

Brentano's 'revised' theory consciousness

ABSTRACT

Three substantial issues raised by Fisetto's interpretation of Brentano's views on consciousness are discussed. The first concerns the difference between "transitive" and "intransitive" consciousness. The second concerns what Fisetto proposes as Brentano's *revised* theory of consciousness, where the notion of a mental agent as a "unified real being" plays a central role. This notion is rejected and some alternative interpretations, which are in the spirit of Brentano's theory, are proposed and defended. Finally, it is pointed out that Fisetto's interpretation remains unclear as to whether Brentano's view is compatible or not with Rosenthal's transitivity principle. I argue that while Brentano's revised theory is not intentionalist, as Fisetto makes it clear, it is nonetheless compatible with the transitivity principle, contrary to what Fisetto claims.

Keywords: Philosophy of mind; Brentano; Transitivity principle; Intentionalism; Consciousness.

RESUMO

Três problemas substanciais levantados pela interpretação de Fisetto a respeito das visões de consciência de Brentano são discutidos. O primeiro é concernente à diferença entre consciência "transitiva" e "intransitiva". O segundo trata do que Fisetto propõe como sendo a teoria revisada da consciência de Brentano, onde a noção de agente mental como um "ser real unificado" desempenha um papel central. Esta noção é rejeitada e algumas interpretações alternativas, que estão no espírito da teoria de Brentano, são propostas e defendidas. Finalmente, é apontado que a interpretação de Fisetto permanece pouco clara a respeito da questão se a visão de Brentano é compatível ou não com o princípio da transitividade de Rosenthal. Argumento que enquanto a teoria revisada de Brentano não é intencionalista, como Fisetto deixa claro, é, entretanto, compatível com o princípio da transitividade, contrário ao que Fisetto reivindica.

Palavras-chave: Filosofia da mente; Brentano; Princípio de transitividade; Intencionalismo; Consciência.

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In the target paper, Fisette presents a detailed interpretation of Brentano's views on consciousness as they are found in *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* and as they have evolved in some of his posthumously published works. Fisette's endeavour is well motivated in light of the influence of Brentano on important contemporary theories of consciousness which fall, broadly speaking, under what is known as higher-order approaches to consciousness. The paper is dense and it raises many interesting issues, either exegetical issues or substantive philosophical issues with respect to contemporary debates on the nature of consciousness. In what follows, I focus on three issues of the latter kind. The first concerns the difference between "transitive" and "intransitive" consciousness as these notions are used by Fisette throughout the paper, particularly in his interpretation of Brentano's two theses on consciousness (see section 4). The second concerns what Fisette proposes as Brentano's revised theory of consciousness which he presents towards the end of the paper (sections 7 and 8), where the notion of a mental agent, understood as a "unified real being", plays a central role. It is not my purpose to criticize Fisette's interpretation on exegetical grounds. I take his interpretative hypothesis at face value, but I try to clarify what Brentano's revised theory of consciousness amounts to, especially with respect to the question of the relationship between the primary and secondary object of mental states. I point out that Brentano's revised theory is interesting because it suggests a way to make sense of the strong intuition that conscious mental states necessarily involve a sense of "for-me-ness", as it has recently been stressed in the literature (LEVINE 2006, and KRIEGEL 2009). Brentano's notion of a mental agent as a "unified real being", however, strikes me as something implausible. So I suggest some alternative interpretations which are in the spirit of Brentano's theory but which come short of postulating a mental agent, in Brentano's sense. I argue that these alternative interpretations are more plausible than Brentano's revised theory. Finally, in the last section, I point out that Fisette's interpretation remains unclear as to whether Brentano's view is compatible or not with the transitivity principle, which is central to Rosenthal's higher-order thought (HOT) theory. I argue that while Brentano's revised theory is not intentionalist, as Fisette makes it clear, it is nonetheless compatible with the transitivity principle.

"Transitive/Intransitive"

Fisette's discussion of the similarities and important dissimilarities between Brentano's theory of consciousness and Rosenthal's HOT theory rests crucially on his use of the distinction between so-called transitive and intransitive consciousness. At several places, he claims that according to

Brentano's theory, consciousness turns out to be intransitive, for instance when at the end of the paper he states that "[...] consciousness represents within Brentano's theory a form of intransitive self-consciousness which is intrinsic to the agent." (p. 32). In section 4, where he discusses Brentano's two theses, Fisette argues in support of his interpretation of Thesis II, namely "2b. Every mental phenomenon is an object of consciousness." (p. 17), on the grounds that the alternative interpretation according to which "is conscious" is used in an intransitive sense would "stand in contradiction with Thesis I", according to which "1b. Every mental phenomenon is consciousness of something". Fisette's use of the notions of transitive and intransitive consciousness, however, is puzzling especially because this is not a distinction found in Brentano, but one which was only recently introduced in the literature (ROSENTHAL, 1986, 1997 and TUGENDHAT 1979).

In some important passages, Fisette uses this distinction in the material mode as if "transitive" and "intransitive" would denote some properties of consciousness, even suggesting that they are incompatible properties of mental states. Some of his uses of this distinction also suggest that it would capture a distinction between rival views about consciousness, for instance a view according to which consciousness is essentially transitive and a view according to which it is essentially intransitive. This, however, seems to be a misunderstanding of the distinction between these notions. To avoid this confusion, it is important to stress that the distinction, as well as the distinction between "creature consciousness" and "state consciousness", is a *conceptual* distinction about different uses of the predicate "is conscious" in ordinary language. For instance, in "Pierre is conscious that Mary has just arrived" the predicate "is conscious" is used transitively and in "Pierre's desire to have sex with Mary is conscious" it is used intransitively. But there is no contradiction in saying that when Pierre is conscious that Mary has just arrived (transitively conscious), Pierre is conscious by virtue of being in a mental state which is conscious, that is, intransitively conscious. Moreover, there is no contradiction in the claim that whenever someone is in a mental state which is conscious (intransitive consciousness) the subject is conscious of something (transitive consciousness). One might have theoretical reasons to deny the latter claim, but there is no logical incoherence in that claim. So it is important to be clear that the distinction between transitive and intransitive consciousness is a conceptual distinction between different uses of "is conscious" in ordinary language. For all we know, every instance of a conscious mental state may well lend itself to correct uses of "is conscious" as creature, state, transitive and intransitive consciousness even if, of course, ordinary language hardly allows us to do all that at once. Whether the *nature* of consciousness is to be understood as ultimately intransitive, transitive or creature consciousness is a different issue, and nothing rules out, a priori, that consciousness may ultimately be

necessarily all of that. Of course, proponents of higher-order theories of consciousness notoriously deny that, by pointing out that we can have unconscious states by virtue of which we are aware of something, that is, transitively conscious, like in the well-known example of the inattentive truck driver. If, however, someone denies that there are unconscious mental states, as Brentano does, then it would indeed follow that whenever one is transitively conscious of something one must necessarily be in a mental state which is conscious (intransitively).

What are the implications of this remark for Fisette's discussion? I can see two important implications. The first concerns Fisette's interpretation of Brentano's Thesis II and the second concerns the question whether Brentano's revised theory of consciousness is compatible with the transitivity principle, which I discuss in section 4. As I already pointed out, Fisette presents Brentano's two theses and he advocates an interpretation of Thesis II which conflicts with Rosenthal's (p. 16-17). Let us grant that Thesis I can be interpreted along the lines suggested by Fisette, namely as

1b. Every mental phenomenon is consciousness of something.

Thesis II is as follows:

2. Every mental phenomenon is conscious.

A quite natural reading of 2 is that "is conscious" is used intransitively to attribute consciousness to mental phenomena, or to mental states to use the contemporary terminology. At any rate, from a grammatical point of view, this seems to be the right interpretation. Moreover, this interpretation makes perfect sense in light of the fact that Brentano never accepted the existence of unconscious mental states. Fisette, however, is not satisfied with this straightforward interpretation for the reason that it "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". (p. 16). Why can consciousness not be at once transitive and intransitive, especially if we deny that there exist unconscious mental states as Brentano does? Fisette's reason to reject the straightforward interpretation seems to rest on a misunderstanding of the distinction between the meanings of "transitive" and "intransitive". His claim that it is impossible that consciousness be at once transitive and intransitive would have to be based on some logical or a priori truth. As I have already noted, there is no incoherence in the claim that, on the contrary, consciousness can indeed be at the same time transitive and intransitive. Moreover, this is something that Brentano seems to be committed to, in so far as he denies that there are unconscious mental states. The straightforward intransitive reading of Thesis II is incompatible with Thesis I only if the latter is understood in such a way that it leaves open that one might be transitively conscious of something by virtue of being in an unconscious mental states,

that is, a state which is not intransitively conscious, as proponents of higher-order approaches to consciousness claim. It would seem natural for Brentano, however, to deny that assumption.¹ Thus, Fisette's rejection of the first interpretation of Thesis II is unwarranted.

This being said, it may well be that Brentano's use of "is conscious" in Thesis II is simply ambiguous or indeterminate between the first interpretation and Fisette's proposed interpretation, namely:

2b. Every mental phenomenon is an object of consciousness. (p. 17).

Saying that Thesis II is ambiguous between these two senses seems totally acceptable because, again there is simply no contradiction in claiming that the predicate "is conscious" can be used both transitively to say that a subject is conscious of something and intransitively to talk of a mental state by virtue of which the subject is conscious of something. Finally, it should be pointed out that even if "is conscious" in Thesis II is interpreted as expressing intransitive consciousness, as I have argued, this does not rule out that we may have independent reasons to think that it is plausible to attribute 2b to Brentano. The reason is that given Brentano's claim that every mental phenomenon has both a primary and a secondary object, this strongly suggests that every mental phenomenon is an object of consciousness because every mental phenomenon is a secondary object of consciousness. In other words, there is no incompatibility between Thesis I, the first (intransitive) interpretation of Thesis II, and 2b.

Brentano's revised theory of consciousness and the relation between primary and secondary object

In order to overcome the infinite regress argument, Brentano's strategy consists in denying the third premise according to which "[t]he representation that accompanies the initial mental state is numerically distinct from the targeted state" (p. 19). If so, then insofar as Brentano holds that a mental state has both a primary and a secondary object, we need an account of the relation between the primary and secondary object of mental states, and of how they are unified in "one and the same act". As Fisette notes (p. 23), Brentano holds the following view, as an answer to this question:

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

¹ See Kriegel (2009, p. 28-32) who, in this Brentanian spirit, claims that transitive creature consciousness depends on intransitive state consciousness.

In this statement, M^* = representation of the primary object, M^{**} = representation of the secondary object and M = the whole (complex) unifying M^* and M^{**} . It is important to recall that 3 stands in sharp contrast to standard higher-order approaches to consciousness such as Rosenthal's HOT theory, because while the latter necessarily involve two numerically distinct states, 3 involves only one mental state. For this reason, standard higher-order approaches to consciousness are sometimes called two-state views in contrast to accounts like 3, which are sometimes called one-state views.² The question I want to raise is how Brentano's revised theory of consciousness is supposed to account for the relation between the primary and the secondary object, since it is unclear how 3 could play that role.

In section 8, Fisette proposes an interpretation of Brentano's revised theory of consciousness which rests crucially on the notion of a mental agent understood as a "unified real being". The motivation for this notion is that the mental agent is understood as a real substrate, which unifies the various parts ("divisives" in Brentano's terminology) of the mental phenomenon. According to Brentano's revised theory:

[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, [...] in performing normally, say, an act of external perception the agent becomes aware not only of the primary object, but also of himself as 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 the secondary consciousness of 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. (p. 29).

The passage quoted from Brentano states that "the secondary object is not a reference but a mental activity, or, more strictly speaking, the mentally active agent [...] in which the secondary reference is included along with the primary one. (*Psychology*, translation modified, p. 215; *Schritten* I, p. 385)" (p. 29). It is important to recall that according to Brentano's revised theory, a "unified real being" is something quite peculiar because in contrast to physical phenomena, which have only "intentional existence", a unified real being does not exist only intentionally but it really exist.

How is statement 3 above supposed to give an account of the relation between the primary and secondary object according to Brentano's revised

² For the most well-known standard higher-order approaches to consciousness, or two-state views, see Rosenthal (1997, 2005), Lycan (1996, 2004), and Carruthers (2000). For one-state views see, for instance, Kriegel and Williford (2006), Kriegel (2009) and Van Gullick (2006). As Fisette indicates, proponents of two-state views endorse statement 2 (p. 22), as an account of the relation between primary and secondary object, while proponents of one-state views endorse either statement 1 (p. 22) or statement 3 (p. 23). According to Fisette, Brentano's account of that relation corresponds to statement 3.

theory? As I noted, it is unclear that 3 will still work, at least as it stands, because the revised theory rests crucially on the notion of a mental agent, understood as a unified real being, while no mental agent figures as parts of the mental state, or as the whole (complex) mental state in 3.

I can only think of two ways to accommodate the mentally active agent in a revised formulation of 3. Either M , the whole or complex mental state, is the mentally active agent, or M^{**} is the mentally active agent. According to the latter, the mentally active agent, namely M^{**} , would be a part of a whole (or complex), namely M . The mental agent, however, is supposed to be what plays the role of unifying the diverse parts of the mental states. Thus, this option would seem to be a non-starter in so far as it identifies a unified real being with a part of something else. What about the former option? Since M is the whole (or complex) unifying M^* and M^{**} , it is tempting to hold that, according to the revised theory, M is the mentally active agent, but then what about M^{**} ? We might be tempted to say that M^{**} stands for the agent's activity of representing the secondary object, namely the mentally active agent, that is, M itself. This, however, raises two difficulties. First, M^* would have to be the agent's activity of representing the primary object. On such an interpretation, however, M^* and M^{**} would turn out to be two different activities: (i) the activity of representing the primary object and (ii) the activity of representing the mentally active agent. Moreover, in what sense would M^{**} be the activity of representing the mentally active agent? What mentally active agent would it represent? Would it represent the agent actively representing the primary object or the agent actively representing herself? Here it might be tempting to say that M^{**} is the activity of representing at once both the primary object and the mentally active agent, namely M . If so, however, M^* becomes unnecessary: M is the mentally active agent and M^{**} is a part of M whose function it is to represent both the primary object and the secondary object, namely the whole mentally active agent herself. Thus, this account would be substantially different from 3.

A better way to accommodate 3 within Brentano's revised theory would be to understand M^* and M^{**} as two parts of one and the same activity which consists in representing at once both the primary object and the secondary object which, as we saw, is the mentally active agent, namely the whole of M . In what follows, I use this idea to formulate a revised version of the relation between the primary and secondary object.

The second difficulty concerns the nature of the relation, or relational activity, between the mental agent and the primary and secondary object. If Brentano's revised theory should be compatible with 3 along the lines I have just suggested, then the mental activity would have to be a representational activity. If this is so, however, Brentano's revised theory of consciousness would indeed be intentionalist, contrary to Fissette's interpretation. The mental

agent would stand in a representational, and hence intentional, relation both to the primary object and to the secondary object, namely herself, or herself mentally acting. According to such an interpretation, however, the mental agent could no longer be a “unified real being” since it would only be “intentionally existent”, like the primary object. These difficulties are serious enough to suggest that attempts to accommodate Brentano’s revised theory with statement 3 fail or, at least, that they are far from being straightforward. The second difficulty is a serious problem indeed. Given that the unity of the mental act requires that such a mental act place the mental agent at once in an intentional relation to the primary object and in a non-intentional relation to herself, or to her own mental activity, it seems preferable to give up 3 altogether and to try to find a different account of the relation between the primary and secondary object, that is, an account which is better suited to Brentano’s revised theory of consciousness. As a first approximation, the subject *S*, understood as a “unified real being”, actively represents a primary object (say the sound) and is actively in a direct non-intentional relation to herself representing the primary object. More formally:

4. For any mental state M of a subject S, M is conscious iff M is an act of S such that by M-ing S represents a primary object O, and S is non-intentionally, directly aware of herself and of her M-ing.

It should be stressed that, according to this view, the subject is understood as a mental agent in Brentano’s sense, namely as a unified real being which does not have only intentional existence. As far as I can tell, statement 4 provides us a clear understanding of the relation between the primary and secondary object, according to Brentano’s revised theory of consciousness. In the next section, I assess this view, and point out why I find it implausible and why some alternative views, which are in the spirit of Brentano’s theory, should be preferred.

Assessing Brentano’s revised theory of consciousness

Before assessing Brentano’s view concerning the relation between the primary and secondary object, I should underline an important difference between my interpretation of Brentano’s view, namely 4, and Brentano’s revised theory of consciousness as it must be strictly understood. This is only a minor point, but an important one nonetheless. Strictly speaking, statement 4 provides a definition of what it is for a mental state to be conscious. This way of talking is, of course, quite relevant in the context of recent discussions in philosophy of mind concerning the nature of consciousness, which try to underscore some essential characteristic of mental states by virtue of which they are conscious rather than unconscious. From Brentano’s point of view,

however, it is quite irrelevant to try to give a specific characterization of conscious mental states *per se*, as opposed to unconscious mental states, simply because Brentano never accepted that there exist unconscious mental states. Thus, a more careful formulation of Brentano's account of the relation between the primary and secondary object must consist first in stressing that all mental states are conscious (Thesis II). Whether we interpret Thesis II in the sense of intransitive consciousness or as Fisette's 2b, namely the claim that "every mental phenomenon is an object of consciousness" (p. 17), or even that Thesis II is indeterminate between these two interpretations, it remains that for Brentano it makes no sense to talk of unconscious mental states. Thus, Brentano is a good Cartesian because for him consciousness is the mark of the mental, to use Rosenthal's terminology. A more careful formulation of Brentano's account of the relation between the primary and secondary object, according to his revised theory, would thus be as follows:

4*. For any state *M* of a subject *S*, *M* is a mental state of *S* iff *M* is conscious, where *M* is conscious iff *M* is an act of *S* such that by *M*-ing *S* represents a primary object *O*, and *S* is non-intentionally, directly aware of herself and of her *M*-ing.

Of course, 4* will strike most contemporary philosophers and cognitive scientists, including myself, as totally implausible and obsolete, in so far as it is highly plausible that there are indeed many unconscious mental states which provide fruitful explanations of psychological phenomena and of human behavior, from an empirical point of view.

This being said, even if we accept that there are plenty of unconscious mental states which can contribute to explain our mental lives, Brentano's revised theory of consciousness can still constitute a plausible account, which is of interest to contemporary philosophy of mind, if his revised theory is understood not as a general account of mentality, but specifically as a theory of what makes mental states conscious, that is, what distinguishes them from unconscious states. This is precisely my interpretation of Brentano's account of the relation between the primary and secondary object, as it is stated in 4. This being said, is that view plausible?

First, this view certainly has the *prima facie* appeal of easily accounting for what Uriah Kriegel calls "the subjective character" of conscious mental states. According to Kriegel's theory, the *bluish* way it is like for me to experience the blue sky has two aspects or components: "the *bluish* component, which I call the experience's qualitative character, and [...] the *for-me* component, which I call the experience's subjective character." (KRIEGEL, 2009, p. 8). Joseph Levine makes a similar point noting that in a conscious experience "there is both a distinctive qualitative character to be reckoned with and *also the fact that the state is conscious – 'for the subject' – in a way that unconscious*

states are not." (LEVINE, 2006, p. 174). If in a conscious experience the subject is non-intentionally, directly aware of herself, understood as a unified real being, then this would readily explain why conscious experiences have a "subjective character".

Secondly, Brentano's revised theory of consciousness would also provide an account of an intuition that some philosophers have recently underscored in the literature.³ According to this intuition, the awareness one has of one's own conscious states is not an intentional relation and, hence, it cannot be accounted for in the context of a purely representationalist theory of consciousness. According to this line of thought, the relationship between oneself and one's own conscious states is more *intimate* than any representational, or intentional, relationship. As Kriegel (2009, p. 107) points it out, according to this intuition, such a relationship does not involve a gap between the vehicle of representation and the content of representation, while a representational relation does involve such a gap. Claiming that "S is non-intentionally, directly aware of herself and of her M-ing", as it is stated in 4, would be a way to make sense of that intuition.

The first issue that obviously arises, however, is to understand what the non-intentional direct relation of the unified real being to itself is supposed to be. Fissette's presentation of Brentano's revised theory is silent about that. This suggestion, however, strikes me as very similar to Bertrand Russell's view according to which a Self – which is understood in a similar way than Brentano's mental agent, and Descartes's notion of ego for that matter – is in a mental relation of acquaintance to itself. It seems that the best prospect for accounting for this non-intentional relation is indeed russellian acquaintance. Thus, if we have reasons to doubt the plausibility of Russell's notion of acquaintance, this would undermine the plausibility of 4.

More fundamentally, however, why should we accept in our ontology such Brentanian mental agents? Why should we accept that especially if, as Brentano's own view holds it, physical phenomena have *only* intentional existence, while mental agents have a more real kind of existence? This suggests that things can exist in two different ways, which will strike many as very implausible. From an ontological point of view, we may want to say that some entities do ultimately exist while our referential, and denotational, use of language sometimes refer to, or denote, only pseudo-entities, that is things which do not really exist ultimately, but which can be reduced to things that do exist ultimately. Why should we think, however, that mental agents are ultimate existents while physical phenomena are not? Of course, given the plausibility of materialism, we should say that it is the other way around. Moreover, if we can make sense of Brentano's idea that some things exist only

³ See Levine (2001, 2006) and Hellie (2007).

intentionally, philosophers inclined to accept anti-realism would surely be tempted to say that everything exists only intentionally, and so there is no reason to claim that mental agents exist otherwise. Why should we grant a special ontological status to mental agents?⁴ Is it not possible to account for the subjective character, or *for-me-ness*, of conscious experience without making such an ontological commitment? As it is well known, Derek Parfit (1984) has made it clear that we can make perfect sense of our concept of self (or the I-concept) and of agency without accepting substantial selves in our ontology. The general idea of Parfit's reductionist metaphysics of persons is that the self can be reduced to a psycho-physical continuum constituted of mental states which satisfy a certain relation of psychophysical connexion.⁵

This suggests that we may accept Brentano's central claim that every mental state has both a primary and secondary object and also accept, in part, Brentano's understanding of a mental state as a mental activity, while endorsing some different accounts of the relation between the primary and secondary object, that is, accounts which are free of the ontological burden of mental agents, understood as unified real beings. The first alternative account stands in opposition to Brentano's revised theory, in so far as it is obviously representationalist and, hence, intentionalist, and in so far as no mental agent is invoked. An important motivation of that account is that by being representationalist it does not subscribe to Brentano's view according to which the subject and physical phenomena would have different kinds of existence. To put this point in the Brentanian vocabulary, according to this view, the subject would also have *only* intentional existence.

5. For any mental state M of a subject S, M is conscious iff M is an activity of S by virtue of which M represents at once a primary object O and that S's own M-ing is going on.

It is important to stress that while this view is crucially different from Brentano's, it is still brentanian, or neo-brentanian, in the sense that it is also a one-state view, in contrast to the two-state views of standard higher-approaches to consciousness.⁶ It should also be noted that, according to this view, there is no need to claim that M is a whole constituted of parts. M is a simple mental activity, which has a complex content, and hence, there is no need to postulate a unified real being. In other words, this view can be understood as a variant of the first account of the relation between primary

⁴ See Metzinger (2003) who argues, on the basis of recent empirical findings in cognitive science, that no such things as selves exist, but that there are only "phenomenal selves", namely continuous ongoing processes creating impressions as of a self.

⁵ Parfit's metaphysics of persons is very much in the spirit of the Buddhist doctrine of *anatta* (non-self). See Bernier (2011) where I argue for the cogency of the Buddhist doctrine of non-self.

⁶ See note 3.

and secondary object discussed by Fisette.⁷ We may be tempted to object to 5 on the grounds that it makes no sense to talk of mental activity without postulating a mental agent, understood as a unified real being. This concern can be addressed by pointing out that while it makes no sense to conceive of mental activity without attributing it to a subject, it is an additional and unnecessary claim to identify the subject with a mental agent *qua* unified real being. As long as the activity of M-ing is understood as occurring in a particular mental stream which is constituted of many mental acts which are adequately related to each other, this suffices to conceive the mental act as being the act of a subject. All that is required to account for our intuitions about agency is that the continuum of mental acts exhibits some regular patterns. I pointed out that one of the virtues of Brentano's revised theory is that it allows us to make sense of the idea that conscious states have a subjective character, in Kriegel's sense. This alternative view is also in a good position to account for the subjective character given that M represents that the subject's own M-ing is going on.

The second alternative account is non-intentionalist, but also partly intentionalist. It is non-intentionalist, however, in a different sense than Brentano's revised theory, because it also comes short of postulating a mental agent *qua* unified real being. This account consists in preserving the non-intentional relation – which could perhaps be interpreted as russellian acquaintance – but to interpret it not as a relation to a mental agent *qua* unified real being, but as a relation to the very mental activity itself:

6. *For any mental state M of a subject S, M is conscious iff M is an act of subject S which i) represents a primary object O, ii) represents S, as a secondary object and iii) S is non-intentionally, directly aware of M-ing.*

This interpretation may seem bizarre, but if we grant that physical phenomena only have intentional existence, as Brentano does, why not grant that the subject also has only intentional existence. Moreover, if we accept a reductionist metaphysics of persons, along the general lines suggested by Parfit, all we are directly, non-intentionally, aware of is the conscious mental activity; the *relata* of this activity are conceptual constructions, which are represented, as clauses (ii) and (iii) states it. Still, one might insist that clause (iii) is unintelligible unless we postulate a mental agent, in Brentano's sense. According to 6, however, only the mental activity itself is really existent, that is, not only intentionally existent. Moreover, it is not incoherent to add that this

⁷ See p. 22 : "1. For any mental state *M* of a subject *S*, there is necessarily a mental state *M** such that *S* is in state *M**, where *M** represents *M*, and *M** = *M*." Fisette points out that Brentano rejects 1 on the grounds that it entails phenomenalism. It is unclear, however, that 5 entails phenomenalism since it specifies that the mental state must represent a primary object and it is left open that such an object exists independently of any mental activity.

mental activity has a reflexive, or indexical-like, aspect by virtue of which it directly refers to itself⁸ and, since the mental act represents the subject as a secondary object, the subject at once thinks of herself as performing this very mental activity which is non-intentionally directly referred to. Another way to put this point in the Parfitian framework is to claim that while the mental activity is a real “non-intentional” existent, clauses (ii) and (iii) indicate how this mental activity locates itself in a particular mental continuum. Hence, no mental agent *qua* unified real being is required to make sense of clause (iii).⁹

Just as interpretation 5 is able to account for the subjective character, this interpretation (6) is also able to do so. There is a difference with 5, however, that some may find appealing. I pointed out that, by invoking a non-intentional relation to the mentally active agent, Brentano's revised theory is in a good position to account for the intuition that the relationship a subject has to her own consciousness is more *intimate* than any representational relation. In contrast to 5, interpretation 6 is in a good position to account for this intuition of intimacy, as long as it is able to make sense of the non-intentional relation, perhaps in terms of Russellian acquaintance, as I suggested.

There is also an alternative intentionalist view which combines intuitions of both 5 and 6. It consists in claiming that the representational content “that S's own M-ing is going on” in 5 is a *de re* proposition, in the sense that the very M-ing is partly constitutive of its own representational content. Thus, this variant preserves the idea that the mental activity itself is part of the content of the mental state, which we find in 6, but in contrast to 6, the content is fully representational. Since this view is representationalist, we can call it 5*. This interpretation is very appealing. It preserves the idea that the mental activity is directly referred to, which we have in 6. This is plausible because intuitively a conscious mental state seems to have a kind of inner presence to itself, which does not require conceptualization. In other words, this interpretation makes representationalism compatible with the intuition I noted above concerning the intimate character of the relationship between one's awareness of one's conscious experience and the conscious experience. Moreover, if we accept the parfitian view of persons, the direct reference to this mental activity provides an anchor to the mental continuum which is constitutive of the

⁸ See Bernier (2010 and 2011) where I have proposed a view along these lines.

⁹ If we accept Brentano's distinction between intentional existence and real existence, this interpretation, entails a form of phenomenalism, because only the mental activity would have real existence, as opposed to intentional existence. If, however, we deny Brentano's claim that physical phenomena have only intentional existence, and if we accept that the mental activity is actually some neurobiological activity going on in the brain, then this interpretation would not entail phenomenalism. From an ontological point of view, it would be compatible with realism. According to such a realist interpretation, the distinction between the primary and secondary object, on the one hand, and the mental activity itself, on the other hand, would not be an ontological distinction but only an epistemic distinction. While the subject has an epistemic access to the primary object and to herself, only via some representation, she has a direct epistemic access to her own mental activity.

reductive basis for the mental subject. Finally, since there is no incoherence in thinking that such a reductive basis might eventually be accounted for in terms of a neurobiological continuum, such a *de re* proposition might ultimately be directly referring to some occurring brain activity. Compared to 6, however, 5* has the strong advantage of not invoking a controversial non-intentional relation. As I already pointed out, the best prospect for accounting for that non-intentional relation is to characterize it in terms of russellian acquaintance. The appeal of 5* is that it is free of this controversial theoretical burden.

Moreover, as I pointed out, 6 is committed to the claim that the mental activity which is in a direct non-intentional relation to itself has some kind of ontological priority and thus it can easily lead to phenomenism. This is not the case with 5*, however. Since the content of the mental state is fully representational, it does not need to invoke Brentano's claim that there is an ontological asymmetry between things that exists only intentionally and those, such as mental agents, which have more than intentional existence. According to 5*, the objects of conscious mental states all have the same ontological status. Whether we want to say that they all exist only intentionally, as anti-realism would have it, or that they exist in a more robust sense, as realists would have it, is a further independent issue on which 5* remains neutral.

Since 5 is compatible with 5*, it is useful to distinguish it from a more determinate interpretation of 5, which is incompatible with 5*. According to this interpretation of 5, which we may call 5', the propositional content "that this very M-ing is going on" in 5 is not a *de re* proposition. In addition to being fully representationalist, 5' could be understood also as conceptualist in the sense that all the elements which constitute the representational content are conceptual.

Compared to interpretations 5*, 6 and 5', Brentano's revised theory of consciousness, which I have characterized as claim 4, seems very implausible because it rests on the dubious notion of a mental agent *qua* unified real being which, by definition, cannot be something physical. Moreover, this view presupposes a dubious ontological distinction between the ontological status of such a mental agent and things that have only intentional existence, suggesting that mental agents are, so to speak, more real than any physical phenomena. As I have indicated, this view is unacceptable both from a realist point of view which accepts physical phenomena in its ontology and from an anti-realist point of view which denies the existence of brentanian mental agents, not to mention Cartesian egos. While Brentano's revised theory of consciousness is interesting in suggesting a way to account for the subjective character, or *for-me-ness*, of conscious experience, it rests on an unnecessary ontological distinction between things which have only intentional existence and things which have more existence than that. The appeal of fully representationalist views, such as 5* and 5', is that they do not require such a

distinction. Moreover, as I have argued, while we can accept that conscious mental states do necessarily involve a subjective character, as many philosophers have recently proposed, it is not necessary to postulate the existence of a mental agent in Brentano's strong ontological sense, in order to account for the subjective character. In light of a reductionist metaphysics of persons, à la Parfit, the views suggested by 5* and 6 can also account for subjective character. In so far as 5* and 6 would seem to presuppose such a reductionist metaphysics of persons, however, they must postulate the existence of mental conscious states which are inscribed within some psycho-physical *continuum*. This is hardly a problem, however. Statement 5', on the other hand, lends itself to a more radically anti-realist view, because it is not committed to the existence of such a psycho-physical *continuum*. On such a radical view, conscious mental states would be just as much conceptual constructions, as the primary object and as the subject. While 5* is the view I find most appealing, for the reasons I have suggested, and 6 seems problematic, given that it requires a dubious relation of acquaintance, I must admit that I do not find 5' implausible. Be that as it may, one thing is clear: Brentano's revised theory of consciousness is indeed implausible and 5*, 6, or 5' should be preferred.

Brentano's revised theory of consciousness and the transitivity principle

Fisette's paper makes much of comparing and contrasting Brentano's theory with higher-order approaches to consciousness and, especially, with Rosenthal's HOT theory. As Fisette recalls, the latter rests fundamentally on the transitivity principle according to which a mental state is conscious if, and only if, one is conscious of that state (ROSENTHAL, 2005, p. 179). The question I want to raise is whether Brentano's revised theory of consciousness is compatible with the transitivity principle. Fisette's position seems a bit unstable, in that respect. Towards the end of the paper he notes: "Brentano's theory of consciousness is not consistent with the principle of transitivity" (p. 32). This statement is puzzling because not much earlier in the paper he states: "this new version of Brentano's theory of consciousness is not incompatible with Rosenthal's transitivity principle". (p. 30). What are we to make of these claims, which seem contradictory? My formulation of Brentano's view, as statement 4 above, may help. Statement 4 makes it clear that, according to Brentano's revised theory of consciousness, when a subject has a conscious mental state, she must be non-intentionally, directly aware of herself and of her mental act. If we suppose that the transitivity principle entails that "one can be conscious of one's mental state" only if one is in an intentional relation to one's mental state then, of course, Brentano's revised theory of consciousness would indeed be incompatible with the transitivity principle. Why, however,

should we accept that the transitivity principle has this intentionalist implication? After all, even if the subject is *non-intentionally* directly aware of herself and of her mental act, she is still aware of *something*. The subject is in a transitive or “objectual” relation to her own mental activity, which after all may only be some processes going on in her brain.

Moreover, as I argued in section 1, even if we reject Fisette’s interpretation of Brentano’s Thesis II as “2b. Every mental phenomenon is an object of consciousness”, it is still plausible to attribute 2b to Brentano. Saying that every mental phenomenon is an object of consciousness, however, comes very close to the transitivity principle. How can a mental phenomenon be an object of consciousness otherwise than by the subject being aware of that phenomenon? It is not as if 2b should be understood as claiming that a third person is aware of the subject’s mental state. The upshot is that Brentano’s revised theory of consciousness is compatible with the transitivity principle. As I pointed out, however, this should not be understood as entailing that Brentano’s theory is intentionalist as my statement of the revised theory makes it clear.

There may be reasons to object to Fisette’s interpretation of Brentano’s revised theory of consciousness on exegetical grounds. In this paper, however, I have taken Fisette’s interpretation at face value. I have argued that statement 4 captures the gist of Brentano’s revised theory of consciousness, as Fisette interprets it. I have pointed out that while this theory has the virtue of accounting for the properly subjective character of conscious mental states, or their *for-me-ness*, and of accounting for the intuition of intimacy, still it carries an unnecessary ontological burden by postulating the existence of a mental agent understood as a unified real being. I have underscored some variants of Brentano’s theory which are free of this ontological burden and I have argued that these variants should be preferred to Brentano’s own theory. To conclude, it is important to stress that while the variants of Brentano’s theory (namely, 5*, 5’ and 6) are substantially different from Brentano’s theory, these views can still be called Brentanian, or neo-Brentanian, in the important sense that they all correspond to what has been called “one-state views”, in the literature. As Fisette makes it clear, two-state views are denied by Brentano in his reply to the infinite regress objection.

In so far as Brentano’s revised theory and the three alternative views (5*, 5’ and 6) are one-state views, does this mean that according to all these views, consciousness is an intrinsic property of conscious mental states? I will not attempt to give a definite answer to this question here, but I only want to make the obvious point that this depends on what we mean by an “intrinsic property”. It seems plausible to understand Brentano’s revised theory as entailing that consciousness is indeed an intrinsic property of mental states, as Fisette claims, because Brentano’s theory is in agreement with the Cartesian view according to which consciousness is the mark of the mental and because his

revised theory rests on the postulate of a mental agent understood as a unified real being. In this sense, consciousness turns out to be something *sui generis* which is irreducible to anything else. Thus, it seems safe to say that according to Brentano's revised theory, consciousness turns out to be an intrinsic property in a fairly strong sense. It remains unclear, however, whether according to variants 5*, 5' and 6, consciousness is an intrinsic property. It is certainly not intrinsic in the sense that it would be the mark of the mental, where "the mental" is understood as something necessarily non-physical. If the claim that consciousness is an intrinsic property of mental states is understood in the sense that it is *sui generis* and irreducible to anything else, then it is plausible that according to these variants, consciousness is not an intrinsic property, because nothing rules out a priori that these views be compatible with physicalism.

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