INTRODUCTION

I. The text


In this translation I have not tried to disguise the complicated, sometimes pedantic sentence constructions of the original. This was necessary to do justice to Mally’s philosophical style in the analysis of diagonal semantic paradox and infinite regress. The Zeitschrift pagination is indicated in brackets beside corresponding slash-marks in the text. I am grateful to Roderick M. Chisholm and Bruno Schuwey for criticism and advice about the translation, and for commenting some years ago on a preliminary draft.

II. Translation notes

German has expressive capabilities that do not always carry over straightforwardly into English. Translations of some of the most important problematic terms in Mally’s text should be explained. Mally asks, “Heisst ‘Gegenstand’ soviel wie ‘Gedachtes’?” His use of ‘Gedachtes’, and in other places ‘Erfasstes’, has connotations exploited for philosophical purposes that are not immediately captured in any one-word English equivalent. ‘Gedachtes’ might be translated simply as
‘that which is thought of’. But here it is more appropriate to render it, ‘that which is thought of as thought of'. The emphasis is required to bring out the precise sense of the term in context. Similarly, ‘Erfasstes’ is translated as ‘that which is apprehended as apprehended’.

Another central term in Mally’s philosophical vocabulary is ‘treffen’ and its conjugates. The word means to encounter, meet, or hit the mark, and as such is an intentional success verb. I have followed standard practice in translating it as ‘directed toward’ (it is sometimes rendered ‘directed upon’), but this may require further explanation. To be directed toward something does not necessarily imply that the thing is actually hit or encountered, though as Mally uses the term ‘treffen’, an actual encounter with or hitting of the object is understood. The English ‘directed toward’ must therefore be stipulated to have a quasi-technical sense connoting success in the actual encounter with or hitting of the object intentionally aimed at. By contrast, ‘träge’ and ‘trifft’ in contexts where the voice is evidently meant to be passive are translated as ‘encountered’. The form ‘getroffen’ is rendered by the usual convention as ‘referred to’.

III. Historical-philosophical significance of Mally’s argument

Mally attempts to refute what he calls epistemological-critical idealism, offers a demonstration against the possibility of self-referential thought, and argues in polemical fashion that the objects of thought are independent of thinking, or that there are mind-independent unapprehendable objects. He presents an architectonic of ordered totalities of objects like Russell’s ramified theory of types, by which he tries to preserve a general theory of objects in spite of his paradox about the impossibility of self-referential thought. The essay is historically important as the source of Mally’s paradox, which prompted Alexius Meinong to develop the theory of defective objects in Über emotionale Präsentation (1917). The discussion includes problems in metaphysics, philosophical and phenomenological psychology and philosophy of mind, logic, and epistemology.

As Mally observes, the question whether there are unapprehendable objects and the thesis of epistemological or critical idealism are closely connected. Idealism for Mally is the view that there are no objects beyond the objects of actual thoughts. This he emphatically rejects,