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REPRESENTATIONS IN BELIEF AND BEHAVIOR: THE PROBLEM OF MEANING IN AN EMPIRICAL PSYCHOLOGY

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The psychological perspectives of Behaviorism and Functionalism seek to study behavior and the mind through purely objective empirical methods. In the first part of this paper I argue that the objective, causal-physical relations of a mental state cannot strictly determine belief or intentional content. Thus any objective account of intentionality (i.e., Behaviorism or Functionalism) is incoherent.

In the second part of this paper I explore the ways in which Functionalists have tried to enlist mental representation to explain belief. I utilize the arguments of Robert Cummins to show that any causal-physical account of mental representation will leave representational content indeterminant. I argue that this representational indeterminacy is a derived version of the intentional indeterminacy presented in the first section. I show how this indeterminacy has caused great difficulties for theories which try to equate mental representations with beliefs, and also for Artificial Intelligence which designs computational models of representational systems.

In the final section I present Cummins' account of mental representation, Interpretational Semantics, and how it avoids making claims about content and remains objective. I then examine this theory's consequences for psychological method and theory as well as Artificial Intelligence.