BRENTANO ON THOUGHT AND EXISTENCE

This paper discusses some of Franz Brentano's later theories concerning mental representation. After 1905 Brentano pursued the following two aims, among others:

1) showing that there is no mental representation of abstract objects; 2) showing how we can represent concrete objects which do not exist. In both cases he attempted to achieve his goal by applying a theory of what it is to be or exist.

I wish to spell out some ways in which Brentano's views on being and on the nature of thought support each other. After sketching a few of his general claims about mental activity, I consider an argument which purports to show that the only targets of mental representation are what Brentano calls 'things' or '*Dinge*': concrete objects. (This view is sometimes referred to as his '*Reism*'). I then go on to explore a puzzle about non-existent things, and argue that Brentano's failure to solve it reveals instructive difficulties in his philosophy. It turns out that in spite of resourceful and sustained efforts he fails to accomplish either of the two goals he sets out to achieve.[1]

Representing and Other Mental Acts

Brentano holds that there are three fundamental genera of mental phenomena: representing (*Vorstellen*), judging (*Urteilen*), and activity of the affections (*Gemütstätichkeit*) or loving and hating taken in a broad sense (e.g. P.II 33, 124). The three genera, which are said to have been discovered by Descartes, are listed here in order of independence, simplicity and generality.[2] According to Brentano the most basic mental phenomena are representings. Activities of the latter two types depend for their existence upon simple or complex representings, but he believes we may

coherently speak of a creature which can represent but can neither judge nor engage in acts of loving and hating. Again, it is Brentano's view that no loving or hating could exist in a creature incapable of judging (P.II 128), but that we can imagine a creature which judged yet experienced no movement of the affections. To judge is always to accept (*Anerkennen*) or reject (*Verwerfen*) the object of some representing activity. We might say with Roderick Chisholm that it is to "take an intellectual stand" towards the object,[3] where it is understood that this taking of intellectual stands does not necessarily involve movement of the affections, and that it may occur in some form in other animals. The intellectual acceptance or rejection of an object--the judgement of existence or non-existence--enters into an act of loving or hating and helps determine the act's character as joy, sadness, hope, fear and so on.

In a short work dated November 20, 1914 Brentano puts forward some principles concerning acts of representing. He remarks that 'to represent' ('*Vorstellen*') is univocal, having a uniform meaning (*eine einheitliche Bedeutung, W&E* 122). Then he says that because to represent is to represent something, the word for 'something' in this expression ('*etwas*' in '*etwas vorstellen*') must also be univocal if the complete expression is to have uniform meaning. But, he adds, there is no generic concept common to things (*Dinge, rei, Sachen*) and non-things; so the word for 'something' here cannot now signify (*bedeuten*) a thing and now a non-thing (W&E 122, 132). Since 'something' is always used for things, Brentano concludes that we never represent and hence never strictly think about non-things.[4]

Writing to Oskar Kraus, Brentano calls this argument absolutely decisive, a strict and simple proof that nothing but things can be the objects of thought (W&E 105f, AN 249). We can distinguish at least two questions exercising him here. The first is:

a) For each act of mental representation, can we say that the

act is a represension of something?

And a second question is:

b) What do the words 'thing' and 'something' mean or signify?

Brentano's unwavering answer to the first question is 'Yes'. He holds it absurd to say that there is a mental representation which is not of anything. Its being directed toward an object is just what he thinks sets mental activity apart from other phenomena (see P.I 109-140). While he changed his mind about the nature and targets of mental acts, Brentano certainly never abandoned the notion that directedness is common to all mental representation. In spelling out his argument we can perhaps understand him as claiming that the verb 'to represent' expresses its meaning incompletely; that it is shorthand for 'to represent something'. There would then be another claim: that the complete expression is univocal; and an unstated principle, which is difficult to generalize, telling us that if the whole is univocal, and so is the former of its two constituent parts, then the latter constituent is as well. 'To represent' is univocal, and this gives the required conclusion that 'something' in 'to represent something' is also univocal.

Being a univocal expression seems to be the same as having a uniform meaning (W&E 107). Brentano holds that if the expression 'something' is used univocally and names or signifies (*bedeutet, bezeichnet*), then the something-concept is a generic concept (*Gattungsbegriff*; W&E 122, P.II 214ff; cf. his clarification to Kraus at AN 283). Clearly, 'something' covers the whole range of things: everything is something. Since whenever we represent, what we represent counts as something, and since no generic concept is common to things and non-things, the something-

concept is common only to things when 'something' is used univocally. Brentano

concludes that when we represent we can only be representing a thing.

Reism

 For now, let us waive possible objections to the claim that the words

'something' and 'thing' pick out a genus. Although Brentano writes as if 'something'

in 'to represent something' always names or signifies a thing, it is not necessary to say

that things form the highest genus or that 'something' in 'representing something'

reveals a generic concept in order to hold that whatever is a thing is not a non-thing.

He clearly maintains that, as he is using 'thing' in the broadest way, nothing will fall

outside its extension (W&E 108, P.II 216).

 Prior to his so-called 'Reistic Turn' in 1905, Brentano had believed that some

objects of representation were abstract. For instance, he thought that the expression

'the non-being of a square circle' could signify an abstract object of representation (cf.

W&E 163f). But around 1905 he came to the conclusion that only what we might call

'concreta', including mental substances, are objects of representation and hence of

thought generally. This is the view known as 'Reism'. The writings published as *Die

Abkehr vom Nichtrealen* chart the course of his conversion to this theory. For the later

Brentano, only concrete particulars can count as things, and when we look through his

subsequent writings to see what he takes to be 'non-thing' words we find, among

other expressions, the German equivalents of 'existence/non-existence' as well as

words purporting to designate abstract properties and relations (see, e.g. W&E 112,

121; P.II 160ff; AN 342). He will argue that, although objects of thought may be

represented in a more or less general manner, the objects themselves must be non-

abstract. We call something a 'thing' ('*Ding*', '*Reales*') when we think about it in a completely general manner (K 58).

When Brentano argued in 1914 that only things may be objects of thought he was clearly of the view that all things were concrete. But of course, this special understanding of things as concreta is not a straightforward consequence of the claim that 'thing' is univocal and covers everything. His hostility to abstracta is really grounded on what he supposes to be certain absurd results of positing them, and on his view that concepts are acquired from intuitions (*Anschauungen*), by representing things in a more or less general way (see, e.g. W&E 122). He also believes his Reistic doctrine is confirmed by paraphrases which serve to eliminate any apparent reference to abstract objects. We shall consider some of these paraphrases later on (W&E 106, AN 249).

Criticizing those (such as his former student Alexius Meinong) who would deny Reism, Brentano notes that some philosophers hold the being or non-being of things to have being; also the being of a thing's being or of its non-being, and so on without end (see, e.g. W&E 121). He would say that talk of abstract propositions which are expressed by sentences but not identical with them is another way of trying to talk about the being of what is spoken of. However he thinks it excessive to say that abstract properties and relations or the being or non-being of things can actually be represented. He hopes to undercut such talk. Given that all objects of representation are things, and that only concrete particulars are things, and that only what can be represented can be thought of and referred to, we cannot even think about abstracta, and any apparent reference to them is deceptive.

A Puzzle

An old problem for theories of representation arises from our habit of saying that some objects of our thoughts do not exist. We read and write stories about admittedly mythical characters, for example, or agree that we have mistakenly asserted the existence of a certain physical object. In fact, whenever we truly deny that something exists we seem by the nature of the case to be directing our thoughts toward a non-existent thing (cf. W&E 101, 131). Sometimes what we seem to be representing involves conceptual difficulties such that we say it could not exist: the round square, for example. Brentano is not willing to allow that impossible things exist, yet he notes that ordinary language behaves as if we can imagine both impossibilities and possible things which remain unactualized (W&E 93; K 7ff). But (it might be objected) if in the absence of an existing thing there is nothing, common sense seems to leave us with the unhappy conclusion that the thinking mind may be directed toward nothing.

When defending his theory that all mental acts are directed toward things, Brentano thus feels obliged to explain how we should understand the expressions 'a non-existent thing' and 'represents something non-existent'. His belief that the objects of thought are always concrete particulars makes the task more difficult for him. Unlike Russell in 'On Denoting' he cannot explain away the apparent representation of a golden mountain by postulating an acquaintance with the subsisting abstracta goldenness, mountainhood and existence. His response to the Meinongian view, that there are non-existent and even impossible objects which may stand in relations to thinkers, therefore has to differ from Russell's.

Thus, Brentano's Reism places special constraints on his treatment of the non-existent. We can perhaps best capture the difficulty facing him by means of the puzzle stated above, put into the language of representing. It consists of a trio of

plausible statements which cannot all be true without equivocation. Given, namely, Brentano's notion of what constitutes a thing, what will he say about the following three claims?

(1) All things and only things exist.

(2) All objects of representation are things.

(3) Not all objects of representation exist.

So far as I know Brentano himself never set down the puzzle in just this form, but it is clear from many of his works that he reflected at length about its constituent statements. How then does he attempt to forestall contradiction? The answer is not easy to discern, and I shall argue that he ends up failing to avoid inconsistency, but we shall see him trying to address the problem by means of an analysis of the verbs 'to be' and 'to exist', and by giving a fuller account of what is happening when a thinker represents something.

Being

Let us consider some claims Brentano makes about what it is to be. Faced with the puzzling triad just mentioned, one might be inclined to distinguish being from existence. One might, for example, grant that all things and only things have being, that whatever is is a thing and conversely, while denying that everything exists. There may be objects of representation, a proponent of the distinction could say, which do not exist; for on this view existence would be some special kind of being. (The same distinction could be made in German using the expressions '*Sein*' for 'being' and '*Existenz*' for existence.)

This move would not eliminate the difficulty, since another version of the puzzle arises when we substitute 'have being' for 'exist'. Brentano, in any event, does

not believe that existence is a special kind of being. In the November 20, 1914 paper

he says that such a distinction between *Sein* and *Existieren*, where the words are used

in their proper sense (*im eigentlichen Sinne*) is an empty one, incomprehensible to him

(W&E 127; cf. P.II 136f). On another occasion he describes it as a peculiar

distinction, coming up in recent times; and he attributes it to Bolzano, Meinong and

Höfler (K 29-31; cf. AN 375). However, while denying that existing is a special way

of being, Brentano argues that the German words for 'being' and 'existing' are

ambiguous. In particular, the various forms of the verb 'to be' can be used in

improper, as well as proper, ways. A dictation from February 4, 1914 tells us that in

the proper sense of 'being' ('*Seiendes*') every thing is a being and, moreover, in this

proper sense the word '*Seiendes*' is synonymous with '*Ding*' or '*Reales*'(K 58; cf. K

4, 11ff; AN 356, 357, 385; P.II 238).

In the February 4 dictation Brentano goes on to say that among the things we

think about we hold that some *are* and that others *are not*. This, he says, is another

sense of '*Seiend*', which coincides with the proper sense of *'es gibt'* ('there is/are')

and '*es existiert*' ('there exists') (cf. AN 353ff, 359ff, 373). He suggests that centaurs

and the city of Nineveh, for instance, fail to be or exist in this sense (K 58; W&E 131;

P.II 162). He is not as explicit as we might wish concerning the ambiguity in

question, but introducing a somewhat inexact term we may call this the 'narrower use'

of the verbs 'to be' and 'to exist'. In the narrower use, '*Seiend*' does not express the

most general concept, for it does not express a concept at all (K 58). Brentano holds

that the 'being' in the narrow sense as well as 'be', 'is' and 'are' function as

synsemantic words (*synsemantische, mitbezeichnende Worte*) inasmuch as they are

not names or concept words and can signify things only when taken together with

other expressions.

It will be recalled that Brentano takes all judging to be a case of accepting or rejecting. That view was developed by him into a theory about the function of the copula in the four categorical judgements of the syllogistic. He thinks that all judgements of the form 'S is P' and their negations entail something of the form 'SP is' or 'SP is not', where the 'is' or 'is not' is synsemantic and without any meaning or signification (*Bedeutung*; cf. P.II 57), but serves to express acceptance or rejection. For example, 'Some S is P' ('*Ein S ist P*') is equivalent to a double judgement, of which one part accepts the subject S and the second part accepts the SP combination or identification (e.g. P.II 163ff). The copulative judgement 'Some cats are black' is thus said to entail the existential judgement that there are black cats.[5] Not every judgement can be reduced to categorical form, but every simple judgement can without loss of meaning be expressed as an existential judgement (P.II 193). Complex judgements may be built out of simpler judgements but do not depart from the nature of judging, which is always a more or less complicated case of acceptance or rejection.

Eliminating Linguistic Fictions

We have seen that on Brentano's account 'being' has a proper, broad use as a genus word synonymous with 'thing', as well as a narrow use in which a being is an *existing* thing and what has being is the same as what there is/exists. The words 'is' and 'exists' are not concept words on this view, but instead express an intellectual acceptance or rejection of a certain kind. But although they are said to be synsemantic, they need not always serve the same function. In particular, when they are used in such sentences as 'X is/exists', 'There is/exists an X', or 'Some X's are Y's' they have a different function when 'X' and 'Y' are replaced by thing words than

when these variable letters are replaced by non-thing words. For instance, when we say 'There is a lack' or 'A lack exists' the verb 'to be/exist' is said to function differently than it does when we say 'There is a God' or 'God exists'. That is because the superficially positive form of 'There is a lack' expresses a negative or rejecting act of judgement. Brentano's reasoning seems to go as follows: in order to assert a lack we must introduce negation; but to negate is to issue a denial, which is to perform a special mental act. Since the verb 'is' in 'There is a lack' expresses the speaker's rejecting act it must be functioning in an unusual way.

We also sometimes say that there are truths, or claim that the color red is a warm color, or that fatherhood is a relation. These claims and others might seem to commit speakers to the existence of universals or abstract propositions. Brentano wants us to understand instead that such statements involve misleading (improper) uses of the verb 'to be'. Thus, while 'being' in its proper use is said to be a non-synsemantic expression, there are also proper and improper uses of 'being' in its narrow, synsemantic occurrences. As was mentioned earlier, after his Reistic Turn Brentano undertakes to show how sentences which appear to entail the existence of abstracta can without loss of assertive content be rephrased as sentences which clearly do not (cf. P.II 215). The goal in paraphrasing will be to employ only thing words as nouns and to use synsemantica in the proper ways.

I will give a few brief illustrations of Brentano's proposed anti-abstracta reductions before returning to the question of non-existent individuals. Talk about the universal red must be construed as talk about red things, and talk about love as talk about lovers. To assert that there is a truth is to assert that there is a correct acceptor or rejector of something (W&E 124): as Brentano will explain, an acceptor or rejector who judges as one would who judged in the light of self-evidence (W&E 139). The

assertion that an impossibility exists can be understood as an assertion that some thing is impossible, which judgement is in turn an apodictic rejecting of that thing (W&E 93, 97f, 123). Again, since all names are properly speaking names for things, Brentano infers in the expected way that the word 'possibility' is not a name. To judge that something is possible is to contradict the claim that it is impossible, and is therefore to reject the thing that is a *correct apodictic rejector* (K 208).[6] Finally, to assert the being or non-being of things (where 'being' is not used as a synonym for 'thing') is to speak of the things themselves, accepting or rejecting them. For example, to deny the being or existence of centaurs is to reject a generally-thought centaur thing. It is not Brentano's view that words like 'possibility' and 'existence' and 'truth' should be banned from the vernacular. On the contrary, he elsewhere speaks of abstracta as useful fictions which when recognized as such can play a role in our thought as conceptual shorthand, or as a means to new discoveries. But when we speak with the care appropriate to philosophy we will have to perf orm translations into thing-language.

As an historical aside, it was probably Brentano's youthful study of Aristotle which turned his thoughts toward positing different cases of being as a way of solving problems concerning the highest genera and the nature of substance and predication. The introduction to his doctoral dissertation on Aristotle's senses of being speaks of separating proper from improper senses and excluding the latter from consideration. His thinking was further shaped by an analysis (cf. Hume's *Treatise* I.ii.vi, I.iii.vii) which construed putative representations of existence as representations of concrete objects. He has been quoted above saying that to think 'something' is to think of things themselves in a general way. In this union of Aristotle and British empiricism there is no anticipation of the Fregean doctrine that existence is a second-order

property. Brentano does not pursue the possibility that false assertions of existence falsely assert the instantiation of a concept or the applicability of a description.

Let us now pause to summarize. Reviewing some of Brentano's views about mental activity, we have noted that he believes only things (in the special sense of 'concrete particulars') may be objects of our mental representations. We saw that his account of being is intended to buttress this view and how he proposes to reduce certain statements, ostensibly about abstracta, to other statements, held to be more perspicuous for logical purposes. With respect to concrete particulars a puzzle has been set out, arising from our supposed representation of things that don't exist.

It may now appear that Brentano's solution to the puzzle has already come to light. For, the remarks which have been cited about 'being', 'is', and 'exists' strongly suggest that he gives up the claim that all and only things exist, which is the first statement of the paradox. More exactly, he seems committed to asserting that, while every thing is a being in the broad sense of 'being', not every being exists or is: not everything has being in the narrower sense of 'being'. Using the form 'there are' we ought to say that *there are* only those concrete particulars that can be correctly accepted in the present mode, or only presently existing things (K 18).

If he were to give up the claim that everything exists, Brentano would avoid immediate self-contradiction. All objects of representation are things and not all objects of representation exist; yet we need not worry, because those things which we are correct in rejecting may be objects of representation while failing to exist. However, a question remains as to whether Brentano could have endorsed this solution. If there are non-existent things, then presumably some I-Categoricals are true of them; yet Brentano thinks that these entail the existence of their subjects. We also saw him assert that when 'being' is used as a noun (or *Name*, as he says) in its

proper sense, all things and only things are beings. So perhaps when he says that 'being' in the strict sense is coextensive with 'thing' we should after all take him to mean that all and only things exist. He would then be absolved of the claim that some beings (proper, genuine sense) cannot be said to exist, a view which seems to saddle him with the claim that there are things of which it can be truly said that there are no such things.

What contributes to our uncertainty here is that we do not know what relationship is supposed to hold between 'being' in the proper use (synonymous with 'thing') and 'being' in its narrow use. One suspects it is no accident that the word 'being' is employed both for the highest genus and also to express intellectual recognition, acceptance or endorsement. But I do not see why we are not presented with a sheer ambiguity on Brentano's view. On the one hand, the notion of a thing's being or existence is a representation of the thing itself, together with the representation of someone (correctly) accepting it. On the other hand, 'being' proper is said to be a generic term having just the same sense as 'thing'.

Altogether, then, it is not yet clear which of the puzzle's three premises Brentano wishes to reject. The problem is not that he didn't think about the issue, but that he is pulled in different directions. My own view, which I shall now try to defend, is that he fails to escape inconsistency, and that the statements in our puzzle succinctly capture his conflicting intuitions.

Representing What Doesn't Exist

We must inquire more closely into the question of whether Brentano thinks that some things or beings may be signified, and may be objects of thought, even though they do not exist. It is especially important that he have an answer to this

query because of his view that all things are non-abstract. We know that he wishes to

paraphrase away apparent reference to abstracta by using canonical thing-language.

But among the thing-words which his paraphrases contain are words like 'centaur',

whose status is unclear. Because some of the translations use words for non-existing

things, the success of his abstracta-reducing project will depend upon making good

sense of our apparent ability to think about things that don't exist.

Unfortunately, at certain revealing points his reasoning falters.[7] Brentano

says:, '*Von einer Sache kann man aber sprechen und über sie urteilen auch dann

wenn sie nicht ist...*' (W&E 131). And again: '*Dieses (a thing represented by a

painting) mag gar nicht sein, und ebenso mag, wenn einer etwas denkt, das, was er

denkt, nicht sein*' (K 14; cf. P.II 134). And yet again: '*Die Dinge, auf welche man

sich psychisch bezieht, sind in vielen Fällen nicht*' (P.II 158). To reject a centaur, for

example, is to correctly reject a thing that doesn't exist. At such places it looks as if

there is an object which is contemplated and rejected. In the last passage cited,

however, Brentano goes on to say:

> However, one is accustomed to say that they also are, as
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> objects. This is an improper use of the word 'to be'
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> which one allows oneself for the sake of convenience,
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> and which is just as harmless as talk about 'rising and
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> setting' applied to the sun. One is saying nothing more
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> than that someone is engaged in mental activity with
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> reference to them. It is only consistent to allow
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> oneself further expressions like 'A centaur is half man,
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> half horse', although a centaur in the proper sense is
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> not, and thus in the proper sense is no centaur, has

no body which would be half human and half horselike.'[8]

(P.II 158; cf. P.II 136, AN 372)

We seem to be talking here about a thing where there is no such thing, a relation or reference to what isn't there, and a centaur that is not a centaur. The apparent difficulties are said to be resolved by distinguishing proper from improper uses of 'is' and 'being' (cf. W&E 124). But how is this to be understood?

To understand how Brentano's analysis of the phrase 'is a represented centaur' is supposed to work, we should note a potential source of confusion in the words 'represented thing' or 'represented object'. Like 'pictured mountain', 'represented object' can be used to say of some identifiable existing thing--Mount Robson, for instance--that *it* is represented. Alternatively, the expression can be used so as to leave open the question of whether there is anything corresponding to the act of representing. In this latter use, to say that Mount Robson is represented is merely to characterize the representation itself or its content. It is indeed obvious, when it has been pointed out, that there is a lack of clarity in the use of the phrase 'represented object'. A similar slipperiness is associated with such expressions as 'worships', 'refers to', 'thinks of' and 'talks about'. Describing these uses accurately and saying what the difference amounts to is not easy, but is important to the theory of thought and reference.

Pressing a little harder, we can discern several ways in which the expression 'represents such-and-such' could be read. It is worth while to list these, since Brentano seems to adopt incompatible readings in different places. (1) First, on a given occasion we could take it that the expression following 'represents' successfully designates something that is normally non-mental. By 'successfully designates' I

mean that something satisfies a description or answers to a singular term, and by 'something' I mean something we can quantify over.

(2) Second, we could take it that the expression successfully designates something mental in nature. In either of these first two interpretations I am assuming that there is something to be designated by the expression which follows the word 'represents'.

(3) Third, 'represents such-and-such' could be taken as saying that the expression after 'represents' successfully designates something such that there is no such thing. Brentano's one-time student Alexius Meinong certainly thinks that expressions sometimes designate in this manner; but it is not Brentano's view. One might posit ambiguity in the expression 'there is', and argue that in a weaker sense 'there is such a thing' is true. The weak sense would have to be too weak to entail existence, yet strong enough to secure a purchase for thought. However, in spite of his theory about proper and improper uses of 'is', Brentano denies that 'there is' is ambiguous in this way.

(4) On a fourth reading of 'represents such-and-such', the expression replacing 'such-and-such' fails to designate successfully on this occasion, though it would designate successfully if there were something appropriate for it to designate.

(5) And finally, one could take it that the phrase 'represents such-and-such' is functioning as a unit, in a way that makes it somehow a mistake to ask what object the expression replacing 'such-and-such' designates. The suggestion is that one cannot get inside the phrase in that manner, but must treat it instead as a whole. A well known example of this situation is provided by W. V. O. Quine: in the idiomatic form 'for the sake of' it is inappropriate to ask what entity is designated by the word 'sake'.

Brentano's Quandary

How does Brentano interpret the expression 'represented centaur' in 'A represented centaur is the object of John's mental act'? The path he chooses will certainly make a difference to his account of thought. Consider then the sentences 'The object of John's representation is a centaur', 'There is a centaur which John represents' and 'John represents a centaur'. Does Brentano take the word 'centaur' to designate successfully anything in any of these contexts? At times he talks as if it does: some passages were quoted earlier in which he speaks as if 'centaur' successfully designates something that does not exist. (This would be to adopt the third of the interpretations just mentioned.) In fact, he usually speaks this way when he says that to deny the existence of a such-and-such is to reject a such-and-such. What is rejected is the object of a representation, and in the case of centaur-rejection Brentano often seems to suggest that the object is a centaur.

Aside from the passages quoted, there is also a lesser known passage in a letter to Oskar Kraus which may support such a reading of Brentano. The letter in question dates from June 19, 1916, and it is one of Brentano's more peevish epistles (AN 308-10). Kraus had evidently suggested in a previous communication that if a represented object exists, the representing act or relation is of another sort than if the object fails to exist. After expressing surprise at Kraus's incomprehension, Brentano dismisses this proposal:

> Was Sie von dem Vorstellenden sagen, dass im Fall, das
> vorgestellte Ding sei, die Relation eine andere werde,
> indem sie zu jenen gehöre, bei welchen auch das Korrelat
> existiert, kann ich nicht billigen. Vielmehr kommt hier

zu der Beziehung des Vorstellenden noch eine zweite

Beziehung hinzu, insofern der Vorstellende etwas zum

Gegenstand hat, dem dieses in Wirklichkeit entspricht.[9]

(AN 309)

I quote this in German because it is difficult to understand Brentano's use of the pronouns '*dem*' and '*dieses*' in the last clause. How are we to read them? So far as I can see, the best way to make sense of the passage is to let '*dieses*' pick up the '*etwas*' of '*etwas zum Gegenstand*' while '*dem*' picks up the word '*Gegenstand*'. Then if some zoological mishap produced a centaur, while a skeptic continued to deny its existence, we would have Brentano holding that there is one relationship between the rejector and the object represented and in addition a correspondence relationship ('*entspricht*') between the object represented and the real thing. We should not put much interpretive weight on a single difficult text, but if this reading is right Brentano takes '*etwas*' in '*hat etwas zum Gegenstand*' as successfully designating something (a centaur) which is both the object of thought and which can stand in a correspondence relationship to something of real flesh and blood.

In spite of the evidence, one hesitates to ascribe such a view to Brentano, since it is not very plausible and since at times he seems to be trying to avoid it. Let us attempt a different approach. We saw from the argument set out in the first section of this paper that he takes '*etwas*' in '*etwas vorstellen*' to name or signify. So it is reasonable to think that he takes 'a centaur' in 'represents a centaur' to name or signify too. 'Signifies' could merely mean 'has a designating function', or it could mean 'successfully designates'. Since the latter seems false, we shall assume instead that only the former is true: perhaps Brentano holds that the word 'centaur' in 'represented centaur' does not successfully designate, but would do so if there

happened to be centaurs. (This adopts the fourth of the possible interpretations listed above.) Because we cannot take it that the mental act of representing is directed toward concepts or the use of an expression, or universals, we would have to suppose on this reading that it has an object only if the expression 'centaur' happens to apply. The claim might then be that an act is sometimes object-directed without having any object.

However, it appears that there are no such mental acts on Brentano's view. An objectless act would seem to be a case of the mind not being related to anything, yet the mind would become related if things of a certain sort were to come into existence. But the letter to Kraus quoted earlier suggests pretty strongly that if a centaur were to come into existence the act of centaur-rejection would not change in nature. Brentano says that the *Beziehung des Vorstellenden* does not alter. He always speaks as if the representing mind has an object, not as if there is an act which fails to fasten on to anything at all, but which is still somehow object-directed. In centaur-representing, the object in question must be a centaur. I do not think his view can be expressed by saying that the word 'centaur' in 'represents a centaur' serves a designating function without successfully designating any object of thought.

A final possibility must be canvassed. At times Brentano seems to hold that the word 'centaur' in 'represented centaur' does not serve a designating function at all, and that one shows misunderstanding if one asks what it designates. In a dictation dated January 30, 1917 he maintains that when we say 'a man is thought of' the word 'man' no longer signifies (*bedeutet*) a thing, but rather functions synsemantically.[10] To admit that a thought-about man (*einen gedachten Menschen*) exists is in fact to admit only that there is a thinker engaged in representing activity (P.II 231). Brentano says this in the service of showing that there is no genuine relation between thinkers and

their objects, but rather only something analogous to a relation ('*etwas relativliches*'; cf. AN 372).

The move now under discussion does not comport well with the argument reviewed at the start of our inquiry, where it was assumed that 'object' in 'represents an object' always univocally names or signifies a thing. While the current suggestion reminds us that 'represented object' can be used in more than one way, it fails to reveal how we can represent, and sometimes make reference to, public objects. For there can be little doubt that 'thought-about man' sometimes designates an existing man. Brentano occasionally makes use of the word 'as' (*als*) to stress that he is talking about the thought-about man *as* thought-about (P.II 233, 234). Whatever this means exactly, it leaves unexplained what is before the mind when the expressions 'man' and 'centaur' respectively are given their regular use. We may imagine someone saying 'There are no centaurs', or 'I saw a (real) centaur', and the word cannot be said to function synsemantically here; nor does it in certain uses of 'represented centaur'.

These are reasons for thinking that Brentano does not consistently endorse an interpretation of 'representing a centaur' which treats that expression as non-relational. We can explain Brentano's lack of clarity by supposing that he does not adequately distinguish among the various readings of 'a represented such-and-such' which were set forth earlier. That, together with his confusing remarks about existence and being, explains why it continues to be unclear whether he wishes to hold that in the final analysis everything exists. His Reism and his theory of being require the advantages of incompatible readings. In particular, things are required for acts of rejection, while the existence of such things is denied.

Let us grant for the sake of argument the questionable claim that when we say there is a thought-about centaur the word 'is' is improperly used. If to say 'There is a non-existent centaur which exists as the object of my mental activities' is to use 'is' and 'exists' in a non-proper way, there must be a translation into canonical thing-language. Brentano's effort to provide one uses an apparatus of direct and oblique modes of thought (*modus rectus*, *modus obliquus*). It was mentioned that according to him the assertion that there is a thought thing is just the assertion that there is a thinker engaged in representing-activity. When I think of a thinker representing a horse or centaur, I represent the thinker in the direct mode, and the object of his thought in an oblique mode (W&E 138; cf. P.II *Anhang* IV, XV). Similarly, when I think of an effect, I think in an oblique mode of the cause, and when I think of a larger thing *modo recto* I think of a smaller thing *modo obliquo* (e.g. P.II 217). In such cases, says Brentano, as when I say 'Caius is larger than Titus' the thing represented *modo obliquo* need not exist as the object of the direct mode does (P.II 218; cf. 134ff).

Without examining the doctrine of direct and oblique modes in detail we can see that it will not help us with the question of what Brentano thinks non-existent things are. To say 'I represent a thinker who is representing a centaur' invites the question 'A thinker who exists or one who doesn't?' If the latter, we immediately have the same problem. But there is no reason why I must be representing a thinker who happens to actually exist in space and time. If it is objected that under the circumstances there will always be at least one centaur-representer in existence, namely me (cf. B&M 28), the story begins to look ad hoc. Moreover, this device would lead to absurdity. What help is it in explaining my representing of a centaur to say that I represent myself representing a centaur?

Brentano's view that there are no abstract objects and his explanation of negation in terms of a rejecting act leave him with little room to maneuver here. He will not say that when judging I reject a thought or a concept or a universal centaur, nor the use of the expression 'centaur': it is *centaur* or *a centaur* or *the centaur* that is rejected, where we are not told what difference the presence or absence of a definite article makes (cf. P.II 158ff). Now gifts and suitors are things that can be rejected, but only if they exist. How can I reject a non-existing centaur? We can put the problem once more. Suppose someone says, 'I am thinking of a centaur', and suppose, as Brentano does, that the word 'centaur' is a name for a thing, not for a thought-thing or an idea (e.g. W&E 88). Then there are two possibilities: either 'centaur' names a thing before the mind or nothing before the mind. Suppose the former, since Brentano rules out the latter. Then there are again two possibilities: either what is named is actually in space or time or neither in space nor time. As we saw, it seems that sometimes when Brentano talks about the representing of centaurs he is adhering to the last alternative: that an animal is successfully designated by 'centaur', something not actually in space or time, yet the object of thought. But unless a Meinongian position is adopted this is unintelligible. If there were a centaur, it would take up space. There is no space occupied by such a thing; therefore there is no such particular thing which can be referred to and is the object of thought. We must say that Brentano has not made clear what the objects of reference are in such cases, or alternatively explained how it is that nothing need be referred to by his thing words. He has failed to solve the puzzle of non-existing objects.

Conclusion

In his later philosophy Brentano tries to carry out the following two projects, among others. One project is to paraphrase away any talk of universals, including talk of universal being. The other is to avoid existential commitment to non-existent concreta, while allowing us to say that we represent them. Both of these projects are classed as eliminating fictions and *entia rationis*. He works on abstracta by bringing his theory of judgement to bear, reducing predicative judgements to judgements of existence or non-existence, i.e. to acts of accepting and rejecting. The canonical sentence forms that express such judgements contain only thing-words and properly used synsemantica. Then, because there is a puzzle concerning non-existent objects of thought, he must say more about what it is to represent and accept or reject non-existing things. In dealing with the problem of fictions like centaurs he does not offer an analysis of definite descriptions, or explain non-existence as the non-applicability of a concept or as a failure in the use of an expression; instead, the difficulty is tackled by positing extended senses of 'is', 'exists' and 'there is'. Phrases such as 'is merely an object of representation', 'exists only as object', and 'there is a represented centaur' are offered as examples of the improper use of existential verbs. Rightly understood, such expressions are supposed to commit one only to accepting a thinking substance in various states. However, new problems are generated by this approach. On the one hand, judgement is held to be a form of rejecting-behavior; on the other hand, it is denied that the judging mind stands in a genuine relation to anything that can be rejected. Brentano's contextual definition of 'object' in 'has as an object' is not consistently maintained, and his ineffective apparatus of direct and oblique modes of thought fails to answer the question of what is before a correctly rejecting (or incorrectly accepting) mind. Since the project of explaining non-existence fails, so does the more general attempt to eliminate talk of abstracta. Such deep-seated

inconsistency reveals a need for an overhaul of Brentano's theory of being and judgement, and it is difficult to know how much of the theory can be saved.

Endnotes

[1] Because of increasing blindness and a reluctance to publish prematurely, Brentano's later philosophical views must be pieced together from numerous letters and short dictations. Many of these texts have now reached print.

The following works have been consulted:

1) *AN: Die Abkehr vom Nichtrealen* (Brentano, 1966). A collection of letters and other writings introduced and edited by Franziska Mayer-Hillebrand.

2) *K: Kategorienlehre* (Brentano, 1933). Collection of works on the theory of categories, introduced and annotated by Alfred Kastil.

3) *P.I: Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt* Vol I (Brentano, 1924). An earlier edition was published by Brentano himself in 1874. This edition was introduced and annotated by his student Oskar Kraus.

4) *P.II: Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt* Vol II (Brentano, 1925). An edition with addenda revealing important changes of view was published by Brentano in 1911. The expanded 1925 edition, including works from the *Nachlass* is edited by Kraus.

5) *W&E: Wahrheit und Evidenz,* (Brentano, 1930). This book is a collection of letters and other short works by Brentano, edited by his student Oskar Kraus.

[2] For the ordering of the genera, see P.II, Chapter 9. On Descartes and their discovery, see Brentano's *The Origin of Our Knowledge of Right and Wrong*, pp. 15,50ff.

[3] R. M. Chisholm, *Brentano and Intrinsic Value*, Cambridge University Press, 1986, pp. 10ff. For Chisholm's interpretive views see also his *Brentano and Meinong Studies* (henceforth cited as 'B&M'). The word '*Anerkennen*' can also be translated as 'to recognize', or 'to acknowledge'. '*Verwerfen*', or '*Leugnen*', as Brentano sometimes says instead, can be rendered 'to deny' as well as 'to reject'. It is noteworthy that there is a certain slipperiness here: some of these expressions can be followed either by a thing-expression or that-clause.

[4] The same argument is repeated at various other places in Brentano's work, e.g. K 58, 210, 265; AN 173, 360. See also P.II 214, 246f, and Kraus's Note 7 at P.II 298. For other relevant correspondence with Kraus around Nov. 1914 see W&E 106, and AN 247 et seq. D. B. Terrell's paper 'Brentano's Argument for Reismus' contains a useful discussion of this reasoning. Compare Reinhardt Grossmann's comments in 'Non-Existent Objects: Recent Work on Brentano and Meinong'.

[5] Brentano thought that his revision of the syllogistic, based on the acceptance theory of judgement, was among his most important discoveries. Some of his logical innovations were set out by Franz Hillebrand in the 1891 book *Die neuen Theorien der kategorischen Schlüsse: Eine logische Untersuchung.* Like his beliefs about the objects of thought, Brentano's beliefs about the proper way to analyse the four proposition types A, I, O and E changed over time. See P.II Ch.VII and the notes by Kraus. Compare Ch. 1 of B&M. For appraisals by two logicians of Brentano's logical work, see A. N. Prior's *Formal Logic*, Pt.II.ii.§ 2, and also 'Brentano's Reform of

Logic', by Peter Simons. (This paper is printed as Chapter 3 of Simons' *Philosophy and Logic in Central Europe from Bolzano to Tarski*.)

[6] Perhaps also, 'accept the thing *incorrect apodictic rejector*'. At P.II 237 Brentano says that a double 'not' comes out as the equivalent of an affirmation; but I do not know whether this is supposed to suggest that the judgement of possibility could be affirmative, given that 'possibly p' is true if and only if 'not impossibly p' is true. He would not be entitled to infer an accepting act from the theorem 'If not not-p, then p'. The rejecting of a rejector is not the same action as an accepting of an affirmer. See W&E 138, P.II 237, 244f.

[7] Compare the remarks of Føllesdal in 'Brentano and Husserl on Intentional Objects and Perception', printed in Chisholm and Haller 1978.

[8] *Man pflegt aber zu sagen, sie seien auch dann als Objekte. Es ist dies ein uneigentlicher Gebrauch des Wortes 'sein', den man sich der Bequemlichkeit halber ebenso ungestraft erlaubt, wie den des 'Auf- und Untergehens' in seiner Anwendung auf die Sonne. Man sagt damit eben nicht mehr, als daá sich ein psychisch Tätiges darauf beziehe. Es ist nur konsequent, wenn man sich daraufhin auch Äusserungen erlaubt wie 'ein Zentaur ist halb Mensch, halb Pferd', obwohl ein Zentaur im eigentlichen Sinn nicht ist und darum im eigentlichen Sinn kein Zentaur ist, keinen Leib hat, der zur Hälfte menschlich und zur Hälfte pferdeartig wäre.*

Brentano is speaking here as if a (certain?) nonexistent centaur is a subject of which we deny that (in the proper sense of 'is') it is a centaur or (in the proper sense of 'has'?) has a body.

[9] 'I cannot grant what you say about the representer, that in case the represented thing exists the relation becomes another one, in that it belongs to [the set of] those relations such that the correlate also exists. Rather, to the relationship of the representer yet another relationship is added here, insofar as the representer has something as an object to which this corresponds in reality.'

[10] In his article 'Acts and Relations in Brentano', Reinhard Kamitz seems to explain Brentano's view thus: the word 'Pegasus' in 'to represent a Pegasus' functions synsemantically, but in other contexts 'Pegasus' has a naming function and may continue to have it even though Pegasus fails to exist. But does this mean (1) 'Pegasus' successfully designates something that doesn't exist; or (2) 'Pegasus' fails to successfully designate but would do so if something appropriate existed? I do not think the article tells us.

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