ROSMINI STUDIES 12 (2025) 359-388

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BERKELEY'S CONCEIVABILITY ARGUMENT, REPRESENTATIONALISM, AND THE NOMINALIST DISMISSAL OF METAPHYSICS

The purpose of my paper is to address the notion of experience, that is, the domain of discourse on the relationship of minds to the world. The mainstream vocabulary developed to handle such a relationship relies on representations. I will defend an empiricist standpoint by raising doubts on the heuristic value of this widely shared assumption. In a basic sense, metaphysics is involvement in nonexperiential entity stipulation. My key claim is that representationalism is a typical metaphysical doctrine because posits nonexperiential entities. My starting point is the very succinct argument by Zeno which is reported by Plato at the beginning of Parmenides. I will reconstruct it as a challenge to any kind of pluralist ontology. In the second section, I will give a cursory account of examples of representationalist doctrines. I will argue that representationalism originates from the need of answering Zeno's challenge. In the third section, I will provide a structured overview of Berkeley's immaterialism. His doctrine is a package of three logically independent blocks: i. a refusal of representationalism; ii. an ontology of mental states; iii. a nominalist account of universals. As such it addresses traditional issues about minds and the world that involve belief justification, semantic concerns about the content of mental states, and the nature of objects. In the fourth section, I will address Berkeley's conceivability argument against representations. I will show how it engages with open issues in contemporary debates. In the fifth section, I will supplement Berkeley's criticism of representations with his views on contents. In the final section, I will summarize why empiricism constitutes an alternative to metaphysics.

In the memory of my father Quinto Riccardo Bertini (1943-2025),
an honest man, loved by his family and his community,
which he served devoutly over many years

ISSN 2385-216X

0. *Metaphysics, Experiences, Representations*

In a basic sense, metaphysics is involvement in nonexperiential entity stipulation. Nonexperiential entities are things inaccessible by ordinary experience. Metaphysicians posit the subsistance of realms of reality wherein these things inhere. Grossly speaking, such a move endorses the ontological commitments of a given domain of discourse. According to the metaphysical attitude, what exists is to be individuated in terms of what we are talking about. The proliferation of existences is then implied by a sort of pluralism towards domains of discourse whereby a domain is specified by a set of incommensurable framework propositions (Price 1997).

The purpose of my paper is to address the most fundamental level of experience analysis, namely, the domain of discourse on the relationship of minds to the world. Mainstream vocabulary to handle such a relationship relies on representations. I will defend an empiricist standpoint by raising doubts on the heuristic value of this widely shared assumption.

1. *Zeno's Challenge*

Plato's *Parmenides* 127d-e reports an extremely short argument against plurality attributed to Zeno (traditionally referred to as "the like and unlike argument"). Socrates thinks that the argument is easy to dismiss, and harshly declares that Zeno's philosophical enterprise is of little relevance because entirely consists in defending Parmenides' claim that "the whole is one" by presuming to show that the opposite (i.e., "that the whole is many") is self-refuting.

As a reply, Zeno comments that what he was trying to pursue with his defence was to challenge the pluralist's unjustified certainty that the existence of a plurality of numerically distinct things cannot be questioned. To the monist eyes, plurality involves falling in patent absurdities. Relying on the fact that experience allegedly testifies that there are many things, pluralists start their explanatory project by primitively assuming that such testifying is veridical. As a consequence, they make fun of monists like Parmenides and ridicule the denial of what appears so clearly stated by experience. However, if plurality involves contradictions, much more ridiculous consequences follow from the pluralists' primitive assumption about the experience of numerically distinct things. Therefore, Zeno reverts the burden of the proof on pluralists by pressing them with giving a reason for holding that experience of plurality is a good starter (i.e., the assumption that experience testifies plurality sounds like a *petitio principi*).

Contrary to the textual narrative showing Socrates' confidence that Zeno is irrelevant, Plato does hold that the *like and unlike argument* is ground-breaking and urges a detailed answer: the story told in the *Parmenides* traces the introduction of the theory of forms back to the solution of the metaphysical issue posited by Zeno (Allen 1964). Plato's self-reading of the motives that originates the core of his views attributes then a pivotal role to Zeno's challenge. Ironically enough, Plato does not disagree with Socrates alone. The *like and unlike argument* is traditionally evaluated as the weakiest of Zeno's paradoxes by common consensus (partly because Plato's answer is held to making the right point), and almost all other philosophers appear throughout worried exclusively by other *reductiones ad absurdum* by Zeno. Nonetheless, Plato's focus on the *like and unlike argument* is decisive, basically because it is his view. As such, it deserves discussion.

ISSN 2385-216X

Here is Socrates' account of Zeno's challenge:

If being is many, it must be both like and unlike, and this is impossible, for neither can the like be unlike, nor the unlike like... And if the unlike cannot be like, or the like unlike, then being could not be many; for this would involve an impossibility. (Parmenides 127d-128e).

Let us unpack the argument:

1. Being is many, namely, there are a plurality of numerically distinct things a, b, c, ... n;
2. Numerically distinct things a, b, c, ... n resemble each other for some features;
3. If x and y resemble each other for some features, then x and y are like (*resemblance involves likeness* principle);
4. If numerically distinct things a, b, c, ... n resemble each other for some features, numerically distinct things a, b, c, ... n are like (by substitution in (3));
5. Numerically distinct things a, b, c, ... n are like (by MP: (2) & (4));
6. Being (i.e., being is many) is like (by substitution of (1) in (5));
7. Numerically distinct things a, b, c, ... n do not resemble each other for some features;
8. If x and y do not resemble each other for some features, then x and y are unlike (*nonresemblance involves unlikeness* principle);
9. If numerically distinct things a, b, c, ... n do not resemble each other for some features, numerically distinct things a, b, c, ... n are unlike (by substitution in (8));
10. Numerically distinct things a, b, c, ... n are unlike (by MP: (7) & (9));
11. Being (i.e., being is many) is unlike (by substitution of (1) in (10));
12. Being (i.e., being is many) is like and unlike (conjunction of (6) and (11));
13. Being like and unlike is to instantiate contradictory features;
14. Being (i.e., being is many) instantiates contradictory features (from (12) and (13));
15. If something instantiates contradictory features, such a something is impossible (*impossibility of phenomenal instantiation of contradictory features* principle);
16. If being (i.e., being is many) instantiates contradictory features, being is many is impossible (substitution in 15);
17. Being (i.e., being is many) is impossible (by MP: (14) & (16)).

Let us see what Zeno's challenge is stating. There is a tray on the table. There are apples and oranges on the tray. Some apples are green, others are red. Some oranges are bigger than others. Experience testifies that there are numerically distinct things after all. Now, you can say that all apples resemble each other. They are all apples, indeed. Nonetheless, green apples do not resemble red apples. They are different colours, indeed. If resembling things resemble each other in being like, and nonresembling things do not resemble each other in being unlike, then apples are both like and unlike (by assuming the *resemblance involves likeness principle* and the *nonresemblance involves unlikeness principle*). The collection of apples taken as a whole is like and unlike. As such it instantiates contradictory features. Something cannot be both green and red at once. The experience of numerically distinct apples generates a phenomenal contradiction. Phenomenal

contradictions are not tolerable (by assuming the *impossibility of phenomenal instantiation of contradictory features principle*). The same holds for oranges. They are all orange. Same colour. But they are different sizes. Oranges in the collection resemble each other in colour likeness, and do not resemble each other in size unlikeness. The collection as a whole cannot be both big and small.

However, there is a categorical mistake, clear. If this is what Zeno's challenge means, you may complain that it is absurd to attribute the properties of the members of a collection to the very collection. Apples are green and red, but the collection is not. Oranges are big and small, but their composition in a set is not.

Nonetheless, Zeno is making a different point. The issue is not mereological. Apples and oranges are both fruits, but they are different. They resemble each other. They are not trays or tables, for example. All fruits are like. But all fruits do not resemble each other too: some are apples and some are oranges; some are green and some are red, some are big and some are small. All fruits are unlike. Fruits are like and unlike, then. Once again, you reply that the collection is one thing, numerically distinct things in the collection are a different matter.

Zeno's challenge begins to reveal what it is when a cunning suspect spreads into your train of thought. Different features in a plurality of numerically distinct things do not involve contradictions once you disentangle higher-order considerations about collections from the instantiation of phenomenal features by their members. But, such higher-order considerations introduce likeness and unlikeness relations standing between the members of the collections which are more universal than first-order phenomenal features of the members of the collections. Numerically distinct things in a plurality generate a domain of ontological discourse (e.g., the domain of discourse on apples, the domain of discourse on oranges, and so on). Phenomenal features instantiation occurs at the level of individuals. The domain cannot be properly predicated of what pertains to individuals. However, different domains somewhat overlap and generate higher order questions about phenomenal features instantiation at their level of ontological discourse (e.g., the domain of discourse on apples overlaps with the domain of discourse on oranges and generates higher-order questions on being a fruit). Consider a further step in Zeno's challenge. The table, the tray on the table, and the fruits on the tray are numerically distinct objects. They resemble each other. They are all solid, for example. As such they are like. But they do not resemble each others for some other respect though. Tables and trays are not fruits, while apples and oranges are. It seems that solids are both like and unlike. Try answering the former conclusion by noting that collections of solids do not instantiate the phenomenal features of their items. It is true. Then, a new higher-order classification generating likeness and unlikeness relations among the items at stake at such higher order of ontological discourse can be introduced. For example, consider collections of objects in a kitchen (i.e., tables, trays on the table, fruits on the tray) and collections of rooms in a house (i.e., kitchens, and so on). Rooms in a house, tables, trays on the table, and fruits on the trays are all spatiotemporally located. As such they are like. But they are very different in other respects.

The fact is that once you group something into a collection, then a universal phenomenal feature appears. Comparisons between collections whose members are like for some phenomenal feature introduce higher level phenomenal features. Apples in a collection of apples, oranges in a collection of oranges, and trays and tables in a collection of kitchen furniture appear to share a phenomenal feature of higher level (i.e., being solid). Apples in a collection of apples, oranges

ISSN 2385-216X

in a collection of oranges, trays and tables in a collection of kitchen furnitures, and the kitchen wherein those object are appear to share a phenomenal feature of a more higher level (i.e., being spatiotemporally located). The more you climb up in higher order considerations, the more universal likeness and unlikeness relations among numerically distinct things are the subject of the comparison between different domains.

The issue is not what constitutes a proper object at a level of ontological discourse. The problem is with the proliferation of domains over domains. The point of Zeno's challenge is that once such proliferation is naturally read in terms of semantic ascent, then *plurality resolves into unity*. Higher-order discourses are more universal than lower ones. Any step towards the dismissal of the apparent contradictory nature of likeness and unlikeness claims within a domain of discourse implies a higher degree of similarity among numerical distinct things. This being the case, semantic ascent is not an exit strategy at the pluralist's disposal. On the contrary, semantic ascent looks dangerously devastating. This is the vexing perplexity of pluralists as Plato in the face of *the like and unlike argument*: either semantic ascent is stopped somewhere or numerically distinct things allegedly testified by experience being a plurality reveal to be in reality one being alone.

2. *Representationalism*

2.1. *Plato and the Triangular Pattern*

Zeno's challenge logically follows from assuming the existence of a plurality of numerically distinct things (1), resemblance and not resemblance relations among them ((2) and (7)), together with the *resemblance involves likeness principle* (3), the *nonresemblance involves unlikeness principle* (8), and the *impossibility of phenomenal instantiation of contradictory features principle* (15).

It is an impressive piece of reasoning because addressing it requires managing a few basic foundational topics such as *what is a thing?*, *what is phenomenal features instantiation?*, *what is existence?*, *what is a relation?*, *what is a collection of things?*, *what is legitimate to say about first-order evidence?*, *what is legitimate to say about higher-order analysis?*, and so on.

Plato furiously accepts the challenge by his faith in (1), (2), and (7). Not bad, I think. Who is willing to give up them? He does not question (15) either. Reading the *impossibility of phenomenal instantiation of contradictory features principle* in terms of pluralist instantiation involves a repugnancy. Wittgenstein wrote about colours (but the same can be said for any other sense modalities): "It is impossible that two colours be in the same time in the same place of the visual field; logically impossible, because this is ruled out by the logical frame of colour" (Wittgenstein 2005, 6.3751). Although pluralism about phenomenal features is a conceptual possibility (i.e., be x a thing and F and Q phenomenal features of the same sense modality, then pluralism about phenomenal instantiation is the claim that "F(x) & Q(X)" is the case; Tye & Bradley (2001) and Byrne and Hilbert (2003) are examples of pluralism about colours), the inclination to believe that a thing can instantiate only a phenomenal feature at once in a sense modality is hard to quit. I'm not claiming that a dialetheist solution is not at disposal. Simply, such a move would require a supplement of exotic metaphysics, against which any resistance is more than plausible. In any

case, an alternative reading of (15) is definitely damaging to the pluralist and should be avoided without hesitation, namely, *that contradictory phenomenal features are actually instantiated by a whole in different portions of its spatiotemporal location*. This be the case, the like and the unlike argument ceases to be a paradox: the world as a whole (both spatial and temporal) instantiates different phenomenal features at different places and times. However, while such a solution provides a consistently meaningful account of the occurrence of likeness and unlikeness relations within the world, such a solution is the vindication of monism to which Zeno urges on pluralists (contemporary Eleathic monists defend such a traditional reading of the historical Parmenides (Severino 1964); influential works in support of such a numerical monist reading of Eleaticism are Owen (1960); Taran (1960); Long (1996)).

As a consequence, Plato embraces the only possibility at his disposal, that is, denying (3) and (8). In the words of Socrates:

> [...] tell me, Zeno, do you not think that there is a form of likeness in itself, and another idea of unlikeness, which is the opposite of likeness, and that these two, you and I and all other things to which we apply the term many, participate? And that things which participate in likeness become in that degree and manner like? And that so far as they participate in unlikeness become in that degree unlike? Or both like and unlike in the degree in which they participate in both? And may not all things partake of both opposites, and be both like and unlike, because of this participation? [...] there is nothing extraordinary in showing the things which only partake of likeness and unlikeness experience both. (*Parmenides* 128e-130a).

The opening question clarifies that things are what they are in reason of their partaking in forms (e.g., a green apple partakes in the form of appleness and the form of greenness). Forms exist by themselves. They are ontologically separated by mundane things. Forms cause things to be what they are. Participation is a causal relation.

The second, the third, and the fourth questions establish that things have nothing substantive in their existence. Things become what they are. What they are depends on their degree of participation in a form. Please note that Plato employs quantitative language. Things do not have a nature. They have degrees of existence by partaking in forms. Things that resemble each other (or which do not) do not share a common nature. No substance here. They resemble each other (or they do not) because they instantiate phenomenal features that depend on their participation in the same form (or in different ones). A green apple and a red apple both partake in the form of appleness. The green one partakes in the form of greenness to a certain degree (the more it partakes, the more it is green), the red one in the form of redness to a certain degree. A green and a red apples resemble each other because they participate in the form of appleness, but they do not resemble each other because the former participates in the form of greenness, the latter in the form of redness. Resemblance does not involve likeness.

The pulsating heart of the Platonist theory of forms consists exactly in the proposition *that resembling things resemble each other in reason of a vertical relation to something which causes things to be as they are and prevents them from possessing natures that would result in substantive likeness and unlikeness relations between their phenomenal features*. The theory of forms is a device completely and uniquely informed by a causal flavour. Essentialism is beyond the realm of feature instantiation. Separation between things and natures is the primary nonnegotiable grounding rule for being a Platonic pluralist. Participation is the subsequent one. There is nothing substantive in

ISSN 2385-216X

common between two resembling things save their participation in the form because of which they resemble each other.

Plato's move appears then to relocate likeness and unlikeness between things to the domain of ontological discourse about them. Clearly, this is enough to dismantle Zeno's challenge, at least from a verbal viewpoint. The ontological domain of form is the last step of existence. Consider any collection of things you like: their location is at the same level of analysis. You can group things as you like. The relevant form under which you collect things accounts for the phenomenal feature instantiation in the same higher-order domain of discourse. There is no proliferation of domains in reason of semantic ascent. No phenomenal feature is more universal than others. The like and unlike argument is blocked by rejection of (3) and (8), and being is many.

Now, independently of that Platonic pluralism demands the dubious belief in the existence of the realm of forms, there are good reasons for holding that the solution does not properly work. Plato's theory is evidently unsystematic: given his outstanding honesty in following reasoning wherever issues arise, different pieces of his research attest dissatisfaction with a stable architecture of the theory. It is definitely unclear which kinds of forms exist, whether any collection of things is ontologically admissible, which relations frame the realm of forms, whether some forms are more universal than others, and so on. Parmenides' and Zeno's attack on Socrates' solution of the like and unlike argument in the progress of *Parmenides* is an extraordinary inventory of all the problems in Plato's ontological storehouse.

Such difficulties notwithstanding, the minimal pack of the theory stipulates a seminal approach to the relation of mind and world (i.e., the representational theory of experience) whose importance is hard to overestimate.

Briefly, experiences (in the sense of what happens to someone) provide the mind with the appearance of instantiated phenomenal features of things. Plato thinks of these occurrences by means of a triangular relation. There are minds, things, and forms. Experiencing things is a matter of enjoying a mental state. What does such a state concern? Plato's answer is: the relevant forms in which experienced things participate. That is, experiential mental states have forms for content: they are not about things, they are properly about forms. This means that experiences are not a presentation of things. Experiences are not presentational. Plato's perseverance in claiming that without the understanding of the relevant forms experiences are not readable by minds, is ubiquitous in his dialogues: having an experience of an apple is collecting the phenomenal features that experience is providing the mind with by the unifying device of the form of appleness. Minds can experience something because access the realm of forms. At a fundamental level, experience is then representational. For Plato, the claim is a literal truism. Minds contemplated forms before their birth. When they experience something, they are experiencing a new presentation of forms: experiences of things are re-presentations of forms. As a consequence, mental states are representational. Mental states should be spelt out in terms of content. Experience of things consists only of a reference to forms. Things stand for forms.

Given that Plato motivates the introduction of the theory of forms as an answer to the like and unlike argument, there is cool moral in the story: representationalism generates as a solution to Zeno's challenge. Basically, metaphysics understood as the positing of an abstract realm of subsistencies for the purpose of accounting for worldly experience originates from entity realism toward representations (if we are ready to follow Plato in his interpretation of his work). This is why representationalism exemplifies the typical attitude of metaphysicians, that is,

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accounting for empirical facts in terms of existences that reside beyond the realm of experience.

2.2. *The Way of Ideas*

Representationalism enjoys pervasive and persistent success during the modern age. Although one variety or other of it can be tracked down after Plato, it is with the way of ideas that the view becomes a mainstream one. The claim that experiences are representational is ubiquitous in the works of Galileo, Descartes, Leibniz, Malebranche, Arnauld, Boyle, and Locke, and marks as the ground of any sound account of all fundamental topics.

The general schema for the claim relies on typically modern assumptions about mental contents (technically termed *ideas*). Minds primitively experience their sensory modification alone. Primitive means direct. I see an apple: I enjoy a visual sensory modification that provides me with colour determinates in some portion of the visual field. I smell the perfume of an apple: I enjoy an olfactive sensory modification which provides me with smell determinates in some portion of my olfactive field. And so on for any sense modality. What I am directly aware of is such sensory modifications.

What does cause such experiential occurrences? Grossly speaking, things in the world. A nuanced understanding of different authors should qualify such general answers with a respectful sensitivity to individual differences. Each of the modern philosophers accounts for the ontology of the world in peculiar manners and relates the phenomenal character of mental states to events about some stuff which is more substantive than those things appearing within experiences. This precisification notwithstanding, it is true for almost any authors that what minds directly are aware of is caused by something that is ontologically external to them. *Things in the world* constitutes then an umbrella expression for the *terminus ad quem* of sensory modifications.

An essential component of the package is the distinction between *primary and secondary qualities.* Sensory modifications split into two kinds. Both of them depend heavily on the functioning of sense organs. What is like having an experiential mental state is the result of how the relevant sense organ works. Phenomenology involves the conflation of physiology and psychology. Nonetheless, sensory modifications of the former group (i.e., size, figure, extension, duration, motion, position) provide the mind with appearances that should be someway strictly related to how the causal stuff external to the mind is. On the contrary, items within the other group (i.e., colours, tastes, odors, sounds, heat, coldness, and tactual qualities) are completely constituted by their subjective frames. The distinction is susceptible to variegated renderings, but gives voice to a very simple transcendental intuition: you cannot think of something unless you think of it as sized, figured, extended, persistent in time, in motion or in quiet, somewhere located; while you can think of that very something without thinking of it as colored, tasting somehow, odoring, sounding, heat or cold at a certain degree, having tactual features (Galilei provides seminal treatment of such an argument). Further, while primary qualities of a thing appear stable across different modalities (i.e., primary qualities are common sensible to any modalities), secondary qualities are subjectively ephemeral, they are evanescent, and none cannot be enjoyed in different sense modalities.

Put all these insights into one picture. Minds are caused to experience things in the world by being sensory modified. Minds directly experience such sensory modifications. Things in the world are not in experiences. They exist beyond them. However, experiences have both content

and phenomenology: primary qualities are fully representational, namely, they are informative about things in the world. Mental states are then enjoyed in terms of awareness of phenomenal character but are about things in the world. Representationality of primary qualities constitutes experiences as representations of reality outside the mind. The subjectivity of phenomenal character is responsible for that experiences are not a direct presentation of that very reality.

Now, Plato's representationalism is certainly a faraway kin of the way of ideas. Modern philosophers (save Platonists of course) do not think that the content of mental states consists of those forms causing minds to experience their sensory modifications. Some of them believe in the realm of forms (Malebranche is a paradigmatic example), and develop compatibilist models of platonism and way of ideas. Others secure a role to cognitive items shaped in the neighbourhood of how forms are pictured by Plato (i.e., forms are reconceptualized as immanent universals) by relocating their existence from heaven to individual minds (Locke's theory of general ideas is the main candidate for such a view). However, the qualifying feature of the way of ideas is a claim about the causal dependency of mental contents on things in the world (no matter whether forms or cognate notions can be employed at a certain degree in the account). Content is the external worldly stuff. Despite such a crucial difference, the essential of Plato's approach to experience is at work. As him, modern philosophers assuming the ways of ideas do hold that experiences are not a presentation of objects: the things provided to the mind in having perceptual experiences are not the content of mental occurrences. They are nothing more than representations of something else. As such, the triangular Platonist pattern is still alive. Plato understands mental states as minds reading experiences in terms of forms. Modern philosophers understand mental states as minds reading experiences in terms of things in the world. In both cases, content is the relevant epistemic matter causing experience to have an informative value. Experiences concern something that is beyond what appears to minds. Triangularity implies that appearances are substitutional, namely, they stand for something other.

It is not by chance therefore that modern representationalists have an answer to Zeno's challenge. Like for Plato, experiential support for the claim of plurality is allegedly unproblematic because experiences refer to an external realm whose subsistence is disentangled from what appears to mind. Worldly stuff is the real content of mental states. The explanation of appearances does not require taking for substantial the relational modes that occur between appearances. Even if philosophers in the way of ideas are read as numerical monists about the world, the prima facie plurality of things in experience would remain supposed to be saved by representationalism. Such a deliverance develops at a purely verbal level since the removal of contradiction does not actually address the issue generating it, namely, the nexus of universality and instantiation which the phenomenal features of things seem to involve.

2.3. *Contemporary Intentionalist Theories of Experience*

Cognitive scientists, social psychologists, cultural anthropologists, linguists, and philosophers of mind are for the great majority representationalists nowadays. Grossly speaking, strong representationalism, which is the consensus view, is the claim that minds are devices adaptively framed to process environmental information and to cause behaviour in terms of how such information interacts with pursuing some ends (Egan 2012). According to the received picture, information processing is a computation of subsequent physical states of the brain and is

governed by syntactical rules. Representations consist of the interpretation of such computational items in terms of external objects (Fodor 1975 and 1987). As such, representationality is to have a propositional attitude towards semantic content. The view that mental states have propositional content is usually stated in terms of intentionality. Mental states are about something. Such aboutness is a dependency relation. Mental states are determined by their content. The way experiencing a mental state is like, namely, phenomenal character is entirely dependent on content (Bertini 2023).

The basic idea is that sensory inputs are processed by the neural system and elaborated in information packages by it. Such packages have either iconic, echoic, tactile (and so on) modelling or propositional one, or both. In any case, the output of the elaboration of information by the brain is a representation of which the mind is aware. The peculiarity of contemporary representationalism is to deal with the matter at stake within the framework of cognitive science. This does not imply reductionism. While most intentionalists believe that the theory reconciles the successful focus of modern epistemological concerns on phenomenology with materialism, contemporary representationalists are not necessarily reductionists. The hard problem of translating neural mechanisms into the specifically qualitative character of first personal experience, together with sparse difficulties related to how explanation of epistemic support relations to evidence works, may justify dualist, experience-comes-first or experience-comes-apart attitudes. Nonetheless, the basic representational pack involves a dualism of the material vehicle of information (the physical state of the brain) and representational content (the experiential state the mind is aware of) (Egan 2014).

Such differences of approach favours very different construals of the notion of content able to state a wide plurality of epistemic and metaphysical views in mutual competition. As a consequence, it is utterly impossible to give a reasoned and succinct account of such complexity, but, fortunately, it is also unnecessary. For a side, all intentionalist theories of experience converge on the representationalist claim, and this suffices for present discussion. For the other, I will specify particular determinations of the representationalist claim when required by the progression of the argument.

3. *Berkeley and Empiricism*

Despite their wide success, representational theories of experience look prima facie unpalatably unsound. The main problem consists of that they openly contravene the phenomenological evidence testified by experiential occurrences. I see an apple. I smell its perfume. I move my hand and grasp it. I bite it, and I enjoy its sour and sweet taste. Representationalism accounts for such experience in terms of content. The contemporary intentional jargon translates it by the vocabulary of propositional aboutness. What happens is my relation to a conjunction of propositions (i.e., that there is an apple; that there is a perfume in my nose, that there are sour and sweet tastes in my mouth, and so on). Such propositions are directed to an external object. They are about it. They represent the environment around me. In my experience of something, there are then me and propositions about that something.

Such an approach opposes the direct testimony of experience: that in my experience of

something, there are me and objects. Although it is a possibility that evidence can be misplaced, it is a grounding fact that experiences do not appear representational; their enjoyment attests in the first instance that they are basically presentational. No matter whether experiencing of something occurs together with that that something states a claim about itself (McDowell 2009, 23-24). Whenever I eat an apple, the certainty that I am primitively in relation to an object and that my relation to a proposition about this object is derivative, is immediately irresistible. The phenomenology of experience occurs in a direct realist fashion (i.e., the immediate relata of minds in experiencing something are the ordinary objects apparently presented in experience - no qualia, no sense data, no propositions are on target in a folk epistemology account).

Intentionalists recognize that the intuitiveness of direct realism is the supporting motivation for the view (Pautz 2011). As a consequence, some of them make a great deal of effort in trying to construe content in a manner that result fully respectful of phenomenology. Representationalism can endorse in this way claims that resemble typical direct realist insights about the objects presented in experiences: that experiential representations are nonconceptual (Block 2023, 166-214); that contents are demonstrative or singular (McDowell 2009, 44-65; Burge 2010); that contents are not syntatically structured (Nanay 2022a); that contents are rich (Siegel 2010); that intentionality is a form of directeness in experience in successful cases of perception (Byrne 2001; Tye 2009). Nonetheless, any representationalist theories assume a fundamental principle towards the relation of minds and the world, namely, that minds experience the world by means of the mediation of their internal representational states. Objects are not the proximate cause of experience, propositions are. This suffices to motivate a strict disjunction between two mutually exclusive options: the content view against the object view (Byrne 2009; Brewer 2017).

As an empiricist, I side with the object view. I completely agree with van Frassen's argument for the claim that empiricism cannot be captured by an essentialist definition (van Frassen 1995). It is a reactive view, motivated by an aversion to metaphysics and reliance on experiential evidence, and it exhibits a plurality of approaches and assumptions (in van Frassen's terminology, empiricism is not a doctrine, it is a stance). However, among the many features which play important roles, trust in ordinary phenomenology is crucial. Such trust should be defended, of course. I accept indeed that representationalists provide compelling arguments against the object view, and that those arguments should be answered. Nonetheless, neither of these wins over me quitting the evidence that when I eat an apple, my experience is primarily the experience of an apple.

The classical empiricism of Berkeley offers a bit of reasoning against representationalism which I find relevant to the rejection of it. What I find important in this reasoning is that it puts in the right connection some non-negotiable claims of the empiricist package: that experience is a direct relation of minds to things, that all things are particulars, and that nominalism towards universal notions is the only metaphysically free answer to the issues of generality.

Berkeley's immaterialism is a building constituted of three logically independent blocks: a criticism of representationalism based on semantic considerations towards conceivability of nonexperiential items (A); a naive realist ontology of mental states (B); a nominalist account of abstract objects, namely, properties, universals or kinds (C).

Very briefly. The following is about (A). Berkeley opens his *Treatise* by an assault on the heart of representationalism in terms of a direct realist theory of experience. Mental states present things as bundles of qualities united by their going together (*Treatise*, § 1). Such bundles are

what ordinary things are by themselves (*Treatise*, § 4). The supposition that such mental states are representations of something that exists outside the mind is ruled out by a conceivability disjunction: either mental states are presentations of directly perceptible things, that is, things are nothing other than those items presented within actual mental states, or mental states are about something different in kind from things presented in mental states, and, accordingly, such something cannot be thought of no way (*Treatise*, § 8). If the former disjunct holds, experienced or experienceable things are all there is. Mental states are not representational then: they are presentational indeed. But, if the other disjunct holds, mental states are nonrepresentational the same way: they would be about nothing conceivable at all.

The problem in positing content is then purely a question of the irreducibility of experience. We can conceive likeness between experiences, but we cannot conceive relationships between experiences and any unexperienced Xs because such relationships would be nonexperiential. Experiences give evidence to experiences alone (West 2021). The primary-secondary qualities distinction does not help either. Assuming that figure, motion and the rest are representational while colours, sounds, heat, and so on are not, entails distinguishing in kind among appearances presented in mental states. Berkeley's complaint is directed against Galileo's claim that primary qualities are, while secondary ones are not, transcendental features of things, namely, properties that cannot be dispensed of in conceiving things. On the contrary, a thing having primary qualities without secondary ones is inconveivable: whenever I imagine a body extended or moved, I must give it some colour or other secondary qualities (*Treatise*, § 10). Further, anything which attests that secondary qualities are not representational holds for primary qualities too: the same arguments proving the no content view for secondary qualities prove the same for primary ones (*Treatise*, § 14).

Berkeley comes quickly to the core of the issue by attributing to representationalists the admission that the claim that experience represents a nonexperiential substance is assumed beyond conceivability. As such, it is a thought void of content (*Treatise*, § 17). This can be ultimately proved by a phenomenology test. Try as you can conceive experiences in terms of content and not of things (i.e., present mental occurrences providing the mind with direct experienced or experienceable things). All you can do is to conceive an experienceable thing preventing from referring that conception to you conceiving it (*Treatise*, § 22-23).

Let us move to (B). Berkeley's ontology is extraordinarily parsimonious. All existence resolves in two basic kinds of things: those experiencing, namely, minds (which bifurcate into finite ones and the infinite one, that is, God), and those being experienced, namely, mundane things (which bifurcate into those objectively existing without finite minds, that is, things constituting the world, and those imagined by a finite mind, that is, subjective representations within a mind) (*Treatise*, §§ 86 and following). Take a close look at the latter kind. Mental states are presentations of things by two alternative modalities (*Treatise*, § 26). Perceptive presentations are direct relation to things. These are actual relations to things presently experienced. Imaginative presentations are representational relations to experienceable things. From an ontological viewpoint, Berkeley restricts the legitimate use of the term *representation* to the relation between things and their imaginative conceiving by minds (*Treatise*, § 33). Perceptively presenting mental states are strong, lively, ordered, coherent, regularly serial, and consistently connexed (*Treatise*, § 30). Imaginatively presenting mental states are will-dependent, excited at pleasure, and eventually random (*Treatise*, §§ 27-29). According to Berkeley, such a difference suffices to identify an objective

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realm of existence, namely, the world, and subjective rendering and epistemic and doxastic work which minds operate upon it (*Treatise*, §§ 35, 90).

(C) is the key to Berkeley's proposal. Quantitatively speaking, Berkeley makes a ubiquitous reference to the doctrine of abstraction as the source of any mistake in philosophy (*Introduction*, § 6; *Treatise*, §§ 5, 10, 11, 13, 97, 98, 99, 100, 118, 119, 120, 121, 126, 133, 143): in Berkeley's arguing, evidence in support for immaterialism generates from the endorsement of nominalism (Pappas 2000). The *Introduction* sets forth a systematic account of general terms which is abstraction-independent. The focus is on whether abstract objects should be postulated for semantic concerns (*Introduction*, §§ 12, 14). The point of departure is that universal terms as predicables of determinates or determinables (e.g., colour names, kinds, concepts) or universally quantified propositions (e.g., every x are F) are pervasive ordinary linguistic items. Berkeley identifies the common consensus explanation of such universality phenomena as the theory that abstract entities are the reference of universal terms and universally quantified propositions (*Introduction*, § 18). He qualifies Locke as the champion of the view. He indeed attributes to him the claim that the meaning of universal terms is a relation to the relevant abstract objects (*Introduction*, § 11 quotes Locke's *Essay* 3.3.6 as evidence that Locke defends the view), and addresses the issue of universally quantified propositions by referring to Locke's signature discussion of triangularity (*Introduction*, § 16 characterises universally quantified propositions according to a semantic framework, namely, they have a truth value in terms of their reference to the abstract object they are about). The problem though is that abstract objects are not abstracta but particulars exchanged for abstracta. Conceive a universal – Berkeley suggests –, and you will conceive something particular ever:

> [...] whatever hand or eye I imagine, it must have some particular shape and colour. Likewise, the idea of man that I frame to myself, must be either of a white, or a black, or a tawny, a straight, or a crooked, a tall, or a low, or a middle size man. I cannot by any effort of thought conceive the abstract idea above described. And it is equally impossible for me to form the abstract idea of motion distinct from the body moving, and which is neither swif nor slow, curvilinear nor rectilinear; and the like may be said of all other abstract general ideas whatsoever. [...] I deny that I can abstract one from the another, or conceive separately, those qualities which is impossible should exist so separated; or that I can frame a general notion by abstracting from particulars in the manner aforesaid. (*Introduction*, § 10).

Berkeley is here calling attention to that any experience is an absolute particular bundle of univocal determinates. While such bundles are contingent as regards their unity (*Treatise*, § 65 rejects any substantive construal of causal identity), it is impossible that they can instantiate features without filling all determinable variables. A red apple might have been green (there is nothing substantive in a thing being both an apple and red coloured), but it could not have been uncouloured. As a consequence, it is performative impossible to experience isolated features: mental states are presentations of fully saturated items.

Such an antiabstractionist frame impacts the conception of universals. As things come particularly in their phenomenal occurrence, features appear always somewhat determined in being determinates of a determinable category. No apple in general, for instance: this particular apple, instead. No red colour in general: an absolute particular shade of red, instead (*Introduction*, § 9). How are universal terms or universally quantified propositions then available? Of course, Berkeley does not deny that the presentation of direct objects in mental states is attended by our

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capability of thinking propositionally to generality issues (Winkler 2005). He simply rejects that mental states should be understood in terms of content. Content comes after as higher-order work by the mind, and, accordingly, content is not real access to abstract entities. Berkeley is then in need of a story alternative to the common consensus one about universality.

The story has a bit of a constructivist flavour. Using a language is a matter of training. Names are arbitrarily adopted as marks of things, and natives of a language learn how to use a name to refer to a thing. When you think generality, you think of something particular as a sign of similar things constituting a collection (*Introduction*, § 12). Conceiving universals (i.e., thinking of them, using general terms, manipulating universally quantified propositions) is having an exemplar as a token standing for all other items which can be attributed to belong to the collection (*Introduction*, § 16). Collections are not substantively identified by reference to a common property; actually, there is not a real stuff that all items of a kind ontologically share (Introduction, § 18). Rather, generality is basically extensionality; it is a method of inclusion of new exemplars into already existing collections (linguistically built by naming and pragmatically enlarged by acknowledging similarity). You have a name *x*. You use it for thing *a*. You learn to use it for thing *b* too. X is the collection of *a* and *b* then. Thing *c* is acknowledged by natives of your language to be similar to either *a* or *b*, or both. You can use *x* for *c*. The collection of X extends to include *a*, *b*, and *c*. And so on to cover all legitimate uses of a general term. No abstract entities are required. Extensionality does the complete job.

Now, the three blocks (A), (B), and (C) of Berkeley's immaterialism are logically independent because neither of these implies the assumption of the others. You can endorse (A) and reject (B). For example, you can accept in a Berkeleian spirit that representationalism is not on point since experiences cannot testify anything else than experiences. Nonetheless, you may choose to assume an alternative to (B): a naive realist ontology of physical objects for instance (B*). According to (B*), differently from Berkeley's account of perceptions, experiences are relations between minds and mind-independent objects, that is, physical objects. Some contemporary non-representationalist theorists, while acknowledging that Berkeley correctly understands experience in terms of objects and not of content, oppose his views exactly by endorsing (B*) in place of (B) (e.g., Campbell 2002; Brewer 2006; Brewer 2007). Further, you can assent to (A) and do not assent to (C). While you may hold that experiences do not have content, so that objects should be understood without reference to properties, universals, kinds, and so on, you may accept that nonempirical frameworks of inquiry (i.e., mathematics or logics) require nonspatiotemporally located objects in a sense that nominalism could not vindicate. Although logical empiricists typically conjoin Platonism towards mathematical objects with sense data theory of perception, nothing prevents a Platonist from adopting naive realism in place of sense data theory. Finally, idealists of almost all sorts exemplify theorists assuming (B) and rejecting nominalism (C).

One of the interesting points Berkeley makes concerns linking (A) to (C) (*Treatise*, §§ 5, 10, 17). Contemporary debates hardly consider the possibility that experiences provide the mind with absolute particulars (I refer with the expression *absolute particulars* to spatiotemporally located particulars – tropes are excluded since abstractness implies some sort of generality, e.g. identical instantiability across different minds). Systematic refutations of naive realism are typical instances of such tendency: whenever theorists scrutinise items that may serve as content, they take alone into consideration what can be construed in general terms (e.g. Pautz 2011 debates what if contents are typical general items as properties, states, propositions). In converse,

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naive realists complain to representationalism exactly that contents are unable to play a role in accounting for experience because they make an implausible structural claim of generality (Brewer 2006). Berkeley's anti-abstractionism has a role to play here.

The clue of the immaterialist criticism of representationalism is that it attacks the metaphysical attitude of positing abstract entities to explain experiences. Nominalism motivated by the claim that experiences are presentational occurrences of absolute particulars is a strict alternative to any postulation of generalities as a reply to Zeno's challenge. Berkeley's attack against abstract ideas goes through the same Platonic intuition that *resemblance involves likeness principle* and *nonresemblance involves unlikeness principle* should be rejected to block semantic ascent leading to numerical monism. By explaining general terms with no reference to actual essential similarity among items of a collection, Berkeley shows where the empiricist hostility to metaphysics originates: it is possible to give a rich theoretical reasons-sustained account of experience independently of beyond experience entities be required.

4. *The Conceivability Argument against Representations*

Berkeley defines *representation* in a very traditional manner by the relationship of *standing for*:

> [...] if we will annex a meaning to our words, and speak only of what we can conceive, I believe we shall acknowledge, that an Idea, which considered in itself is particular, becomes general, by being made to *represent or stand for* all other particular ideas of the same sort. (*Introduction*, § 12).

Such identity of *representationality* and *to stand for* is stable throughout the *Treatise*. Berkeley does not deny the trivial claim that thoughts can have a representational grasp. How could it be otherwise? It is a truism that thinking of something is directed to that something; it is to take this something in someway. Thoughts are about their objects. As such, thoughts have content. In these lights, *a mental state represents content* means that such a mental state stands for some features of what it is about. The key of Berkeley's proposal consists of denying that perceptive mental states are representational and restricting representationality to the relation of conceiving of something to things (in Berkeley's terminology, to restrict representationality to the relations of ideas of imagination to ideas of sense). A thought of an apple represents an apple, that is, stands for it. A thought about appleness is a conceiving of a particular apple standing for any entity x which can be the subject of the proposition *x is an apple*.

Treatise, §§ 18-20 provide a conceivability argument against the view that minds experience the world by being acquainted with representations. The argument begins by asking how can be possible to know that the presentation of things provided by perceptive mental states depends on the existence of something whose subsistence is external to the presentation itself:

> But though it were possible that solid, figured, moveable substances may exist without the mind, corresponding to the ideas we have of bodies, yet how is it possible for us to know this? (*Treatise*, § 18).

Berkeley considers two alternatives. First option: it is directly by experiencing things,

namely, by the testimony of mental states presenting a certain worldly situation. This possibility is ruled out by the fact that no experience provides the mind with anything more than what it presents:

> As for our sense, by them we have the knowledge only of our sensations, ideas, or those things that are immediately perceived. [...] But they do not inform us that things exist without the mind, or unperceived, like to those which are perceived. (*Treatise*, § 18).

Second option: it is indirectly by inferring that what experiences present corresponds to something subsisting outside the experience itself. The problem is that such something would have no necessary connection to the experience since a mind might be experiencing the same train of mental states corresponding to the alleged actual subsistence of something outside the experience also independently of any actual subsistence of such something:

> I say it is granted on all hands (and what happens in dreams, phrensiesm, and the like, puts it beyond dispute) that it is possible we might be affected with all the ideas we have now, though no bodies existed without, resembling them. Hence it is evident the supposition of external bodies is not necessary for producing our ideas. (*Treatise*, § 18).

For the sake of argument, suppose that things subsisting beyond direct experience are what excite mental states. Well, such a hypothesis lacks any explanatory appeal because it is by no means clear how subsistences external to direct experience might produce a mental state (*Treatise*, §§ 22-23 argues that whatever subsistence you may think of is not external to experience; it is nothing more than a possible experience- a mental state, therefore):

> [...] for though we give materialists [i.e. representationalists in Berkeley's construal of materialism] their external bodies, they by their own confession are never nearer knowing how our ideas are produced: since they own themselves unable to comprehend in what manner body can act upon spirit, or it is possible it should imprint any idea in the mind. Hence it is evident the production of ideas or sensations in our minds can be no reason why we should supporse matter or corporeal substances, since that is acknowledged to remain equally inesplicable with or without this supposition. (*Treatise*, § 19).

Berkeley concludes by highlighting that representations are unnecessary at best; more seriously, they are inconceivable because it is unknowable how they should epistemically work:

> In short, if there were external bodies, it is impossible we should ever come to know it; and if there were not, we might have the very same reasons to think there were that we have not. (*Treatise*, § 20).

Two caveats. Firstly, the focus is on the externality of things to experiences. Berkeley is attacking the claim that minds do not perceive directly the world. The charge is that representationalists of all kinds, notwithstanding their eventual self-understanding of the view, are involved in a relational account of experience which introduces an ontological split (Saporiti 2024; West 2019; West 2023). Once mental states are read in terms of content, mental states are qualified as mediate informational states regarding which reality is outside. What produces an experience of the world is different from what minds enjoy. Nothing assures adequacy in the presentational grip. Access to the world is derivative, and this contradicts phenomenology. Secondly,

Berkeley is not a solipsist, and he does not defend the claim that mental states are private events. On the contrary, things are objectively external to any actual presentations to minds. What Berkeley denies is that things are external to experiences, actual or possible, that is, that they are substantively different from what is directly appearing within a perceptive mental state (i.e., that worldly things subsist outside actual or possible experiences). Representationalism implies a basic misindentification: it exchanges externality to any determinate experience (e.g., anything which a mind does not actually experience) with externality to experience tout court (i.d., all which is actually unexperienced).

These considerations point at the conceptual flaw that any varieties of representationalism are unable to manage, that is, the inconceivability of the relational nature between experiences and the alleged external source of them.

Let me now put Berkeley's arguing in a bit regimented form:

1. Either experiences are direct presentations of the world, or experiences have content, namely, they are representations, but not both;
2. If experiences are representations, experiences stand for things external to what is presented in them;
3. Sensation testifies that experiences do not stand for things external to what is presented in them;
4. Reason attests that experiences do not stand for things external to what is presented in them;
5. All we know, is known by sensation or by reason.
6. It is known by sensation and reason that experiences do not stand for things external to what is presented in them (conjunction of (3) and (4));
7. We know that experiences do not stand for things external to what is presented in them (by (5) and (6));
8. If we know that P, then P;
9. If we know that experiences do not stand for things external to what is presented in them, then experiences do not stand for things external to what is presented in them (by substitution of (7) in (8)).
10. Experiences do not stand for things external to what is presented in them (by MP: (7) & (9));
11. Experiences are not representations (by MT: (2) & (10));
12 Experiences are direct presentation of the world (by DS: (1) & (11)).

There is agreement in contemporary debate that the object view and the content view are mutually disjunctive. Naturally, the conceptual distinctions at stake can be worked out for the purpose of smoothing theoretical conflicts over. However, reconciling them into a compatibilist claim is a matter of changing the terms of the debate, which may result in unrespectful of the primitive epistemic difference between the two views. The disagreeing parties are prima facie exclusive alternatives (Brewer 2006; Brewer 2007; Brewer 2017; Byrne 2009; Nanay 2014; Nanay 2022a; Nanay 2022b; Pautz 2010; Pautz 2016). As a consequence, the assumption of (1) seems uncontroversial.

Berkeley assumes (2) by definition: *representing is to stand for*.

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Proposition (3) gives voice to the intuition that experience is transparent. Having an experience of an apple is to be spelt out in terms of the apple. Prima facie, there is nothing more in your experience than the things you are in front of. Try as you like to uncover a subjective vehicle through which the world appears to you: you will always find immediately the world (Martin 2002; Byrne 2009; Tye 2009; Bertini 2023). The transparency of experience is the phenomenal evidence that having an experience is simply being presented with the world which the experience is presenting: if any, the mechanism making the experience actual is blind to the experiencing mind. Berkeley endorses the claim as evidentially secured by direct reference to what experiencing something is like (Cummins 1990; West 2021).

The assumption of (4) relies on two different strands of reasoning. According to a longstanding tradition, the phenomenal character of illusory phenomena and hallucinations is indiscriminable from that of the correspondent veridical perception of reality. This is usually held to mean that you cannot discern by reflection whether in having an illusion or hallucination – say – of an apple, you are seeing an apple or you have an illusion of seeing one or you are hallucinating one (Martin 2006). While most naive realists (me too) adopt a disjunctivist reading for perceptions, illusory phenomena, and hallucinations, Berkeley is radical in accepting that internal indiscriminability of illusory phenomena and hallucinations from perceptions attests that no mental states presenting things is to be understood in terms of representational content. Actually, if illusions and hallucinations are indiscriminable from veridical perception, and they do not represent anything, then veridical perceptions may occur as illusions and hallucinations without any need for things external to the experience. If this is the only reason to accept (4), the argument would be unsteady, given reasonable doubts about the claim that illusory phenomena and hallucination have full phenomenal character. However, Berkeley introduces the hard problem of consciousness as a definitive piece of evidence for (4): it is utterly impossible to give translations of facts about the physical states into conscious mental states. Decades of debates about reductionism, functionalism, dualism, holism, and a plethora of other views in the philosophy of mind assure anyone that such translation is far from being a lively option.

Mystics may deny (5) in reason of some form of intuitionism. It is a possibility that human beings might have exotic access to knowledge by different devices than sensation and reason. However, such a complication is not on target when speaking of ordinary representation of worldly things; I suppose then that the hypothesis can be given up without any trouble.

At this point, the argument logically follows from the assumed propositions and the trivial claim (8). As a whole, Berkeley charges representationalists of being unable to give a conceivable notion of representation. If neither sensation nor reason is capable of justifying how mental states can be representational, namely, how they can stand for things external to those presented in a determined experience, the inconceivability of the representational relation between mental states and the worldly things allegedly causing the former defeats any appeal to the view.

The argument is difficult to reject from the viewpoints of ancient and modern representationalism. Contemporary mainstream representationalists differ from their ancestors in integrating the outcomes of research in cognitive science within the representational picture. The move supposedly answers resistance motivated by (3) and (4). The processing of external stimuli by the neural system accounts for how representations are framed and experienced by minds. I'm not sure, though, that such a certainty is well grounded. To be precise, the conceivability argument seems to preserve all its strentghs.

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Contemporary mainstream representationalism, hereafter intentionalism for short, swings between two opposite sides in the conceptual making of the notion of representation. At one extremity the focus is on transparency. Most intentionalists adopt the evidence that experience is transparent as a tool against subjectivist approaches to perception as sense data theory or adverbialism. The narrative goes that mental states are unperceivable to minds: they are enjoyments directed to objects. Representations are the medium of the relationship between minds and reality. In veridical cases, contents correctly represent how things are; in unsound cases, they do not. To the intentionalist, this bifurcation justifies the common sense approach to perception: it admits the possibility of perceptual error, while in successful cases vindicates direct realism. Nonetheless, there is a basic problem in the account. Actually, transparency does not testify that representations are at work in experiences: phenomenology is blindness exactly to representations. And such blindness contradicts what is held the most relevant epistemic benefit of the notion, that is, that perceptual evidence is subject to an opposition of veridicality and falsity in the representational functioning (Bertini 2023). The assumption of (3) in the conceivability argument questions that transparency may be used as a reason in support of the claim that representations are ingredients of experiences.

At the opposite extremity, it is found the internal dependency of content on the functioning of the neural system. Radical intentionalists may accept that representations are completely generated by the brain, and that the relationship of content to worldly things is purely causal and devoid of epistemic value. As a consequence, they can consistently develop an irrealist ontology, and qualify aboutness of experiences in a purely phenomenological manner (Pautz 2017). That is, experiences are representational events that occur as if the content is informative about something external to the mind, although such something is in principle unknownable. However, there are two problems here, which are pointed out by proposition (4) of the conceivability argument. Firstly, the causal relationship between external subsistencies and representations is unnecessary to the occurrence of a mental state. Why should such a relationship be posited? If representations are all there is in experience, experience ends with representations. And this suffices to raise doubts about the representational nature of mental states. They seem completely presentational indeed. Berkeley's reference to illusory phenomena and hallucinations serves this purpose. Secondly, the causal relationships between external subsistences and representations is inconceivable: there is no way to account for how something unknowable may generate something experienced. What is external to experience is external to any explanation. It is a full-blown imagination of something outside any test of empirical plausibility. It is not by chance, due to the imperfection of human cognitive capabilities. It is in principle. Causation is a relation occurring between things in experience, not between things and hypothetical subsistences outside experience. Any neural account of representations relies on empirical facts, that is, on something that is a direct object of an experience (e.g., the neural system is within experience, not without it). Berkeley argues for a hard problem of consciousness as evidence for such triviality.

Mainstream intentionalism falls in contradiction because assumes a mixture of transparency and internal dependency, which are incommensurable among them. The former notion pushes the account of experience towards a phenomenology of directness. The more theorists rely on it, the more they are inclined to vindicate full accessibility of the world: experiencing is to have the world in front. On the contrary, the latter notion closes the mind within the boundary of its states. The more theorists accept that mental states are internally dependent on the

functioning of the neural system, the more they are sliding into irrealism: experiencing is to have private events with no intelligible renderings of their causal relationship to the world. That is, transparency intends to give value to representationality, but contradicts the primacy of content; internal dependency intends to give value to the primacy of content, but contradicts representationality. The two notions cannot consistently stand together.

However, even in case they can be construed in a compatibilist manner, the conceivability argument raises issues for the very notion of representation. According to the received representationalist view, representations are propositional attitudes towards content. Independently of whether contents are structured propositions, maps, indexical items, or elements of any given sense modality, contents are packages of information qualified by semantic features. Experiences are mental states physically encoded by internality. From an ontological standpoint, mental states are vehiculated by chains of physical processing. Brain states are structures following each other by virtue of computational work. As such, mental states are fully internal. The representational format consists of a semantic relation between such internal computational states of the brain and interpreted distal objects and properties. Representing is to map physical vehicles constituting the brain states to external objects and properties (Egan 2012). The qualifying feature of the view consists exactly of characterising such a mapping in terms of posited entities. The problem resides in a dilemma about the conflation of phenomenology and ontology.

The first horn concerns the stipulation of entities provided by the phenomenology of experience. Mental states seem to provide the mind with worldly things. But if mental states are fully internal occurrences, minds are not directly in front of any worldly objects. This is tentatively captured by the intentional vocabulary of aboutness. Distal objects and properties are then stipulated as referents of the internal states the mind is aware of. Representing would consist of mapping by referring mental states to *posited* external entities. Such a mapping is nonetheless assumed by an unjustified stipulation of external objects. Phenomenology presents mental occurrences as experiences of something, namely, *representing* is *to represent as*. Intentionalists think that this feature is due to the frame of mental states. Experiences present internal objects and such objects would stand for external things that cause the occurrence of the internal presentation. The content of a state is what that state is about. In the good case, external objects are how contents represent them to be. In the bad one, contents misrepresent reality. But, how can this be supported by the phenomenology of experiences? Transparency prevents such an account from having prima facie relevance for an ontology of externality. What appears, is what is presented in an experience. Actually, nothing in an experience attests that objects external to the experience are the cause of experience. On the contrary, the cause of an experience seems to be the objects within the experience itself. The assumption of (3) highlights precisely that what is presented in a mental state is what the mental state is about. No good case, no bad case. I experience an apple, the apple is there. I may mistake the apple for an orange. But the object I see is there. It is the apple which I misidentify with an orange. If experiences are transparent, experiences are not representations then. Experiencing something is to have experience of that something; there is not an experience of you experiencing something (i.e., having an experience of experiencing something is simply experiencing that something). Naturally, intentionalists may dismiss transparency. However, so doing, they lose a basic argument for the view and need construing representationalism in nonintentional terms (Bertini 2023). This being the case, the representational format of physical vehicle and semantic content is devoid of explanatory

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benefits.

The problem is with how any intentional theory of experience is supposed to vindicate naturalism in one way or another. Naturalism here means that the computational processing given by the chain of physical states of the brain is construed with reference to external causes. This would imply that such a chain subsists outside what is presented by representational content. The causal chain experienced within mental states is projected beyond experiences. However such a supplement of ontology is unsupported if transparency is assumed. Phenomenology does the whole job: ontology is internal. It consists simply of listing what items are presented to the mind while having a mental state (e.g., physical states of the brain are not external to phenomenology, they are phenomenal states, something which is observable as a direct presentation of the relevant mental states). In my view, there is a categorical mistake. The phenomenology of allegedly internal states is mistaken for an ontology of externality. Mental states present evidential relations between worldly things as events that relate objects of experience, namely, objects ontologically subsisting within experiences; representationalism stipulates instead that objects presented in experiences relate to something which is beyond experience. In such a way, the phenomenological frame of experience is ontologically externalised by replicating the scheme of evidential relationships between objects presented in experience outside experience.

The second horn of the dilemma consists of bracketing phenomenology and prioritises ontology. Accordingly, there is no focus on externality. Mental states are internally dependent on brain functioning and are proximally caused by processing neural inputs. As such, mental states are the ontological basic facts; they are all there is. Phenomenology is derivate here. Once again, the seemingly representational nature of mental states is entirely due to the framework of mental states. But, no ontological externality now. Accordingly, mental states are read as representations in reason of such a framework. However, transparency still raises a problem. No mental state is ever directly experienced. This is why, entity stipulation concerns representations: representations are posited as mental entities independently of the evidential framework of experience. The problem is real and goes two ways. For one side, representations being unobservable, representations need criteria to stipulate their existence and causal necessary efficacy (Nanay 2022a). For the other, representations should be mandatorily accounted for in naturalistic terms (it is commonly assumed within the literature that intentionalism is the best vindication of physicalism about mental states on the marketplace); as a consequence, representations require to be caused by something natural. Suppose intentionalists have working individuation criteria for representations' causal efficacy. They would have still not answered where they came from. Inference leads them to search for such a cause outside the mind. Worldly things that are not represented within mental states are the distal causes producing the neural inputs which are the proximal causes of representations. At this point, the assumption of (4) in the conceivability argument blocks the intentionalist's inference from posited representations to external objects. Any account of representations in terms of causal chains is internal to the putative representational realm: no reason sustains referring mental states to unknown external objects. Once again, the problem is with an exchange between the order of explanation. Ontology motivates the stipulation of entities as representations. Representations provide a phenomenology of relationships between objects that are presented in experiences. Phenomenology needs a natural explanation. Phenomenology constitutes the scheme of such a natural explanation by transforming relationships between objects within experiences into a model of causation outside experience.

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Intentionalism is then weakened by a superimposition replication of explanation within different domains of discourse. By stipulating distal objects, ontology is superimposed on phenomenology by replicating beyond experience what is attested within experience by the enjoyment of a mental state; by stipulating representations, phenomenology is superimposed on ontology by replicating the scheme of internal relationships between objects presented within experiences to what are supposed to be the causes of the natural states of the brain.

5. *The Nominalist Ontology of Experience*

The conceivability argument unmasks a general ontological difficulty concerning positing a relationship of representationality between mental states and the allegedly represented objects. This problem notwithstanding, representationalists of all sorts assume that their view is basically supported by epistemic phenomena and, therefore, prima facie motivated by semantic concerns. Their explanatory starting point consists of doing justice to the evidence that experiences are informative about something (please, remember Zeno's challenge: Plato introduces the triangular pattern for defending the pluralist experience of reality in the face of the like and the unlike argument). The unnegotiable intuition is that experiences essentially are meaningful transmissions of information about the environment. Contents are developed to account for such a feature. They are explanatory devices modelled in reference to that mental states provide packages of information about worldly things. All intentionalists think that the more successful option to make the notion aptly work is to characterise contents as generality items. Further complications follow from such a characterisation.

However contents are construed (i.e., singular, propositional, not propositionally structured, nonconceptual, rich, pragmatical, and so on), all intentionalists agree that they are abstract pieces of information. This means that contents are general representational schemes, namely, they categorize a plurality of things under some headings and eventually apply to similar objects. The idea is that accounting for experiences consists of characterising awareness in terms of object identification criteria. Experiences provide information by identifying objects because of the features that things instantiate. Abstraction refers to that contents are not spatio-temporally located entities. They cannot be discovered somewhere in the world. As such, the dualism of phenomenal character and content is often assumed in terms of transcendence. Transcendence is sometimes worked out as supervenience (Byrne 2001) and may originate a non-reducible consciousness-first theory of experience (Pautz 2020). Contents are skeletal sketches of general patterns of information to be filled by instantiated features constituting experiences. Such instantiation is accounted for in terms of reference to posited external objects. While there is no issue at matter about interpreting contents as generality items if they are defined as propositional, not propositionally structured, or rich, few doubts may arise in the singular, the nonconceptual, or the pragmatical interpretation. Nonetheless, when contents are identified as singular, they are held to be a general indexical frame to be specified by individuating a particular object (Burge 2010); when they are qualified as nonconceptual, they are pictured as outputs of codifying processings by informationally encapsulated mechanisms (Fodor 2007); when they are characterised as pragmatical, they are defined in terms of context-dependent manner to identify

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their informative value (Egan 2020). All proposals remain faithful to assuming that contents are general schemes for information transmission. That is, each content stands for a plurality of things and is not spatiotemporally located.

This claim is problematic because the presentational format of experiences seems to involve absolute particulars, namely, uniquely spatiotemporally located entities. How can particularities be represented by generality items? In the first place, consider the ontological standpoint which qualifies mental occurrences as internal states caused by external objects. According to the intentionalist view, internal mental states present particular instantiations of the properties of the external objects mental states are about. Such particularities would be grasped by a general abstract entity, namely, content. The problem is to account for how different external objects falling under the same taxonomical type are particularly identified within an experience. That is, if a determinate representation (i.e., a specified content) stands for a plurality of similar external objects, it is difficult to understand how the object of an experience of particular instantiated features is grasped by the relevant specified general scheme which is the mean of information transmission. Particulars' individuation is a hard problem for the characterisation of mental states in terms of informational structures which are generality items. As such, once representationality is thought by means of generality items, representationality seems to clash with empirical evidence. In the second place, consider the internal dependency focus on representations as the essential character of mental states. The phenomenology of mental states completely consists of presentations of particulars. Where do contents come from? How do general abstract entities fit with such a phenomenology in having an explanatory role for the mental capacity of understanding its awareness of experiences?

Brewer soundly identifies the problem in terms of *referential circularity*. Any theory of perception whatsoever assumed, contents individuate their objects by a relation of fitting between the relevant conditions of specification and the particular thing identified. By common consensus among intentionalists, contents play this role by reference to the very identified thing. Nonetheless, the thing is identified by applying the fit content. Try to dismantle such circularity by assigning determinacy to how reference relates to perceptual content:

> If reference to an object O is extrinsic to perceptual content, then perception is incapable of explaining our capacity for reference; if reference to O is intrinsic to perceptual content then perception presupposes our capacity for reference and is therefore again incapable of explaining it. (Brewer 2017).

Contrary to intentionalism, direct realism is not engaged in a similar difficulty. According to the object view, experiences present worldly things. Experiences are relations between minds and the constituents of reality. Objects are absolute particulars. Acquaintance with objects is empirical access to such particularities. Acquaintance warrants reference to objects. Phenomenological evidence is then observed.

True: speaking of experiences involves using universal terms and universally quantified propositions. Ordinary linguistic practice assumes that the information provided by experiences is communicated and represented in epistemic and doxastic discourses according to a generality pattern modality. But this does not seem a real problem.

The semantic concern motivating representationalism implies accounting for the capability of conceiving generality such as kind-referring or predicating in a universally quantified

modality. Berkeley's theory of generality in terms of particulars that are extensionally related under a categorising label (i.e., block (C) of immaterialism, see above) answers the requisite.

The dispute between nominalism and realism towards abstract entities is not a matter of how conceptual capabilities apply to representing knowledge and beliefs but is an ontological problem about what exists and how to talk of existence (de Waal 1996). Experiences present absolute particulars. Berkeley develops his endorsement of nominalism respectfully to such a point (Stoneham 2017). Anti-abstractionism is basically motivated by the principle that *everything which exists, is particulars* (e.g., *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philosnous*, 1). This accounts for why Berkeley thinks that an illegitimate abstraction is involved in the notion of representation (e.g., in the economy of the *Treatise*, the conceivability argument dissolves the epistemic appeal of the notion of representation in view of the anti-abstractionist frame of the master argument as the key test for representationalism). Abstraction is basically abstraction from that all existences are particulars.

Now, despite of that experiences are direct presentations of particulars, humans learn to categorise particulars into kinds. There is no need to posit universal entities. Grouping by categorising labels suffices. According to traditional nominalism, such labels are the words of a language. Berkeley's position is not classical nominalism. He notes indeed that categorising does not imply full-blown conceptual capabilities. Inquiring about when exactly humans develop access to abstract entities, he asks:

> I would fain know at what time it is, Men are imployed in surmonting that Difficulty, and furnishing themselves with those necessary helps for Discourse. It cannot be when they are grown up, for then it seems they are not conscious of any such Pains-taking; it remains therefore to be the business of their Childhood. And surely, the great and multiplied Labour of framing abstract Notions, will be found a hard task for that tender Age. Is it not a hard thing to imagine, that a couple of Children cannot prate together, of their Sugar-plumbs and Rattles and the rest of their little Trinkets, till they have first tacked together numberless Inconsistencies, and so framed in their Minds *abstract general Ideas*, and annexed them to every common Name they make use of? (*Introduction*, 14).

Notoriously, Berkeley's idea is that worldly things come grouped together by similarities independently of conceptual tools for categorising (Tomida 2022). The focus on early age as the period of development of grouping capabilities is in line with much intentionalist literature. Theorists are sometimes tempted to introduce contents as preverbal categorisations. Mental states would be representations because contents are generalisation patterns that precede linguistic competence. Berkeley agrees: generalisation patterns are collections of extensionally related entities which are individuated by a particular instance of the collection. Minds experience particularities. Similar particularities are categorised together under a label. This label is not an abstract entity. It is one of the items of the collection which stands for any other. Any of these items falling under the categorising label is included in the collection extensionally. Collections are extensionally given by the list of their members. Having a concept P is to access the relevant collection of items falling under P, that is, saying that *some x is P* is to say that *this x belongs to the collection of all Ps*. Similarity relations among particulars suffice to construe informative collections. Empirical regularities testified by events can be given in terms of observed or observable collections of regularities among particulars. And so on.

There are problems with nominalism, sure. Sorting by similarity seems to imply higher

order grouping which relocates the issue of generality from features instantions to collections of things (it is evident that nominalists hold that this is not the case and that they have resources to fix the issue). Induction too is an issue. Experiences warrant similarity and regularities on contingent grounds. Acceptance of a degree of uncertainty in inductive inferences is not emendable in empiricism.

Nonetheless, nominalism is not engaged in entity stipulation. There is no problem with positing nonexperiential entities. We arrive here at a fundamental opposition between direct realists and representationalists. The former tolerates uncertainty because of aversion to positing nonexperiential objects; the latter tolerates abstracta because of aversion to uncertainty. However, the informativeness of experience is accounted for even in nominalist terms. What intentionalists think contents are necessary to, namely, providing general information packages from experiences, is constituted by particulars grouped together into collections of similars. Thinking about particular items is made available by direct reference to the relevant experience. Thinking of generality as experiential regularities or causation is made available by referring to extensionally construed collections of particulars. There is nothing abstract. Minds, experiences, and worldly things, that is all.

Berkeley's criticism of abstract ideas supplements then the conceivability argument by providing a story about generality items. Here an argument justified by (C):

1. Either experiences are direct presentations of the environment, or experiences have content, namely, they are representations, but not both;
2. If experiences are representations, experiences are pieces of instantiated general items, i.e., properties, kinds, states, and so on;
3. Experiences are absolute particulars;
4. If something is an absolute particular, it is not a piece of instantiated general items;
5. If experiences are absolute particulars, experiences are not pieces of instantiated general items (by substitution of (3) in (4));
6. Experiences are not pieces of instantiated general items (by MT: (3) & (5));
7. Experiences are not representations (by MT: (2) & (6));
8. Experiences are direct presentation of the environment (by DS: (1) & (7)).

A great deal of controversy arises about proposition (2). Berkeley holds that sorting by similarity does not involve abstracting because sorting by similarity is not to access contents but to group particular things extensionally. There is a cognitive break in how abstraction is modelled. Any account of experience in terms of content should be able to explain how a general scheme of information about particulars actually provides information about the individuated particular thing which is given within a determinate features instantiation. Berkeley's complaints about the impossibility of framing an abstract general idea give voice to this difficulty. Generality does not involve substantive abstract items to which all particulars refer. Within the object view, representationality consists of speaking about the direct objects of experience. The relation is internal to experience. Grouping is then to refer to the worldly things presented by experiences. The extensional structure of any conceiving of generality has a grip in terms of such referring. I speak about apples. I represent the features of apples. I access information about apples. Some of these are directly empirical, my own or someone else's. Others are provided with access to

evidence that can be found within the public domain of discourse on apples. One way or another, what I'm speaking about has a referential link to a collection of things that are presented in experience. That is, apples. Particulars apples. Particularity is linked to a plurality of particularities. Quantitative particularity does not imply qualitative evidence. Concepts are not relations to the essences of things, be essences Platonic forms, mental items, or whatever else.

Intentionalists rejecting (2) should develop an explanatory role for how it is possible that contents, which are patterns of similarities having no particular instantiation, may explain particular instantiation. The referential circularity vexing contents is then a problem with abstraction. For the sake of argument, Berkeley considers two basic ways of abstracting.

First, contents are compounds of all the possible features instantiated by particulars. This means that the general scheme of a thing is all features particulars things exhibit. According to an imagistic approach (the one Berkeley endorses), minds are not capable of similar conceptions. Any iconic, echoic, tactile, or however modally determinate content picks one value among a plurality of variables determinables. For instance, an apple is red or green. But neither conception of an apple can be both red and green. Contents so understood seem impossible. Consider the alternative, that is, the no imagistic approach (the one Berkeley does not discuss). Contents would be propositional or whatever else patterns for information transmission. Even in this case, they are conjunctions of all possible features for any relevant thing. The difficulty of accessing indefinitely extended conjunctive entities raises doubt about the proposal though. The problem is that generality implies that the scope of possible features cannot be contingent on limited experiential cases. How contents are thought to be working in identifying things and epistemically making experiences meaningful involves that contents are not completely subject to empirical training and experiential growth. They cannot be fully dependent on the particular epistemic history enjoyed by a mind. They are what constitutes experience, not what is constituted by experience. Otherwise, contents are no more contents but assimilate to the extensionally construed generality conceptions assumed by the object view.

In any case, independently of these issues, namely, whether contents are imagistic or not and whether imagistic abstract conceptions or propositional abstract conceptions are available to humans or not, the reference to object by contents is evidentially undetermined. If contents are saturated items of all features that particulars exhibit, contents are uninformative about a particular presentation enjoyed within an experience. They would represent all things, not the particular ones involved in the presentation. This being the case, they cannot identify anything in particular and they cannot provide the relevant information. There is indeed no accessible reason accounting for how an instantiated feature of a thing is picked out among all the other.

Second, the contents are skeletal sketches with no determinacy of particular features. This being the case, contents are typically vague entities. Particulars falling under the extension of a skeletal identifying scheme are identified according to rules that cannot accommodate borderline cases. Consider identification by definition as an example of skeletal content. Any real thing is an approximation to the relevant geometrical definition. Ordinary language has no problem with identifying right angles. Nonetheless no actual referent of the expression right angles is strictly right. Each of the things that deviates from the exact definition evidently sets a problem of exactness about the range of application of the definition. Grossly speaking, no issues are at stake. Ordinary language is not strict. Strictly speaking, sorite paradoxes can be generated from how skeletal contents fit into collections of actual existences. Then, exactly the same problem of

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void representationality by totally saturated contents originates from void contents too. Empty generality cannot represent anything in particular. At least in reason of emptiness. Underdeterminacy implies an informational supplement in order to identify particulars. If intentionalists say that such a supplement is the particular thing presented in experience, it is not content which does the job. If they state it does, they can specify how. But they should resolve vagueness in abstraction. As a consequence, they should give up skeletal sketches. And they are newly confronted with the problem of the first characterisation of abstraction.

Berkeley's criticism of abstraction points then to the core explanatory issue of content stipulation within representationalism.

6. *Empiricism and Metaphysics*

Intentionalism seems unsteady by a threefold difficulty. Firstly, the representational claim assumes that semantic understanding consists of mapping the brain states which constitutes the appearance the mind is aware of, that is, *phenomenal character*, to those external objects that contents specify as what such states are about. But, such a relation is internal to mental states. The object view's resistance to the vocabulary of phenomenal character and content relies on that what is allegedly grasped by the term content is not something outside phenomenal character. If a theorist cannot help from modelling the evidential information provided by enjoying an experience in terms of content, they should say that contents are not about external items: they are about phenomenal character, namely, about the direct appearance of things. The representational grip of the propositions expressing the experiential access to the environment completely concerns the objects presented by experience. Reasons in support of propositions (3) and (4) in the conceivability argument identify this flaw of the intentionalist stance and explain why such a flaw infects any explanatory appeal of the notion of representation. Secondly, intentionalism widely traffics with entity stipulation. For one side, it posits against evidence that mental states are representations, postulating the existence of experiential something that minds are not aware of. But, the transparency of experience is blindness to such a move. For the other, it posits indirect objects outside experience. But, internal dependency makes such a positing unaccountable. The conceivability argument provides evidence that, contrary to the common usage, neither transparency nor internal dependency are reasons in support of intentionalism. Thirdly, while experiences are presentational occurrences of absolute particulars, intentionalism characterises phenomenology by means of abstract general entities. According to the representational claim, mental states are framed by generality: they are skeletal sketches of information to be filled by particular instantiated features. Awareness of particulars is made possible by manipulating abstracta. In my view, an empiricist-oriented attitude should be suspicious of an oddity such as treating particularity in terms of abstraction. Prima facie empirical evidence testifies against a similar proposal. In any case, the anti-abstractionist supplement to the conceivability argument shows a strategy to disentangle abstraction and generality by a promising extensionalist approach. There is no need to read the informative flow of experiences by means of abstract entities as contents: nominalist devices suffice.

At this point, I can return to my starting point. Both ancient and contemporary Platonists

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hold that abstract entities are needed to the extent of understanding experience. Their stipulation originates from the ontological commitments of the relevant domains of discourse. Ancient Platonists are ready to posit Forms in a very liberal manner and they have no problem with realms of reality wherein Forms subsist. Contemporary Platonists are certainly more parsimonious and they show to be mostly reticent about the ontology of a third territory of subsistence beyond minds and the world.

Intentionalists of all sorts, siding with conceptualist theorists of any age, relocate the Platonist bulimia towards entities stipulation within consciousness and mental facts.

Common to all is that understanding experience requires postulating substantive facts about the identity of things and their similarity relations. Representationality is the main road to reify such facts into an epistemic dispositive. Contents are accordingly posited as the formats by which representationality works. Minds would then experience the world by means of essences, be these semantic structures or pragmatical performances of kind-referring. The triangular pattern of minds, things, and representations save phenomena from the holistic tendency of numerical monism defending architectonic pluralism towards difference and singularity of meaningful events.

Empiricism opposes reification as a strategy to dismiss similar worries because representationalism involves entity stipulation and an unpalatable metaphysical approach to experience. As Plato, empiricists reject propositions (3) and (8) of the like and unlike argument. Resemblance does not involve likeness; nonresemblance does not involve unlikeness. But they go far more radical in depth. While Plato dissolves the natures of things within things and posits them into a realm of essences with which things are in a constitutive relationship, empiricists give up essences as well. In any modality they can occur. The key move is to assume absolute particulars as ontological basic items. Generality is accordingly defined by sorting in an extensional manner. This blocks semantic ascent leading to numerical monism without positing substantive similarities. You can group things as you like. Conceiving regularities and informational packages is a matter of interpreting reality from a standpoint. No problem with the architecture of collections arises. The same multiplicity of things falls under different categorisations in view of the relevant collecting rules at work. There is no necessity of properties, universals, and the like. There is a perspectival look at the world instead. This does not mean that reality is made subjective. Experience provides a grip on the observational adequacy of identity and similarities. Experience presents how things stand there independently of categorisations. Epistemic variations concern simply the way minds handle such objective realms in terms of orientated domains of discourse.

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ISSN 2385-216X

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