

Idealism and the Question of Truth*

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§1. Introduction: truth after the Copernican turn

On a fairly traditional – and, perhaps, fairly ‘platitudinous’¹ – understanding of its nature, truth seems to be something that should merit the label of being ‘Janus-faced’. This is because truth appears to be something that points at the same time, and seemingly with equal necessity, toward both objects and subjects. On the one hand, the notion of truth seems to involve the notion of objectivity. If something is true, then (aside, perhaps, from certain cases, e.g., involving self-reference) it is true whether we (subjects) like it or not, regardless of whether we think (believe, take) it to be true. What *makes* things true are simply the facts of the matter. On the other hand, the notion of truth also seems to involve an intrinsic connection to the notion of subjectivity – more specifically to the mental and linguistic activity of thinking, speaking subjects. This connection shows itself in two ways: first, in the fact that the truth sets a standard of *correctness* for us, is something of value to us, something the possession of which seems to form the end or aim of belief and the expression of which seems to form the goal of assertion; second, in the fact that what have seemed to many to be the most natural candidates for the things which are true – the things that *bear* the property of being true – are *our* representations of things, whether mental or linguistic, i.e., things that seem only to make sense to talk about in the context of *representers*.

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¹ This is Crispin Wright’s description of ‘very general, very intuitive principles’ such as ‘that to assert is to present as true’ and ‘that to be true is to correspond to the facts’ (Wright 1992: 34).

This traditional conception is more or less encapsulated in what, for a long while, has served as the core definition of truth: ‘truth is the agreement of our thoughts with their objects’ – ‘*veritas est adaequatio rei et intellectus*’, as Aquinas puts it.²² To be sure, not everyone has accepted that all three of these aspects (relation to objective facts (*res*), standard for correctness (*adaequatio*), and relation to acts of representing by subjects (*intellectus*)) must be incorporated into the analysis of truth. Even so, philosophical accounts of truth that leave no room for, or cannot do justice to, one or another of these aspects are often, and for this reason, viewed with a certain amount of suspicion.

Almost immediately after it burst on the scene, Kant’s idealism has come in for just such a criticism. In particular, it is often worried that Kant’s views will eliminate a place for the first two features of truth identified above. In Kant’s hands, idealism consists in the belief in the mind- or representation-*dependence* of certain aspects of the sensible world. But then, to the extent that what allegedly makes our representations of these aspects true is now a function of these representations themselves, idealism seems to imply, first, that our representing something to be so *is* itself responsible for its being so, and secondly, and correlatively, that there is no possibility for us to be mistaken in our representation of these aspects, since there is no further way that these aspects are ‘in themselves’ above and beyond how we represent them as being, such that we could represent them falsely, or in a way in which they, in fact, were not.

Now, as we will see below (§2), Kant himself did not think that his views required giving up on the traditional definition of truth. Yet as will also emerge, many of Kant’s successors were not convinced. Rather, it was by focusing even more intensely upon the nature of truth that several of them hoped to avoid the ‘subjectivizing’ pitfalls of Kantian

²² Compare question 1, article 1 of Aquinas’s *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate* from the 1250s, as cited in (Künne 2003: 102f).

idealism. Bolzano, for example, turned his attention to the development of a revolutionary account of the bearers of truth (cf., §3); Brentano sought to shift the center of the discussion of truth toward a renewed and influential emphasis on our real experiences of correctness as definitive of truth (§4); and Husserl hoped to supplement both Bolzano and Brentano's analyses with a more direct and sustained analysis of the nature of truth-makers themselves (§5).

In the process, these 19th century theorists cast a critical spotlight upon each of the three dimensions noted above. The cumulative result was the cultivation of a dynamic philosophical context in which many of the key issues still at the heart of contemporary debates about truth were first identified as pivotal. Indeed, it brought about the very context in which the origins of two of the most influential movements in 20th century philosophy – analytic philosophy and phenomenology – find their roots. For this reason, even if thinking through the problems and prospects that emerge in this development does not, of itself, provide a complete resolution to these debates, it promises to provide us with both deeper clarity concerning these issues as well as a richer sense of the historical motivations for certain now-familiar theoretical twists and turns.

§2. Kant and the truth in appearances

Aquinas's definition was endorsed repeatedly throughout the early modern period, up till the time of Kant. We find it, for example, in Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz, as well as in two of Kant's more immediate predecessors, Christian Wolff and Georg Meier.³ We also find it explicitly endorsed by Kant himself in the *Critique of Pure Reason*: 'the nominal definition of truth, namely that it is the agreement [Übereinstimmung] of cognition

³ Cf., Descartes' October 16, 1639 letter to Mersenne (Descartes 1898: 597); (Spinoza 1677: part I, axiom 6); (Leibniz 1705: Book IV, Chapter 5); (Wolff 1740: §505); and the textbook Kant used in his logic lectures (Meier 1752: §99).

[Erkenntnis] with its object [Gegenstand], is here granted and presupposed' (B82). Kant affirms this definition at many points throughout the *Critique* and in several other contemporary writings as well.⁴ This suggests that Kant does not take himself to be putting forward a deeply revisionary or heterodox theory of truth, despite his clear sense that he is up to something revolutionary within theoretical philosophy, and despite his other radical departures from the Leibniz-Wolffian tradition. Even so, the threat to the familiar conception of truth becomes readily apparent once we look more carefully at Kant's own understanding of the three key terms in the traditional definition, especially his understanding of 'object'.

Concerning 'cognition': though Kant above makes it sound as if truth can pertain to any species of cognition, Kant's considered view is that truth is restricted to *judgments*: 'truth as well as error...is to be found *only* in judgments' (B350). Judgments, like all cognitions, are a species of 'representation [Vorstellung]', which means that a judgment is a mental act that is related to an object. Judgments are distinguished by being acts of our capacity for understanding – i.e., our 'intellect' – acts, in particular, that involve the kind of synthesis or 'combination [Verbindung]' of further cognitions that is expressed by the copula 'is' (cf., B141).⁵

⁴ See B236, B196-7, B296, B848; see as well *Prolegomena* §5 (4:279), JL §VII (9:50f), and the following student transcripts of Kant's lectures on logic: *Logik Dobna Wundlacken* 24:709; *Logik Busolt* 24:627; *Wiener Logik* 24:823. For a dissenting interpretation of Kant's 'acceptance' of the tradition definition in this passage, see (Prauss 1969).

In this essay, I will cite major works parenthetically, according to the abbreviations provided in the Bibliography. For Kant, I will cite the first *Critique* according to the B-edition pagination, and will cite the *Prolegomena* ('Prol.') and Jäsche's *Logic* ('JL') according to the *Akademie Ausgabe* volume and page numbers (cf. Kant 1902-). For Brentano and Husserl, I will cite according to pagination from the English translation (where available) followed by that of the German edition. In all cases, the translations are my own, though I have consulted (and especially in the case of Kant's works, usually followed) the standard English translations, where possible (see Bibliography).

⁵ It is worth noting that, unlike Frege, 'judging' for Kant is not equivalent to 'holding-for-true [Fürwahrhalten]' (cf. JL §IX, 9:65f). Kant takes the act of judging to form a representation (a judgment) that *is* true or false (in the case of theoretical judgments), and which can then also *be held to be* true or false (in a separate act), but need not be.

Turning to ‘agreement’, we can note, first, that the particular representational ‘relation’ that a given cognition bears to its object is what Kant calls the ‘content [Inhalt]’ of the cognition (B79; cf., B83). Kant takes the agreement (and its opposite, the ‘contradiction’) between a cognition and its object to be a further specification of this relation, such that a particular cognition’s agreement with its object – i.e., its *truth* – is something that ‘pertains precisely to content’ (cf., B83-4).⁶ In this respect, truth, for Kant, is primarily a semantical notion, as it concerns the representational relation between acts and objects, in virtue of their content. This contrasts with the more ‘metaphysical’ view of truth, also anticipated in Aquinas, and put forward by some of the Leibnizians, according to which truth is a property of objects themselves.⁷ Kant explicitly rejects any conception that would make truth a ‘transcendental predicate of *things*’, rather than a property of our ‘*cognition of things*’ (B113-14).

So far, so traditional. Things become considerably more complex, however, once we take a closer look at Kant’s mature conception of the third notion in the above definition of truth: the ‘object [Gegenstand]’ to which our cognition ‘agrees’ when it is true. For what Kant says about the objects of our cognitions threatens to eliminate their representation-independence altogether. Yet without this link to genuine objectivity, Kant’s views might seem to become deeply revisionary indeed.

Kant’s ‘Copernican’ revolution comes about with his questioning of a commonly-held assumption about the relation between our cognition and the objects of our cognition, with the hope that rejecting this assumption will allow us to finally make decisive progress in metaphysics. As he writes in the Preface to the *Critique of Pure Reason*:

⁶ As he puts it later in the *Critique*: truth ‘is to be found...*only* in the *relation* of objects to our understanding’ (B350; my ital.).

⁷ This view can be found in (Baumgarten 1757: §89), the textbook Kant used in his metaphysics lectures. For references to Aquinas’ discussion of ‘truth in things [*in rebus*]’, see (Künne 2003: 104).

Up to now it has been assumed that all our cognition must *conform to the objects* [sich richten nach den Gegenständen]; but all attempts to find out something about them apriori through concepts that would extend our cognition have, on this presupposition, come to nothing. Hence let us once try whether we do not get farther with the problems of metaphysics by assuming that the objects must *conform to our cognition*, which would agree better with the requested possibility of an apriori cognition of them, which is to establish something about objects before they are given to us. (Bxvi; my ital.)

The first *Critique* is Kant's attempt to explore and vindicate this inversion of the common assumption, with Kant's conclusion being that the only metaphysical, apriori cognition that is possible is, in fact, of objects that 'conform' to our cognition.

Along the way, however, Kant's views about metaphysical cognition turn out to be intertwined with his account of cognition in general, whether metaphysical (apriori) or otherwise. The core of Kant's argument about metaphysical cognition lies in his belief that the only thing that our minds can be thought to have apriori access to, the only thing 'given and present' to the mind apriori, is the mind itself, its own structure, and its two basic capacities for representing – 'the constitution of our capacity for intuition' (our sensibility) and the 'rules' for our understanding as a capacity for thinking and judging – since all of these are things that lie 'in myself before any object is given to me' (Bxvii; cf., Prol §9, 4:282). Yet precisely because our apriori cognition is limited in this way, the only information that such cognition can convey about *objects* is that any object represented by these capacities will be represented in the forms that representations from these capacities must take, due to the nature of the capacities themselves. In this way, our apriori cognition of objects is restricted to knowledge about whatever *representations* of objects can 'conform' to our capacities for cognition, rather than extending to cognition of these objects as they are 'in themselves'.

The consequences for our cognition in general emerge once Kant begins to spell out what we know apriori about our mind. In particular, Kant thinks we know that an object can only be 'given' to us in intuition if our mind's sensibility is 'affected' by it, such that we

‘sense’ it in some way or other, with the effect of this affection being that the object is able to ‘appear’ to us (B33). But we also know apriori that any representation (intuition) from our sensibility must ‘conform’ to the way that this capacity represents things. For this reason, the appearance of an object in an intuition can only take place in a representation that will inevitably bear the marks of having been produced by our mental capacities. Even so, the universal and necessary presence of these marks in the appearance – what Kant calls ‘the forms of appearance’, and what he identifies with the spatial relations and temporal orderings that organize the contents given in our sensations – is something that we know is present due to the nature of our minds rather than the nature of the affecting objects (B34).

Now, Kant thinks that, aposteriori, it is ultimately the *appearances* of objects that are ‘the *only* objects that can be given to us immediately’ (A108-9; my ital.). These ‘objects’, however, are not really genuine self-standing things in their own right, since they are not a way something could be ‘in itself’, but are instead ‘representations’ of things (A109). But then, because an appearance exists only as a ‘way of perceiving’ or ‘representing’ something else, Kant claims that it *only* exists ‘in us’, or at the very least, only in the relation between the object and our minds (B59; cf. Prolog. §52c, 4:341).

With this further claim, Kant can seem to straightforwardly threaten the mind-independence of the possible objects of our cognition *in general*, for the following reasons. If the only object that can be immediately present to us apriori is the mind itself (and its capacities), and the only things that can be immediately present aposteriori are appearances, and if the only things we can have knowledge of are things we can have immediately present before our minds, then our cognition, in general, will be ‘restricted’ or ‘limited’ to the mind and of appearances. But since appearances are objects whose forms are supplied by our minds, then our cognition is, in general, restricted to objects that, in a very straightforward

sense, *must* ‘conform’ to our capacities for cognition, since they are either these capacities themselves or a ‘product’ of them (Prol §20, 4:300).

With this we see why Kant’s revolutionary account of our cognition and its objects can seem to have no grounds for retaining anything like the traditional notion of *truth*, and more specifically, the distinction between truth and falsity – Kant’s own assent to the traditional definition notwithstanding. On the traditional picture of conformity or agreement of our representations with their objects, the former entities are beholden to the latter: the way objects actually are makes certain representations of them true, and the fact that we can represent objects otherwise than how they actually are makes falsity possible. On Kant’s new picture, however, the objects of possible cognition are now beholden to our mental acts, as something of the mind’s own making, as merely ‘ideal’ rather than ‘real’ (cf., B66). Yet with this inversion, the possibility of gaps between a putative object of knowledge *being* a certain way and its being *represented* as being that way can seem to have disappeared. The fact that our representations ‘produce’ their immediate objects means that these objects simply do not have the sort of existence that outstrips their being represented; as Kant says repeatedly, they *are* nothing outside of their being represented. But then a conformity or agreement between cognition and object would seem to be guaranteed, universally and necessarily, and *all* of our intuitions (representations of appearances) would become trivially true.

At this point, however, Kant can insist that his position is being mischaracterized in two important respects. The first has to do with the nature of appearances. It is not *every* feature of appearances that is said to ‘lie in the mind’ apriori, but rather only their *form*; this is part of why Kant thinks a better name for his idealism would be ‘formal idealism’ (Prol. 4:337). Kant does not think that the ‘matter’ of any appearance is itself already present as an

apriori contribution due to nature of our mind's capacities. Rather, this matter is present only because of the contribution that the object makes to its appearance: it is present as 'an effect of an object on our capacity for representation', and consists in what Kant calls the content of a 'sensation [Empfindung]' (B34). This dependence of the matter on objects lends some independence to the appearances themselves and gives Kant a hook on which to hang his 'empirical *realism*' about appearances (cf., A368f).

What is more, Kant himself concedes that the 'agreement' of the products of a capacity for representation with the basic constitution of the capacity itself could achieve only 'the form of truth', rather than full-blooded truth, since the complete cognition (form plus matter) could, at least in principle, still go on to 'contradict' its object (B84). Hence Kant himself would admit that the mere 'agreement' of appearances with the forms of cognition is at best a merely '*formal truth*', since this, in effect, 'consists in the agreement of a cognition *with itself*' (JL §VII, 9:51; my ital.). This contrasts with genuinely '*objective truth*', which requires the 'matter' of the appearance, too, to 'agree' with its object (ibid.).

This first appeal, however, can seem to only help so much. For one thing, Kant takes contents of sensations themselves to also be contained 'in' the appearance, and hence also immediately present to the mind in a way that the *object* affecting us is not. This leaves opaque the exact relation between these contents and whatever features of the object of the appearance they are representing.

Equally problematic is Kant's thesis that '*all* the properties that make up the intuition of [an object] belong *merely* to its appearance' (Prol., 4:289; my ital.). This suggests that even the sensory qualities that fill in the forms supplied by the mind – even this matter is ultimately something that belongs merely to the appearance of things. But if these material features of appearances are likewise things that do not exist outside of being represented,

then they don't actually seem to possess the requisite representation-independence to function as facts that can constrain our representations to make them true.

Here, however, we must recall that Kant does not think that *appearances* are themselves actually the genuine bearers of truth and falsity. As we saw above, this title belongs instead to our *judgments*: 'truth and illusion are *not* in the object, insofar as it is intuited' – i.e., in its appearance – 'but in the judgment about it, insofar as it is thought' (B350). It is, therefore, only in judgments concerning appearances that any questions of agreement in the sense of truth arise.

What is more, Kant thinks we are able to make *true* judgments about the status of the appearances, judgments whose contents 'agree' or conform exactly to the way their objects actually are:

[I]f I take all the [sensible] representations together with their form – namely, space and time – for nothing but appearances, and these last two for a mere form of sensibility that is by no means to be found outside it in the objects...then in the fact that I take them for mere appearances is contained not the least illusion or temptation for error.... (Prol. 4:291)

We can make true judgments about appearances whenever we say exactly what Kant himself says about them and therefore we 'take [halten]' them for what they really are – namely, appearances. Here the object of our judgment (appearance) is just as we are representing it to be in our judgment. Furthermore, at this point, Kant thinks that error is clearly possible; indeed, many metaphysicians prior to Kant wrongly 'take' what belongs to the appearance of an object to belong instead to the object itself, and in this way 'make mere representations into things' (Prol. 4:293).

Actually, Kant thinks we do even more than simply 'taking' or 'holding' appearances 'for' what they really are. This is something he makes clear in the following important footnote in the *Transcendental Aesthetic*:

The predicates of appearance can be attributed to the object in itself in *relation* to our sense, e.g., the red color or fragrance to the rose.... What is not to be encountered in the object in itself at all, but is always to be encountered in its *relation* to the subject and is inseparable from the representation of the object, is appearance, and thus the predicates of space and of time are rightly attributed to the objects of the senses as such, and there is no illusion in this. On the contrary, if I attribute the redness to the rose in itself...or extension to all outer objects in themselves, *without* looking to a determinate *relation* of these objects to the subject and limiting my judgment to this, then illusion first arises. (B69-70n; my ital.)

Above and beyond simply (and correctly) ascribing the property *being an appearance* to the immediate object of our intuition, we can also correctly ascribe the ‘predicates’ that are contained ‘in’ the appearance itself – i.e., all of the ‘properties that make up an intuition’ (to recall a passage cited above) – not to the object as it is in itself, but instead to the object *in relation to* our capacity for sensing it. What is represented in these more sophisticated judgments will also be able to ‘agree’ with their ‘object’ because their object is now the complex: object-in-relation-to-my-sensibility; and we can see straightaway (thinks Kant) that *this* ‘object’ *is* just as it *appears* to be.

With this, Kant would seem to have escaped the worst of the difficulties posed above. Since the object of the judgment is not dependent for its existence on the judging itself, it enjoys a form of relative representation-independence (i.e., relative to judging, even if not relative to intuiting). This, moreover, also opens up space for our judgments to misrepresent these objects, since we are ‘entirely free’ to ‘take’ them to be something other than they actually are, as when we take them to be, or contain properties of, things in themselves (cf., Prolog. 4:290).

Yet however much is clearly gained for Kant’s position by returning our focus to *judgment* rather than appearance, this shift brings with it a further difficulty – a problem, moreover, that is perhaps the deepest yet encountered. Recall that judgments arise through acts of combination, combination that is expressed by the copula ‘is’. Now, Kant takes this

combination to be the result of an ‘act [Actus]’ of our capacity for understanding, something ‘executed by the subject itself’ out of its ‘spontaneity’ or ‘self-activity [Selbsttätigkeit]’ (B130). Importantly, for Kant, this means that such combination is a feature of our representations that ‘can *never* come to us through the senses’ (B129; my ital.) and ‘is *not* given through objects’; rather, Kant thinks we ‘cannot represent something as combined in the object without having previously combined it ourselves’ via our understanding (B130; my ital.).

From this, however, it would seem to follow that the combinatory form of what is represented in judgment is not a feature that tracks anything *either* in the objects as they are ‘in themselves’ *or* – and this is the crucial point – ‘in’ objects as they *appear*. For, just as the fact that spatial relations and temporal order are put into intuitions by the exercise of our sensible capacity implies that they are not representative of something present in the object ‘in itself’, so too should the fact that predicative combination is put into our judgment-representations only by acts of our conceptual capacity (understanding) entail that *it* is not representative of something present in the object of the judgment (the thing in relation to my sensibility through intuition (appearance)). But then if we know that the very form that judgment must take is not something that will ‘agree’ with *any* object – either objects as they are in themselves, or objects as they appear (appearances) – all routes would seem to be blocked for making the case that what is represented in the judgment, *as a whole*, could somehow stand in agreement with – and hence, be ‘true’ of – either of these objects nevertheless. And, a fortiori, it is unclear what it would mean for us to claim to ‘see’ this agreement or have evidence for taking it to obtain (and so for holding a judgment to be true).⁸

⁸ Kant concedes that it is not in virtue of seeing that any such ‘agreement’ obtains between an appearance and its object that we take a cognition to be true. For despite taking the notion of agreement to provide the content of the concept of truth, Kant rejects the idea that this notion can function as an independent *criterion*

Though the force of this predicament concerning the lack of objective correlates for the very form of judgment was recognized by some of Kant's immediate successors (perhaps most notably, Hölderlin and Hegel),⁹ a more sustained attempt at its resolution was not undertaken until several decades later, when Brentano and his followers wrestled with the notion of distinctive objective correlates for whole judgments – what are now most commonly called 'states of affairs' or 'facts' – and how they might be 'given' to us. In the meantime, however, a challenge to Kant's account of truth arose from an altogether different angle.

§3. Bolzano on the objectivity of the bearers of truth

Bolzano belonged to a counter-stream in post-Kantian German-language philosophy, one that paralleled chronologically the Idealist and Romantic developments, but which took such developments – along with Kant's original turn toward transcendental idealism and his 'subjectivist' emphasis on the mental capacities – to have set philosophy off on the entirely wrong track.

In his *Wissenschaftslehre* ('Theory' or 'Doctrine of Science'), his 1837 masterwork, Bolzano places one particular failing at the center of his critique of the Critical philosophy: the failure to think carefully enough about the nature of truth itself, and in particular, a failure to identify the genuine *bearer* of truth. Bolzano is in broad agreement with Kant in holding that the bearer of truth is representational in nature. Hence, like Kant, Bolzano too

for use in telling which judgments are true. Knowledge of such agreement would just *be* the knowledge of the truth of the judgment, rather than an apprehension of a mark that could *then* be used as a sure sign for taking something to be true (cf., JL §VII, 9:50). In fact, Kant accepts that the only criterion that we have for holding a judgment to be true, prior to knowing it to be true (to 'agree'), is the internal '*coherence* [Zusammenstimmung]' of our claims about what appears with our other claims about appearances (B179; cf., Prol. 4:290). At one point Kant even seems to accept that such coherence is a '*sufficient* mark' for truth relative to appearances (B679; my ital.). For interpretations which claim that Kant already means to embrace a more coherentist *definition* (rather than criterion) of truth, see (Windelband 1884), (Kemp Smith 1918), and (Walker 1989). For a discussion of the difficulties facing this sort of reading, see (Van Cleve 1999).

⁹ Cf (Hegel 1812: Introduction); for some discussion of Hölderlin, see (Henrich 1997).

rejects the application of the property of being true directly to objects, simply in virtue of their *being* or existing; this sense of ‘truth’ Bolzano also calls ‘transcendent’ or ‘metaphysical’, as opposed to its genuine ‘logical’ sense, which is linked to judgments (WL §27, I.118f). Yet Bolzano also thinks that describing the bearer of truth as a kind of representation tends to cover over an important ambiguity in the term ‘representation’ itself – namely, the ambiguity between its picking out the *act* of representing and its picking out the *content* contained in such acts. In fact, Bolzano takes the failure to ‘distinguish sharply enough’ between the act and the content of our representations to be ‘the source of most of the current errors in logic’ – Kant’s included (WL §12, I.47).

Even if (as we saw above) Kant had noted that acts of cognition possess a content, construed as a representational relation to an object, in addition to this object itself, Bolzano thinks Kant did not do nearly enough to clarify this distinction, nor did he undertake any sustained investigation of the nature of these contents directly. What such investigations show is that the contents of our representings possess an identity that is *independent* of the reality of any one of these acts. The very same content can be taken up in multiple acts at multiple times (without itself being ‘multiplied’) or might never be thought of or grasped by anyone at all – save, perhaps, by God (WL §48, I.217-18). But then such contents can in no way be products, effects, or creations of these acts either (cf CE 115; 32 and CE 142; 63). Consequently, Bolzano thinks we should regiment our terminology and speak of ‘subjective representation’ when we mean to pick out real mental acts that exist in some subject, and use ‘objective representation’ or ‘representation in itself [an sich]’ when we mean to pick out the act-independent self-identical content (or ‘matter [Stoff]’), which is ‘not something existing’ and ‘is not to be found in the realm of the actual’ (WL §48, I.217).

Bolzano takes this threefold distinction between act, content ('matter'), and object to apply at the level of judgments as well. Here he introduces the terms 'objective proposition [Satz]' or 'proposition in itself' – for short, simply 'propositions' – to pick out the content of judgments (WL §19, I.76-78). Since propositions are themselves composed of objective representations (WL §48, I.216), they, too, cannot be ascribed 'a being [Dasein] (existence or actuality [Wirklichkeit])' at all (WL §19, I.78).¹⁰ Rather, just like their constituents, propositions have an identity that is distinct in kind from the acts in which they are grasped, and they are not brought into being by any act of mind either. In these respects, Bolzanian propositions are closer kin to Fregean 'thoughts [Gedanken]' than they are to Russell's propositions.¹¹

With this in mind, Bolzano argues that the genuine bearer of the 'property [Beschaffenheit]' of *truth* must be the objective content of such an act – i.e., the proposition – rather than the (subjective, real) act of judgment (WL §24, I.108). Though this partially echoes Kant, Bolzano distances himself from Kant by insisting that the content of a judgment itself is not something that is 'combined' or put together by any 'act' (spontaneous or otherwise); rather, any combination that is present in a proposition is present in this content 'in itself', as it were.

Still, Bolzano does accept that propositional content contains a combination of sorts. Bolzano takes every proposition to consist in three parts: a subject-representation which represents an object, a predicate-representation which represents a 'property [Beschaffenheit]', and the concept of 'having [Haben]' (which Bolzano prefers over 'being') that functions as the copula or the 'connecting part [Bindeteil]' that links the representation

¹⁰ Even so, Bolzano thinks that (like objective representations) propositions are objects (WL §25, I.115), and that the proposition expressed by 'there are [es gibt] propositions and truths' is true (WL §30, I.144).

¹¹ Though it is worth noting that Bolzano uses 'Gedanke' itself in an un-Fregean way, to refer to mental acts of thinking (cf., WL §19, I.78).

of the property to the representation of the object (WL §§126-27, II.9). Bolzano typically represents this structure as ‘A has b’. It is this link that makes the property be ‘asserted of this object’ in the proposition (WL §28, I.122), though this asserting, of course, is something that propositions ‘do’ in themselves, so to speak, independently of anyone actually having them in mind (WL §24, I.114).

What then does Bolzano think distinguishes true propositions from false ones? Bolzano claims that propositions are true when ‘they assert [aussagen] something as it actually [wirklich] is’ (WL §24, I.114). More specifically, propositions are true when they assert a property of an object that, in fact, belongs to the object: ‘in a true proposition, that which is *asserted* [ausgesagt] of the object must *actually pertain* to it [wirklich ihn zukommen]’ (WL §28, I.122; my ital.). In false propositions, by contrast, this coordination between asserting and pertaining is lacking: there is the ‘mere asserting [blosse Aussagen]’ of such a ‘belonging or pertaining’ without such a connection ‘actually’ obtaining (§28, I.123).

This appeal to a coordination between content and object might seem to bring Bolzano’s account of truth in line with the traditional analysis in terms of *adaequatio*. Yet when Bolzano takes up the traditional definition itself, Bolzano claims not to see what is gained by using the terms ‘correspondence’ or ‘agreement’ to refer to such a coordination (cf CE, 167; 90; WL §29, I.128; and WL §42, I.180). Even so, Bolzano applauds Aristotle for claiming (in *Prior Analytics* I.1) that ‘the following two manners of speaking are *identical* [identisch]: ‘this pertains to that’ and ‘this can in truth be asserted of that’” (WL §28, I.124; my ital.). And however it is labeled, Bolzano does think that to say that such a coordination obtains – and, hence, to assert of a proposition that it is true – is to say something *substantive*. ‘*p* is true’ predicates a genuine property of an object – namely, the ideal object that is the

proposition in question.¹² Bolzano's view, then, stands in direct opposition to redundancy theorists (and also to Frege, on some readings), even if he agrees that what *can* be said about the nature of this property is very limited.

Yet in light of the previously encountered difficulties concerning what in the object is to correspond to the copula in a true judgment, Bolzano's reticence about the right way to characterize the relationship between true propositions and the objects they represent might begin to look more problematic. Worries deepen once we draw out Bolzano's account of propositions. Being themselves representational in nature, propositions (like all objective representations) must be distinguished from the 'objects' to which they are 'related' representationally (cf., WL §49, I.218f).¹³ What Bolzano explicitly identifies as the 'object [Gegenstand]' of a proposition as a whole, however, is simply the object of the subject-representation of the proposition; at certain points, Bolzano even calls the subject-representation simply the 'object-representation' (cf., WL §126, II.8).¹⁴ Yet Bolzano clearly accepts that there is *more* that is being represented 'in' a proposition than simply the object. Recall that, for Bolzano, propositions possess the following kind of structure: A has b. Hence, there is not only the subject-representation, but also the predicate-representation that

¹² In the note to WL §32, for example, Bolzano distinguishes between the proposition 'A is B', and 'the proposition, that A is B, is true', on the grounds that the latter 'is a different one according to its component parts, and thus a second truth distinct from the first' (I.147). At the very least, the two propositions have different subject-terms: for any proposition 'A', 'we find that the proposition expressed by the words 'A is true' is one distinct from the proposition 'A' itself, since the former obviously has a completely different subject from the latter. Its subject is, namely, the complete proposition 'A' itself' (Bolzano 1851: §13, 13). This is so, despite the fact that, as Bolzano acknowledges, 'if the proposition 'A is B' is true, then so too the assertion 'the proposition, that A is B, is true' a true proposition' (WL §32, I.147) – i.e., despite the fact that the semantical predication itself *follows* from the truth of the original proposition.

¹³ Bolzano thinks that, in every case, a content must be distinguished from the *object* that it represents, both because distinct contents can represent the same object, and because – as is especially evident in cases when the object is something really existent – the content and its object bear obviously distinct properties (WL §49, I.219).

¹⁴ In a similar fashion, Bolzano identifies the 'extension [Umfang]' of a proposition as a whole with the extension of the subject-representation (cf., WL §130, II.25).

represents a property, and, in addition, the copula or ‘linking part’ or ‘linking member’ that ‘indicates [anzeigt] that the object *has* the given property’ (WL §126, II.8-9).

Now, if what the whole proposition were to be coordinated with was simply the object of its subject-representation, then this would seem to make the rest of the propositional representation superfluous for its truth, since the relevant coordination would have already been taken care of simply by the subject-representation itself. What the proposition as a whole seems to aim to coordinate with, then, is instead something like the fact that A has b, or the having-b of A. That Bolzano is angling for such a view would seem to be further encouraged by the willingness we saw above to identify b’s (actually) ‘pertaining to’ A as that which is coordinated with b’s being predicated or ‘asserted of’ A in the proposition, when that proposition is true.

The problem with crediting Bolzano this line of analysis, however, is that, like Kant, Bolzano ultimately explicitly denies that there is anything at the level of objects and properties that corresponds to what is represented by ‘has’. In WL §78, Bolzano claims explicitly that ‘has’ belongs to the class of representations ‘that have no *object* at all’, along with ‘nothing’, ‘and’, and ‘round square’ (I.360).¹⁵ And it follows from Bolzano’s analysis in WL §64 that ‘has’ does not pick out a property either. There Bolzano emphasizes that, in composite representations, in addition to the representation of the object and the ‘mere representations of its properties’, there will ‘still be need of some *other* representations as well which will serve to combine [verbinden] them’ (my ital.):

In order to represent, in particular, that the object has the properties b, b’, b”... in itself, one must form [bilden] the representation: ‘something which has (the properties) b, b’, b”...’. In this representation, however, there are many other representations besides the representations of the properties b, b’, b”... – namely, the representation of *something*, the representation of the relative pronoun *which*, and the representation of *having*. (WL §64, I.270-271)

¹⁵ In other words, it is an ‘objectless [gegenstandlose]’ representation (cf., WL §67, I.304).

Here Bolzano claims explicitly that the concept of having, i.e., the copula, represents something ‘besides’ any of the properties of the object. But then, while the properties *b*, *b’*, *b’’* and so, on are all properties that *A* has (properties that pertain to *A*), it follows that neither the *having* of *b*, the *having* of *b’*, and so on, nor (so it would seem) *b*’s *pertaining to A*, etc., are themselves further properties that *A* has.

For Bolzano, then, the only significance of the copula would seem to be its sense-conferring role of ‘linking’ the other representations into something that has the form of a proposition. Rather than itself representing any object or property, the purpose of the representation expressed by ‘has’ appears to be fulfilled entirely internally to the economy of representations, by serving to ‘combine [verbinden]’ the other (objective) representations. Yet if its presence in a proposition is *not* demanded of it by its *object*, then why *is* the combination present in the proposition, in the sphere of representations, in the first place?

The traditional answer up through Kant was that such combination is present in the bearers of truth, not because of the objects, but as a result of mental activity.¹⁶ Now, as we saw above, this also implied that the copula does not have an objective correlate (and is hence ‘gegenstandslos’). Indeed, it was precisely this feature of the view that posed an obstacle to analyzing truth as an agreement between contents of judgments and the things represented. To be sure, this act-theoretic account of the significance of the copula is unavailable for Bolzano, since he denies that combination is present in propositions as the result of mental activity. But then, by rejecting both the mind-dependence of propositions *an sich* (or their forms), as well as any account on which their form is made to order, as it

¹⁶ In (Locke 1689: Book III, Chapter VII), Locke, for example, gives a similar account of the significance of ‘is’ and other ‘particles’: such words ‘signify the connection that the mind gives to ideas’ (§1), and thereby serve as ‘marks of some action, some intimation of the mind’ (§4). In (Arnauld and Nicole 1683: Part II, Chapter II), the Port-Royal logicians similarly describe the ‘principle usage’ of words like ‘is’ as that of ‘signifying movements of our soul’.

were, as a result of something ‘in’ their objects, Bolzano appears to leave us with no explanation whatsoever of the distinctive unity and structure of propositions.

Furthermore, by accepting the presence of representational *content* in propositions (and hence, in truths themselves) that in no way tracks the way *objects* themselves are *an sich*, it is hard to see how Bolzano’s account will be able avoid re-introducing Kant’s ‘subjectivizing’ distinction between the way that objects ‘appear’ to us – even if now in ‘objective’ propositions ‘in themselves’ – and the way *they* (the objects) are ‘in themselves’. In effect, Bolzano seems to trade Kant’s sensible idealism for a ‘logical’ idealism.

This is especially troubling, given Bolzano’s additional claim that all of our ‘knowledge [Erkenntnis]’ of objects takes the form of grasping true *propositions* about them in judgment (cf WL §36, I.163). Insofar as the very contents of our ostensible knowledge are not transparent guides to how things stand in the realm of objects, Bolzano seems unable to escape Kantianesque conclusions concerning the restriction of our knowledge to the (now) propositional ‘appearance’ of an object. So long as this gap remains, Bolzano’s account of propositions, and therefore truths, threatens to leave us one step short of the facts, and therefore to eliminate the intelligibility of the first aspect of the traditional notion of truth identified above – namely, truth’s beholdenness to the *res*.

At the same time, however, Bolzano also threatens to eliminate the third aspect from the traditional understanding as well – namely, its essential link to an *intellectus*, to the mental activity of representers (subjects) like ourselves. We have already seen that Bolzano takes propositions to possess an identity and a structure that is what it is independent of any relation to any actual existent mental activity. In fact, Bolzano thinks that the nature of propositions is also fixed independently from any relation that they might bear to any *possible* mental activity as well. This can be seen from Bolzano’s claim that even if it is true that God

can (and does) think every proposition and can (and does) know every truth – and hence, even if it is true that the *properties* of being thinkable and knowable belong to every proposition and truth as *objects*, respectively – that even so, the *concepts* of a proposition and of a truth do not ‘include’ or ‘contain’ the *concepts* of being thinkable and being knowable (cf., WL §23, I.92, and §25, I.113).

Hence, despite the fact that Bolzano himself first introduces these concepts by pointing to their function as the content of subjective representations, he ultimately takes the concept of a proposition and a truth to be both concepts that are intelligible independently of the concepts of mental acts. But if *these* concepts are not included in the concept of being a proposition, it is hard to know what such a concept *does* contain. Indeed, insofar as propositions are essentially representational in nature, one might wonder what else could belong essentially to the concept, if not the notion of being something that can represent an object (as being a certain way) *to a mind or subject?*

§4. Brentano and the experience of truth

Brentano saw quite clearly, from early on in his career, that the problems opened up by Kantian idealism would not be blocked completely and decisively until a better account of the place of combination in the contents of judgment was provided. Even so, as we will see below, throughout his life, Brentano remained highly self-critical of each of his own previous attempts to resolve these questions. This led to a very rich progression of views through roughly three stages of Brentano’s writings: an early period, in which Brentano explores what might be called a more ‘metaphysical’ conception of truth, which makes the bearers of truth the objects themselves; a middle period, in which Brentano takes a turn toward the more traditional, ‘logical’ conception of truth, in which judgments are restored as the truth-bearers, though with an innovative conception of the objective correlates of such judgments; and a

final period which sees Brentano focus instead on certain primitive experiences that we have as the key to understanding truth.

There is, however, one very important commitment that Brentano embraced early on and never relinquished, a commitment that – in light of the preceding sections – might seem to be a natural option for someone attempting to avoid the pitfalls of idealism.

Nevertheless, it was a quite radical one, from the traditional perspective of thinking about judgment, especially after Kant. This is Brentano's unfailing rejection of the idea that the copula in judgment consists in, or represents, *any* sort of *combination* at all.

Brentano presents his case against this traditional doctrine toward the end of his early and most well-known work, the 1874 *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*. Brentano points out, first, that some cases of mere representing without judging have complex objects (e.g., merely thinking of 'a green tree'); this Brentano takes to imply that combination among representations is not sufficient for judgment (PES 205; II.45). Brentano then argues, secondly, and more importantly, that, even in judgment, combination is not necessary: 'affirmation and denial are not exclusively directed at composites or relations', since a single object, or even 'a single feature of an object', is such that it 'can be affirmed or rejected' (PES 208; II.48-9). Brentano takes a paradigmatic case of this to be found in existential judgments of the form 'A is' and 'A is not'. Concerning such judgments, Brentano writes: 'It is not the combination of an attribute 'existence' with 'A', but 'A' itself is the object that we affirm. [...] The affirmation of A is the true and full sense of the proposition, therefore nothing other than A is the object of the judgment' – with the complementary point being made about the negative form (PES 208-9; II.49-50).

What is it, then, that Brentano thinks distinguishes these existential judgments from mere representings? Brentano focuses his analysis, unsurprisingly, on the presence of the

‘is’. Brentano agrees with Kant and Bolzano that the existential ‘is’, like the ‘is’ in general, does not have an objective correlate in the ordinary sense: ‘the ‘being [Sein]’ of the copula does not signify [bedeute] anything of itself, as a name does’ (PES 212n; II.54n). Rather, like Kant, though now unlike Bolzano, Brentano holds, that this ‘is’ signifies an act of the mind: ‘it completes the expression of an act of judgment’ (ibid.). Yet contrary to Kant’s official view, Brentano thinks that it is obvious that the relevant act consists, *not* in a synthesis or combination of contents with other contents, but rather in a simple *thesis* or act of positing or ‘affirming [anerkennen]’, or, in the negative case, an act of a simple ‘negating [leugnen]’ or ‘rejecting [verwerfen]’ (cf., PES 210f; II.53f).¹⁷

Brentano’s next claim, however, is the most revisionary. Far from simply offering one isolated counterexample to the traditional doctrine of judgment, Brentano insists that the structure of existential judgment provides all we need for ‘nothing less than a complete overthrow’ of the traditional doctrine of judgment, and hence, ‘at the same time, a reconstruction of elementary logic’ (PES 230; II.77). This is because Brentano thinks that *all* expressions for judgments can be ‘reduced’ to ‘sentences’ in existential form. Brentano takes this to be true even of sentences that appear to express judgments involving acts of combination or predication, such as those expressed in categorical ‘sentences’ like ‘All A is B’, and also of those involving even more complexity, such as those expressed in hypothetical ‘sentences’ like ‘if A is B, then A is C’. The former becomes ‘A non-B A is not’ (cf., PES 214; II.56-7), while the latter becomes, first, ‘All AB are AC’, and then (like the former) ‘A non-AC AB is not’ (cf., PES 218; II.59). Granting Brentano’s assumption – not implausible at the time, in light of the then-contemporary doctrines of pre-Fregean logic –

¹⁷ Brentano recognizes that Kant’s well-known doctrine that being is not a real predicate points in the direction of this sort of analysis of existential judgments, though he thinks that Kant failed to follow through on this insight, insofar as Kant still maintains that existential judgments are *synthetic* (cf. PES 211; II.53). For discussion of the relation between Brentano and Kant on this point, see (Martin 2006: Chapter 2).

that all expressions for judgments are, at root, in either categorical, hypothetical, or existential form, Brentano takes himself to have shown that ‘the reducibility [Rückführbarkeit] of *all* sentences which express a judgment to existential sentences is indubitable’ (PES 218; II.60; my ital.).¹⁸

With this Brentano has rejected Kant’s idea that any special mental act is necessary for combination (complexity) to be represented. Rather, Brentano thinks that combination *can* simply be ‘given’ straightaway, present to the mind in an act of mere representing. Indeed, on Brentano’s new picture, the very same object, whether simple or complex, is both the possible target of a mere representing and of the correlative act of judgment:

With regard to content, there is not the slightest difference between [judgment and representation]. The same object is had in consciousness whether a person affirms it, denies it, or is uncertain and merely questioning it; in the last case the person is merely representing it, in the first two cases it is being both represented and affirmed or denied. (PES 221; II.63)

Judging to be distinguished from ‘mere representing’, therefore, not by the introduction of a new more complex kind of objectivity or content, through acts of combination, but instead solely by the ‘particular kind of mental relation [Beziehung]’ to the original object or content of the representation, whether that object or content is simple or composite (PES 240; II.89). It is one and the same ‘object of representation’ that ‘*becomes* the object of an affirmative or negative judgment’ when ‘our consciousness enters into a completely new kind of relation [Art von Beziehung] to the object’ (PES 201; II.38; my ital.).¹⁹

Brentano intends for his account to be anti-idealist in another fashion as well, insofar as he insists that, in cases of adequate perception, when the object is given, it is genuinely the

¹⁸ For more on Brentano’s proposed revision of the traditional logic, see (Simons 1987) and (Simons 2004).

¹⁹ As Anton Marty, one of Brentano’s students, noted as early as 1884, this brings Brentano’s views on the relationship between judgment and mere representation quite close to Frege’s account in §2 of his 1879 *Begriffsschrift* of the relationship between the act of judgment and what is expressed by the horizontal content-stroke – though, as Marty also notes, Brentano retains a duality at the level of acts (affirmation and denial), whereas Frege’s account moves this distinction into the content judged (cf., *Begriffsschrift* §4), leaving only the single act of asserting (cf Marty 1884: 185f).

object that is given to the mind, and not merely some intermediary content of a representation of it.²⁰ This can be seen in Brentano's *identification* of the contents of representations with their objects, i.e., his identification of the act's 'relation [Beziehung] to a content [Inhalt]' with its 'directedness [Richtung] toward an object' (PES 88; I.124). In this respect, Brentano appears closer to the direct realism of the early Russell and Moore (himself a close reader and admirer of Brentano) than he does to Bolzano or Frege.

Unsurprisingly, these revisions of the traditional conception of judgment bring with them a revisionary conception of *truth*. For though Brentano concedes that there is a link between judgment and truth, and though Brentano, in effect, accepts that it is the contents of judgments that are the bearers of truth (cf. PES 141, I.200; 198, II.34; 223, II.67; 239-40, II.88-9), because Brentano does not sharply distinguish between the content and the object of the judgment, this ultimately leads Brentano to take *objects* themselves, as contents of judgments, to be true. Thus we find Brentano frequently identifying both what is accepted (or rejected) as true or false, as well as what is true or false, with the *object* itself, even going so far as to talk at times directly of 'the truth *of the object* [die Wahrheit des Gegenstandes]' (PES 240; II.89-90; my ital.).²¹ On this more 'metaphysical' conception of truth, there is no room for a gap between how something objective is represented as being – e.g., via some combinatory element that turns out to be 'merely' in the content – and how it is 'in itself'. Importantly, however, this gap has not been eliminated due to the mind's acts 'producing' the object.

By late 1880s, however, Brentano's conception of truth had undergone a further shift, one in which Brentano moves away from this metaphysical conception, and at least a

²⁰ Brentano thinks that these cases are limited to our inner, 'incidental' perception of mental acts; cf. PES 19f and 30; I.28 and 41.

²¹ Here again there are parallels with the early Russell and Moore, to their so-called 'identity' theory of truth.

few steps back towards the more traditional, 'logical' conception favored by Kant and Bolzano – though with important modifications. Brentano presents the new position in his 1889 lecture, 'On the Concept of Truth'. Brentano appears to have been led to revise his position by rethinking his account of negative existential judgments, i.e., cases in which the denial of the existence of an object is true. Such a judgment is true when the object is non-existent. Yet what *makes* this judgment true cannot *be* the object itself, since it does not exist. There must, therefore, be a distinct entity or objectivity that performs this service. Brentano thus now takes the complex *the non-existence of the object* as a whole to be the correlate of such judgments (cf., §41 et seq.; TE 19f; 22f).

Accordingly, Brentano now defines *truth* in the following manner: 'a judgment is true if it asserts, of something that is, that it is, and also when it denies, of something that is not, that it is' (§51, TE 21; 24). Note, first, that Brentano is now conceiving of judgment as the affirmation or denial, not simply of an object, but instead of its existence or non-existence – something Brentano describes in fact-like terms (*that it is*). Note, second, that what it means to say that a judgment is *true* is cashed out in terms of the correlation between the affirmation of the existence of the object and the existence of the object itself, and between the denial of existence and non-existence.

Brentano's embrace of this new correlation is stated more directly in a supplement to his 1889 work, *On the Origin of Our Moral Knowledge*:

The concepts of existence and non-existence are correlatives to the concepts of the truth of (simple) affirmative and negative judgments. [...] If I say that an affirmative judgment is true or that its object is existent, *in both cases I say precisely the same thing*. [...] The assertion of the truth of the judgment, that there is a learned man, is thus the correlate of the assertion of the existence of its object, 'a learned man'. (TE, 39n; 45n)

To say ‘*p* is true’, where *p* is affirmative, is to say ‘the object represented in *p* exists’, and what *makes* an affirmative judgment true is the existence of the object, rather than simply the object itself. And, finally, what *is* true is the judgment expressed by ‘*p*’, not its object.

With the introduction of these correlates and the parallel interest in the question of truth-makers, Brentano is also now willing to endorse a revised version of the traditional definition of truth, as the ‘agreement [Übereinstimmung]’ or ‘harmony’ of a judgment with its object (§52, TE 21; 25). Revision is necessary, though, because what is at the heart of this ‘harmony’ between judgment and object is actually a more sophisticated ‘correlation’, consisting in ‘the agreement of a true judgment with its object or [rather] with the *existence* or *non-existence* of its object’ (§54, TE 22; 25).

Brentano’s introduction of special object-like correlates for judgments – items that are both distinct from objects or things or realities in the typical sense and yet what make judgments true – marks a decisive shift in the theorizing of truth in the 19th century. This feature of Brentano’s middle-period views was extraordinarily influential among his students, colleagues, and readers. In decades to follow, many philosophers in Brentano’s circle of influence introduced very similar (though not identical) notions, such as Alexius Meinong’s ‘objective’, and Carl Stumpf’s notion of a ‘state of affairs [Sachverhalt]’, not to mention Moore and Russell’s notion of a ‘proposition’.²²

This new account of truth introduces a compositeness into the ‘objects’ that are involved in even otherwise simple existential judgments, one that was missing from the point of view of the *Psychology*. What is more, it introduces a distinction between an object and its being or existence, something the earlier Brentano was loath to do (cf., PES 240; II.89). Even so, Brentano retains one key feature of his revisionary account of judgment, insisting

²² For discussion and comparison, see (Smith 1989) and (Benoist 2006).

that whatever compositeness is present in these new correlates (the existence or non-existence of the object) is still not the result of their having been ‘combined’ or ‘synthesized’ by the mind in judgment, but are simply presented directly before the mind in mere representation, and then affirmed or denied (cf., §30 et seq.; TE 16f; 18f).

In any case, much to many of his students’ chagrin, Brentano’s own acceptance of these distinct objectual correlates for judgments was short-lived. By the early 1900s, Brentano had become deeply dissatisfied with his new position and reverted back to views much closer to those of the *Psychology*. The two main vices that were associated with the introduction of these states of correlates were the resulting bloated ontology and the absence of any plausible account of how we could be acquainted with such entities.

Concerning the first, Brentano thinks that embracing such correlates entails the absurd conclusion that ‘there are not merely the real things [die realen Dinge], but also their being [Sein] and non-being and a legion, indeed an infinity, of impossibilities’ (TE 82; 91):

Anyone who says that, in addition to things, there is the being of things, as well as the non-being of things is also committed to this: in addition to the individual dog, there exists not merely the being of that dog, but also the being of each of its parts, however small, as well as the being of the limits which belong to it as a body.... And then the being of the being of the dog, in turn, would require analogous assumptions. An infinite and entirely unfruitful complication. Yet the adventures one encounters with the non-being of an individual dog – whether one denies or affirms the dog itself – would be even more bizarre. (TE 111; 126)²³

Concerning the second, Brentano despairs of answering the following question: ‘how does one arrive at *knowledge* of the *being* of A, as distinguished from the knowledge simply of A itself?’ (TE 108; 122). Brentano takes the two options to be immediate apprehension

²³ This is an argument that Brentano returns to again and again in his later letters and writings: cf., his 1906 letter to Marty (TE 86; 95-6), his 1914 letter to Kraus (TE 98; 110-1), a 1914 fragment (TE 108; 122), and a 1917 manuscript (PES 338; PES II.236). It should also be noted that the parallels between this reductio and Bolzano’s entirely serious argument for the existence of an infinity of truths (present in both the *Wissenschaftslehre* and the *Paradoxes*) were not at all lost on Brentano; see especially TC 32; 29-30. Indeed, Brentano was happy to lump Bolzano in with Marty and the others as someone who also ‘ascended too high and lost his way’ with the ‘absurd’ supposition of ‘a realm of *Gedankendinge*’, as Brentano puts it in a 1905 letter to Husserl (TE 137; 157).

through perception or intuition and mediate apprehension through inference or abstraction.

The first is ruled out of hand:

Is [being] something that is immediately perceived? Is the being of this being, etc., also perceived at the same time...? No one would assert [this], for the consequences are much too paradoxical. [...] Intuition [Anschauung] of the being of A, alongside that of A, can clearly not be spoken of. (TE 108; 122)

Brentano's arguments against acquiring knowledge of such *entia* via inference and abstraction are equally quick: it is entirely unclear what premises could yield these *entia* as inferential conclusions; and abstraction would have the unfortunate consequence that the concept of the being of A would have to be a 'more general concept' than that of A itself, and so somehow include A under itself as a species (TE 108; 122). Having taken himself to exclude all options, Brentano concludes that no story about our representational access to such objects is forthcoming: 'it appears to be obvious, therefore, that there can be no talk of a *representation* of the being of A in the proper sense, but instead that it is always *only* the A that we are representing' (TE 109; 123; my ital.) – with the same thing following for the non-being of A as well (cf., TE 112; 128).

By 1904 at the latest, then, Brentano holds, not just that 'there *is* nothing other than something real', but also that 'nothing other than something real can be *thought*' (TE 67-8; 78-9; my ital.).²⁴ Yet however compelling the arguments against such *entia* may be, and however appealing the new austere realist ('reistic') ontology may itself be, Brentano is now faced with making sense of *truth*, and the relation of making-true – and in particular, in the case of negative existential judgments – while avoiding reference to the very things he previously took to be necessary for such a task. How does Brentano now propose to deal

²⁴ As he indicates in a later manuscript from 1914, what Brentano means by 'real' here, includes things like 'a body, a mind, a topoid of more or fewer than three dimensions' (TC 16; 4), and more generally 'every substance, every plurality of substances, every part of a substance, and also every accident' (TC 19; 11). Brentano also identifies 'the concept of what is, in the proper sense' with 'the concept of what is temporally present [das Gegenwärtige]' (TC 20; 12; cf., TC 24; 18). Only such '*realia*' are 'what *is* in the proper sense [im eigentlichen Sinne]' 1914 (TC 16; 4).

with truth and falsity, if not in terms of the harmonious correlation, or lack thereof, between the quality of judgment (affirmative or negative) and the being (existence) or non-being of its object?

Brentano's final proposal is, once again, quite radical:

Truth pertains to the judgment of the person who judges correctly [richtig] – i.e., to the judgment of the person who judges about a thing in the way in which anyone whose judgment was made with *evidence* would judge about the thing; hence it pertains to the judgment of one who asserts what the person who judges with evidence would also assert. (TE 122; 139)

Rather than an analysis of truth in terms of the agreement between judgment and *object* altogether, Brentano now moves toward an analysis in terms of the agreement between a judgment and *another judgment* – namely, agreement with what is *evidently correct* to judge. Instead of consisting in the agreement of a judgment with an object toward which it is intentionally directed, truth is now taken to consist in terms of an agreement with what a judge who sees the evident correctness of his judgment would experience or perceive.²⁵

Once this step is taken, Brentano now thinks that he can provide a new analysis of negative existential judgments as follows. Brentano argues, first, that concepts like 'the existent' and 'the non-existent' appear to be correctly applied to objects because the object in question is either 'something correctly thought in a positive manner' ('something correctly affirmed') or something correctly thought in a 'negative' manner (TE 68-69; 79). Yet Brentano now notes that though properties like 'thinking of X correctly' *look* like they are relational properties, they are really species of monadic properties of the form *thinking in a certain way*.²⁶ This opens up a path for taking kinds of representing or thinking that *look* like

²⁵ Brentano sees this later view as harkening back to the explanation of truth in terms of clear and distinct perception (*verum quod clare et distincte percipio est*) that Descartes had elaborated in the Third Meditation (TE 124; 141).

²⁶ Brentano's commitment to this sort of redescription-project can be seen in the following equation that he introduces during this period: "there is something thought of [ein Gedachtes]' = 'there is a thinker [ein Denkendes]" (TE 68; WE 79).

they involve reference to non-existent objects – whether of the mundane sort (e.g., a centaur), or of the more exotic, philosophical sort, like the existence or non-existence of a dog – and re-analyzing them as consisting instead in thinking or representing in certain ways. This, in effect, leads Brentano to a reconstrual of intentional content along the lines of what now goes under the name of adverbialism, which, in turn, is meant to help remove any temptation to think that such properties involve genuine relations at all. Once revised, the new statements refer only to *realia* – to real substances (subjects) with real accidents (thinking in a certain way).²⁷

To be sure, in some cases, there will be a self-standing *reale* that appears to ‘correspond’ to what is thought by the judger. In others, however, such as in correct negative judgments, there obviously won’t ‘be’ any further thing; the only *reale* involved will be the judger, who possesses a certain accident (thinking in a certain way). Brentano’s main point now is that, because what there is in *every* case is the judger, his acts, and certain modifications of these acts, the universal doctrine of truth and falsity should be built out of the consideration of these materials alone. What it means to say that something (a judgment) is true, ultimately, is to say that someone (a judger) is judging correctly. If there is any *adaequatio* between an *intellectus* and a *res*, the *res* in question is another *intellectus* – namely, that possessed by the correct *judger*.

Of course, Brentano now owes us an explanation of what it is to judge ‘with evidence’, what it is for a judgment to be ‘evidently correct’, to be the sort of thing the correct judger does. In particular, he owes us an account of that in virtue of which something is, or can be, judged with such evidence. Ultimately, however, Brentano appears to *deny* that any further explanation can be given for the experience of the evident

²⁷ For more on Brentano’s late theory of judgment, see (Chisholm 1982); on the turn toward adverbialism, compare as well (Moran 1996).

correctness of a judgment. All we can do, he thinks, is ‘consider a multiplicity of evident judgments and then contrast them with other judgments that lack this characteristic’, just as ‘when we make clear to ourselves what is red and what is not red’ (TE 125; 143), so that we can finally ‘see’, as it were, what it is to be an evident judgment. In this way, Brentano therefore takes the ‘characteristic’ or ‘mark’ of being evident itself to be explanatorily *primitive*.²⁸

At this point, however, worries arise that Brentano has eliminated truth from view altogether. We might worry, more specifically, whether such a position runs the risk of sacrificing the idea of the objectivity of truth, of truth’s being ultimately object-or fact-directed, its being ultimately beholden to the facts involving the objects represented. For Brentano’s late analysis not only prohibits things like facts from playing any interesting role in an account of truth, it ultimately denies that there ‘are’ any such facts, in ‘the proper sense’ of ‘being’. To the contrary, Brentano now wishes to take our primitive *experience* of evidence – experience of a state that we are in, or of a property that we possess, as being correct – as something that provides not just the entry-point for the analysis of truth, but rather a sufficient basis for completely reconstructing its content.²⁹

It is hard to see how primitive experiences of a sense of correctness *alone* could do full justice to what motivates all of the familiar appeals to more semantical considerations having to do with successful reference to an object of an intentional act.³⁰ For with its adverbialist construal of representational content, Brentano’s late account threatens to

²⁸ Here there would then be clear affinity between the views of Brentano on evidence and the views of Brentano’s contemporary, G.E. Moore, concerning our relation to such ‘simple’ concepts as ‘good’ and ‘yellow’ (cf Moore 1903: §§7-10).

²⁹ In this respect, Brentano’s late account of truth might well be called ‘epistemic’; compare (Parsons 2004).

³⁰ This is more than a little ironic, given the early Brentano’s fame for having reintroduced intentionality as a central topic in philosophy.

detach truth entirely from its *relation* to those objects toward which we otherwise take ourselves to be engaged with, in and through our representations.

§5. Husserl and the return of the facts

Husserl, for one, came to think that his erstwhile teacher had gone too far at this point. Though Husserl agreed that any account of truth must be intimately linked to our experiences of evident correctness, Husserl also thought that any plausible account of evidence itself simply must recognize a link in the other direction, between truth and the objectivities that were represented in the bearers of truth. In effect, though the connection between truth and intentionality-involving acts by subjects should not be severed along Bolzanian lines, its preservation should not come at the expense of the facts represented, as Brentano had. For the latter to be achieved, Husserl saw no better hope than to return to Brentano's middle-period intuitions concerning the need for objective correlates of judgment – despite the challenges posed by Brentano himself.

By the late 1890s, however, it was Bolzano's influence – and in particular, Bolzano's way of drawing the distinction between mental act, logical content ('matter'), and metaphysical object – that pushed Husserl's thought decisively away from Brentano's. The embrace of this threefold distinction provided Husserl with an important platform from which to address Brentano's worry about the bloat in ontology that acceptance of states of affairs would cause, since the reasons that support Bolzano's way of drawing the distinction between acts and contents are reasons that Husserl takes to *already* support an ontology that goes well beyond the bounds of Brentano's 'reism'.

When Brentano introduced the distinction between act and content, his account of this distinction did not push much further than an appeal to the testimony of an inner experience of a difference between, e.g., the hearing of a sound and the sound as what is

heard (cf., PES 78-80; I.111-12). Yet by describing the content as ‘in-existing’ or as being ‘immanent’ or ‘contained’ within the act (PES 88; I.124-5), Brentano’s language made it sound as if the content was connected to the act by being a real part of it. Brentano’s later adverbialism about contents connects them even more explicitly to the reality of the acts of which they are modifications. Husserl, by contrast, joins Bolzano in taking the fact that several, distinct, real mental acts can nevertheless contain *identical* contents or meanings to show that there is a reason for drawing a deeper ontological distinction between acts and contents – namely, because these contents *cannot* themselves be real parts of acts or any other sort of real entity. While everything that is real, whether physical or mental, is individual and individuated by its absolutely singular place in time (cf., LU II §8, I.249; II.123), ‘the essence of meaning’, by contrast, lies in ‘one *identical* [identische] intentional unity set over and against the dispersed multiplicity of actual and possible experiences of speaking and thinking’ (LU I §30, I.228; II.97; my ital.; cf., LU I §31, I.229; II.99). We see this, thinks Husserl, when we realize, for example, that we cannot ‘confuse the ‘judgment’ as *content* of judgment, i.e., as an *ideal* unity, with the individual *real act* of judgment’, since otherwise we could not speak of ‘*the* judgment ‘ $2 \times 2 = 4$ ’ as being ‘the same whoever makes it’ (LU Prol §36, I.80; I.119; my ital.).

Husserl, therefore, agrees with Bolzano that *any* plausible theory of knowledge (‘doctrine of science’) will have to acknowledge the ideal sameness of meaning across multiple mental acts – at the very least, if it itself is to be communicated to others or even to one’s future self. A commitment to the ideality of contents (meanings; Bolzanian propositions) is required by the very idea of a theory as such, as a collection of communicable truths (as a species of propositions). Any theory which ‘denied’ this ideal, objective semantical aspect (such as Brentano’s) would ‘nullify itself [hebt sich auf]’ and

become ‘countersensical [widersinnig]’ (LU Prol. §32, I.76; I.112). From this Husserl takes it to follow, not only that at least *some* ‘ideal objects’ have their own ‘proper justification alongside of individual (or real) objects’, but even more so that ‘idealism’ in *this* (Bolzanian, logical) sense ‘presents the *sole* possibility of a self-consistent theory of knowledge’ (LU II, I.238; II.107; my ital.).³¹

If Bolzano and Husserl are both right to think that reference to non-real, ideal entities is ineliminable for any coherent account of knowledge, then Brentano’s ontological scruples begin to look misplaced. Of course, accepting these particular ideal entities (i.e., contents) need not necessarily entail that states of affairs (the being of A, the being-F of A), or any other putatively necessary ideality, must be accepted as well. Even so, such entities cannot be rejected simply out of concern for ontological austerity.³² And if, as Brentano himself had at one point conceded, the appeal to such entities enables a much more satisfying account of the nature of truth – and in particular, the nature of the truth-making relation – then they should merit a second look.

Yet while this might help assuage the ontological worry, Husserl still owes Brentano an answer to his second epistemological worry about the introduction of these sorts of entities, concerning the seeming impossibility of explaining how we could ever become acquainted with them in the first place. Husserl’s ultimate answer is that we *are*, in fact, ‘seeing’ or ‘intuiting’ whole states of affairs when we see the truth of a judgment: ‘If an act is knowledge [Erkenntnis] in the strictest sense, i.e. if we judge with evidence, then the objectivity is *given*. The state of affairs now stands before us, not merely putatively [vermeintlich], but rather actually [wirklich] before our eyes...’ (LU Prol. §62, I.145; I.230).

³¹ This lies behind Husserl’s claim that ‘logic as a science *must* be constructed out of Bolzano’s work’ (LU Prol §61 App, I.143; I.227).

³² Not unlike Frege, Husserl himself would add that Bolzanian idealism is motivated as well by considerations concerning the ontology necessary for arithmetic (cf., LU Prol. §46).

But what can this mean, that a state of affairs, like the being on the table of the knife, is ‘given’ or present before the mind?

Husserl’s attempt to go beyond Brentano here rests upon the assumption that once we are in possession of the simple, direct Kantian intuition (sense-perception) of a real individual, we can then go on to ‘see’ further things about it:

Every direct act of perception... can function as a grounding act [Grundact] for new acts... acts that, in their new manner of consciousness, at once bring about a new consciousness of objectivity, one which originarily and essentially presupposes the grounding act. (LU VI §46, II.282; II.618)

What Husserl has in mind here includes our ability to attend to the concrete parts of the knife (its handle, its blade) as its parts, but also our ability to attend to its more ‘abstract’ parts, like the relation that it bears to the table – and, ultimately, its being on the table.

Now, Husserl accepts that something akin to intellectual activity is required to get ourselves in a position to do such seeing. Nevertheless, Husserl wants to insist, first, that the resulting ways of relating to the given object are not *mere* intendings or thinkings about aspects of the object (as when we merely *wonder* whether the knife is on the table), since what is being meant in these cases is, in a clear sense, genuinely present before the mind: I *see* that the knife is on the table. What is more, what is subsequently uncovered or brought to light is still something about the same object, something that is that is true of it, something ‘grounded’ in the object itself. Finally, Husserl rejects the idea that these preparatory acts are synthetic or combinatory acts in the sense supposed by the Kantian tradition. The new acts that are required to be able to ‘see’ such *abstracta* as states of affairs are not acts that ‘make up’ or ‘create’ something that is not there at all, nor do they introduce things into our representations of things that find no match in what is ultimately given. Rather, the acts necessary for this new kind of intuition are more appropriately described as a kind of *analysis* that lets us *abstract* from what is already sensibly present, by teasing out or lighting up for our

consciousness the abstract, categorial structure of the object itself – an act that Husserl aptly calls ‘categorial abstraction’ (LU VI, II.186; II.478).³³

At the same time, though, Husserl takes great pains to emphasize that it is not abstraction through *generalization*. Husserl thinks that Brentano had been right to complain that construing the moves from S to the being of S, the being-P of S, etc., as moves from species to genus is nonsensical. Rather, Husserl takes the requisite act of abstraction to be one in which consists in a form of *partition*, one in which abstract ‘parts’ or ‘moments’ of the whole object are to be ‘set into relief [heben heraus]’ and ‘new objects thereby emerge [erwachsen sind]’ (LU VI §48, II.286 and 289; II.624 and 628). As Husserl’s student, Martin Heidegger would put the idea some years later, such acts ‘disclose [erschliessen]’ or ‘lay open [aufschliessen]’ the being (or being-P) of S (Heidegger 1927: §16).

In this way, Husserl thinks that direct, sensible intuition is something that can go on to ‘found’ or ‘ground’ new acts of intuiting which *do* make present ‘new objectivities’ that are constituted with just the right sort of (ontological) ‘categorial’ structure (such as the being-P of S, etc.) to place them in correlation with (logical) propositional structure (such as the predicative structure: S is P). Hence, though it is true (as the late Brentano and Kant had both supposed) that ‘intentions containing categorial forms cannot find their fulfillment in *mere* sensibility’, such intentions *do*, nevertheless, have fulfillment in *something* that is ‘given’ or ‘intuited’ – namely, ‘in a sensibility that has been *formed* [geformte] through categorial acts’ (LU VI, II.186; II.477; my ital.). Husserl’s name for the exercise of this kind of ‘formed’ sensibility is ‘categorial intuition’ (LU VI, II.186; II.478).

On this picture, what the copula ultimately represents – and in true judgments, ‘corresponds’ to – is not an *act* of mind at all (early Brentano), nor is it something ‘put’ into

³³ In this respect, Husserl is onto something not unlike the topic of Wittgenstein’s discussion of what is involved in ‘seeing aspects’ of an object. For exploration of this analogy, see (Bell 1990: 107f).

our representations by an act (Kant), nor is it simply ‘mysteriously’ there in the content without representing anything (Bolzano). Rather, just as the middle-period Brentano had intimated, the copula corresponds to something that is genuinely ‘out there’, something mind-independent and objective, something waiting to be ‘given’ and so ‘fulfill’ our judgments about objects:

Not in reflection upon acts of judgment...but in the fulfillments of judgments themselves lies the true origin of the concepts of states of affairs and of being (in the sense of the copula). Not these acts as objects, but in the *objects* of these acts do we have the foundation for abstraction which enables the realization of these concepts. (LU VI §44, II.279; II.613)

If this is right, however, then the analysis of the *truth* of propositions in terms of their genuine, full-fledged *agreement* with their objects is given new life. Like Bolzano and Kant, Husserl takes the primary significance of ‘true’ (and ‘false’) to be the ‘logical’ sense, of predicates that apply to contents, i.e., propositions, and not to the acts in which these are grasped or judged, nor to the objects (states of affairs) that such contents represent (LU Prolog. §47n, I.318n7; I.178). Yet unlike Bolzano or Kant, Husserl can now, finally, claim that what *makes* propositions true is the fact that there is an objective correlate that contains in it *nothing less than* what is represented in the proposition itself. And in its ability to fully re-instate, without qualification, the object-directness of the truth-relation, Husserl sees the notion of categorial intuition as providing, at long last, a genuine escape-route from the legacy of Kantian subjectivist idealism in the theorizing about the nature of truth.

The introduction of categorial intuition also had the further appeal for Husserl of allowing him to account for the experience of evidence or correctness in a way that gives the lie to the late Brentano’s claim that this phenomenon possesses absolutely self-sufficient or primitive intelligibility and is that in terms of which truth itself must be explained. Husserl agrees with Brentano that there is an intimate connection between our understanding of

truth and our sense of the ideal possibility of having an experience of, ‘insight’ into, the correctness of the corresponding judgment, in the sense of seeing it to be evidently correct: ‘The assertions ‘the truth obtains [gilt]’ and ‘there could be thinking beings who have insight [einschauen] into judgments with the relevant meaning-content’ are *equivalent* [von gleichem Werte]’ (LU Prol. §39, I.86; I.129; my ital.).³⁴ Yet Husserl insists on supplementing Brentano’s account by continuing the circle of interconnections so as to show the notion of evidence itself to contain an intrinsic link to the intentional or representational relation to objects.

This is achieved, Husserl thinks, by recognizing, first, that the concept of being in general and the concept of an object in general are concepts that are intelligible only in correlation with the concept of an adequate perception of the relevant objectivity:

Perception and object are the most intimately interconnected concepts, concepts that reciprocally assign sense [Sinn] to one another. (LU VI §43, II.277; II.610)

The equivalence of the concepts of being [Sein] and the possibility of adequate perception is undeniable. (LU Prol. §50, I.118; I.185)

Evidence, as a kind of perception or experience, is no different in this basic respect, though its particular objectivity is of a special sort. This is because evidence is the ‘experience’ of truth itself, which Husserl thinks we can now understand as the experience of the ‘fulfillment’ of what is intended in one’s judgment (a proposition) by what is actually ‘given’ in a categorial intuition (a state of affairs). Or, as Husserl also puts it, evidence, as the experience of truth, is nothing other than the experience of the *adaequatio* between the *intellectus* and *res* (cf., LU VI §37, II.261; II.590).³⁵

³⁴ Compare LU Prol. §50, where Husserl states that a general ‘equivalence’ obtains between the propositions ‘A is true’ and ‘It is possible that anyone could judge with evidence that A is true’ (I.117; I.184).

³⁵ Cf., LU Prol. §51: ‘Evidence is nothing other than the ‘experience [Erlebnis]’ of truth. [...] [T]hat which is evidently judged not merely judged (not merely meant in a judging, asserting, affirming manner) but is itself present [gegenwärtig] in the experience of judgment.... The experience of the agreement [Zusammenstimmung] between the meaning [Meinung] and that which is present, experienced, as what it

With this last stroke, then, Husserl provides us with a position in which all three of the dimensions we initially identified as belonging to the familiar conception of truth – the mind-independent fact-directness of truth (*res*), the felt sense of correctness or normativity we experience in relation to the truth (*adaequatio*), and, finally, the truth’s link to our mind and its representations (*intellectus*) – are all accorded a proper place, with none of these dimensions being reduced or eliminated or re-constructed in terms of another. Instead, Husserl proposes a relationship of mutual and necessary correlation, of ‘reciprocal sense-dependence’, between these notions.

For some, like the late Brentano, the ontological cost of this otherwise harmonious position will be too high, insofar as Husserl is asking us to accept that ‘there are’, in a genuinely objective sense, an infinity of infinitely complex abstracta waiting to be lifted out of the world of ordinary sense-experience. For others, perhaps like Kant, Husserl’s proposal of a mutual accord between the dimensions of truth ignores the necessity of a deeper inquiry into the reason or ground for such inter-correlations between concepts, the need to pursue questions like: Why do states of affairs have just the right structure to be apprehended as correlates of propositional contents? Why do propositions themselves have just the right structure to be grasped in judgments? Why are parts of reality able to be represented, ‘intended’, by what is ideal? And how are real acts able to grasp what is ideal?³⁶

§6. Conclusion: the return of the subject?

Whether or not we find such questions well-motivated, it is worth noting, in closing, that, in the ensuing decade, Husserl himself was later moved to pursue an inquiry along just

meant, between the experienced sense of the assertion and the experienced state of affairs – this is evidence’ (I.121; I.190).

³⁶ These are, in fact, just the questions that the neo-Kantian Paul Natorp raises in his review of the *Prolegomena* to Husserl’s *Investigations* (cf Natorp 1901).

these lines. What is more, in his next major work, his 1913 *Ideas I*, Husserl argues explicitly that Kant was more or less on the right track after all, that the ultimate, ‘absolute’ ground for such correlation does lie in what Husserl himself now calls ‘transcendental subjectivity’. Indeed, though it has been less common after Husserl to appeal to ‘transcendental’ grounds, many others throughout the 20th century have followed suit in attempting to ground an account of truth in reflections on manifestations of human subjectivity, whether our mental activity, socio-linguistic practice, or our biological or neurological make-up. For those, by contrast, who, though perfectly willing to recognize *a* role for subjectivity to play in the analysis of truth, nevertheless want to retain an equal role for the objectivity that comes with fact-directness to play as well – for such traditionalists, Husserl’s early attempt to strike just the right, delicate, non-reductive, non-eliminative balance between the powerful intuitions of Kantian idealism, Bolzanian idealism, and Brentanian anti-idealism may provide something of more lasting value.

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