

# Dennett and the Quest for Real Meaning: In defense of a “Myth”

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**Abstract:** In several recent pieces, Daniel Dennett has advanced a line of reasoning purporting to show that we should reject the idea that there is a tenable distinction to be drawn between the manner in which we represent the way things are and the manner in which “blessedly simple” intentional systems like thermostats and frogs represent the way things are. Through a series of thought experiments, Dennett aims to show that philosophers of mind should abandon their preoccupation with “*real* meaning as opposed to *ersatz* meaning, ‘*intrinsic*’ or ‘*original*’ intentionality as opposed to *derived* intentionality.” In this paper, I lay out the case that Dennett builds against original intentionality, with the aim of showing that, once it has been properly clarified, the notion of original intentionality isn’t nearly the myth that Dennett makes it out to be.

## Introduction

*My view is that belief and desire are like froggy belief and desire all the way up. We human beings are only the most prodigious intentional systems on the planet, and the huge psychological differences between us and the frogs are ill described by the proposed contrast between literal and metaphorical belief ascription. - Daniel Dennett (The Intentional Stance, 112)*

In several recent pieces, Daniel Dennett has advanced a line of reasoning purporting to show that we should reject the idea that there is a tenable distinction to be drawn between the manner in which we represent the way things are and the manner in which “blessedly simple” intentional systems like thermostats and frogs represent the way things are, a distinction that would underwrite the cherished intuition that we *really* represent the world, or that we represent it *to ourselves*, whereas things like thermostats and frogs do not.<sup>1</sup> As he sees it, the root error of “industrial strength intentional realism” is the idea that there is something special about us or our activity that renders us susceptible to attributions of a distinctive kind of intentionality. Instead, intuitive distinctions between mental capacities are to be cashed out in terms of differences in the *contents* of the thoughts that may be attributed to subjects. Attempts to discover something special about persons - some feature that would ground attributions of an

*original* or *intrinsic* intentionality - is, as he puts it, “a great labor wasted,” a stultifying and ultimately quixotic yearning for a skyhook.<sup>2</sup>

It isn't hard to see why Dennett might find it important to convince us that all intentionality is of roughly the same, relatively derived sort. Throughout his work, Dennett's favorite tactic is to consider the attribution of intentionality to the blessedly simple, and then to apply the conclusions he reaches there to the attribution of mental states to much more sophisticated kinds of things, such as people. Indeed, it is from considering the attribution of intentionality to things like chess-playing computers that Dennett reaches his famous conclusion that “a particular thing is an intentional system only in relation to the strategies of someone who is trying to explain and predict its behavior.” Through a series of thought experiments, Dennett tries to show that philosophers of mind should abandon their preoccupation with “*real* meaning as opposed to *ersatz* meaning, ‘*intrinsic*’ or ‘*original*’ intentionality as opposed to *derived* intentionality.”<sup>3</sup> In this paper, my task will be to investigate the case that Dennett builds against original intentionality, with the aim of showing that, once it has been properly clarified, the notion of original intentionality isn't the myth that Dennett makes it out to be.

## **Presenting the Case**

Dennett begins his case against original intentionality by having us consider about as uncontroversial a case of derived intentionality as there could be: a run-of-the-mill soft-drink vending machine called “the wandering two-bitser,” which has been equipped with some means for detecting when quarters have been dropped into its slot.<sup>4</sup> By dint of our understanding it as having the function of exchanging sodas for quarters, we can understand it as capable of making (at least) two types of mistakes. It makes a mistake whenever it coughs up a soda when it hasn't been given quarters. For example, it might be fooled by slugs of the appropriate dimensions, or by Panamanian quarter-Balboas, which (so we are told) are minted from the same stock as their U.S. counterparts. It can

also make a mistake should it fail to deliver a soda when it has been given quarters, such as when its quarter-detection system rejects two legitimate (possibly bent) quarters.<sup>5</sup> One might say, at least metaphorically, that when the two-bitser accepts a coin it takes (or perhaps perceives or believes) it to be a quarter. But whether or not the two-bitser should be so interpreted depends upon more than its intrinsic physical constitution. It can serve several different purposes instead, including some that its designers never intended it to have. Transport it to Panama, and the local population might find use in its capacity to exchange sodas for the local coin. There is nothing *intrinsic* to the two-bitser that requires us to interpret its states one way or another. Its states mean what they do, only against the background of shared purposes and intentions of its patrons, which may change without any concomitant change in the two-bitser's physical makeup.

Dennett urges us to draw the same moral of biological organisms. Several philosophers have shown us how to understand products of natural selection as exhibiting a teleo-biological kind of intentionality.<sup>6</sup> These accounts exploit the intuition that creatures can be regarded as artifacts of a sort, designed as it were, to propagate their kind. For instance, it is reasonable to suppose that frogs have been selected to detect and to snap out at flies; we can thus understand them to be making a sort of mistake when they exhibit their legendarily pathetic disposition to snap out at lead pellets. For Dennett, this means that the intentionality of biological organisms is not significantly different in kind from that of the two-bitser. And like that of the two-bitser, it is sensitive to external factors, such as selective history. So while it is reasonable to understand the mechanism responsible for triggering a frog's snapping to be a fly-detector, it isn't *intrinsically* so. We can imagine a population of frogs with identical internal constitutions that have been selected to snap at other things: ballistic frogchow for instance.

As you might suspect, Dennett is greasing us up for a slide down the great chain of being. He'd like us to think that what goes for frogs must go for us as well. Our own intentionality is similarly determined from our natural purposes, and so no more *original* than that of the frog. However, many resist the idea that the meanings of our own intentional states would be sensitive to external features such as our selective history.

After all, wouldn't we still regard ourselves as having minds were we to discover that we were cosmic coincidences spontaneously generated out of swamp muck? Dennett replies by pointing out we shouldn't reject biological accounts of intentionality on the grounds that such accounts render the content of our intentional states unacceptably extrinsic. The lesson from the twin-Earth thought experiments that has so preoccupied recent philosophy of mind and language is that subjects with the same internal constitutions may nevertheless be interpreted as having thoughts with differing contents, due simply to differences in their respective environments. If so, then belief contents are not completely determined by the activity inside a subject's head. Our intentionality would thus seem every bit as non-intrinsic as that of the two-bitser and the frog.

Dennett further claims that the inclination to think that we possess a special type of original meaning or intentionality is incompatible with properly Darwinian thinking, for this special type of intentionality is ultimately inexplicable from a properly evolutionary perspective. Yet another thought experiment is meant to bolster this contention. Imagine I wanted to spend the next few centuries (or the next economic recession) frozen in temporary stasis. Since there is no guarantee that my descendents will be much interested in keeping me preserved, I decide to build a robot to protect my comatose body. I won't be able to monitor my robot's efforts to keep me secure, and I cannot be entirely sure just what the environment will be like a few years down the road. Since I cannot predict just what kinds of situations my robot will encounter, it is clearly in my best interest to design a robot with an intelligence and autonomy sufficient to see it through situations that I have failed to anticipate. In particular, this idea might catch on with others, who then design robots of their own. Faced with the threat of possible competition and exploitation by other robots, I should want mine to interact with its surroundings with all the cleverness of a genuine human being. Accordingly, let us suppose that I have managed to endow my robot with such a marvelous intellect (this is, after all, science fiction).

Since the robot in this thought experiment is clearly one of our artifacts, its intentionality would seem every bit as derived as that of the two-bitser. But given that its

behavior is every bit as sophisticated as that of a genuine human being, Dennett would have us believe that there could be no distinction worth drawing between our relative intentional capacities. As he sees it, Darwinian thinking demands that we regard ourselves as complicated artifacts of a sort, on par with our imagined robots, designed by Mother Nature to protect and preserve our genetic heritage. Like frogs, we are nothing more than “survival engines,” charged with the mission of serving the interests of our genes through self-preservation and procreation. *Therefore, our intentionality couldn't be any more original than the derived intentionality exhibited by our robots (and frogs).*

As a late and specialized product, a triumph of Mother Nature's high tech, our intentionality is highly derived, and in just the same way that the intentionality of our robots (and even our maps and books) is derived.... We may call our own intentionality real, but we must recognize that it is derived from the intentionality of natural selection, which is just as real- but just less easily discerned because of the vast difference in time scale and size. (*The Intentional Stance*, 318; this passage also appears in “The Myth of Original Intentionality,” 62)

Darwin's theory shows us how, although our intentionality is derived, it need not derive from anyone in particular. Instead, Dennett urges us to accept the apparently paradoxical thesis that our *literal* intentionality depends upon or derives from the *metaphorical* intentionality or selective wisdom of Mother Nature.<sup>7</sup> So if anything deserves to be called the root of all intentionality, it is either Mother Nature or our mindless genes. Much as Aquinas saw God to be first cause and Unmoved Mover, Dennett views Mother Nature, or at least our genes, as the ultimate source of our intentionality or “Unmeant Meaners.”

We now have an answer to the question of where we got our intentionality. We are artefacts, in effect, designed over the aeons as survival machines for genes that cannot act swiftly and informedly in their own interests.... So our intentionality is derived from the intentionality of our ‘selfish’ genes. They are the Unmeant Meaners, and not us, and in so far as some theorist can interpret an event or structure in us as being about something or other ..., it is only because of the informative role [it] plays within the artifact, and the way it contributes to its self-preservation.... There is no need or room for a more absolute, ‘intrinsic’, and ‘original’ intentionality than this. (“The Myth of Original Intentionality,” 59)

So even the intentionality we attribute to people must be of a derived sort - derived, that is, from Mother Nature. In the end, we must adopt the point of view of a subject's genes.

But, of course, genes have no point of view, not *really*; they aren't the kinds of things to have anything like original intentionality or understanding. The same goes for Mother Nature. Thus Dennett maintains that our intentionality is, so to speak, "derived all the way down."

### **Assessing the Case**

So how should we assess this case against original intentionality? Most commentators have tried to show that Dennett cannot coherently claim intentionality to be "derived all the way down."<sup>8</sup> They haven't, however, provided wholly satisfactory specifications of what it means for intentionality to be *original*. My task is to address this lacuna. Dennett's case breaks down into two distinct strands. In the first, he tries to embarrass the defender of original intentionality by showing that the contents of our intentional states is somehow extrinsic or dependant upon external factors. The second strand turns on the idea that we are survival engines or products of Mother Nature. So any satisfactory account of original intentionality will have to accommodate the extrinsic nature of intentional content as well as respect our biological heritage.

To be sure, precious few of our concepts are as murky as that of intentionality. One thing, however, stands out. *Normativity* must lie at the heart of any satisfactory account of intentionality.<sup>9</sup> Beliefs are *essentially* states that can be evaluated as *correct* or *mistaken* depending upon the truth or falsity of a certain state of affairs. Thus you don't have anything that warrants being called an *account* of belief (or doxastic states more generally) without an account of error (and correlatively, of correctness). Likewise, any intelligible account of desire (or other conative state or pro-attitude) requires a story about how to identify conditions of *satisfaction* - understood as possibly non-actual states of affairs that might not ever obtain, which a subject is *in some sense* disposed or inclined to bring about, all things being equal.<sup>10</sup> Such conditions of correctness and satisfaction are, of course, identified as the *content* of an intentional state. Hence the intuition that intentional states are inherently contentful (as well as the attendant puzzles behind such

contentfulness) are expressions of this commitment to the essential normativity of the intentional. While other kinds of intentional states (e.g., curiosity, envy, or pride) do not possess evident *directions of fit* – their intentionality is likely to be explained in terms of the intentionality of beliefs and desires that they presuppose.<sup>11</sup>

Accounts of intentionality should then be construed as attempts to provide stories (couched in suitably informative, paradigmatically naturalistic terms) about how creatures can possess states that are answerable for their correctness to the way things are.<sup>12</sup> This focus upon the *normativity* of intentional phenomena suggests that different *types* of intentionality correspond to different ways in which subjects can become so beholden to the world.<sup>13</sup> For instance, designed artifacts or instruments like the two-bitser are accountable with respect to standards imposed upon them by their designers or users. Since the standards by which we evaluate such items as having gotten things right or wrong stem from the purposes we standard-setting beings take it to have, their intentionality *derives* from us. Analogously, the standards by which we are able to evaluate the frog as getting things right or wrong ultimately depend upon our regarding it as a survival engine, in some sense designed to pass on its genetic heritage to future generations.<sup>14</sup> Since the states of the frog are beholden to norms imposed by Mother Nature (or the selective interests of its species), its intentionality would also qualify as derived.

This suggests that for a creature to exhibit an *original* type of intentionality, it must become accountable to standards of a kind not merely imposed upon it by designers or natural selection. Rather, these standards must be *sui generis* - discernible in a creature's own activity independently of (or without regard to) the purposes for which it might have been designed or selected by others to perform.<sup>15</sup> This would explain the allure of looking to educability as a place to draw the distinction between those with and without minds. For it is in the self-correction implied by educability that one begins to discern in a creature's behavior an *acknowledgement* that its own activity is beholden to standards.<sup>16</sup> Thus there is a sense in which the originally intentional are genuine subjects. Insofar as they can be correct or mistaken with respect to norms that they acknowledge

(or correct or mistaken *by their own lights*), the world becomes objective *for them*. The frogs of philosophical legend and vending machines aren't capable of recognizing their mistakes *as mistakes*. Things don't go wrong for them by their own lights. At this point, we can connect the notion of original intentionality developed here with that of free will, and see the insight behind the very old idea that we have a sort of freedom that things like the two-bitser (and instinct-driven brutes) do not. There is a sense in which the originally intentional are autonomous, not in the metaphysically suspect sense that they are free from the causal order, but rather in the sense that they have an intentionality that can be discerned independently of the purposes imposed upon them by designers (God) or Mother Nature.<sup>17</sup>

For present purposes, there are two observations worth making about this characterization of original intentionality. The first is that there is nothing in it that requires the content of originally intentional states to be intrinsic or invariant across possible changes in a subject's environment. So we shouldn't be moved by Dennett's first series of thought experiments demonstrating that the contents of our own thoughts and utterances are just as extrinsic as the contents of froggy or two-bitser beliefs. The fact that our intentionality is as relational as biological or artifactual intentionality need not make it the same fundamental type. In particular there is nothing in the idea that the contents of our beliefs and utterances are not wholly settled by cranial activity which precludes our being beholden to the truth or falsity of certain states of affairs in ways that do not ultimately appeal to the purposes for which we might have been selected or designed. [more chit-chat here about linguistic intentionality??]

The second, more important observation is that there is no reason why original intentionality couldn't be possessed by products of natural selection or even designed artifacts. The second strand in Dennett's case against original intentionality is thus no more compelling than his first. We shouldn't let Dennett talk about our intentionality as if we could have only one kind. That just goes to show that Dennett is in the grip of the frankly non-ecumenical idea that rival accounts of intentionality preclude one another. We should challenge Dennett's inference that since people are the products of natural

selection, the ways in which they can be understood as answerable to the world are intelligible only with respect to Mother Nature's standards or intentions. By no means do I want to deny that we are products of natural selection, and so *could* be understood as having intentional states of the sort described by biological accounts of intentionality. Such accounts show how humans could be attributed intentional states like those of the frog. But they don't thereby show that those are the *only* types of intentional states properly attributed to humans. To clinch his case, Dennett must establish that all intentionality is some form of biological intentionality. That is, he must demonstrate that all of the norms to which we are beholden are ultimately reducible to, and so cannot be understood independently of, biological norms. However, there is nothing in Dennett's thought experiments that comes close to showing that humans couldn't possibly exhibit intentional states grounded in a different kind of normativity. Indeed, I don't see how Dennett could go about arguing for this stronger claim. Dennett has thus concluded more from his thought experiments than is warranted. The fact that the products of natural selection can be evaluated according to biological norms doesn't preclude the possibility of there being other ways in which our states are answerable to the world that turn out to be independent (or intelligible apart from) the purposes for which humans have been designed or selected.

Here we must keep in mind that not all of an organism's attributes have to be identified with respect to their proper functions. Being green and having a disposition to snap at flies are two examples. One can see that a frog is green or recognize that it has a disposition to snap at flies without having to know how these traits contribute to the frog's biological success. One might demand a further explanation of why being green or having a disposition to snap at flies would be evolutionarily advantageous for something like a frog. Still, the point is that an account of how a subject must be constituted in order to exhibit a particular trait need not include an account of the causal or historical factors that led up to its exhibiting that trait. The question of *what it is* for an organism to have a certain property must be distinguished from the question of how a creature came to possess that property. Similarly, bipedalism would seem to be a trait that need not be identified with respect to an organism's proper function, even though only products of

natural selection have so far turned out to be bipeds. An intentional realist can reasonably maintain that having thought (or original intentionality) is a behavioral trait - albeit a complex one - that is similar to these other attributes in the sense that it can also be discerned in creatures without having to determine how it contributes to these creatures' biological fitness. In this fashion, an intentional realist can explain how having contentful thought could be independent of a subject's biological purposes, even while admitting the capacity to think confers a selective advantage, and even though it might turn out that only biological organisms possess minds. Just as there *could* be green things or bipeds that aren't products of natural selection, there could be non-biological things (such as Dennett's robots or Davidson's swampman) that have original intentionality.

So in no way do I need to deny that an *organism's* possession of original intentionality calls for biological explanation. One would want to know how having states that are answerable to the way things are with respect to non-biological norms could have enabled (or at least not prevented!) an organism's ancestors to survive to reproduce their kind. Any original intentionality ought to be biologically explicable if it is possessed by thoroughly organic beings like us. But although any capacity we have to harbor intentional states is presumably the *product* of natural selection, and so in a sense a biological phenomenon, that doesn't mean that *the intentionality* of these states is discernible only in terms of the operation of natural selection. Even though our intentionality derives from the operation of natural selection in the sense that it comes from our genes, that doesn't mean that the intentionality itself is derived in the same sense that the intentionality of frogs is derived- to wit, that the norms by which they are evaluated must ultimately be biological norms. Dennett's conclusion that our intentionality must be as derived as that of simpler biological organisms runs these distinct senses of "derived" together. In other words, he seems to have conflated the constitutive question of *what it is* for subjects to possess intentional capacities with the causal-historical question of *how they've come* to possess those capacities. This is most evident in the second of the passages quoted earlier, where Dennett is preoccupied with locating the source of our *capacity* for intentionality, rather than discerning the nature of the standards to which our intentional states are beholden. The fact that beings with high-

grade, original intentionality have evolved from organisms with low-grade, biological intentionality doesn't make this higher-grade intentionality a form of, or even continuous with, this lower form of intentionality. And this would still be the case, even though our capacity to harbor originally intentional states emerged, like vision, only gradually, and that the possession of original intentionality comes in degrees.

In a sense, organisms with original intentionality- or *persons*- would have the ability to rise up above their biological purposes to have purposes of their own.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, I take it to be a chief virtue of this discussion that we can make some sense of the idea that we are able to transcend our biology. That needn't mean that we are ever at cross purposes with Mother Nature, or that in pursuing our goals or purposes, we must resist or overcome biological urges. The point is simply that we are susceptible to additional types of evaluation. The intentional realist can thus claim that beings like us have been designed, as it were, by Mother Nature (or perhaps by some other deity of one's choosing) to have an original, or non-derived, sort of intentionality, whereas the simpler sorts of things Dennett typically considers in his examples have not. As Jeffrey Foss rhetorically (though perhaps infelicitously) queries: "Might not our genes intend merely that we have intentional states, but leave their content and nature largely undecided?"<sup>19</sup> Creatures like us are *meant to be meaners* or to represent the way things are *to themselves*. They have been designed to have purposes, beliefs, and/or intentions of their own, and so designed to have a distinct accountability. But none of this would make our intentionality particularly derived, or discernible as such only with respect to the norms or standards according to which things like us have been selected. The same goes for the robots in Dennett's thought experiment. Were we to be as successful fangling the sophisticated kinds of robots that Dennett bids us to imagine, they *too* would have special intentional capacities that artifacts like the two-bitser lack. Having purposes of their own, they would be answerable to the world in ways that do not presuppose their having been designed to keep us alive.

Now it certainly seems reasonable to suspect that things like us have evolved some capacity for intentionality that is not merely biological. Dennett's conclusion that

all intentionality, including our own, must be derived, like that of frogs and vending machines, strikes me as wildly implausible, given the sense I've now attached to the notion of original intentionality. Unlike vending machines and (perhaps) frogs, the standards governing the correctness of at least some of our performances and beliefs have no direct or obvious grounding in our biological purposes. There are plenty of grounds (educability and linguistic capacity being prime candidates) to distinguish our abilities from those of the frog of philosophical legend, and so to reject Dennett's contention that the difference between us and frogs is merely one of degree.

In light of this discussion, it is worth pointing out that Dennett himself sets out to describe differences in the intellectual capacities of critters in the chapter of *Darwin's Dangerous Idea* immediately prior to the one to which I've been devoting much of my attention.<sup>20</sup> There he tries to show how beings with full-blown linguistic capacity (such as us) could have evolved from simpler, tropistic creatures. Dennett's taxonomy is based upon the capacity to construct and evaluate possible responses to situations in their environments. As Dennett sees it, creatures with higher intellectual capacity have the ability to kill off bad plans before those unwise courses of action end up killing them. Dennett begins with abjectly tropistic, or *Darwinian*, creatures, whose responsive dispositions evolve only through the operations of natural selection. From there, his so-called "Tower of Generate and Test" ascends through *Skinnerian* creatures (whose responsive dispositions are modifiable through operant conditioning) and *Popperian* creatures (which are further capable of basing their behavior upon simulated outcomes of the possible responses that they may make). Finally, *Gregorian* creatures occupy the top of Dennett's hierarchy. These creatures are capable of designing tools of their own, including linguistic tools like words, to discover ever better means of navigating their surroundings. This final step, according to Dennett, "puts our minds on a different plane from the minds of our nearest relatives among the animals."<sup>21</sup>

So Dennett is clearly willing to draw boundaries between the mental capacities of creatures. However, while there is much to be said for Dennett's classification scheme, I find it striking that Dennett doesn't regard it as describing differences in *kind* between the

relative intentional capacities of critters.<sup>22</sup> Notice that Dennett's taxonomy is constructed around a creature's resources to pursue its biological purposes. Some organisms are cognitively superior to others because they are more adaptive or able to cope flexibly with the contingencies of their environments. Dennett does not try to show how creatures occupying the upper reaches of his tower can have goals of their own, or be evaluated as having gotten things right or wrong, in ways that don't ultimately appeal to their biological purposes. Instead of showing how creatures with more adaptive behavior warrant the attribution of special *intentional* capacity, Dennett unpacks intuitive distinctions between the mental capacities of creatures in terms of differences in the types of thought-contents that may be attributed to them. We are different from other creatures, not because we possess any original intentionality, but rather because it is profitable to understand us as second-order intentional systems, those which are themselves capable of adopting the intentional stance to have beliefs about other mental states.<sup>23</sup>

Elsewhere, Dennett endorses the idea that a special type of selection process goes on inside our heads, a process he calls the selection of *memes*.<sup>24</sup> Roughly, memes are ideas; like viruses, they inhabit and infect our minds, and they can be transmitted from one mind to another. Notice that this is an intentional characterization. For this reason, I haven't been as taken by (or infected with) the "meme"-meme as Dennett has. As I see it, Dennett simply trades in one sort of intentional vocabulary for another even more obscure (yet still intentional) idiom. However, we can still ask: what makes us such suitable hosts for memes? For some reason, however, Dennett doesn't draw the natural conclusion that our capacity to harbor memes demonstrates that we have a special sort of intentional capacity that simpler organisms lack. If he did, then he would see that it ultimately undermines his case against original intentionality, and he would come to understand that the quest for real meaning is perfectly compatible with an appropriately evolutionary perspective. There is no reason why we must, as he so colorfully puts it, "lose our minds to Darwin."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Different versions of this argument can be found in *The Intentional Stance* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Bradford, 1987), Chapter 8, "The Myth of Original Intentionality," in Said, et al. (eds.), *Modelling the Mind* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990: 43-62, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea* (New York: Simon & Schuster,

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1995), Chapter 14, and *Kinds of Minds* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), Chapter 2. See also *Brainchildren* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Bradford, 1998), Chapter 3.

<sup>2</sup>*The Intentional Stance*, 294 and *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, 412.

<sup>3</sup>*Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, 404.

<sup>4</sup> Considering that the two-bitser's stated capacity to accept change is so much more limited than that of a regular vending machine, it might be better to think of the two-bitser as a slot-machine instead.

<sup>5</sup> It might also be understood to be making a mistake if it dispenses something other than a soda (or the correct kind of soda) to its patron, but that carries us beyond the present point.

<sup>6</sup> See Millikan, *Language, Thought and Other Biological Categories* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Bradford, 1984).

<sup>7</sup> "The Myth of Original Intentionality," 60. These are the kinds of claims that drive critics like Jerry Fodor berserk. See Fodor, "Deconstructing Dennett's Darwin," *Mind and Language* 11:3 (1996): 246-62.

<sup>8</sup> See, for instance, Jeffrey Foss, "On the Evolution of Intentionality as Seen from the Intentional Stance," *Inquiry* 37 (1994): 287-310, Natika Newton, "Dennett on Intrinsic Intentionality," *Analysis* (1992): 18-22, and Marc Slors, "Why Dennett Cannot Explain What it is To Adopt the Intentional Stance," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 46 (1996): 93-98.

<sup>9</sup> While some (e.g. Fodor) might reject it, this is an assumption that few proponents of the evolutionary approach would be inclined to give up. As Millikan puts it (p. 94): "Beliefs, on the other hand, are *essentially* things that can be true or false, correct or defective."

<sup>10</sup> It would seem that an essential part of "all things being equal" is that a subject's relevant beliefs are correct. Thus I don't believe that one can unpack this *ceteris paribus* clause without some story about the correctness and incorrectness of doxastic states. For this reason, I think there is little prospect of specifying belief content in terms of an antecedently intelligible account of desire.

<sup>11</sup> As Searle points out in *Intentionality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), other types of intentional states often presuppose a subject to have a certain desire, given a certain belief. Beliefs and desires are thus "ground-level" intentional states.

<sup>12</sup> Such accounts need not seek to *reduce* (in the sense of *define*) the mental in terms of some other, less mysterious vocabulary. Rather, they might just aim to give *sufficient* conditions for mental activity, so that one could show how such activity could be implemented by systems obeying all the laws of nature. That is, a recognizably naturalistic project in the philosophy of mind would be that of profiling how something completely governed by physical and biological law could at the same time be appropriately understood as beholden to the way things are.

<sup>13</sup> Dennett might well agree. "There is no taking without the possibility of mistaking. That's why it's so important for us as theorists to be able to identify and distinguish the different varieties of taking (and mistaking) that can occur in intentional systems." (*Kinds of Minds*, 37)

<sup>14</sup> Opponents of biological intentionality challenge the legitimacy of adopting such a stance toward a product of natural selection.

<sup>15</sup> Several authors carelessly gloss original intentionality simply as that which doesn't presuppose the interpretive capacities of other subjects (see, for instance, Newton, 19). On that view, original intentionality couldn't be socially instituted. As a consequence, the meanings of our linguistic utterances wouldn't qualify as originally intentional. The account being developed here avoids that unhappy result as long as linguistic intentionality is discernible as such without appeal our natural purposes.

<sup>16</sup> Dretske mounts just such a project with limited success in *Explaining Behavior* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Bradford, 1988). I think I do better in "The Importance of Being Erroneous," *Philosophical Topics* 27:1 (Spring 1999): 281-308.

<sup>17</sup> If this is so, then the freedom alluded to in the free will debate is not best construed as a *causal* notion, as Descartes construes it, nor as a phenomenological notion, as Hume would have it, but rather a *normative* notion (as perhaps Harry Frankfurt would have it).

I think (albeit tentatively) that we can similarly relate the concept of *consciousness* to that of intentionality. Insofar as something has lights by which it can be understood as answerable to the way things are, it can be regarded as having a perspective or subjective take on the world. That is, subjects with original intentionality would exhibit reasonable publicly-accessible marks of consciousness. To be conscious is (at least in part) to be a source of standards or to be an evaluative being. To the extent that the two-bitser isn't a source of standards, then we may presume that it is not conscious. On this line, consciousness, like intentionality and autonomy, is best understood in normative terms.

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<sup>18</sup>Curiously, in several places Dennett endorses the same idea. My complaint is that Dennett doesn't recognize this distinction as marking a transition from one sort of intentionality to another.

<sup>19</sup>Foss, 304. Another, more inchoate expression of this thought can be found in Newton, 22-3.

<sup>20</sup> See chapter 13 of *Darwin's Dangerous Idea* and chapter 4 of *Kinds of Minds*.

<sup>21</sup>*Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, 381.

<sup>22</sup>This is all the more striking when you consider Dennett's illustrations of his various creature-types (*Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, 374-5), which depict his higher level creatures as themselves forming *pictures* of the world in some inner environment. Now what could that possibly represent, if not some special intentional capacity?

<sup>23</sup>Among the several places in which Dennett sees fit to distinguish the high-grade or second-order kind of intentionality that we have from the low-grade type exhibited by frogs and vending machines are *The Intentional Stance*, 108-112, chapter 5 of *Kinds of Minds*, and "Language and Intelligence," in Jean Khalifa, ed. *What is Intelligence?* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 161-78.

<sup>24</sup>The "Meme"-meme was generated (spontaneously?) by Dawkins in *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976) and has flourished ever since.

<sup>25</sup> This paper has been a long time coming. Successively refined versions were presented to audiences at Middlebury College, the 2001 Northwest Conference on Philosophy at Pacific University, and the 2001 annual meeting of the *Society for Philosophy in the Contemporary World*. Many thanks to Laura Ruetsche, Jane Chaplin, Kim Hannula, Mark Perlman, and my colleagues at UNLV for their respective efforts to improve the work.