

# A Sartrean (or New Intentionalist\*) Analysis of the Fallacy of the Intentional Fallacy: Thought, Consciousness and Conflicts of Interests

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*ABSTRACT.* Incorporating Sartre's work on consciousness and adapting those dualistic elements of the literary argument over the 'intentional fallacy', this paper involves a critique of the new-materialist trend that typifies agency and intentionality in materialist terms. It will argue that attempts to dissolve all dualist distinctions (as, for example,

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\* The authors have repurposed the term «New Intentionalism» to «mark off» their stance as distinct from recent initiatives in the philosophy of mind on intentionality that derive solely from Brentano's early work (famously developed by Husserl) but more so as a counterweight to the attacks on anthropomorphism characteristic of the «New Materialism» (LEACH 2015). Primarily, however, the term denotes a critical engagement with several dogmatic positions that the authors find in the «new materialism» of HARAWAY (1985), and «agential realism» of BARAD (2007) within the humanities (broadly construed): these theoretical positions are pointedly inured to human/non-human distinctions. Part of the authors' objective, then, is to rekindle the importance of the «intentional idiom» in aiding and abetting ethical talk of consciousness, sentientism, transcendence and embodiment in our relation to the material world.

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posthumanists are inclined to do) are problematic when dealing with conflicts of interests especially those of non-human animals. This critique applies particularly well to environmental ethics and animal ethics because ethicists and decision-makers need to be able to make moral judgments regarding cases in which the interests of creatures (conscious and nonconscious ones included) conflict, and where many different interests need to be weighted.

*KEYWORDS.* Consciousness; Sartre; New materialism; Intentionality; Agency; Applied ethics.

## 1. Introduction

Incorporating Sartre's work on consciousness and adapting those dualistic elements of the literary argument over the «intentional fallacy» this paper involves a critique of the new-materialist trend that typifies agency in materialist terms. It will argue that attempts to dissolve all dualist distinctions (as, for example, posthumanists are inclined to do) are problematic when dealing with conflicts of interests especially those of non-human animals. This critique applies particularly well to environmental ethics and animal ethics because ethicists and decision-makers need to be able to make moral judgments regarding cases in which the interests of creatures (conscious and nonconscious ones included) conflict, and where many different interests need to be weighted. This should on no account somehow be taken to imply that the interest of conscious, sentient creatures always outweigh the interests of nonconscious ones or a human exceptionalist stance in which the interests of humans always take moral precedence. Far from it, commercial practices today unjustifiably involve the atrocious suffering of sentient nonhuman creatures, whose interests in not suffering clearly outweigh the more peripheral, human interests at stake, such as having cheap meat available and the profit resulting from the meat industry<sup>1</sup>. In such cases, the intentional actions of agents and agencies involved in said commercial practices is, for the authors, only fully brought into the light when considered alongside the phenomenal consciousness of the animals in question and their subjective experiences mattering to them, that is, mattering to their awareness as minded agents – unlike mere material objects. This paper therefore attempts to set out the groundwork for why any ethical understanding or concern with the aforementioned suffering involves a resolute commitment to a form of dualism and intentionality that permits us to articulate how «they

1 For further discussion on the ethics of our use of animals in commercial practices, see HUMPHREYS 2023, JAMIESON 2002, NUSSBAUM 2022, SINGER 2023.

have a perspective from which their lives go better or worse»<sup>2</sup>. This is central to a consideration of what makes their suffering so appalling, as is of course the flesh and blood suffering itself.

The authors' aim in this paper is twofold: firstly, to collect and advocate for an eclectic array of largely overlooked epistemological positions that they find extant in mid to late 20th century philosophy from Stuart Hampshire through to the late Daniel Dennett that strike us as broadly dualistic in their outlook and which seem largely sympathetic to those ideas of mind that an intentional idiom in our language give shape to. Secondly and perhaps more centrally within this piece, is our outlining and paraphrasing the essential ontological and dualistic distinction made within Jean Paul Sartre's ontological and ethical magnum Opus – *Being and Nothingness*. In nutshell, those arguments he made for holding fast to the firm metaphysical distinction that consciousness plays in drawing out those things which are *en-soi* (beings-in-themselves) – of fixed predetermined essence and those that are *pour-soi* (beings-for themselves) which are marked off by self-consciousness.

The «personal heresy» – the dispute about whether an author's intentions should form the basis of an assessment of their work – was brought to the forefront of literary criticism debates by C.S. Lewis; it was a dispute that would come to receive much attention and would later become known as «the intentional fallacy»<sup>3</sup>. For Lewis himself, as clearly explained by Rosemarie Maier in her article ««The Intentional Fallacy» and the Logic of Literary Criticism», in relation to poetry «the experience of the poet is not the experience of the poem»<sup>4</sup>.

«The intentional fallacy» itself was a term repurposed by W. K. Wimsatt Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley (1946) to refer to the uncritical, presumed judgment (in particular, a fallacious one) that an assessment of the value or otherwise of an author's work should be based on the author's intended meaning and purpose<sup>5</sup>. Epistemologically speaking,

2 JAMIESON 1998, 47; see further JAMIESON 2002.

3 MAIER 1970, 134-34.

4 MAIER 1970, 135.

5 Oxford Reference 2020.

proper knowledge of the author's work is assumed falsely to be derived from the author's intentions or purposes in relation to that work. The supposed fallacy has its forms not only in literacy criticism – or the «new criticism», so called<sup>6</sup> from which the term itself originally relates – but also manifests in a range of other disciplines, most notably (in respect of the purposes of this paper) in archaeology.

Indeed, we propose that the substantive claims of the intentional fallacy are still at work, and at work as a given (even if an underlying, hidden one), in much of what constitutes the new «post human» ontologies within the seminal (new) materialist literature by authors such as Haraway<sup>7</sup>, Delanda<sup>8</sup>, Barad<sup>9</sup> and Leach<sup>10</sup>, which appear to be accepted as philosophically *de rigueur* according to more recent overviews of the New materialist «manifesto»<sup>11</sup>.

Much like the principle of the intentional fallacy, the new materialist «turn» in academia cuts across disciplines and can be characterised partly by its turn away from an ontological stance that lays emphasis on what, in the history of ideas, cemented dualism in terms of its popularity particularly from the Early Modern Period to the current day; that is, the importance of that which supposedly transcends the materiality of human beings – that is, the mind and its contents.

Indeed, Descartes' interactionism<sup>12</sup> left a legacy that no doubt contributed to dualistic distinctions that we make between ourselves and (the rest of) the natural world; distinctions between «us» (self-conscious creatures «elevated» to a status beyond that which is material, towards immaterial selves characterised by the mental) and «them» (all nonhumans (and all that is not human) which are (is) deemed to lack or be incapable of consciousness, self-conscious, or higher-order thoughts). Thus, the idea in relation to the principle of

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6 GREEN AND LEBIHAN 1996.

7 HARAWAY 1985/1991.

8 DELANDA 2002.

9 BARAD 2007.

10 LEACH 2015.

11 See FOX & ALLDRED 2019.

12 DESCARTES 1968 [1641].

the intentional fallacy is that its rejection is not only unjustifiably anthropocentric but creates a false nature/culture dualism by which humans perceive and understand the world.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide an evaluation of Cartesian interactionism. Suffice it to say, that this type of dualism is well documented as being fraught with problems<sup>13</sup>, despite its continued influence on our thoughts and actions, not least with regard to our interactions with the nonhuman world, particularly our treatment of sentient nonhuman creatures *as if* they were not conscious; as if they were merely material things.

However, there is another ontological stance that has close affinities with dualist interactionism and which we find in the works of many philosophers of existence, not least Jean-Paul Sartre who was publishing about the same time as Wimsatt Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley – Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* was published in 1943, and his essay «Existentialism and Humanism» (1946) was published in the very same year as Wimsatt's and Monroe's «The Intentional Fallacy».

It is not clear whether they would have read Sartre's work. In any case, even we assume that they had read *Being and Nothingness*, considering its length it is unlikely that it would have been digested sufficiently to influence their article, published as it was only three years after *Being and Nothingness*. But Twentieth Century existential thought still offers a fruitful avenue to explore 21<sup>st</sup> century alternative dualistic ontologies expressed in our everyday language (or at least ontologies that have dualistic foundations, or are heavily indebted to dualism) other than the Cartesian one that the new materialists most vehemently reject; a rejection of which is all but implied in their anti-intentionalist stance that claims that intentionalism is mistaken in its subscription to an internal criterion of evidence in relation to an assessment of an object / a piece of work rather than an external one, one related to the object / work itself.

Intention may be deemed to be an internal, private mental event for neo-Cartesian epistemologists or those historians of ideas or

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13 See, for example, KENNY 1968; COTTINGHAM 1986; and SORRELL 1987

philosophers of mind indebted to Brentano's «three theses» which view the problem of intentionality as purely a philosophical matter rather than one which clearly involves the humanities as a whole<sup>14</sup>. In any event, internalism of this sort need not imply Cartesian dualism; by the same token externalism need not imply a non-dualist, monist, or materialist ontological stance. That this is so is for another paper.

Therefore, in wanting to reassert the importance of intentions under their newly coined banner of New Intentionalism, the authors of this paper are not engaged in making (herein) a detailed contribution to the «fine grained» discussions within philosophy of mind on intentionality broadly construed or picking a quarrel with the new materialists or Object Oriented Ontologies<sup>15</sup> per se; far from it. Rather, the authors want to stress how a peculiar *inexistential* dualism expressed through our thought, intention (goals; aims etc.) is at work immanently in the language we speak and lends support for the view that intention(s) or purpose(s) is (are) key to an understanding of the object(s) of authors and artists in question within our current locus of debate – namely, the humanities broadly construed. Such a positioning has some important implications for ethics, as we shall see (to be discussed below).

In defending an «intentionalist stance» of the type popularly articulated by Daniel Dennett<sup>16</sup> in his book of the same name and by rejecting the «intentional fallacy» we would not want our position paraphrased crudely into taking sides with a resolutely conservative and private Cartesian dualism of mind on the one hand, against a reductive world of brute objective facts on the other – in the words of DZ Phillips, this form of dualism has already caused sufficient «havoc» in philosophy<sup>17</sup>.

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14 See LEACH 2015, and GOVIER & STEEL 2020

15 The authors have determined that for the purposes of this discussion paper, the introduction of what has become termed as Object Orientated Ontology (see HARMAN 2002) overlaps sufficiently with the post human thread within the New Materialist literature to be included – very occasionally in our critical overview (LEACH 2015).

16 DENNETT 1989.

17 PHILLIPS 1970.

Rather, we argue that to defend a new intentionalist position in the context of this paper is simply to admit or affirm an everyday ontological distinction or «existential dualism»<sup>18</sup> we make in ordinary language in which it *is* possible to speak meaningfully of objects or materials on the one hand, through the idiom of thoughts and intentions, on the other.

We quote approvingly and directly from Stuart Hampshire's critical and astute review in the journal *Mind* of Gilbert Ryle's *The Concept of Mind*,

Common sense language is, in fact, for better or worse, firmly dualistic [...]. We constantly ask and are beginning to answer various more or less general questions about the relation between a person's body and his mind, questions which cannot therefore be dismissed as improper<sup>19</sup>.

## 2. Jean-Paul Sartre

Sartre also drew attention to the importance of the ontological (dualistic) distinction between things that are *en-soi* (beings-in-themselves) and things that are *pour-soi* (beings-for-themselves). The former has an essence that is pre-determined, already fixed so to speak. Sartre provides the example of a paper knife to elucidate this: when the paper knife comes into existence, it already has a fixed

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18 Our principal grievance with the principle of «the intentional fallacy» – or the very idea that an author's work ought to be approached independently of authorial intent or biographical content, may be expressed via the phrase «it is the thought that counts». Namely, that our thoughts and intentions are every bit as real in conferring meaning on the world as the brute materiality which apparently constitutes it (existential dualism). The authors acknowledge that there is clearly further work to be done on integrating their thoughts on intentionality within the framework of more recent philosophical work on intentionality, that have tended to focus more on what BRENTANO's (1874) «theses» make of the scholastic's notion of *intentio*» (intention) and which turn on his rather cryptic use of «relata», such as «objects of thought» or their «immanent» or «intentional inexistence» (See CRANE 2006, KRIEDEL 2016).

19 HAMPSHIRE 1950, 240-1.



purpose, that is, to be a paper knife. It cannot decide to be something else – it cannot decide that its function is to be a machete, for example. It is what it is via a fixed, pre-determined nature; in this case, a nature that is determined by its designer. This is also true of other artifacts. According to Sartre, the same would also be true of an oak tree: an acorn develops into an oak tree because of its biological, physical features (its DNA and so forth) that make up its essence. Beings that are *en-soi* are, most obviously, things that are not conscious. Not being conscious, they do not have the freedom as humans do to decide to change and become something else.

In terms of the range of things that are *en-soi*, this paper will limit its discussion in this section to artifacts, rather than nonconscious living things (for nonconscious living things, see below section: «Implications and Ethics»). This is because while we can go along with Sartre's categorisation of *en-soi*, in addition we may wish to add that things that are not conscious and living may be further categorised from things that are neither conscious nor living. This would invoke different arguments compared to those presented below, particularly arguments concerning issues to do with the distinction between inanimate and living things, but also to do with divine creation and the existence of God, for example. This is not to suggest that Sartre's arguments depend on the existence of God – indeed, he convincingly argues that this is not the case<sup>20</sup>. But considering artifacts alone in the first instance is necessary to gain clarity of the issues before additional conceptual categorisations are brought to the fore.

Here, it is worth interjecting for clarity's sake that it is not the authors» part to deny that objects have been usefully understood as having «biographies»<sup>21</sup> or indeed «agency»<sup>22</sup> or elsewhere that these objects, may in an archaeological and anthropological sense, «resist» a particular interpretation<sup>23</sup>. However, a caveat is required: talk of

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20 SARTRE 2007 [1946], 28.

21 KOPYTOFF 1986.

22 HOSKINS 2006.

23 JONES 2004.

objects having such things is creative play and makes metaphorical use of agency in respect to artefacts. This is quite distinct from such talk's actual or denoting sense, where the relevant terms would «mark out» or «attribute» consciousness.

The case is very different when it comes to things that are *pour-soi*. These things are distinguished from the former by virtue of being self-conscious. While much of the time our experience is directed outside of ourselves, towards things that are *en-soi*, our consciousness can also be directed back in on ourselves, that is, consciousness can turn its attention to itself. Following Husserl<sup>24</sup> who himself borrowed the idea from Brentano<sup>25</sup>, Sartre adheres to the idea that all conscious experience is necessarily consciousness *of* something or other – consciousness *about* something<sup>26</sup>. Indeed, consciousness has about it this quality of being directional or intentional – it is aimed at an object, whether that object be one of ordinary experience, outside of ourselves (such as an artefact, a table or an oak tree), or an object of consciousness itself (such as feeling of dread, an idea in the mind, a headache, an aim for the future, or – and importantly for the section on implications and ethics, below – the feeling of frustration, pain, loneliness, and discomfort).

Characteristic of beings-for-themselves is that, unlike *en-soi* which are objects, they are subjects for the very reason that their existence precedes their essence<sup>27</sup>. In contrast, with regards to ourselves, as human subjects, our existence comes before any essence we might have. This is because we can determine what we are through our choices. Being conscious creatures with no predetermined essence, we can, through what we do, determine our own essence: My essence can be seen as the things that would define me were I to die today<sup>28</sup>. But, as Sartre claims with regards to the artist, «saying 'You are nothing but your life' does not imply that the artist will be judged solely by his

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24 HUSSERL 1970 [1900], 1913.

25 BRENTANO 1911, 1973 [1874].

26 SARTRE 2007 [1943], 17.

27 SARTRE 2007 [1946], 22.

28 See for example SARTRE 2007 [1946], 35-9.

works of art, for a thousand other things also help to define him. What we mean to say is that a human is nothing but a series of enterprises, and this he is the sum, organization, and aggregate of the relations that constitute such enterprises<sup>29</sup>.

One should perhaps note that what Sartre is claiming here does not depend on there being no divine creator, for even if God does exist and It has given us a purpose, and even if we discover what this is, it is up to us to fulfil this purpose through the choices we make. We really are free to create our own destiny<sup>30</sup>; it is really is up to us.

Of course, Sartre realises that there are aspects of our existence for which we are not responsible – such as our place of birth, our genetic make-up, and the laws of existence. These aspects are fixed and refer to what Sartre calls our «facticity».

### 3. Intentional fallacy and Sartrean analysis

But, and key to this paper, our facticity is not who we are. It is our consciousness, as human beings, that is key to our existence, and which notwithstanding bad faith, transcends the materiality of our existence.

Indeed, often it is simply the case that it is «the thought that counts» or in so far as it is often said that it is the thought or the intention (think of the Gift) which finesses the physical aspect of the gift or object. And so, while it makes sense to say that our freedom (though transcendent) is limited by our facticity, for artefacts – as beings *en-soi* – it makes no sense to say the same of them. They do not have this dual aspect to their existence (unlike sentient humans and other animals), so it makes no sense to say that they have freedom or that their freedom is limited. They *are* their facticity but are so by virtue of their designers who created them with a purpose in mind quite irrespective of whether we view their thoughts or these «purposes» to

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29 SARTRE 2007 [1946], 38.

30 SARTRE 2007 [1946], 53.

be lost to us through time<sup>31</sup>. What they are is fixed in this very way. It makes sense of an artifact that (for example) it *is* a sculpture of this or that nature, in a way it makes no sense to say that the authors *are* writers or teachers. We contend that this distinction is not merely a difference in degree, rather it is a difference in kind (when that difference concerns objects on the hand, and conscious creatures on the other).

But saying this is different from understanding the nature of what *is* in this case (the case of the sculpture). For we have said that what it *is* in similar cases is predetermined by beings that are *pour-soi* – by beings that are not merely conscious, but self-conscious. And considering the intentionality aspect of consciousness, this makes a difference to the ontological status of artifacts and relatedly to what we can say an object *is*, in itself (that is, what we can say of its essence or of its defining features or characteristics, an essence which, unlike the case of a being *pour-soi*, precedes its existence).

And so it is that epistemologically speaking, to know of the objects in themselves – to know what the objects *are* – we need to know of the creator's / creators» intentions or purposes. Knowledge here starts from the self, and Sartre himself admits that the Cogito will be his starting point in his philosophy of existence<sup>32</sup>. But this need not imply Cartesian dualism through and through. It does, however, imply a dualistic basis for his arguments. But his view of consciousness is not subject (or at least, less subject) to the charges against Descartes; charges regarding implications of solipsism and other problems arising from self-consciousness being at the heart of his theory of knowledge.

This is because, for Sartre, subjectivity is conceived as «intersubjectivity», as being in the world<sup>33</sup>. Indeed, unlike Descartes, Sartre rejects the drive for objectivity, arguing instead that we are not dispassionate observers of the world, and must admit our personal

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31 DAVIS 2013.

32 SARTRE 2007 [1946], 40.

33 SARTRE 2007 [1946], 42.

engagement with it, even if we take the individual as the starting point for philosophical enquiry<sup>34</sup>.

And this starting point is crucial to Sartre's philosophy. Humans create their own world, but this is as far as charges of individualistic isolationism go, for it is through being in the world as a concrete bodily consciousness<sup>35</sup> that the human creates meaning. With regards to the intentional fallacy, she creates objects within that world, the intentional drive for which *makes* those objects what they *are*. Thus, the ontological status of artifacts – beings *en-soi* – is determined by beings *pour-soi*, and as such the intentional fallacy advocates are mistaken in saying that the author's / authors' meaning, purposes or intentions need to be somehow bracketed off in order to «get to» the objects themselves.

Further, the materiality stances, while exploring the role of the body as the site of meaning for human beings, have downplayed the importance of our embodiment rather than our bodies; embodiment itself being a term that, following Maurice Merleau-Ponty, refers to *the mind as essentially embodied*. As Merleau-Ponty says, «The body is the vehicle of being in the world»<sup>36</sup>; it is the vehicle through which our thoughts and emotions are «lived» as a body-subject. Crucially, for Merleau-Ponty, «Because we are in the world, we are *condemned to meaning*»<sup>37</sup> that is created via an interaction «between subject and object, perceived [sic.: perceiver] and perceived, visible, and invisible»<sup>38</sup>. But it is the *phenomenal* body that creates meaning – *my* body as *I* experience it – not the objective body as a physiological, material entity: «[Embodiment] pertains to the phenomenal body and to the role it plays in our object-directed experiences»<sup>39</sup>. In contrast, consider the New Materialist agenda: «For new materialists, human bodies and all other material, social and abstract entities have no

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34 See SARTRE 2007 [1946], 40-1.

35 SARTRE 2003 [1943], Part III: Being-for-Others'.

36 MERLEAU-PONTY 2002 [1945], 94.

37 MERLEAU-PONTY 2002 [1945], xxii.

38 ADAMS 2001.

39 AUDI 1999, 258. For meaning in context, see further ROMDENH-ROMLUC 2012, 103-12.

ontological status or integrity other than that produced through their relationship to other similarly contingent and ephemeral bodies, things and ideas»<sup>40</sup>.

We firmly deny the aforementioned ontological status as unduly reductive and unhelpful. All this of course relates to the ontological nature of things that are conscious, rather than nonconscious. Indeed, the authors propose that the distinction between conscious and nonconscious things is crucial to our understanding of the materiality of the world (as well as to developing an ethical relation with it, but that is for another paper though it will be necessary to touch on it below). As human beings, our facticity is outweighed by our transcendence, our ability to create meaning through our conscious experiences. In Merleau-Ponty's terms, meaning is derived through our phenomenal body, our lived experiences of the conscious body, not through the body as a purely material, physiological thing, as simply an object causally related to the mind.

#### 4. Implications and ethics

The significance of phenomenal consciousness and how this rests on making distinctions which are both ordinarily and fundamentally dualistic in nature is – one imagines, recognised by sentientists, including for example Dale Jamieson, who implicitly argues for such significance to play a key role in environmental ethics, claiming that animal liberationism can stand as an environmental ethic. Indeed, in his well-known paper «Animal Liberation is an Environmental Ethic»<sup>41</sup>, he claims that «any plausible ethics must address concerns about both animals and the environment»<sup>42</sup>. Sentientism – the position that all and only sentient creatures have moral standing<sup>43</sup> – tends to be the normative stance adopted by animal liberationists («tends»

40 FOX & ALLDRED 2019, 4

41 JAMIESON 1998.

42 JAMIESON 1998, 46.

43 For further discussion on environmental ethics stances, see ATTFIELD 2023, ch.7.

because such liberationists may consistently adopt biocentrism as an environmental ethic: see below). Certainly, sentientism is much more inclusive than the current anthropocentric ethic (that is embedded in many practices across the globe, particularly in big businesses that use nonhuman creatures for meat, fur and experiments, and which continues to be used as a framework for environmental policies and practices<sup>44</sup>). Most obviously, sentient creatures (humans and nonhuman ones included), need habitable environments in which to live, clean water to drink, and adequate food sources, and in terms of climate adaptation, adequate climate refugia. As Jamieson argues,

One reason to oppose the destruction of wilderness and the poisoning of nature is that these actions harm both humans and nonhuman animals. I believe one can go quite far towards protecting the environment solely on the basis of concern for animals<sup>45</sup>

Suitable environments are of course necessary for the flourishing of all sentient creatures and necessary to minimise conflicts (human-human conflicts, and well as ones between other species and across species). But the multi-species world, dissolved of all binary relations, need not, contrary to what is argued by some theorists, need not be one that thrives. On the contrary and accepting that hierarchical ideological binary relations should be rejected, there is a sense of agency and intentionality that tends to be underemphasised within some current discourses that have been criticised earlier in this paper and which is very different from the so-called «agency» of material things.

While the sheer extent of the suffering of nonhuman creatures makes sentientism a much more plausible position from which to tackle

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44 See further McMULLEN 2016, and THOMAS 2022.

45 JAMIESON 1998, 46. For more on the harmful impacts of, for example, factory farming as a food source in relation to the interests of humans, animals and the environment, see HUMPHREYS ET AL 2022. For further discussion on animal ethics as an environmental ethics, see HEEGER AND BROM, 2000, and for the importance of animal welfare in relation to meeting the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, see HUMPHREYS AND VARGHESE, FORTH. 2024

environmental problem than anthropocentrism, it centres everything that matters morally on the capacity for conscious experiences. But, as argued by biocentrists, nonsentient creatures have interests too<sup>46</sup>, although such interests, all things beings equal, and when considering judgments of moral weight, do tend to be less significant than the sentient ones at stake. For sentient creatures, their phenomenal experiences matter to them, from their own subjective standpoint<sup>47</sup>.

Certainly, as sentientists and biocentrists would no doubt agree, what we do to animals in commercial practices is not companionable, and animals are not considered as kin (one only has to reflect on the extent of their suffering and the numbers of animals involved to recognise this) and this is all the more keenly understood, as it is evidently quite intentionally brought about. But a dissolving of all conceptual boundaries as is so often argued for in new materialist positions is unlikely to enable a recognition that what we do to them is a matter of justice. Sentientism, at the very least, allows for such recognition, as does biocentrism as a more inclusive view that also considers the interests of nonsentient creatures as a matter of direct moral concern, whether they are considered to have agency or not.

Indeed, a dissolving of all binary conceptual distinctions as – as well as of terms that point to real ontological properties of creatures, including a sense of agency as distinct from material agency and grounded in consciousness or intentionality – is to cast aside talk of those very capacities that we need to reference and reflect on in matters of justice in relation to all creatures. In addition, reference to such capacities is needed in order to be able to apply the principle of equality cross species, such that like interests are given equal consideration in contrast to unlike ones<sup>48</sup>.

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46 ATTFIELD 1995, 7-27; 2020, 63-74; 2023, CH.7; HUMPHREYS 2023, 118, 127, and 108-9; and RODOGNO 2010, 84-99.

47 See further JAMIESON 2002.

48 SEE SINGER 2023.



## 5. Conclusions

These issues are underplayed by the materiality position at the expense of an understanding of consciousness *as* our intentionality and as a necessary part of the phenomenal body that «as the potentiality of this or that part of the world, surges towards objects to be grasped and perceives them»<sup>49</sup>. Accordingly, the materiality positions tend to lump all things into one (into the category of beings *en-soi*) or at least to present them as if they have the same ontological make-up, whether they are conscious, nonconscious but living, objects in nature, or artefacts.

Accepting that the materiality advocate might claim that the tendency to categorise things in the world in a Platonic sense is something she wishes to overcome, it has to be said that problems with dualistic ideologies are not a sufficient reason to throw the baby out with the bath water, so to speak. Attempts to collapse all conceptual distinctions with regards to metaphysical stances only leads to a misrepresentation of what things are in themselves. We are free to reject the old dualistic constructs that separate human beings from the rest of the world, whilst also recognising that there are key ontological distinctions between conscious and nonconscious things, recognition of which is compatible with not reducing the world to separate components (a reduction neither Sartre nor Merleau-Ponty can be accused of).

Further bones of contention are laid bare when considering a key tenet of Barad's worldview, who remarks «We are part of the world in its differential becoming. The separation of epistemology from ontology is a reverberation of a metaphysics that assumes an inherent difference between human and nonhuman, subject and object, mind and body, matter and discourse»<sup>50</sup>. For Barad, then, the distinction is only a metaphysical «reverberation» and has no meaningful bearing on the critical role this distinction has within ethical and metaethical

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49 MERLEAU-PONTY 2002 [1945], 121.

50 BARAD 2007, 185.

determinations that hinge on the rights and wrongs which attach to making and upholding this difference: but surely this is wrong. The distinction between conscious and non-conscious things is something that should be recognised by not just metaphysicians but also by meta-ethicists and applied ethicists as we have done elsewhere in this paper when canvassing for and unpacking ethical positions in animal or environmental ethics. Such a distinction should be essential to understanding how we mediate conflicts of interests, the intentionality or culpability of agents and weigh up beneficence and harms, as well as address questions concerning which beings have moral standing and why. Surely, accepting that the possession of consciousness is not necessary for moral standing, it is nevertheless not only sufficient but makes its bearers likely candidates for moral significance in cases of conflict<sup>51</sup>.

The distinction is also, of course, central to being able to say that we are free and responsible or that we intended to do this or that in a way that it makes no sense to say of non-conscious things. (In anticipation of an attempted criticism, recognition of relevant distinctions (and non-relevant ones) is not only compatible with the principle of equality in relation to nonhuman beings but is crucial to its proper application in intra- and inter-species cases. In any case, such cases are different from the one we are dealing with here which involve artefacts and human beings.)

Similarly, making the distinction between conscious and non-conscious things and our inquiring into what others meant, intended, planned or aimed for helps us to understanding what artefacts are, what they mean, and why.

In summary, the authors have begun outlining a broad but nonetheless (in their view) necessary entry in support of adopting an «intentional stance» (Dennett) toward the material world within philosophical studies in the humanities as they are broadly interpreted. It takes into the account the importance of ordinary

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51 See, for example, ATTFIELD AND HUMPHREYS 2016 and 2017; GOODPASTER 1978; and HUMPHREYS 2011

dualistic language (Hampshire) and the intentional, ethical and meaning giving elements of embodiment which (they argue) clearly transcend our «facticity». The authors believe that this is a timely and necessary position to adopt (under the banner of a repurposed «New Intentionalism») particularly in view of what they perceive as a persistent downplaying of the importance of the conscious subject and allied studies in human and nonhuman consciousness, in favour of a resolute (and reductive) realism toward object and things, in which (it seems) our thoughts or intentions count for very little at all.

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