

Franz Brentano's higher-order theories of consciousness

ABSTRACT

This article aims at giving a brief comment on Denis Fisette's interpretation of Higher-Order Theories of Consciousness by Franz Brentano, where consciousness has been seen as a form of intransitive self-consciousness being intrinsic to the agent. In agreement with that interpretation, I want to present a few more basic arguments in order to support that assumption such as, for example, some epistemic thoughts by Brentano given in his books *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkte* (1874) and *Die Deskriptive Psychologie* (1982). The present paper has been divided into five sections. The first section deals with the initial understanding of psychology in Brentano. Section two deals with the concepts of consciousness and intentionality. In the third section, the classification of mental phenomena will be presented. Section four refers to the concept of descriptive psychology or phenomenology and finally, I will show the consequences of Brentano's epistemic and ontological arguments related to his concept of consciousness.

Keywords: Philosophy of mind; Brentano; Higher order theory of consciousness; Consciousness; Descriptive psychology.

RESUMO

Este artigo tem por objetivo fazer um breve comentário sobre a interpretação de Denis Fisette das teorias de ordem superior da consciência feitas por Franz Brentano, onde a consciência tem sido vista como uma forma de auto-consciência intransitiva, sendo intrínseca a um agente. De acordo com esta interpretação, gostaria de apresentar alguns argumentos básicos para dar suporte àquela assunção, tais como, por exemplo, alguns pensamentos epistêmicos de

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Brentano dados nas obras *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkte* (1874) e *Die Deskriptive Psychologie* (1982). O presente trabalho foi dividido em cinco seções. A primeira seção trata do entendimento inicial a respeito da psicologia de Brentano. A seção dois lida com os conceitos de consciência e intencionalidade. Na terceira seção, será apresentada a classificação do fenômeno mental. A seção quatro se refere ao conceito de psicologia descritiva e à fenomenologia e finalmente, mostrarei as consequências dos argumentos epistêmicos e ontológicos de Brentano relacionados ao conceito de consciência.

Palavras-chave: Filosofia da mente; Brentano; Teoria de ordem superior da consciência; Consciência; Psicologia descritiva.

Psychology

In his work, *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkte*, Franz Brentano (1838-1917) presents his theory on consciousness and intentionality. That theory is part of a more general and more ambitious project on the epistemic value of a knowledge which has been generated by pure psychology with respect to other sciences. According to Brentano, psychology doesn't differ from other sciences due to its methods but due to its research object, that is, its psychological acts. Both mathematics and physiology form the base of psychology, but psychology is thought to primarily rely on internal perception or experience. That is why Brentano entitles his work as psychology from an empiric point of view. The term "empiric" doesn't refer to those aspects being subject of measurement but to phenomenological or descriptive studies of psychological acts by means of internal experience which is able to produce clear judgments.

"Internal perception" (*innere Wahrnehmung*), however, shouldn't be understood as an internal observation or insight. Brentano rejects the concept of insight since it is impossible to have an insight or an observation of current psychological acts, because that attempt is prone to modify the mentioned psychological act or even to delete it. Let's take the following example: if someone tries to observe the anger he feels when he listens to the noise of his neighbor's house, his psychological act (to feel anger) could be changed or eliminated at the very moment the person feeling anger is observing that act. Any form of insight as an internal observation of its own psychological acts can only be done in the case of psychological phenomena which aren't current anymore, such as when we, for example, remember past psychological phenomena. It is only in that sense that we can speak of insights. Yet memory may fail and doesn't bring about any evidence of internal perception.

An external perception is some kind of perception of bodily phenomena, such as colors, sounds, a landscape we see, and is captured by means of our senses and is observable. Unlike internal perception, external perception doesn't give us any evidence. That means that, in epistemological terms, judgments of internal perception have to be located on a higher order than judgments of external perception. Inasmuch as natural sciences tend to lean more on external perception than on internal perception, their knowledge shows to be epistemically lower-ordered than the knowledge of psychology.

Consciousness and intentionality

Consciousness has been defined by Brentano as *psychological act*. The term "act" doesn't refer to an activity such as drinking beer or swimming, but to the Aristotelian term "actualita". Thus, he stresses the present and actual features of the psychological phenomena. Still another reason for him to identify "consciousness" and "mental act" is because every psychological act is deliberate and conscious, that means, 1) the content of such an act is an object that is deliberately *inexistent* and refers to an object, and 2) is its own object of internal perception. The expression "inexistence" shouldn't be understood here as the negation of something's existence, but as the existence of the referred object "within" the psychological state of the mentioned object. Existence of the intentional or inherent object within the psychological act doesn't mean the existence in its strict sense since it is merely a deliberate existence (as represented object). Besides, there doesn't exist any physical object to show that feature. That is the reason why the basic feature of consciousness or of psychological phenomena is the intentional inexistence. Therefore he is making the case of two intentional arguments:

- (1) Every psychological act is intentional
- (2) Only psychological acts are intentional

The combination of those two arguments became known as "Brentano's argument". Within that context he distinguishes between two types of consciousness: (i) *primary consciousness* and (ii) *secondary consciousness*. Let's think about the case that a particular individual A is listening to a particular sound x. In such a case the psychological act of hearing α directly refers to the sound x and to the psychological act, α holds the sound x by means of an intentional inexistence (the sound "exists" within α). Primary consciousness comprises the relation between the psychological act of listening, α , and its intentional object x, which could be a transcendent object as well as something imaginary. That means that the intentional "relation" is unable to ensure real existence of the referred object. (In fact, it is not a relation

stricto sensu. When “a R b” is meant to be true for “R”, any real relation, the individual constants “a” and “b” should designate existent things; nevertheless, such as Brentano accurately noted in the case of a “quasi-relation” of intentionality, the imagination of a centaur only presupposes the existence of a bearer of the psychological act).

When listening to the sound *x*, the individual *A* doesn't only have primary consciousness, but also a secondary consciousness of the psychological act *a*, once the psychological act of listening can be an object of its internal perception too. Secondary consciousness encompasses the relation between the psychological act of listening *a* and itself, bearing in mind the internal perception of that individual. The psychological act of listening *a* is deliberately directed to itself. Thus, intentionality and consciousness are *inextricably linked*. That kind of consciousness cannot be understood, though, as consideration or introspection as there is no other psychological act *b* that may refer to the mentioned psychological act *a*. Therefore, Brentano, following inspiration in Aristotle, tries to avoid a return to infinity, because if the existence of a further psychological act *b*, being addressed to the psychological act *a*, should be necessary in order to turn the psychological act *a* into a conscious state, then the existence of a psychological act *c*, heading to the psychological act *b*, should be necessary and so on. Brentano, in his mereological analysis of consciousness, assumes primary consciousness and secondary consciousness as “parts” or “divisions” of consciousness, being without number distinction but just being mentally different. The following remarks are to foster a better understanding of that kind of consciousness.

The classification of mental phenomena

According to Brentano the psychological acts can be sorted on: (i) representations (*Vorstellungen*), (ii) judgments (*Urteile*) and (iii) emotions (*Gemütsbewegungen*). That hierarchical separation is crucial because the psychological acts are cumulative. That means that if an individual *A* feels an emotion regarding *x*, then he also has a judgment of *x* as well as a representation of *x*. If an individual *A* has a judgment about *x*, he also has a representation of *x*, but it could also be the case that he only has a representation of *x* but neither judgment nor emotion addressed to that object.

The basic acts of consciousness are the *representations*, since they exhibit and bring the intentional object to the level of consciousness. They are epistemically neuter inasmuch they don't imply any opinion or any kind of agent judgment about the intentional object. The individual has a representation whenever something arises to the level of consciousness, whether by means of his senses or by means of his imagination.

Judgments involve the individual's judgment, in other words, at least the acceptance or rejection of existence of the intentional object. As judgments do not add any intentional object to consciousness, representations and judgments are just different ways of consciousness of the same intentional object. Judgments can be classified into a) *apodictic* and b) *assertoric* ones. Apodictic judgments are true judgments within all possible worlds, for instance such as mathematical statements. Assertoric judgments can be true or false, such as for example all judgments of external perception and some judgments of internal perception. The latter can be classified into: (i) *blind* judgments and (ii) *evident* judgments. Blind judgments are those from external perception. For example: when an individual happens to have a visual experience from an object x, then he experiences the representation of x as well as the blind judgment about it, since external perception alone is unable to ensure the existence of the intentional object. Evident judgments are either judgments of internal perception or of secondary consciousness, because in that case a distinction between psychological act and intentional object cannot be done. That means that there is a *real identity* between the represented object and the act representing the object.

Emotions do not include only feelings like love and hatred, but also wishes, intentions, fears etc. In most cases, the intentional object happens to be at the same time object of representation and the judgment presupposed by an emotion, although emotion is sometimes just referring to the corresponding psychological act. Let's take the following example: When an individual A listens to a sound x, he is going to have the representation of x and a judgment on x, yet the related positive or negative emotion possibly refers only to the psychological act of listening and not just to sound x. In that case the emotion would be just a kind of secondary consciousness.

The coupling of those three kinds of consciousness (representation, judgment and emotion) sometimes has been called *internal perception* by Brentano. Furthermore, those three types of psychological acts aren't really different from each other from the point of view of mereology, but only in mental terms. That means that when an individual A experiences a visual perception of an object x, that individual doesn't have in number three psychological acts, but only one single psychological phenomenon, presenting, however, three distinct aspects, namely a representation, a judgment and an emotion.

Descriptive psychology

In his work *Descriptive Psychology*, Brentano splits psychology into *psychognosia* and *genetic psychology*. Psychognosia is the same as descriptive psychology or descriptive phenomenology. It is dealing with "parts" or elements of consciousness, in other words, with psychological acts themselves. Genetic

psychology considers the origins and conditions of psychological phenomena. Those two areas are thought to complete each other. Nevertheless, it is ultimately genetic psychology that rather presumes the study of descriptive psychology than vice versa. On the field of psychognosia it's impossible to distinguish between appearance and reality, because psychological acts usually seem to us the way they really are. For that reason, Brentano keeps on supporting the thesis that knowledge of descriptive psychology comprises a higher epistemic value than knowledge of natural sciences.

It is in that context that he differentiates between *implicit consciousness* (*awareness in a wider sense*) and *explicit consciousness* (*awareness in a narrow sense*). Implicit consciousness occurs whenever the individual is apprehending an object yet doesn't understand it. Explicit consciousness, on the other hand, occurs when the individual not only has the apprehension or experience of an object but also the act of noticing it (*Bemerken*). For example: while looking at the sky, an individual A is seeing a black spot, although he actually doesn't notice that spot. In that case, when an individual B asks him what it is the other individual will be unable to answer. So, we may claim that individual A only has implicit consciousness of the object. Moreover, we cannot affirm that there has been any error there since when someone doesn't perceive something that doesn't mean he has done something wrong there. An error can only arise when the objects of external perception have been fixed and generalized in a wrong manner. In case of an implicit consciousness, the individual has an experience of the object together with an appreciative judgment (*anerkennendes Urteil*).

Final Remarks

The final remarks on his seminar in Vienna about descriptive psychology bring about some clarification on his theory of consciousness, because when an individual A only experiences implicit consciousness of an intentional object x he doesn't have any knowledge about it. Thus, awareness of an object x, be it either a bodily or a psychological phenomenon, doesn't imply neither knowledge nor a form of reflection about the respective intentional object. The verdict p: "I am aware of x" cannot be replaced by q: "I know that I am experiencing x." In the case of explicit consciousness, though, a verdict p can be replaced by the verdict q. Both kinds of consciousness are feasible occurrences within an internal perception as well as within an external perception.

On one side it is only internal perception or secondary consciousness that is able to produce evident judgments, because there won't be any doubling of the psychological act, that is, psychological act and secondary consciousness are identical. If there were any doubling of the intentional object in secondary consciousness, that would require some form of internal

observation or insight, something that Brentano declines. Furthermore, he would be unable to assert epistemic argumentation on the fact that descriptive psychology will bring about reliable knowledge. That means that a judgment produced by explicit consciousness of a psychological act will always be evident. In the case of an implicit consciousness of a psychological act, on the other hand, there won't be a judgment about that psychological act. That means that we might have a psychological act without experiencing knowledge about it. As it won't be the same thing whether we don't perceive or whether we make a mistake, that fact won't jeopardize the status of epistemic value of the internal perception.

To make it short, I agree with Fisette's interpretation that the epistemic theses upheld by Brentano in his theory of consciousness are shown to be only partly Cartesian and that they come close to Aristotle's position, whereas his ontological theories are actually Aristotelian. These remarks thus confirm Fisette's view that Brentano's consciousness is a form of intransitive self-consciousness which is intrinsic to the agent, or is a pre-reflective self-awareness in an intransitive sense. However, unlike Fisette and according to Brandl, I believe that the pre-reflective theory of self-consciousness has been already present in *Psychology*.

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