

Kasimir Twardowski on the content of presentations

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Abstract In *On the Content and Object of Presentations*, Kasimir Twardowski presents an interesting line of thought concerning the content of a presentation and its relation to the object of that presentation. This way of thinking about content is valuable for understanding phenomenal intentionality, and it should also be important for the project of “naturalizing” the mental (or at least for discovering the neural correlates of the phenomenal). According to this view, content is that by virtue of which a presentation of an object presents a certain object and no other. In the cases in which an object is presented as simple, there is nothing more that can be said about the relation of content and object. It is *sui generis*: the relation of content to an object by virtue of which it presents that object. Further, the content of a presentation is never itself directly presented. The content can only be gotten at indirectly, as the content by which such and such object is presented. Where the presented object is complex—as is of course the normal case—a lot that is useful can be said about the structure of the content. In this paper, I lay out Twardowski's theory of the content of presentations. Since the business of content is to present its object, I briefly present the basics of Twardowski's mereology of objects.

Keywords Content of presentations · Phenomenal intentionality · Mereology

Every mental phenomenon is characterized by what the Scholastics of the Middle Ages called the intentional (or mental) inexistence of an object, and what we might call, though not wholly unambiguously, reference to a content, direction toward an object (which is not to be understood here as meaning a thing), or immanent objectivity. Every mental phenomenon includes something as object within itself....

Franz Brentano, 1874/1995, p. 88

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[Twardowski's *Zu Lehre vom Inhalt und Gegenstand der Vorstellungen*] is unquestionably one of the most interesting treatises in the whole range of modern philosophy; it is clear, concentrated, and amazingly rich in ideas.

J.N. Findley 1963, p. 8

If you know anything at all about Kasimir Twardowski's philosophy,¹ you probably know that he holds that every presentation has both a content and an object.² In the relatively sparse literature on Twardowski, not much attention has been paid to what he has to say about the *content* of presentations. The content of a presentation is that by virtue of which the presentation presents its object—what it is of or about. There is, in Twardowski's (1894/1977) *On the Content and Object of Presentations*, an interesting line of thought concerning the content of a presentation and its relation to the object of that presentation that is valuable for understanding phenomenal intentionality. This way of thinking about content should also be important for the project that dominates analytic philosophy of mind, that of “naturalizing” the mental (or at least for discovering the neural correlates of the phenomenal). It is not clear that Twardowski consistently maintains all the tenets of this view of content. There are places where he says things that seem to conflict with it. But it does seem to be the dominant and official view.

According to this view, content is that by virtue of which a presentation of an object presents a certain object and no other. In the cases in which an object is presented as simple—that is, no structure of the object is presented—there is nothing more that can be said about the relation of content and object. It is *sui generis*: the relation of content to an object by virtue of which it presents that object. Further, the content of a presentation is never itself directly presented. There can, of course, be presentations of content, but such presentations can only be indirect, as the content through which such and such object is presented. Where the presented object is complex in some way—as is of course the normal case—Twardowski has much that is useful and insightful to say about the structure of the content and its relation to its object.

Whether or not it is ultimately the view one should adopt, Twardowski's view of content is a valuable one to have in mind when one is thinking about phenomenal intentionality, or the intentionality of consciousness. One aim of this paper is to point out some reasons why Twardowski's view of content is valuable. However, even insofar as it is valuable, it cannot be the whole story. In particular, he holds that all objects of presentations are literally *objects*, anything that can be referred to by a noun phrase. There are no sententially structured objects. That is, no objects of mental acts are the sorts of things called propositions or states of affairs (Chapter 2). Most

¹ Kasimir Twardowski (1866–1938) is credited with founding the Polish tradition of analytic philosophy. See, for example, Betti (2010), Woleński (1989), Poli (1996), and Smith (1994), Chapter 6.

² Presentations (*Vorstellungen*) are phenomenally conscious intentional acts. Twardowski does not explicitly say this. In the intellectual milieu in which he wrote, this went without saying. Perhaps it needs to be said today.

will find this unacceptable. It is surprising, however, how far one can go thinking of content as object or noun-phrase structured and how much of cognition this can illuminate.

The sections “Presentations, contents, and objects” and “Every presentation has an object” briefly explain Twardowski's view of presentations and his reasons for holding that every presentation has an object. Since the business of content is to present its object, the section “Twardowski's mereology of objects” presents the basics of Twardowski's mereology of objects. Finally, the section “Content” presents Twardowski's account of content.

Presentations, contents, and objects

The famous passage (above) in which Brentano introduced the term “intentional” into the discussion of the mental is something of a mess. Brentano succeeds in introducing the idea that it is characteristic of the mental to be directed toward or about something. But he is unsure what to call what mental acts are about. He calls it both object and content, and he puts it in the act. It has, he says, intentional inexistence; it is an immanent objectivity. This internal object or content or whatever is what Brentano calls a physical phenomenon. Twardowski's book can be seen as aiming at clearing up this mess.^{3,4} He maintains that every mental act—every presentation—involves both a content and an object. Thus, we need to distinguish three things with respect to a mental act: the presentation or act itself, the content of the presentation, and the object of the presentation. Indeed, every presentation has exactly one content and exactly one object. In the literature following Brentano's *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, to which Twardowski is responding, both the content and the object of presentations are said to be “presented.” Unfortunately, Twardowski does not question this practice; he does provide a way to clear up the ambiguity that could result.

For Twardowski, to make a judgment is to affirm or deny an object, that is, to affirm or deny the existence of the object. To judge (or believe) that the paper is white is to affirm the object, the whiteness of the paper. The very same object can be the object of a (mere) presentation or the object of a judgment. Likewise, one can love or hate/abhor an object. In general, then, anything that one affirms or denies, perceives, imagines, remembers, loves, hates, desires, or fears is the object of a presentation. And any object of a presentation can be the object of any cognitive or conative act. Thus, presentations are at the core of all mental

³ This is not to say that others had not aimed to distinguish content and object. Twardowski mentions several authors who had done so, including some who had gotten the relation of content and object more or less right by his lights. But, as he makes clear, they all have a hard time consistently adhering to the correct relationship. See section “Content” below.

⁴ Current uses of ‘content’ and ‘object’ vary considerably, and often depend upon the author's theory. Often, after introducing the idea of intentionality in terms of mental acts having objects, items on the side of the objects are referred to as content. However, it is not necessarily Twardowski's terminology that I wish to advocate—though I find it useful in many cases—but his theory of the structure of certain mental acts.

acts (pp. 6f. 35),⁵ and it is the nature of presentations that is the focus of Twardowski's book.

We see here an important feature of Twardowski's view. All objects of presentations, and hence all objects of any mental act, are structured like noun phrases, not sentences (p. 34). There are no propositions or states of affairs in Twardowski's theory of presentations. Anything that can be designated by any noun phrase can be the object of a presentation (or judgment or emotion).⁶

In Chapter 3, Twardowski relates his view to language as follows. All categorematic linguistic signs have three functions.⁷: first, to make known that a certain mental act occurs in the speaker; second, to arouse in the hearer the same content as the content of that mental act; the content is the linguistic meaning of the categorematic word or phrase; and third, to designate an object (by way of that content). That is, a meaningful utterance of a categorematic linguistic sign requires a mental act with a certain content or meaning; it typically aims to bring that content to the attention of the audience, and it refers to the object that is presented through that content.

Twardowski then (Chapter 4) makes an interesting linguistic point and an interesting analogy, which come into play later. He distinguishes between attributive or determining uses and modifying uses of adjectives. Attributive uses of adjectives are the ordinary uses that decrease or increase the extension of the noun they modify. A happy man is a man. Modifying uses cancel the attribution of the property referred to by the noun and change the extension. A dead man is no longer a man. A small diamond is a diamond; a fake diamond is not a diamond. Many adjectives can have either function, depending on context. A false judgment is still a judgment; a false friend is no friend.

Twardowski says that "presented" is ambiguous in this way and uses this to explain why one says both that the object is presented and that the content is presented. He starts with an example that he says is "completely analogous." Twardowski points out that the adjective "painted" produces cases of attributive/modifying ambiguity. Consider the noun phrase "a painted landscape." This might refer to a painting hanging in a museum. This is a modifying use of "painted." It is a painting *of* a landscape. On the other hand, the phrase "a painted landscape" could also refer to an actual portion of land that can be seen in a single view; this is the landscape that is depicted in the painting in the museum. An area with trees and rocks and so forth became a *painted* landscape by virtue of the activity of the artist.

Twardowski says that "presented" can be treated the same way. We can say either of the content or of the object of a presentation that it is presented. When we say of the object that it is presented, this is a straightforward attributive use of the adjective "presented." In the

⁵ Page references are to Reinhardt Grossmann's translation, *On the Content and Object of Presentation* (1977), of Twardowski's *Zu Lehre vom Inhalt und Gegenstand der Vorstellungen*. The passage in the 1982 edition of *Zu Lehre* can be found by adding two or, occasionally, three.

⁶ Twardowski refers (pp. 25f.) approvingly to the idiogenetic theory of judgment according to which all judgments can be reduced to positive existential judgments (Some S is P) and universal negative judgments (No S is P), both of which are easily changed to noun phrases. Shortly after publishing his book, he came to see this view as inadequate and to accept something like states of affairs (Betti and Van Der Schaar 2004).

⁷ By a categorematic sign, Twardowski means a linguistic sign that has a meaning that is not solely determined by context and which does not express a judgment or perform a speech act.

case of an actually existing object, it simply means that the object has entered into a certain relation with a cognizer; the object is perceived or thought about (pp. 13, 14; cf. the discussion of the apple, p. 40.). But, Twardowski says, we also say that the content is presented. In this case, “The expression ‘presented’ is a modifying determination of the object; for the presented object is no longer an object, but is merely the content of a presentation (p. 13).” “To the verb ‘to present’ there corresponds—in a similar fashion as to the verb ‘to paint’—first of all, two things: an object which is presented and a content which is presented. The content is the picture; the object, the landscape (*Ibid.*).”

These remarks are philosophically unfortunate in at least two ways. The comparison of content to a painting as “completely analogous” sounds like a mental-image notion of content, as does the anticipation of Chapter 4 in the last paragraph of Chapter 2 (p. 7). As we will see, this is not the conception of the relation between content and object that is articulated when that relation is the primary topic of discussion. We might charitably say that perhaps Twardowski adopts the mental-image way of speaking to facilitate getting across his point about the modifying use of “presented.” Second, the content certainly is in the presentation in some sense. But it is at best odd to say that the content is *presented* in the presentation, especially in light of the account of content that Twardowski develops later in the book (“Content” section, below), and I will not follow him in this.

Having adopted the language that both content and object are presented, Twardowski needs a way to distinguish them. Following Robert Zimmermann, he says that the content is presented *in* the presentation. “We shall say of the object that it is presented through the content of the presentation (or through the presentation).” Thus, “What is presented *in* a presentation is its content; what is presented *through* a presentation is its object (p. 16).” However, saying, as he also does in the first sentence quoted here, that the object is presented through the content (of the presentation) gets more exactly the role of the content.

Every presentation has an object

Chapters 5 and 6 of *On the Content and Object of Presentations* are entitled “So-called ‘Objectless’ Presentations” and “The Difference between Content and Object.” These chapters form a package-deal argument that has the consequence that every presentation has an object that is distinct from its content. In Chapter 5, he first considers three sorts of presentations (or, in the first case, alleged presentations) that have been put forward as presentations that do not have objects: “Firstly, presentations which involve in a straightforward way the negation of any object, like the presentation of *nothing*. Secondly, presentations to which there correspond no objects because their contents combine incompatible determinations, for example, *round square*.” Thirdly, presentations to which no object corresponds as a matter of empirical fact (p. 19).

As for “nothing,” he argues (rather subtly) that this is not a categorematic term and hence does not designate a presentation at all (p. 19).⁸

He treats the second and third types of allegedly objectless presentations together because the basic point is the same. If what one is thinking about does not exist, still, one is thinking about something. If one uses the expression, “oblique square,” for

⁸ It seems to be customary to remind readers that this is what Carnap said to Heidegger.

example, we find the three functions of names. It makes known that there is a certain act of presentation in the user. It aims to arouse the content of this presentation in the hearer; this content is the meaning of the expression. But the expression also designates something, something whose existence one is immediately inclined to deny. There must be an object whose existence one denies. Furthermore, the mental act attributes obliqueness and squareness to that object. That is why one immediately denies its existence. Later (p. 28) in this discussion, he says the object has these properties. And this seems to follow from his theory of the object.⁹

But there is a likely objection. “The object of a presentation in whose content contradictory characteristics are presented does not exist; yet one asserts that it is presented; hence it exists after all, namely, as a presented object (p. 22).” But if something exists as the object of a presentation, “then this is no genuine existence.” The phrase “as the object of a presentation” is a modifying expression. “Something which exists as an object of a presentation does in truth not exist at all, but is merely presented (Ibid.).”¹⁰

Thus, Twardowski is committed to objects that do not exist standing in at least some relations, in particular the intentional relation of being presented (in a presentation, through a content, to a subject). In fact, he holds that nonexistent objects can stand in all sorts of ordinary relations, both to existing objects and to other nonexistent objects (p. 28).

In Chapter 6, Twardowski considers a move that he says some might find tempting. One might maintain that, although when the object exists, the content and object are distinct, when the object does not exist, content and object are the same; there is only a logical difference. That is, in this case, content and object are really one, but this one entity is sometimes considered object, sometimes content, depending upon the point of view one adopts. But this is wrong. “If one makes a true judgment which denies an object, then one must surely have a presentation of the object which one judges and denies. The object is therefore presented by means of a corresponding content. Whenever this is the case, the content exists, but the object does not, for it is this object which is denied in a true negative judgment (p. 27).”¹¹

⁹ The first of these ways of talking seems defensible—that is, we can say that we *attribute* properties to nonexistent objects. Arthur Conan Doyle attributed being a detective to Sherlock Holmes. If, as happens in some TV plots, you make up an intruder to explain the disappearance of something, you attribute properties to the (nonexistent) intruder. But the second way of talking—that the object *has* these properties—does not seem acceptable. No detective is Sherlock Holmes. And nothing has the property of being the intruder.

¹⁰ Actually, it seems that what he should say is that something that exists as the object of a presentation *may* not exist. “As the object of a presentation” is like “alleged.” An alleged thief need not be a thief. But an alleged thief might also be an actual thief. And what exists as an object of a presentation may also actually exist.

¹¹ Husserl (1994) objects to this already in the review of *On Content and Object* that he wrote in 1896 but did not publish. In this review, he also criticizes Twardowski for not recognizing the ideal nature of content. He repeats this criticism in *Logical Investigations* (1901) (V, §45), rather harshly, in my opinion, and in *Ideas* (1913) (§129). But Twardowski does in fact make the relevant distinction. “[T]he content in our sense is not the same as the act. It does form together with the act one single mental reality, but while the act of having a presentation is something real, the content of the presentation always lacks reality (p. 29).” That is, the act occurs in space and time (is real), whereas the content of the act is not located in space and time, but is repeatable in many acts (lacks reality, is ideal). The repeatability obviously follows from his account of language. Smith and McIntyre (1982, p. 112) suggest that Husserl is not being fair to Twardowski and say that it is not clear that Twardowski could not accommodate Husserl’s notion of ideal content. But they cite only a not particularly revealing footnote (note 5, p. 15) in *On Content and Object*; Cavallin (1997) correctly sees that Twardowski does make the distinction Husserl criticizes him for not making (p. 88).

In this chapter, Twardowski also argues that content is different from objects because the same object can be presented through different contents.

For one conceives of something quite different when conceiving of the city which is located at the site of the Roman Juvavum from what one conceives of when conceiving of the birthplace of Mozart. These two presentations consist of very different parts. The first contains as parts the presentations of Romans and of an ancient city forming a fortified camp; the second contains as parts the presentations of a composer and the relation in which he stands to his native city.... In spite of these great differences between the parts of the contents both contents intend one and the same object (p. 29).

Thus, we consider two presentations that have as object the city of Salzburg. One of these presentations contains a content that has a (material) part that presents Mozart and which could occur alone as a content through which the composer is presented, as well as a (material) part that presents a certain relationship to Mozart. The other content has a part through which Romans are presented. And so forth. In Russellian terms, there are two descriptions that have the same denotation. These descriptions do not refer to or specify contents. The descriptions specify relational properties of the *object*, aspects (broadly speaking) of the object by which we can think of that object. In Twardowski's position, the contents are the meanings of the descriptions, which present the object by presenting these relational properties of the object. For Russell, of course, there are no such contents or meanings in this sense (see below, p. 19).

Twardowski rejects another argument that has been given for distinguishing between content and object (p. 31). The argument is that a general presentation presents a plurality of objects but contains only one content. He rejects this argument because, as he argues in the final Chapter, 15, general presentations do not present a plurality of objects. Consider, for example, the general presentation, *pictures hanging in this room*. In order to count the objects falling under this general presentation, one needs presentations of these pictures as individual objects. The number of pictures falling under the general presentation cannot be determined from the general presentation alone. That is, the general presentation does not present the objects falling under it. "What is presented through a general presentation presents a group of constituents that are common to several objects (p. 100)." A group of constituents is, for Twardowski, a single object; it is a *group*.

In Chapter 14, he argues that the kind of presentations that are called indirect present a single object. The main examples he considers there are the human eye and a land without mountains. The phrase "the human eye" designates a kind of eye. (The designation of the phrase, recall, is the object presented through the content that is the meaning of the phrase.) It does not designate human beings. Likewise, the phrase, "a land without mountains" designates a flat country, not mountains. And in the quote above, the presentation that contains as a part the content that presents the birthplace of Mozart is a presentation of Salzburg, not of Mozart. If, for example, one wants to visit the birthplace of Mozart, then one wants to visit Salzburg, not Mozart. It is, to be sure, a presentation of Salzburg indirectly, by way of a ("helping") presentation of Mozart, but that does not make it a presentation of Mozart.

Thus, these last two chapters (14 on indirect presentations and 15 on general presentations) allow Twardowski to maintain that every presentation has one content and one object. Summing up, he says "Everything that is presented through a

presentation, that is affirmed or denied, that is desired or detested through an emotion, we call an object.... Everything which is the widest sense 'something' is called 'object,' first of all in regard to a subject, but then also regardless of this relationship (p. 37)."¹²

If one says something like, "I'm thinking about someone who might do the job for us" or "I have someone in mind for the job," there must be some actual person that you are thinking about (barring untimely death). But if you say (truly) something like, "I have thought of something we have to guard against for our project to succeed," then you have thought of something in the broadest sense, and presumably you hope that it is something that will never exist. Whenever you are thinking, you are thinking of something, and apart from thinking of actual persons and physical objects, it is plausible that most of what one thinks of does not exist.

Twardowski's mereology of objects

Since what content does is present its object, a good deal must be said about objects in order to understand content. Furthermore, as we will see, one cannot think about content except indirectly, and the best access to content is by way of the object it presents. For each of the various aspects of an object that you can be aware of, there must be a corresponding aspect of the content that does the presenting of that aspect of the object.

Twardowski intends his account of objects to be completely general, to apply to any possible object. It is probably not a good idea to think of physical objects as the best examples of objects of thought, although of course, his account is intended to apply to them as well. First of all, objects have what Twardowski calls *material constituents* (Chapter 9).¹³ A book has a cover and pages. A city has neighborhoods, houses, streets, public buildings, etc. A number series is made up of numbers. An hour is composed of minutes. Minutes are composed of seconds. The seconds are also parts of the hour. So both minutes and seconds are material constituents of an hour. But often, the parts of parts are not thought of as parts of the object. Twardowski gives the example of the windows of a house. The house is part of the city. The windows are part of the house. But ordinarily, the windows of the house are not thought of as parts of the city. Two steps of analysis are involved. In such a case, Twardowski calls the house a material constituent of first order. The windows of the house, in this example, are material constituents of second order of the city.

Many objects are made up of different types of material constituents. A baseball game is made up of innings, which are made up of at bats, etc. But a baseball game is also made up of players, etc. And in a different way, the game contains bats and balls and gloves and players' uniforms and umpires. All of these are different kinds of

¹² It should be obvious how this could have (and did) influenced Meinong. But perhaps, it also shows why Meinong is sane. Cf. Grossman's Introduction to *On the Content and Object of Presentations* (p. xvii).

¹³ Material constituents can be thought of as parts of an object, taking "part" "in its widest sense [to include] everything that can be distinguished in or about the object of a presentation, irrespective of whether one can speak of a real analysis into the distinguishable parts or merely of an analysis in thought (pp. 46f.)." So, the hue, lightness, and saturation are material constituents of the color of the cover of the book (p. 72).

material constituents of the game in a fairly natural sense of “constituent.” Twardowski also considers an object's relations to other objects among its constituents. This might seem a terminological stretch, but there is insight behind the terminology. You might think of the game as the second game of a series or as, say, the 54th game of the season. The relations to the previous game, to the series as an object, and to the season count as material constituents. These are things about the game that matter for its identity; a win or a loss in the game, for example, affects the team's season record and place in the standings. I say a bit more on behalf of this terminology shortly.

More interesting are what Twardowski calls the formal constituents of objects. For each of the material constituents (of first order) of an object, there is the relationship between that constituent and the object as a whole—the relation, that is, of it being a material constituent of the object. Twardowski calls such relations *primary formal constituents (in the strict sense)*. He also considers these relations to be the *properties* of the object. Consider a red triangle. Some philosophers call its red color and its particular shape *properties* of the triangle. Others consider its *being* red or *having* that precise shape to be the properties of the triangle. Twardowski opts for the latter, in part because it is more general. One example he gives is a regiment of an army. The regiment is a part of the army—a material constituent of the first order. But it is not a property of the army. On the other hand, having that regiment as one of its regiments is (or can comfortably be called) one of its properties. To remind us that the properties of an object are the relations of belonging between its material constituents and the object as a whole, he sometimes calls these relations *property relations*.¹⁴

It is properties in this sense “by virtue of which the parts form a whole... (p. 56).” The object of your thought is the *army* when you think of it as *having* this regiment as one of its regiments. It is by virtue of the totality of such relations that you are thinking of the army as such and not of a collection of regiments or a collection of soldiers.

In general, for any object of thought, anything one thinks of, there are various aspects of that object that one thinks of in that act, including the object's relations to other objects. Twardowski calls all of these aspects “material constituents of first order.” The *formal* constituents of first order are the particular relations between each such constituent of the object and the object itself by virtue of which that constituent is considered a constituent of the object. It is these relations that make it *that object* that one is thinking of and that constitute it as a presented unity.

There are also ordinary relations between an object and its material constituents. An hour, for example, is longer than a minute; a physical object is larger than any of its proper parts. A part of an object may bear the relation of similarity to the object as a whole. All such relations Twardowski calls *primary formal relations in an extended sense* (pp. 50 f.).

¹⁴ Here, he makes, and supports, what might seem a bizarre move: “But if the relations of “having” which obtain between a whole and its parts are in turn parts of the whole—and that they are such parts cannot be denied, and justifies us in calling them formal *constituents* of the object—then these relations are had by the objects no less than the material constituents. But now there arises an infinite complication in that these second primary formal constituents are likewise had by the whole. Perhaps it is just this infinite nesting of primary formal constituents which contains the key to answer the question concerning the nature of the relation which holds the parts together in a whole (*Ibid.*).”

We can also consider the relations between and among the parts of an object, each considered merely as object. Thus, in a triangle, we can think of (or perceive) this line as longest, these two lines taken together as longer than the third, etc. Twardowski calls such relations *secondary formal constituents in the figurative sense* (p. 58).

But we also, importantly, consider relations among constituents of an object qua constituents of that object. Since these are relations among the constituents qua constituents of the object, they are relations among its property relations. Twardowski calls them *secondary formal constituents in the strict sense* (pp. 57f.). These are the relations that constitute the structure of the object: the ordering relations of a number series, the spatial relations of the parts of a physical body, the spatial and temporal relations of the constituents of a process or event, and so forth. They are the relations that are most important for our knowledge of the object. For example, the Pythagorean theorem applies to a triangle because it has three sides and a right angle. “Has” here expresses the having that constitutes property relations.

Say you are thinking about yesterday's baseball game. So the object of your presentation is that game. Then you think about a part of the game, say the (visitors') eighth inning. Now the object of the presentation is that inning. The game has a certain property: that inning being its visitors' eighth. And the inning has the property of being the eighth inning of that particular game. One might find it odd to count an object's relations among its properties, but being *that game's* eighth inning makes it what it is. Any other (*per impossible*) exactly similar sequence of events would not be the same inning. Furthermore, when you think of the inning, you think of it as an inning of that game. What the score was, what players had been taken out of the game, and so forth are things that could readily be thought of when thinking of that inning, and these things depend upon its being the eighth inning of that particular game. Many of an object's relations make it the object it is. It makes some sense to include an object's relations among its constituents when considering the object as thought of.

Going back to yesterday's game, you might think they should have let the third batter of the inning hit away instead of trying a squeeze play. That is, you have a certain sort of pro-attitude, a should-have attitude, toward (the object) letting that batter hit away. There is something you think they should have done that they did not do. This last sentence illustrates just how common and unproblematic it is to use the existential quantifier for objects thought of that do not exist.

We have quite a remarkable ability to move in thought and conversation among the parts or aspects of an object, all the while keeping in mind that it is that object. Again, the object need not exist. Think of, e.g., working on formulating a plan. Many proposed courses of action will be abandoned. The plan may never be put into effect. Twardowski's mereology of objects helps us understand this ability. Thinking of cognition only in terms of propositional attitudes does not.

Twardowski's mereology categorizes the items one can take note of concerning an object of one's awareness. It does this in terms of the different ways these items can be related to the object and to each other. Since all that one is aware of concerning the object is presented through the content of the presentation, to understand content, it is important to have a clear understanding of the mereology of the object.

Thus, in being aware of an object (in the broadest sense), one is aware of several sorts of items. There are the parts or aspects of the object. There is the object's having

each of the parts or aspects that you are aware of or, to put it the other way around, of each of these aspects being an aspect of that object. There are ordinary relations between parts and the object as a whole. There are ordinary relations between and among the various parts. And there are the relations among the parts in their roles in the structure of the object. (And since, in general, the parts can be considered objects on their own, subject to similar analysis, such analysis reveals similar constituents of second, third, etc. order.)

Content

Twardowski says “there must be a relation between the content and the object by virtue of which an object belongs to this particular content... (p. 64).” He rejects “a primitive psychology” that takes the content to be a mental picture of the object. Rather, he says, the relation between content and object is irreducible and fundamental. It is not a picture or anything like a picture. Indeed, for most presentations, the idea that the content pictures the object does not make sense, since most things one thinks about are not picturable or imaginable as such. Even when one thinks about a physical thing, one usually thinks about the thing as having some property or relation. So the object would be the book's being red or the book's being on the third shelf.

The objects of most presentations are complex. But some objects are simple—or better, as Twardowski frequently says, presented as simple. If an object is presented as simple, then all that can be said about the relation of the content and object of that presentation is that the object is presented *through* (by virtue of) the content. The relation of an object *being presented through* a content is *sui generis* and, in a sense, unknown. Neither the content itself nor the relation of *presenting through* is open to inspection. You can, of course, have a presentation of the content. That is, you can think about or have in mind content. But you can only think about content indirectly, by way of its relation to something one can think about more directly. The best kind of indirect presentation of a particular content is as the content through which such and such object is presented. What you are aware of is the object. We describe the content as the content through which there is the presentation of the baseball game, or of a number series, or of a horse.¹⁵

If an object is presented as complex, it will have constituents that can themselves be taken as objects. In many cases, if not all, an analysis will eventually arrive at constituents which could be presented as simple. Roughly, at least some complex objects have simplest parts. Again nothing substantive can be said about the part of the content through which the simple part of the object is presented. (Hence, Grossman's choice of “presentation” rather than “representation” to translate *Vorstellung*.)

Some authors, such as Russell and Sartre, deny that there is any such thing as content; they hold that there is only the relation of the cognizer to the object. Twardowski holds that there must be something about the cognizer by virtue of which the cognizer is

¹⁵ This is not exactly correct. Since one is always aware of some but not all of the constituents of a presented object, the best characterization of a particular content is as the content through which an object is presented by way of the aspects of the object that one is aware of in that mental act (that is, as the content that presents the “characteristics” of the object—in Twardowski's technical sense of “characteristic” p. 22 below).

related to this particular object and not some other. But his view of content explains why some might (mistakenly) deny content. Content, in his view, is not something that is revealed by phenomenology alone. It is not an object of acquaintance.

Furthermore, when the object is complex—as is normally the case—there is more to say about the content through which the object is presented. If one is presented with a horse—visually, let's say¹⁶—then one is thereby presented with parts of the horse. There must be *material* constituents of the content that present these parts, its legs, for example, and its brown color. But that is not all. In being presented with parts of the horse, one is also presented with the relation of each of the presented parts of the horse to the horse as a whole and with relations among these parts. For example, the right rear leg is presented to your left in your view of the horse. The rear leg is also seen as, say, thicker than the fore leg. There must, Twardowski says, be material constituents of the content that present these relations. That is, the relation between the rear leg of the horse and the horse as a whole cannot be presented by a relational aspect of the content, nor can the relations among the parts of the horse. Remember, the content of the presentation of a horse is not a picture of a horse or anything like a picture. It does not have formal constituents that can present the spatial relations in the object. That is, the content does not contain relations that are like or that can present (or represent) the relations among the parts of the object. Anything that is presented in the object must be presented by a *material* constituent of the content. That is, anything that you are aware of about the object when it is presented must have a corresponding material constituent in the content of that presentation.

The formal constituents of the content do not present. The formal constituents of the content are, first of all, its property relations that bind *its* constituents into a unity—so that it presents an object as a unity. It is through the material constituents of the content that what one is aware of in the object is presented. Thus, he says, there are three groups of material constituents of the content of a presentation (pp. 71, 76f.): material constituents of the content that present the material constituents of the object, material constituents that present the property relations of the object (i.e., its having such and such constituents), and material constituents that present the secondary formal constituents of the object (i.e., relations among its constituents). Since we can only get at content by way of what is presented, Twardowski says, not surprisingly, “It may be the case that the nature of the relations [among the material constituents of the content] can be described only very rarely (p. 71).”

One reason all this matters is for the project of naturalizing the mental. There is, in fact, nothing in the story so far that says anything one way or the other about whether presentations are physically realized. Twardowski is working within what Brentano (1995) called “descriptive psychology,” that is, analytic description of the elements of the mental, as opposed to the causal processes they enter into.¹⁷ If one is interested in the project of “naturalizing” the mental or showing how the mental can be part of a world that is at root physical, descriptive psychology done well is important. If, for example, one were to seek the neural correlate of a presentation, of a mental act, it is the neural correlate

¹⁶ One can, of course, think of a horse without having a visual image of a horse. And having a horsey image does not by itself make a mental state about a particular horse or about horses in general. Images don't have aboutness. They are not mental phenomena in Brentano's sense.

¹⁷ Brentano (1995, p. 4) himself says that descriptive psychology “will never mention a physico-chemical process in any of its doctrines,” whereas “Genetic psychology will never be able to fulfill its task fully and properly without mentioning physico-chemical processes and anatomical structures (*ibid.*).”

of the *content* of the presentation, not of the object, that one should seek.¹⁸ This is one reason why recognizing and studying content is important.¹⁹

Twardowski reckons the relations of an object to other objects among its constituents. He also proposes an infinite nesting of property relations (note 14, above) above. So every object will have constituents that are not presented. But he seems to hold something much stronger. “On closer examination, there may turn out to be no object at all whose presentation contains even the presentations of all the *material* constituents of the object *which are not relations to other object*; no adequate presentation exists of any object (pp. 78f., emphasis added).” That is, every object has *parts* for which there is no corresponding material constituent of the content through which it is presented.²⁰

Having earlier discussed the ambiguity of the term “characteristic” (*Merkmal*) and the variety of ways it is used in the contemporary literature, Twardowski chooses to use this term for those constituents of an object that are presented in the given presentation—roughly, those aspects of the object that one is aware of. And on Twardowski’s view of content that we have been looking at, that means the characteristics of an object of a presentation are the constituents of the object that have a corresponding material constituent in the content of that presentation. Clearly, characteristics in this sense are relative to presentations, since different presentations of the same object can be by way of different constituents of the object.

Twardowski frequently complains that philosophers who distinguish between content and object still confuse them. One of the ways this happens is that they use language appropriate only for objects when they mean to be talking about content. Any straightforward descriptive language refers to aspects of objects, not contents. Contents are not mental descriptions. Twardowski himself is careful about this. Recall how he described the contents of the different presentations of the city of Salzburg quoted above: “...the second contains as parts the presentations of a composer and the relation in which he stands to his native city.... In spite of these great differences between the parts of the contents both contents intend one and the same object (p. 29).” When he distinguishes different contents, he refers to each, not by straightforward descriptions, but always as the content that presents whatever it is that it presents.²¹

Twardowski now takes up the question of whether there are any constituents that are characteristics of all objects—that is, presented as constituents of every object. He rejects self-identity and difference from all other objects. These are constituents in his sense, but they need not be presented. The only characteristic of all objects is *unity*.

¹⁸ At the end of the last section, I mentioned our remarkable ability to move around in thought about a complex object, or move around in a complex object in thought. Whatever is the momentary focus of attention, other objects are lurking nearby, so to speak. This lurking must have its neural correlates as well, although seeking such neural correlates is, of course, far beyond current capabilities.

¹⁹ In general, if one seeks to explain a “higher-level” phenomenon in terms of a lower level, one needs an adequate theory of the higher level in its own terms. Most current analytic theories of intentionality evidence being constructed with an eye toward a lower level, rather than with an examination of intentionality in its own right.

²⁰ This seems plausible for any object that exists and for complex objects that do not exist. Whether it is true even for a simple nonexisting object is outside of the scope of this paper. Twardowski does not help with examples.

²¹ Thus, it is not correct to represent Twardowski’s content, as some recent authors (e.g., Betti and Van Der Schaar 2004) do, in the way that Frege (1892, p. 153) attempts to give examples of senses that might be attached to the name “Aristotle:” “The pupil of Plato and teacher of Alexander the Great,” or “the teacher of Alexander who was born in Stagira.”

“Everything that is presented as an object, no matter how complex it is, is presented as a unified whole. Its parts are united into this unified whole through property relations which have a common term [the object] on one side (p. 86).”²² “But this ‘unity’ of the object is not only a property, a constituent, but also a characteristic of all objects. One does not only conceive, through every presentation, of *one* object, but one also conceives of it *as being one* (pp. 86f.).”

Conclusion

There is much to be valued in Twardowski's account of phenomenally intentional acts. There is something about the cognizer by virtue of which a phenomenally intentional act is about what it's about. Twardowski quite appropriately calls this the content of the presentation. Content is repeatable. That same content can be the content of another presentation—of the same or another cognizer. Every conscious, phenomenally intentional act has a content, but the content itself is phenomenologically invisible. You cannot say anything about the relation of content to objects except that the object is presented through or by virtue of the content. And this relation of *presenting through* is also invisible.

But a good deal can be said about content on the basis of a general mereology of presented objects. Anything that one is aware of in the object must have a corresponding material constituent in the content. And this means not only the *parts* (material constituents) of the object, but also the having of the parts by the object (property relations), all of the relations among the parts that one is aware of, and indeed, all of the relations of the object to other objects that one is aware of in the presentation, in the phenomenally intentional act.

If we take Twardowski's theory of content to be *insight* into the nature of content, as I think we should, at least two philosophical questions arise. Can anything general and useful or illuminating be said about the noncharacteristic constituents of objects that do not exist? It is a fundamental feature of Twardowski's position that there are presentations the objects of which do not exist. He also says that there are no adequate presentations. That is, all objects of presentations have material constituents that are not presented, and in fact nonrelational material constituents that are not presented. So, the question is, for objects that do not exist, can anything useful be said about the material constituents that are not presented?

Second, can Twardowski's theory of presentations of *objects* be extended to propositional attitudes, that is, to presentations properly expressed with that clauses? What should we take the contents and objects of such acts to be, given the insight that content is invisible? And how should we take the objects of such acts to be bound into a unity?²³

²² In his generally excellent presentation of Twardowski's theory of content and object, Findlay (1963) seems to miss this point: “On Twardowski's theory, it is hard to see how we ever cognize more than a set of independent moments, which cannot possibly constitute a unified object (p. 17).”

²³ Here is a different sort of question. Twardowski says that the meaning of a categorematic word or phrase is the content of certain presentations that occur when the word is used. But almost universally accepted arguments of Hilary Putnam and Saul Kripke seem to show that there are no presentations whose content could be the meaning of a proper name or natural kind term. It is an interesting question, what might be said from Twardowski's point of view about such words and their relation to the content of presentations.

There are, of course, worthwhile historical questions concerning Twardowski's influence on his contemporaries and subsequent philosophers, and concerning influences on him. But if we take Twardowski's theory of content to be insight into the nature of content, then it seems to me that Twardowski's theory cries out for application to the philosophical assessment of the theories of philosophers such as Husserl, Meinong, Frege, and Russell.²⁴

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²⁴ Several years after studying Twardowski in a seminar, a former student said to me, “I cannot help but see Husserl through Twardowskian eyes.”