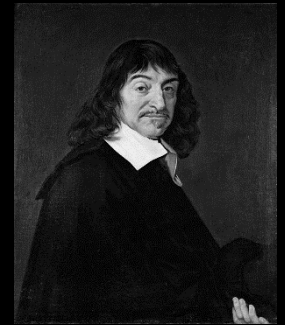


Philosophy of Language

Lecture 4: Intentionality

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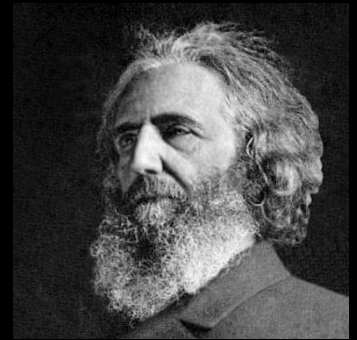
1. The mind-body problem

1. Descartes's view

Mental and bodily phenomena are different – if not in fact, then at least in how we think of them. What account can we give of the difference?

Descartes's response: mental phenomena are **conscious**, bodily phenomena are not.

But ... beliefs and desires can be unconscious.



1. The mind-body problem

2. Brentano's view

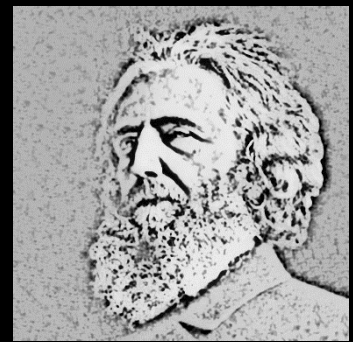
Mental and bodily phenomena are different – if not in fact, then at least in how we think of them. What account can we give of the difference?

Brentano's response: mental phenomena are **intentional**, bodily phenomena are not.

A thought is always a thought **about** something, a wish is always a wish **for** something, a fear is always a fear **of** something, and so on.

What is being represented:	intentional object
How it is being represented:	intentional content

But ... photographs and drawings also represent.



1. The mind-body problem

3. Brentano's view with a tweak

Mental and bodily phenomena are different – if not in fact, then at least in how we think of them. What account can we give of the difference?

Brentano with a tweak: mental phenomena have **non-derivative, non-transparent** intentionality, bodily phenomena don't.

A representation is derivative iff it represents in virtue of its relation to another representation; e.g. drawings. A representation is transparent iff it cannot misrepresent; e.g. photographs.

1. The mind-body problem

4. Intensional language

We tend to speak of non-derivative, non-transparent **intentional phenomena** using **intensional language**. There are three marks of intensionality.

Existential neutrality: I am looking for a unicorn – but there are no unicorns.

Non-specificity: I am looking for a cat – but no particular one.

Opacity: I am looking for a woodchuck – but not for a groundhog.



2. Unreality

1. Ponce de Leon and the fountain of youth

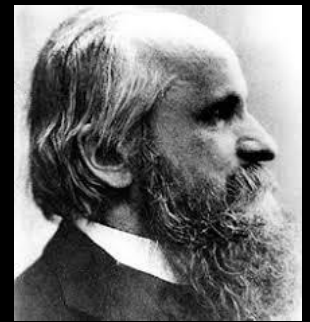
When Ponce de Leon was searching for the Fountain of Youth, he was certainly searching for **something**, and yet, what he was searching for was **not a real thing**. How can we make sense of this?

Consider the intentional object of Ponce's search. What is it?

First response: a fountain

Second response: nothing

Third response: something abstract



2. Unreality

2. The non-existent object view

Meinong's view: "Not only is the much heralded gold mountain made of gold, but the round square is as surely round as it is square."

Ponce de Leon was searching for the Fountain of Youth.

Therefore, Ponce de Leon was searching for something.

?? Therefore, there is something such that Ponce de Leon was searching for it.

Perhaps when we count we tend to restrict our attention (and the domains of our quantifiers) to what exists.

Still, this does make a mess of ontology.

2. Unreality

3. The no object view



Anscombe's view: we can interpret the direct object of intensional transitive verbs adverbially.

Ponce de Leon was searching for the Fountain of Youth.

Ponce de Leon was searching Fountain-of-Youth-ly

$\exists e(\text{search}(e) \wedge \text{Agent}(e) = \text{Ponce} \wedge \text{FoY}(e))$

Perhaps one can motivate a type shift of the appropriate kind. Still, this does make a mess of semantics.



2. Unreality

4. The abstract object view

Montague's view: the intentional object of Ponce's search is the function that assigns to each possible world the set of those sets that contain the fountain of youth in that world as a member.

$\llbracket \text{the Fountain of Youth} \rrbracket = \llbracket \text{Atlantis} \rrbracket$

We can fix the problem of grain by changing the type-theory. Instead of a type for truth-values we can have one for propositions. Since the proposition that the Fountain of Youth is interesting is distinct from the proposition that Atlantis is interesting, we can now distinguish $\llbracket \text{the Fountain of Youth} \rrbracket$ and $\llbracket \text{Atlantis} \rrbracket$.

Still, the view does seem like a **category mistake**.

2. Unreality

5. Is this really a category mistake?

Objection: What kind of thing is the Fountain of Youth?

Reply: It is an **imaginary fountain**. Also, a property of properties but this is not something most people know about it. (Compare: water is in fact H₂O but many people don't know this.)

Objection: Had Ponce found what he was searching for he would not have found an imaginary fountain!

Reply: Ponce's search was **non-specific** (although he mistakenly thought it was specific). A non-specific search is successful if some object is found that fits some representation of the intentional object of the search. This representation could be an image, a description, an idea, etc.

3. Are there propositions?

1. The role of propositions

Proposition is a technical term of philosophy and linguistics. We need to settle what role propositions are supposed to play in our theories before we can argue whether propositions exist, and if so, what exactly they might be.

- i. Propositions are the intentional objects of belief.
- ii. Propositions are the intentional objects of assertion.
- iii. Propositions are the primary bearers of truth-value.

Beliefs and assertions appear to be individuated by their objects: we share a belief just in case what you believe and what I believe are the same.

Individuation of other mental states goes differently. For example, we don't necessarily share the same fear when what I fear and what you fear is the same.

3. Are there propositions?

1. The role of propositions

The following three claims are often made but remain controversial:

- iv. Propositions are the semantic values of indexical-free declarative sentences.
- v. Propositions are what **that**-clauses designate.
- vi. Propositions are the intentional objects of mental states other than belief and of speech acts other than assertion.

iv. and v. are substantive theses of semantics. Some philosophers have defended vi. by claiming that mental states are representational and representing is impossible without truth-apt content.

Non-transparent representation does require the possibility of **misrepresentation**. But it is not clear that misrepresentation must amount to falsehood.

3. Are there propositions?

2. Easy arguments

Jack believes that the Moon is made of green cheese, and so does Jill; therefore there is something Jack and Jill both believe – to wit, that the Moon is made of green cheese.

Jack said that the Moon is made of green cheese, and Jill believes everything Jack said; therefore, Jill believes that the Moon is made of green cheese.

Jack believes that the Moon is made of green cheese, it is false that the Moon is made of green cheese; therefore, Jack believes something false.

3. Are there propositions?

3. Overkill

Jack believes that the Moon is made of green cheese, and so does Jill; therefore there is something Jack and Jill both believe – to wit, that the Moon is made of green cheese.

Ponce de Leon was searching for the fountain of youth, and so was Alexander the Great; therefore, there is something Ponce de Leon and Alexander the Great were both searching for – to wit, the fountain of youth.

3. Are there propositions?

3. Overkill

Jack said that the Moon is made of green cheese, and Jill believes everything Jack said; therefore, Jill believes that the Moon is made of green cheese.

Alexander the Great was longing for the fountain of youth, and Ponce de Leon was searching for everything Alexander the Great was longing for; therefore, Ponce de Leon was searching for the fountain of youth.

3. Are there propositions?

3. Overkill

Jack believes that the Moon is made of green cheese, it is false that the Moon is made of green cheese; therefore, Jack believes something false.

Ponce de Leon was searching for the fountain of Youth, the Fountain of Youth is famous; therefore, Ponce de Leon was searching for something famous.

3. Are there propositions?

4. Moral

The existence of propositions is no more (or less) obvious than the existence of other intentional objects.

A **Meinongean view** about the intentional object of Jack's belief that the moon is made of green cheese treats this object as a **nonexistent fact**.

An **Anscombian view** says that it is nothing at all: what Jack believes is simply a matter of **how** he believes.

A **Montagovean view** regards it as an abstract entity – perhaps the semantic value of a **that**-clause.

4. What are propositions?

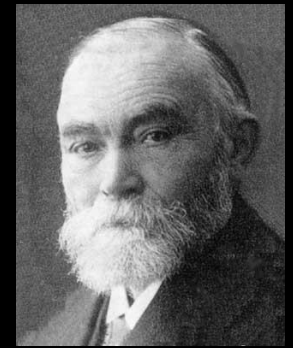
1. Three views

Let's suppose with the majority of philosophers of language, that propositions exist. What sort of thing could they be?

Carnapian propositions: sets of possible worlds (ways everything could be).

Russellian propositions: complexes built from intentional objects (things we can think about).

Fregean propositions: complexes built from intentional contents (ways we can think about things).



4. What are propositions?

2. Fregean propositions

Fregean propositions are **unchanging** entities that inhabit a realm distinct both from the external and the internal world. They exist **eternally** and **necessarily**.

What distinguishes them from physical entities is that (like mental entities) they are in principle **insensible**; what sets them apart from mental entities is that (like physical entities) they are in principle **public**.

They have a **structure**, mirroring (more or less) the structure of sentences that express them; their constituents are the **senses** of the constituents of those sentences.

4. What are propositions?

3. Two problems with Fregean propositions

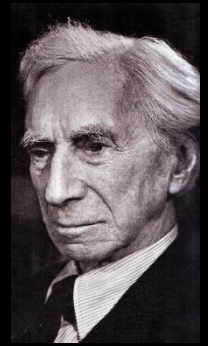
Fregean propositions are like Platonic numbers. But the former pose two problems the latter don't.

Existence. Fregean propositions are unchanging, so they always had the same truth-value. Fregean propositions are eternal, so they existed even when there were no minds. Yet, in a mindless world there was no intentionality, and hence, no truth or falsehood.

Identity. Fregean propositions are identical iff no one could believe one without the other. Propositions are supposed to be the primary bearers of truth-value, but how could they explain the truth or falsity of beliefs if propositions themselves are individuated in terms of beliefs?

4. What are propositions?

5. Russellian propositions



Russellian propositions have the same structure as Fregean ones, but instead of senses, they are built of referents. Objects, properties, relations and complexes built from them could be identified mind-independently and so **the problem of propositional identity goes away**.

In its original form, Russell's view fares no better than Frege's when it comes to the problem of propositional existence. But there are contemporary neo-Russellian views that do better. In one version, propositions are facts whose existence depends on natural languages; in another they are event types whose existence depends on human cognition. Assuming a non-Platonic view of languages and types, **the problem of propositional existence goes away**.

4. What are propositions?

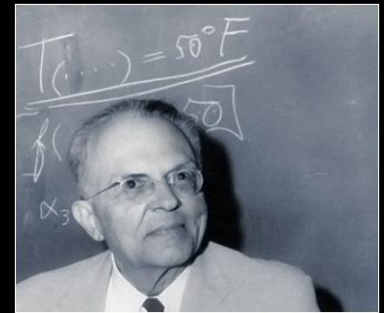
6. Truth in a world vs. truth at a world

Let's assume that the proposition that the radius of the Earth is approximately 4000 miles did not exist a billion years ago. But how can a proposition be true at a time when it does not even exist?

Maybe it can. Consider the proposition that presentism is false, i.e. that there is more than one time. This seems true, but it is surely not **true in** this moment (since no moment contains more than one time). The suggestion is that it is **true at** this moment (and all others). There might be an analogous distinction between being true in a world and being true at a world.

4. What are propositions?

7. Carnapian propositions



Semanticists tend to use Carnapian propositions but that does not mean they are committed to the view that that is what propositions really are. Semanticists just **represent** propositions as sets of possible worlds.

The main advantage of the view that propositions really are sets of possible worlds is that it makes propositional truth and falsehood clear. A proposition is true iff the actual world is a member of it.

The main disadvantage of the view that propositions really are sets of possible worlds is that it entails that there is only one necessary proposition, which seems deeply counterintuitive.

4. What are propositions?

8. How to deal with coarse-grainedness?

The Babylonians believed that Hesperus is Hesperus.

The Babylonians did not believe that Hesperus is Phosphorus.

Option 1: there is an impossible world where Hesperus is not Phosphorus but no impossible world where Hesperus is not Hesperus.

Option 2: the intentional object of these two beliefs is the same but their intentional contents are distinct.

Option 3: the beliefs we ascribe are meta-linguistic: that *Hesperus is Hesperus* expresses a truth and that *Hesperus is Phosphorus* expresses a truth.

Option 4: the Babylonians did believe that Hesperus is Phosphorus but they did not realize this.

5. Summary

- Non-derivative non-transparent intentionality is a characteristic of mental phenomena. Reports of mental states are cashed in intensional language.
- There are three views on the intentional objects of mental phenomena: the Meinongean, the Anscombian, and the Montagovean.
- The same three views are available when it comes to propositions – the intentional objects (and contents) of belief and assertion.
- About the nature of propositions there are also three types of views: the Fregean, the Russellian, and the Carnapian.

the end (for this week)

