Mental Content, cont’d
Dretske, “A Recipe for Thought”

1. Two related questions:
   i. How do intentional states come to have the content they do?
   ii. How do we go about attributing intentional states to others?

Regarding (i): There are two ‘styles’ of answer, reductive and non-reductive

- **Reductive account**: an account that does not help itself to any mental ingredients
- **Non-reductive views**: an account that *does* help itself to mental ingredients

Think of the cake analogy here.

Dretske provides a reductive account; Dennett provides a non-reductive one. As we shall see, Dennett’s answer to (i) is intrinsically related to his answer to (ii).

2. How could a purely physical system exhibit intentionality?  (Help us understand this!)

Well, consider the compass.

**One feature of intentionality**: intensionality (with a ‘s’)

A compass indicates (when used properly) the location of the North Pole, not the whereabouts of polar bears (even if polar bears are at the North Pole). The compass represents “under aspects”. That is, the compass can say that x is F without saying that x is G despite the fact that ‘F’ and ‘G’ ‘point to’ the same thing.

So the way the compass represents seems importantly similar to how beliefs represent—one may believe that the location of the pole is over there and not believe that the location of polar bears is over there (even if polar bears are at the north pole).

**A second feature of intentionality**: misrepresentation

We also need a system that can say that x if F without its being the case that x is F. Content is independent of the truth of what one thinks. (Think of the unicorns case.)

Compasses can misrepresent, but they need our help to do it.

“Their representational successes and failures are underwritten by the purposes and attitudes of their designers and users” (494).

“We are the source of the job, the function, without which the [compass] could not say anything false” (494).

So the compass doesn’t help us understand how a purely physical system could exhibit the “first mark of intentionality”—the power to misrepresent. (Remember, Dretske seeks a reductive account.)

What we do learn however is that if something is to be representational, it must have a certain function. (It is in virtue of *not* performing this function that it misrepresents.)

**A distinction**: between something’s being the purveyor of information and something’s being a ‘representational system’.
3.

Natural functions:

“If an information carrying element in a system could somehow acquire the function of carrying information, and acquire this function in a way that did not depend on our intentions, purposes, and attitudes, then it would thereby acquire (just as a thermometer or compass acquires) the power to misrepresent the conditions it has the function of informing about” (495)

Two ways of acquiring natural function: phylogenic and ontogenic

**Phylogenic**: coming from their evolutionary, selectional, history

But this could not explain how an individual animal might acquire representations of its environment through learning.

**Ontogenic**: coming from learning and development

“These functions are results of the right kind of history” (496).

“…[T]he result will be a system with internal resources for representing (with the associated power of misrepresenting) its surroundings. Furthermore, that this system represents, as well as what it represents, will be independent of what we know or believe about it…The entire process can happen spontaneously and, when it does, the system will have its own cache of original intentionality.”