

# Target paper: Franz Brentano and higher-order theories of consciousness<sup>1</sup>

## ABSTRACT

This article addresses the recent reception of Franz Brentano's writings on consciousness. I am particularly interested in the connection established between Brentano's theory of consciousness and higher-order theories of consciousness and, more specifically, the theory proposed by David Rosenthal. My working hypothesis is that despite the many similarities that can be established with Rosenthal's philosophy of mind, Brentano's theory of consciousness differs in many respects from higher-order theories of consciousness and avoids most of the criticisms generally directed to them. This article is divided into eight parts. The first two sections expound the basic outline of Rosenthal's theory, and the third summarizes the principal objections that Rosenthal addresses to Brentano, which I, then, examine in sections 4 and 5. In sections 6 and 7, I discuss Brentano's principle of the unity of consciousness, and in section 8, I consider the scope of the changes that Brentano brings to his theory of consciousness in his later writings, which follow the 1874 publication of *Psychology*. I then draw the conclusion that Brentano's theory rests on a view of intransitive and intrinsic self-consciousness.

**Keywords:** Brentano; Higher-order theories; Consciousness; Self-consciousness.

## RESUMO

Este artigo trata da recente recepção dos escritos de Franz Brentano sobre a consciência. Estou particularmente interessado na conexão estabelecida entre a teoria da consciência de Brentano e as teorias de ordem superior da consciência e, mais especificamente, na teoria proposta por David Rosenthal. Minha hipótese

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de trabalho é que, apesar das muitas similaridades que possam ser estabelecidas com a filosofia da mente de Rosenthal, a teoria da consciência de Brentano difere em muitos aspectos das teorias de ordem superior e evita boa parte das críticas geralmente dirigidas a elas. Este artigo é dividido em oito partes. As primeiras duas seções expõem o arcabouço básico da teoria de Rosenthal, e a terceira resume as principais objeções que Rosenthal dirige a Brentano, que eu, então, examino nas seções 4 e 5. Nas seções 6 e 7, discuto o princípio da unidade da consciência de Brentano, na seção 8, considero o alcance das mudanças que Brentano faz em sua teoria da consciência em escritos posteriores à publicação de *Psicologia* em 1984. Eu, então, concluo que a teoria de Brentano repousa sobre a visão de uma auto-consciência intrínseca e intransitiva.

**Palavras-chave:** Brentano; Teorias de ordem superior; Consciência; Auto-consciência.

The theory of consciousness put forth by Franz Brentano in *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*<sup>2</sup> has recently been a topic of interest in the philosophy of mind and cognitive sciences. This growing interest must be understood in connection with the current debates on the so-called “problem of consciousness”. This problem, which has been at the center of discussions in philosophy of mind for more than thirty years now, refers to the difficulties of both defining consciousness and explaining it according to the descriptive apparatus that is currently available.<sup>3</sup> This problem is also known, ever since D. Chalmers (1995), as the “hard problem” of consciousness, given the specific challenge of explaining scientifically (phenomenal) consciousness in the context of the cognitive sciences.

Faced with this problem, some philosophers have recently developed theories of consciousness, which follow in some respects in the steps of Brentano’s theory of consciousness, thereby emphasizing its relevance and its significance in the context of the recent debates about consciousness<sup>4</sup>. Such is the starting point of a debate on what has come to be known as the neo-Brentanian theories of consciousness. This debate is partly exegetic because it deals with how Brentano’s psychology exposed in *Psychology* is to be interpreted. But the main philosophical issue at stake in this debate concerns the viability of Brentano’s theory of consciousness with regards to the problem of consciousness.

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<sup>2</sup> I will use the abbreviation *Psychology* to refer to the English translation of *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt*, and *Schriften I* for the German edition provided by Ontos. Other abbreviations used in this text are indicated in the bibliography at the end of this article.

<sup>3</sup> See D. Fisette and P. Poirier (2000).

<sup>4</sup> This is particularly the case of Uriah Kriegel who maintains in a recent article entitled “Brentano’s Most Striking Thesis” (forthcoming) that Brentano’s theory represents currently one of the main options available in philosophy of mind.

I am particularly interested here in an interpretation of Brentano's theory of consciousness which currently prevails in Brentanian studies and which is based on higher-order theories of consciousness<sup>5</sup>. Neo-Brentanians, like most critics of Brentano, share the view that the latter's theory constitutes a version of a higher-order theory of consciousness<sup>6</sup>. Such is also the interpretation of David Rosenthal, one of the most notable supporters of higher-order theories of consciousness, who has emphasized on many occasions the importance of Brentano's contribution to philosophy of mind, most notably in the context of an interpretation of the main principles of the theory of consciousness put forth by Brentano in Book II of *Psychology*<sup>7</sup>. In spite of disagreeing with some of these principles, Rosenthal (1991, p. 30) nevertheless considers that the heart of the Brentanian theory of consciousness "is virtually indistinguishable from that for which [he] argue[s]".

That being said, opinions differ with regards to the significance of Brentano's theory. Critics of Brentano maintain that his philosophy of mind is obsolete in that it conveys the same assumptions as those of higher-order theories of consciousness, all of which were already denounced by most of Brentano's students, most notably by Husserl and his students. Brentano's work on intentional consciousness would therefore be of no use in addressing contemporary issues in philosophy of mind<sup>8</sup>. Dan Zahavi (2004), for example, holds that Brentano and higher-order theories of consciousness cannot adequately account for (self-) consciousness since both fail to distinguish between consciousness and intentionality:

Any convincing theory of consciousness has to be able to explain the distinction between *intentionality*, which is characterized by an epistemic *difference* between the subject and the object of experience, and *self-consciousness*, which implies some form of *identity*. But this is precisely what

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<sup>5</sup> On the connection established between Brentano's theory and higher-order theories of consciousness, see in particular G. Güzeldere (1997, p. 789); C. Siewert (1998, p. 357-358); D. Zahavi (1998, p. 130-131; 2004, p. 73; 2006, p. 7); V. Caston (2002, p. 754); M. Textor (2006, p. 412); G. Janzen (2008); and R. Gennaro (1996, p. 27-29).

<sup>6</sup> There are also other interpretations of Brentano's theory that question this connection, but they nevertheless assume as a starting point the same presupposition as the neo-Brentanian theories of consciousness. See A. Thomasson (2000) and J. Brandl (forthcoming).

<sup>7</sup> Rosenthal comments Brentano's psychology in many of his articles, most notably in D. Rosenthal (2011; 2009; 2005; 2003; 1997; 1993; 1991).

<sup>8</sup> We can mention, for instance, most notably the criticism that Husserl addresses to Brentano in the *Logical Investigations* (D. FISETTE, 2010), which have been echoed by some of the Husserl's students, such as A. Gurwitsch (D. Zahavi, 2006, p. 4) and R. Ingarden (1969). The latter in particular suggests that one should do away with what he considers to be Brentano's main idea, that is, that one can only be conscious of an act through a representation of the said act: "One must rather admit that consciousness and, particularly, the act of consciousness, for example, of perception is something that is lived-through (*Durchleben*), a certain form of self-knowledge, where there is no need to introduce reflection, representation, or judgment". (R. INGARDEN, 1969, p. 629, my translation) Thus, the debate is a not new one. It is also at the center of a debate which opposes E. Tugendhat (1979), who defends a position similar to Rosenthal's, and the members of the Heidelberg School. (D. ZAHAVI, 1998, p. 130-131).

the higher-order theory, which seeks to provide an extrinsic and relational account of consciousness, persistently fails to do. (ZAHAVI, 2004, p. 70).

This objection bears a resemblance to what C. Siewert (1998, p. 197), a further critic of Brentano's theory, calls the "conscious-of trap" or what is also known as "intentionalism".<sup>9</sup>

These criticisms presuppose, however, a certain interpretation of Brentano's philosophy of mind that has prevailed within Brentanian studies ever since the publication of R. Chisholm's writings in which he maintains that intentionality is the fundamental concept in Brentano's theory of the mind. Hence what has been termed as "Brentano's thesis," which states that intentionality is what constitutes for Brentano the fundamental characteristic of the mind.<sup>10</sup> Brentano deserves credit for having reintroduced intentionality as a key philosophical notion which still remains significant in the context of contemporary philosophy. However, it is one thing to acknowledge that Brentano has reactualized the notion of intentionality, it is quite another to take it to be the central thesis at the heart of his psychology. For as the recent reception of Brentano's writings has shown, this intentionalist reading rarely takes into consideration the other principles of Brentano's *Psychology* and, particularly, of his theory of consciousness, which represents the central theme of Book II of *Psychology*, where intentionality is introduced.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, Brentano's writings on the topic of consciousness that follow the publication of *Psychology* in 1874 provide further arguments against the presupposition that underlies this interpretation.

This article addresses the recent reception of Brentano's writings on consciousness. I am particularly interested in the connection established between Brentano's theory of consciousness and higher-order theories of consciousness and, more specifically, the theory proposed by Rosenthal. The latter's remarks on Brentano's theory of consciousness in *Psychology* will serve as this article's common thread. My working hypothesis is that despite the many similarities that can be established with Rosenthal's philosophy of mind, Brentano's theory of consciousness differs in many respects from higher-theories of consciousness and avoids most of the criticisms generally directed at them.<sup>12</sup> I will argue that Brentano's theory rests on a view of intransitive and intrinsic self-consciousness.

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<sup>9</sup> Intentionalism is the thesis that intentionality is the (only) mark of the mental, or that a conscious mental state is mainly determined by its intentionality. One of the proponents of this thesis is T. Crane who at times similarly attributes it to Brentano (T. CRANE, 2007).

<sup>10</sup> For a criticism of this thesis attributed to Brentano since Chisholm, see D. Moran (1996).

<sup>11</sup> See the papers of J. Brandl, U. Kriegel and M. Textor collected in the first section of *Themes from Brentano* (in D. FISSETTE AND G. FRÉCHETTE (Eds.) (2013, p. 23-86)).

<sup>12</sup> See R. van Gulick (2000) for a comprehensive summary of the main points of criticism raised against higher-order theories of consciousness.

## Two Concepts of Consciousness

Rosenthal distinguishes between two main traditions at the source of the contemporary trends within philosophy of mind, namely Cartesianism and Aristotelianism. Each tradition exemplifies a view of consciousness which can be identified by combining two fundamental concepts in philosophy of mind, namely intentionality and consciousness. According to the Aristotelian tradition, to which Rosenthal claims to belong, the essential property of the mental is intentionality, and Rosenthal's own theory of consciousness, better known as a higher-order theory of consciousness (hence the acronym HOT), endorses the reduction of consciousness to an intentional relation between a higher-order thought and its object. Within the Cartesian tradition, on the other hand, the mind is characterized by consciousness, and intentionality is thus understood as a mode of relation between consciousness and its objects.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, Rosenthal maintains that the way we understand consciousness is determined by our adherence to either one of these concepts of the mind. Interpreters of Brentano are divided on the question of whether the view of consciousness endorsed by Brentano in *Psychology* makes him a Cartesian or an Aristotelian in the area of philosophy of mind.<sup>14</sup> Before suggesting an answer to this question, we must consider some of the features that Rosenthal attributes to each of these concepts of the mind.

Let us begin with a distinction between two notions of consciousness, namely state consciousness and what Rosenthal calls "creature consciousness", that is, the consciousness of an organism or what could simply be referred to as subjective consciousness. To attribute the predicate of "being conscious" to a state simply means that a mental state has the property of being conscious. For example, a persistent stomach pain may be conscious or not depending on whether we pay attention to it or not. On the other hand, the notion of creature consciousness simply refers to the property that an agent has of being awake

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<sup>13</sup> A passage from Rosenthal's classic article "Two Concepts of Consciousness" summarizes well the opposition: "Thus writers with Cartesian leanings have generally favored some mark based on consciousness, while those in a more naturalist, Aristotelian tradition have tended to rely instead on some such mark as intentionality or sensory character" (1986, p. 335). One of Rosenthal's arguments against Cartesianism is that by defining consciousness as an intrinsic property, it deprives us of the possibility of providing a satisfactory (naturalist) explanation of consciousness. (D. ROSENTHAL, 2003, p. 166; 1997, p. 735)

<sup>14</sup> In many of his articles (ROSENTHAL, 1990, p. 746-7; 1991, p. 30; 2004, p. 30 sq.; 1993, p. 211-212; 2009, p. 4), Rosenthal describes Brentano as a Cartesian, but we will later see that many other aspects of the latter's theory of consciousness brings him rather closer to Aristotelianism. It goes without saying that the notions of Cartesianism and Aristotelianism such as they are used by Rosenthal represent first and foremost two general views of consciousness and, to a lesser extent, two historical currents to which these two notions also refer. The influence that Descartes exerted on Brentano's philosophy should not be neglected (D. FISSETTE, 2015), but the main inspiration for his theory of consciousness, just as for his ontology, is without any doubt Aristotle, as Brentano himself indicates on many occasions in *Psychology* (V. CASTON, 2002). We should also note that Herman Schell, a student of Brentano, had published in 1873 a doctoral thesis dedicated to the latter on the topic of the unity of consciousness in Aristotle, a fact that is not trivial given that Brentano was very directive with respect to his students' research. (H. SCHELL, 1873).

or, say, of being in a deep coma. By favoring the latter view, which Cartesianism seems to do, a theory of consciousness seems incapable of accounting for what it is for mental states to be conscious other than by stating that an agent is simply conscious (of all his thoughts).<sup>15</sup>

A second distinction that we also owe to Rosenthal refers to two uses of the attribute “being conscious” which figures in the definition of both concepts of consciousness: an intransitive use, which requires no accusative object (such as, for example, to be conscious or unconscious, to be anxious, to be in a good mood or excited, etc.) and a transitive use which makes use of an accusative object (such as, for example, to be conscious of some noise, to be conscious of the fact that returning to class (after the strike) will be difficult, etc.). Transitive consciousness is another term meant for intentional consciousness and refers to the relation that an agent has to something:

One is transitively conscious of something if one is in a mental state whose content pertains to that thing - a thought about the thing, or a sensation of it. That mental state need not be a conscious state (ROSENTHAL, 1997, p. 737).

This notion pertains first and foremost to the subject insofar as one cannot say of a mental state that it is in itself conscious of anything (ROSENTHAL, 1997, p. 738). Used in an intransitive sense, the term “conscious” refers to a monadic predicate that stands as a non-relational property, such as in the definition of subjective consciousness.

The distinction between “being conscious” in an intransitive and a transitive sense is associated with another distinction established between two types of properties ascribable to mental states, namely intrinsic properties and extrinsic properties. The latter distinction finds its linguistic expression in the previous distinction between the transitive and intransitive uses of the predicate “being conscious”. Considered as a monadic predicate, it refers to an intrinsic property, while when used as a relation, it characterizes, instead, an extrinsic property:

A property is intrinsic if something’s having it does not consist, even in part, in that thing’s bearing some relation to something else. If being conscious is at least partly relational, a mental state could be conscious only if the relevant relation held between the state and some other thing. (ROSENTHAL, 1997, p. 736).

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<sup>15</sup> This view of consciousness attributed to Descartes also serves as the starting point of David Armstrong’s analysis of consciousness in his book *The Nature of Mind*: “There is, however, one thesis about consciousness that I believe can be confidently rejected: Descartes’s doctrine that consciousness is the essence of mentality. That view assumes that we can explain mentality in terms of consciousness. I think that the truth is in fact the other way round. Indeed, in the most interesting sense of the word ‘consciousness,’ consciousness is the cream on the cake of mentality, a special and sophisticated development of mentality. It is not the cake itself.” (D. ARMSTRONG, 1997, p. 721).

We may now formulate, with the help of these terminological distinctions, the concepts of consciousness that correspond respectively to Cartesianism and Aristotelianism. A theory of higher-order thoughts regards consciousness as an extrinsic, transitive and relational property of mental states, that is, as an intentional relation between a higher-order thought and its object. To use the example of a stomach pain, the higher-order thought that accompanies the initial pain state could be expressed as: "I am presently feeling pain in my stomach". A sensory state that would not be accompanied by such a thought could not be, strictly speaking, a pain given that for most higher-order theories of consciousness this sensory quality does not exist prior to the thought or the perception that we have of it. For this pain state to be conscious, we must be transitively conscious "of" this state, and in order to be transitively conscious of it, we must have a higher-order thought about the targeted initial state, thereby making it conscious. This theory rejects Cartesianism insofar as the latter maintains that consciousness is a non-relational, intransitive and intrinsic property of the mind (ROSENTHAL, 1997, p. 737). According to Rosenthal, all of modern philosophy up to Brentano has come to understand consciousness as an intrinsic and intransitive property of agents and it was therefore assumed, for this reason, that the agent was conscious of all his thoughts or mental states. In support of this diagnostic, Rosenthal quotes the passage of the *Meditations* ("Fourth Reply") in which Descartes maintains that "no thought can exist in us of which we are not conscious at the very moment it exists in us" (1964-1965, p. 246; translation from ROSENTHAL, 1997, p. 747). Hence the criticism that Rosenthal opposes to Cartesianism of confusing state consciousness with subjective consciousness, that is, of merging a mental state's being conscious in virtue of which one is *intransitively* conscious of that state with one's being conscious of that state in virtue of which one is *transitively* conscious of being in that state.

That being said, it seems that Brentano, by insisting more on state consciousness than on subjective consciousness while, nevertheless, regarding consciousness as an intrinsic property of mental states, holds a middle position between Cartesianism and Aristotelianism. This is at least the interpretation that Rosenthal has proposed in a recent article, where he maintains that the originality of Brentano's theory of consciousness, in comparison to that of the Cartesian tradition, lies in the thesis that all psychical (or mental) states are conscious (D. ROSENTHAL, 2009, p. 2)<sup>16</sup>. Hence the breakthrough that Brentano's theory represented historically insofar as it provided an explanation "both of what it is for states to be conscious and of why, as he held, all mental

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<sup>16</sup> Rosenthal explains later on in the same article: "it was rare until Brentano's time to describe mental states as conscious at all. Even though Descartes and Locke were plainly writing about the property we describe as a state's being conscious, they did not say that our mental states are all conscious, but rather that we are conscious of all our mental states." (ROSENTHAL, 2009, p. 4).

states are conscious” (ROSENTHAL, 2009, p. 2). Part of this explanation lies in Brentano’s theory of primary and secondary objects, which I will later discuss.

## Rosenthal and higher-order theories of consciousness

Let us first examine precisely how this form of Aristotelianism expresses itself in Rosenthal’s theory. This theory shares with other higher-order theories of consciousness many features (R. VAN GULICK, 2000, 2006). As their name indicates, higher-order theories make a distinction between lower-order and higher-order states. Lower-order states may be either qualitative states such as pain and moods or intentional states such as desire, belief, etc. However, many of these theories maintain that these two types of states are numerically distinct in the sense that they exist independently of one another. Conscious states are also distinguished from non-conscious states; a non-conscious state consists in a higher-order state, which is by definition not accompanied by a higher-order state that would make it conscious. The postulate that there are non-conscious mental states is common to all higher-order theories, and it raises many questions when considered in relation to the issue of *qualia* (is it possible, for example, for one to feel pain without being conscious of it?). Thus, a conscious state is a state accompanied by a higher-order state (or a meta-state). To have a pain, for example, presupposes a higher-order perception or thought of the type: “I presently have or feel a pain”; to have the desire to eat seafood or to have inclinations towards abstract things assumes a meta-state of the type: “I presently have the desire for or the inclination towards something”. This meta-state is intentional; it is about a lower-order state which it targets. Given that consciousness is for many of these theories a relational and extrinsic predicate, it is the intentional relation between the higher-order state and the target state that makes the latter conscious. However, the conscious state must be immediate and non-inferential. In other words, the process by which the higher-order perception or thought bears a relation to the initial state is not itself conscious. Lastly, these theories all insist on the reflexive character of the content of the higher-order mental state.

That being said, there are significant differences between the various versions of higher-order theories, the most important being what distinguishes Armstrong’s theory (higher-order perception or HOP) from Rosenthal’s. They differ first and foremost on the question of the psychological mode of the higher-order state (whether a thought or a perception) and on the role played by introspection. Rosenthal unequivocally rejects the perceptual model upheld by Armstrong and, more recently, by W. Lycan on the basis that there is, on the one hand, no empirical support for the existence of a monitoring consciousness as held by HOP and, on the other hand, that higher-order thoughts, in contrast to perception, lack any qualitative properties (ROSENTHAL, 2005, p. 105-109).

Moreover, Rosenthal suggests that the concept of introspection must be revised as to insist on the fact that it is independent of qualities and of perceptual monitoring, as I will later further discuss.

What is specific to Rosenthal's higher-order theory is the role that it assigns to thoughts and, more precisely, to contents of propositional attitude and the relation that these higher-order thoughts bear to their target states. Returning to the example of stomach pains, we may express the higher-order thought that accompanies such initial states in the following way: "I now have or (feel) a pain in my stomach". A sensory state that would not be accompanied by a thought of this type would not be, strictly speaking, a pain because, as we have already indicated, this sensory quality does not exist prior to the thought that we have about it. In order for this pain state to be conscious, we must be transitively conscious of it, and to be transitively conscious of such a state means that we have a higher-order thought about it, such that it makes the latter conscious. This is the central thesis of Rosenthal's theory, which he succinctly summarizes as follows:

We are conscious of something, on this model, when we have a thought about it. So a mental state will be conscious if it is accompanied by a thought about that states. [...] The core of the theory, then, is that a mental state is a conscious state when, and only when, it is accompanied by a suitable HOT. (ROSENTHAL, 1997, p. 741).

The heart of this theory may be reformulated with the help of the following definition: a mental state  $M$  of a subject  $S$  is conscious iff  $S$  has another mental state,  $M^*$ , in such a way that  $M^*$  is an appropriate representation of  $M$ . As in many of these theories,  $M$  refers here to the target states which are either intentional, such as in the intention of planning a trip, or non-intentional, such as in a pain or in the aesthetic pleasure taken in a work of art.  $M^*$  refers to a belief state whose assertive modality and whose content makes the target state conscious. What is thus meant by "appropriate representation of  $M$ " is that  $M^*$  is an assertive state which, strictly speaking, can be the only state to perform such a function given that it is by means of this belief that the agent posits the existence of the target state, and thereby becomes conscious of it. A doubt, a desire or any other state that does not have this quality or this mode may not adequately perform such a function.

One of the fundamental principles accepted by any higher-order theory of consciousness is the *transitivity principle*, which Rosenthal defines as consisting in "the view that a state's being conscious consists in one's being conscious of that state". (ROSENTHAL, 2009, p. 4; see also 2005, p. 4). As Rosenthal indicates, this principle imposes a new constraint on the specific content of any higher-order thought, namely that "one is, oneself, in that very mental state". (ROSENTHAL, 1997, p. 740-741). To be conscious consists in

being, oneself, in a given mental state, which is not the same thing as being conscious of our mental states, as maintained by Cartesianism. For all conscious states are my own states and first-person accessible: I can only be conscious of my own stomach pain and not someone else's. Rosenthal follows Aristotle and Brentano, who maintain that when the subject perceives, believes or desires something, she is conscious not only of what she perceives, believes or desires, but also of being in these states or of performing these acts. But, contrarily to Brentano and Aristotle, Rosenthal argues that higher-order thoughts are unconscious in that we generally do not notice that we are aware of being in such states. Hence the appeal to a third-order thought to account for the process by which one becomes explicitly aware of the content of the state that one is in:

A mental state is conscious only if it is accompanied by a HOT. So that HOT will not itself be a conscious thought unless one also has a third-order thought about the second-order thought. (ROSENTHAL, 1997, p. 742).

By postulating third-order thoughts, Rosenthal is, then, able to account for introspection. But introspection should not be understood, as in Armstrong's model of consciousness, as a perception or an internal monitoring mechanism. Rosenthal conceives of introspection rather in reference to attention and by means of the opposition between focal and peripheral consciousness:

A state is introspectively conscious only when one is conscious of it in an attentive, deliberate, focused way, whereas states are non-introspectively conscious when our awareness of them is relatively casual, fleeting, diffuse, and inattentive. (ROSENTHAL, 2005, p. 107).

The notion of introspection put forth by Rosenthal is therefore very different from that which is criticized by Brentano in his *Psychology*, and such a notion is actually not too remote from Brentano's own notion of inner perception as we will later see.

## Brentano's intrinsicism and the self-representational theory of consciousness

Let us now turn to Rosenthal's reading of Brentano's theory of consciousness. One immediately remarks Rosenthal's insistence on the aspects of Brentano's theory that differ from his own more than the aspects which bring it closer to a higher-order theory of consciousness. First with respect to some of the similarities, we should note that Brentano, like many higher-order theories of consciousness, makes a distinction within his classification of mental states between lower-order states (representations) and higher-order states (judgment

and emotions). Furthermore, Brentano's notion of judgment (or belief) performs a function similar to that assigned to higher-order thoughts by Rosenthal. Indeed, Brentano regards it as a mode of consciousness and as a relational property of mental states<sup>17</sup>. But there are also significant differences between both theories of consciousness; the main two being the unconscious character of higher-order thoughts and the thesis that consciousness is an extrinsic property of mental states. The main point of contention between Rosenthal and Brentano concerns the question whether consciousness is ultimately an intrinsic or an extrinsic property of mental states<sup>18</sup>. There are three main problems associated with the view of intrinsicism, which Rosenthal attributes to Brentano and which is of particular interest in the context of our analysis. The first concerns the infinite regress objection, which Brentano discusses at length in *Psychology* in connection with the hypothesis of the existence of unconscious mental states. The problem faced by Brentano's theory is that by rejecting this hypothesis he must explain how the thesis that all mental states are intrinsically conscious does not culminate in an infinite regress. The second problem refers to what van Gulick has termed the "distinctness assumption", that is, the thesis that higher-order and lower-order states are numerically distinct. This problem addresses the relation that Brentano establishes between target states (for example, the representation of a sound) and higher-order states (for example, the judgment about the represented sound). The third problem faced by intrinsicism is that of the individuation of mental states.<sup>19</sup>

Before we discuss these objections, we should take note of a certain ambivalence on Rosenthal's part in his interpretation of Brentano's theory of consciousness. Despite acknowledging that the latter bears a resemblance to a higher-order theory of consciousness, Rosenthal sometimes draws a parallel between Brentano's theory and his own (ROSENTHAL, 1991, p. 30), while on

<sup>17</sup> For an analysis of this notion of mode of consciousness in Brentano, D. Fisette (2014).

<sup>18</sup> On the idea that mental states are intrinsically conscious, a thesis that Rosenthal attributes to Brentano, see D. Rosenthal (1990, p. 790; 1991, p. 30; 1993, p. 212-213; 1997, p. 30); see also D. Rosenthal (2009, p. 7, 10; 2004, p. 30-31; 2005, p. 179-180, 184).

<sup>19</sup> We can immediately leave aside the objection regarding the individuation of mental states, which Rosenthal (1993, p. 211 sq.) addresses indirectly to Brentano, to the extent that it assumes an interpretation Brentano's theory that is in line with that suggested by Kriegel. Such a problem supposes that there is indeed only one (representational) state whose consciousness is an intrinsic property, and the question that Rosenthal asks, and rightly so, is how in these circumstances can mental states be individuated by means of attitudes, such as for example the assertive attitude by which Rosenthal characterizes higher-order thoughts and which differ from non-assertive attitudes such as desire or doubt (ROSENTHAL, 2005, p. 184, p. 180). According to Rosenthal (1993, p. 212-213), a one-level account of consciousness such as Kriegel's, where there are within one single state many parts among which one represents the whole to which it belongs, the criterion of individuation represents a problem for cases of non-assertive attitudes such as desire or doubt: "Suppose the higher-order thought is about a suspicion or doubt; that state will perforce have a mental attitude distinct from any higher-order thought, since higher-order thoughts will invariably have the mental attitude corresponding to an assertion". (ROSENTHAL, 1993, p. 212-213); Kriegel (2003b, p. 487 sq.) responds to Rosenthal's objection with the help of an argument, which rests entirely on Searle's notion of direction of fit, which I will not discuss here.

other occasions he associates it with self-representational theories of consciousness (ROSENTHAL, 2009, p. 10) or even with the HOP model of consciousness.<sup>20</sup> The connection with self-representational theories, and more particularly with the version recently upheld by U. Kriegel, seems all the more plausible given that the latter explicitly appeals to Brentano and even characterizes his own theory of consciousness as neo-Brentanian. Moreover, it seems that the thesis that mental states are intrinsically conscious, which Rosenthal attributes to Brentano, rests on an interpretation that is in line with that of Kriegel<sup>21</sup>. Given the impossibility of exposing here in detail the ins and outs of Kriegel's theory, I will simply address here the aspects which enable us to establish a connection with Brentano's theory of consciousness and what justifies, to a certain extent, Kriegel's neo-Brentanianism.

Let us begin by distinguishing Rosenthal's theory from that of Kriegel with the help of the following two definitions, the first corresponding to the HOT theory, and the second to Kriegel's self-representational theory:

1. A mental state  $M$  of a subject  $x$  at a given time  $t$  is conscious iff  $x$  has a state  $M^*$  in such a way that  $M \neq M^*$ , and  $M^*$  represents the occurrence of  $M$ .
2. A mental state  $M$  of a subject  $x$  at a given time  $t$  is conscious iff  $M$  represents its own occurrence.

One immediately notices that the main difference between these two theories lies in that the first postulates two numerically distinct mental states, a postulate which the second theory rejects.  $M$  refers to a single mental state which is nevertheless characterized, as in the higher-order theories, by two distinct contents, the first being the first-order representation, such as the hearing of a sound, while the second is the higher-order content, which corresponds to the consciousness of this representation and, in the present case, the fact of being conscious, oneself, of hearing a sound. In Kriegel's

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<sup>20</sup> In connection to the HOP model, Rosenthal (2004, p. 34; 2005, p. 179-180) has made the point that the importance given to inner perception in Brentano's theory of consciousness, like most of the examples taken from visual and auditory perception, seems to indicate that this theory of perception brings it perhaps closer to HOP (higher-order perception) theory than to HOT (higher-order thought) theory. However, this is not the case because inner perception is clearly distinguished from observation or introspection on the basis of its non-reflexive character as Brentano clearly indicates in a text about Thomas Reid's philosophy, whereby he associates observation with reflexive consciousness and inner perception with non-reflexive consciousness. (BRENTANO, 1975, p. 2). This distinction is at the heart of his criticism of introspection in *Psychology* in which he maintains that the accompanying consciousness does not consist in a second-order reflexive act and that the idea of self-observation directed at mental states such as anger, for example, is simply counterevident (*Psychology*, p. 99; see also p. 22). Brentano conceives of inner perception in terms of judgment (*Psychology*, p. 109-110), that is, of *Wahrnehmung* in the literal sense of the word: as a positive or negative stance (*Stellungnahme*) taken towards the object of judgment.

<sup>21</sup> On the similarities between Brentano's theory and that of Kriegel, D. Rosenthal (2004, p. 30-31; 2009, p. 10).

theory, however, these two contents are carried by one and the same vehicle which exhibits a particular structure insofar as it consists in a mental state that represents its own occurrence. Hence the thesis that consciousness is in this sense an intrinsic property of mental states.

What makes this theory of consciousness neo-Brentanian in nature is that Kriegel identifies “self-representational consciousness” with the thesis that a mental state is conscious if, and only if, this state is at the same time about itself.<sup>22</sup> Kriegel’s interpretation of Brentano’s theory of consciousness is consistent with intentionalism insofar as he presupposes not only that intentionality is the single feature of mental phenomena for Brentano, but also that consciousness consists in nothing more than this self-referential structure, or *self-directed intentionality*, by means of which he characterizes mental states. A mental state is therefore conscious if, and only if, it represents its own occurrence. It is in light of this view that Kriegel interprets Brentano’s theory of primary and secondary objects, mainly in connection with the following passage from *Psychology* <sup>23</sup>:

Every mental act is conscious; it includes within it a consciousness of itself. Therefore, every mental act, no matter how simple, has a double object, a primary and a secondary object. The simplest act, for example the act of hearing, has as its primary object the sound, and for its secondary object, itself, the mental phenomenon in which the sound is heard. (*Psychology*, p. 119; *Schriften I*, p. 174).

Considered in itself, this passage seems to corroborate the thesis which Kriegel attributes to Brentano in a recent text (“Brentano’s Most Striking Thesis”), and which asserts “that conscious states are conscious *in virtue of* self-representing (and to that extent that self-representation is the essence of consciousness).” (KRIEGEL, 2013, p. 24). Thus, Kriegel supposes that the concomitant consciousness, which in principle accompanies all mental states, is itself a representation and that accordingly the secondary object consists in nothing other than the representation referring to itself as an object. The status of this accompanying consciousness remains admittedly problematic in *Psychology* and we will see that Brentano overcomes some of these problems in his lectures and later writings. However, it is clear that the inner consciousness that accompanies the representation of the secondary object is not itself a representation, but rather a (existential) judgment whose function within

<sup>22</sup> According to Kriegel (2003b, p. 479-480), a neo-Brentanian theory of consciousness is based on the following three theses: the No-Coextension Thesis (“all, but *not only*, conscious states are mental states”); the Physicalist Thesis (“all conscious states *are* physical states”); the Self-Representation Thesis (“all and only conscious states are self-representational states”). Kriegel acknowledges, however, that only the self-representation thesis may be attributed to Brentano!

<sup>23</sup> This represents the only passage from Brentano’s *Psychology* on which Kriegel’s interpretation is based and to which he refers on several occasions. (U. KRIEGEL, 2009 p. 14; 2003b, p. 480; 2004, p. 175).

Brentano's theory is similar to the one performed by higher-order thoughts within Rosenthal's theory. On the other hand, the idea of a self-referential structure of intentionality as well as the thesis that consciousness may be reduced to such a self-representational property of mental states is not corroborated by any of Brentano's writings.

## Brentano's two theses on consciousness

Let us now return to the point emphasized by Rosenthal (2009, p. 2) that the originality of Brentano's theory with respect to the Cartesian tradition resides in the thesis that all mental states are conscious<sup>24</sup>. This thesis seems to be one of the two general theses formulated by Brentano at the beginning of the second chapter of Book II of *Psychology* (§2):

1. Every mental phenomenon is a consciousness (*Bewußtsein*)
2. Every mental phenomenon is conscious (*bewußt*)

The first thesis refers to the notion of consciousness in its transitive sense, that is, to *consciousness of something*, and thus to intentional consciousness. We may reformulate this thesis as follows:

- 1b. Every mental phenomenon is consciousness of something.

As a first approximation, the notion of consciousness as expressed in the second thesis is used in an intransitive sense as monadic predicate that refers to an intrinsic and non-relational property of mental states (the fact, for example, that a state like a pain is conscious or unconscious). But this interpretation stands in contradiction with the first thesis since consciousness cannot be at the same time transitive, as in the first thesis, and intransitive as the second suggests. Another interpretation inspired by Brentano's use of the notion of unconscious in *Psychology* (*Psychology*, p. 79; *Schriften* I, p. 120) rests on the distinction established between the passive and the active senses of this notion. The notion of consciousness suggested by the second thesis is comparable to the meaning that Brentano attributes to the notion of unconscious, which he uses in a passive sense, that is, "unconscious" as referring to a thing of which we are (not) conscious", thereby refusing to acknowledge the notion of "unconscious" in an active sense (*Psychology*, p. 79; *Schriften* I, p. 120). In its passive sense, consciousness would therefore refer to the mental phenomenon of which we are conscious or, as Brentano indicates, as an "object of consciousness". Using Brentano's example, we would say that in hearing a

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<sup>24</sup> Rosenthal specifies later on in this article: "it was rare until Brentano's time to describe mental states as conscious at all. Even though Descartes and Locke were plainly writing about the property we describe as a state's being conscious, they did not say that our mental states are all conscious, but rather that we are conscious of all our mental states." (ROSENTHAL, 2009, p. 4).

sound, the mental phenomenon of hearing a sound is, in its active sense, about the sound, whereas the act of hearing, in its passive sense, is the object of consciousness insofar as the agent is conscious of being in such a state. We can thus reformulate the second thesis in light of this interpretation that appeals to the distinction between the passive and the active senses of the notion of consciousness:

2b. Every mental phenomenon is an object of consciousness

This formulation fits well with the theory of primary and secondary objects through which Brentano articulates his two theses on consciousness. According to this theory, every mental phenomenon refers at the same time to a primary object (a sound that is heard) and to itself as a "secondary object" (the hearing of the sound). It is to this second thesis to which Brentano devotes the major part of the discussion of consciousness in Book II of *Psychology* and it is on the basis of this thesis that he opposes from the beginning the hypothesis of the existence of unconscious mental states. (*Psychology*, p. 79; *Schriften* I, p. 119).

Now the question remains as to how consciousness can simultaneously stand in relation both to a physical phenomenon (Thesis I) and to itself as an object (Thesis II). Brentano's answer lies in the Aristotelian distinction between the *in recto* and *in obliquo* modes of relation, as the following passage of *Psychology* seems to suggest:

We can say that the sound is the primary object of the act of hearing, and that the act of hearing itself is the secondary object. Temporally they both occur at the same time, but in the nature of the case, the sound is prior. [...] The act of hearing appears to be directed toward sound (*dem Ton zugewandt*) in the most proper sense of the term, and because of this it seems to apprehend itself incidentally (*nebenbei*) and as something additional (*als Zugabe*). (*Psychology*, p. 98; *Schriften* I, p. 146).<sup>25</sup>

As Rosenthal has rightly noted, the difficulty lies in how to interpret this Aristotelian doctrine which plays a central role in Brentano's theory. Indeed, the question is how to understand the *en parergo* relation that consciousness bears to itself as a secondary object<sup>26</sup>. The phrasing of this

<sup>25</sup> This should be compared to the following passage taken from Brentano's lectures on descriptive psychology: "Every consciousness, upon whatever object it is primarily directed, is concomitantly directed upon itself (*geht nebenher auf sich selbst*). In the presenting of the colour hence simultaneously we have a presenting of this presenting. Aristotle already [emphasizes] that the psychical phenomenon contains the consciousness of itself." (BRENTANO, 1982, p. 25).

<sup>26</sup> This is confirmed by a passage from *Psychology* where Brentano identifies his position with that of Aristotle in the *Metaphysics*: "Thus in the twelfth book of the *Metaphysics*, he says, 'Knowledge, sensation, opinion and reflection seem always to relate to something else, but only incidentally to themselves.' Here it is apparent that his conception agrees entirely with our own and he undoubtedly had this conception in mind when he wrote the above quoted passage in which he rejected the infinite complication of mental activity as an unjustified inference". (*Psychology*, p. 102).

passage may be a source of confusion given that the terms “*nebenbei*” (incidentally) and, especially, “*Zugabe*” (something additional) suggest that the accompanying consciousness of the representation of the sound is something extrinsic to the hearing or is to be thought of as a simple additive like the cream or the sugar that one might add to coffee. This further suggests that consciousness would therefore be imposed from without, as higher-order theories maintain, in the sense that the content of the higher-order state would make the target state conscious. But this interpretation is not consistent with Brentano’s second thesis on consciousness, which maintains that all mental states are conscious.

There are many ways to understand the dual relationship of consciousness to its primary and secondary objects such as, for example, the distinction between focal and peripheral awareness (or A. Gurwitsch’s notion of marginal consciousness or W. James’ notion of fringe), which, as we have seen, is used by Rosenthal. We generally refer to this distinction in order to explain the difference between, on the one hand, the attentive and deliberately focused consciousness of things and, on the other hand, the pre-reflexive, non-attentive and immediate consciousness or perception of things. In such a case, the *in recto* consciousness of a primary object would correspond to the focal awareness of a sound while the *in obliquo* consciousness that accompanies the hearing of the sound would correspond to the peripheral awareness of that perception. But this interpretation also entails a number of problems as we will later see.

## Brentano and the infinite regress problem

Let us now consider the infinite regress problem that Rosenthal (2005, p. 184) ascribes to Brentano’s theory. In Book II of *Psychology*, Brentano examines several objections raised against his own theory, particularly what is known since Aristotle as the threat of infinite regress. This objection is discussed by Brentano in connection with the hypothesis of unconscious mental states as well as with the duplication problem, which refers to the idea that in any mental state a physical phenomenon would have to be represented twice (once in the representation of the sound and once again in the hearing of the sound, that is, the representation of the representation of the sound).<sup>27</sup> The threat of infinite regress is, in fact, the fourth objection addressed by Brentano in §7 (p. 93 ff.)

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<sup>27</sup> Rosenthal raises the problem of duplication in Brentano and Aristotle in the following way: “As Brentano puts it, we must choose whether to individuate propositional mental states (presentations) in terms of their (propositional) object or the mental act of the presentation. Brentano credits Aristotle with the idea. Aristotle’s actual argument, which Brentano adapts, is that if the sense by which we see that we see is not sight, then the sense of sight and the other sense would both have colour as their proper object, and distinct senses cannot share the same proper object”. (ROSENTHAL, 1993, p. 222).

given that his second thesis on consciousness seems to involve such a problem. For if we deny that the representation that accompanies the hearing of the sound is unconscious, as most higher-order theories of consciousness maintain, it would seem that one must therefore necessarily postulate an infinite number of mental states. Brentano's answer consists in denying one of the premises shared by both objections, namely that the concomitant consciousness that accompanies the representation of the sound is numerically distinct from such a representation. Thus, Brentano attempts to demonstrate that both belong to one and the same mental act.

The threat of infinite regress clearly formulated by Brentano (*Psychology*, p.93-94) can be rendered in the following way:

1. Every mental phenomenon is about an object (the hearing of the sound) (Thesis I).
2. Every mental phenomenon is itself the object of an accompanying consciousness (the representation of the hearing of the sound) (Thesis II).
3. The representation that accompanies the initial mental state is numerically distinct from the targeted mental state.
4. If, however, the representation must also be conscious (Thesis II), and the representation that makes it conscious must in turn be conscious, the series is, therefore, infinite.
5. Therefore, either the representation of the initial state is unconscious (and thesis II is, then, false) or there must be an infinite number of mental acts.

The problem lies precisely in the third premise. It posits that the concomitant consciousness, which accompanies the initial representation, is a numerically distinct mental act from the initial mental act to which it refers as an object. Brentano argues that the representation of the sound and the representation of the representation of the sound are one and the same mental act, which is about two different objects, a primary object and a secondary object. From this perspective, the distinction between a lower-order and a higher-order act consists ultimately only in a simple conceptual abstraction:

The presentation of the sound and the presentation of the presentation of the sound form a single mental phenomenon; it is only by considering it in its relation to two different objects, one of which is a physical phenomenon and the other a mental phenomenon, that we divide it conceptually into two presentations. In the same mental phenomenon in which the sound is present to our minds we simultaneously apprehend the mental phenomenon itself. (*Psychology*, p. 98; *Schriften I*, p. 146).

In other words, there are not two numerically distinct entities, but rather two *abstracta* which belong to one and the same thing, such as, for example,

in the form and the size of a circle or likewise the velocity and the direction of motion<sup>28</sup>.

The second assumption, which is challenged by Brentano in his response to this objection, rests on the idea that the concomitant consciousness takes as an object – which refers here to the secondary object – the initial representation as such, that is, the representation of the primary object. This is similar to Rosenthal's theory according to which a higher-order thought can only take as an object the initial or lower-order state.<sup>29</sup> In contrast to Rosenthal, Brentano maintains, however, that the secondary object of the concomitant consciousness consists in the whole mental act, which is comprised of both the represented sound and itself:

These results show that the consciousness of the presentation of the sound clearly occurs together with the consciousness of this consciousness, for the consciousness which accompanies the presentation of the sound is a consciousness not so much of this presentation as of the whole mental act in which the sound is presented, and in which the consciousness itself exists concomitantly. Apart from the fact that it presents the physical phenomenon of sound, the mental act of hearing becomes at the same time its own object and content, taken as a whole. (*Psychology*, p. 100; *Schriften I*, p. 148).

A review of the objections raised against the second thesis shows, on the one hand, that there is not and cannot be any unconscious representation in the sphere of our experience (*Psychology*, p. 81; *Schriften I*, p. 122) and that, on the other, the threat of infinite regress cannot be considered as an argument against Brentano's theory because the series of mental acts ultimately ends with the second term, that is, with the consciousness of the whole mental act. (*Psychology*, p. 100; *Schriften I*, p. 148).

### Three options regarding the Interpretation of "one and the same act"

The question remains now of determining what Brentano means by a "whole mental act" or by the expression "one and the same act" on which rests

<sup>28</sup> As Brentano explains in a fragment published in *Religion und Philosophie*: "Es ist ein Akt, den wir nur begrifflich zerlegen, indem wir ihn einerseits denken, insofern er das Farbige, andererseits insofern er das Farbige-Sehende zum Objekt hat, ähnlich wie wir an einem Kreis Gestalt und Größe oder an einer Bewegung Richtung und Geschwindigkeit unterscheiden". (BRENTANO, 1954, p. 191).

<sup>29</sup> In an appendix to the classification of 1911, Brentano duly insists that if this were the case, the threat of infinite regress would still hold: "As I have already emphasized in my *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, however, for the secondary object of mental activity one does not have to think of any particular one of these references, as for example the reference to the primary object. It is easy to see that this would lead to an infinite regress, for there would have to be a third reference, which would have the secondary reference as object, a fourth, which would have the additional third one as object, and so on". (*Psychology*, p. 215; *Schriften I*, p. 385).

part of his solution to the infinite regress problem, and which is also a presupposition of the doctrine of *in recto* and *in obliquo* consciousness. That is the third problem which Rosenthal associates with Brentano's intrinsicism, expressed as follows:

How could we ever show, in a non-question-begging way, that a higher-order thought is part of the mental state it is about, rather than that the two are just distinct, concurrent states? (ROSENTHAL, 1993, p. 212-213).

Providing an answer to this question requires that we first consider the three main options to which the various higher-order theories of consciousness appeal in order to account for the relationship between the representation of the primary object and the representation of the secondary object.

Suppose  $M$ , the representation of the primary object, and  $M^*$ , the representation of the representation or, in other words, the representation of the secondary object. The first version of the account simply consists in identifying  $M$  with  $M^*$ :

1. For any mental state  $M$  of a subject  $S$ , there is necessarily a mental state  $M^*$  such that  $S$  is in a state  $M^*$ , where  $M^*$  represents  $M$ , and  $M^* = M$ .

This view has been upheld by Kriegel (2003), but, as of recently, he has endorsed the third option described below (KRIEGEL, 2009, p. 228)<sup>30</sup>.

The second option, which is upheld by most higher-order theories of consciousness that subscribe to what van Gulick (2006) has termed the *distinctness assumption*, that is, the assumption that there is a numerical distinction between lower-level and higher-level states, can be characterized in the following way:

2. For any mental state  $M$  of a subject  $S$ , there is a mental state  $M^*$  such that  $S$  is in the state  $M^*$ , where  $M^* \neq M$ .

This position represents views such as Rosenthal's higher-order thought theory, where  $M$  and  $M^*$  are two numerically distinct states. The essential difference between these first two options is that, according to the second view, consciousness is a relational and extrinsic property conferred on the initial state from without by, for example, a higher-order thought whereas, according to the first view, consciousness is an intrinsic property of mental states.

Brentano rejects the second view as indicated by his response to the infinite regress objection, which consists in rejecting the assumption that the representation of the primary object and the representation of the secondary

<sup>30</sup> M. Textor rightly criticizes the various interpretations which identify Brentano's theory with the identity thesis. (TEXTOR, 2006, p. 421-424).

object are numerically distinct. But Brentano also dismisses the first view, as shown by his criticism of phenomenalism<sup>31</sup> and by the following passage of *Psychology* in which he maintains that part of the whole, a “divisive”<sup>32</sup>, cannot be identical to another part:

A divisive never stands in a relation of real identity with another which has been distinguished from it, for if it did it would not be another divisive but the same one. But they do both belong to one real entity. (*Psychology*, p. 124-125; *Schriften* I, p. 180-181).

This passage suggests, moreover, that Brentano considers another option, the mereological option, in that he conceives of the representation of the primary object and the concomitant representation of the secondary object as divisives of the same whole (or of the whole mental act).

Hence the third option recently suggested by van Gulick (2006) and Kriegel (2009, p. 228), which postulates a mereological relationship between the primary objects and the secondary objects. Suppose the following three elements:

$M^*$  = Representation of the primary object

$M^{**}$  = Representation of the secondary object

$M$  = The whole (or complex) unifying  $M^*$  and  $M^{**}$

3. For any mental state  $M$  of a subject  $S$ ,  $M$  is conscious iff there is a  $M^*$  and a  $M^{**}$ , such that (i)  $M^*$  is a part of  $M$ , (ii)  $M^{**}$  is a part of  $M$ , and (iii)  $M$  is a whole which  $M^*$  and  $M^{**}$  are parts of.

According to this view, the consciousness of the primary object and the consciousness of the secondary object are metaphysical parts or, in Brentano’s words, divisives that belong to one and the same phenomenon, that is, one and the same reality. This is the view upheld by Brentano in virtue of the principle of the unity of consciousness, to which we will now turn.

## Unity of Consciousness

The theory of primary and secondary objects raises what I will here refer to as the complexity problem, that is, the problem of unifying within inner

<sup>31</sup> The phenomenalist hypothesis, which Brentano attributes to A. Bain and W. James, simply consists in identifying the primary objects with the secondary objects as it “assumes that the act of hearing and its object are one and the same phenomenon, insofar as the former is thought to be directed upon itself as its own object. Then either ‘sound’ and ‘hearing’ would be merely two names for one and the same phenomenon”. (*Psychology*, p. 94; *Schriften* I, p. 140-141).

<sup>32</sup> Brentano justifies the use of the neologism “divisive” as follows: “Naturally, just as we can use one term to cover a number of things taken together, we can also consider each part of a thing as something in itself and call it by its own name. But just as in the first case the object to which the term is applied is not a thing, but a mere collective, the object will not be a thing in this case either. So, for want of a commonly used unequivocal term (since the term ‘part’ is also applied to real things when they are in collectives) we shall call this a divisive”. (*Psychology*, p. 121; *Schriften* I, p. 176).

consciousness the entire complex of elements involved in the constitution of our mental life.<sup>33</sup> Brentano invokes the principle of the unity of consciousness precisely in order to address this problem. The first question raised by Brentano is whether the multiplicity of these elements forms a whole or, rather, a collective (*Kollektiv*), which he defines in the following way. A collective is a multiplicity of parts grouped under the same point of view and each of these parts is an independent thing (BRENTANO, 1954, p. 225).

In contrast to a simple aggregate, a collective such as, for example, a company of soldiers or the trees of a forest may be apprehended from the point of view of a unity and represents in itself a homogeneous totality as Brentano maintains above. However, in contrast to the whole, the parts or, more precisely, the pieces (*Stücke*) maintain their independence in their relationship to the collective, to which they belong as their existence does not depend upon their participation to this whole. Conversely, the collective is neither dependent on the existence of its parts or on the relations between its parts since one can take away a tree or modify the relations between the trees and still talk of a collective.

Such is, however, not the case for wholes such as, for example, a melody whose parts are moments, or what Brentano refers to in *Psychology* as divisives. In contrast to the parts of a collective, divisives stand in a relation of dependence to the whole. In the case of a melody, one may, of course, change the notes of a melody when played in another key, but in order for it to be characterized as one and the same melody, the same relations between the notes must obtained, that is, in the present case, the same chords. We may therefore reframe our initial question and ask ourselves whether the multiplicity of states apprehended in inner perception presents itself as a collective or, rather, as a whole:

[...] in the case of more complex (*verwickelten*) mental states, do we have to assume a collective of things, or, does the totality of mental phenomena, in the most complex states just as in the simplest, form *one* thing which we can distinguish divisives as parts? (*Psychology*, p. 121; *Schriften* I, p. 176).

Brentano's answer is that all mental activity constitutes a whole whose mental states are divisives. In this respect, consciousness of the primary object

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<sup>33</sup> The following passage of *Psychology* on which Kriegel's interpretation of Brentano's theory rests gives us a sense of what the complexity problem consists in: "Every mental act is conscious; it includes within it a consciousness of itself. Therefore, every mental act, no matter how simple, has a double object, a primary and a secondary object. The simplest act, for example the act of hearing, has as its primary object the sound, and for its secondary object, itself, the mental phenomenon in which the sound is heard. Consciousness of this secondary object is threefold: it involves a presentation of it, a cognition of it and a feeling toward it. Consequently, every mental act, even the simplest has four different aspects under which it may be considered. It may be considered as a presentation of its primary object, as when the act in which we perceive a sound is considered as an act of hearing; however, it may also be considered as a presentation of itself, as a cognition of itself, and as a feeling toward itself. In addition, in these four respects combined, it is the object of its self-presentation, of its self-cognition, and (so to speak) of its self-feeling". (*Psychology*, p. 119; *Schriften* I, p. 173-4).

and consciousness of the secondary object are both metaphysical parts that belong to one and the same phenomenon and reality. Hence the principle of the unity of consciousness through which Brentano attempts to account for the relationship of these elements as a whole to one and the same reality. (*Psychology*, p. 124-125; *Schriften I*, p. 180-1).

This principle is invoked as early as in the first chapter of Book II in order to understand why multiple mental phenomena which are involved in the simplest of mental acts appear in consciousness not as an aggregate consisting of dispersed elements, but, rather, as a unified reality. It is in this context that Brentano refers to his theory of wholes and parts, whereby mental phenomena are conceived as “partial phenomena (*Teilphänomene*) of one single phenomenon in which they are contained, as one single and unified thing” (*Psychology*, p. 74, translation modified; *Schriften I*, p. 114). This principle reveals itself most significantly in the context both of the complexity problem, which stems from the theory of primary and secondary objects, and of the infinite regress problem, which is insoluble unless one supposes that primary objects and secondary objects form a unified indivisible whole. This point is, furthermore, confirmed by Brentano while discussing the issue of the unity of consciousness:

[...] the totality (*Gesamtheit*) of our mental life, as complex as it may be, always forms a real unity. This is the well-known fact of the unity of consciousness which is generally regarded as one of the most important tenets (*Punkte*) of psychology. (*Psychology*, p. 126 *Schriften I*, p. 182).

Thus, the purpose of this principle is not to do away with complexity in favor of simplicity, but, rather, to guarantee that what is perceived in inner consciousness is, despite this complexity, something that is unified (TEXTOR, 2006).

## Mental agent and self-consciousness

One of the fundamental criteria which Rosenthal associates with higher-order theories of consciousness is the principle of transivity which, as we have seen, stipulates that mental states are conscious if, and only if, one is in some way conscious of that state (ROSENTHAL, 2005, p. 4; 2009, p. 7). It has also been noted that in Rosenthal’s theory it is the higher-order thought that performs such a function by positing that in being conscious of a given state one is in a way conscious of oneself as being in that state (ROSENTHAL, 2005, p. 6). To use once again our example, a pain cannot be conscious if the subject does not have a higher-order thought about it, such as “I am currently feeling a pain in my stomach”. Thus, the principle of transivity presupposes that state consciousness (pain) is dependent upon subjective (transitive) consciousness insofar as, in

addition to having a higher-order thought, the subject must be conscious of being in such a state or of having it. The question at the present time is to determine whether Brentano's theory complies with this transitivity principle.

To answer this question, I will now turn to some of Brentano's posthumously published writings, written after the publication of *Psychology* in 1874. For, in these writings, Brentano reconsiders his initial theory of consciousness in providing substantial revisions to it. Two of these revisions are particularly relevant in the present context: the first refers to the important distinction between implicit consciousness (or awareness in a wider sense) and explicit consciousness (or awareness in a narrow sense) introduced in the Vienna lectures on descriptive psychology; the second modification consists in the notion of the "mentally active agent" (*Psychisch Tätige*), introduced in several fragments collected in *Religion und Philosophie* as well as in the "Appendix to the Classification of Mental Phenomena" of 1911 to solve some of the problems pending in *Psychology*. I am referring, among other things, to the ambiguous status in *Psychology* of the concomitant consciousness that accompanies all mental states and of the substrate, which Brentano also characterizes as a "unified real being." (*Psychology*, p. 120; *Schriften* I, p. 175), that is, as a being whose modes of consciousness, as divisives, consist in its determinations.

As a first approximation, the notion of a "unified real being" refers to the whole mental state, which consists in a "real" unity. In contrast to physical phenomena, individual mental phenomena "are those phenomena which alone possess real existence apart from (*ausser*) intentional existence". (*Psychology*, p. 70, translation modified; *Schriften* I, p. 109). And, as indicated above, the unity of consciousness consists in these partial phenomena (*Teilphänomene*) belonging to this real thing. But the principle of unity of consciousness, as formulated in *Psychology*, provides us with details neither on the nature of the substrate that underlies and unifies as a whole the modes of consciousness, nor on the status of the simultaneous consciousness that accompanies the various elements that make up this unity. It is precisely in this context that the notion of mental agent is introduced. It first attempts to answer the question as to what constitutes the real substrate of the complex mental act as apprehended in inner perception. This is confirmed by Brentano in a number of fragments that make up *Religion und Philosophie*, and most notably in the following passage where Brentano expresses his general thesis in response to what he calls Aristotle's semi-materialism:

It therefore follows that one and the same agent must ultimately be at the basis of all mental acts, whether sensory or non-sensory, such as they are simultaneously apprehended in inner perception. The unity of consciousness excludes Aristotle's semi-materialism. (BRENTANO, 1954, p. 228, my translation).

Thus, the modes of consciousness do indeed belong to one and the same complex act as suggested by the principle of the unity of consciousness. However, it is not consciousness as such, but rather the mental agent which is the bearer of this whole. All conscious states are mental phenomena that belong to the mental agent in the trivial sense that it is she, and no one else, who performs these mental acts, and it is she who is conscious of her stomach pain or of the pleasure she takes in playing chess or in composing verses. This privileged and private (or first-person) access to her own mental states is incidentally a presupposition on which Brentano's use of inner perception and consciousness rests.

Hence the second problem which deals with the status of the accompanying consciousness and with the second general thesis on consciousness in *Psychology* according to which all mental states are conscious. This thesis may be interpreted in two different ways whether one conceives the predicate "is conscious" as an intrinsic property of mental states, as Rosenthal sometimes suggests in his interpretation of Brentano, or rather as an object of consciousness in the sense that a mental state is always accompanied by a concomitant consciousness. The first interpretation is problematic for the simple reason that a state as such cannot be said to be conscious (or not) unless one supposes, following G. Ryle, the "self-luminous" character of mental states (D. ROSENTHAL, 1986 p. 344; 1990, p. 738). For, as Brentano (1954, p. 226-228) clearly acknowledges, a state requires that a bearer or an agent performs these acts, and this must be accounted for by an explanation of consciousness. On the other hand, the second interpretation also includes its share of problems since it does not explain why standing in relation to a secondary object would simply make one conscious of performing an act whose object is a physical phenomenon. The problem stands out more clearly in relation to the principle of the unity of consciousness (or that of the consciousness of a real unity): how can consciousness be at the same time both consciousness (in an active sense) of this unity and object of consciousness (in a passive sense), that is, consciousness of an occurring consciousness? While discussing the ideas of Thomas Aquinas, Brentano considers this possibility and maintains that the consciousness of an occurring consciousness coincides with the consciousness of the initial representation. It is precisely in this context that Brentano introduces the idea that the consciousness of the consciousness' representation of the sound is in fact nothing other than the consciousness of the whole mental act as it "becomes at the same time its own object and content". (*Psychology*, p. 100; *Schriften I*, p. 148) But this concomitant consciousness of the secondary object understood as the whole mental act does not take into account the fact that this state is conscious apart from stating that we are conscious of it. Thus, these two explanations of the second thesis, which is at the heart of Brentano's analyses of consciousness in Book II of *Psychology*, do not adequately account

for what it is for a mental state to be conscious. This seems to be what Brentano had later realized, and my hypothesis is that by taking in consideration the mental agent, Brentano attempts not only to resolve the problem of the substrate that underlies the various modes of consciousness, but also to provide a more adequate explanation of the second thesis.

Indeed, it would seem, according to this explanation, that a state is conscious only if an agent becomes aware not of this state as such, but rather of himself as being in such a state. Thus, the appeal to the mental agent in this theory of consciousness implies that in performing normally, say, an act of external perception the agent becomes aware not only of the primary object, but also of himself as a perceiving agent (BRENTANO, 1954, p. 226). This is also confirmed by a passage from the 1911 “Appendix to the Classification of Mental Phenomena” in which Brentano maintains that the object of secondary consciousness or internal perception is the mental agent himself as constituting both the relationship to the primary object and the secondary consciousness as a relation to the agent himself:

As I have already emphasized in my *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, however, for the secondary object of mental activity one does not have to think of any particular one of these references, as for example the reference to the primary object [...] The secondary object is not a reference but a mental activity, or, more strictly speaking, the mentally active agent (*sondern die psychische Tätigkeit, genauer gesprochen das psychisch Tätige*), in which the secondary reference is included (*beschlossen ist*) along with the primary one. (*Psychology*, translation modified, p. 215; *Schriften I*, p. 385).

This passage highlights a new mode of consciousness that is absent from *Psychology*, namely, the mode of consciousness *de se*, which refers to the consciousness of an agent as being oneself in this complex state. Using once again the example of the representation of a sound, self-consciousness would be expressed as follows: I am myself in the process of representing or experiencing a sound.<sup>34</sup> This point stands out even more clearly in the case of pain insofar as it is a state of which the agent is necessarily aware from a first-person perspective. The thesis that all mental states are conscious should then be understood, in light of the *de se* mode of consciousness, as an assertion about the implicitness of this self-awareness in all of experience. To use Rosenthal’s vocabulary, this consists in saying that Brentano subordinates subjective consciousness to state consciousness and, then, state consciousness to self-consciousness. In this respect, this new version of Brentano’s theory of consciousness is not incompatible with Rosenthal’s transitivity principle.

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<sup>34</sup> This should be contrasted with the remarks made by Kriegel (2003, p. 480-1) regarding the distinction within Brentano between *self-representation* and *representation of the self*.

However, Brentano does not support the view that a mental agent could be transitively conscious of something without being intransitively conscious of being in such a state. In other words, Brentano does not maintain that transitive consciousness can be said to be independent of intransitive consciousness. It is in this sense that I interpret the distinction between implicit consciousness (awareness in a wider sense) and explicit consciousness (awareness in a narrow sense). In these lectures, this distinction is closely associated to the central notion of noticing (*Bemerken*).<sup>35</sup> Brentano first applies this notion to the external perception of a primary object and maintains that one can see or hear (implicitly) something that one does not notice (explicitly). This is demonstrated by Brentano in an example, which recalls an argument made by Dretske (1993) against Rosenthal:

Whoever sees a lark in the blue of the sky does therefore not yet notice it, and hence will just as little notice his seeing of the lark, even though his seeing of the lark is concomitantly experienced [*mitempfinden*] by him. However, were he, at some point, not only to see the lark, but also to notice it, then he would certainly notice simultaneously that he sees it [...]. To see is different from being clear about what is seen. And thus, the concomitant experience [*mitempfinden*] of the seeing will be different from being clear about this concomitantly experienced seeing. (1995, p. 26).

Brentano supposes that the lark is not the explicit object of the act even though it appears in the subject's visual field, and that the latter is implicitly conscious of it. This amounts to maintaining that a state may be (implicitly) conscious without the subject being (explicitly) conscious of it. D. Armstrong (1997, p. 723) has also made a similar point with reference to the well-known case of the inattentive driver, which is often considered as exemplifying the use of the notion of unconscious in higher-order theories. Brentano would, in contrast to Armstrong, explain that the driver is not unconscious, but, rather, that he has an implicit and peripheral consciousness of his driving. For not only does Brentano reject the existence of unconscious mental states, but he argues, moreover, that the subject can be explicitly conscious of experiencing something (say, a lark) only if she is implicitly conscious of it (BRENTANO, 1995, p. 36). Explicit consciousness, or consciousness in a narrow sense, constitutes an act of noticing (*Bemerken*) conceived by Brentano in these lectures as an explicit perception of what is implicitly contained in consciousness (BRENTANO, 1982, p. 36). The distinction between implicit and explicit consciousness also helps to dispel some of the obscurities at the heart of the initial theory, most notably regarding the status of mental phenomena in

<sup>35</sup> See K. Mulligan's article "Brentano on the Mind" for a complete analysis of these distinctions in Brentano's lecture on psychognosy.

*Psychology*, brought to light by Husserl in the *Logical Investigations*<sup>36</sup>. For given that physical phenomena are not elements of inner consciousness insofar as the latter is limited to the domain of mental states, the remaining question is whether this class of phenomena consists of contents of sensory experience or of simple stimulations. The reference to the notion of implicit consciousness shows that *qualia* are elements of primary consciousness and that, in contrast to the view held by higher-order theories, qualitative experience constitutes a necessary condition for having higher-order thoughts, which are about this logically prior experience. It is in this sense that primary consciousness is for Brentano an intransitive and implicit (or intrinsic) consciousness, and as Brentano's commentary on Thomas Reid indicates, it is also a pre-reflective consciousness.<sup>37</sup>

## Final remarks

Once we consider the changes that Brentano brings to his initial theory of consciousness, it is clear that one may not reduce it to either versions of the higher-order theory of consciousness. For that matter, Rosenthal's critical remarks about Brentano's *Psychology* confirm this point: Brentano's theory of consciousness is not consistent with the principle of transitivity. In other words, it does not recognize the fundamental principle of any higher-order theory of consciousness. For despite the affinities that hold between Brentano and higher-order theories, most notably with respect to the distinction between the various levels in mental states in his classification of mental acts and in spite of the significance of intentionality in his philosophy of mind, Brentano has never upheld any form of intentionalism whatsoever and has never attempted to reduce consciousness to any type of intentional relation. Rather, consciousness represents within Brentano's theory a form of intransitive self-consciousness which is intrinsic to the agent. Thus, if one admits that the premise at the basis of most of the criticisms addressed to Brentano's philosophy of mind implies mainly this representationalist or intentionalist postulate (also known as "Brentano's thesis"), one must therefore conclude that such criticisms miss their mark and do not do justice to Brentano's original contribution to the analysis of consciousness. For our

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<sup>36</sup> D. Fisette (2010) for an analysis of the criticism addressed by Husserl at Brentano in the *Logical Investigations*, and A. Werner (1931) on the ambiguous status of the notion of physical phenomena in Brentano's *Psychology*.

<sup>37</sup> My analysis of Brentano's theory of consciousness is similar, in part, to that proposed by J. Brandl in his article "What is Pre-Reflective Self-Awareness? Brentano's Theory of Inner Consciousness Revisited". Brandl criticizes the higher-order theories' interpretation of Brentano's theory, and defends the view that Brentano upheld a pre-reflective theory of consciousness. However, unlike Brandl, I do not believe that this pre-reflective theory of self-consciousness is already present in the two chapters in *Psychology* on inner consciousness.

analysis of Brentano's writings has shown that his theory of consciousness fulfills most of the requirements that motivate such criticisms and address most criticisms directed at higher-order theories of consciousness. Moreover, Brentano's account of the relationship between consciousness and intentionality deserves to be discussed in greater depth than what was possible in the context of this article.

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