

# Philosophy 101

## Representation & Mind (II)

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# Representation

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

# Test Cases

- Linguistic Representation
  - convention
  - expression of ideas



## 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

# Is Mental Representation Compatible with Physicalism?

- ① Material Objects/states do not possess underived representational properties
- ② Mental states possess underived representational properties
- ③  $\therefore$  Mental states are not material

Philosophy 101

Representation  
& Mind (II)

Representation

Naturalizing  
Representation

# Naturalizing Representation

## Dretske's Strategy

- ① Agree that mental representation isn't derived from any other kind of representation
- ② Deny that matter lacks underived representational properties
  - Distinguish between two kinds of intentionality or 'aboutness'
    - indication
    - representation

## Indication

- One thing (S) *indicates* another (P) when the occurrence of S entails the occurrence of P
  - buzzer indicates an unbuckled seat belt
  - fan activation indicates that the engine is overheated
  - thermometer indicates ambient temperature



## Natural Indication

- Natural indicators indicate independently of human interests, intentions, interpretations, etc.
  - compass needle indicates magnetic north
  - tree rings indicate the age of the tree
  - smoke indicates fire

## Indication & Misrepresentation

*Consider the thermometer. Since the volume of a metal varies lawfully with the temperature, both the mercury in the glass tube and the paper clips in my desk drawer carry information about the local temperature... Their behavior depends on a certain aspect of their environment (on the temperature, not the color or size, of their neighbors) in the same way the orientation of a compass needle depends on one aspect of its environment, not another. The only relevant difference between thermometers and paper clips is that we have given the one volume of metal-the mercury in the glass tube-the job of telling us about temperature. The paper clips have been given a different job.*

## Indication & Misrepresentation

*Since it is the thermometer's job to provide information about temperature, it (we say) misrepresents the temperature when it fails to do its assigned job just as (we say) a book or a map might misrepresent the matters about which they purport to inform us. What such artifacts say or mean is what they have the job of indicating, and since you do not lose your job—at least not immediately—merely by failing to successfully perform your job, these instruments continue to mean that a certain condition exists even when something else causes them to perform. (Dretske, 494)*

# Indication & Misrepresentation

- ① (mere) indicators cannot misrepresent
- ② representation & misrepresentation depend on having a function
  - function is typically set by human interests

# Making Minds

- ① Matter does not possess any underived representational properties
  - ② Mental states possess underived representational properties
  - ③  $\therefore$  Mental states are not material
- can we show how matter with indicative properties becomes matter with (mis)representational properties?