

Relational intrinsic representation

Many things may be said to have content, but most of them do so indirectly: they have content in virtue, for example, of having been produced in a certain way or with certain intentions, or of standing in some relation to other things that have content. The most important such relation is that of some things expressing other things. It is in virtue of expressing my beliefs that my utterances have content, and – subject to certain constraints – the beliefs expressed determine what content they have.

Most contentful things thus have their content extrinsically: they mean what they do in virtue of other things having a certain content. At some point, however, the bucket must stop: if there are any representational properties at all, some things must have them intrinsically. Because they are representational, however, they are relational even when exemplified intrinsically: they represent something other than themselves, creating a relation between their bearer and the things they make their bearer be about.

This category, of relational intrinsics, has not received the attention it deserves. It raises fascinating, and difficult puzzles, some of which I will address in my talk. The category has an interesting dual in the category of the non-relational extrinsic. According to what Chisholm calls “Brentano’s Thesis” – that intentionality is the mark of the mental – intentional properties are extrinsic, but non-relational. They are extrinsic, because they are signs, but non-relational, because they are characterised by “intentional inexistence”: psychological states may exist even in the absence of what they are about. Perhaps surprisingly, intrinsic but relational representation and extrinsic but non-relational intentionality are compatible.

Representational properties like *meaning that* Fa , *representing* a to be F or *thinking of* a as F are intrinsically exemplified by some thing x iff x exemplifies the property independently of how matters stand with respect to other things than x – no further properties have to be exemplified for other things for my thought, e.g., to represent a to be F . That some representational properties are exemplified intrinsically by some things follows from the following argument:

- (i) Some things have representational properties.
- (ii) If something exemplifies a representational property extrinsically, it does so in virtue of a relation that bestows it with this representational property.
- (iii) In order for something to bestow something else with a representational property, the first thing needs to exemplify this representational property itself.
- (iv) The transmission of representational powers can neither go on forever, nor go in circle: it must be started by something.
- (v) A thing that has a representational property that is not bestowed upon it by something else exemplifies it intrinsically.

Even when they are exemplified intrinsically, however, representational properties are still relational: they connect their bearers to the things they are about. If my thought, for example, represents a to be F , it stands in the relation of aboutness to a and in the predication relation to the universal F . It is in virtue of these relations that my thought can stand in for a 's being F , and be in some sense further to be specified a substitute of this external fact.

The representationality of some properties has to be sharply distinguished from their intentionality. A property of something is intentional iff it is *taken to be* about something else than itself. It is so taken to be if we attribute to it conditions under which it may be said to be correct. Correctness conditions specify the intentional content, but – being conditions – do not themselves require this content to be satisfied. If I am looking for the Holy Grail, for example, my activity is directed towards, and rationalisable only with respect to the Holy Grail, which, or so let's assume, does not exist. I am intentionally directed towards the Holy Grail, without standing in a relation to it: there is nothing, after all, for me to stand in a relation to.

Because they are outward-directed, and cannot be accounted for without reference to their intentional objects, intentional states are extrinsic: they are what they are in virtue of participating in a complex process, which not only involves their objects, their bearer, but also a process of interpretation or understanding.

In my talk, I will try to substantiate these claims and provide them with enough detail to make them evaluable for their truth or falsity.