

Philosophy 101

Representation

The Puzzle of
Representation

Mental
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What is a Representation?

Representation: something that represents something (either itself or something else)

- goes proxy; stands for; symbolizes something
- refers to something; is accurate/inaccurate; is true/false

Examples of Representational Kinds

- Pictorial Representation
- Linguistic Representation
- Mental Representation

Two Questions

- ① How does a representation represent?
- ② Are some kinds of representation more fundamental than others?

Test Cases

- ① How does a representation represent?
 - resemblance
- ② Are some kinds of representation more fundamental than others?
 - pictorial representation

Test Cases – Resemblance



Figure: Vincent Van Gogh, 1889

Test Cases – Resemblance

- How does Van Gogh's portrait represent him?
 - represents him in virtue of resembling him
- Is the fact of resemblance both necessary and sufficient for the portrait to resemble Van Gogh?

Test Cases – Resemblance



Figure: Who do I resemble?

Test Cases – Resemblance

- Resemblance is neither necessary nor sufficient for representation
 - not necessary: pictures can *represent* non-existent objects but they cannot *resemble* non-existent objects
 - not sufficient: everything resembles something but not everything represents something

Test Cases – Pictures



Figure: Walking Uphill or Sliding Down?

Test Cases – Pictures

- ① Interpretation
- ② Logical relations
 - if...then...
 - ...and...
 - either...or...
 - not...

Test Cases – Pictures

- Pictorial representations:
 - require interpretation
 - cannot represent logical relations

Test Cases – Language

The cat is on the mat

- How does the string of symbols 'the cat is on the mat' come to represent a particular situation—viz. the cat's *being on the mat*?

Test Cases – Language

- Language is not *intrinsically* representational
 - Convention
 - Expression of 'ideas' or mental states

Test Cases – Language

Convention

- cannot explain the representation relation, only why some things represent other things
 - 'dog' represents dogs by convention
 - convention cannot explain *how* 'dog' represents without appealing to the mental states of subjects *doing the representing*

Test Cases

words, like pictures, do not represent in themselves ('intrinsically'). They need interpreting – they need an interpretation assigned to them in some way. But how can we explain this? The natural answer, I think, is that interpretation is something which the mind bestows upon words. (Crane, p. 22)

Fundamentality

- ① Any representational system that depends on interpretation or convention is not fundamental
- ② Linguistic and pictorial representation depend on interpretation and convention
- ③ \therefore Linguistic and pictorial representation are not fundamental

Is Mental Representation Fundamental?

Mental representation is not conventional

- ① Conventions rely on the intentions of a subject or subjects
- ② Intentions are a kind of mental representation
- ③ \therefore Convention cannot be used to *explain* mental representation

Is Mental Representation Fundamental?

Mental representation does not depend on interpretation

- ① If mental representation required interpretation then we would need to be able to think about the interpretations in some way, in order to use them as interpretations
- ② But thoughts are a form of mental representation, so we would need a further interpretation to make sense of those thoughts
- ③ But a further thought would be needed to think *that* interpretation, etc.
- ④ \therefore we would have an infinite regress of thoughts and interpretations of them
- ⑤ \therefore Mental representations do not require interpretation

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Thoughts & Propositional Attitudes

Thought: A state of mind that represents a state of the world (a 'fact' or 'situation')

- Some thoughts—'Propositional Attitudes'—have a particular structure
 - the situation represented
 - the 'attitude' taken towards the represented situation

Thoughts & Propositional Attitudes

- John believes **that it is raining outside**
- Jane hopes **that class will be canceled**
- S As that ... F ...

Intentionality

Intentionality: The 'directedness' of a mental state at some (existing or non-existing) thing

- All mental representations are 'intentional' or directed at some thing, fact, or situation

Intentionality & Mentality

- Is it true that if something exhibits intentionality, then that thing is (or has) a mind?
 - If something exhibits *intrinsic* intentionality (i.e. not derived in like pictorial or linguistic intentionality) is it a mind?

Mental Representation

- According to Crane, only mental representation could plausibly be fundamental because only mental representation is *intrinsically* intentional
- What kinds of things might have intentional states?
 - Could machines have intentional states?