

Brentano on Intentionality of Consciousness: A Brief Exposition

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Abstract: Intentionality is one of the central concepts in phenomenology. In the book two of his famous book, ‘**Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint**’ Brentano offers a vivid description of his thought on intentionality. Here he introduced the most important and influential doctrine for understanding the fundamental and crucial distinction between psychical and physiological or non-mental phenomena. The whole doctrine is based on the famous Brentanoian concept of the intentional- inexistence of mental or psychic acts. This doctrine has become decisive constituent of psychological phenomena. It is called decisive not only in the context of Brentano, but also in the context of the later phenomenologist, like Husserl. Husserl, one of the followers of Brentano placed it in proper phenomenological map. While investigating psychical (mental) phenomena Brentano discovered that every psychical phenomena is characteristically different from physical phenomena by being intentionally related to some object. He then contended that intentionality is the sufficiently distinguishing feature of all mental phenomena, while no non-mental (i.e. physical) phenomena deserve this peculiarity. Here I just want to point out the fact that helps Brentano to formulate his whole theory of intentionality. All will be discussed elaborately after the discussion of the methodological approach and the source of the thought of Brentano.

Keywords: Psychical phenomena, Physical phenomena, Intentional-inexistence, Phenomenalism, Presentation, Thomistic conception, Intentionality

Introduction: Intentionality is one of the central concepts in phenomenology. In the book two of his famous book, ‘**Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint**’ Brentano offers a vivid description of his thought on intentionality. Here he introduced the most important and influential doctrine for understanding the fundamental and crucial distinction between psychical and physiological or non-mental phenomena. The whole doctrine is based on the famous Brentanoian concept of the intentional- inexistence of mental or psychic acts. This doctrine has become decisive constituent of psychological phenomena. It is called decisive not only in the context of Brentano, but also in the context of the later phenomenologist, like Husserl. Husserl, one of the followers of Brentano placed it in proper phenomenological map.

In this paper I want to offer a brief exposition of the concept of intentionality as explained in Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint. Husserl or the other followers of Brentano are not my subject of discussion in this context. I shall discuss the source of the thought; the methodology used by Brentano, the difference between psychological and physical phenomena made by Brentano and lastly the changed view of Brentano concerning the famous concept of the intentional inexistence.

While investigating psychological (mental) phenomena Brentano discovered that every psychological phenomenon is characteristically different from physical phenomena by being intentionally related to some object. He then contended that intentionality is the sufficiently distinguishing feature of all mental phenomena, while no non-mental (i.e. physical) phenomena deserve this peculiarity. Here I just want to point out the fact that helps Brentano to formulate his whole theory of intentionality. All will be discussed elaborately after the discussion of the methodological approach and the source of the thought of Brentano.

In the beginning I shall quote a famous quotation from Brentano's Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint to open the gate of the discussion. Brentano, in his book Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint "*Psychology as a Science*" explains in detail the difference between psychological and physiological phenomena. He says "Every psychological phenomenon is characterized by what that scholastic of the Middle Ages called the intentional inexistence of an object, and what we should like to call, although not quite unambiguously, the reference (*Beziehung*) to a content, the directedness (*Richtung*) toward an object (which in this context is not to be understood as something real) or the immanent object quality (*immanent Gegenständlichkeit*). Each contains something as its object, though not each in the same manner. In the representation (*Vorstellung*) something is represented, in the judgement something is acknowledged or rejected, in desiring etc. This intentional inexistence is peculiar alone to psychological phenomena. No physical phenomenon shows anything like it. And thus we can define psychological phenomena by saying that they are such phenomena as contains objects in themselves by way of intention (intentional)¹. In this passage Brentano clearly and distinctly makes the separation between psychological and non-psychological phenomena focusing the quality of intentionality. All mental phenomena characteristically related to an object. Apart from this characteristic, Brentano gives a hint of the source of the concept pointing to the scholastic's notion of intentional inexistence along with the different mode of the relation. Undoubtedly, the concept of intentional inexistence has become the guiding force of his famous doctrine

of intentionality.

What methodology is used in one of the important questions. It is said that Brentano used methodological phenomenism to explore the concept of intentionality. Methodological phenomenism is a common method used by 19th century philosophy of science. It is said that Brentano himself, at the time of beginning of psychology, mentions Mill's concepts of psychology as a purely phenomenalist science. Not only that, Brentano occasionally showed his sympathy to phenomenism.

It should be kept in mind that there is a debate regarding the methodological phenomenism used by Brentano. Some scholars think that Brentano was not a phenomenalist. Because Brentano's concept of intentionality does not fit with the concept of phenomenism, Phenomenism holds that the constituent parts of the world is phenomena, appearance or some data where as Brentano holds that there is a world which transcends the phenomena; physical phenomena are 'signs of something real, which, through its causal activity produces presentations of them'.² This view of Brentano shows that he is not a phenomenalist in true sense. But the other scholars, like Tim Crane believe that Brentano can be labeled as phenomenalist. I think that Brentano is not a phenomenalist in true sense, as he used the concept of transformation of phenomena. Not only that he himself indicates that all the physical phenomena are basically mental and all the mental phenomena are transcendental. So, there is a transformation of phenomenist. The concept of methodology used in Brentano's philosophy is called the methodological phenomenism, and it is transformed into a phenomenological method. At last Brentano in respect of methodology is in the transition period. From Brentano, the concept of phenomenological method is introduced.

The background of Brentano's view is partly Aristotelian, as Brentano indicates in a well known footnote (1995a: 88). Aristotle had talked in *De Anima* about how in perception, the perceiving organ takes on the 'form' of the perceived object: in seeing something blue, the eye takes on blueness without taking on the matter of blueness. Brentano, like Aquinas, wanted to follow Aristotle in at least this respect: the proper objects of thought and perception – what it is that we are thinking of, and what makes thought possible at all – are actually immanent in the act of thinking, and do not transcend the mental act. In this respect, objects of thought may be compared to universals on an Aristotelian conception of them, according to which they are immanent in the particulars which instantiate them, and do not transcend

those particulars.³

All mental events, such as our perceptions, thoughts, beliefs, hopes, fears, loves, hatreds etc. – have this characteristic feature of being “of” or “about” something and so giving us a sense of something that resides in the external world. Each such mental state or experience is in this way a representation of something other than itself and so gives one a sense of something. This representational character of mind or consciousness – its being “of” or “about” something – is “intentionality”.

To explain the most significant expression “Intentional in Existence”, Brentano himself says that, “the entire world, as it appears to us, is divided into two great classes- the class of psychological and the class of psyche phenomena.”⁴ To make the difference Brentano offers a criterion in this passage. “Every ideas or presentation (vorstellung), which we acquire either through sense perception or imagination... By presentation I do not mean that which is presented, but rather the act of presentation (Act des Vorstellens). Thus, hearing a sound, seeing a colored object, feeling warmth of cold, as well as similar states of imagination are examples of which I mean by this term. I also mean by it the thinking of a general concept, provided such a thing actually does occur. Furthermore, every judgment, conviction or opinion, every doubt, is a mental phenomenon. Also to included under this term is every emotion: joy, sorrow, fear, hope, courage, despair, anger, love, hate, desire, act of will, intention, astonishment, admiration, contempt, etc”.⁵

In this passage Brentano clearly says that psychic phenomena have some special qualities, such as they all are either presentation or based on presentation, non-extended, directed towards objects, only perceivable by inner consciousness. They have actual existence in addition to intentional existence and lastly they are presentation squarely as a unity.

On the other hand physical phenomena also have some special qualities. Physical phenomena are not intentional, they are extended and also they do not base on presentation. Brentano says, “A colors, a figure, a landscape which I see, a chord which I hear, warmth, cold odor I sense; as well as similar images which appear in the imagination.”⁶

Actually the first characterization of the psychological phenomena makes use of two phrases: “intentional inexistence” and “reference to content”. It is the first of these phrases which has attracted most attention, and it has even given rise to the view, supported by both anti-scholastic and non-scholastic critics, that this whole doctrine was nothing but a loan from

medieval philosophy. While a quick reading of the passage may seem to confirm this view, it is nevertheless misleading. “Intentional inexistence”, which literally implies the existence of an “intention” inside the intending being, as if imbedded in it, is indeed a Thomistic conception. But it is precisely this conception which Brentano himself did not share, or which in any case he abandoned, to the extent of finally even dropping the very term “intentionality”. Herbert Spiegelberg offers an explanation of the Thomistic concept in his famous book, ‘The Phenomenological Movement’. He says, “Brentano’s originality is revealed by a comparison of his usage with that of Thomas Aquinas. For the term ‘intentio’ as used in Scholastic philosophy, signifies the peculiar image or likeness formed in the soul in the process of acquiring knowledge, thus representing, as it were, a kind of distillate from the world outside. This “intentio” is linked up with the so-called species theory of human knowledge, which goes back to Aristotle’s theory of perception as the reception of the form of an object without its matter. Thomas Aquinas distinguishes actually an intention sensibilis, and intention intelligibilis, and at times even an intentio intellection. In a similar vein, the much-used scholastic terms prima and secunda intentio refer to concrete objects and to logical categories, respectively. Never is there any suggestion of a reference to an object as the distinguishing characteristic of these “intentions”.

Brentano never uses the term “intention” in isolation but only in combinations like “intention inexistence” or “intention relation”. It should be kept in mind that the theory of ‘intention- inexistence’ is the basis of the distinction between psychical physiological phenomena. Brentano’s first concern was to find a characteristic which separates psychological from non-psychological or “physical” phenomena.

Let us think over the matter whether Brentano is describing the concept of intentional relation holding internalist or externalist position. Various commentators think that it is removed from its proper context, i.e. from philosophically grounded theory of mind, merging empirical method and frameworks from late nineteenth- century philosophy of science with Brentano’s earlier work on Aristotle.⁷

Herbert Spiegelberg also indicated a second characterization of the psychic phenomena. Thus, the second characterization of the psychic phenomena, “reference to an object”, is the more important and the only permanent one for Brentano; it is also the one listed exclusively in the table of contents, beginning with the first edition. What is more: as far as I can make

out, thus characterization is completely original with Brentano, except for whatever credit he himself generously extends to Aristotle for its “first germs” in a rather minor passage of the *Metaphysics*. It was certainly none of Brentano’s doing that this new wholly unscholastic conception came to sail under the old flag of “intentionality”. Reference to an object is thus the decisive and indispensable feature of anything that we consider psychical.

In this way Brentano offers a new structure of all phenomenological analysis. According to Tassone Linguistically, psychic or mental phenomena are almost always characterized by verbal forms of expression in Brentano’s text, and physical phenomena by nominal ones. Furthermore, in part one of the *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, Brentano has distinguished between physical phenomena by calling them “blosse phenomena”- i.e. “mere phenomena”, while the psychical were said to have the status of full phenomena.⁸ Building on the Aristotelian conception of “act”, Brentano assumes that psychic phenomena are only made full actual, i.e. given as full statues or processes by which we are immediately aware of their existence, when they take or are directed to objects. As psychic acts are irreducible directed towards physical phenomena in various modes, the former are, according to Brentano, explicitly said to be epistemologically privileged. Brentano writes of how psychic phenomena can be said to be, “the things which are most our own.”⁹ Psychic phenomena are also described as being precisely as they appear to be-which means that we can never be mistaken about them and that they can be given with evidence and even with what can be called apodictic evidence.

Brentano also sees two types of phenomena from the point of complexity. According to Brentano, psychic phenomena are more complex than the physical phenomena. He said “The psychic phenomena that the science of psychology must study are said to be of the highest level of complexity ;one for greater than that displayed by the phenomena studied by mathematic, physics, or chemistry, etc.”¹⁰

It is true that to Brentano’s mental or psychic phenomena are more significant than that of the physical phenomena. The reason behind the acceptance of Brentano perhaps is his attitude to psychology. Brentano did not believe in the analysis of psychology of his time as the then psychologists had no conception of scientific psychology. Herbert Spiegelberg said, “thus far Brentano seemed to be slated for an uncritical adoption of the nineteenth century psychologies of James and J. S. Mill, Fechner, Wundt, or Lotze, and the stage set for a classical

demonstration of “psychologism.” What changed this prospect was Brentano’s realization that none of these psychologies could fill his specifications. What they seemed to lack was the indispensable preliminary clarification of their fundamental concepts. It was this basically philosophic task which absorbed Brentano in his psychological studies, much as he utilized in them the beginnings of a scientific psychology as far as it existed at the time. In fact, what he hoped for from his own approach was that it would make this psychology truly scientific and replace the many rivaling psychologies of his day by one psychology. Only after the development of such a psychology would it be possible to approach the final metaphysical questions such as the relation between mind and body and the chances of immortality, which remained Brentano’s ultimate concern, although he never published anything on these subjects and none of his pertinent manuscripts have been printed.”¹¹

Presentation, for Brentano, is the fundamental way of being conscious of an object: all other mental phenomena involve presentations, and therefore all mental phenomena are conscious. Judgement, the second fundamental class of mental phenomena, always involves presentation of an object, but this is distinct from the conscious act of judging itself. When one judges X, X is before one’s mind in two ways: as the object of the presentation, and as the object of judgement. Brentano’s conception of judgement, however, is very different from the conception of many 20th century philosophers. Those philosophers who take their lead from Frege, G.E. Moore or Bertrand Russell, for example, treat judgement as a relation to a proposition: the kind of thing expressible in a sentence, assessable as true or false. Brentano’s theory does not contain propositions, and took all judgement to involve affirming or denying the existence of something (see CHAP. 10). To judge that it is raining, for example, is to affirm (or better, acknowledge) the existence of rain.¹²

The third main category of mental phenomena, which Brentano calls ‘the phenomena of love and hate’, incorporates not just emotions but also acts of will and desire. These phenomena also involve presentation, as every mental phenomenon does, but also involve some kind of motivational or affective attitude to the object of the presentation. Much of Book Two of the *Psychology* is concerned with articulating the distinction between the three kinds of mental phenomena (see Mulligan 2004 for a useful discussion).¹³

Another way in which his view changed was his rejection of the idea that all mental activity involves a genuine relation to an object. In the supplementary remarks published in the 1911

book, he writes: What is characteristic of every mental activity is, as I believe I have shown the reference to something as an object. In this respect, every mental activity seems to be something relational.... If I take something relative from among the broad class of comparative relations, something larger or smaller for example, then, if the larger thing exists, the smaller one must exist too. If one house is larger than another house, the other house must also exist and have a size.... It is entirely different with mental reference. If someone thinks of something, the one who is thinking must certainly exist, but the object of his thinking need not exist at all.... For this reason, one could doubt whether we are really dealing with something relational here, and not, rather, with something somewhat similar to something relational in a certain respect, which might therefore be called 'quasi-relational'. (1995a:272)¹⁴

Brentano himself says, in *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, "The title I give to my book characterizes its subject-matter and its method. My standpoint in psychology is empirical: Experience alone is my teacher. But I share with others the convictions that a certain intuition ("ideale Anschauung") can will be combined with such a standpoint"¹⁵

So, according to Brentano the real subject matter of psychology is mental phenomena. He said "we must consider only mental phenomena [psychischen phenomena] in the sense of real states as the proper object of psychology. And it is in reference only to these phenomena that the science of mental phenomena."¹⁶

In his illustration of his doctrine of intentional inexistence in the famous quotation, Brentano uses these examples: in presentation, something is presented, in judgment, something is judged, and in love something is loved. These examples correspond to Brentano's division of mental phenomena into three fundamental classes (1995a: Book Two, Chapter VI). These are the classes of (1) presentations, (2) judgement, and (3) phenomena of love and hate (which for Brentano includes desire). This classification is original to Brentano, as he himself observes, and a few remarks are necessary in order to elucidate Brentano's conception of the mind.¹⁷

Now I am going to explain each of these items classified. The first one is presentation. The word 'presentation' has its special meaning as classified by various philosophers. Immanuel Kant designates this as 'representation'. On the other hand Gottlob Frege indicates it as idea. But Brentano uses it in a different way. To Brentano presentation refers a way which helps to be conscious of an object. As Brentano puts it: 'by "presentation" we do not

mean that which is presented, but rather the presenting of it' (1995a:79)

The judgment refers to a class of mental phenomena. It always involves presentation of an object. Though it involves presentation of an object, it has some special characteristic. When we are going to judge a proposition, it always remains in our mind as the object of presentation and also as the object of judgment. It should be kept in mind that unlike the philosophy of language Brentano thinks that all judgments are either affirming or denying of something. We can offer an example in support of this view. Suppose someone judges that boys are playing cricket in the field. Here the person clearly affirms the existence of the playing.

The third one is the mental phenomena. These phenomena are indicated by Brentano as the phenomena of love and hate. These phenomena, here, in Brentano's philosophy are not just emotions. Generally we think that love and hate are two different kinds of emotions that leads a human being to act accordingly. But here, according to Brentano, they are also will and desire. It should be kept in mind that like other mental phenomena it involves representation. Besides this, the involvement of motivational or effected attitude is also there to the object of the presentation.

The concept explains in what sense Brentano understood 'intentionality': Psychological phenomena, contains an 'immanent' object in themselves by way of intention. This objects, obviously is not real object which is outside of consciousness. It can be understood as the scholastic equivalent of 'intentional inexistence' of objects. This phrase seems to imply that the whole doctrine is a loan from mediaeval philosophy. It is also true that the scholastics philosophers got the concept of intentionality from Islamic scholar Avicenna (980-1037). Avicenna formulated the notion of intentionality from the philosophy of Aristotle. So the of the concept is in the philosophy of Aristotle. Brentano explained this thought in his famous book, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* at first and later he termed it as descriptive psychology.

The phrase 'intentional inexistence' literally implies the existence of an 'intentio' inside the intending being is needed a Thomistic notion. Thomistic notion means Thomas Aquinas's Concept of being. According to Thomas Aquinas, 'Being' means that which is. Then the problem for Brentano is what exactly is the status of this objects which a mental phenomenon contains in itself by way of intention?

Generally we think that the phrase ‘intentional inexistence’ refers to possible or actual non-existence of objects of thought. Objects are divided into two groups- existent and non-existent. We have no problem to explain what is existent. But when we come to explain non-existent thought or beings, we feel problem. Brentano’s theory of intentionality deals with main problem of inexistence thoughts or objects. According to Brentano

Brentano’s doctrine was criticized by many scholars. Husserl makes deviation from Brentano in respect of the concept of intentional inexistence. In his critique on Brentano in the appendix to the *Six Investigations*, he overlooks the distinction that Brentano made between the mental act of sensation and the sensed quality. As a consciousness he identifies Brentano’s physical phenomena with the concept of sensation. Not only that Husserl criticized Brentano for accepting these phenomena as physical phenomena. According to Husserl if all the physical phenomena are sensation then they must be in the part of consciousness. In this way Husserl criticized Brentano.

The other scholars, like Twardowski, Meinong also criticized Brentano. Twardowski argued that a distinction is needed between the object of a thought and its contents, where it is the content which is something immanent to the thought.¹⁸

Meinong on the other hand thought that the realm of objects should including object of all kind including non-existent and impossible object. And of course, in one of the most famous and influential discussions of Brentano’s doctrine of intentional inexistence.¹⁹

Being criticized Brentano later changed his mind. Brentano’s later discussions of intentionality, which entail the rejection of methodological phenomenism, do not approach anywhere close to the sophistication of Husserl’s. Indeed, it is hard to see that they do more than state the problem. Calling something a ‘quasi-relation’ (*Relativliches*) without further explanation does little but draw attention to the phenomenon we are trying to understand. But nonetheless, we can see that with the move away from methodological phenomenism, Brentano is facing up to the problem of intentionality as we conceive of it today. This problem is pretty much invisible as long as we stay within the framework of methodological phenomenism. If one is a methodological phenomenist, one construes intentional relations as relations to phenomena, which are mental or mind-dependent. Since every intentional mental act is a relation to some phenomenon or other, then there simply is no issue about the non-existence, or the possible non-existence of objects of thought. So, in that sense, there is

no problem of intentionality. But once one move beyond the methodological phenomenalist framework – as Brentano did when he adopted his ‘innovation’ – one has to say something about what it is that characterises your thought when the object of thought does not exist.²⁰

This simply is the problem of intentionality for anyone who accepts the minimal ‘realist’ assumptions that there is a mind-independent realm of objects, our thought can concern them, and moreover, that the way they concern these mind-independent objects is what distinguishes thoughts from one another. These assumptions easily generate the conception of thought as relational – as a relation to its objects – which, together with the metaphysical assumption that relations entail the existence of their relata, give us our problem. In this way, we can see how Brentano’s move away from the doctrine of intentional inexistence, and towards the embracing of transcendent objects of thought, dramatizes within his philosophy the problem of intentionality itself.²¹

Husserl has given a generous credit to Brentano for drawing our attention to this peculiar characteristic of intentionality. But Husserl, at the same time, holds that Brentano has failed to grasp the real import of intentionality, and consequently, failed to put the concept into its philosophical use. Consciousness, as Husserl ultimately sees, is a region of being which is non-physical as well as non-psychological (psychology as the natural science). Such a wide concept of consciousness cannot be studied within the frame-work in which Brentano operated. Needless to repeat, intentionality, for Husserl, it is out and out a phenomenological concept and so demands a total abandonment of naturalistic, casual mode of explanation.

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