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Mind as Intentionality Alone

During a career that has spanned over forty years Panayot Butchvarov has advocated what amounts to a new theory of mind. Although the view was intimated by Hume, the "early" Wittgenstein, and Sartre among others, it is apparently found in its more developed form only in Butchvarov's works and in those of his former student, Dennis E. Bradford. I will argue that the position is interesting but encounters at least as many problems as its more traditional alternatives. Butchvarov's conception of mind is contrary to common sense, fails to provide a basis for morality, is sometimes inconsistent, and is hopelessly idealistic. I will furthermore try to show that Butchvarov's unremitting phenomenological approach is chiefly to blame. It leads to these difficulties.

His idea is to analyze mind as intentionality alone. What are sometimes called awarenesses or mental acts such as perceivings, imaginings, conceivings, etc., are construed by Butchvarov as monadic properties of *objects*, the things toward which, on the usual interpretation, the acts are directed. If I imagine a rhinoceros in my basement, the imagining is not something separate and distinct from the rhinoceros; rather, it is one of its properties. Thus, the view rejects a substantial self, and it consequently denies that awarenesses are either properties of selves or relations between selves and objects. Rather, they are properties of what Brentano dubbed "intentions." Butchvarov credits Sartre with the discovery that "if the intentionality of consciousness is taken seriously, then consciousness is seen to be nothing additional to its objects, it exhausts itself in the object,"² and he thinks of himself as bringing Sartre's theory to its logical

¹ I wish to thank Dennis E. Bradford, Theodore Everett, and Walter Soffer for their criticisms and suggestions. They are not, however, responsible for errors in the paper, nor do they necessarily agree with my views. Bradford, especially, does not.

² Panayot Butchvarov, *Being Qua Being: A Theory of Identity, Existence, and Predication* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), 252.

conclusion. In short, we should say that

the mind is *in the things* we ordinarily describe as its objects, that it is nothing but the set of certain characteristics of objects in the world. These characteristics are very different from, say, colors or shapes . . . Yet they are quite familiar. They are such characteristics as being perceptual (including its species, being visual, being tactile, etc.), being imaginal, being memorial, perhaps being purely intellectual.³

Like Butchvarov, Bradford denies "two and three-term" theories of mind. While the former hold that awarenesses stand in direct relations to their objects, the latter interpose certain intermediaries between the acts and their intentions, but these views are inadequate. According to Bradford, Introspection shows that there is no object that is the mind This pushes us toward accepting a one-term theory of mind. And that is exactly what I understand Sartre to be proposing. The notion of mind is the notion of consciousness. Consciousness is characterized by intentionality. And, given the nature of intentionality, consciousness can have no other qualities.⁴

For a more adequate understanding of Butchvarov's proposal, consider his distinction between objects and entities. In general, an object is any object of consciousness, that is, "anything that may be referred to, singled out for our attention, whether in perception, thought, or discourse."⁵ Since, moreover, existence is a genuine concept-- one that classifies and sorts-- there are both existent and non-existent objects. Anything that can be "singled out" is an object, such as the Empire State Building, numbers, or the golden mountain. Butchvarov denies Meinong's "impossible" and "defective" objects on the grounds of their *inconceivability*; they *cannot* be singled out. Otherwise, his notion is Meinongian. In contrast, an entity is an *existent* object. The class of entities is a proper subset of the class of objects, since to be an existent object,

³ Ibid., 255.

⁴ Dennis E. Bradford, *The Fundamental Ideas* (St. Louis: Warren H. Green, Inc., 1986), 158-159.

⁵ Butchvarov, *Being Qua Being*, 45.

something must, minimally, be an object. The main difference between entities and nonexistent objects is that the former, but not the latter, are "multiply identifiable." The Empire State Building is an entity, because it can be perceived, and hence identified, both by you and by me, and the book on my desk is an entity, because I can both see it and touch it. Likewise, my wife is an entity, because I correctly identified her this morning and may do so again this evening. But the supposed rhinoceros in my basement is nonexistent, since it is *not* indefinitely identifiable, though it is nonetheless an object.

Strictly speaking, then, awarenesses are properties of *objects*, not entities. Butchvarov admits it would be "absurd" to think that "being perceptual," say, is a monadic property of an entity. Even though the Empire State Building can be perceived by different persons at the same time or by the same person at different times, it would be odd, to say the least, to claim that its being perceived was one of its "constituents." As Butchvarov says, an entity "does not itself have any actual monadic, intrinsic characteristic such as being perceptual, memorial, or imaginal."⁶ However, the species of awareness involved in the singling out of an object *is*, he maintains, "an actual monadic, intrinsic characteristic of the object itself."⁷ Thus, a red square object that I remember has the property of being memorial. It might be *materially* identical, but not formally, with a red, square object that is currently being perceived by someone else. The latter object, though not the former, would have the property of being perceptual in addition to being red, square, etc. *Qua existent* object, however, the red, square thing would have neither of the two special qualities.⁸

An advantage of a one-term theory of mind is that it avoids the mistakes of two and three-term theories. Typically, two-term theories such as idealism or direct realism are unable to account for the difference

⁶ Ibid., 253.

⁷ Ibid..

⁸ For the distinction between material and formal identity, see Panayot Butchvarov, "Identity," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy, Vol. II, Studies in the Philosophy of Language*, ed. Peter A. French, Theodore E. Uehling, Jr., and Howard K. Wettstein (Morris, Minnesota: The University of Minnesota, 1977).

between veridical and nonveridical perception. Three-term theories such as representative realism may account for the difference metaphysically but are problematic in other ways. Often, the second term in the relation is mysterious-- a philosophic invention-- but, even worse, the position fails from an epistemological point of view: Since the mind has no direct access to the third term, there is no way of knowing whether judgments about it are true or false or, indeed, whether it even exists. For that matter, Butchvarov also rejects the first term, the self, interpreted as a simple, enduring substance or substratum that is somehow the bearer of properties, and for Humean reasons: Not only are we unable to experience such a thing, but we cannot even *conceive* what it would be like.⁹

A second benefit, as far as Butchvarov is concerned, is that, in contrast to the others, his theory is phenomenologically well-grounded. He regards the failure to take phenomenology seriously as a serious defect of much contemporary Anglo-American philosophy. We are urged to heed Husserl's admonition to return to "the things themselves." Leaving in abeyance both philosophical and scientific preconceptions, we should engage in a careful, detailed *description* of the things that enter into our experience. Phenomenology provides us with our only reliable starting point (which Butchvarov believes is appropriately Cartesian), and it functions as a touchstone to which we should return again and again. On the basis of their inability to measure up phenomenologically, Butchvarov rejects two-term theories that require "intermediaries" (for example, sense data, sensations, mental representations, ideas, images, etc.), not to mention the so-called "adverbial" theory of perception.¹⁰ In contrast, a one-term theory of mind is as well grounded phenomenologically as anything could be. Intentionality is at the heart of our experience.

Butchvarov's phenomenological approach underlies his acceptance

⁹ Butchvarov, *Being Qua Being*, 251. Cf. Panayot Butchvarov, "The Self and Perceptions: A Study in Humean Philosophy," *The Bobbs-Merrill Reprint Series in Philosophy*, Phil-44. The article originally appeared in *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 9, No. 35 (1959). Page references are to the Bobbs-Merrill reprint.

¹⁰ Panayot Butchvarov, *Skepticism about the External World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 13-20, 35 ff.