

Intention in Intentionalism

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1. Debate between intentionalists and anti-intentionalists.

Intentionalism is a theory that claims the relevance of authorial intention as a criterion for interpreting art, since it considers that meanings of art works by itself can be ambiguous. In return, anti-intentionalism claims the irrelevance of authorial intentions for interpretation because it considers the work by itself is enough in order to determinate its meaning. Besides, anti-intentionalism claims that intention cannot be the criterion for interpretation because it is not always recognizable. The defence of early anti-intentionalism is focused on Beardsley and Wimsatt's article "The Intentional Fallacy". The main thesis of these authors is founded in the impossibility of knowing authorial intention, which is related, in turn, with the "evidence problem". This problem lies in the thought that we cannot have a reliable evidence of author's intentions. There are two kinds of evidence: external and internal. We are talking about external evidences when an author tell us which were his or her intentions in realizing a work of art. The problem here happens when we can find a contradiction between what is told by the author and the evidence that is given to us by the work. Besides, this evidence is not always available, because in the most of the cases authors don't leave to us a testimony about their intentions. Whether, in order to avoid this problem, the intentionalism adopt a internal evidence, them the problems increase, since it falls in a request of principle, that is, *The Intentional Fallacy*.

According to Beardsley and Wimsatt, the intentionalism commits a fallacy, if it subscribes an internal criterion of evidence. We are talking about the internal criterion

of evidence when we use the work as evidence of author's intentions. Although these authors don't explain the fallacy in this way, I think it consists in the following: so that a work acts as evidence is necessary the author's intention had been fulfilled in the work. But in order to check whether the intention had been fulfilled we need to carry out an interpretative process. Here, we have to interpret the work without the knowledge about intention, since (fulfilled) intention is what we really want to know, hence the intention is in fact a sub-product, that is, a result of interpretation and not its condition of possibility. We need to interpret the work in order to know the intention through the work, and we cannot know the intention through the work without having interpreted it before. This is the fallacious nature of intentionalism: the intention cannot be the criterion to interpretation, since it requires interpretation.

However, Beardsley and Wimsatt have other arguments against of intentionalism. They claim that intentionalism misreads the object of literary criticism, because it focuses its object in the realm of causes of the work and not in the work itself, such as other wrong approaches, which locate the object of the criticism in the term of effects of the work. In return, they consider the object of literary criticism has to be only the work, and not its causes (such as intentions in the authors' minds) or its effect (such as certain readers' feelings). Besides, these authors defined the intention as a private aspect that we cannot know, and the work as a public element, which remains in the time and is given to everybody. About this, they claimed the *Semantic Autonomy Thesis*, which establishes the work is the only necessary evidence in order to determinate its meaning.

On the other hand, E. D. Hirsch claimed a radical intentionalist proposal. He thought determining the meaning only by work is impossible, since a word sequence is compatible with many conventional meanings, that is, the conventional meaning is ambiguous. What meaning is always depend of a subject, an utterer, because according to Hirsch "does not exist a magic land of the meanings taken isolated". He points out that what really happens with anti-intentionalism is that they pretend to replace the author's meaning for the critic's or reader's meaning. Besides, the author considered the meaning of a text is identical to the intentions of its author, hence this proposal was hardly critiqued (by Dickie and Wilson for instance) because it didn't admit the possibility the author fails in fulfilling his or her intentions, and neither had in consideration the significance of conventional aspect of the meaning.

2. Concepts of intention and their philosophical foundations.

To face so many problems, the intentionalist strategy can be to analyze the concept of artistic intention which is handled by anti-intentionalism, and try to draw up a new concept, proving its objections are founded in a mistake. There are many concepts of intention in the tradition of this debate, which are considered wrong by the intentionalism. Here, I shall point out three of them: *idealistic notion of the intention*, *vacuous notion of the intention*, and *private notion of intention*.

The first one, the *idealistic notion of the intention*, is usually attributed to Collingwood, and it refers the idea that artistic intention is as a facsimile of work of art in the author's mind. Thus, creative process consists in the author trying to imitate what there is in his or her own mind. The idealistic nature of this approach lies in the deed that art work exists completely as a mental state, before being created. This concept of artistic intention has been discussed by R. Wollheim, like we will see in the last section, whom justifies the intention is not formed completely previously, but it is developed during creative process.

The second one, the *vacuous notion of the intention*, might be attributed to G. Dickie, and it refers the idea that artist intention consists in the intention of making an art work. Under Dickie's approach intention looks like other mental states such as beliefs and desires. These mental states have a propositional nature, that is, they are about something. Their structure is like the following: "I have the belief that "p"" or "I have the desire (that) "q"". Where "p" and "q" have a specific propositional content. Likewise, intention would have the structure "I have the intention of "r", where propositional content of "r" is "making an artwork". This notion, as the first one, does not consider the impact of creative process contingencies over the artist's intention. Besides, it leads us to a very counterintuitive consequence, namely, all artists would have the same intention. This notion of intention will be discussed later by its opposite concept which is the idea of *significant intention*.

The third one, *private notion of intention*, might be attributed to Beardsley and Wimsatt. They considered the work as a public event and the intention as a private one. Underlying this thought is internal/external dualism, related with mental events, which is the main premise of anti-intentionalist arguments, because that is the support of its

main objection, namely, the knowledge of intention problem. Such as we saw below, intentionalism fails so much whether subscribes an internal criterion to know the intention as whether subscribes an external criterion. Then, the solution can be in rethinking the mind conception and cancelling the dualism. This proposal can be refuted appealing to Ryle's or Wittgenstein philosophy of mind and Anscombe's and Davidson's philosophy of action.

These different kinds of intention can not be the foundation of a sound intentionalism because they entail many and very important epistemological problems, which are related with the mind concept, the causality notion, and mental events nature. Setting off that, we can question the philosophical foundations of intention notion in order to develop a more appropriate concept. The intention as a private mental event is a particular case of mind conception as a private entity. The origins of this thought can be found mainly in the Cartesian epistemology. Descartes claimed the privilege of the subjects as for the knowledge of their own minds, while we are always uncertain about the mind of the others. His thought happened in a radical dualism, which gave rise to the most important problems in the contemporary epistemology, like the other minds problem, the first person authority, the scepticism on the knowledge of the world, which in turn lead us to the solipsism, the classical dualism between mind and body, and mental causality problem; all of them related among themselves. Applying this to our question on intention, we can find, in one hand, the knowledge of intention problem as a instance of other minds problem, and in the other hand, the problem on intentions and art works like two elements in a causal relation as a instance of the mental causality problem.

Beardsley and Wimsatt developed their notion of intention in coherence with the Cartesian view. But, like C. Lyas proves, they are not completely coherent. The incoherence is the following: they can not say at the same time that the intention is a private mental event and admitting the possibility of work can act as a internal evidence of intention. That is because claiming that intention is private entails, in turn, a engagement with the Humean notion of causality. This engagement is not fulfilled by Beardsley and Wimsatt. If the intention is really private it can not be display in the work (which is necessary in order to the work acts as internal evidence of intention), but it has to be a completely discrete entity of its effects (in the same way of Hume's causal relata).

The Hume's notion of causality is a necessary premise in order to claim the private nature of intention. So that mental causes can be conceived as private entities, they have to be absolutely discrete of their effects, that is, they have to maintain a logic independence relation, so that none of the elements in relation can be identifiable from the other one. So that work can act as a internal evidence of the intention we have to refer to some kind of causality, which admits some sort of continuity between causes and effects. If there is this sort of continuity then mental causes can not be private entities. At the same way if the intention can be displays in the work, when it is fulfilled, the intention are not private. Besides, intention can be identifiable through the work. One consequence of this is if the intention is displays in the work, then work and intention are not entities absolutely independents. When a critic carries out an analysis of the work he or she is analyzing the intention at the same time.

On the other hand, we can say intention and action are a couple which is an instance or the kind of cause-effect relation, and there are many others arguments to justify that intention and action are not given separately. For instance, other proof refers to those cases in which the characterization, explanation, description or knowledge of an effect can not be carried out without attending to the cause. In a C. Lyas' example we can see that we can not call "murder" an action unless we can ascribe certain intentions and events in an agent's mind. In this case, unless we know anything about the causes, that is, for instance, that we know if there was intentionality, we can not characterize the effect rightly. It is not the same describing an event as a "death" that as a "murder". Here what give to us the sense of the differences between two descriptions is the intention: the intention prints the actual character of the action which is "to murder" and the knowledge of this intention gives to us the correct description. Likewise, the knowledge of the effect is not the same if it is made regardless of the cause. Applying this to the art, the right description of the effect, which is the art work, can not be carried out without appealing to its causes, that is, artistic intentionality, since only in the light of it we can perceive its actual sense.

Related with that we can analyze the concept of intention called "significant intention", which can also refute the earl notion of intention called "vacuous notion of the intention". The notion of significant intention is coherent with those intuitions which are in against of intention as a discrete and independent entity with regard to its effects. Likewise, it develops a notion which is the opposite of artistic intention as a

mere efficient cause, whose theoretical representative was G. Dickie, such as we said below. We can remember, according to Dickie, art works are a product of an intentional action, but his concept of intention only includes the intention of “making an art work”, and it does not include anything related with the content of the work. In this way, the content of the work is given in the way that it is given separately of intentions. This is referring to a empty concept of intention, since it does not entail anything about what the work is and how the work is. In return, the significant intention is defined as those that has causal efficiency in making the work and has explanatory power over its content and purpose.

On the other hand, related with Dickie’s notion of artistic intention, we can see neither is a good idea to think the intention is like an order that one is given to him or herself, that is, as saying “I am going to make an artwork”. This statement has the form of a declaration of intention, which puts in relation a mental state with a future deed. However, intention does not have to be always the expression of a prediction, neither a prediction and neither a verbal expression. The track of the intentionality goes with the action of making an art work in each action in the process, and not only previously. Talking about intentional actions does not entail to conceive intention as a event which needs a deliberative process that precedes the action. That process can happen or not, but if it does not happen, that does not subtract intentionality to the action. That is, we can talk about intentional actions which are not preceded by a deliberation. The author’s intention remains operative during all production process, hence he or she has the intention previously, but during the production he or she acts intentionally too, thus each action in the process is an intentional action, although it is not preceded by a deliberation. For that, the characteristics and content of the work are determined by the intention, since they are the result of intentional actions. In this way, artistic intention refers to a very complex concept, since it includes a whole of intentions. In so far as the content of the artwork is determined by the intention, we have to appeal to the intention in order to determinate the meaning of the work. Thus, the artistic intention is a significant intention since it is the responsible one of content and purpose of the work.

From intentionalism the notion of significant intention can be claimed as an argument in against of intention as a private entity view, since here intention is conceived as a element which is determining of its effects. But this is not the only argument in against of intention as a mysterious entity, because we can think about

intention as an element which is determined by its causes too. According to Wittgenstein (*Philosophical Investigations*, investigation 337), we can say the intentions are not discrete with regard to its causes because the range of intentions that one subjects is able to make is limited by many factors, which have a public character and whose knowledge is given to all for equal. This factors can be, for instance, the situations, contexts, institutions, customs, even the skill of speaking a language. In so far as we can know this factors we can determinate this range of intentions, in a greater or smaller degree, and this range will not be private.

However, while Wittgenstein paid attention in those aspects that we would call “extra-mental” determinants of intentions, D. Davidson pointed out those ones that we can call “mental” determinants of intentions. This mental factors can be the beliefs and desires that are related with subjects’ formation of his or her intentions, although this two kinds of factors are, in turn, related among themselves because extra-mental factors determine to mental factors. According to Davidson “an action is carried out with a certain intention if this one is caused, in the right way, by the attitudes and beliefs which rationalize it”. Subjects’ beliefs make up a favourable attitude to execute an action, although having certain beliefs and making an action does not entail that this action is an intentional action, because in some cases we can find deviances in causal chain. What happens in these cases is beliefs and desires do not work like those elements which cause, rationalize and shape action character. By the way, subjects’ beliefs and desires do not have to be a mystery for the others since, in Davidson’s proposal, we are able to identify them, in the daily life as well as in the most inhospitable cases, as the author proved with the *radical interpreter* experiment.

3. Artistic intention according to R. Wollheim.

Finally, I would like to pay an special attention to R. Wollheim’s concept of artistic intention, since it is suitable with regard to the particular characteristics that we have defined before. We can say, under Wollheim’s proposal, intention is not a private entity, is not completely before making the artwork and is a significant intention. However, although there are some points of convergence, in the Wollheim’s proposal there are some differences with regard to classical approach from the debate between intentionalism and anti-intentionalism. One of them can be that Wollheim developed his

intentional theory from a very important perspective change, since he did not take as point of broken up the critic's, reader, interpreter or spectator point of view, but the artist or creator's point of view. One more difference is that his interest about what is made by the artist did not prevent that Wollheim's was able to carry out a global study on the triad of elements which are playing a role in the interpretative process, namely, the artist, the work, and the spectator. Likewise, he analyzed three factors which go with this elements, namely, the intention, the meaning, and the experience, respectively. Giving primacy to some of them lead us to a partial analysis, which is not able to grasp the holistic character of the relation among these three elements, which are in a causal relation. According to Wollheim, we cannot think about the intention without noting in what way it works in the artist's mind, how it is displayed in the work, and which is its power in order to produce a certain experience.

In *Painting as an Art*, Wollheim carried out an actual taxonomy of the creative process in order to define what artistic intention is. He focused his attention in what happens in artist's mind during creation, thus the study about intention is became in a study about the artist's mental events. According to the author, there are two wrong conceptions of intention, namely, a too wide one, and a too narrow one, between which Wollheim wanted to find a solution in the middle. The too narrow view is those that conceives the intention as an order that the artist give to him or herself in order to act according to what he or she wants to produce in the spectator. This view is characterized by its instrumentalism, since it consists in the identification of a purpose and securing the means to fulfil it. The problem here is that it does not seem right the artists work in this programmatic way. The too wide view of intention is those that includes in the intention a higher number of relevant aspects, namely, all and each one of artist's mental states in the creative process. The problem here is we are leaded to a undetermined and undeterminable concept of intention, since specifying all of theses mental events is impossible.

In this way we can conclude artistic intention is not only one mental state neither all mental states. Then, what is artistic intention? In what is referred to the quantity of mental states, artistic intention is a group of mental states. In what is referred to the quality, the intention is shaped only by those mental states which are relevant to the artistic activity, where relevance is identified with the causal efficiency of them. The mental states with causal efficiency are those that are responsible of artist's action, that

is, they are the causes and the reasons for the action and the how of this one. Thus, an early definition of intention can be: the artistic intention is those group of artist's mental states which are responsible of he or she acts in the way that he or she do it in the creative process of a work of art.

Like we can see, this definition locates intention in a narrow relation with its effect, since intention is responsible of that effect happens and how it happens. However, this definition is within the problematic around the relation between causes and effects. The relationship between intention and action is broken by a logic gap, since we can not determinate the intention in the light of the action, that is, the intention is infra-determined by the action. An action is compatible with many description of it, among which some of them can be intentional and other ones not. Besides, might there are many different intentional descriptions on the same action. About that, Wollheim claims that there is a thinking which is matched to each description of an action, and an action is intentional under a certain description if what is the guide of the action is corresponding thinking, and one thinking guides an action when causes and forms its character. Saying the intentions are infra-determined by the action does not entail that we are not able to get the knowledge about this corresponding thinking at all. We have skills to configure a range of possible intentions in order to determinate the thinking, with help of many other dates. Characterizing an action under the right intentional description requests to pay attention in other factors like the context, the creative process, artist's beliefs and desires, and cognitive stock from the spectator, and so forth.

However, this notion of intention can be questioned if is regarded it fall in the *idealistic notion of intention*. The approach might be the following: if the thinking that shapes the intention determines causally the work features is possible that features might or must be found, before of the work, like the content of this thinking in the author's mind. Thus the content of the mental states which shape the intention is matched with the work content. In this way the creative process would be an externalization of a predetermined content. But what is held by Wollheim is the opposite, since he thought artist's mental states do not remain unchangeable in the creative process. That is in this way because the causal relation is not unidirectional, from the artist to the work, but bidirectional, from the artist to the work and from the work to the artist. This proposal is justified by the particular Wollheim's view on the artist's role, since he thought the distinction between agent and spectator is not matched

to a distinction among peoples, but among roles. However, the most important in this point is, for Wollheim, there is a kind of person whom is able to play both roles at the same time, namely, the artist; the artist is essentially an spectator of his or her own work. Thus, we can see how the artist can change his or her mind in the light of the experiences that is caused by his or her own work over him or herself. There are two very important consequences: the first one is the work can be conceived as a common cause of an experience over the artist and the spectator, and this minimizes the first person authority over the work; the second one is that minimizes the asymmetry between the author and the spectator too. That is possible because we can regard Wollheim's proposal is a an externalist approach to the intention problem. All that might have many consequences, in turn, over how we conceive our relation with the art's experience and the interpretation problem, which should be seriously reconsidered.

4. Conclusion.

To conclude we can say we had drawn some characteristics of intention by taking into account some of their philosophical foundations. Intention is an entity with causal and explanatory power over its effects and their features. Besides, this concept gives to intention a complex character, which entails the necessity of proposing the significant nature of intention and the impossibility of a mere artistic intention. On the other hand, we had regard the intention as an element that is determined by its causes, and is determining of its effects. Thus, anti-intentionalists objections can be based in wrong philosophical approaches, which are related with the epistemological dualism, the notion of causality, the relation between the actions and its causes and reasons, and so forth. In return, intentionalism can be strong if claims an intention not private, not previous to the work and significant, conditions which are all well fulfilled by the Wollheim's intentional theory. Finally, we had seen how many problems in the intentionalism have underlying very important philosophical questions with regard to the Philosophy of Mind or Philosophy of Action, and how problematic around the intention in art, which concerns to Aesthetics, is in a big engagement with other philosophical field.