A Brief History of Misrepresentation
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“Realist” Theories
- Representation involves a real property – similitude – between representation R and object O.
- Misrepresentation involves a dissimilitude between R and O.

“Nominalist”/Anti-Realist Theories
- Similitude is neither necessary nor sufficient for representation.
- Representation involves suggestion (understood either as semantic role or functional role).
- Misrepresentation involves anomalous suggestion, not necessarily dissimilitude.

Goals for the talk
(i) Motivate realist and nominalist accounts of misrepresentation.
(ii) Propose nominalism as a superior better anti-skeptical option.

Scholastic Intentional Species (Über Realist)
“An intentional species, in order to mediate cognition of an object, must be ‘like’ or ‘similar to’ a quality in that object…”

“Intentional species… [represent] external objects; the representative relation arises from a similitude between species and object.”

“Intentional species… were accorded mind-independent reality, as was their similitude with qualities [my emphasis].”

“Intentional species of colour are really there in the air the air or in some other medium, and they have a kind of similitude with the colors of objects, even if they do not instantiate those colours in the usual way…” (Hatfield 1998, 957-8).

Descartes’s Realism
“…you will have no reason to suppose that… there is something in the objects which resembles the ideas or sensations that we have of them. … By this means, your mind will be delivered from all those little images flitting through the air, called ‘intentional forms’, which so exercise the imagination of the philosophers.” (CSM I 153-4.)

“[The intellect] must not judge that the imagination faithfully represents the objects of the senses, or that the senses take on the true shapes of things, or in short that external things always are just as they appear to be. In all such cases we are liable to go wrong…” (CSM I 47.)

Malebranche’s Realism
“…our eyes generally deceive us in everything [my emphasis] they represent to us: in the size of bodies, in their figure and motion, and in light and colors, which are the only things we see.” (Search I.vi)
“Our eyes represent colors to us on the surface of bodies and light in the air and in the sun; our ears make us hear sounds as if spread out through the air and in the resounding bodies; and if we believe what the other senses report... all the sensible qualities will be in the bodies that seem to exude... them. Yet it is certain... that all these qualities do not exist outside the soul that perceive them.”

(Elucidations 6)

**Locke’s Realism**

“...the ideas of primary qualities of bodies are resemblances of them, and their patterns do really exist in the bodies themselves, but the ideas produced in us by these secondary qualities have no resemblance of them at all. There is nothing like our ideas, existing in the bodies themselves.” (E II.viii.15)

**Features of Realist Theories of Representation**

- **Similitude** is a real property S of R's.
- **Externality:** S is in relation to an external object O.
- **Intentionality:** R is about O in virtue of having property S.
- **Intrinsicality:** R is intrinsically representational in virtue of having property S.
- **Indication:** R indicates O in virtue of S.

**Realist Definition of Misrepresentation**

(RM): Misrepresentation =df R lacks property S in relation to O.
(RMi): Illusion =df R lacks S in relation to O, but indicates O.
(RMh): Hallucination =df R lacks S in relation to O and R doesn’t indicate any O.

**Ockham’s Nominalism/Anti-Realism**

“Intuitive cognition is the proper cognition of a singular [i.e., an individual] not because of its greater likeness to one thing more than another... but because it is naturally caused by one thing and not by another; nor can it be caused by another.” Quodlibeta Septem 1.13.

“Likeness is not the precise reason why we understand one thing rather than another…” (Opera Theologica 287 17).

**Berkeley’s Nominalism/Anti-Realism**

“Language is a kind of symbol system in which there is a purely arbitrary connection between the signs and what they signify. Language thus provides a model whereby we can understand how visual signs can suggest, and hence call to mind, information supplied by touch. As in a language, visual signs can lead the mind to their meanings through what Berkeley calls ‘suggestion’. Vision need not resemble the nonvisual for it to inform us of what it stands for... so that we can reason our way from one to the other.” Atherton (2005 97, my emphasis.)

“...a man born blind, being made to see, would, at first, have no idea of distance by sight; the sun and stars, the remotest objects as well as the nearer, would all seem to be in his eye, or rather in his mind.” (NTV 41.)

“I grant... that [the Molyneux man] would never think of men, trees, or any other objects that he had been accustomed to perceive by touch, upon having his mind filled with new sensations of light and colours, whose various combinations he doth not yet understand, or know the meaning
of, no more than a Chinese, upon first hearing the words man and tree, would think of the things signified by them. In both cases, there must be time and experience, by repeated acts, to acquire a habit of knowing the connexion between the signs and things signified, that is to say, of understanding the language, whether of the eyes or of the ears.” (Alciphron IV.11, my emphasis.)

“Hence it follows that the man born blind and afterwards, when grown up, made to see, would not in the first act of vision parcel out the ideas of sight into the same distinct collections that others do, who have experienced which do regularly coexist and are proper to be bundled up together under one name. He would not, for example, make into one complex idea, and thereby esteem an unit, all those particular ideas which constitute the visible head or foot. For there can be no reason assigned why he should do so, barely upon his seeing a man stand upright before him. There crowd into his mind the ideas which compose the visible man, in company with all the other ideas of sight perceived at the same time. But all these ideas offered at once into his view, he would not distribute into sundry distinct combinations until such time as, by observing the motion of the parts of the man and other experiences, he comes to know which are to be separated and which are to be collected together.” (NTV 110.)

“On the basis of this account, [Berkeley] argues for a particular understanding of the nature of visual representation. It is not the goal of the visual system to produce a representation that stands for a world it either resembles or fails to resemble. Rather, the job of the visual system is just to perceive visual qualities, which represent by suggesting tangible and other sensible qualities. When we take vision to function as a language, we will understand it does not misrepresent the world it stands for, but is a successful vehicle for tangible meanings.” (Atherton 2005 102, my emphasis.)

**Hume’s Nominalism/Anti-Realism**

“‘Tis therefore by experience only, that we can infer the existence of one object from that of another [e.g., from one kind of impression to another kind of idea]. The nature of experience is this. We remember to have had frequent instances of the existence of one species of objects [i.e., mode of sensation]; and also remember, that the individuals of another species of objects [i.e., a different sense modality] have always attended them, and have existed in regular order of contiguity and succession with regard to them. Thus we remember to have seen that species of object we call flame, and to have felt that species of sensation we call heat. We likewise call to mind their constant conjunction in all past instances. … But in all cases, wherein we reason concerning them, there is only one perceiv’d or remember’d, and the other is supply’d [by the imagination] in conformity to our past experience.” (T 1.3.6.1.)

“[Hume] agrees that copying is, in general, neither necessary nor sufficient for representation. It is only in the special case of ideas that copying has a strong claim to be a necessary condition for representation; and even in that special case, the qualitative character of the idea is not sufficient by itself to determine its specific representational content.” (Garrett 2006.)

“On [Hume’s] view, perceptions represent at all only because of the associative, inferential, sentimental, emotional, and conative causal networks in which they participate.” (Garrett 2006.)
**Nominalist Account of Representation**

**Indication:** Internal & External

*Internal Indication:* R indicates R′
*External Indication:* R indicates O

**Similitude** (*Internal Only*): R resembles R′

**Dissimilitude:** Internal & External

*Internal Dissimilitude:* R suggests (dissimilar) R′
*External Dissimilitude:* R suggests (dissimilar) O

**Intentionality:** Internal & External

*Internal Intentionality:* R is about R′ in virtue of either suggesting (dissimilitude) or resembling (similitude) R′
*External Intentionality:* R is about O in virtue of suggesting (dissimilitude) O.

**Extrinsicality:** R is only extrinsically representational of R′ (when R′ and R are dissimilar) and O.

**Intrinsicallity:** R is intrinsically representational only internally, and only when R resembles R′.

**Nominalist Account of Misrepresentation**

(NM): Misrepresentation =df R anomalously suggests O.

Misrepresentation is a failure to play a certain semantic role or causal/functional role.

NM allows for various failures of intentionality:

- R can lack intentionality with respect to R′ but not with respect to O (transparency of ideas).
- R can lack intentionality with respect to O but not to R′ (fanciful ideas of the imagination).
- R can lack intentionality with respect to R′ and O (the Molyneux man).

**Anti-Skepticism**

The nominalist bar for a skeptic is set pretty high. Using the nominalist account of misrepresentation, the skeptic would have to argue either:

- R fills a semantic or functional role (in which case R is not a misrepresentation by definition), but R either doesn’t suggest or deviantly suggests.
  
  *But the second conjunct implies that R doesn’t fill the semantic or functional role in question, contradicting the first conjunct.*

- Or, R doesn’t fill a semantic or functional role at all (think of the Molyneux man), in which case R isn’t a representation.
  
  *But if R isn’t a representation, it couldn’t be a misrepresentation.*

The realist bar for a skeptic is exceedingly low: Show that R and O are dissimilar (or that similitude cannot be established between R and O).