

Troubles with Wagner's Reading of Millikan

Wagner's "Teleosemantics and the Troubles of Naturalism" (this journal:81.1, April 1996), the bulk of which consists of a critique ostensibly of the theory of mental content developed in my (1984, 1993a), contains numerous serious errors as well as more homely inaccuracies in the statement of my position. I will treat only the serious errors, roughly in order of appearance. Omitting all the "I said"s, I will simply state my position on the relevant points, with page references to the passages in which Wagner states the opposite (W:) and references to the relevant portions of my own work (M:).

The notion that intentional items "have the function of indicating" (W: 83, 90, 100) is usually shunned for good reason, and when that idiom is used (twice in the corpus) it is heavily guarded or its sense carefully qualified (M: 1983 p.86 with a more careful statement of the matter almost immediately; p. 128, where a number of importantly different senses of this notion are distinguished). Especially relevant, in Dretske's sense of "indicating," nothing could possibly have indicating as a function (pointed out on 1993 p. 129), so to treat Dretske and Millikan in a lump together clearly is not possible. Constantly emphasized is that it is not proper functions but "Normal conditions for proper performance" (and only the most "proximate" of these—defined., e.g., in 1884 ch 1) to which we must look to locate the semantic content of (indicative) representations (M: 1984, 1993 ch 3-6, explicit warning in 1991).

Beliefs, along with other "(indicative) representations" as distinguished from mere "intentional icons" (M:1984 and 1993 ch 5, distinction footnoted also in 1993 Ch 4), do not ever have as a proper function, to produce any specific behaviors (W: 83, 96, 97; M: 1984 ch. 6, and then throughout; 1993a ch. 3-6 throughout).