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AN ADVERBIAL MEINONGIAN THEORY

By WILLIAM J. RAPAPORT

I. Introduction

A fundamental assumption of Alexius Meinong's Theory of Objects (1904) is the act-content-object (ACO) analysis of psychological experiences. I suggest that Meinong's theory *need not* be based on this analysis, but that an *adverbial* theory might suffice. I then defend the adverbial alternative against a recent objection raised by Roderick Chisholm, and conclude by presenting an apparently more serious objection based on a paradox discovered by Romane Clark.

II. An Adverbial Meinongian Theory

According to Meinong (1904), every psychological experience is "directed" towards something called its "object" (*Gegenstand*) (pp. 483ff). ('Object' is here used more in the sense of 'that which is aimed at' than 'individual thing' and is perhaps best thought of for the moment as elliptical for 'object of thought', where 'thought' is generic for 'psychological act'.) This is a version of Brentano's Thesis of Intentionality (Brentano (1874) p. 50). As modified by Twardowski, it developed into the ACO-theory, according to which every psychological experience is analysable into an "act" which is directed to an object external to the experience by means of a "content" internal to the experience (cf. Grossmann (1974), Ch. III).

This is based on the fundamental datum that every judgment or idea is a judgment or idea *of* something, where this is interpreted to mean that there is an act and an object of the act. But it seems equally plausible to interpret it to mean that there is an act which has a certain characteristic or which is "performed" or experienced in a certain manner. Thus interpreted, there would be no "pure" judgments or ideas: just as there is no "pure" colour, but only red, blue, etc., so there would be only, e.g. mountainlike ideas, ghostly ideas, etc. On the former interpretation, however, there *is* a pure act of, say, judging, in the sense that the act is distinguishable from the object.

Nevertheless, on the alternative theory I wish to consider (roughly, one conflating the content with the object), the act is an experience *of a certain kind* or is experienced *in a certain manner*; this seems sufficient as an explication of the phenomenon of "directedness". I here make no commitment to the truth of this alternative; I am only concerned to see whether a Meinongian theory of objects would be impossible *were* the alternative true. Since the "content" was defined as that part of the psychological experience which "directs" the act to its object, let us

call this the “act-content (AC) theory”. The AC-theory, then, holds that all ideas etc. *are* “of” something, *in the sense that* they all have a content.

It may help in clarifying the distinction between these two theories to consider the adverbial theory of perception. According to this theory,

(1) I am sensing a red sensation (or, I am sensing a red square)

is to be explicated, not as a dyadic relation of sensing holding between a subject (I) and an object (a red sensation or a red square), but in a subject-predicate form as:

(1A) I am sensing redly (or, as Sellars would have it, I am sensing a-red-square-ly).

(Cf. Chisholm (1957), Ch. 8 (1966), p. 95f; and Jackson *et al.* (1975) and the references therein.)

The generalization of this move to the case of thinking was, perhaps, first suggested by Wilfrid Sellars (1969, esp. pp. 235ff) and recently objected to by Roderick Chisholm (1973). On such a theory,

(2) I am thinking of Plato

would be ‘construed as telling us, not about something which is related to me as being the *object* of my thought, but only about the *way* in which I happen to be thinking’ (Chisholm (1973), p. 210), e.g. as

(2A) I am thinking Plato-ly.

(Roughly, when one thinks Plato-ly, one’s thought processes (be they mental or physical) “present” to the thinker properties and characteristics which, we are inclined to say in ordinary language, are (thought to be) had by Plato.)

The AC-theory, then, may be taken as a version of an adverbial theory of thinking. On this theory, there are no “pure” acts of, say, thinking or fearing, nor is there any need for independent “objects” such as unicorns or ghosts which one might think about or fear. There would only be unified acts-of-a-kind or acts-in-a-kind-of-manner, such as “ghostly fearing”. But clearly we can abstract an act of thinking and, so to speak, an “object” (i.e., a content or manner) of the act, and this abstracting allows us still to have a Theory of Objects. The Thesis of Intentionality can be preserved by interpreting it to mean that every act has a “manner”, i.e., a content.

One difficulty is that the content is so intimately tied to the act that no two contents are identical, just as, on the ACO-theory, every two distinct acts have distinct contents, whether the acts be of distinct types or merely experienced by different people or at different times. Hence, in the AC-theory, we must talk of “content-types” or, perhaps, of

universals (or properties) whose particulars (or instances) are the individual contents (or content-tokens). Now, just as the ACO-theory must distinguish between individual acts (or act-tokens) and kinds of acts (or act-types) without thereby requiring a fourth component (making it an AtypeAtokenCO-theory), so the AC-theory, which needs content-tokens and content-types, need not be thought of as a three-component AtypeCtoken-theory.

Nevertheless, the AC-theory augmented by content-types is isomorphic to the ACO-theory. Instead of a theory of *objects* on this view, we would have a theory of “manners” or contents. Such a theory would contain versions of the key theses of Meinong’s original theory (cf. Rapaport (1978)). For example, suppose I think of the golden mountain: since the golden mountain is golden, the object of my thought is golden. On the AC-theory, this could mean that I am thinking goldenly and mountainly, and, so, I am thinking goldenly. And by means of the content-type we can explain how it is possible for two people to think of the “same” thing: the contents of their thoughts are of the same kind; i.e., they are thinking in the same manner.

In Rapaport (1978), it is suggested that the ACO-theory needs to be augmented by a fourth component after all, viz., by the “actual” object (*if any*) corresponding to the Meinongian one. There is even stronger reason for thus augmenting the AC-theory: If I think, e.g., of Jimmy Carter, we can distinguish four items: myself (the thinker), the act (thinking), the content (Jimmy-Carter-ly), and *Carter himself* (the actual, physical object).

III. Chisholm’s Objection

Roderick Chisholm (1973) has objected that interpreting (2) as (2A) renders invalid an argument-form which had been valid before. Consider, first,

(3) Jones thinks of a unicorn.

This is paraphrased adverbially by Chisholm as

(3A) Jones thinks unicornically,

which is supposed to do away with the putative reference to unicorns and to have only to do with Jones, his act of thinking, and the manner of his thinking.

Consider, next, this valid inference:

- (4) (i) Jones thinks of a unicorn.
 (ii) Jones thinks only of things that exist.
 ∴ (iii) There are unicorns (i.e., a unicorn is a thing that exists).

Upon Chisholm's adverbial paraphrase, this becomes the *invalid* inference:

- (4A) (i) Jones thinks unicornically.
 (ii) Jones thinks only of things that exist.
 ∴(iii) There are unicorns.

Chisholm's point is that (3A) (= (4Ai)) must still have something to do with *unicorns* to preserve the validity of the paraphrased inference.

Perhaps so. But (4A) is not the complete paraphrase. To obtain that, (4ii) would have to be adverbially interpreted also, as (let's say)

- (4AiiA) Jones thinks only existentially,

i.e., in whatever manner Jones thinks, some actual thing corresponds to his manner of thinking. (This will be made more precise in Section IV; cf. n. 1.)

Now, if (4Aiii) follows from (4Ai) and (4AiiA), then Chisholm's objection fails; otherwise, it is upheld.

I think that it does follow. For consider this valid inference:

- (5) (i) Jones thinks of Quine.
 (ii) Jones thinks only of things that exist.
 ∴(iii) Quine exists.

Adverbially paraphrased *in toto*, I suggest that the premisses would become something like:

- (5A) (i) Jones thinks Quinely.
 (ii) Jones thinks only existentially.

Now, the conclusion which follows from these adverbial premisses is:

- (5Aiii) Jones's Quinely thinking is existentially thinking,

i.e., some actual thing corresponds to Jones's Quinely thinking. Now, if (5A) is valid, as it seems to be, then (5Aiii) must be an adverbial reading of (5iii); i.e., to say that Quine exists is to say that (at least some instances of) thinking Quinely is (or, are instances of) thinking existentially. (This is spelled out in n. 1 and defended in Rapaport (1978).) So, to say that unicorns exist is to say that (at least some instances of) thinking unicornically is (or, are instances of) thinking existentially. Thus, the complete adverbial paraphrase of (4) is not (4A), but

- (4B) (i) Jones thinks unicornically.
 (ii) Jones thinks only existentially.
 ∴(iii) Jones's unicornically thinking is existentially thinking.

Since this inference is valid, the adverbial theory is upheld.

IV. Clark’s Paradox

The AC-theory has several advantages, including fitting neatly into a broader philosophical scheme along with the adverbial theory of perception, so that we might speak more generally of an Adverbial Theory of Mental Phenomena. Unfortunately, a paradox discovered by Romane Clark in a revised, ACO-style, Meinongian theory (reported on in Rapaport (1978)) rears its ugly head here, too. One way of presenting it is to turn to an interpretation of the *augmented* AC- (or adverbial) Meinongian theory.

If theories such as Meinong’s are to embody the structure of the nature of thinking and its relation to the world, then any adequate neurophysiological theory about the nature of thinking ought at least to be consistent with such a structure. Suppose, then, that when one thinks *m*’ly, some (mental or physical) event is occurring in the thinker, having characteristics *X*, *Y*, etc., which, in turn, can be correlated in some way with (the property of being) *m*. For example, *X*, *Y*, etc., might be replaceable by some description of a sequence of neuron firings.

Now let *m* be some manner of thinking, say, a neuron-firing sequence correlated with my thinking of Pegasus. Surely, there is some sort of relationship between *m* and the properties ordinarily attributed to Pegasus (else, why would *m* be an act of thinking “of Pegasus”?); call this “relation” *R*. So, e.g., *mR*(flying horse), *mR*(creature of Greek mythology). Surely, too, any act of thinking *m*’ly will itself have properties, e.g., being a sequence of 13 neuron firings, or lasting for 1 second; call the relationship of *m* to such properties, *S*. So, e.g., *mS*(being a sequence of 13 neuron firings), *mS*(lasting for 1 second). Intuitively, for some property *F*, *mRF* iff *m* “represents” *F* “to us”, and *mSF* iff *m* “(is conveyed by an act of thinking which) exemplifies” *F*. (My use of ‘relationship’ and “‘relation’” is not intended to beg the question of the logical status of *R* or *S*. E.g., if *S* turns out to be, say, exemplification, it may or may not be a *relation*. Cf. Rapaport (1978), in. 12.)¹

Now, some thoughts, as we ordinarily say, are “about” other thoughts. So it seems plausible that *m* might “exemplify” all of the properties it “represents” or, still more plausibly, perhaps, *m* might *fail* to exemplify some property it represents. E.g., if I think “about” a

¹ Using these notions, (5A) becomes:

- (i) Jones thinks *m*’ly & (*m*’ly)*RQ*
- (ii) $\forall M$ ’ly (Jones thinks *M*’ly $\rightarrow \exists \alpha \forall F((M$ ’ly)*RF* $\rightarrow \alpha$ *SF*) (i.e., in whatever manner Jones thinks, some actual object α exemplifies all of the properties represented to Jones by his manner of thinking)
- (3) $\exists \alpha \forall F((m$ ’ly)*RF* $\rightarrow \alpha$ *SF*) (i, Simp, ii, UI, MP)
- (4) $\forall F((m$ ’ly)*RF* $\rightarrow \alpha_1$ *SF*) (3, EI)
- (5) (*m*’ly)*RQ* $\rightarrow \alpha_1$ *SQ* (4, UI)
- (6) $\exists \alpha(\alpha$ *SQ*) (i, Simp, 5, MP)

thought which lasted for 1 second, and if that thought itself lasted for 1 second, then mS (lasting for 1 second) and mR (lasting for 1 second), We may express these possibilities thus:

$$\begin{aligned} &\forall F(mRF \rightarrow mSF) \\ &\exists F(mRF \ \& \ \sim(mSF)), \end{aligned}$$

and we might consider two corresponding properties:

$$\begin{aligned} &\lambda x \forall F(xRF \rightarrow xSF) \\ &\lambda x \exists F(xRF \ \& \ \sim(xSF)). \end{aligned}$$

Call these P and \bar{P} respectively. Finally, suppose that I think “of” (to return once again to the more idiomatic ACO-talk) an object with *only* the property \bar{P} . Let m be the manner of my act of thinking thusly; i.e., $mR\bar{P}$ (and m “represents” nothing else).

Assume that mSP . Then $\forall F(mRF \rightarrow mSF)$, and, so, $mS\bar{P}$, which, on a reasonable requirement of consistency for the S -mode of predication (viz., $\forall F(mSF \leftrightarrow \sim(mSF))$) contradicts our assumption. So, $\sim(mSP)$.

Assume that $\sim(mSP)$. Then $\exists F(mRF \ \& \ \sim(mSF))$, and, so (because m “represents” *only* \bar{P}), $\sim(mS\bar{P})$. This, on our consistency requirement, entails that mSP , contradicting our assumption. So, mSP .

But, either mSP or $\sim(mSP)$. So, *both* $\sim(mSP)$ and mSP . This is the adverbial version of Clark’s paradox. (Both Clark and the referee have suggested to me that the present paradox is reminiscent of Grelling’s.) The adverbial theory appears to be inconsistent.

Clearly, there are many challengeable steps in the derivation of this form of the paradox. The *most* challengeable, it seems to me, is the assumption that because (to revert once more to ACO-talk) I am thinking “of” an object which is *only* \bar{P} , therefore m represents \bar{P} and *nothing else*. Perhaps the ACO-talk is *too* misleading; in the ACO-version of a Meinongian theory, a complex property *could* be the sole property of a Meinongian object, and the object’s having that property would *not* force it to have any properties which might follow logically from its having that complex property. This is repugnant to many philosophers, though it is useful for resolving various philosophical puzzles (of the Hesperus-Phosphorus type; cf. Castañeda (1972)). The present suggestion is that the adverbial (AC) version might *not* have this repugnant feature and, thus, might avoid the paradox.

I am unhappy with this for several reasons. First, the usefulness of the lack of logical entailment just mentioned seems to be missing from the adverbial theory if we drop the assumption I characterized as ‘most challengeable’. Second, and more importantly, this is an ad hoc way of avoiding the paradox. The paradox was discovered in connection with the ACO-version of a Meinongian theory (cf. Rapaport (1978)), and

preliminary investigation suggests that it is also applicable to Frege's theory of sense and reference. It seems reasonable to require, then, that a *general* way out of the paradox be sought.¹

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