

CHAPTER 2

THE FIRST ANALYSIS OF TIME-CONSCIOUSNESS

2.1. *Outline of the problem*

2.1.1. A. Meinong

In his discussion with Meinong, Husserl mainly relies on an article by Meinong published in 1899.¹ In this article, Meinong addresses the matter Husserl is concerned with in the context of his doctrine of objects of higher order (*Gegenstände höherer Ordnung*). These objects of higher order are non-self-sufficient objects. As a *superius*, they are founded on other objects that function as *inferiora*.² In this context, Meinong addresses objects of higher order of which the *inferiora* are – using an expression that he himself considers to be of an imprecision soon to be corrected – separated temporally.³ The example Meinong has in mind here is that of a melody. A melody is an object of higher order that is based on notes that succeed each other in time.

Meinong's explication aims toward answering the question how such a melody is presented. If an object of higher order cannot be presented without the *inferiora*, then all the successive notes must be presented in one way or another at the same time that the melody is presented.

1. A. Meinong, "Über Gegenstände höherer Ordnung und deren Verhältnis zur inneren Wahrnehmung," *Zeitschrift für Psychologie und Physiologie der Sinnesorgane*, Band 21(1899): 182-272. In particular the third part is of importance here. This article was reprinted in: A. Meinong, *Gesamtausgabe. Band II. Abhandlungen zur Erkenntnistheorie und Gegenstandstheorie* (R. Haller & R. Kindinger gemeinsam mit R.M. Chisholm Hrsg.) Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1971, p. 377-471. English translation: "On Objects of Higher Order and Their Relationship to Internal Perception," in: M.-L. Schubert Kalsi, *Alexius Meinong. On Objects of Higher Order and Husserl's Phenomenology*, The Hague/Boston/London: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978, p. 137-208.

2. Meinong (1899), p. 190, translation, p. 144.

3. Meinong (1899), pp. 243-244, translation, p. 181.

Meinong addresses this question in greater detail by means of a number of distinctions he introduces. He distinguishes three elements in presentation: the content, the act, and the presented object. With respect to all these elements, one may speak of their proper time. Hence, in addition to the time of the content, there is the time of the act and the time of the object. The time of the content and the time of the act are taken together by Meinong under the denominator "time of the presentation." According to Meinong, this is possible because the time of the content and the time of the act necessarily coincide. It is absurd to assume that a presentation might exist while the content of that presentation does not exist. Next to the time of presentation there is the time of the object. That these two times do not need to coincide is evident. I can now have a presentation of a past object, for example, in memory. The question at stake, however, is whether the independence of the time of the presentation from the time of the object has a certain limit.⁴ This limit might lie in the perception of an object. After all, in the case of perception it seems evident that these two times are not independent from each other.

Before Meinong proceeds to answer this question, he introduces yet another distinction, namely the distinction between so-called temporally distributed objects and temporally undistributed objects.⁵ An object is temporally distributed if it requires a time span to unfold itself. An object is temporally undistributed if all its characteristics are present in one point in time, one cross-cut of time (*zeitlicher Querschnitt*).⁶ Concerning this difference, Meinong observes the following.

The contrast, therefore, is not so much concerned with the object's occupying a temporal extension, for it occupies that, at any rate, but with the manner in which the object is distributed over the temporal extension. Color and notes as such are not distributed. But melody and color change are.⁷

In terms of this last distinction, the question regarding the relation of the time of the object to the time of the presentation turns into whether the presentation of a temporally distributed object is itself also temporally distributed or not. As stated above, in the case of an original intuition of time, at first sight it seems self-evident that the time of the presentation runs parallel to the time of the object, and that a temporally distributed

4. Meinong (1899), p. 247, translation, p. 183.

5. Meinong (1899), p. 248, translation, p. 184.

6. Meinong (1899), p. 247, translation, p. 184.

7. Meinong (1899), p. 248, translation, p. 184.

object, therefore, requires a temporally distributed presentation in order to be perceived. In the perception of a temporally distributed object, for example a movement, one speaks of a succession of impressions, a succession of contents of presentation, which runs parallel to the successive phases of the movement. Once the movement is over, the perception of it has come to an end. The argument Meinong raises against the equivalence of the time of the presentation with the time of the object is the by now well-known argument that the temporal sequence of a presentation is not yet the presentation of a temporal sequence. According to Meinong, a temporally distributed presentation is not yet a presentation of a temporally distributed object. A temporally distributed object can only be presented if all the contents of the presentation are given simultaneously and if this simultaneous multiplicity of contents is encompassed in one act.

All this seems to lead to the conclusion that the perception of time is impossible. A temporal sequence can be presented but this presentation cannot be a perceptual presentation because it is based on the simultaneous givenness of a series of contents that function as reproductions of a successive series of originally given contents. Consequently, the presentation of a temporally distributed object lacks the directness and immediacy that are characteristic of perceptual presentation. Meinong notes that he himself has long been convinced of this impossibility.⁸ The insight, however, that adherence to this conviction implies that one has to acknowledge the impossibility of any perception altogether leads him to plea for the possibility of a perception of time. If one relinquishes the possibility of the perception of a temporal sequence, then perception can only apply to the domain of what is given in a so-called mathematical now-point. Yet, such a now-point is only thinkable as a limit, that is, as something ideal that cannot exist in itself. And since perception refers to what is real, nothing remains for the act of perception to perceive.⁹

In his attempt to ensure the possibility of the perception of time, Meinong mainly directs his attacks at a presupposition that lies at the root of the determination of the domain of what can be perceived. According to this presupposition, one can only perceive what is real, and what is past or future is not real. Meinong points out that the being-past or being-in-the-future of something does not detract from its possible reality. The being-past or being-in-the-future rather has an impact on the

8. Meinong (1899), p. 259, translation, p. 191.

9. Meinong (1899), p. 259, translation, p. 192.

relation between what is being presented and the subject that presents something. The determinations “past,” “present,” and “future” consequently form a subjective moment. The reality or existence of what is being presented, however, cannot be dependent on such a subjective moment. From this, Meinong concludes that one cannot support the exclusion of what is past from the domain of perception on the basis of the concept of reality.

In fact, it does not influence the reality of something real (*Realität eines Wirklichen*) if and when a cognizing subject deals with it. In the same way the past cannot, in principle, be excluded from the domain of the perceptible because of deliberations based on the concept of reality.¹⁰

This argument does not yet demonstrate that the past can be perceived. It may be the case that the reality of something real is not dependent on the condition if and when a subject occupies itself with it, but from this it does not follow that the past may indeed be perceived. To make the latter somewhat acceptable, Meinong appeals to evidence that is characteristic of some judgments that are made on the basis of memory. If memory judgments are close in time to what is being judged, in other words, if the distance between the time of the judgment and the time of the object is small enough, then these judgments are characterized by a high level of evidence. In the case of a temporally distributed object, this distance can naturally never have a zero value. Therefore, the ideal of absolute evidence cannot be reached in the case of a temporally distributed object. But what if this ideal cannot in principle be achieved? Indeed, Meinong just argued that this ideal cannot be achieved. A time-point that is absolutely present can only exist as something ideal that may exist as a limit, but not as something in itself. In view of this state of affairs, Meinong asks himself the question whether, in special circumstances, a memory judgment might not be called a perceptual judgment.¹¹ These circumstances refer to the time span between what is being judged and the judgment. If this time span is short enough,¹² there is, according to Meinong, no reason not to call the judgment a perceptual judgment.

In summary, according to Meinong, the seemingly self-evident point of departure can and must be abandoned. This point of departure states

10. Meinong (1899), p. 261, translation, p. 193.

11. Meinong (1899), p. 262, translation, p. 193.

12. For this time span, Meinong uses a term he borrows from Stern: “presence-time” (*Präsenzzeit*).

that one may only speak of the perception if a simultaneity exists between the perception and what is perceived, that is, if a simultaneity exists between the time of the presentation and the time of the object. According to Meinong, the only manner in which one may arrive at a presentation of a temporally distributed object is by means of a presentation that is not temporally distributed itself. It is in this sense that the seemingly self-evident point of departure must be abandoned. And it can be abandoned because Meinong revises the concept of perception. If the restriction of the domain of what can be perceived to what is absolutely present is lifted, nothing obstructs the way to consider the object that is close enough in time to its presentation as being a perceived object. This rough sketch of Meinong's analysis of the perception of time will be elaborated further in this chapter, in a discussion of the positions that are taken by Stern and Husserl with regard to the question of the possibility of the perception of time.

2.1.2. L.W. Stern

The then current answer to the question how an original intuition of time is possible is called into question by L.W. Stern.¹³ He mainly focuses on Meinong's position. Stern primarily attacks Meinong's plea for temporally undistributed presentations as the only manner in which temporally distributed objects can be presented. He compares such an undistributed presentation to a microscope slide.¹⁴ According to Stern, such a slide, such a cross section, is an artificial something that often offers no insight into the continuous whole of which it is a cross-cut. In addition to momentary acts of consciousness, temporally distributed acts of consciousness must be viewed as self-sufficient entities. Stern formulates the following position.

The psychic occurrence that takes place within a certain stretch of time may possibly form a unitary coherent act of consciousness, regardless of the non-simultaneity of its constituent parts. – The stretch of time over which such a psychic act is capable of being extended I call its presence-time.¹⁵ (author's translation)

13. For a discussion of Stern's position, I rely on the article on which Husserl relied in his discussion of Stern's position, namely: L.W. Stern, "Psychische Präsenzzeit," *Zeitschrift für Psychologie und Physiologie der Sinnesorgane*, Band 13(1897): 325-349.

14. Stern (1897), p. 326.

15. Stern (1897), pp. 326-327: "Das innerhalb einer gewissen Zeitstrecke sich abspielende psychische Geschehen kann unter Umständen einen einheitlichen zusammen-

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