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# Concepts as Representations, as Senses, and as Abilities

## Pojmi kot reprezentacije, kot smisli in kot sposobnosti

Obstajajo trije glavni pristopi k ontologiji konceptov: reprezentacionalizem, fregejanstvo in mešani pogled, ki združuje reprezentacionalizem in fregejanstvo. Reprezentacionalizem na koncepte gleda kot na mentalne reprezentacije, medtem ko fregejanstvo trdi, da so koncepti fregejevski smisli. Vsaka od teh razlag ima več prednosti. Kljub temu imajo ti pogledi poleg svojih prednosti tudi pomembne slabosti, ki bodo poudarjene v tem članku. V tem kontekstu predlagam alternativno stališče, ki ga imenujem »abilitizem«. Abilitizem je pristop k ontologiji konceptov, ki trdi, da so koncepti zmožnosti za usklajevanje skupin sposobnosti. Ta pristop rešuje vse probleme reprezentacionalizma, fregejanstva in mešanega pogleda. Abilitizem je tudi zelo primeren za razlago pluralizma konceptov in delnega lastništva konceptov. Vendar pa obstaja nekaj možnih ugovorov glede abilitizma, na katere bom odgovoril v zadnjih razdelkih.

*Ključne besede:* koncepti, mentalne reprezentacije, sposobnosti, ontologija konceptov, reprezentacionalizem.

## Introduction

The ontology of concepts is an ancient topic. We have known about these discussions since the time of Plato, or perhaps even earlier. Yet there exist many contemporary philosophers who discuss this problem (Fodor, 1987; Laurence, Margolis, 2007; Peacocke, 1992; Zalta, 2001).

The question I want to begin with is »What are concepts?« Fortunately, philosophers and cognitive scientists have a conventional answer to this question. The conventional description of concepts was originally proposed by John Locke in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Locke characterizes concepts (or »ideas« in his terminology) as »materials of reason and knowledge« (Locke, 1690/1979: 104). In the contemporary literature on the subject, we find similar descriptions: »building blocks of thought« (Solomon, Medin, Lynch, 1999: 99), »constituents of thoughts« (Prinz, 2002: 2), »units of thought« (Carey, 2009: 5),

etc. Unfortunately, this description is not very informative. We cannot deduce anything about the ontological aspect of concepts from it. Therefore, we cannot use this characterization to answer questions like »How do concepts exist?«, »Where do they exist?«, »What kind of existence is it?«, »Are they psychological entities or abstract entities? Or both?« etc. There are three main approaches to the ontology of concepts: representationalism, Fregeanism, and the mixed view. In this article, I will point out the drawbacks of these approaches. Then I will propose a less popular view, which I call »abilitism«, and show how it is better than the alternatives. Then I will answer some possible objections to the abilitist approach.

## Representationalism

The first way to approach the problem of the ontology of concepts is to adopt representationalism. Representationalism (sometimes called the »psychological view«) is based on the Representational Theory of Mind, whose main theorist is Jerry Fodor (Fodor, 1975; Fodor, 1987). According to representationalism, concepts are mental representations (or mental symbols) in the language of thought. For example, the concept DOG<sup>1</sup> is a mental symbol that refers to a dog.<sup>2</sup> Representationalism is well suited to explain the compositional properties of concepts or the productivity of thought. Representationalists can easily extend their approach with the Language of Thought Hypothesis (LOTH)<sup>3</sup> (Fodor, 1975), which they can use to explain compositionality. If LOTH is true and the relation between a concept and a thought is similar to the relation between a word and a sentence, then we can explain how our minds are able to construct an infinite number of meaningful thoughts using combinatorial rules. In other words: If LOTH is true, we can explain the productivity of thought. For example, using just the three basic concepts DOG, LOOK, and CAT, we can construct an infinite number of thoughts:

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<sup>1</sup> Concepts are usually capitalized in academic literature.

<sup>2</sup> However, the concrete details of this reference depend on the theory of reference we accept (e.g., the causal theory of reference describes it through the causal relations).

<sup>3</sup> The Language of Thought Hypothesis (LOTH) is the hypothesis that mental representation has a linguistic structure. According to LOTH, the process of combining mental representations into thought is similar to the process of building up a sentence from words. Additionally, the produced thought will be more or less the sum of its parts (concepts or other thoughts).

THE DOG IS LOOKING AT THE CAT.

THE CAT IS LOOKING AT THE DOG.

THE CAT IS LOOKING AT THE DOG LOOKING AT THE CAT.

THE CAT IS LOOKING AT THE DOG LOOKING AT THE CAT LOOKING AT THE DOG.

Etc.

However, in addition to the advantages, this view has significant disadvantages. Its main shortcoming is the idea of mental representation. Mental representation is a term that in theory refers to a natural phenomenon. However, this concept is so vague that we cannot really say what this natural phenomenon is. The only thing we can say for sure about mental representations is that they are *in the mind*. The plethora of different definitions of mental representation is a good illustration of this problem. For example, L. Roitblat describes mental representations as all internal changes caused by experience (Roitblat, 1982). At the same time, A. Newell claimed that mental representations are mental entities that designate facts of the world (Newell, 1980). As for the designation, Newell describes it as follows: »An entity *X* designate an entity *Y* relative to a process *P* if, when *P* takes *X* as input, its behavior depends on *Y*« (Newell, 1980: 156). Another definition of mental representations comes from S. Laurence and E. Margolis, who describe them as components of propositional attitudes (Laurence, Margolis, 2007: 563). Moreover, all of these definitions themselves have problems. Roitblat's definition is too broad, resulting in the term »mental representation« including entities such as psychological trauma. Newell's definition does not take into account that the behavior of concepts does not always depend on the facts of the world (the transformation of a concept may be caused by mental processes). The definition proposed by S. Laurence and E. Margolis is tautological. Thoughts, according to the mainstream definition, are propositional attitudes (Crane, 2016: 19). If so, then mental representations are constituents of thoughts. However, if concepts are constituents of thoughts, as we noted earlier, and mental representations are constituents of thoughts, then the statement »concepts are mental representations« is simply a tautology.<sup>4</sup>

As we can see, the term »mental representation« itself needs justification. Therefore, we should not use it, because describing an unclear term (»concept«) by another unclear term (»mental representation«) would be a bad strategy.

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<sup>4</sup> This issue with the term »mental representation« was also noticed by Robert Cummins who characterize it as an umbrella term.

The second problem with representationalism is that it does not give us a good explanation of representations of certain kinds of concepts. Namely, for non-actual and very abstract concepts. For example, most of us certainly possess the concept ALLIGATOR WITH BIG EYES AND A SMALL INJURED TAIL.<sup>5</sup> We own it because we know what that concept means. When we hear the phrase »alligator with big eyes and a small injured tail« we know exactly what it means. We are also prepared to act on that knowledge. For example, we know that alligators are dangerous, and we should be careful if we want to help that alligator. But do we really have representations for all very specific concepts like the concept ALLIGATOR WITH BIG EYES AND A SMALL INJURED TAIL? I think that is very unlikely. Laurence and Margolis objected to this criticism. They had the objection that representationalism only captures actual concepts and therefore we do not actually possess these sophisticated concepts until we hear them (Laurence, Margolis, 2007: 577). Yet we usually know (or at least are familiar with) these concepts and we are able to act on this knowledge. If this is so, how should we account for it other than that we possess these concepts? Laurence and Margolis have not given us a satisfactory explanation. Therefore, I think that possessing these concepts is the only acceptable option.

Similarly, there is no good way to describe very abstract concepts like MATHEMATICAL ADDITION in terms of mental representations. What kind of representation should that be? Someone might guess that it could be the concrete example of a mathematical addition or a set of them (e.g.  $3+4=7$ ). However, we can easily imagine a person who remembers some examples of addition, but does not understand the general principle behind this mathematical operation.

I have mentioned the main problems with representationalism. Nevertheless, this view also faces other difficulties that I have not addressed here (e.g., the regress argument (Blackburn, 1984; Laurence, Margolis, 1997)).

## Fregeanism

A different approach to the ontology of concepts, which I call Fregeanism (after Frege), was proposed by Christopher Peacocke (Peacocke, 1992). According to Fregeanism, concepts are Fregean senses, which means that they are abstract entities (like mathematical objects) whose existence is independent of the mind. According to Fregeanism, a concept can be described as a mode of representation of a referent (Peacocke, 1992: 3). For example, the concept DOG is a (purely abstract) mode of presentation of a dog. Peacocke also noted that we are capable of distinguishing concepts from one another on the basis of different possession

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<sup>5</sup> This objection is similar to Dennett's argument against mental representations. The difference is that Dennett uses belief (not a concept) as an example (»Zebras don't wear overcoats«) (Dennett 1977: 104).

conditions. The possession condition is a set of logical queries that we have to cope with in order to possess the concept (Peacocke, 1992: 9). For example, we possess the concept CONJUNCTION by virtue of finding these logical queries persuasive:  $p, q \rightarrow pCq$ ;  $pCq \rightarrow p$ ;  $pCq \rightarrow q$ .

As for the perceptually based concepts, their possession conditions are only related to the perceptually based premises. For example, the possession condition for the concept RED would be the fact that we find the inquiry »this ball is red« persuasive, provided the ball is in a red region of our vision and we are in regular circumstances.

In addition to describing the conditions of possession, Peacocke also proposes the theory of determination. This theory, according to Peacocke, explains how possession conditions and the external world determine the semantic content of concepts (Peacock, 1992: 17). For example, the semantic content of the concept CONJUNCTION would be a determinate truth function. Thus, the determination theory would say that this truth function »makes transitions of the forms mentioned in the possession conditions truth-preserving under all assignments to their constituents  $p$  and  $q$ « (Peacock, 1992: 18).

As we can see, Fregeanism is a very sophisticated approach to the ontology of concepts. The Fregean approach avoids the main errors of representationalism. It does not use vague terms like »mental representation«. In contrast, Fregean sense is a fairly clear concept. Fregeanism can also explain the ontology of non-actual terms and concepts like MATHEMATICAL ADDITION. According to Fregeanism, they are simply abstract objects that are independent of our minds, and the mind grasps them only when they can be useful.

In spite of the fact that Fregeanism solves many of the problems of representationalism, it also has its own drawbacks. The first disadvantage of Fregeanism is that it does not have enough explanatory power to deal with psychological aspects of concepts: categorization, concept acquisition (Carey, 2009), prototype effect (Rosch, 1973; 1978), etc. Possession theory and determination theory cannot explain such phenomena.

The second problem is that Fregeanism cannot explain how the senses, which are abstract objects, are related to the human mind and brain, which are part of the physical world. There are two aspects to this problem. The first and more general one is that abstract objects cannot have causal relations with physical processes if we accept physical causal closure (Kim, 1993). If this is so, we cannot explain the process of »grasping« concepts and other interactions between our psyche and concepts. The second and more specific aspect of this problem is that Fregeanism invokes the problem of modes of representation (Schiffer, 1990). This problem can be illustrated in the following way. Suppose that Peter Parker and Spider-Man are the names of the same person. Suppose further that Gwen Stacy knows her classmate Peter Parker and she has also heard from her friends about the exploits

of Spider-Man. However, she does not know that Peter Parker is Spider-Man. If she finds out that Peter Parker is Spider-Man, that would be new information for her. In contrast, the information that Peter Parker is Peter Parker will not be new to her. The reason these situations are so different is that Gwen Stacy uses two modes of representation when thinking of the same person. Hence, we are tempted to think that presentation modes are Fregean senses (or at least related to them). But, as noted above, Fregean senses are abstract entities. Therefore, they cannot be mental processes or causally connected to mental processes. Moreover, as abstract objects themselves, Fregean senses can have multiple modes of presentation in a human mind.

We can try to solve this problem by saying that language provides us with modes of presentation. However, it is easy to object to the fact that even a creature that cannot acquire language can have multiple modes of presentation for the same object. For example, we can imagine the situation where a cat does not know that the person on whom that cat is sitting and the thing touching the cat's tail are the same object. However, if the cat turns around, it would possibly understand that.

## The mixed view

There is also the mixed view proposed by Steven Laurence and Eric Margolis (Laurence, Margolis, 2007) and by Wayne Davis (Davis, 2008), which combines representationalism and Fregeanism. On the mixed view, types of concepts are senses, and tokens of concepts are mental representations. For example, the concept type DOG is an abstract mode of representation for a dog, and the token is a mental symbol corresponding to a dog. According to Laurence and Margolis, the mixed view is supposed to solve the problem of presentation modes. They see the solution in what they call »mental orthography«, which is a mental copy of the formal properties of concept types (i.e. Fregean senses). Laurens and Margolis suggest that mental orthography can be understood in two ways. The first interpretation states that mental orthography is a property of concepts that enables them to function as representational forms and express Fregean concepts. According to the second interpretation, which takes up Fodor's conception (Fodor, 1998), mental orthography is a fundamental property of the human mind that allows it to use concepts as logical entities. According to this interpretation, mental orthography is itself a mode of presentation. Moreover, this way of thinking about mental orthography suggests that concepts are the basic units of thought and lack internal structure.

The first problem with this solution is that the mental orthography still sheds no light on the nature of the relation between Fregean senses and modes of presentation. Is it a causal relation? If so, then the physical causal closure is violated. If not, then why is there an isomorphism between them? The second problem is that

the mental orthography hypothesis ignores the type/token relation between Fregean senses and mental representations proposed by Laurence and Margolis. If modes of representation are copies of Fregean senses in our minds, then the former are tokens of the latter. However, the term »mode of presentation« is not the equivalent of the term »mental representation« (mode of presentation is just an aspect or function of a mental representation). If this is so, we cannot say that there is a type/token relation between mental representation and Fregean sense, and the mixed view is just one version of Fregeanism. The third problem is that the mixed view uses the term »mental representation« and therefore inherits some of the problems of representationalism (especially the problem with the vagueness of the term »mental representation«).

## Abilitism

There is also a more Aristotelian way of thinking about concepts, which I will defend here. I will call this view »abilitism«. In *De Anima*, Aristotle writes, »It follows that the soul is analogous to the hand«. This way of thinking, as I will show, can be effectively adapted to modern understandings of concepts. Another source of inspiration for this view is the work of Michael Dummett (Dummett, 1993) and Anthony Kenny (Kenny, 2010), in which they propose ideas similar to the abilitist approach.

According to abilitism, concepts are cognitive abilities that generally coordinate groups of other abilities (cognitive and non-cognitive). First, we need to clarify what a cognitive ability is. Cognitive ability is the ability that our psyche uses to accomplish certain tasks such as categorization, object recognition, etc. (Benjafeld et al., 2010). I believe that the term »ability« itself is quite intuitive, but if necessary, as Kenny noted, we can describe »ability« using the Aristotelian distinction of *potential* and *actual*, where an ability is a potential state and a performance of that ability is an actual state (Kenny, 2010). A theoretical model of the ability to master a particular set of sufficient abilities can be called a type of concept. The token of a concept would be the concrete ability that exists in the mind of a particular person. Thus, the bearer of a token of the concept would be a human or non-human being who possesses a sufficient group of abilities and has the ability to manage them. The owner of the ability (i.e., the bearer of a token of a concept) is distinct from the ability. The ability is also different from its execution. For example, the ability to distinguish the red color is different from the concrete action in which a person uses this ability to select the red napkin. We should also distinguish between the ability and the vehicle of the ability. The vehicle of the ability is a concrete physical implementation of the ability, which is usually the neural networks and their interactions.

Now we can illustrate the abilitist approach using the concept DOG as a toy example. The concept DOG is the ability to coordinate abilities such as 1) the ability to distinguish dogs from other objects; 2) the ability to use the word »dog«; 3) the ability to compare and combine the image of a dog with other images; 4) the ability to compare and combine the language unit »dog« with other language units; 5) the ability to discover relationships between DOG and other concepts (e.g. PUPPY or HOUND). The bearer of a token of the concept DOG in this example may be a person who has at least the abilities (1), (3), and (5) from the list above and the ability to coordinate these abilities with each other. The performance of the concept DOG would be the use of some of the listed skills. Finally, the vehicle of the concepts DOG would be the neural mechanisms that the person uses to perform these abilities.

Anthony Kenny defended a different version of the abilitist approach in his article. He wrote that the concept of *X* is just the ability to use the word »*X*« (Kenny, 2010). This view oversimplifies the cognitive processes involved in possessing and acquiring a concept, because possessing the ability to use the word »*X*« is far from sufficient for possessing a concept *X*. The ability to use the word »*X*« is not enough to possess a concept. It is only *one of the abilities* a person must master in order to acquire the concept. For example, imagine a person *Z* who can use the word »tomtit«. She knows how to pronounce this word, and she uses it effectively when *Z* is talking to her friends about their favorite animals. During these discussions, *Z* can say that she admires tomtits and that she especially likes their black heads and the yellow band across their chests (real tomtits usually have these features) and never say anything else about them. However, *Z* thinks that tomtits are mammals and not birds. Based on this knowledge, should we conclude that *Z* owns the concept TOMTIT? I don't think so. Even though *Z* may actually use the word »tomtit« during the conversation, she does not actually possess the concept. In order to possess it, she must be able to adequately categorize tomtits (in our situation, she obviously cannot). This example shows that possessing the ability to use the word »*X*« is not nearly enough to possess concept *X*.

One of the main advantages of abilitism is that it can effectively explain concept pluralism, which saves the term »concept«. Based on some experiments in cognitive science, we can conclude that different concepts can have different structures. In addition, we can conclude that different concept carriers (or even the same concept carrier in different ages) can have the same concept but with different structures. I call »concept pluralism« the theory that states that the structure of the same concept can vary from person to person and can change over time in the person's mind. One of the examples of experiments I will mention is the study by Susan Gellman, in which she points out differences between categorization mechanisms we use when we process concepts of artifacts and categorization mechanisms we use when we process concepts of animal kinds (Gellman, 1988; Gellman, Markman, 1986). According to abilitism, different concepts tend to ha-

ve different sets of abilities depending on the bearer of a concept, the type of concept (a concept-ideal, a concept of an abstract thing, a concept of a natural kind, etc.), and other variables. Therefore, there is no difficulty in explaining these phenomena. For example, in the experiment mentioned above, we can assume that people tend to have different sets of abilities for concepts of artifacts and for concepts of animal kinds.

Another example is the experiment where Susan Carey found that children tend to associate the concept ANIMAL with the concept PERSON, while adults do not associate these concepts (Carey, 1985; Carey, Johnson, 2000). Abilitism can explain these observations. According to abilitism, a concept carrier may sometimes lose a skill associated with that concept or acquire a new skill during the course of life. Of course, we can ask whether these two or more states of the set of abilities separated by time are the same concept. This question has the same structure as the problem of personal identity. Therefore, we can adapt some of the answers to this problem. For example, we can adapt narrative theory (Schechtman, 2014), which means that each concept has a historical narrative that maintains its unity.

Abilitism accounts for conceptual pluralism while preserving the term »concept«. The abilitist approach unifies various phenomena under the term »concept« and thus does not make this term too broad. In contrast, representationalism does not have this advantage. According to the representationalist view, we can explain the conceptual change discussed above in two ways. First, we can assume that the change of concept ANIMAL requires the replacement of the mental representation *animal*#1 by another mental representation – *animal*#2. Therefore, we must assume that there are at least two concepts of an animal: ANIMAL #1 and ANIMAL #2. The problem with this explanation is that we must assume the existence of a very large number (potentially infinite) of similar concepts (ANIMAL #1, ANIMAL #2, ANIMAL #3, ..., ANIMAL #N etc.). Another way to explain this conceptual shift with representationalism is to expand the notion of »mental representation«, which is already too broad, as I have shown before. Therefore, this is also a poor explanation.

The second main advantage of abilitism is that »cognitive ability« is a clear concept, unlike the concept »mental representation«. We showed earlier how it can be clarified using the dictionary definition and the Aristotelian distinction between potential and actual.

The third advantage is that, unlike Fregeanism, the abilitist approach has no commitment to the problem of abstract entities. Abilitism simply does not use such entities in its framework.

The fourth point in favor of abilitism is that it can explain partial ownership of a concept better than the alternatives. For some concepts, we can say that we partially own them (e.g., the example with Z and the concept TOMTIT). Abilitism

explains the gradation of possession of a concept by assuming that a person can initially acquire some abilities as for a concept and does not acquire other abilities with regard to that concept. In contrast, representationalism and Fregeanism do not have as good an explanation for this phenomenon.

Finally, abilitism has a good explanation for concepts such as ALLIGATOR WITH BIG EYES AND A SMALL INJURY TAIL and MATHEMATICAL ADDITION. According to abilitism, these are simply cognitive abilities that manage sets of other cognitive abilities (e.g., the ability to distinguish the species of an alligator, the ability to add numbers, the ability to talk about both, and so on).

As we have just seen, abilitism has many strong points compared to other views. Therefore, I believe that abilitism is the best explanatory model for the problem of the ontology of concepts. However, there are some possible objections to abilitism. I will discuss them below.

### Objection#1: Abilitism does not explain compositionality

The first possible objection to abilitism is that it does not explain compositionality and therefore cannot explain the productivity of thought. At first sight, this objection seems justified, since faculties do not have the same combinatorial properties as representations and Fregean senses. Indeed, how do we combine concepts according to abilitism? I think there are two possible explanations, which are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The first possibility is to say that the combination of terms is the combination of different capacities. For example, imagine the situation where person *X* has two concepts: *A* and *D*. Concept *A* has the set of abilities  $\{a,b,c\}$  and *D* has the other set  $\{d,e,f\}$ . According to abilitism, when *X* combines concepts *A* and *D* to *AD*, she actually combines the sets of abilities  $\{a,b,c\}$  and  $\{d,e,f\}$  to  $\{a,b,c,d,e,f\}$ . However, the combination process is usually not so straightforward. In a standard situation, the context also affects the process of combination. Depending on the context and properties of the concepts, some capabilities may be dropped or/and some additional capabilities may be added. For example,  $\{a,b,c\}$  and  $\{d,e,f\}$  may be combined to form  $\{a,d,f,g\}$ . This context dependency was highlighted by Zachary Estes and Sam Glucksberg when they showed that one concept usually assigns its properties to another during the combination process (Estes, Glucksberg, 2000). For example, when we combine the concept SHARK and the concept LAWYER, we attribute the most salient properties (or the abilities to distinguish them, according to the abilitist view) of the concept SHARK («predatory», «aggressive», «vicious») to the concept LAWYER, which has some relevant dimensions for attribution («temperament», «competence», «cost»). It is obvious that these traits and dimensions strongly depend on the context in which a person is located.

Another solution to the combination problem is to propose that we have a distinct ability to combine different mental entities (e.g., visual images, linguistic entities, etc.). This solution does not necessarily rule out the first one. We can have the general ability to combine concepts, and the set of specific abilities to combine particular aspects of concepts. I think the question of which solution is better and whether they are compatible is a matter of future research.

## **Objection#2: Abilitism does not explain knowing-that**

Another possible objection to abilitism is that it does not explain knowledge-that. Knowledge-that is knowledge about a fact (e.g., knowledge about a weather report). In contrast, knowledge-how presents itself in our minds in the form of an ability (e.g., the ability to swim) (Ryle, 1945). G. Ryle uses this distinction between knowing-that and knowing-how to show that a person normally has two different faculties of the mind (which can nevertheless be used simultaneously). Obviously, abilitism suggests that all concepts should be classified as knowing-how. The point of the objection is that if some thoughts can be classified as knowledge-that, and all thoughts consist of concepts, then we need a good explanation of how knowledge-how converts to knowledge-that at the level of thought.

There are two possible solutions. The first is to accept a radical anti-intellectualism according to which all knowledge can be expressed in (and eventually reduced to) concepts of knowing-how (Hetherington, 2011). If all knowledge can be explained in terms of knowledge-how, then there is no need to explain the compatibility between abilitism and knowledge-that. However, radical anti-intellectualism is a rather controversial approach (Adams, 2009), so it needs justification itself. An analysis of all the advantages and disadvantages of this position is beyond the scope of this article. Here, I would only like to highlight that radical anti-intellectualism can possibly be a solution to the aforementioned problem.

Another solution is to say that knowledge-that is mere modal imagery (visual imagery, auditory imagery, etc.) that is normally handled with specific capacities associated with those images. If so, these modal images can be described as knowledge-that, and we need not abandon abilitism, since modal images are not concepts. This solution seems preferable. However, the first solution can also be used if it turns out that radical anti-intellectualism is correct.

## Conclusion

As has been shown, there are three main approaches to the ontology of concepts: representationalism, Fregeanism, and the mixed view. All of them have significant drawbacks: the problem of describing mental representations, the problem of abstract entities, the problem of non-actual concepts, etc. Abilitism, which proposes that concepts are cognitive abilities, is a viable alternative to these approaches. This view solves all the problems mentioned above. Abilitism is also well suited to explaining concept pluralism and partial ownership of concepts. There are some possible objections to abilitism, but as has been shown, they are easily answered.

## Concepts as Representations, as Senses, and as Abilities

There are three main approaches to the ontology of concepts: representationalism, Fregeanism, and the mixed view combining representationalism and Fregeanism. The representationalist view views concepts as mental representations, while Fregeanism states that concepts are Fregean senses. Each of these accounts has several advantages. Nevertheless, along with their advantages, these views also have significant disadvantages, which will be highlighted in this article. In this context, I propose an alternative view, which I call «abilitism». Abilitism is an approach to the ontology of concepts that holds that concepts are capabilities for coordinating groups of capabilities. This approach solves all the problems of representationalism, Fregeanism, and the mixed view. Abilitism is also well suited to explain concept pluralism and partial ownership of concepts. However, there are some possible objections to abilitism, which I will answer in the final sections.

*Keywords:* concepts, mental representations, abilities, ontology of concepts, representationalism.

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