken view that they are relations.

How does this view handle the difference between opaque and transparent ascriptions? Take (3) as our example. If (3) is opaque then it is true if Bob *Ss* a token with the meaning of purportedly referring by the mode of ‘his missing daughter’. If it is transparent then it is true if Bob *Ss* a token with the meaning of referring to his missing daughter. On my preferred answer, the only difference between the two construals of (3) lies in the meaning specified by ‘his missing daughter’, hence in the meaning of the token that Bob has to be related to for (3) to be true. ‘Searched for’ is univocal, part relative term and part quantifier on both construals. On the opaque construal (3) affirms a relation to a

token than could hold even if Bob has no missing daughter; see (1). On the transparent construal (3) affirms a relation to a token that could hold only if Bob has a missing daughter, for the token could not have the meaning of referring to a missing daughter unless Bob had one. Although the transparent (3) does not *primarily* affirm a relation between Bob and his daughter, we can take it as *derivatively* doing so, for it could not be true unless a token in his head referred to her.

3. The previous two answers each allow the facts according to RTM to support what we ordinarily ascribe to the mind; so (1) and (2) can be true. I conclude by mentioning an answer that removes that support, making (1) and (2) false. The answer follows answer 1 in taking *searching for* and *believing* to be relations to intentional objects. So (1) would be true if Ponce de Leon stood in the *searching for* relation to <the fountain of youth> and (2) if Ralph stood in the *believing* relation to <Orcutt is a spy>. The answer differs from 1 in not supposing that (1) holds in virtue of (1S) nor (2) in virtue of (2B). Rather the answer claims that (1) and (2) do not hold because there are no intentional objects. (1) and (2) are convenient manners of speaking but, when the chips are down, must be abandoned in favor of (1S) and (2B). This is revisionist but it does not seem objectionably so to me. It is an acceptable fall-back if linguistics tells us that answer 2 does not work.<sup>3</sup>

My original response to Tomberlin's challenge sustains actualism but showing how it does has raised an interesting question about the relation between RTM and what we ordinarily ascribe to the mind.<sup>4</sup>

## Notes

1. Strictly speaking this applies only to "core" beliefs not to beliefs one has but one has not entertained.
2. I aired this idea in my 1996, p. 216. The view that the underlying structure of a sentence might contain a quantifier not visible on the surface is not surprising. There is so much underlying syntax. Thus linguists find an underlying quantifier in 'He ate' (as Georges Rey reminded me) and Lepore and Ludwig (2000) have argued that complex demonstratives (like 'that dog') have underlying quantifiers.
3. The three answers parallel suggestions made by Eugene Mills in his critical discussion (1998) of my *Coming to Our Senses* (1996). The present discussion shows that my response to his criticism (1998a: 397–8) was far too harsh. He was right to be puzzled by RTM. And I was wrong to say that "nothing much hinges" on whether we call the functional relation that I am here calling "*B*" "believing." The discussion raises the question: What is the *common* view of where RTM stands on this issue? I don't know but I suspect that my earlier failure to address the issue carefully is typical. Georges Rey's masterly presentation (1997) of RTM, under the name "CRTT" (short for "Computational/Representational Theory of Thought"), includes remarks that are suggestive of the identity-of-relation view. Thus, he talks of CRTT attempting "to *analyze* propositional attitudes" (p. 209; my emphasis), and claims that "hoping, imagining, wishing, dreading, believing, and preferring that *p* consist in different computational relations to a sentence that expresses the proposi-

tion [that p]" (p. 210; my emphasis). Still, there is no clear commitment to the identity view. And he talks often of CRTT "capturing" the attitude states which could well be answer 1 or 2.

4. I am grateful to Hartry Field and Georges Rey for comments.

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