
DIRECT REALISM, INTENTIONALITY, AND THE OBJECTIVE BEING OF IDEAS

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Abstract: My aim is to arrive at a better understanding of the distinction between direct realism and representationalism by offering a critical analysis of Steven Nadler's account in *Arnauld and the Cartesian Philosophy of Ideas*. I argue contrary to Nadler that Descartes and Arnauld are representationalists, and I also argue that Aquinas is a representationalist.

The aim of this paper is to understand the contrast between two philosophical theories of perception: direct realism and representationalism. In rough formulation, direct realism is the view that when we perceive mind-independent physical objects we are directly or immediately aware of them. Representationalism or indirect realism agrees that we perceive mind-independent physical objects, but denies that we are immediately aware of them. Rather, we perceive physical objects by being immediately aware of ideas that represent them.

This rough formulation of the distinction might make it appear relatively easy to determine whether a philosophical theory counts as a direct realist theory or a representationalist theory. However, this appearance is dispelled by disputes concerning which historical figures in philosophy count as direct realists and which are representationalists. While it is commonly believed that Aquinas is a direct realist and Descartes is a representationalist, Steven Nadler has argued forcefully that Descartes's and Arnauld's use of the notion of objective being commits them to an essentially Thomistic theory of cognition and that they too are direct realists.¹ Nevertheless, it has still seemed to me that Descartes is a representationalist, even though I count myself among those who read Descartes as holding

an essentially Thomistic theory of cognition.² And this has led me to ask whether Aquinas, perhaps in spite of himself, is also a representationalist. But at the same time it has led me to call into question my own understanding of the contrast between direct realism and representationalism. Why would other philosophers claim that these theories are direct realist theories? Moreover, it has led me to wonder what is at stake in determining whether a philosopher holds a direct realist or a representationalist theory. What sort of motivations are there for adopting one theory over the other?

The bulk of the paper will be spent answering the first of these questions. My strategy will be to examine in some detail Nadler's various formulations of the contrast between direct realism and representationalism and his arguments that Descartes and Arnauld are direct realists. But before turning to that first question, let me comment briefly on the second question.

1. Three motivations for adopting representationalism

Among contemporary philosophers, representationalism is typically understood to be motivated by a commitment to the thesis that there must be immediate objects of awareness that have the properties that bodies appear to have but do not have.³ In order to perceive a coin as elliptical we must be immediately aware of something that is elliptical. There must be something that has the color that a white cat appears to have in pink light in order to account for our perception of the cat as pink.⁴ Understood this way representationalism is motivated by an explanatory project – that of explaining how sensory illusion is possible. And the fundamental assumption driving this motivation is that in order to perceive a physical object as having some property, there must be an immediate object of awareness that actually has that property.⁵

Representationalism is also linked to foundationalism. It is not a big jump, although it is a jump, from commitment to the thesis that there must be immediate objects of awareness other than bodies that possess the properties bodies appear to have to the thesis that these immediate objects of awareness are certain and indubitable and hence can provide a secure foundation for empirical knowledge. Understood this way representationalism is motivated by the epistemological project of providing an indubitable foundation for empirical knowledge.

It is important to distinguish these two projects. One can be committed to the explanatory project without being committed to the epistemological project. That is, one might believe that it is necessary to posit things that have the properties bodies appear to have in order to explain the

possibility of sense illusion without being a foundationalist. However, in order to be a foundationalist who takes sense data as the foundation, then one would also need to be committed to the view that those sense data have the properties bodies appear to have.

The explanatory project must also be distinguished from a second explanatory project. One might hold as a basic metaphysical principle that direct cognition (awareness) of objects cannot be achieved at a distance. A subject cannot have direct awareness of something with which it is not in immediate contact. Thus it might be claimed, as it was by Malebranche, that a subject of awareness cannot have direct awareness of physical objects which are not in immediate contact with it.⁶ The resulting explanatory project is to provide a theory of how we can be in direct contact with some entity that enables us to claim indirect cognition of physical objects. But even if one follows Arnauld in rejecting the view that the sort of presence required for cognition is local presence, that is, lack of spatial distance, and claims instead that the sort of presence required for immediate cognition is objective presence,⁷ one still might construe the notion of objective presence to require that all objects of direct awareness exist objectively in the subject of awareness. On this understanding of objective presence a theory needs to be provided to explain how something in us can represent external objects in a way that justifies the claim that we are perceiving those external objects.

This second explanatory project is completely different from the first. The assumptions driving the two projects are independent. One can hold that the immediate objects of awareness must have the properties bodies appear to have without holding that the immediate objects of awareness cannot be at a distance. Indeed one could go so far as to hold that we are often directly aware of physical objects and only fail to be directly aware of them in cases of sense illusion. Conversely, one can hold that the immediate objects of awareness must exist objectively in the subject of awareness without holding that the immediate objects of awareness must be as they appear or that the immediate objects of awareness must actually possess the illusory properties of physical objects.

It is crucially important that these motivations underlying the adoption of representative theories not be confused. It is my belief that Aristotle's theory of cognition and those of his Thomistic followers are driven by the basic assumption that drives the second explanatory project, an assumption held in opposition to Plato, namely, that we can have immediate cognition of objects only insofar as they exist in us. What I take to be the controversial issues of interpretation are first, whether the Aristotelians were aiming to reconcile this assumption with direct realism, and second, whether it can be made consistent with direct realism or in fact entails representationalism.

2. *The Thomistic-Cartesian theory of cognition*

Let me turn now to the first question, why would philosophers understand the Thomistic theory of cognition as a direct realist theory and is it plausible to interpret it that way? Let me begin with a sketch of basic elements of the Thomistic theory of cognition. Then I will present my reasons for thinking that Descartes retains that theory of cognition and why it has seemed to me to be a version of representationalism.

A. THE THOMISTIC THEORY

According to Aquinas, following the views of Aristotle, we have cognition of both essential and accidental forms of substances. To have cognition of the essential form of a substance is to have knowledge of the substance. It is in virtue of our having a mind or intellect that we are able to have cognition of these essential forms. Our senses enable us to have cognition of the accidental forms of substances. For example, the sense of sight enables us to have cognition of the brownness of a horse, but since the color of a horse is not what makes the horse what it is, brownness is considered to be an accidental form of the horse.

Again following Aristotle, Aquinas held that in order for a subject to have cognition of a form that very form must be received in the cognizing subject. So essential forms are received in the mind and accidental forms are received in the senses. Now the reception of forms also underlies the Aristotelian account of becoming – something becomes brown in virtue of receiving the accidental form of brown, or something becomes a horse in virtue of receiving the form of horse. However, we do not become a horse when we come to have knowledge of a horse. And although there is still considerable controversy regarding Aristotle's account of sensation,⁸ Aquinas saw himself as following Aristotle in maintaining that it is equally true that no part of us becomes brown in virtue of our seeing something brown. Thus it was necessary for Aquinas to distinguish two ways in which forms are received by a subject. He distinguishes natural or material reception of forms from spiritual or immaterial reception of forms. When a form is received naturally or materially by a subject, the form is predicated of that subject. When a form is received spiritually or immaterially, the subject has cognition of the form, but the form is not predicated of it.⁹ So one and the same form, say the form of a horse, can have two kinds of being: it exists naturally or materially in a horse, but it exists spiritually or immaterially in our mind when we have knowledge of a horse. Or, to take our other example, the accidental form brown exists naturally in a brown thing (say a horse) but spiritually or immaterially in our eyes when we see a brown horse. The form as it exists spiritually or immaterially is often referred to by Scholastics as a species.

B. THE CARTESIAN THEORY

By the time of Descartes and Arnauld, the terms used by Scholastics to demarcate this distinction between two kinds of being were ‘formal being’ and ‘objective being.’ Formal being referred to the being that things have in the world, objective being referred to the being that things have in thought.

Although Descartes rejects two key elements of the Thomistic theory of cognition, I believe that his theory is fundamentally Thomistic. Descartes rejects the Thomistic view that we have cognition of forms, and he rejects the view that a species – a spiritual form – is somehow transmitted from the object and received in the soul. But the reason his theory of cognition is fundamentally Thomistic is that he accepts the most basic element of that theory, namely, he agrees that we have cognition of things in the world when they come to have another kind of existence – objective existence – in the soul. So in explaining what he means by the term ‘objective being’ in the *Replies to the First Objections* Descartes asserts that “the idea of the sun is the sun itself existing in the intellect – not of course formally, as it does in the heavens, but objectively, that is, in the way in which objects are wont to be in the intellect” (AT VII 102; CSM II 75).¹⁰ This I take to be a clear endorsement of Thomistic theory. Although Descartes thinks that we have cognition of the sun itself and not of the form of the sun (because on his view there is no such thing as the form of the sun), he thinks that the sun is capable of the same two kinds of being – formal and objective – that the Scholastics thought forms were capable of, and it is in virtue of its capacity for objective being that we can have cognition of the sun.

C. THE QUICK ARGUMENT THAT DESCARTES AND AQUINAS ARE DIRECT REALISTS

If the idea of the sun just is the sun, then there hardly seems room to say that the idea of the sun represents an object distinct from it. Similarly, on the Thomistic view, if we have cognition of forms, but those very forms exist in the soul, then it would seem false that we have knowledge of forms only indirectly by means of something else that represents them. And this might well seem to provide conclusive evidence that Aquinas and Descartes are direct realists.

D. AN ARGUMENT THAT DESCARTES AND AQUINAS ARE REPRESENTATIONALISTS

Descartes thinks that some of our ideas represent things external to the mind (AT XI 342; CSM I 335). So he seems committed to saying that the idea of the sun, that is, the sun as it exists objectively in the mind,

represents the sun as it exists formally in the heavens.¹¹ In other words, the sun in one mode of existence represents itself in another mode of existence.¹² We might say that sun as it exists objectively is a mode of presentation of the sun as it exists formally. I am tempted to attribute to Descartes the view that the sun as it exists objectively is able to represent the sun as it exists formally in the heavens precisely because it is the same thing that has these two different modes of existence.

To say that it is the same sun that has these two modes of existence does not imply that the sun as it exists objectively in the mind is identical to the sun as it exists formally in the heavens, at least in our contemporary sense of identity according to which whatever is truly predicated of one is truly predicable of the other. So while it is true that the sun as it exists objectively is an idea, it is false that the sun as it exists formally is an idea. There is no contradiction in asserting both that the same sun has two modes of existence and that the sun in one mode existence is not identical to itself in the other mode of existence any more than there is in asserting that we are the same human being we were at birth even though it cannot be truly predicated of us as adults that we are under thirty inches tall.¹³

Given the non-identity claim, it does not follow from the fact that we are directly aware of the sun as it exists objectively in the mind that we are directly aware of the sun as it exists formally in the heavens. By my way of thinking, this strongly suggests that Descartes is not a direct realist. To be a direct realist about physical objects, he would have to hold that we are directly aware of the sun insofar as it exists formally in the heavens. Such an understanding of direct realism is similar to that of A. O. Lovejoy, who maintains that direct realism requires that "objects are given *in propria persona*."¹⁴ I am not entirely sure what Lovejoy means by this phrase, but it would appear to be susceptible to two different interpretations, one weak and one strong. According to the weak interpretation, to be directly aware of objects external to the mind is to be directly aware of them insofar as they are external to the mind. According to the strong interpretation, the objects of direct awareness must be as they appear to us – not in the sense that we are aware of every aspect of them, but in the sense that those aspects of the objects of which we are immediately aware must be as they appear. I am not sure that Lovejoy intends to commit himself to the strong interpretation and I certainly do not want to make such a commitment myself. Instead I want to rely solely on the weak interpretation because it captures what seems to me to be a necessary condition for direct realism. Even if we reject the strong interpretation, so that we can be directly aware of external objects even if they appear to be other than they are, we cannot claim to be directly aware of external objects unless we are directly aware of them insofar as they are external to the mind.

Descartes's view seems to be that the sun as it exists objectively in the mind plays the role of being a representative intermediary between us and the sun as it exists formally in the heavens. Thus we are not directly aware of the sun insofar as it exists formally in the heavens. By the same token, Aquinas's assertion that the intelligible species is not what the intellect understands, but that by which the intellect understands, which is often thought to provide evidence in favor of his being a direct realist, can equally well be taken to point in the other direction.¹⁵ If the form existing spiritually in the intellect is not what is understood, then it must be playing the role of being an intermediary between the intellect and what is understood. Aquinas says that a thing seems according to the way the cognitive faculty is affected and that the form existing spiritually in the intellect enables us to understand because it is a likeness of what is understood.¹⁶ This sounds like representationalism to me. Aquinas would appear to believe that the form as it exists in the object is not presented to us *in propria persona*.

3. Nadler's argument that Descartes and Arnauld are direct realists

Is there some way in which this understanding of direct realism is inadequate? Why would other commentators maintain that Aquinas and Descartes are direct realists? Nadler sets out what I take to be the leading contemporary argument for the view that Descartes and Arnauld are direct realists. He claims that it is true on both direct realism and representationalism that our perception of external bodies is mediated by ideas.¹⁷ The difference between the theories lies in how that mediation is understood. According to representationalism, our perception of external bodies takes place by means of our awareness or apprehension of ideas. According to direct realism, ideas do not mediate our perception of bodies in virtue of our being aware of or apprehending those ideas. Rather ideas are merely the acts of awareness themselves. According to the direct realist, talk of ideas is meant to flag only the trivial and obvious fact that we cannot perceive a body without an act of perception. The contrast between representationalism and direct realism therefore amounts to this: the representationalist holds that ideas enable us to perceive bodies by being themselves immediate objects of perception; the direct realist maintains that ideas mediate our perception of external bodies only in virtue of being acts of perception and not in virtue of being objects of perception.¹⁸ While I take this to be Nadler's fundamental account of the distinction between direct realism and representationalism, at various points he mentions or suggests five other ways of characterizing the distinction.

Three of them I take to be elaborations of this fundamental account. I will focus my attention on those. But first I would like to set aside the other two seemingly independent accounts.

First, Nadler claims direct realism maintains that external bodies are perceived non-inferentially, whereas according to representationalism the perception of external bodies involves an inference based on the direct perception of ideas.¹⁹ I did not notice any place where Nadler makes use of this way of drawing the distinction, which is just as well, because Frank Jackson argues against it convincingly in his book *Perception*.

In criticizing D. M. Armstrong's analysis of Berkeley's coach example, Jackson argues that the claim that the indirect perception of external objects involves an inference is based on a confusion between perception and belief about perception. Armstrong suggests that we can hear the sound of the coach without hearing the coach, on the grounds that someone who heard a noise that was made by a coach would not be able to say that he knew he heard a coach if he didn't already know that coaches made such a sound. But Jackson rightly points out that if we hear a noise made by a coach, by that very fact we hear the coach, whether or not we believe we hear the coach. We don't need any beliefs added on to hearing the sound to get hearing the coach.²⁰

Similarly, a representationalist can argue that by the very fact of our being directly aware of ideas of external objects, we perceive external objects (indirectly), whether or not we form the belief that we are perceiving those external objects. It may require an inference for us to form the belief that we are perceiving an external object. It is equally true that on direct realist theories perceiving need not be identified with believing. Even if we are directly aware of *q*, it still may require an inference for us to form the belief that we are perceiving *q*.²¹

The other account of the distinction I would like to set aside is that representationalists maintain that the immediate object of perception truly has the properties it appears to have, whereas direct realists allow that the immediate object of perception can appear other than it is.²² I do not dispute that among contemporary defenders of representationalism such as Jackson, its primary justification rests on the claim that there must be some thing, some entity that has the properties that bodies appear to have but do not have.²³ Furthermore, I grant that if a philosopher does maintain that we are aware of entities that have the properties bodies appear to have but do not have, that constitutes strong evidence that he is a representationalist. But I have already asserted that a representationalist need not be committed to the claim that the immediate objects of perception are as they appear. If a representationalist is motivated only by concern about the impossibility of direct awareness at a distance, then he could still maintain that even though we are directly aware of ideas, these ideas need not be as they appear.

Nadler's third characterization of the distinction is supposed to be a restatement of the fundamental account. He says that according to direct realism, perception is a dyadic relation involving the perceiver and the object perceived; whereas according to representationalism, perception is a triadic relation involving a perceiver, an intermediate object immediately perceived, and an indirectly perceived external body.²⁴

Fourth, Nadler maintains that according to representationalism there is an indirect relation between the act of perception and the external object of perception. This indirect relation involves two direct relations. One direct relation obtains between the act of awareness and the idea.²⁵ The second direct relation is the relation of representation that obtains between the idea and the external object. According to direct realism, in contrast, the relation between the act of awareness and the external object of perception is direct.²⁶

These third and fourth characterizations do not fit easily together. According to the third characterization, the immediate relation that typifies direct realism obtains between the perceiver and the external object; whereas according to the fourth characterization, it obtains between the act of awareness and the external object. If these two accounts are to be consistent, then it would seem to be the case that the connection between the perceiver and the act of perception is not a relation. However, Nadler quotes Arnauld as asserting that the connection between the perceiver and the act of perception is a relation:

I have said that I take the perception and the idea to be the same thing. Nevertheless, it must be remarked that this thing, although single, stands in two relations: one to the soul which it modifies, the other to the thing perceived, in so far as it exists objectively in the soul. The word *perception* more directly indicates the first relation, the word *idea*, the latter.²⁷

Thus it would appear that according to Nadler's third characterization, Arnauld is in fact a representationalist because in this passage he is committing himself to the view that the relation between the perceiver and the external object is not immediate but instead is indirect, being mediated by two relations: first, the relation between the soul and the idea (the act of perception), and second, the relation between the idea (the act of perception) and the thing perceived.

I imagine that Nadler would reply to this objection that even though on Arnauld's theory the act of perception is an entity, it is merely a modification of the soul, and the fact that it is related to the soul as a modification is not sufficient to show that Arnauld thinks the soul is only indirectly related to the perceived object.²⁸ In other words, the mere fact that an act of awareness is related to the soul as a modification does not make it a third thing, a *tertium quid* standing between the perceiver and the external object.

It is important to note in this connection, as Nadler emphasizes, that the direct realist need not deny that ideas are immediate objects of awareness. Indeed, the direct realist can go so far as to maintain that each idea – each act of awareness – involves an awareness of itself. The direct realist is committed only to denying that this immediate awareness that we have of ideas plays a role in our perception of external bodies.²⁹

A more difficult question is whether Nadler thinks that a representationalist must deny that ideas are acts of awareness. Some representationalists do hold that ideas are distinct from our acts of awareness and so have analyzed perception as involving a subject of awareness, an act of awareness, an idea, and the object represented by that idea. In other words, some representationalists hold that ideas are a third thing, a *tertium quid*, standing between the act of awareness and the external object. Evidence that Nadler thinks that this is true of all representationalists is provided by the fact that he seems to conclude at one point that Descartes is a direct realist simply on the grounds that Descartes thinks of ideas as acts of perception.³⁰

But there are other grounds for concluding that Nadler does not think all representationalists must hold that ideas are distinct from acts of awareness.³¹ In defending his claim that Arnauld is a direct realist Nadler seems to allow that a theory that identifies ideas with acts of perception would still count as a representationalist theory if it maintained that our perception of those acts of perception is the means by which we perceive external objects.³² So I think that Nadler's considered view is that a representationalist need not deny that ideas are acts of perception. A representationalist is committed only to saying that if ideas are considered as acts of perception, then they enable us to perceive bodies only insofar as they themselves are objects of perception. However, to assert that our perception of bodies is mediated by our awareness of our acts of perception might seem so implausible that one might conclude that the identification of ideas with acts of perception shows that representationalism is false and thus that it would be uncharitable to interpret a philosopher who makes such an identification as a representationalist.

To this point Nadler's account of the distinction between representationalism and direct realism does not differ significantly from that of other defenders of the direct realist interpretation of Descartes and Arnauld, such as John Yolton. Nadler's argument for the direct realist interpretation has relied primarily on the assertion that they think ideas are acts of perception. But his account diverges significantly from Yolton's when it comes to the question of the nature of objective being. Yolton offers what I would call a strongly deflationary interpretation of Descartes's and Arnauld's use of the notion of objective being. According to Yolton, Descartes's and Arnauld's use of notion of objective being is different from that of Aquinas and has no metaphysical punch whatsoever. To

speak of objective being is just to refer to the object as understood, it is not to suppose that the object exists in the intellect in a special kind of way.³³ Nadler, in contrast, maintains that when Descartes and Arnauld make use of the notion of 'objective being' they are referring to an intrinsic feature of an idea, that is, to the act of awareness, that "gives it directedness to an object."³⁴ These are very different interpretations. On Yolton's interpretation Descartes and Arnauld are referring to the idea's object when they talk in terms of objective being but on Nadler's interpretation they are referring to a feature of the idea that directs it to the object.

In order to see what is motivating Nadler's interpretation of Descartes's and Arnauld's use of the notion of objective being and to motivate his fifth characterization of the distinction between direct realism and representationalism, it is helpful first to consider a crucial question about perception that leads up to it. One wants to know how a particular act of awareness gets an external object. How is it that this act of visual perception is directed to my computer screen and not say, to my retina or to the intervening rays of light?

According to Nadler, this is where the theory of intentionality comes into play. To say that acts of awareness are intentional is to say that they are of something, they are object-directed, even if that object does not exist outside consciousness.³⁵ To explain how acts of awareness are of something is to provide a theory of intentionality. Borrowing from David Woodruff Smith and Ronald McIntyre's impressive study of Husserl, Nadler distinguishes two general theories of intentionality.³⁶ One general theory is the object approach. The other is the content approach.³⁷

The underlying idea of the object approach to intentionality is that no mental act can be object-directed without there being an object immediately present to the mind. Smith and McIntyre point out that since not all mental acts are directed at objects that exist in the external world, this approach to intentionality requires that at least some of these objects which are immediately present to the mind must be objects with a special ontological status. They claim further that defenders of object theories of intentionality typically maintain, apparently by some process of generalization, although this inference is left unexplained by Smith and McIntyre, that all immediate objects of awareness have an unusual ontological status.³⁸ Object theories that include this generalization would thus be versions of representationalism.

It is misleading, however, to describe the move from the object theory of intentionality to representationalism as motivated primarily by reflection on cases such as hallucinations in which the immediate object of awareness is an object with an unusual ontological status (because there is no appropriate ordinary object in the external world). Rather, the object theory can count as a theory of intentionality with explanatory

power in ordinary cases only if we assume from the outset that there is an immediate object of awareness different from the real object perceived. That is, in order to count as a theory of intentionality the object theory presupposes representationalism.³⁹

The rival theory of intentionality, the content approach, is supposed to be congenial to direct realism. According to the content approach to intentionality, as described by Nadler, each mental act has a certain structure or content which is an intrinsic, non-relational property of that act and which accounts for its object-directedness.⁴⁰ Therefore on this theory the object toward which a mental act is directed must be distinguished from the content of that act. Moreover, there can be acts which are object-directed even if there is no object present to the mind.

This distinction between the object approach and the content approach to intentionality provides the basis for what I take to be an implicit fifth characterization of the distinction between direct realism and representationalism. According to the representationalist, intentionality is based on a non-intrinsic, relational property of the act of awareness, namely, the relation that it bears to the immediate object. According to the direct realist, intentionality is based on an intrinsic, non-relational property of the act of awareness.

Nadler makes use of this fifth characterization to support his main argument that Descartes is a direct realist. He claims Descartes thinks that the objective being of ideas accounts for their intentionality.⁴¹ Combining this together with his additional claim that Descartes thinks of ideas as acts of perception together with the further claim that objective being "is something inhering in or intrinsic to the idea-act itself," he concludes that Descartes holds a content theory of intentionality and that he is therefore a direct realist.⁴²

The objection to this fifth characterization is that it is not sufficient for direct realism that intentionality is taken to be an intrinsic property of acts of awareness. A theory of perception that held that we perceive external objects by perceiving the content intrinsic to acts of perception would still be representationalist, because that intrinsic content would be serving as an intermediate object.⁴³ Therefore, Nadler is not entitled to conclude as he does that Descartes does not hold an object theory of intentionality simply by arguing that Descartes thinks that the objective being of an idea is intrinsic to it.⁴⁴

Thus the fifth characterization cannot be used as a basis to establish that Descartes and Arnauld are direct realists. It seems to me that the underlying problem with Nadler's argument arises from a confusion between two subtly different questions. The first question is whether a mental act's directedness towards an object arises from our perceiving or apprehending the content of the act. Nadler focuses on this first question and seems to believe that a negative answer yields direct realism. The

second question is whether the objective being of an idea directs our attention to its object in virtue of our being aware of that objective being. Nadler would grant, I believe, that a positive answer to this question yields representationalism. But the crucial point to see is that a negative answer to the first question can be consistent with a positive answer to the second question. I agree with Nadler against Yolton that Descartes thinks the objective being of an idea directs our attention to its object, and moreover, I agree with him that in order to do so the directedness of an idea's objective being must be logically prior to our awareness of it. But it does not follow from this that our attention, that is, our thought, is directed to that object independently of our being aware of the objective being of the idea.

One might respond to this objection by claiming that since an idea just is an act of awareness that is intrinsically directed to an object, it is not necessary to posit awareness of the intrinsic directing feature to explain our awareness of the object. However, this response does not settle the historical question of what Descartes and Arnauld thought. Surely a philosopher might believe that our awareness of an object must be mediated by our awareness of the directing feature intrinsic to the act of awareness. As far as I can see, Nadler has not provided textual evidence that Descartes and Arnauld maintain that this awareness is not necessary. And while this ultimately might be a matter of the feel of various passages that could be rendered consistent with either reading, it seems to me overwhelmingly the case that Descartes and Arnauld both believe that our awareness of objects is mediated by our awareness of the objective being of our ideas. And that makes them representationalists.⁴⁵

In the case of Arnauld we can make an even stronger case that he is a representationalist. Arnauld asserts that in the case of vision, the intelligible sun, that is, the sun as it exists objectively in the mind, is a flat and circular body, about two feet in diameter.⁴⁶ No one who thinks that objective being accounts for the intentionality of our ideas would make such a claim if he did not believe that our awareness of the sun in sensation is mediated by our awareness of the objective being of our ideas. On the contrary, the most plausible motive for making such an assertion is the belief that in order to account for the possibility of sense illusion we need to posit immediate objects of awareness that have the properties bodies appear to have.

In closing I would like to make three further points about the content theory of intentionality. First, it is a misnomer. On the content theory, we are supposed to think of the idea's content as something like a meta-physical fiber optic telescope that directs our attention to a particular external object but not by means of our being aware of it. It would be more appropriate to call such a view the pointer theory of intentionality. And if a pointer points us in a direction without our being aware of the

feature in virtue of which it points us in that direction (and perhaps even without our being aware of the pointer itself), it seems misleading to refer to that feature as the pointer's content. It is misleading because referring to a feature of an idea as its content already suggests that the feature functions in virtue of being an object of awareness, whereas the whole point of the content theory is that the directing feature of an idea works independently of its being an object of awareness.

Second, once it is clear that the content functions only as the feature of an idea that points it towards its object, then there is absolutely no reason to think of the content as resembling or being similar to its object. Pointers standardly do not resemble what they point to. So the fact that a philosopher thinks it is important that the element of our thought which directs our thought to an object resemble the object provides a *prima facie* reason to believe that he does not hold a content theory of intentionality. Thus I would conclude that there is *prima facie* reason to believe that Aquinas does not hold a content theory of intentionality. Similarly, it is crucial to Descartes's theory of intentionality that at least sometimes there is a resemblance between what exists objectively in our ideas and the object in the world causing that idea. On the other hand, if a philosopher thinks that it is important that the element of our thought which directs our thought to its object be in some way dissimilar to its object in order to account for the possibility of sensory illusion, that also provides a strong reason for concluding that he does not hold a content theory of intentionality.

The third point has to do with the relationship between intentionality and appearances on the content theory. If a direct realist wants to maintain that our perceiving an external object as having a particular property counts as directly perceiving the external object, then it cannot be the case that the object appears to have that property because some feature of our act of perception is projected onto or ascribed to the external object by us. Perceiving is one thing, projecting properties onto things is another. It is some further activity on our part. Therefore I think it is inconsistent to try to maintain as Nadler does both that Arnauld thinks that sensible qualities such as color are sensations, that is, modifications of the mind, that are projected onto perceived bodies and that "sensations are incorporated into the *immediate* perception of external objects."⁴⁷

Let me summarize briefly. In trying to understand the distinction between direct realism and representationalism, I have argued that a representationalist can grant to Nadler that ideas are acts of awareness, that an intrinsic feature of an idea directs our attention to its object, and that the directedness of this feature is prior to our awareness of it. This is possible because a representationalist can distinguish between the directedness of that intrinsic feature of the idea and the directedness of our awareness. It is sufficient for being a representationalist that one

maintain that the directedness of our awareness arises from our awareness of the intrinsic directing feature of the idea.

I have also argued that a representationalist need not assert that the immediate objects of perception are as they appear, and I have made two claims about direct realism: first, a direct realist cannot hold an object theory of intentionality; and second, a direct realist needs to be careful not to confuse projecting properties onto external objects with immediately perceiving them.⁴⁸

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NOTES

¹ Nadler, Steven (1989). *Arnauld and the Cartesian Philosophy of Ideas*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. Other contemporary commentators besides Nadler who have interpreted various seventeenth-century philosophers as direct realists include Monte Cook, (1987) "Descartes' Alleged Representationalism," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 4 pp. 179–195 and (1974) "Arnauld's Alleged Representationalism," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 12, pp. 53–62; Lennon, Thomas (1974). "The Inherence Pattern and Descartes' Idea," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 12, pp. 43–52; Yolton, John (1975). "Ideas and Knowledge in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 13, pp. 145–166 and (1984) *Perceptual Acquaintance from Descartes to Reid*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press; and Kremer, Elmar J. (1990) in the introduction to his translation of Arnauld's *On True and False Ideas*. Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, pp. xxiii–xxxi.

² See my (1996) "Descartes on Misrepresentation," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 34, pp. 357–381.

³ Jackson, Frank (1977). *Perception*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 149.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁵ I am not asserting that all representationalists believe that sensory illusion can be explained only by attributing to immediate objects of perception the properties that bodies appear to have but do not have.

⁶ Malebranche, Nicholas. *The Search after Truth*, translated by Thomas M. Lennon and Paul J. Olscamp. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1980, p. 217.

⁷ Arnauld, Antoine. *On True and False Ideas*, translated by Elmar J. Kremer. Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990, Chapter VIII, pp. 37–39.

⁸ The main contenders in this debate are Richard Sorabji (1974), "Body and Soul in Aristotle," *Philosophy* 49, pp. 63–89, and Miles Burnyeat (1992), "Is an Aristotelian Philosophy of Mind Still Credible? A Draft" in Martha C. Nussbaum and Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (eds.) *Essays on Aristotle's De Anima*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 15–26.

⁹ For a fuller account of Aquinas's views, see my (1990) "St. Thomas Aquinas on the Halfway State of Sensible Being," *The Philosophical Review* 99, pp. 73–92.

¹⁰ The abbreviations to editions of Descartes's works are as follows:

AT *Oeuvres de Descartes*, Vols. I–XII and Supplement, edited by Charles Adam and Paul Tannery (Paris: Leopold Cerf, 1897–1913).

- CSM *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Vols. I and II, translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).
- CSMK *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Vol. III, translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

¹¹ Here I am opposing the explicit claim of Norman J. Wells (1990) in “Objective Reality of Ideas in Descartes, Caterus, and Suárez,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 28, pp. 33–61, and the implicit claim of Michael J. Costa (1983) in “What Cartesian Ideas Are Not,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 21, p. 540, that ideas taken objectively are not representative. I am agreeing with Vere Chappell (1986), “The Theory of Ideas,” in Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (ed.) *Essays on Descartes’ Meditations*. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 192–3, who argues that ideas taken objectively are representative.

¹² Descartes also holds that things external to the mind cause our sensory ideas. So he seems committed to saying that the sun as it exists formally in the world causes the sun as it exists objectively in the mind.

¹³ See note 44 for discussion of a related and more threatening inconsistency in the view I attribute to Descartes.

¹⁴ Lovejoy, A. O. (1923). “Representative Ideas in Malebranche and Arnauld,” *Mind* 32, p. 454.

¹⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia, q85, a2.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Nadler, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 10, 114–5.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 11–12.

²⁰ Frank Jackson, *op. cit.*, pp. 7–8.

²¹ Nadler, *op. cit.*, pp. 132–3, also cites Jackson in arguing that direct realism is no better off than representationalism with respect to the epistemological problem of our knowledge of the external world.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 133.

²³ Jackson, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

²⁴ Nadler, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 112–3. This characterization of the distinction is derived from Nadler’s contrast of all representationalist theories with Arnauld’s direct realism. He does not explicitly assert that this characterization applies to all versions of direct realism, but such an inference is suggested by the context.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 109. Nadler is quoting from *On True and False Ideas*, Chapter 5, #6.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 118–122.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 127–9.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 84–6.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 121, 175.

³³ Yolton, *Perceptual Acquaintance*, pp. 38–39.

³⁴ Nadler, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 143–144.

³⁶ Smith David Woodruff and McIntyre, Ronald (1982). *Husserl and Intentionality: A Study of Mind, Meaning, Language*. Dordrecht: D. Reidel.

³⁷ Nadler, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

³⁸ Smith and McIntyre, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

³⁹ I am indebted to the referee for a more succinct formulation of this point.

⁴⁰ Nadler, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 161–2.

⁴³ There need be no regress here so long as the act of awareness is reflexive, that is, if it is by means of the very act of awareness that we are aware of the content intrinsic to the act.

⁴⁴ I am attributing two views to Descartes and Arnauld that might seem inconsistent. First, I am claiming that they think the distinction between an idea taken materially as an act of awareness and an idea taken objectively as the content of that act of awareness is merely a distinction of reason. Second, I am claiming that they think an idea taken objectively is one and the same object as the object that exists in the external world, although not as it exists formally in the external world, but rather objectively as it exists in the mind. Michael Ayers (1998) in “Ideas and Objective Being,” in Daniel Garber and Michael Ayers (eds.) *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, Volume II Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 1067 argues that if the distinction between the object as it exists formally in the world and as it exists objectively in the mind is also understood to be a distinction of reason, then the views are inconsistent because “on ordinary realist assumptions, there cannot be one thing, the idea, which is really identical *both* to the mode of thought [i.e. to the act of awareness] *and* to the real object.” My way out of this dilemma is to assert that even though an idea taken objectively is one and the same object as the object that exists in the external world, the object as it exists objectively in the mind is really distinct from that same object as it exists formally in the external world. Descartes himself makes the same assertion (AT IV 350, CSMK 281). While I acknowledge that it might sound contradictory at first, I do not see that it is objectionable in the end to say that the same object can have two different ways of being such that as it exists in one way it is really distinct from itself as it exists in another way. The apparent contradiction is to say that things that are really distinct are nevertheless the same. But what this comes to is that two things which can exist separately turn out to be different ways of being the same thing, and I, agreeing with Descartes, do not see that that is contradictory.

⁴⁵ For related criticisms of Nadler’s interpretation of Arnauld, see Elmar J. Kremer’s (1994) “Arnauld’s Philosophical Notion of an Idea,” in Elmar J. Kremer (ed.) *The Great Arnauld and Some of His Philosophical Correspondents*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp. 98–101.

⁴⁶ Arnauld, Antoine (1781). *Oeuvres*. Paris: Sigismond D’Arnay & Compagnie, Vol. 39, p. 132.

⁴⁷ Nadler, *op. cit.*, pp. 125–6.

⁴⁸ An earlier version of this paper was presented at UCI in May, 1995. I would like to thank Janet Broughton, John Carriero, Hannah Ginsborg, Davd Hills, Larry Nolan, Ed McCann, Alan Nelson, Calvin Normore, Daniel Warren, Gideon Yaffe and the referee for *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* for their helpful comments.