

Brentano's Revolution, Meinong's Progress and Wittgenstein's Setback

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1. Mental Representationalism and Idealism

It was Descartes who began the new way of ideas, also aptly called representationalism. That view had come a long way from the epistemological realism of Aquinas though this way had been prepared already by late Scholasticism in particular by Occam. The main point of representationalism is that as far as the physical world is concerned we are acquainted with representations only, not with things in themselves. Descartes retained Aquinas' premise that there has to be partial identity between mind and object in order for the former to know the latter. The relation of whole and part is one of partial identity and Descartes presupposed that the mind can know directly only what is part of it, what is *in* it. Naturally, mental representations are in the mind, which is impossible for physical objects. In addition to the whole-part-relation, Descartes and his disciples take into account only the causal and the similarity relation in their analysis of knowing. While they take mind and representation to be connected by the whole-part-relation, the relations of similarity and causation are discussed but finally discarded as connections between representation and physical object. Thus mind and physical object remain in principal unconnected and there is no basis for the realist view that we know the physical object as it is in itself. This was felt to be an impasse.

The empiricist analysis of Gassendi, Locke and Hume was an attempt to avoid the realism issue and to concentrate on what is given: the ideas in the mind. Locke is always vague on the relationship between ideas and objects. Sometimes he identifies ideas and qualities of physical objects and physical objects with complexes of ideas. That identification which Berkeley and Hume adopt is Kant's starting point. He claims that the physical objects we perceive are mere appearances, i.e., ideas in the mind and he does not shy away from the contention that that is in accordance with common sense and from calling his view realistic (empirical realism).

Kant pretends to be able to prove the existence of the external world by taking space and time as subjective, as forms of perceptual representation. He upholds that there is something non-mental (the thing in itself), which he assumes to be the cause of sense data in the mind. However, he takes it to be absolutely unknowable. Thus, the physical objects with which we are acquainted by perception are turned into mental objects and the thing-in-itself cannot be conceived of as physical in any customary sense, if only because it is unknowable.

Kant is not a representationalist any more since he does not consider the non-mental as an object of knowledge and since he transforms the physical objects into mental objects and thus into objects with which we are directly acquainted. Thus he holds all knowledge to be direct knowledge. In this way, he escapes from the impasse into which the representationalist theory of knowledge leads.

Kant dissolves the realism problem by turning physical into mental objects and non-mental objects into unknowables. He is convinced that he solved the problems of representationalism and overcame scepticism. However,

his solution of turning the physical into a mental object and making knowing into a purely mental production with only a loose causal connection to a non-mental „I know not what“ is absurd.

The connection between mind and physical object on which the empiricists base their analysis is causal. They understand perception as a causation of ideas by objects and their test of validity of an idea is to trace it back causally to perceptual ideas (sensations). However, since we know only the last link of the causal chain, we know nothing about that causation and therefore have no ground for inference to the physical object. Hence, Kant, who draws the final consequences from representationalism, does not admit the non-mental as an object of knowledge, although he sticks to it as the first cause of perception. He grounds the validity of knowledge wholly on the process of knowing which he takes to produce its object in the first place.

Being primarily a practical philosopher, Kant has the stomach to swallow such a subjectivist theory of knowledge. But a philosopher who strives for a tenable realism has not. Kant's so-called Copernican revolution which should rather be called Ptolemeian revolution (because it places the subject in the centre) amounts in his eyes to complete failure. Kant's theory of knowledge is clearly subjectivist (he equates objectivity with intersubjectivity), while epistemological realism is objectivist. Considering this opposition and the absurdity of the idealistic transformation of the physical into a mental object, the philosopher who strives to realism and sees that representationalism leaves mind and physical object unconnected or leads into idealism has all reason absolutely to avoid representationalism and to be on his guard against hidden representationalist premises.

2. Brentano's Revolution

In the 19th century it was Brentano who gave the movement towards objectivity, away from idealist subjectivism, a decisive momentum. He wanted to make a new start in philosophy, a new start from scratch, i.e., from phenomena not in the Kantian sense of mere appearances, but in the sense in which natural scientists use the term. First, he focuses his phenomenological research on the classification of phenomena and he finds that there is a basic difference between psychical and physical phenomena. After British empiricists and idealists who dominated philosophy had blurred and dissolved that distinction, that finding was a revolutionary step. As the essential feature of psychical phenomena Brentano notes intentionality, i.e. the directedness to an object. That was not new. It was new that intentionality is closely investigated. Before all, Brentano brings out the difference between the mental act and its object, which is also blurred by empiricism and idealism (in both views knowing and the known are more or less fused). However, Brentano's most important innovation is the discovery of the intentional relation. It makes him focus on the ontology of relations. Brentano's ontology of relations develops with respect to intentionality, especially with respect to the circumstance that mental

acts can stand in the intentional relation to non-existent objects. First, Brentano takes the view that genuine relations require the existence of all their relata and that intentionality is merely similar to a relation in contrast to relations of comparison such as 'louder'. Later, he arrives at the view that relations of comparisons are not genuine relations and that intentionality is a model relation. Yet, Brentano's relations of his second phase are one-sided. They characterise only the first relatum, while the second relatum is involved merely insofar as it is needed to describe the relational character of the first relatum. Therefore, Brentano's intentional relation is not able to connect act and object.

3. Meinong's Progress

While Husserl paves his way back to idealism by denying that there is an intentional relation (he thinks he can ground it on spatial and temporal proximity), Meinong consolidates Brentano's revolution by establishing an intentional connector, by having a two-term intentional relation. According to Meinong, relations are objects of higher order building on at least two objects. Meinong also claims that non-existent objects have ontological status. Meinong distinguishes between mental acts, their contents, and their objects and he assumes that the intentional relation holds between the content and the object of a mental act. The content of a mental act is clearly distinguished from its object. Thus it is clearly different from the representative (idea) of representationalism, which is taken to be the primary object of all mental acts.

What also helps Meinong to develop a tenable epistemological realism is his introduction of the category of objectives which is similar to that of facts. With this category he overcomes the traditional realism to which Brentano still sticks. It allows him to advocate a correspondence theory of truth without any reverting to similarity. Meinong holds that only judgmental acts are true and that they are true if and only if the respective objective to which they stand in the intentional relation obtains (*besteht*).

4. Wittgenstein's Set Back

The author of the *Tractatus* who wrote after Brentano and Meinong fell back to representationalism. His theory of knowledge is that sentences are facts, which represent other facts in virtue of being similar to them in so far as they have the same logical form. Where Locke distinguishes between idea and object, he takes ideas and properties of things to be similar and an idea to be the idea of a certain property in virtue of similarity. In contrast, Wittgenstein's representationalism could be called structural representationalism. At any rate, Wittgenstein does not understand cognition as apprehending a fact but as representing it. That may be due to his being immersed in the Kantian tradition and to his rejection of the mental, as can be gathered from *Tractatus* 5.542 and 5.5421.

Like the historical development the early representationalist Wittgenstein turns into the idealist later Wittgenstein. Admittedly, the later Wittgenstein is not an idealist in the classical sense, as was mentioned, he is even a materialist, denying or, at least, brushing aside the mental. What is idealist about the later Wittgenstein is that he rejects the cognitive relation to the object in favour of context.

Under the spell of Wittgenstein but also under the indirect idealist influence via American pragmatism, mainstream analytical philosophy is holistic and unwittingly representationalist. All mainstream analytical philosophers take representationalism for granted, although there has been criticism of it in their ranks (by Ryle, by Quine and by Davidson, typically the criticism was operationist).

Recently, an influential analytic philosopher (Hilary Putnam) finally realised the implicit representationalism (he needed a Spanish physicist for that). He reacted by jumping into some kind of direct realism which does not take up Brentano or Meinong or Moore or Russell and lacks theoretical articulation.