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## Hypothetical Intentionalism

The intentional fallacy debate marked the beginning of an extensive discussion about the role of intentions in the scholarly interpretation of literature. For a long time, treatments of intentionalism in the study of literature were centred on the question of whether the actual intentions of a text's author should or should not be taken into account when interpreting that text. This meant that the argument became reduced to a question of whether one adopted a positive or negative attitude to the relevance of actual intentions. More recently, however, the situation has increased in complexity. Alongside actual intentionalism, rival positions such as hypothetical intentionalism and fictionalist intentionalism are attracting increasing attention in present-day discussions of intentionalism.

At the beginning of this article, the rival positions in the discussion of intentionalism are described as follows, drawing on the terminology of current Anglo-American work: (I) anti-intentionalism can be divided into (1) conventionalist forms and (2) forms that stress the value of the work as a self-contained whole; (II) intentionalism can be divided into (1) forms of actual intentionalism, either (a) extreme or (b) moderate, and (2) forms of hypothetical intentionalism, either (a) conjectural or (b) fictional. In recent theoretical debate, it is above all

the position of hypothetical intentionalism that has been felt to offer the best chance of future progress. Taking this impression as my starting point, I begin by outlining the problems of literary theory that provide the context in which hypothetical intentionalism can be reconstructed as an approach to solving the problem of intentions (section 1). Hypothetical intentionalism owes its popularity to the fact that, even though previous intentionalistic theories have all been dogged by substantial problems, there is still an underlying desire for an intentionalistic concept of interpretation. Hypothetical intentionalism can be described as prompting literary theory to develop a new intentionalistic stance, one capable of overcoming the difficulties of actual intentionalism.

Next, I reconstruct the most important forms of hypothetical intentionalism, including those of Alexander Nehamas, William Tolhurst, Jerrold Levinson, and Gregory Currie, from a critical perspective (sections 2.1 to 2.4). The reconstructions show that hypothetical intentionalism is typically marked by a theoretical perspective centred on the receiving entity in the act of literary communication, whereas actual intentionalism retained a genetic perspective centred on the producing agent. As analysis of the various formulations of hypothetical intentionalism shows, though, the conceptual differences between its supporters are so marked that we can at best speak in the plural of hypothetical intentionalisms that promise to solve what are at times dissimilar problems of literary theory.

Taking the reconstruction of the various hypothetical intentionalisms as my starting point, I then point out serious problems in the definitions of hypothetical intentionalism that have been put forward to date (section 3). My criticisms include the fact that the relationship between hypothetical intentionalism and actual intentionalism is unspecified; that the concept of the hypothetical, central to all stances based on hypothetical intentionalism, is deployed in an ambiguous manner; and that the status of the receiving entity, the central participant in communication for hypothetical intentionalism, is unclear (it usually vacillates between factual and counterfactual status). Hypothetical intentionalism is faced here with problems of construction that were typical also of approaches to interpretation based on reception history or the aesthetics of reception.

The various forms of hypothetical intentionalism are faced with a number of problems. The primary factor behind them can be identified with reference to current systematic overviews of the most important theoretical options available in the discussion of intentionalism in literary theory: the concept of the hypothetical is contrasted with that of the actual (section 4). Progress in the discussion of intentionalism is hindered by the concept of the hypothetical because it leads to the systematic confusion of metaphysical and epistemological issues. Finally, I present a terminological apparatus for future consideration. Its conceptual clarity is superior to that of previous terminologies, and it allows us to separate clearly for the first time the ontological and epistemological aspects of the debate on hypothetical intentionalism as it has unfolded to date.

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