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SENTENTIALISM AND BERKELEY'S MASTER ARGUMENT

By Zoltán Gendler Szabó

Sententialism is the view that intensional positions in natural languages occur within clausal complements only. According to proponents of this view, intensional transitive verbs such as 'want', 'seek' or 'resemble' are actually propositional attitude verbs in disguise. I argue that 'conceive' (and a few other verbs) cannot fit this mould: conceiving-of is not reducible to conceiving-that. I offer a new diagnosis of where Berkeley's 'master argument' goes astray, analysing what is odd about saying that Hylas conceives a tree which is not conceived. A sententialist semantics cannot account for the absurdity in attitude ascriptions of this type: we need to acknowledge irreducibly non-propositional (but none the less de dicto) conceiving.

I. INTENSIONAL POSITIONS

Certain sentences contain syntactic positions where the substitution of extensional equivalents may affect the truth-value of the sentence, and where normal existential commitments appear to be suspended. (The precise definition of intensional positions is a contentious matter. My conjunctive characterization is intended to be a sufficient condition, not a necessary one.) Paradigm examples of such intensional positions are within complements of mental attitude verbs such as 'believe'. In the following, (1) and (3) may be true, even if (2) and (4) are false:

1. Henrik believes that the author of *Alciphron* was a bishop in Cloyne
2. Henrik believes that the author of *The Analyst* was a bishop in Cloyne
3. Henrik believes that Santa Claus was a bishop in Myra
4. There is someone such that Henrik believes that he was a bishop in Myra.

One important but often neglected question about intensional positions concerns their distribution. We know they occur in clausal complements.

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Can they occur elsewhere? Richard Larson has dubbed the claim that they cannot *sententialism*, and has argued that it is a plausible hypothesis.[1]

Prominent among putative counter-examples for which sententialism fails are the intensional positions within the complements of transitive verbs, such as 'want', 'seek', 'visualize', 'expect', 'honour', 'resemble' and dozens of others. For example, (5) and (7) may be true, even if (6) and (8) are false:

5. Henrik seeks the author of *Alciphron*
6. Henrik seeks the author of *The Analyst*
7. Henrik seeks Santa Claus
8. There is someone such that Henrik seeks him.

Larson's strategy is to argue that intensional transitive verbs take clausal complements invisible at the surface but present at the level of logical form. These concealed clauses are non-finite (their subjects are not in the nominative case and the predicate within them is not overtly inflected for tense or agreement) and they come in two varieties. Some, e.g. (9′), contain a covert pronoun (called *PRO*) in subject position that is referentially dependent on the subject of the main clause. Others, e.g. (10′), contain an overt subject and a bare predicate (these are called *small clauses*):

9. Berkeley wants some tar water
9′. Berkeley wants [*PRO* TO HAVE some tar water][2]
10. Berkeley visualizes some tar water
10′. Berkeley visualizes [some tar water IN FRONT OF HIM]

(Unpronounced material is in capitals.) Larson cites some interesting syntactic data in favour of the concealed-clause analysis of intensional transitive verbs (e.g., that 'Henrik will need a copy of the *Principles* tomorrow' is

[1] R. Larson, 'The Grammar of Intensionality', in G. Preyer and G. Peter (eds), *Logical Form and Language* (Oxford UP, 2002), pp. 228–62. Larson calls the view 'sententialism' because he thinks the complement clauses of mental attitude verbs designate interpreted logical forms, and because since they encode all phonological, syntactic and semantic information about these clauses, interpreted logical forms may be identified with sentences: cf. R. Larson and P. Ludlow, 'Interpreted Logical Forms', *Synthese*, 95 (1993), pp. 305–56. For detailed criticism of this proposal, see S. Soames, *Beyond Rigidity* (Oxford UP, 2002), pp. 147–59. The terminology is not perfect: one could accept the view Larson calls 'sententialism' and combine it with a different view on the semantics of propositional attitudes.

[2] 'Henrik seeks a unicorn' is expanded into 'Henrik seeks [*PRO* TO FIND a unicorn]', which is reminiscent of Quine's proposal in *Word and Object* (MIT Press, 1960), p. 152, where 'look for' is analysed as 'endeavour to find'. Larson's view is immune to the objection raised in B. Partee, 'Opacity and Scope', in M. Munitz and P. Unger (eds), *Semantics and Philosophy* (New York UP, 1974), pp. 81–101, that if all verbs of search decompose into 'try to find' we lose the differences in meaning among 'seek', 'hunt-for', 'search-for', 'look-for', etc. For Larson, 'seek' is 'seek-to-find', 'hunt-for' is 'hunt-to-find', and so on.

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ambiguous in just the same way as 'Henrik will need to have a copy of the *Principles* tomorrow' is[3]) and he explains away apparent anomalies (e.g., that 'Some tar water is sought by Berkeley' is grammatical but *'Some tar water is sought to find by Berkeley' is not[4]).

Larson offers no explanation of why intensionality should be associated with clausal complements; indeed, he goes so far (p. 260) as to call it a 'mystery'. Nevertheless, sententialism sits rather well with two well established theses in the philosophy of mind. According to the first, the source of inten*s*ionality is inten*t*ionality, the representative character of certain mental attitudes.[5] According to the second, the representational content of a mental attitude is always propositional. So if we understand how representational states with propositional content, the so-called propositional attitudes, are possible, we understand intentionality and thereby the phenomenon of intensionality as well.

I think sententialism is false, and instructively so. Some of the counter-examples strongly suggest that there is more to intensionality (and if we accept the first of the above-mentioned theses, to intentionality as well) than propositional attitudes.[6] One such counter-example arises in a rather unexpected setting: Berkeley's 'master argument'. To present my case, I shall take a large step back and provide a diagnosis of just where that argument goes wrong.

II. THE MASTER ARGUMENT

It is hard to see it as anything but sheer *hubris* when, after outlining his considerations in favour of the stunning doctrine that nothing exists outside the mind, Berkeley announces that he is willing to set these aside and rest his

[3] As Larson notes (p. 234, fn. 6), arguments for bi-clausal analysis of intensional transitives can be traced to discussions in the 1970s.

[4] The explanation appears first in M. Den Dikken *et al.*, 'Intensional "Transitive" Verbs and Concealed Complement Clauses', *Rivista di Linguistica*, 8 (1996), pp. 29–46.

[5] This thesis is more plausible if we set modality aside. According to one conception of modality, syntactic positions within the scope of a modal operator are not intensional, assuming that we treat failures of substitution and existential generalization as necessary conditions for being an intensional position. Positions within the scope of modal operators do not give rise to substitution failures – appearances to the contrary can be handled if we treat definite descriptions as quantifiers and recognize that they give rise to scope ambiguities. And if existence is necessary the normal existential commitments are also in force in such positions; cf. T. Williamson, 'Bare Possibilia', *Erkenntnis*, 48 (1998), pp. 257–73.

[6] G. Forbes, 'Verbs of Creation and Depiction: More Events in the Semantics of English', draft (2003) at http://www.tulane.edu/~forbes/preprints.html, argues that the concealed-clause analysis for verbs of creation and depiction fails. My key example, the verb 'conceive', should probably not be called a depiction verb.

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case entirely on a single argument.[7] Here is what has been frequently called Berkeley's *master argument*, as he presents it in the *First Dialogue*:[8]

> *Philonous*: ... I am content to put the whole upon this issue. If you can conceive it possible for any mixture or combination of qualities, or any sensible object whatever, to exist without the mind, then I will grant it actually to be so.
> *Hylas*: If it comes to that, the point will soon be decided. What more easy than to conceive a tree or house existing by itself, independent of, and unperceived by any mind whatsoever? I do at this present time conceive them existing after that manner.
> *Philonous*: How say you, Hylas, can you see a thing which is at the same time unseen?
> *Hylas*: No, that were a contradiction.
> *Philonous*: Is it not as great a contradiction to talk of *conceiving* a thing which is *unconceived*?
> *Hylas*: It is.
> *Philonous*: The tree or house therefore which you think of, is conceived by you.
> *Hylas*: How should it be otherwise?
> *Philonous*: And what is conceived, is surely in the mind.
> *Hylas*: Without question, that which is conceived is in the mind.
> *Philonous*: How then came you to say, you conceived a house or tree existing independent and out of all minds, whatsoever?
> *Hylas*: That was I own an oversight; but stay, let me consider what led me into it. – It is a pleasant mistake enough. As I was thinking of a tree in a solitary place, where no one was present to see it, methought that was to conceive a tree as existing unperceived or unthought of, not considering that I myself conceived it all the while. But now I plainly see, that all I can do is to frame ideas in my own mind. I may indeed conceive in my own thoughts the idea of a tree, or a house, or a mountain, but this is all. And this is far from proving, that I can conceive them *existing out of the minds of all spirits*.

Hylas walks into a verbal trap: he wants to say something completely reasonable, even common sense, but he ends up saying something absurd.

III. CLEARING THE GROUND

Philonous asks Hylas whether he can 'conceive it possible for any mixture or combination of qualities, or any sensible object whatever, to exist without

[7] He should not have done so: if sound, a variant of the argument would establish not only idealism but solipsism, a doctrine as repugnant to Berkeley as materialism itself. Cf. D.M. Armstrong, Editor's Introduction to *Berkeley's Philosophical Writings* (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1965), p. 10; G. Pitcher, *Berkeley* (New York: Routledge, 1977), pp. 112–13; I.C. Tipton, *Berkeley: the Philosophy of Immaterialism* (London: Methuen, 1974), p. 161.

[8] Berkeley, *Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, in A.A. Luce and T.E. Jessop (eds), *The Works of George Berkeley Bishop of Cloyne*, Vol. II (Edinburgh: Nelson, 1949, pp. 165–263, at p. 200. There is an earlier version in *A Treatise concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, *Works*, Vol. II, pp. 23–113, at p. 50. There are subtle differences, but none that matters for my purposes.

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the mind'. Almost everything is contentious in this question, but fortunately very little of it matters for the argument itself. First, the wording vaguely suggests that sensible objects are mixtures or combinations of qualities – something Berkeley is clearly committed to – but the reasoning does not rest on this assumption: it is conducted entirely in the neutral terms of conceiving a tree or a house. Secondly, the challenge which Philonous poses to Hylas seems to be that he must conceive a certain possibility, but the modality is dropped immediately in the argument, and it is missing from the conclusion as well: Hylas is forced to accept the categorical statement that he cannot 'conceive a house or tree existing independent and out of all minds'. Finally, although it is hard to say what exactly it means for Berkeley that something exists in the mind, he offers us a way to bypass this difficulty; we can go along with Hylas and accept that 'what is conceived, is surely in the mind' without finding a necessary condition. Given these simplifications, Philonous' challenge comes to this: whether Hylas can conceive a tree to exist which is not conceived. Hylas tries to meet the challenge, but after artful questioning, he concedes that he cannot do so without absurdity.

There are two more or less standard lines of criticism against the master argument that I shall set aside at the outset. The first is that even if we could not *conceive* of a tree to exist which is not conceived, there none the less may *be* such a thing. To rule this out we would need the assumption that nothing real is inconceivable for us, and there is no good reason to make such an assumption. While I think this objection is entirely correct, I also think it offers little solace to opponents of idealism. The justification of our belief in mind-independent reality would be in serious peril if we had to concede that counter-examples for idealism are inconceivable.

The second criticism I shall set aside is that the master argument rests crucially on an equivocation between conceiving and imagining. Hylas permits Philonous to move from the claim that one cannot see a thing which is unseen to the seemingly analogous claim that one cannot conceive a thing which is unconceived. The move is facilitated by a theory which equates conceiving with (visual) imagining. (In the *Dialogue* version of the argument Berkeley appears to use 'conceive', 'perceive' and 'think' interchangeably; in the *Principles* version 'imagine' is added to these.) And, the objection goes, this theory is false. Again I agree with this objection, and again I do not think it goes to the heart of the matter. Philonous might have used trickery to lead Hylas to worry about the claim that he can easily conceive a tree that is not conceived. Still, I think it is important to acknowledge that the worry itself appears justified: it sounds *absurd* to say for Hylas that he has conceived something which is not conceived. The key to understanding where the argument goes astray is to identify the source of this absurdity.

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IV. A 'GREAT CONTRADICTION'?

Following Philonous' rhetorical question, Hylas agrees that it is 'a contradiction to talk of *conceiving* a thing which is *unconceived*'. We need to distinguish two ways in which one might take Hylas' concession. What is said to be contradictory might be the content of his *claim* that he has conceived a thing which is unconceived, or it might be the content of his *conceiving* a thing which is unconceived. I think neither concession is warranted.

I start with the first option, the idea that the reason why it sounds absurd for Hylas to say that he conceives a tree which is not conceived is because (11) is contradictory. The sentence certainly has a contradictory reading, which could be paraphrased as (12):

11. Hylas conceives a tree which is not conceived
12. A tree which is not conceived is such that Hylas conceives it.

There is a tradition of commentary according to which the master argument is based on scope confusion. Philonous traps Hylas by illegitimately moving from a *de dicto* reading (where the indefinite takes narrow scope with regard to the attitude verb) to a *de re* reading (where the scopes are reversed). The *de dicto* reading of (11) is alleged to be true and unproblematic, while the *de re* reading is contradictory.[9]

I think this analysis is uncharitable: it should be obvious to Hylas that he does not have to conceive *de re* anything whatsoever to conceive idealism refuted by a counter-example. If the argument turns on his missing this point, it certainly lacks subtlety. Furthermore, I do not think the argument needs to rely on a scope fallacy: while the *de re* reading is indeed contradictory, the *de dicto* reading is not innocent either. The following, where the *de dicto* interpretation is forced upon us, still sound absurd:

13. Hylas conceives a tree which is not conceived, but no particular tree
14. Hylas conceives a tree – not some specific tree, just any old tree – which is not conceived.

The absurdity cannot be that these sentences are contradictory. They ascribe some sort of thought to Hylas, they are true if and only if Hylas has

[9] The scope-based analysis of the argument goes back at least to A.N. Prior, 'Berkeley in Logical Form', *Theoria*, 21 (1955), pp. 117–22, although Prior takes a line slightly different from the one suggested above. Using a formalism where the predicate '*x* is thought of' is defined as 'someone thinks something about *x*', he shows that the claim that there is nothing such that Hylas truly thinks of it that it is not thought of is a logical truth. Then he points out that this does not imply that Hylas does not think truly that something is not thought of.

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that thought, and since for all we know Hylas might be completely irrational, the possibility that Hylas *does* have that thought cannot be excluded on logical grounds.

The second option for interpreting Hylas' concession is that it sounds absurd for him to say that he conceives a tree which is not conceived because the thought (11) ascribes to him is contradictory. The immediate worry is that the content of this thought is not presented in (11) as something that can be true or false: the complement of 'conceive' seems to be a noun phrase, not a sentence.[10] But as sententialists would surely remind us, it would be premature to assume on the basis of surface form that the thought ascribed to Hylas in (11) does not have a truth-evaluable content. So I shall set this worry aside for the moment and try to conduct the investigation on neutral ground. Without committing ourselves to a specific view on what the content of the complement of 'conceive' might be, we can all agree that if Hylas conceives a tree which is not a tree, the content of his thought involves ascription of contradictory predicates to the same thing. Could conceiving a tree which is not conceived be something similar?

The answer is no, as the following show:

15. Hylas conceives a tree which is not conceived by Hylas
16. Philonous conceives a tree which is not conceived by Hylas.

I take it that if the thought ascribed to Hylas in (11) involves ascription of contradictory predicates to the same thing, that must be because the thought ascribed to him in (15) does. (There is surely nothing wrong with saying that Hylas conceives a tree which is not conceived by anyone *except him*.)

But (15) and (16) ascribe the same thought; whenever (15) is followed by 'Philonous does too', we can expand this elliptical sentence into (16). The latter surely ascribes a thought to Philonous which does not involve ascription of contradictory predicates to the same thing. So the thought ascribed to Hylas in (15) does not either.

The conclusion I wish to draw is that Hylas' concession was a mistake: he *can* conceive a tree which is not conceived, and can do so without having a thought which involves ascriptions of contradictory predicates to the same thing. Still, I think there is a less direct way in which when Hylas says that he conceives a tree which is not conceived, he implicates himself in a contradiction, and it is this which explains the uneasiness one feels in granting Hylas his achievement.

[10] I am using the term 'thought' rather broadly as applying any mental event or state that involves representation. I am not committed to the claim that the content of all thought is truth-evaluable.

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V. SELF-DEFEATING THOUGHTS

Suppose Hylas conceives a unicorn, and then reflects on his own thought. Then he comes to conceive a unicorn and himself conceiving it,[11] from which he can conclude that he conceives a unicorn which he conceives. This is a new thought: while the original one was about a unicorn, the new one is about both a unicorn and Hylas conceiving it. This pattern seems very general: the following schema yields a truth whenever we substitute a proper name for *N* and a noun phrase for *NP*[12] (assuming we can read both the antecedent and the consequent *de dicto*[13]):

Reflection principle. If *N* conceives *NP*, then, by reflecting on this, *N* can come to conceive *NP* which (whom) *N* conceives.

By substituting 'Hylas' for *N* and 'a tree which is not conceived' for *NP*, we get that if Hylas conceives a tree which is not conceived, then through reflection he can come to conceive a tree which is not conceived which he conceives – a thought whose content involves the ascription of contradictory predicates to the same thing. Although Hylas' original thought involved no ascription of contradictory predicates to the same thing, reflection alone can lead him to one that does, and the seamless transition accounts for the absurdity of the original thought. Conceiving a tree which is not conceived is to have a thought with a consistent but *self-defeating* content.

In order to get a better sense of what this diagnosis amounts to, two comparisons are useful. First, there is a difference between 'conceive' and 'draw'. You can draw a unicorn and then, if you wish, you can add yourself to the picture sitting on a chair with a pad of paper drawing that unicorn. But nothing beyond your whim compels you to do so – you can fully

[11] It is a bit of a mystery how pronouns like the 'it' in 'Hylas conceives a unicorn and himself conceiving it' work. The pronoun is in the scope of a mental attitude verb and its antecedent, 'a unicorn', is in the scope of another. We have here a case of what Geach dubbed 'intentional identity': see P.T. Geach, 'Intentional Identity', *Journal of Philosophy*, 64 (1967), pp. 627–32. *Prima facie*, such cases violate well confirmed generalizations about operator scope and anaphoric potential. For a survey of some current proposals on the semantic problem, see C. Roberts, 'Anaphora in Intensional Contexts', in S. Lappin (ed.), *The Handbook of Contemporary Semantic Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 215–46.

[12] I here use '*NP*' in the way most philosophers do and in the way most linguists did before the debate began about whether the head of phrases like 'every dog' or 'two cats' are actually the determiners 'every' and 'two', rather than the nouns 'dog' and 'cats'.

[13] We cannot always read '*N* conceives *NP*' *de dicto*: cf. 'John conceives every unicorn' can only mean that within a certain given domain every unicorn is such that John conceives it. For discussion, see Forbes, 'Depiction Verbs and the Definiteness Effect', draft (2003) at http://www.tulane.edu/~forbes/preprints.html.

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recognize what you have been doing (i.e., drawing a unicorn) without drawing yourself into the picture. By contrast, you can conceive a unicorn and then, if you wish, you can conceive yourself conceiving that unicorn. Although the transition is similar to the previous one, this one is not completely arbitrary. It is the recognition of what you have been doing (i.e., conceiving a unicorn) that leads to the new thought. This, I think, is the reason for the difference between 'Hylas drew a unicorn he did not draw' and 'Hylas conceived a unicorn he did not conceive'. Freed of interference from the *de re* reading, the first sounds fine while the second remains odd.

It is also interesting to compare the master argument with the *cogito*. Descartes says that he is thinking, therefore he exists; and few have objected to this inference. In fact, Gassendi suggested that Descartes could have used a true statement about any other action – say, that he is walking – to reach the same conclusion. Descartes' response was that he cannot be certain that he is walking (at least not on the basis of what he knows at the point of the investigation when the *cogito* is presented), for even if he thinks that he is walking, he might still be in bed dreaming about walking.[14] By contrast, when he is thinking, he cannot be deceived. Why not? One way to explain this would invoke another reflection principle – for thinking, rather than conceiving. If Descartes were to think of himself unthinking, through reflection he could come to think of himself unthinking of whom he thinks of – a thought whose content involves ascription of contradictory predicates to oneself. The analogy with Hylas' case is striking; reflection alone can show the absurdity of both of the following:

17. Descartes thinks of himself unthinking
18. Berkeley thinks of a tree unthought of.

The similarity is far from complete and I shall come back later to a crucial difference. Still, the idea that the master argument is in some way analogous to the *cogito* is uncomfortable, for we definitely do not want to grant the force of the latter to the former. If Hylas indeed cannot conceive without absurdity a tree which is unconceived, how are we to answer Philonous' challenge?

VI. THE FALLACY

After simplifications, Philonous' challenge to Hylas was to conceive a tree to exist which is not conceived. What is absurd is not *exactly* the same: it is to conceive a tree which is not conceived. To rebut the master argument we

[14] Descartes, *Objections and Replies* (1641), in J. Cottingham *et al.* (eds), *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Vol. II (Cambridge UP, 1984), pp. 66–398, at pp. 180, 244 (AT VII pp. 259, 352).

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need to distinguish (19) from (20) and say that only the latter ascribes an absurd thought to Hylas:

19. Hylas conceives a tree to exist which is not conceived
20. Hylas conceives a tree which is not conceived.

But how could these claims come apart? Is it not obvious that to conceive a thing is nothing more or less than to conceive a thing to exist? After all, has not Hume argued (*Treatise* I i 6) that 'to reflect on any thing simply, and to reflect on it as existent, are nothing different from each other'?

The distinction is hard to appreciate at first, because in the clause 'a tree to exist which is not conceived', the bare predicate separates the subject from the relative clause which modifies it. But on reflection it seems clear that (19′) is equivalent to (19′′), which is in turn equivalent to (19′′′) and (19′′′′):

19′. Hylas conceives [a tree to exist [which is not conceived]]
19′′. Hylas conceives [a tree [which is not conceived] to exist]
19′′′. Hylas conceives [that a tree [which is not conceived] exists]
19′′′′. Hylas conceives [that there exists a tree [which is not conceived]].

And it seems plausible to say that (19′′′′) is very different from (20): unlike the latter, (19) does not seem to ascribe a self-defeating thought to Hylas. Given that in (19′)–(19′′′′) 'conceive' takes a clausal complement, the reflection principle is not applicable. The subtle but important difference between (19) and (20) is not the mere presence of 'exist'; it is rather that 'a tree to exist which is not conceived' is a *clause*, and 'a tree which is not conceived' is a *phrase*.[15] This can be seen from the fact that, unlike (19) but like (20), 'Hylas conceives an existing tree which is not conceived' also ascribes a self-defeating thought to Hylas.[16]

I do not say that there is no reflection whatsoever Hylas could perform that would lead him from conceiving a tree to exist which is not conceived

[15] Hume's claim is that to reflect on a tree and to reflect on a tree as existent come to the same thing. The expression 'a tree as existing' is much more slippery than either 'an existing tree' (clearly a noun phrase) or 'a tree to exist' (clearly a clause). This is not the place to discuss the syntax and semantics of 'as'-phrases.

[16] There are locutions that are hard to assess. Is 'Hylas conceives a tree existing unconceived' equivalent to (19) or (20)? My hunch is that it is ambiguous. On one reading it is equivalent to 'Hylas conceives a tree *as* existing unconceived', on another 'Hylas conceives a tree *which is* existing unconceived'. The latter is obviously analogous to (20) and ascribes an absurd thought to Hylas; the former, I suspect, is analogous to (19) and ascribes an unproblematic thought to him. To substantiate this last claim, an argument is needed that expressions of the form 'an F as G' are clauses in disguise; I provide such an argument in my 'On Qualification', in J. Hawthorne and D. Zimmerman (eds), *Philosophical Perspectives: Language and Philosophical Linguistics*, 17 (2003), pp. 385–414.

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to a thought whose content involves ascription of contradictory predicates to himself. I shall stay neutral on this matter. The contrast between (19) and (20) is rather this. If (20) is true and Hylas reflects on his thought, he *must* thereby come to have such a thought – that he conceives a tree which is not conceived. There is no other form of reflection possible. If, however, (19) is true and Hylas reflects on his thought, he *might* fail to come to have such a thought – he might just think that he conceives that some tree or other exists which is not conceived.

So I think Hylas can meet Philonous' challenge. He can conceive a tree to exist which is not conceived, without absurdity. The fallacy in the master argument lies in shifting the challenge to conceiving a tree which is not conceived – for that would indeed be to come to have a self-defeating thought. This, I think, is what Hylas should have responded to Philonous.

To return briefly to the analogy with the *cogito*, I have mentioned that a version of the reflection principle can be used to justify the claim that if Descartes thinks of himself unthinking, he has a self-defeating thought. And if Descartes thinks of himself *to exist* unthinking – that is, if he thinks that he is not thinking[17] – he has another self-defeating thought. (Suppose he thinks that he is not thinking; then by reflecting, he can come to think that he is thinking, which conjoined to his earlier thought yields the contradictory thought that he is thinking and not thinking.) Obviously, a similar move could not be used to justify the claim that if Berkeley thinks of a tree *to exist* unconceived – that is, if he thinks that there is a tree which is not conceived – he has a self-defeating thought. He does not. This, I think, is the source of the vast difference in force between the two arguments. Conceiving of a tree unconceived is self-defeating, just as thinking of oneself unthinking is; but conceiving of a tree to exist unconceived is not self-defeating, while thinking of oneself to exist unthinking still is.

To substantiate the response to the master argument, our semantics must block the inference from 'Hylas conceives [*NP* to exist]' to 'Hylas conceives [*NP*]'.The obvious way to do so is to distinguish between the 'conceive' which takes a clausal complement and the 'conceive' which takes a noun phrase complement. I shall call the former *conceive-that*, the latter *conceive-of* (the terms are used as mnemonics only; as in (19) and (20), both 'that' and 'of' can be omitted). Assuming a simple theory of attitude ascriptions, where *conceive-that* expresses a binary relation between a conceiver and the content of a declarative sentence, which is traditionally called a *proposition*, I say that *conceive-of* expresses a binary relation between a conceiver and the content of

[17] For ease of exposition, I am here helping myself to the plausible but not uncontestable assumption that there are no non-existent things. Though it would be cumbersome, it would be possible to phrase the point without this assumption.

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a noun phrase, which I shall call a *term*.[18] What terms are depends primarily on what propositions are.[19] Once this distinction is made it is no more surprising that 'Hylas conceives [*NP* to exist]' fails to entail 'Hylas conceives [*NP*]' than the fact that 'Hylas knows [*NP* to exist]' fails to entail 'Hylas knows [*NP*]'.

But this is not a move a sententialist can make. So, after a long detour, I have produced a challenge for sententialism, which in the final section I shall turn into an argument.

VII. BACK TO SENTENTIALISM

Sententialists *can* distinguish (19) from (20), if the latter contains covert material in logical form:

19′. Hylas conceives [a tree to exist [which is not conceived]]
20′. Hylas conceives [a tree *P* [which is not conceived *P*]]

Permissible values for *P* in the schema (20′) are bare predicates possibly prefixed by the infinitival 'to', e.g., 'in the garden', 'to be a tree', 'to grow', etc. The fact that the same schematic variable is used reflects the assumption that the concealed clause of an intensional transitive verb can be determined uniformly and independently of the larger context. This also entails that the predicate that occurs (twice) in the logical form of 'Hylas conceives a tree which is not conceived' is the one that occurs in the logical forms of 'Hylas conceives a tree' or 'Hylas conceives a unicorn'. What I shall argue is that no value for *P* in (20′) yields a plausible interpretation for (20).

It is clear from the outset that finding an appropriate value for *P* is not an easy matter. In every case that I am familiar with, the clausal analysis of intensional transitive verbs where a concealed clause with overt subject is postulated is controversial. For example, according to Larson (p. 233), 'Max visualized a unicorn' means something like 'Max visualized a unicorn in front of him', and 'Max expects a unicorn' means something like 'Max expects a unicorn to appear'. But I think that if Max visualizes a unicorn behind his back he visualizes it without visualizing it in front of him, and if Max expects an invisible unicorn he expects it without expecting it to

[18] I deviate from currently standard usage. Nowadays terms but not propositions are typically taken to be linguistic expressions. I think this is unfortunate – it is better for these words to remain tightly correlated.

[19] If propositions are structured entities ultimately made up of objects, properties and relations, then terms are constituents of these entities ultimately made up of the same sort of things. If propositions are functions from possible worlds to truth-values, then terms are functions from possible worlds to noun phrase denotations. If propositions are sentences of Mentalese, then terms are phrases of Mentalese. And so on.

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appear. It is unlikely that any proposal to set the value of *P* in (20′) would be much more convincing than these.

But there is also a direct argument that no instance of (20′) can plausibly regarded as equivalent to the relevant reading of (20). This follows from the facts that (i) the relevant reading of (20) ascribes to Hylas a thought that is both *de dicto* and *self-defeating*; and (ii) no instance of (20′) has both these properties. If the thought ascribed to Hylas in saying that he conceives a tree (to be) *P* which is not conceived (to be) *P* is indeed *de dicto*, the truth of this ascription must be compatible with the non-existence of trees. How then can the ascription be self-defeating? The content of the thought ascribed in (20′) tells us that everyone (including Hylas) fails to conceive some tree *de re* (to be) *P*. But this cannot lead to absurdity, since we know that (20) is compatible with the non-existence of trees, and hence with nobody's having any *de re* thoughts about trees. The content of the thought ascribed in (20′) also tells us that some tree is *P*, but this could not be the source of absurdity either – for then, by the uniformity requirement mentioned above, 'Hylas conceives a tree' would also have to be self-defeating. It seems that no amount of reflection on such a thought can lead Hylas to a thought which involves ascribing contradictory predicates to the same thing.

This shows at least that 'a tree which is not conceived' is not a concealed clause in the *de dicto* reading of (20). But assuming systematicity, I have now given good reason to think that conceiving something is not the same as conceiving that something or other holds of that thing. And 'conceive' is not alone in irreducibly taking both noun phrase and clausal complements – as far as I can tell 'think (of)', imagine', 'believe (in)' could all replace it in the argument.[20] And this means that understanding intentionality requires significantly more than understanding propositional attitudes.[21]

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[20] In my 'Believing in Things', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 66 (2003), pp. 585–611, I argue that (a) the proper way to express ontological commitment to Fs is to say that one believes in Fs; and (b) belief in Fs is not reducible to believing that there are Fs. One argument there turns on the non-equivalence of the claims that *X* believes in things he does not believe in (an ascription of a self-defeating belief) and the claim that *X* believes that there are things he does not believe in (a humble belief *X* can hold without the threat of absurdity). Berkeley's fallacy is exactly like the illegitimate slide from the second claim to the first.

[21] I presented an early version of this paper at a Colloquium at Cornell University, and later versions at the Central European University in Budapest, at the University of California at Davis, and at Yale University: I thank all the participants. I am especially thankful to Tim Crane, Kati Farkas, Graeme Forbes, Tamar Szabó Gendler, Michael Glanzberg, Peter Ludlow, Zsófia Zvolenszky and an anonymous referee for comments and objections.

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