

Theory and History of Ontology (www.ontology.co) by Raul Corazzon | e-mail: rc@ontology.co

Kazimierz Twardowski on the Content and Object of Presentations

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Introduction

"It is not easy to characterize Twardowski's place in the history of Polish philosophy. This is always difficult with regard to those persons who sacrifice their own creativeness to initiate a school or a movement which may reach a culminating point in the next generation. Twardowski was not so original a thinker, or at any rate not so accomplished as some of his pupils. He gave rise to the analytical movement in Poland, but himself belonged to the period of transition. His original contributions were in the philosophy of mind, which later was developed by Meinong as the theory of object, and which inspired Husserl to create a new branch of philosophy-phenomenology. Twardowski's merit was to advocate effectively the classical (correspondence) concept of truth, the extensive discussion of which accelerated the emergence of semantics in the narrower sense as contrasted with syntax. His greatness lay in his teaching, which led to the creation of a school of philosophy of international reputation. His importance for Poland goes beyond philosophy. One might say about him what John Stuart Mill said about his father: 'He did not revolutionize or create one of the great departments of human thought. But in the power of influencing by mere force of mind and character the convictions and purposes of others, he left few equals among men.' " (p. 55)

From: Henryk Sklolimowski, *Polish Analytical Philosophy. A Survey and a Comparison with British Analytical Philosophy*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1967.

"Twardowski's little book (...) is one of the most remarkable works in the history of modern philosophy. It is concise, clear, and -- in Findlay's words -- "amazingly rich in ideas." (1) It is therefore a paradigm of what some contemporary philosophers approvingly call 'analytic philosophy.' But Twardowski's book is also of considerable historical significance. His views reflect Brentano's earlier position and thus shed some light on this stage of Brentano's philosophy. Furthermore, they form a link between this stage, on the one hand, and those two grandiose attempts to propagate rationalism in an age of science, on the other hand, which are known as Meinong's theory of entities and Husserl's phenomenology. Twardowski's views thus point to the future and introduce many of the problems which, through the influence of Meinong, Husserl, Russell, and Moore, have become standard fare in contemporary philosophy." (p. VII)

From: Reinhardt Grossmann, "Introduction" to: Kasimir Twardowski, *On the Content and Object of Presentations*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff 1997.

Twardowski's ontology

"1. One of the characteristic features of modern ontology relates to the distinction between a *Dasein* and a *Sosein* of objects -- that is, between the existence of objects and their properties. Most of modern ontology is *Daseinsfrei*: it is an ontology of the nature of objects in general as they are given to thought. And it is this feature that distinguishes modern ontology from traditional metaphysics, since this ontology concerns objects as things (*res*) and not their existence. (1) This was already to be seen in the school of Brentano, but its origins are in effect even older and can be traced back to the Middle Ages and to the Stoic interpretation of Aristotle, which passed on to Wolff. Starting from Kant the role played by the acts of consciousness has become a fundamental component of ontology.

2. As regards Twardowski's ontology, I shall try to specify its Kantian commitment. Since this analysis is somewhat pioneering, I shall present it in the form of a proposal. Moreover, I shall confine myself to his book of 1894, *Zur Lehre vom Inhalt und Gegenstand der Vorstellungen*. The following features will be of service to my proposal:

- a) Its descriptive basis stemming from Brentanian psychology. Twardowski's ontology, like Brentano's, is grounded in inner perception: it is concerned not with the genesis but with the description of the elements of consciousness. (2)
- b) The distinction between act, content and object in presentation (*Vorstellung*). (3)
- c) The primacy of the act over the contents of consciousness. In fact every presentation is an act which possesses an intentional object. In the case of Twardowski the intentional object is the content of the act, which pictures an image (*Bild*) the external object of presentation. (4)
- d) The consequent distinction concerning the act of presentation of two different directions: 1. towards the object, which is presented in a modified way by consciousness, and 2. towards the content, which is presented in a determinate way. (5)
- e) The presence of Kantianism, as Twardowski points out on several occasions in his text, especially at the outset of his ontological analysis (i.e. the description of the object of presentation), in the concept of characteristic, and in its conclusion, concerning the nature of general objects. (6)" (pp. 26-27)

Notes

(1) According to this ontology, existence is a mode or an attribute, not an essential property of all objects. The objects of ontology, therefore, are possible objects.

(2) As we shall see, certain basic concepts in Twardowski's ontology like the object in general, a the outcome of genetic research in the phenomenological sense.

(3) We translate the German word *Vorstellung* as presentation rather than representation, pointing out the Brentanian meaning of this term: presentation, in fact, refers to the intentional character of

the consciousness, directed towards an intentional object. It is worth noting that the term *Vorstellung* has Kantian origin. Also in the case of Kant, then, we shall adopt presentation instead of representation, even if we are conscious that also in Kant the term is not univocal. Put briefly, we could speak of the representation only at the level of concepts.

(4) The intentional object is the secondary object of presentation and coincides with the content, by means of which the object is presented. On this see Husserl's criticism: Twardowski, according to Husserl, does not distinguish between the mental picture (*Bild*) proper of content, which has a psychological root, and ideal meaning (*Bedeutung*). See *Logische Untersuchungen* (Hua XVII), E. Heidegger ed., 1975, *First Investigation*. Content may vary in relation to different presentations of an object, says Husserl, however meaning remains identical. Meaning is not a constitutive part of the act, it is not psychological but logical. Moreover picture is only a special case of intentional consciousness, related to imagination: in literature or science, in fact, presentations do not occur by means of pictures. What matters, according to Husserl, is the individual capacity to refer to the object on the basis of mental picture. On this see K. Schuhmann, "Husserl and Twardowski", forthcoming. [published in: Coniglione, Francesco, Poli, Roberto, Wolenski, Jan (eds.) - *Polish Scientific Philosophy: The Lvov-Warsaw School* - Amsterdam, Rodopi, 1993, pp. 41-58]

(5) There is still a way in which also the object is given in a determinate way, which is opposed to all others, as *etwas überhaupt* in presentation.

(6) K. Twardowski, *Zur Lehre vom Inhalt und Gegenstand der Vorstellungen. Eine psychologische Untersuchung*, 7 and 15.

From: Liliana Albertazzi, "Is there a transcendental Object?," in: *Theories of Objects: Meinong and Twardowski*, edited by Jacek Pasniczek, Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej 1992, p. 26-44.