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## *Frege's hyperbolic objectivism*

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### **Introduction**

Many Thomists and like-minded philosophers perceive a duty to foster the integration of the concept of *person*, and particularly its spiritual dimension, into the empirical sciences. The Seventh International Conference on Metaphysics, held in October 2018 at the Pontifical University of Salamanca, Spain, intended to respond to this perceived duty. The conference subtitle, "Contemporary Insights into Metaphysics: Person and Science open to the Absolute" is a good indication of this intention. To paraphrase the inaugural presentation of the conference director Dr. David G. Murray "either we integrate the spiritual and physical sciences, or we will have confusion" and "Without such integration, there will never be real progress in civilization". Dr. Jesús Conill Sancho, professor of moral philosophy at the University of Valencia, Spain, echoed this intention in his opening address, which presented a conception of the human person as a "transcendental locus of true liberty like nothing else in the universe"<sup>84</sup>. While such intentions are salutary and compelling, most often they reach the ears only of those already inclined to recognize the unique metaphysical status of the human person and its role in the sciences. They actually do little to change empirical scientific attitudes and methods, and amount merely to "preaching to the choir".

The dichotomy presented by Dr. Murray, while attention getting, is not persuasive. The empirical sciences in all likelihood will be able to carry on their orderly march of practical progress quite well without stopping to investigate the role of the knowing subject in science. Similarly, Dr. Conill Sancho's observations about the unique status of the knowing subject, while inspirational, will not persuade empirical scientists of the scientific benefits of considering the spiritual and self-reflective dimensions of the human being. Empirical scientists are quite happy to pursue their research without such considerations. It seems dubious that scientists will do the homework that some theologians and philosophers have assigned to them. It is insufficient to aim to persuade with rhetoric, however compelling the description of the wonder that is the human being. To achieve real change, a different strategy is called for.

A successful strategy would constrain the empirical scientist to take seriously considerations such as those highlighted by Dr. Murray and Dr. Conill Sancho. Only an argument based on accepted empirical evidence, and elaborated with impeccable logic will suffice. Philosophers must demonstrate, and not merely claim, that failing to incorporate the study of the human person into the empirical sciences tantamount to accepting incoherence, and to embracing self-contradiction.

The present article limits itself to the material contained in my oral presentation at the above-mentioned conference at Salamanca<sup>85</sup>. It aims merely to help prepare the way for such an argument. It examines what prompts empirical scientists in the first place to distrust the knowing subject as a pernicious influence on their research. It begins by examining the epoch-making observations of Gottlob Frege concerning truth and objectivity. Frege's perspective constitutes, in large measure, the

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<sup>84</sup> For these texts see: *Proceedings. Metaphysics 2018, Seventh World Conference, Fondazione Idente di Studi e di Ricerca*, Rome, Italy and *Fundación Fernando Rielo*, Madrid, Spain, 2019.

<sup>85</sup> Joseph Li Vecchi, "Intentionality and Objective Knowledge of Reality," oral presentation, October 25, 2018, *The Seventh World Conference on Metaphysics*, Pontifical University of Salamanca, Spain, October 24-27, sponsored by *Fondazione Idente di Studi e di Ricerca*, Rome, Italy and *Fundación Fernando Rielo*, Madrid, Spain.

paradigm under which the contemporary empiricist program of science operates. In a second and third section, it examines the Thomistic doctrine of intentionality and its impact on the objectivity and subjectivity of knowledge, and presents this doctrine in an historical survey. Finally, it shows Frege's stance to be hyperbolic in excluding all reference to the knowing subject. The desired demonstration of the incoherence and self-contradiction brought about by ignoring the role of the knowing subject in scientific research will have to await development in a companion article preliminarily tentatively entitled "The Illogical Logicians of Hyperbolic Objectivity" whose publication is hoped to be forthcoming.

### **Frege's Doctrine of Objectivity, and its Positive Value.**

Frege is the first philosopher to cast logic as an absolutely objective science, in the sense of having no dependence on psychological acts of the knowing subject. Frege aims to supersede what he views as latent forms of subjectivism contaminating logic, and knowledge in general, due to the subjective nature of psychology and the structure of the human intellect.

For Frege, logic is absolutely independent of all psychological acts, such as the relations of intentionality of the knowing subject. This view of objectivity derives from two key doctrines. First, *the linguistic turn* affirms that a philosophical account of thought requires a philosophical account of language<sup>86</sup>. Language is objective since it can be evaluated without referring to a thinking subject. The thought of the thinking subject, however, cannot be evaluated without referring to language. Second, Frege's anti-psychologism denies that an account of truth and of the meaning of words can be given in terms of mental processes:

One could scarcely falsify the sense of the word 'true' more mischievously than by including in it a reference to the subjects who judge. Someone will no doubt object that the sentence "I am hungry" can be true for one person and false for another. The sentence, certainly – but not the thought; for the word "I" in the mouth of the other person denotes a different man, and hence the sentence uttered by the other person expresses a different thought<sup>87</sup>.

For Frege, psychology corrupts logic. Logic concerns being true (*Wahrsein*), which is different from being taken to be true (*Fürwahrgehaltenwerden*), whether by one or many or everybody, and in no case is to be reduced to it<sup>88</sup>. Being true is a purely objective matter. It is unrelated to what anyone takes to be true. Being taken to be true, by contrast, is a purely subjective matter. It is not necessarily related to what actually is true. A knowing subject's particular act of judging is irrelevant to truth.

In order to distinguish being true from being taken to be true Frege resorts to the ontologically hyperbolic remedy of removing truth from the domain of the knowing subject. He is forced to posit a "domain of the objective" (*Gebiet des objectiven*), a Platonic realm where truth is entirely independent of subject.

"For me there is a domain of what is objective, which is distinct from that of what is actual, whereas the psychological logicians without ado take what is not actual to be subjective. And yet it is quite impossible to understand why something that has a status independent of the judging subject has to be actual, i. e., has to be capable of acting directly or indirectly on the senses"<sup>89</sup>.

For Frege, truth is a relation between the logical structure of language on the one hand, and objects in this purported domain of the objective on the other hand.

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<sup>86</sup> Dummett, *Origins of Analytical Philosophy*, 5, 7.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-14.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-13.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 15-16.

## Two Fundamentals of the Scholastic Doctrine of Intentionality.

The scholastic doctrine of intentionality consists of two central tenets. First, according to this tradition the knowing subject is directed towards some object that is known, or received mentally by the knowing subject. To indicate this relation between object known and knowing subject, the scholastics coin the term ‘intentionality’<sup>90</sup>.

Second, this tradition affirms the mutual epistemic determination of knowing subject and object known. What may be called the *recipitur dictum*, that “whatever is received is received according to the mode of the receiver”<sup>91</sup>, implies not only that the object known epistemically determines the knowing subject, but also that the knowing subject, in virtue of its mode of receiving, epistemically determines the object known<sup>92</sup>. Knowledge of an object being received by the intellect of the knowing subject, is like water being received into a glass. On the one hand, there is something that is received that is metaphysically independent of the knowing subject per se. Knowledge has an objective aspect. On the other hand, knowledge also has a subjective aspect. The object is received according to the capacity of the intellect of the knowing subject.

## History of the doctrine of intentionality.

Socrates is first to recognize definitions as the entities that make knowledge possible in virtue of their unchanging status. Definitions arise in virtue of the intentional relation between subject and object<sup>93</sup>. However, it is Aristotle who first thematizes intentionality as a topic of philosophical study by contrasting mind independent being with “being as true”. Being includes not only things found in nature, or what falls into the ten categories, but also anything about which a true sentence can be formed<sup>94</sup>. Aristotle also is first to give a general indication of logic’s proper object, intentional being, or being in the soul<sup>95</sup>. Ibn Sina makes this description precise by defining logic’s proper object as intentional being of second order<sup>96</sup>. Aquinas follows Aristotle in distinguishing real beings, which posit something in nature, and being as true, or anything for which we use the verb “to be”, including not only real beings, but also beings of reason, which do not posit anything in nature, including privations, such as blindness, of which we say, “blindness *is* in the eye”<sup>97</sup>. Hervaeus Natalis writes the first philosophical treatise on the topic of intentional being, coining the term *intentionalitas* in order to speak of the mutual epistemic determination of subject and objects<sup>98</sup>. Subsequent logicians distinguish logica minor, the lesser topic, which addresses the techniques of formal logic, from logica maior, the greater topic, which addresses the question of logic’s proper subject matter, intentional being.

After the Council of Trent (1545-1563), the Church brings research into the nature of intentionality to an effective halt, because of the need to respond to the Protestant Reformation. Philosophers of logic repeat the scholastic doctrine of intentionality without further elaboration. Joan Poincot, (John

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<sup>90</sup> Hervaeus Natalis coins the term ‘intentionalitas’ to highlight the epistemic determination of object by subject, Cf. *De secundis intentionibus*. This contrasts with contemporary usage which highlights only the epistemic directedness of subject towards object.

<sup>91</sup> “Omne quod recipitur in aliquo, recipitur in eo per modum recipientis”. Aquinas, *Super. Sententias*. lib., II, d. 17, q. 2, a. 1, arg. 3 and *De potentia Dei* q. 3, a. 11, arg. 14. Cf. Pseudo-Dionysius’ *De divinis nominibus*. IV, 1 and *De caelesti hierarchia*, XII, 2; Boethius, *De consolatione philosophiae*, V, proem. 4. See my article,

<sup>92</sup> Aquinas, *Sup. Sent.* II, d. 17, q. 2, a. 1, arg. 3; *De pot. Dei* q. 3, a. 11, arg. 14.

<sup>93</sup> Plato, *Parmenides*, 129a-130a.

<sup>94</sup> Aristotle, *Metaph.* Bk V, Ch. 7, 1017a22-35.

<sup>95</sup> Aristotle, *Post. Anal.* A, 10 (76b24ff), *Metaphysics*, VI, 1, 1026a18ff.

<sup>96</sup> *Illahiyat* of the *Shifá*, *Metaph. of the Healing*, I, 2.

<sup>97</sup> Aquinas, *De ente et essentia*, I, 1.

<sup>98</sup> Hervaeus Natalis, *De secundis intentionibus*.

of St Thomas), for example, distinguishes real being from being of reason<sup>99</sup>. Eventually the need to address the question of logic's proper object is cast aside in favor of its technical development. Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole first eliminate considerations of intentional being from their *Port Royal Logic*, focusing instead on formal considerations<sup>100</sup>. With the question of its proper object effectively ignored, logic is reduced by later logicians, to pure formalism, for example, in Immanuel Kant's treatise on logic, which follows his hyper-subjective metaphysics<sup>101</sup>, and in Gottlob Frege's philosophical logic which denies logic's intrinsic dependence on subjective psychology<sup>102</sup>.

### **Frege's Objectivism is hyperbolic.**

Frege adopts a conception of objectivity according to which linguistic meanings and logical operations follow exclusively and automatically from symbol patterns. These patterns reflect the relations between objects in a purported "domain of the objective". On this view, objectivity in no way involves the knowing subject's interpretation or understanding of reality.

By contrast, the scholastic doctrine of intentionality highlights aspects of the knowing subject's psychological process of understanding that do not diminish the objectivity of knowledge. Frege is right to root out excessive subjectivism, especially the prevalent post-Kantian hyper-subjectivism for which truth cannot be related to ultimate realities, but only to phenomena. These interpretative aspects of psychological acts of *takings-to-be-true* are irrelevant to logic. They should be excluded from a logically rigorous account of truth. However, not all psychological acts are interpretative. Psychological acts such as acts of intentionality, do not involve subjective interpretation. Rather, they are constitutive of the subject object relation. They are acts necessary for bringing about knowledge and truth. In order to avoid interpretative subjectivity Frege need not exclude psychological acts of second intention. While Frege is justified in excluding from the consideration of truth and objectivity interpretative psychological acts such as acts of "taking to be true", he is not justified in excluding from this consideration psychological acts of intention. It follows that not all psychological acts are irrelevant to logic, truth, and objectivity, and that Frege's objectivism is hyperbolic. Finally, since Frege does not directly recognize these aspects of intentionality, a charitable interpretation might judge that his effective rejection of them is unintentional. However that may be, in eschewing all psychological acts from his considerations, Frege exceeds his mark.

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<sup>99</sup> Joan Poincot, *Cursus philosophicus: Ars Logica*, (1631–2).

<sup>100</sup> Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole, *La Logique ou l'art de penser* (1662), *The Port Royal Logic*, First Discourse.

<sup>101</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Logik*, 1800, Introduction.

<sup>102</sup> Gottlob Frege, *Grundlagen der Arithmetik*, 1884; *Grundgesetze der Arithmetik*, 1893.