

A Critical Analysis of Brentano's Intentionality in Relation to Meinong's Object Theory

Isenyo Solomon Ogaba

Federal University Wukari, Taraba State, Nigeria

E-ISSN: 2775-6645

P-ISSN: 2775-1686

Abstract. Our thoughts are certainly about things (objects), however, what kind of things(object) are our thoughts directed at? What is the relationship between mental objects and external world object? What is the nature and character of mental and extra mental objects? An attempt at answering these meta-epistemological questions, brought to light the ideas of Franz Brentano on 'Intentionality' and Alexius Meinong's *Theory of object*. Through proper method of philosophical analysis, it was discovered that both philosophers agreed that intentionality is a unique character exhibited by the human mind. However, Meinong went further to develop a more comprehensive object theory which attempts at clarifying some of the ontological difficulties associated with Brentano's notion on intentionality. The research concluded that, though, both philosophers had areas of divergence and convergence in their respective epistemological thoughts, but insisted that the influence of Brentano's ideas on Meinong cannot be overemphasized, which is to say, Meinong's object theory, could be said to be a reaction towards the problem of referential opacity present in Brentano's account of Intentionality.

Keywords: Objectives, intentionality, objects, Franz Brentano.

<https://ojs.unm.ac.id/societies/index>



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).

INTRODUCTION

Brentano's conception of intentionality (mind's character to be about something) and Meinong's theory of object are concerned with the ontological nature and character of possible objects of thought (mind). According to Alexius Meinong the entities we assume or infer are very complex objects called objectives. To Meinong these objects are built from other objects. It is by what we see that we can think and imagine of something which is not in real existence by making use of the object we have already experienced in reality. For example Gold and Mountain=Golden-Mountain, Man and Animal=Centaur, to mention a few. For Meinong, an object in any case can be as much as an object of thought, as when someone thinks about the fact that Otukpo is in Benue, and thereby makes that state of affairs an object of thought.

For Franz Brentano intentionality is something mental rather than physical because our intentions are in our minds devoid of the other person's knowledge. One might show the feeling of love and care to an individual through expressions but his main intentions will not be seen, because it is in one's own mind. Let's look at an example of a 5 year old child carrying a glass cup to his father, but mistakenly dropping it to break. We can say the thought about (aboutness) was a good one, to 'assist' but the outcome turns out disastrous. Meinong's theory of Object can be best understood as a reaction to the ontological difficulties in Brentano's account of intentionality. Rather than accepting the notion of an immanent content, Meinong argues that the intentional relations is always a relation between the mental act and an object. In some cases the intentional object does not exist in reality, but even in these cases there is an object subsistent to the mental act towards which they are directed.

AN EXPOSITION OF ALEXIUS MEINONG'S OBJECT THEORY

Whatever can be experienced in some ways, as the target of a mental act, Meinong calls an object. The term "object" is a relational term" in the sense that "you shall not speak of an object without considering a mental activity" (1888-1903:47). Meinong does not see an ontological but only a conceptual dependence expressed by the term "object" and he does not determine an object intentionally as something that is grasped, but only as something that can be grasped by mental acts which can be represented, judged to mention a few. He acknowledges the following connection between "everything" and object". Everything is an object, but everything is logically prior to its apprehending and pre given to the mind.

Not only existing but also all kinds of non-beings (nonentities, Routley 1980) find their place in Meinong's all-embracing theory of objects-among them even impossible objects, like the round square, as well as paradoxical, "defective objects, liker special cases of purely self-referential thinking (the thought about itself, for example). Similar to Twardowski, Meinong maintains that talking about non beings is

not just speaking of nothing. i.e. there can be no objectless representations and thoughts. He clears up the apparently paradoxical sentence "there are objects of which it is true that there are no such objects" (Meinong, 1981, p. 4) by introducing two meanings of "there are": first as outside being (pre-giveness), second as being, and he tries to give a rational account of the paradoxical sentence by referring to two closely related principles: (1) the "principle of independence of so-being " and (2) the "principle of the indifference of the pure object to being" ("principle of the outside-being of the pure object"(Meinong, 1981, pp. 7-8).

The independence principle, first formulated by Ernst Mally in 1903, States that " the so-being of an object is not affected by its non-being" (Meinong,1981, p. 8) that is to say, an object's having properties is independent of whether it has being or not. Meinong's comments on this principle show that it combines several claims; in particular, (1) the Characterization principle, which postulates that any object has those properties that is characterized as having (e.g., "the AB is A and B, respectively'), and (2) the denial of the ontological assumption, which denies that there are no true propositions about what does not have being (Routley 1982).

The indifference principle says:"the object is by nature indifferent to being, although in any case one of the object's two objects of being or its non-being, subsists (Meinong,1981). This formulation is supposed to be less misleading than the claim that "the pure object stands 'beyond being and non-being'". The latter catchphrase means that neither being nor non-being belongs to the make-up of an object's nature(it's so being, but it should not be taken to mean that an object is beyond being and non-being in the sense that it neither has being nor does not have being. The second clause of the indifference principle makes this clear. Although the non-being of an object may be guaranteed by the object's nature as in the case of the round square, for example, the non being does not belong to its nature. In other words: being (or non being) is not part of an objects nature, but nevertheless" the law of excluded middle lays it down that every object necessarily stands in a fact of being or in a fact of non-being" (Findlay, 1963:49) it is worth noticing that there are two interpretations of negation (narrower, internal, predicate, or ontological negation versus wider, external, sentence, logical negation), and accordingly there are two versions of the law of excluded middle. Meinong seems to accept the law of excluded middle only with respect to sentence negation object, such as a table, are different from the acts involved in reading a book and thinking about a fictional character such as Sherlock Holmes.

Meinong's conception of "the object of my representation." What object is Meinong referring to? The introduction of this object may seem problematic and may even seem inconsistent with Meinong other comments. First, "the object of my representation" seems to be something that cannot be the actuality or the same as the object in the extra-mental world. If it were, then Meinong would be suggesting that knowledge is based on an object's agreement with itself, and this seems absurd. Second, "the object of my representation" cannot be the same as the content (or

representation), since the content is mental and Meinong wants to predicate of its properties only predicable entities, such as the property of being quadrangular.

TYPES OF OBJECT

Meinong holds that objects can be divided into three categories on the basis of their ontological status. Objects may have one of the following three modalities of being and non-being:

1. Existence or actual reality which denotes the material and temporal being of an object
2. Subsistence, which denotes the being of an object in a non-temporal sense.
3. Absistence or Being-given, which denotes being an object but not having being.

Certain objects can exist (mountains, birds, etc.); others cannot in principle ever exist, such as objects of mathematics (numbers, theorems, etc.): such objects simply subsist. Finally, a third class of objects cannot even subsist, such as impossible objects(e.g square circle, wooden iron etc.) Being-given is not a minimal mode of being, because it is not a mode of being at all. Rather, to be "given" is just to be an object. Being-given, termed "absistence" by J.N. Findlay, is better thought of as a mode of non-being than as a mode of being. Absistence unlike existence and subsistence, does not have a negation; everything absists. (Note that all objects absists, while some subset of these subsists, of which a yet smaller subset exist.) the result that everything absists allows Meinong to deal with our ability to affirm the non-being of an object. Its absistence is evidenced by our act of intending it, which is logically prior to our denying that it has being.

OBJECT AND SUBJECT

Meinong distinguishes four classes of "objects".

1. "Object" (*Objekt*), which can be real (like horses) or ideal (like the concepts of differences, identity, etc.)
2. "Objective" (*Objective*), e.g., the affirmation of being (*Sein*) or non-being (*Nitchsein*), of a being-such(*Sosein*), or a being-with (*Mitsein*)-parallel to existential, categorical and hypothetical judgments'. Objectives are close to what contemporary philosophers call states of affairs(when these may be actual, "obtain"- or not).
3. "Dignitative", e.g. the true, the good, the beautiful
4. "Desiderative", e.g. duties, ends, etc.

To these four classes of objects corresponds four classes of psychological acts:

1. Representation(*das Vorstellen*), for objects
2. Thought(*das Denken*), for the objectives
3. Feeling(*das Fühlen*), for dignitatives
4. Desire (*das Begehren*), for the desiderative

AN EXPOSITION OF BRENTANO'S CONCEPT ON INTENTIONALITY

The main goal of Brentano's was to lay the basis for a specific psychology, which he defines as "the science of mental phenomena" (Brentano, 1995, p.14). In order to give flesh to this definition in the discipline, he provides a more detailed characterization of mental phenomena. He proposes six criteria to distinguish mental from physical things (Brentano 1995), the most important of which are:

1. Mental phenomena are the exclusive object of inner perception.
2. They always appear as a unity, and
3. They are always intentionally directed towards an object.
4. The other three criteria are: psychological phenomena and only those are presentations or phenomena based upon presentations; they seem to have no spatial extension; and have not intentional, but also actual existence.

All mental phenomena have in common, Brentano remarked, "that they are only perceived in inner consciousness, while in the case of physical phenomena only external perception is possible" (Brentano, 1995: 70). According to Brentano, the former of these two forms of perception provides an unmistakable evidence for what is true. Since the German word for perception (*Wahrnehmung*). Literally translated, means "taking-true", Brentano says that it is the only kind of perception in a strict sense. He points out that inner perception must not be mixed up with inner observation, which would require that one is having a mental act, the act of observing, that is directed towards another mental act, the act observed. Inner perception, on the other hand, must not be conceived as a full-fledged act that accompanies another mental act towards which it is directed. It is rather interwoven with the latter: in addition to being primarily directed towards an object, every mental act is accidentally directed towards itself as a secondary object. When I see a tree, for example, the primary object of my visual experience is the tree. But I am also aware that I am seeing and not, say, hearing or touching the tree; I am, in other words, aware of the fact that I have a mental phenomenon that is directed towards the tree. This is possible because one and the same mental phenomenon, my visual experience, is directed not only towards its primary object, the tree, it is incidentally directed also towards itself as a secondary object.

As such, Brentano is probably best known for having introduced the notion of intentionality to contemporary philosophy. He first characterizes this notion with the following words, which have become the classical, albeit not completely unambiguous formulation of the intentionality thesis: "every mental phenomenon is characterized by what the Scholastics of the Middle Ages called the intentional (or mental) inexistence of an object, and what we might call, though not wholly unambiguously, reference to a content, direction toward an object, (which is not to be understood here as meaning a thing), or immanent objectivity. Every mental phenomenon includes something as object within itself." (Brentano, 1995, p. 68). Brentano aims at providing one of six criteria to distinguish mental from physical

phenomenon with the aim to define the subject matter of scientific psychology, and not to develop a systematic account of intentionality. However, that the intentional object towards which we are directed is part of psychological act. It is something mental rather than physical. Brentano thus seems to advocated a form of immanentism, according to which the intentional object is "in the head," as it were. In the light of other texts by Brentano from the same period they argue that he distinguishes between intentional correlate and object, and that the existence of the latter does not depend on our being directed towards it. When Brentano's students took up his notion of intentionality to develop more systematic accounts, they often criticized it for its lack of clarity regarding the ontological status of the intentional object: if the intentional object is the part of the act, it was argued, we are faced with a duplication of the object.

Next to the real, physical object, which is perceived, remembered, thought of, etc., we have a mental, intentional object, towards which the act is usually directed. thus, when I think about the city of Abuja, I am actually thinking of a mental object that is part of my act of thinking, and not about the actual city. This view leads to obvious difficulties, the most disastrous of which is that two persons can never be directed towards one and the same object. If we try to resolve the problem by taking the intentional object to be identical with the real object, on the other hand, we face the difficulty of explaining how we can face mental phenomena that are directed towards non-existing objects such as Hamlet, the golden mountain, or a round square. Like my thinking about the city of Abuja, all these acts are intentionally directed towards an object, with the difference, however, that their objects do not really exist.

According to Brentano, every mental phenomenon is directed towards itself as a secondary object; inner perception is, thus, a form of mechanism on the basis of which we become aware of our mental phenomena. As a consequence, Brentano denies the idea that there could be unconscious mental acts: since every mental act is incidentally directed towards itself as a secondary object, we are automatically aware of every occurring mental act. He admits, however, that we can have a mental acts of various degrees of intensity. In addition, he holds that the degree of intensity with which the object is presented is equal to the degree of intensity in which the secondary object, that is the act itself, is presented. Consequently, if we have a mental act of a very low intensity, our inner perception of the act or, as he puts it, our secondary consciousness of it will also have a very low intensity. From this Brentano concludes that sometimes we are inclined to say that we had an unconscious mental phenomenon when actually we had a conscious mental phenomenon of very low intensity.

As such, consciousness for Brentano always forms a unity. While we can perceive a number of physical phenomena at one and the same time, we can only perceive one mental phenomenon at a specific point in time. When we seem to have more than one mental act at a time, like when we are listening to a melody while

tasting a sip of red wine and enjoying the beautiful view from the window, all these mental phenomena melt into one, they become moments or, to stick with Brentano's terminology, divisive of a collective. If one of the divisive ends in the course of time e.g., when I swallow the wine and turn my eyes to the fireplace, but continue to listen to the music, the collective goes on to exist. Brentano's views on the unity of consciousness entail that inner observation, as explained above, is strictly impossible, for this would require us to have two distinct acts in the very same moment ago, or expect future mental acts, but due to the unity of consciousness one cannot have two distinct mental acts, one of which being directed towards the other, at the same time.

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF MEINONG'S OBJECT THEORY IN RELATION TO BRENTANO'S INTENTIONALITY

Meinong's theory can best be understood as a reaction to the ontological difficulties in Brentano's account of Intentionality as a unique character of the mental. Rather than accepting the notion of an imminent content, Meinong argues that the intentional relation is always a relation between the mental act and object. In some cases the intentional objects does not exist, but even in these cases there is an object external to the mental act towards which we are directed. According to Meinong, even non-existence object are in some sense real. Since we can be intentionally directed towards them, they must subsist (*bestehen*). Not all subsisting objects exist, some of them cannot even exist for they are logically impossible, such as round squares (Meinong 1981). The notion of intentionality played a central role also in Husserl's phenomenology. Applying this method of the phenomenological reduction, however, Husserl addresses the problem of directedness with the notion of "noema" as intentional correlate of the act.

THE SIMILARITIES BETWEEN MEINONG'S OBJECT THEORY AND BRENTANO'S THOUGHT ON INTENTIONALITY

Both of them use theory or concept of intentionality, which they explain as a form of thought on something. Meinong considered the basic features of mental state to be aboutness or the direction of attention to objects. He says: intention has to do with the "content" of the experience which distinguishes one thing from another. Likewise Brentano also use the concept of intentionality, he is considered as the one who reintroduce it to contemporary philosophy. For him, intentionality simply means aboutness, or the relationship between mental acts and external world. He also defined it as the main characteristic of mental phenomena. That, every psychological act has a content which is directed at an object, (the intentional object). Every belief, desire and so on, has an object that they are about: the believed, the desired.

Again, Meinong states that certain external objects can exist such as (mountains, birds etc.); others cannot exist which are the mental objects such as (square-circle, wooden-iron etc) accordingly, Meinong is of the view that some objects exist in

reality, while others does not exist in the real sense. Also, Brentano used the expression "internal inexistence" to indicate the status of the object of thought in the mind. He says, the property of being intentional, of having an intentional object, was the key feature which distinguishes psychological phenomena and physical phenomena, as Brentano defined it, that physical phenomena lacked the ability to generate original intentionality, and could only facilitate an intentional relationship in a second hand manner, which he labeled derived intentionality. Basically, right from the beginning, we see that Meinong has being together with Brentano as his teacher, as a matter of fact, it is from this that Meinong took the position to write on his *object theory*, based on the background of his studies as a student of Brentano. Simply put, Meinong was influenced by the writings of his teacher Brentano on intentionality.

AREAS OF DIVERGENCE

1. Meinong's first deviation consists in dividing up the class of emotions into the classes of feeling (*Gefuhle*) and of desires (*Begehrungen*).
2. His second modification consists in introducing the differentiation between serious (*ernstartige*) and fantasy (*phantasieartige*) experiences (the latter include what he called "assumptions").
3. He distinguishes between the act, the (psychological) content and the object of a mental phenomenon.
4. He gives up Brentano's thesis that we can be intentionally directed to one and the same object in different ways, i.e. by different kinds of mental acts, and he argues In favour of proper, non-real (ideal) objects corresponding to judging, feeling and desiring.

REFERENCES

- Alexius Meinong, A. (1981). *The theory of objects* .trans. Isaac Levi, D.B. Terrell, and Roderick Chisholm. In *Realism and the background of Phenomenology*, ed. Roderick Chisholm. Atascadero, C.A Ridgeview.
- Bergmann, Gustav. (1997). *Realism: A Critique of Brentano and Meinong*. University of Wisconsin Press.
- Chisholm, R (1992) *Brentano and Meinong Studies*. Rodopi.
- Findlay, J.N(1963) *Meinong's theory of Objects and Values*, 2nd ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Grossman, R (1994) *Meinong*. London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Lindenfeld, D. F (1990) *the transformation of Positivism: Alexius Meinong and European thought, 1880-1920*. University of California Press.
- Rollinger, R. D. (1993). *Meinong and Husserl on Abstraction and Universals. Number XX in Studien zur Osterreichischen Philosophie*. Amsterdam Rodopi.
- Rollinger, R. D. (2008) *Austrian Phenomenology: Bretano, Husserl, Meinong, and others on mind and object*. Frankfurt am Main: Ontos.

Routley.R.(1982). *Exploring Meinong's Jungle and Beyond*. Atascadero: Ridgeview pub Co.

Chrudzinski, A. (2005). "Abstraktion und Relationen beim jungen Meinong". Schramm.

Dolling, E. (2005). *"Eine semiotische Sicht auf Meinong's Annahmenlehre"*. Schramm.

Armstrong, D. (1968). *A Materialist Theory of the mind*. Routledge.

Brentano, F. (1995) *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*. Routledge.