

# Brentano on Judgment

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'Judgment' is Brentano's term for any mental state liable to be true or false. This includes not only the products of conceptual thought, such as belief, but also perceptual experiences, such as seeing that the window was left open. 'Every perception counts as a judgment,' writes Brentano (1874: II, 50/1973a: 209). Accordingly, his theory of judgment is not exactly a theory of the same phenomenon we today call 'judgment,' but of a larger class of phenomena one (perhaps the main) species of which is what we call judgment. Even if we keep this in mind, though, the profound heterodoxy of Brentano's theory of judgment is still striking.

Brentano develops this heterodox theory in some detail already in the *Psychology from Empirical Standpoint* (Brentano 1874/1973a). But he continued to work out its details, and various aspects of it, until his death.<sup>1</sup> Many of the relevant articles, notes, and fragments of relevance have been collected by Oskar Kraus in 1930 and published under the title *Truth and Evidence* (Brentano 1930/1966b). Kraus prefaces this volume with an elaborate reconstruction, of dubious plausibility, according to which Brentano's accounts of judgment and truth have gone through four distinct stages. In reality, there is a unified underlying conviction underwriting Brentano's work both on judgment and on truth (see CHAP. 20 on the latter). Here I present this unified core of this highly original theory of judgment, which can be captured in terms of three main theses. The first is that contrary to appearances, all judgments are *existential* judgments (§1). The second is that the existential force of judgment is indeed a *force*, or *mode*, or *attitude* – it does not come from the judgment's *content* (§2). The third is that judgment is not a propositional attitude but an 'objectual' attitude (§3).

## 1. All Judgments are Existential

The most fundamental thesis in Brentano's theory is that every judgment is in the business of affirming or denying the existence of something. The judgments that there are zebras and that there are no dragons are thus paradigmatic instances. It is natural to think that not all judgments are of this sort – some are in the business of not only affirming or denying the existence of something, but also in the business of saying what something is like, what properties it has. Thus, the judgment that all zebras are striped predicates stripedness of zebras, thereby committing not only to the existence of zebras, but also to their character. Brentano, however, insists that the psychological reality of judgments is very different from this. Judging that all zebras are striped, for example, is in reality an existential judgment as well – it is the judgment *that there is no non-striped zebra*.

To show that this generalizes, Brentano systematically goes over the four types of categorical statement in Aristotle's logic and shows that they are all reducible or 'traceable back' (*rückführbar*) to existential statements (Brentano 1874: II, 56-7/1973a: 213-4; see also Brentano 1956: 121):

- (A) < All zebras are striped > 'traces back' to < There is not a non-striped zebra >.
- (E) < No zebras are striped > traces back to < There is not a striped zebra >.
- (I) < Some zebras are striped > traces back to < There is a striped zebra >.
- (O) < Some zebras are not striped > traces back to < There is a non-striped zebra >.

These are the only four types of *categorical* statement in Aristotle's logic. In addition, however, Aristotle recognizes *hypothetical* judgments. Brentano offers an existential 'account' or 'tracing back' of those as well. He writes:

The statement (*Satz*) "If a man behaves badly, he harms himself" is a hypothetical statement. As far as its meaning is concerned, it is like the categorical statement "All badly-behaving men harm themselves." And this, in turn, has no other meaning than that of the existential

statement “A badly-behaving man who does not harm himself does not exist,” or to use a more felicitous expression, “There is no badly-behaving man who does not harm himself.” (Brentano 1874: II, 59-60/1973a: 218)

The proposed treatment of hypotheticals is this:

(H) < If a clown does not wear a pointy hat, then he is not funny > is traceable back to <There is not a non-pointy-hat-wearing funny clown >.

Brentano concludes:

The traceability-back (*Rückführbarkeit*) of categorical statements, indeed the traceability-back of all statements which express a judgment, to existential judgments is therefore indubitable. (Brentano 1874: II, 60/1973a:218)

More cautiously, Brentano should have concluded that all statements used *in Aristotelian logic* turn out to be disguised existentials. He does not consider other kinds of statement in any notable detail.

What does this ‘traceability-back’ prove? For Brentano, it shows that non-existential judgments are *dispensable* – positing them plays no explanatory role. Yet, it involves considerable ontological cost. In a 1906 letter to his student Anton Marty, he writes:

... every assertion affirming your *entia rationis* [notably, propositions] has its equivalent in an assertion having only *realia* [i.e., concrete individual objects] as objects... Not only are your judgments equivalent to judgments about concrete objects (*reale Gegenstände*), the latter are always available [for paraphrasing the former]. Hence the *entia rationis* are entirely unnecessary/superfluous (*unnützig*) and contrary to the economy of nature. (Brentano 1930: 93/1966b: 84; see also Brentano 1956 §17)

The argument evidently proceeds in two steps. The first is to show, as we have just seen, that every indicative statement that expresses a judgment can be paraphrased into an existential. The second step is to argue that significant ontological economies are enabled by the paraphrase. Two such seem close to Brentano’s heart. First, if some judgments are predicative, then their contents are propositional, which means that there *are* propositions. Secondly, what such predicative would seem to be *about*

are states of affairs, which means that there *are* states of affairs as well. In contrast, Brentano seems to claim, existential judgments do not require a propositional content, and what they are about can be individual objects.

What motivates this last claim is Brentano's notion that existential judgments are not about existential states of affairs, and thus do not have existential propositions as their contents, but are simply about the entities whose existence they affirm. Brentano makes the point clearly in the already quoted 1906 letter to Marty:

[T]he being of A need not be produced in order for the judgment "A is" to be ... correct; all that is needed is A. (Brentano 1930: 95/1966b: 85)

The existential is about the *existent itself*, and not *the fact of the object's existence*, that makes true the relevant existential. If this is true, then indeed we have here a remarkable result: all judgments are existential, and existentials are about individual existents, not existence-facts.

What is the reason to take the existent itself, rather than the fact of its existence, to make true the existential judgment? Brentano offers an argument from infinite regress (1930: 95-6/1996b: 85-6; see also Bergmann and Brentano 1946: 84 and Brentano 1930: 122/1996b: 108). Suppose for reductio that belief in my dog Julius is made true not by Julius, but by Julius' existence. Then in addition to Julius, we must add to our ontology the state of affairs of Julius existing. That is, we must commit to the existence of this state of affairs. To commit to this state of affairs' existence is to judge that the state of affairs of Julius existing *exists*. But then what makes *this* judgment true? If it is the state of affairs of *the existence of* the state of affairs of Julius existing, then we are off on a regress. The simplest way to avoid the regress is to recognize Julius himself as the making true the Judgment that he exists.

## **2. The Existential Force of Judgment**

If the existence of Julius does not show up in the content of the existential judgment that affirms Julius' existence, then in what sense is the relevant judgment an *existential* judgment at all? The answer is that the judgment's existence-affirmation must be built into its *intentional mode* (since it does not figure in its intentional content and has nowhere else it could be "put").

The idea here is that existential judgments are existence-affirming, but not existence-ascribing. Their existence-affirmation is an aspect of the judgment *attitude* rather than *content*. Brentano writes:

The most natural expression is "A is," not "A is existent," where "existent" appears as a predicate... [Such an existential statement] means rather "If anyone should think of A in a positive way, his thought is fitting (*entsprechend*)". (Brentano 1930: 79/1966b:69)

On this view, mental commitment to the existence of X is not an aspect of *what* the judgment represents but of *how* it does the representing. We may put this by saying that an existential judgment's commitment to the existence of X is not a matter of representing X as existent, but a matter of representing-as-existent X. Thus, to judge that some zebras are striped is to perform a mental act that represents-as-existent striped zebras, that is, represents striped zebras in an existence-affirming *manner*.

As for *negative* existential judgments, such as that no zebra can fly backwards, Brentano's view is that these represent-as-*nonexistent* their intentional objects, in this case a backward-flying zebra. This means that for Brentano, there is a categorical difference between negative and positive judgments – the former cannot be reduced to the latter. Whereas we are now inclined to think that there is only one judgment-mode, and that negative judgment regarding *p* just amounts to judging that  $\sim p$ , Brentano's view is that there are two primitive and mutually irreducible judgment-modes, the positive-judgment mode and the negative-judgment mode. We might put this by saying that Brentano posits *disbelief* as a fundamental doxastic state on a par with *belief*.

Brentano appears to have three arguments for the 'attitudinal' or 'modal' account of (positive) judgments' existence-affirmation. The more explicit (and

weakest) argument appears, to my knowledge, only in Brentano's lecture notes from his logic courses in Vienna at 1878-9 and 1884-5 (Brentano 1956 §15). Those who maintain that existence-affirmation is an aspect of content, says Brentano, must have the following picture in mind. When you judge that the Pope is wise, you put together the concept of Pope and the concept of wisdom. If so, then likewise, when you judge that the Pope exists, you put together the concept of Pope and the concept of existence. But note, says Brentano, that you cannot judge that the Pope is wise without acknowledging (*anerkennen*) the Pope, that is, representing-as-existent the Pope. By the same token, you cannot judge that the Pope *exists* without acknowledging the Pope. But now, it would seem that acknowledging the Pope is not only necessary but also *sufficient* for judging that the Pope exists – there is nothing in the latter not already in the former. Since the commitment to the Pope's existence is already built into this attitude of acknowledging, there is no point in replicating that commitment within the act's content. All there is to judging that X exists, then, is acknowledging X, that is, taking a certain distinctive *attitude* toward X.

Brentano's second argument for building existence-affirmation into the judgment-mode can be found in the *Psychology*. The basic idea is that acts of judging and acts of mere representing (i.e., contemplating or entertaining) can have the same content (Brentano 1874: II, 44-5/1973a: 205). Yet the judging commits the subject to the reality of what is judged, while the mere representing does not commit to the existence of the represented. Therefore, the existence-commitment exhibited by the former but not the latter cannot come from the content, which *ex hypothesi* is shared. It must come from some other difference between judging and presenting. The best candidate, says Brentano (1874: II, 64-5/1973a: 221-2), is an attitudinal or modal difference: the judging represents the judged in a *way* that the mere presenting does not represent the presented.

A further argument close to the surface in the *Psychology* builds on the Kantian claim that 'existence is not a property,' which Brentano cites approvingly:

In his critique of the ontological argument for the existence of God, Kant made the pertinent remark that in an existential statement, i.e. in a statement of the form 'A exists,' existence 'is not a real predicate, i.e. a concept of something that can be superposed (*hinzukommen*) on the concept of a thing.' 'It is,' he said, 'only the positing of a thing or of certain determinations, as existing in themselves.' (Brentano 1874: II, 53/1973a: 211)

If there is no such thing as a property of existence, any attribution of existence to something would be attribution of a property that nothing has. That is, it would perforce be a *misattribution*. But in fact not all existential beliefs are *false*: it is true, for example, that there are ducks. So it must be possible for us to affirm the existence of ducks without quite attributing the property of existence, which they do not have. The only way to makes sense of *that* is to suppose that to affirm the existence of ducks is just to adopt a certain attitude toward ducks.

### 3. Judgment is not a Propositional Attitude

If the commitment to something's existence or nonexistence shows up in judgments' attitude rather than content, then the content itself must be exhausted by the individual item whose existence is affirmed or denied. If a judgment that a three-legged dog exists simply represents-as-existent a three-legged dog, then *what* is represented is just a certain kind of individual object: a three-legged dog. On this view, then, judgment turns out to be an *objectual* rather than *propositional* attitude (Chisholm 1976).

It has sometimes been held, at least in analytic philosophy of mind, that all attitudes are propositional. But the psychological reality of mental life suggests many objectual attitudes. Typically, one loves *one's child*, not (just) *that* she or he is one's child. One is afraid of *dogs*, not (just) *that* the dog might bite one. Brentano's theory of judgment models judgment on the case of love and fear: judgments are always directed at some sort of individual object, and simply represent-as-existent/nonexistent that object. In fact, for Brentano *all* mental states are objectual in this way – this is why he writes that 'All mental references refer to things' (1973a:

291). (Here ‘thing’ is used to refer to an individual object or concrete particular, and ‘mental reference’ is another term for intentionality.)

It might seem strange to posit a *doxastic* attitude directed at objects rather than propositions. Love and fear are *emotional* attitudes. Perhaps emotional attitudes can be emotional, but are not doxastic attitude paradigmatically propositional? Clearly, Brentano does not think so. But in fact, we do recognize doxastic objectual attitudes in our folk psychology. Consider such statements as ‘Jimmy believes in Santa Claus.’ Belief-in is clearly a doxastic objectual attitude: the content of Jimmy’s state is exhausted by some individual object, Santa Claus, the commitment to whose existence comes in at the level of attitude, through the attitude of believing-in. Now, *philosophers* may wish to paraphrase this into ‘Jimmy believes that Santa Claus exists,’ so that belief is always construed as propositional. But for Brentano this paraphrase gets things backwards. Talk of objectual belief-in is actually more faithful to the psychological reality of judgment than talk of propositional belief-that. In a way, we can see it as the whole of Brentano’s theory of judgment that positive judgment is just belief-in and negative judgment is just disbelief-in (Textor 2007, Kriegel forthcoming).

In fact, since belief-in talk is talk of an ostensibly objectual rather than propositional doxastic state, the Brentanian should offer the *opposite* paraphrase, paraphrasing belief-that reports into belief-in reports. Consider again the four types of categorical proposition in Aristotle’s logic, and the four corresponding types of categorical belief. The Brentanian should offer the following paraphrases for reports of such beliefs:

- (A) S believes that all zebras are striped  $\Leftrightarrow$  S disbelieves in a non-striped zebra
- (E) S believes that no zebras are striped  $\Leftrightarrow$  S disbelieves in a striped zebra
- (I) S believes that some zebras are striped  $\Leftrightarrow$  S believes in a striped zebra
- (O) S believes that some zebras are not striped  $\Leftrightarrow$  S believes in a non-striped zebra



As for hypothetical-belief reports, they admit of the following Brentanian paraphrase:

- (H) S believes that if a clown does not wear a pointy hat, then he is not funny  $\Leftrightarrow$   
S disbelieves in a non-pointy-hat-wearing funny clown

Here, ' $\Leftrightarrow$ ' just means 'can be paraphrased into.' The arrow is bidirectional because paraphraseability is a symmetric relation: if ' $p$ ' is a good paraphrase of ' $q$ ,' then ' $q$ ' is an equally good paraphrase of ' $p$ .' As we have seen, Brentano has substantive arguments for using this bilateral paraphraseability specifically to underwrite a uniform account of judgment as an objectual (dis)belief-in.

An immediate concern with this non-propositional take on judgment is its implication for our understanding of reasoning and the viability of standard logic for modeling it. Certainly propositional logic must go out the window, but so does predicate logic, since in Brentano's picture there is no element of predication in existential judgments (and all judgments are existential!). Brentano was actually acutely aware of this problem, and tried to address it in some of his logic lectures, notes for which were posthumously published in *The Theory of Correct Judgment* (Brentano 1956). One of Brentano's and Marty's students, Franz Hillebrand (see CHAP. 40), developed Brentano's logic in some detail in his habilitation (Hillebrand 1891). The idea for both is to just reformulate the known laws of valid inference within a non-propositional framework. Consider a straightforward instance of *modus ponens*: if the window is open, the room gets cold; the window is open; therefore, the room gets cold. In Brentano and Hillebrand's reform of syllogistics, this becomes: there is no open window without a cold-getting room; there is an open window; therefore, there is a cold-getting room. Formally, the idea is to replace the familiar

$$\frac{p \rightarrow q \quad p}{q}$$

with something like

$$\frac{-a^{-}b \quad +a}{+b}$$

Here + is an existence-indicator, – is a nonexistence-indicator, and  $a^{-}b$  means ‘ $a$  without  $b$ ’. The rule thus reads: there is not  $a$  without  $b$ ; there is  $a$ ; therefore, there is  $b$ . This rule for valid inference is either to be deduced from more basic rules or is to be added as a basic rule in its own right. The program is to put in place all the rules we accept as valid, using a uniform formalism, and then prove consistency and completeness. Although this program has not to my knowledge been fully carried out yet, see Terrell 1976 and Simons 1984, 1987 for important contributions.

## Conclusion

Brentano’s theory of judgment is so heterodox that it has never made any notable inroads outside the most entrenched centers of Brentanian philosophy, in Vienna, Prague, and Innsbruck. Certainly within analytic philosophy it was doomed by its non-propositional take on judgment, which greatly limits the possibility for informative linguistic representation of judgments and their content. Yet even if we concede that propositional structure is much more powerful for purposes in modeling in public language, the *psychological reality* of judgment need not be so accommodating to our purposes. Brentano’s arguments that the psychological reality of judgment reveals an objectual existence-affirming attitude must be contended with. As the above brief discussion suggests, these are by no means frivolous.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It is possible to maintain that late in life Brentano had a change of heart and allowed that some judgments have a predicative structure (see Hillabrand 1891: 95-102).

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