Something about the Question of Aboutness. Comments on Crane

Davide Bordini
Department of Philosophy
University of Fribourg
davide.bordini@gmail.com

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Abstract. What makes any intentional state about something? Call this the Question of Aboutness (QA). In his article, Crane discusses and criticizes Putnam's argument for the assumption that a plausible theory of intentionality should answer QA. Crane focuses on the crucial premise: the claim that what goes for physical representations goes for mental representations. Accepting such a claim, Crane argues, depends on one's commitment to physicalism or anti-psychologism, two substantial and controversial assumptions one is not forced to accept. Hence, he concludes, the requirement of answering QA should not be imposed as a constraint on theories of intentionality. In my commentary, I do three things. First, *contra* Crane, I argue that Putnam's crucial premise can be accepted *regardless* of one's commitment to physicalism or anti-psychologism. Second, I sketch an alternative way of justifying that premise on purely methodological grounds. This leads to an improved version of Putnam's argument. Third, borrowing Kriegel's distinction between subjective and objective mental representation, I sketch a way of resisting the improved version of Putnam's argument. However, I argue, that is not enough to prevent some version of QA from arising. So, an answer to QA (or some version of it) still constrains theories of intentionality.

Keywords: Intentionality, mental representation, subjective vs. objective mental representation, aboutness.

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1. Introduction

What makes it the case that any intentional mental state is about something? Following Crane (this volume), let us call this the *Question of Aboutness* (henceforth, QA). In contemporary philosophy of mind, QA is often taken to be a question any plausible explanation of intentionality should reply to. This is what Crane calls the *Aboutness Assumption* (AA):

(AA) Anything that could count as a plausible explanation of intentionality must answer the question of aboutness.

But why should QA be answered in the first place? Isn't intentionality itself the aboutness that makes mental states *representations of* something else? And isn't it an intrinsic, essential feature of (at least some) mental states? What is then the point of raising QA and imposing an answer to it as a constraint on a plausible explanation of intentionality?

Crane suggests that those who raise QA and accept (AA) tend to think of intentionality as something elusive and mysterious, which must be explained and illuminated in terms of something else. In his article, he claims that this attitude stems from a widespread way of reasoning, paradigmatically exemplified by Putnam's (1981) famous argument against the view that mental states represent intrinsically. Roughly, the argument goes something like this. Crawling on the sand, an ant happens to trace a line that looks like a caricature of Winston Churchill. Is the configuration of lines traced by the ant in the send a *picture of* Churchill? Putnam replies negatively. Nothing *in that configuration of lines* makes it *about*—i.e., *a representation of*—Churchill. Granted, it *resembles* Churchill. But resemblance is neither sufficient nor necessary for representation. This suggests that pictures, words, etc., do not have *intrinsic* representational powers. Now, Putnam (1981: 3) maintains, 'what goes for physical pictures also goes for mental images, and for mental representations in general; mental representations no more have a necessary connection with what they represent than physical representations do.' So, they do not represent intrinsically either. Consequently, just as a legitimate question arises as to what makes words or pictures representations, so a legitimate question arises as to what makes mental states representations.

According to Crane, the argument can be reconstructed as follows:

PUTNAM'S ARGUMENT

(1) No physical representation (pictures, words, etc.) represents intrinsically.
(2) What goes for physical representations goes for mental representations.
(3) Therefore, no mental representation represents intrinsically.
(4) Therefore, mental representations must represent via some non-intrinsic connection.

Crane's primary aim is to show that such an argument gives no compelling reason to ask QA and accept (AA). He argues that to accept (2), the crucial premise, one must assume physicalism or a semantic conception of intentionality—which he calls anti-psychologism. However, he continues, those are both substantial assumptions that one is not forced to make. Moreover, they make the argument *redundant*: moving from physicalism or anti-psychologism, one does not really need Putnam's argument. Given that, Crane concludes, the

requirement of answering QA is tied to substantial and controversial assumptions. So, it should not be imposed as a general constraint on a plausible theory of intentionality.

My commentary focuses on Crane's discussion of Putnam's argument in relation to QA and, in particular, on the following connected claims:

(C1) Accepting (2) requires one to assume physicalism or anti-psychologism;
(C2) Answering QA 'is not a general philosophical requirement independent of more specific metaphysical views.' (Crane this volume)

I respectfully disagree with both and articulate my disagreement in three points—somewhat connected in my mind, but quite independent in principle. First (§3), taking for granted Crane's own reconstruction of the justification of (2), I argue that (2) can be accepted regardless of one's commitment to physicalism or anti-psychologism. Second (§4), I sketch an alternative—and I argue better—way of justifying (2) on purely methodological grounds. Together with an improved version of Putnam's argument, that provides more general and widely acceptable reasons to raise and answer QA. Third (§5), borrowing Kriegel's (2014) distinction between subjective and objective mental representation, I create a presumption against (2). While that provides us with a way of resisting the improved version of Putnam's argument, it is not enough to prevent some version of QA from arising—or so I will argue. But let me first quickly recap how Crane reconstructs the justification of (2).

2. The justification of (2) according to Crane

(2) states that what goes for physical representations (words, pictures, etc.) goes for mental representations, too. Crane suggests the following way of reading this premise:

(2*) What is true about physical representations *with respect to their representational powers* is also true of mental representations.

What backs up (2*)? In the case of physical representations, we have something like lines, shapes or signs. None of them are intrinsically representational, but they do the job of representing X in virtue of some contingent relation that they bear to X. In other words, physical representations are such that we can distinguish the represen*er* (the vehicle of the

representation) from what is represent*ed* (the content). To accept (2*), one must believe that the same holds for mental representations: there must be some non-intrinsically-representational mental representers (thought forms, mental images, etc.) that we can distinguish from what they represent. That is, one must accept the following claim (RR):

(RR) The representer/represented (or vehicle/content) distinction can be drawn in the case of mental representations.

Crane suggests that there are two reasons for accepting (RR). One is *physicalism*—the view that everything is (determined by, supervenient upon, constituted by, grounded in the) physical. This supports (RR), in that it programmatically brings along the representer/represented distinction. On a physicalist account, mental representation consists in a relation between certain physical happenings in the brain (the representers) and things in the external environment (the represented)—such a relation, in turn, is typically explained in causal/informational terms.

The other reason to accept (RR) is *anti-psychologism*. This view models mental representation on linguistic representation. Roughly, the idea is: the relation that links mental items to their corresponding things in the world is the same that connects words or sentences to their referents. More generally, mental representations have semantic properties. That gives us reasons to accept (RR), insofar as it casts mental representations as the mental equivalents of linguistic items; as such, they should be treated just like meaningful signs (representers) that stand for something else (represented).

Consequently, insofar as it depends on (RR), accepting (2)—read as (2*)—requires one to assume physicalism or anti-psychologism. As Crane stresses, this raises two problems.

First, both physicalism and anti-psychologism are substantial metaphysical claims. They are legitimate options, but not obligatory choices. The problem for Putnam's argument is that it *depends* on them: it is not clear what other independent reasons one might have to accept (RR) and hence (2) (Crane this volume).

Second, if physicalism or anti-psychologism are one's reasons to believe in (RR), then Putnam's argument becomes *redundant*. A physicalist already believes that mental representations, *qua* subset of physical representations, do not represent intrinsically. They do not need to be persuaded by Putnam: QA is already included in the physicalism-package, as it were. Likewise, an anti-psychologist already believes that, like linguistic signs, mental

representations do not represent intrinsically, and QA stems directly from this. Again, there is no need of Putnam's argument.

As anticipated, from this Crane concludes that the urge to raise and answer QA is strictly tied to certain substantial and controversial assumptions and does not arise from a general philosophical concern. So, we should *not* impose an answer to QA as a constraint on a plausible explanation of intentionality.

3. (2) without physicalism and anti-psychologism

I disagree with Crane on what is required for one to accept (2). In this section, I take for granted that, to accept (2), one must accept (RR). However, I argue, accepting (RR) does not require any antecedent commitment to physicalism or anti-psychologism. In fact, one might well believe that there are non-intrinsically-representational mental representers without being a physicalist or an anti-psychologist. If so, accepting (2) does *not* require one to assume physicalism or anti-psychologism.

3.1. (RR) and physicalism

For starters, consider early modern philosophers such as Descartes, Locke, or Malebranche. To be sure, they were not physicalists—in fact, they were dualists.[1] Yet, arguably, they accepted something like a representer/represented distinction. For they all believed in *ideas*—very roughly, entities in one's head that somehow do the *job of representing* things outside of one's head (e.g., Yolton 1984; Chappell 1994; Wilson 1999; Slezak 2002; Smith 2021).[2] Notoriously, their problem was precisely to tell *what makes* ideas in our head *of* or *about* things in the world. In addition to sounding remarkably similar to QA (e.g., Slezak 2002), this suggests that those theorists used to think of ideas as *non-intrinsically-representational* representers.[3] Indeed, there are grounds to interpret at least some of them (e.g., Descartes and Locke) as maintaining

[1] For Locke's dualism, see, e.g., Bennett (1994).

[2] For example, writing about Descartes' ideas, Smith explicitly casts them as representational vehicles: 'When considering one of the more complex modes of thought—for instance, fearing a lion or affirming the Pythagorean Theorem, where the lion and the theorem are the objects presented—it is *the idea that is doing the presenting*; it is the *vehicle of representation*' (Smith 2021: §1, emphasis mine). As for Locke, Chappell (1994) talks of *marks* quoting Locke himself: 'Locke claims that simple ideas are … able to serve as "the *Marks*, whereby we … know, and distinguish Things, which we have to do with"' (Chappell 1994: 50, emphasis mine).

[3] Interestingly, Descartes calls ideas 'the *form of any given thought*' (Descartes 1984: 113, emphasis mine), which reminds of Putnam's 'thought forms' and suggests that ideas are vehicles of thoughts.

that ideas have their representational powers in virtue of standing in a *causal relation* with what they represent (e.g., Chappell 1994; Wilson 1999).

Here are some quotes from Descartes that nicely illustrate the point:

> Moreover, in accordance with the rule of perspective [engravings] often *represent circles by ovals* better than by other circles, *squares by rhombuses* better than by other squares, and similarly for other shapes. Thus it often happens that in order to be more perfect as an image and to *represent* an object better, an engraving ought *not* to *resemble* it. *Now we must think of the images formed in our brain in just the same way*, and note that the problem is to know simply how they can enable the soul to have sensory perceptions *of* all the various qualities of the objects to which they correspond—not to know how they can resemble these objects. (Descartes 1985: 165-6, emphasis mine)

> Now if *words* … suffice to make us conceive things to which they bear *no resemblance*, then why could nature not also have established some *sign* which would make us have the sensation of light, even if the *sign* contained nothing in itself which is similar to this sensation? (Descartes 1985: 81, emphasis mine)

Putnam could have written the same or something very similar, it seems to me.

In a more contemporary vein, consider a view on which there is mental paint (Block 2003). On such a view, at least some phenomenal properties are non-intrinsically-representational representers: they *do the job of representing* things in the environment contingently in virtue of being appropriately correlated with them.[4] For example, Papineau (2021) seems to defend an account of sensory experience along these lines. As far as I can tell, in principle, nothing prevents one from combining this view with some anti-physicalist account of phenomenal properties.[5] Simply, in that case, the representers (or vehicles) would be non-physical properties that happen to be linked to and correlated with things in the environment.[6] This view looks perfectly coherent—or at least far from being obviously incoherent. So, I conclude, one can accept (RR) without assuming physicalism.

[4] Loar (2003) defends a view on which mental paint is intrinsically representational. By Loar's own admission, however, that is an unorthodox way of looking at mental paint, which is typically seen as a vehicle of representation that is not intrinsically representational.
[5] This is neither Papineau's nor Block's view.
[6] See Papineau (2021: 52, 90) for a similar point.

3.2. (RR) and anti-psychologism

What about anti-psychologism? Recall, anti-psychologism implies a semantic conception of intentionality, which models mental representation on linguistic representation. On this view, the same relation obtains between mental representations and their contents that obtains between linguistic items and things in the world. Perhaps, that is the real motivation behind (RR). I am not convinced.

Consider, again, a case from early modern philosophy: Hume. He does not model ideas on words, but on *pictures*. On his view, roughly, (simple) ideas are images—copies, in fact—of things; and they get to be *of* things in virtue of a combination of resemblance and causation (e.g., Garrett 2006; Landy 2018). So, he does not seem to embrace anti-psychologism; still, he accepts the representer/represented distinction for mental representations. Moreover, there is nothing in Hume's account that seems to commit him to physicalism—an anti-physicalist might well accept it.[7] So, there is no 'hidden interference' from physicalism that tacitly grounds the acceptance of the representer/represented distinction in this case.

A more recent example comes from the contemporary debate on mental imagery. Some theorists have modelled mental imagery on (quasi-)pictorial representation (e.g., Kosslyn 1980) in overt opposition to an account in terms of linguistic representation (e.g., Pylyshyn 1981). Whether or not this is a good account of mental imagery, clearly it is one that can (and does) accept the representer/represented distinction. For plausibly, on this view, mental imagery is an analogical representation—and, as Machery (2009: 110) correctly points out, 'analogical representations are usually thought to be such that some properties of their vehicles covary with what is represented.' Moreover, I do not see why, in principle, an anti-physicalist might not accept that. So, I conclude, one can accept (RR) without assuming anti-psychologism.

The upshot is that accepting (RR) does not require one to assume physicalism or anti-psychologism—quite the contrary: it seems acceptable *regardless* of one's commitment to those views.[8] The same is true of (2), insofar as it relies on (RR) for its justification. This gives us some initial reasons to think that QA is *not* so strictly tied to heavy metaphysical assumptions, such as physicalism or anti-psychologism, but can arise regardless.

[7] Plausibly, Hume himself was not a physicalist but held some version of property dualism (see, e.g., Armstrong 1999; Robinson 2020).

[8] I have not offered a positive proposal concerning what other reasons might lead one to accept (RR), as my aim in this section was just to untie (RR) from physicalism and anti-psychologism. To do that, it suffices to show that one can accept (RR) without being a physicalist or an anti-psychologist—there is no need to tell *why* one does that.

4. A different (and better) justification for (2)

The discussion in the previous section suggests that there can be reasons other than physicalism or anti-psychologism to accept (2). In this section, I want to put forward one, by sketching an alternative—and I argue better—way of justifying (2) on methodological grounds. This leads to an improved version of Putnam's argument that provides more general and widely acceptable reasons to raise and answer QA.

Crane asks why we should accept (2). Thereby, he seems to suggest that it is *not* a natural or default assumption to make about representations—and that is why we need extra reasons to accept it. But one might as well wonder why we *shouldn't* accept (2) as the default assumption, at least at the outset. That does *not* have to be the result of one's antecedent metaphysical commitments but can be rooted in broader *methodological* concerns. Here is the thought, intuitively put:

> We are interested in a general phenomenon: representation. At least initially, it seems *methodologically* better to consider both physical and mental representations *qua representations*—namely, as instances of one and the same phenomenon—and *not qua* mental or physical. After all, why should we *initially* think that the mental/physical distinction (if there is any such a distinction) must have an import here? That assumption is too strong to be made at the outset. If we can proceed with something more minimal and less committal, that would be preferable. Let us do that and see where it takes us. If that allows us to explain all that there is to explain, great! Otherwise, we drop our initial assumption.[9]

This makes room for justifying (2) on purely methodological grounds. In short, the idea is that the premise can be justified by appealing to something like the following principle—call it Unity of Representation (UR):

(UR) Assume that representation is a *unitary phenomenon*, unless proven otherwise.

[9] I do not mean to suggest that this captures what Putnam had in mind. Regardless of his original intentions, this line of thought strikes me as a something that many would accept as a reasonable starting point for an inquiry.

When we start an inquiry in a certain domain, it is not uncommon to assume unity and uniformity within that domain as much as possible and unless we have clear evidence to the contrary. Ultimately, that is because we search for regularities and aim at explanations and theories that are as unitary and simple as possible. (UR) is just the local application of these more general methodological principles that are commonly used as well as widely shared and accepted/acceptable.

Three remarks are in order. First, (UR) does *not* tell us that (2) is true. It creates an *initial presumption* in favor of (2) on methodological grounds. That is, it gives us a *defeasible reason* to assume (2) by default as a premise in the argument. In short, the idea is: we do not assume (2) because we have direct reasons to think that it is true; we assume it because, and as long as, we have no reason to think that it is false. Second, (UR) does *not* take a stance on the physical or mental nature of representation or intentionality. It simply tells us to treat representation as unitary phenomenon, whatever its ultimate nature (or source) is. This is compatible with different accounts. Third, (UR) does *not* tell us that an account of physical representations should be extended to mental representations. It tells us that physical and mental representations should be treated equally with respect to their representational character—that works both ways.

So, reasons other and more generally acceptable than physicalism or anti-psychologism—namely, methodological reasons—can be given to assume (2). This is a better way of justifying (2).

With this at hand, we can now see Putnam's argument under a new light. We start by assuming that what goes for physical representations goes for mental representations—namely, (2)—on the methodological grounds just outlined. The ant case provides reasons to believe that at least an important subclass of representations—pictures words, etc.—do not represent intrinsically. This is (1). So, we have (at least a presumption to think) that mental representations do not represent intrinsically either but in virtue of some non-intrinsic connection. Hence, the question arises as to what makes mental states represent. Thereby, we have grounds to impose the constraint that a plausible account of intentionality should answer such a question.

This is an improved version of Putnam's argument. First of all, it does not rely on heavy metaphysical claims but on more neutral and largely methodological assumptions. Secondly, it is not redundant: the reasons to accept (2) do not, alone, make QA arise. In this new version, Putnam's argument is a more widely acceptable ground to raise and answer QA. This gives us further reasons to think, *pace* Crane, that QA and the demand for an answer to it can arise from

more general concerns independent of one's commitment to physicalism or anti-psychologism. It is then interesting to see whether and how the argument, so construed, can be defeated and where that leads us. Let us turn to that.

5. A presumption against (2)

In this section, I show a way of resisting the improved version of Putnam's argument by creating a presumption against (2). Still, I will suggest, that does not remove QA (or something close enough) entirely.

One way of attacking (2) consists in showing that, if we assume it, we get some bad results. Now, by assuming (2), we get (3):

(3) No mental representation represents intrinsically.[10]

So, our task will be to find reasons to think that (3) is a bad result. That amounts to finding support for (Not-3):

(Not-3) Some mental representations represent intrinsically.

If there are independent reasons to accept (Not-3), then it is (UR) itself—namely, its 'unless proven otherwise' part—that allows us to drop (2).

Can't we just say that intentionality is the essence of the mind, and *that* is why mental representations represent intrinsically? Dialectically, that would not do in the present context, as it merely states what we must prove. Given (UR), *if* some satisfying account can be given that treats mental representations as non-intrinsically-representational, there is no reason to drop (2). Since there is plenty of accounts that do not treat mental representations as intrinsically representational, we need to show that they are not satisfying—i.e., that there is something important about mental representation that they fail to capture because they do *not* treat mental representations as intrinsically representational. This would be a reason to think that (Not-3) is true.

[10] (3) follows from (1) and (2). Of course, in principle, one might argue that the problem is (1). But I assume, with Crane, that there is no problem with (1).

Kriegel's (2014) distinction between a subjective and an objective notion of mental representation might serve our purposes. He introduces the distinction by appealing to a famous scenario:

> There is a possible world where, just as I was born, a brain neuroanatomically and neurophysiologically indistinguishable from mine was placed in a vat and fed random sensory stimulations by a machine suitably hooked to the vat. In fact, there are many, many such worlds. In one of them, the influx of sensory stimulation happens to be indistinguishable from the one my actual brain has enjoyed. Consequently, let us suppose, it is impossible to rule out from the inside that I am in fact such an envatted brain: the envatted brain's stream of consciousness is *subjectively indistinguishable from mine*. Thus whenever the stimulating machine is in state S1, the envatted brain undergoes an experience *subjectively indistinguishable* from the experience I normally undergo when I see an apple; when the machine is in state S2, it undergoes an experience indistinguishable from mine when I see a banana; … and so on and so forth. (Kriegel 2014: 161, emphasis mine)

According to Kriegel, the lesson to be drawn is that there are two different but equally legitimate senses in which the envatted brain's experience represents—each of them corresponding to a different notion of mental representation. In one sense, insofar as they are subjectively indistinguishable, the envatted brain's experience and my own experience represent the same content: an apple (or something that looks apple-ish). When we think of mental representation in this way, we do not consider what in the external world (reliably) causes/covaries with the experience as relevant to tell what the experience represents. What is relevant is *only* what is *subjectively given* in undergoing the experience, namely, its *phenomenal character*. Call this the *subjective notion of mental representation* (S-representation).

However, there is another sense in which what (reliably) causes/covaries with the experience *is* relevant to tell what the experience represents. Call this the *objective notion of mental representation* (O-representation). In *this* sense, the envatted brain's experience represents the state S1. Thus, on the assumption that I am *not* the brain in the vat, its experience and mine do not share the same content. As Raimondi (2021) correctly notes, this distinction only applies to conscious states.

Kriegel argues that S-representation is not *conceptually* reducible to O-representation, as they are *thoroughly separable*. That is, there are *conceptually* possible scenarios where: (i) mental representation varies subjectively, but not objectively; (ii) it varies objectively, but not subjectively; (iii) there is S-representation, but no O-representation; (iv) there is O-representation, but no S-representation. Moreover, as they stand, existing causal-covariational-teleoinformational theories of mental representation (e.g., Dretske 1981, 1988; Millikan 1984, 1989; Fodor 1990) seem well-suited to capture O-representation but not to capture S-representation. In fact, they do not seem to be designed to do that (Kriegel 2014: 165-7).[11]

As Kriegel (2014: 167-8) himself stresses, this is at least a *prima facie* case in favor of a distinction between *two kinds* of mental representational properties. The objective kind would fit an account according to which mental states do *not* represent intrinsically but in virtue of standing in the right relation with the environment. The subjective kind would fit a phenomenology-based account on which at least some mental states do represent *intrinsically*, plausibly in virtue of their phenomenal properties (internalistically construed).[12]

If that is correct, it gives us reasons to think that something about mental representation escapes a treatment in extrinsic causal/informational terms. In particular, it gives us grounds to think that some mental representations, the conscious ones, are S-representations. That is, we have reasons to think that (Not-3) is true—some mental representations represent intrinsically. Therefore, they differ from physical representations, which in no case represent intrinsically. Consequently, following the 'unless proven otherwise' part of (UR), we can drop (2) on the very same methodological grounds that we used to justify it.

Notice: my point is *not* that the proponent of (2) cannot push back. In fact, they have two options here: one is to deny that there are S-representations; the other is to reduce them to O-representations. Either way, some significant philosophical effort is required to show that (2) is *not* undermined by the distinction between subjective and objective mental representation (see Kriegel 2014: 168-73). So, and *that* is my point, accepting that distinction shifts the burden of proof on the proponent of (2), thereby turning the initial situation around. Some general methodological considerations led to an initial presumption in favor of (2). Holding fixed the same methodological principles, the distinction between subjective and objective mental representation defeats that presumption and creates a new one *against* (2).

[11] See Mendelovici (2018: Chapter 2) for a similar point.
[12] For a recent account along these lines, see Mendelovici (2018).

Does that block QA from arising? Not entirely, it seems to me. Accepting two kinds of mental representations means accepting two kinds of aboutness: *subjective* aboutness, proper of S-representations, and *objective* aboutness, proper of O-representations. Reference to (or tracking) things in the external environment is *not* constitutive of subjective aboutness. Constitutive of subjective aboutness is some feature of the experience—i.e., its being *phenomenally* such that, in undergoing it, one is presented with something. By contrast, reference to (or tracking) things in the external world *is* constitutive of objective aboutness. Regardless of what is subjectively given to one, what matters is what reliably causes/covaries with one's experience.

Thus, there are two versions of QA: *subjective* QA (SQA) and *objective* QA (OQA):

(SQA) What (if anything) makes it the case that (at least some) intentional mental states are *subjectively about* (= phenomenally present one with) something?

(OQA) What (if anything) makes it the case that (at least some) intentional mental states are *objectively about* (= refer to) something?

To keep things simple, let us consider a philosopher sympathetic to the idea that genuine (or original) intentionality is essentially mental. They might be inclined to claim that possessing genuine intentionality is just a matter of S-representing. In other words, genuine intentionality is aboutness in the subjective sense. If that is the view, then one might think that SQA does not arise or is redundant, as the answer is simply built into the notion of *intentionality* one is working with. Let us grant that. Still, casting intentionality as subjective aboutness, *per se*, does not tell us anything on whether and how intentional states get to be *objectively* about something—namely, whether and how they get to *refer* to things in the external world.[13] *That* is a genuine and legitimate question to ask, insofar as intentional states are supposed to play a role in (explaining) cognition, intelligent behavior, and successful action—and without a link to the external world it is hard to see how they could do that.

So, the distinction between subjective and objective mental representation gives us reasons to accept that at least some mental states represent intrinsically. On those grounds, one might separate intentionality (S-representation) from reference (O-representation). However, even in that case, QA does not seem to disappear entirely but arises as OQA. One might think

[13] Notice that claiming that no intentional state possesses objective aboutness, or only some of them do, are ways of dealing with this question.

that accounting for how intentional states reach out to the world is *not* the *primary* task of an explanation of intentionality. Still, a plausible explanation should say something about that—if nothing else, to avoid the charge of making intentionality epiphenomenal. At least in *this* more minimal sense, OQA arises, and the demand for an answer constrains a plausible explanation of intentionality.

6. Conclusion

The focus of my comments has been Crane's discussion of Putnam's argument in relation to QA. In §3, relying on Crane's own way of justifying (2), I argued that (2) can be accepted *regardless* of one's being antecedently committed to physicalism or anti-psychologism. In §4, I sketched what I take to be a better way of justifying (2) on purely methodological grounds. This led to an improved version of Putnam's argument, which does not rely on substantial metaphysical commitments but on more general and widely acceptable methodological assumptions. *Pace* Crane, these results suggest that QA, as well as the demand for an answer to it, is not strictly tied to physicalism and anti-psychologism but can arise regardless and out of more general concerns. In §5, I argued that the distinction between subjective and objective mental representation gives us reasons to think that at least some mental representations represent intrinsically. Hence, (2) can be dropped. While that blocks the improved Putnam's argument, it does not prevent a version of QA—namely, OQA—from arising. Interestingly, *if* I am right, at least something in the ballpark of QA can be asked legitimately, *even if* there are reasons to reject (2) and resist Putnam's argument. If so, there really is something about the question of aboutness.

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