

Representationism

1902 | Representationism | DPP 2:464-5; CP 5.607

The doctrine that percepts stand for something behind them.

In a certain sense it must be admitted, even by presentationists, that percepts only perform the function of conveying knowledge of something else. That is to say, they have to be combined and generalized to become useful knowledge; so that they may be said to represent their own generalizations. In this, representationists and presentationists may agree. But the dispute between them consists in this, that the representationist regards the percept in the light of testimony or a picture, from which by inference, or a mental act analogous to inference, the hidden cause of the percept may become known; while the presentationist holds that perception is a two-sided consciousness in which the percept appears as forcibly acting upon us, so that in perception the consciousness of an active object and of a subject acted on are as indivisible as, in making a muscular effort, the sense of exertion is one with and inseparable from the sense of resistance. The representationist would not allow that there is any bilateral consciousness even in the latter sense, regarding the bilaterality as a quasi-inference, or product of the mind's action; while the presentationist insists that there is nothing intellectual or intelligible in this duality.