

SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS AND INTENTIONALITY

A Reappraisal of Brentano's and Rosenthal's Theses

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Abstract

In this paper, I examine some important features of Brentano's and Rosenthal's theories of consciousness and self-consciousness. In particular, I discuss the distinction between mental states and conscious states, and the related question of determining whether all mental states can become conscious states. I interpret Brentano's theory as a one-level theory of mind which is in keeping with the Cartesian conflation between mental states and consciousness. I argue that the problems arising from Brentano's position are to a certain extent surpassed by a higher-order theory, so that Rosenthal's position is more accurate. Nevertheless, I disagree with both in the construal of the consciousness of a mental state as self-consciousness. I develop then the fundamentals for a theory based on the primacy of the organism and its vital world, and of conscious experience as the higher form of mental life, which has, however, its roots in the complex net of mental states which are not conscious states.

Self-consciousness is an important, almost decisive element in an overall theory of subjectivity. In particular, a matter that deserves careful consideration has to do with the way intentionality, as the supposed fundamental feature of consciousness, relates to the acts by which the mind is permanently aware of itself. Within this framework, Brentano's intentionalist thesis, combined with his description about the special features of self-consciousness, are worth considering. The importance of Brentano's conceptions stems from the psychological accuracy of his analyses, as expressed in *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* and related texts. Additionally, Brentano's reception in the contemporary theories of mind, chiefly Rosenthal's, raises issues that are of great importance regarding the general development of a theory of subjective consciousness and of the conscious self.

Concerning a possible dialogue between Brentano's conception of self-consciousness and contemporary theories of mind, especially the so-called Higher-Order theories as presented by Rosenthal and others, some issues must be considered, namely:

1. The correct understanding of Brentano's theory of self-consciousness;
2. Brentano's place within the framework of modern higher-order theories (HOTs) of (self-) consciousness, especially Rosenthal's;
3. An assessment to Brentano's theory of intransitive and intrinsic self-consciousness, reinstated in the wider context of his latter writings;
4. The overall connection between mental states and consciousness.

The general discussion of these issues involves, as a background, some particular conception about the highly controversial relationship between, on the one hand, consciousness and mind, and, on the other hand, between the (conscious) mind and the physical system where mental states and conscious states occur. Indeed, to account for the relationship between conscious states and mental states, and eventually between the mind and the physical system underlying it (a question that will be left aside here) is a task that is not independent from the theoretical position one wants to uphold regarding the definition of what are mental and conscious states by themselves.

Indeed, can we simply equate mental states and conscious states, so that there are only conscious mental states and, therefore, an overlap between consciousness and mind? Or, the other way around, is there room for an in-principle distinction between mental states and consciousness? If this is the case, either consciousness will be reduci-

ble to some relational feature of mental states (for instance, overall access), or it will become a property superimposed on some (but not all) mental states.

Lurking in the twilight, and twinkling here and there in this paper, there is, in addition, the paramount question whether it still remains an acceptable image of our mental life the common idea – which has its roots in Descartes as well as in Locke – of a conscious self that knows everything that happens in its own mind, and which is in control of all that goes on in his mind because it is conscious of it. In short: are the ideas of a unitary (and unique) stream of consciousness, and of a non-analyzable conscious subject piloting (or at least accompanying) his own mental life something we can still be comfortable with? This is an issue which has both theoretical and ethical implications, as it questions the traditional image of a cognitively self-transparent, ontologically autarkic, and ethically autonomous subject.

If this Cartesian and Lockean view shows itself as eventually untenable, there are other models available on the market besides the “Aristotelian” conception of the mind that Rosenthal proposes (1989, 335). Indeed, there is something of a false dilemma in the way Rosenthal invites us to choose between an Aristotelian-like or a Cartesian-like conception of mind and consciousness. The dilemma amounts to choosing between a characterization of the mental through self-consciousness (Descartes) or through intentionality (Aristotle). Certainly, in modern ages the Cartesian approach was the dominant one. However, another alternative powerful conception of mind was put forth in modern ages by Leibniz. His emphasis on the “*petites perceptions*” and on the “*perceptions inaperçues*” involves a clear separation between representational states (perceptions) and self-consciousness (apperception), so that, as a consequence, there are in the mind, at any time, plenty of perceptions that remain unconscious. This emphasizes the deep complexity and richness of our mental life, in opposition to the very few perceptions that, one after another in the stream of our reflective life, reach the level of consciousness. Additionally, the separation made by Leibniz implies not only that there are perceptions that are in fact without self-consciousness, but also the much stronger thesis that there are perceptions in the mind that will remain forever unnoticed to self-consciousness. Moreover, according to Leibniz’s insight, apperception is a matter of degree. There is not a yes-no question regarding it. Apperception decreases to zero at a certain (variable) limit. Nevertheless, the perceptual life of the mind still continues below this limit. And what the unconscious perceptions carry with themselves is not a conscious-self, but instead the unity (the coherence) of a single point-of-view rooted in

the entire organic system. Consequently, when conscious life arises over this complex unity of mental life, the reflective grasp of one's I rests on this "mute" unity of a point-of-view and allows then the emergence of a new kind of mental life, where new things arise, like decision-making and reflective thinking, things that make up the mental life of a human person.

Thus, are we constrained to choose between consciousness and intentionality as the essential mark of the mental? No, we are not. There is a deeper vantage point rooted in the unity of the entire organic system, in its mute construction of a point-of-view which, in a systemic unity, encompasses physical processes (the so-called "physical basis" of mental life), perception (intentionality), and apperception (self-consciousness).

My subsequent considerations are to a certain extent tributary of this Leibnizian insight about mental life. This is a "*parti pris*" I must state at the outset.

1. What does Brentano say?

Despite the mainstream in Brentano's interpretation, we can argue convincingly that Brentano's theory of mental-state consciousness is in keeping with a one-level account of consciousness, i.e., with the thesis that the mental state by which an organism (having "creature consciousness") is transitively conscious of something is itself, at the same time, an intransitively conscious state (Fisette, 2015, 22). The content of this intransitive consciousness is *self*-consciousness. Thus the formula in the jargon proper to the contemporary philosophy of mind: a mental state is transitively conscious of something and intransitively conscious of itself. In Brentano's own words we could rephrase the former formula stating that (i) every mental phenomenon is a consciousness (*Bewusstsein*) of something different from it, and, simultaneously, (ii) every mental phenomenon is conscious (*bewusst*) of itself, so that, we could add, there is no mental phenomenon directed to something as an object (say, a physical phenomenon) which does not represent its own occurrence as a mental phenomenon.

However, there are some strange aspects on these formulae.

Firstly, a kind of "diplopia", inasmuch as every mental state is accounted for as displaying two representational contents and having, thus, two objects: the intentional object as such (as its primary object) and itself (as a secondary object).

Secondly, a somewhat baffling displacement of the expected locus of self-consciousness: indeed, in what sense can we say that a mental state is conscious of *itself*, rather than that there is a consciousness of the self through the mental state?

Finally, if Brentano's exegesis as a one-level theorist is accurate (and it seems to me that it is), there is here a clear commitment to the controversial thesis that all mental states are by themselves self-conscious states, and, then, that self-consciousness, understood as an intrinsic, non-relational property, is an essential element of mental states as such. This last exegetic assumption contravenes the long-established – and newly reinstated in the contemporary philosophy of mind – interpretation of Brentano's psychology, provided that it puts intransitive self-consciousness, and not only intentionality, as a fundamental feature of the mental. However, the defense of this point against "intentionalism", based as it is on an attentive analysis of the relevant passages of Chapters I and II of the Second Book of *Psychology*, looks like a comprehensive reading of Brentano's global position.¹

However, as I said, all this strikes me as problematic.

To begin with the third point, I think that a disambiguation of the consciousness-thesis is required. Is Brentano endorsing the thesis that

- A. All mental states are conscious,
- or rather the thesis according to which
- B. We have consciousness of all our mental states?

The second version, as stated in B., is pretty compatible with Rosenthal's position, provided that he would be willing to acknowledge that a higher-order thought targeting a lower-order thought is always and everywhere possible. Despite the fact that, in our mental life, not every first-order thought gets to be a conscious mental state by means of a second-order thought, it would be conceivable that some other more powerful mind than ours will target all its mental states by second, third order thoughts, achieving not

¹ For instance: "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. Thus, without any further complication and multiplication of entities, not only is the self-presentation presented, the self-cognition is known as well as presented, and the self-feeling is felt as well as known and presented." (Brentano, 1995, 119)

only consciousness of all its mental states, but also reflective introspection about all its mental life. What prompts a HOT, according to Rosenthal? Is it the simple existence of an unconscious mental state? Is the bare existence of a mental state a sufficient condition for a suitable HOT? If this is so – and I am not sure if it is – then Brentano and Rosenthal would not be in a radical disagreement.² In this vein, Rosenthal goes so far as to state that Brentano’s theory of mind is “virtually undistinguishable” from his own (1991, 30, n. 4)

It appears obvious that Brentano’s consciousness-thesis has a quite different sense. It is not the case that an unconscious mental state prompts by itself the (possible) occurrence of a suitable HOT; rather, the case is that unconscious mental states do not exist at all. Thus, the version A. is the good one. Being so, self-consciousness appears as the fundamental mark of mental life, because, if self-consciousness did not exist, then consciousness of an intentional content would not exist either. Certainly, the converse assertion is also true: if an intentional act did not exist, then self-consciousness would not exist too. Nevertheless, the intentional relationship to an object seems, in this construal, to be a basis, a requirement, for a total act that has in self-consciousness its own achievement. Tracing this idea to its final reinstatements in Brentano’s latter writings, one comes eventually to acknowledging that all consciousness is *de se* (we are talking, of course, about intentional states directed to primary objects), containing, thus, not only an object, a sound heard, say, but an “implicit” self-awareness of the very subject which is in the psychic activity of hearing the sound. It seems that performing this loop-like self-awareness is the ultimate end of mental life, as if the self would be able to know everything that goes on in it, and thus to gain control over his entire life. If thesis A. is the accurate interpretation of Brentano’s position, then we find here a point of divergence between him and higher-order theories.

For reasons that I shall explain in a while, it seems to me that theses A. and B. are both incorrect. This is no more an exegetic issue. Despite the fact that one can be right in ascribing to Brentano the position expressed in A., the question whether thesis A. is accurate still remains, and I am not full convinced by the arguments that have been put

² See for instance Rosenthal’s explanation of his general thesis: “A mental state’s being conscious ... is our being aware of that state in a suitably immediate way. So we can then go on to argue that a mental state’s being conscious is its being accompanied by a roughly simultaneous higher-order thought about that very mental state. On this account, not all mental states are conscious, and we can explain how the conscious ones differ from those which are not.” (2005, 47)

forward, namely by Kriegel (2003, 479-480), or Fisette (2015). I will argue this point later. For now, I want to address the second strange aspect of the formulae above.

As a matter of fact, I cannot find a good sense for the assertion that a mental state is conscious of (or for)... *itself*! A mental state has a representative content. By means of it, the mental state intentionally refers to an object, either physical or mental. In addition, does the mental state have a content that represents the very mental state, namely its own occurrence? I ask: represents for whom? Can we say: for him (or it)? Is this the answer? But a mental state is not the subject of mental life; it is an event in the life of a mind. And what means to represent? This representation must not be construed as an intentional relation to an object which is transcendent to the act itself. This is all the point with the idea of an intrinsic, intransitive consciousness. But how would be *expressed* the sense of this intrinsic, intransitive self-consciousness (if there is any)? If the mental state is accounted for as a close unity referring intrinsically to itself, the expression of this self-representation would necessarily be: (i) “there is a sound” (intentional, primary object), and (ii) “there is a hearing of a sound” (secondary object). However, at least for us, the normal expression of the last content is “I hear a sound”, or “I am hearing a sound”, or, in order to grant to the opponent everything we can, “there is a hearing of a sound, and that hearing is mine”. But the inclusion of one’s I, which is in the state of hearing that sound, amounts to introducing a more complex content that cannot be shrunken in the mental state itself. In a word, if there is something like an intransitive consciousness, and if this intransitive consciousness can be accounted for as a self-consciousness, then we must say that it is not the mental state that is conscious of itself as a secondary object, but rather that a subject is conscious of being himself in that mental state.

Fisette addresses this issue, acknowledging “the ambiguous status in *Psychology* of the concomitant consciousness that accompanies all mental states”, and that “a state as such cannot be said to be conscious (or not)” (2015, 31-32). The revisions made by Brentano in his last writings consist in introducing the notion of a psychic agent as the subject of mental life, and in making a distinction between expressly noticing (*be-merken*) some content or having just an implicit consciousness of it (see Brentano, 1954, 226-228). This last move bestows some plausibility to Brentano’s account. A state can be said to be (intransitively) “conscious” only if an agent becomes aware of himself as being in such a state. This self-consciousness, insofar as the intentional act is performed by a psychic agent, is merely implicit in the very act being performed, so

that, as Fisette avows, this implicit (self-) consciousness accompanying the act could be described as a pre-reflective consciousness of the agent itself, when performing an intentional act and before reflectively taking notice of his own psychic activity.

Hence, I wonder if, in the light of this last reappraisal by Brentano himself, we can continue sustaining that the mental act is “conscious” in an irreducibly intrinsic and intransitive sense. To begin with, this consciousness does not belong to the act itself; it is, rather, the consciousness that a subject has of being itself in a determinate mental state. Secondly, this last consciousness of the subject’s own activity when performing a mental act is declared to be only “implicitly” present in the mental state as such. Therefore, the following conclusion seems to me unavoidable: to say that a mental act is implicitly conscious is only a name to describe the capability of the act to be subsequently apprehended by a subject as its own mental state. Phrasing this in Rosenthal’s jargon, we have: a mental state is (intransitively) conscious if and only if it can be (transitively) conscious for another mental state. Call this capability an “implicit feature” of every mental state and name it “pre-reflective consciousness”, if you want. The question is that, in this new light, Brentano’s position is not incompatible with Rosenthal’s explanation of self-consciousness, and, even more, it is virtually reducible to it. To insist that the mental act was already (intransitively) “conscious” is just a way of circumventing the huge problem of describing how and why a mental state can be captured by a subject as its *own* mental state (the so-called first-person privileged access). If an extrinsic remark is here allowed to me, I would suggest that Husserl’s distinction between the pre-phenomenal being of lived-experiences (*das präphänomenale Sein der Erlebnisse*) before reflection, and their being as phenomena, when reflective turning-to (*Zuwendung*) constitutes them as objects (1969, 129), is a possible way-out for the difficulties affecting Brentano’s theory. Mental states *are not* phenomena before reflection constitutes them as such, and mental-living (*erleben*) *is not* intentionally seizing an object.

Nonetheless, let me now return to *Psychology* in order to address the first strange feature I pointed above in the formulae. I will be brief, because this is a well-known criticism directed to Brentano’s theory of primary and secondary objects. As the mental act is presented as having two representational contents, the second being the side-representation of the act itself (as secondary object), this second act must be itself represented by a third act, and so on. In his paper, Fisette tries to contravene this line of reasoning pointing to Brentano’s mereological distinction between wholes formed by collective and by divisive parts (Fisette, 2015, 29). While collectives can be analyzed in

parts that are mutually independent, there are wholes whose parts are simple *abstracta* that have no independent existence outside the whole. Such is the case with the representation of the primary object and the representation of the secondary object in the mental phenomenon containing both. Therefore, the objection seems to be blocked, because we can no more say “as the side-representation is an *act*, so...” I think, however, that the issue is not settled with this move. My point is that the new presentation of Brentano’s thesis states that every intentional relationship to a primary object must contain the consciousness of the entire act as its secondary object. However, this second part, representing the total act (and, thus, once more the primary object), is itself a part that must be conscious by a tertiary part, and so on.³ All in all, there is no clear cutting line between Brentano and Rosenthal: the mental acts have a double representational content, and the second act (or the part) is in both theories accounted for as a case of self-consciousness, so that the real disagreement is limited to the question whether this self-consciousness is a second act or a divisive part of the former act. In my opinion, this is the reason why Brentano’s position in the circle of HOT theorists oscillates between the partial acceptance and the partial refusal. We could say that, if HOTs are reducible to a brentanian-like one-level account, this is the right way to go, because a one-level theory is more economic and simple. However, there is a huge obstacle to embark in such a kind of reduction. For a higher-order theory, the accomplishment of lower-order acts does not depend on the accomplishment the higher-order acts. A first-order thought, a FOT, say, is not dependent on the existence of a SOT or a TOT. We have a progression to infinity which remains merely potential: for a mental state to be performed there is no need of a second mental state targeting the first, and for that last one to be performed, there is no need of a third order one targeting it, while, as a matter of principle, this progress to ever new strata always exists as an open possibility. Regarding Brentano’s account, the situation is, however, completely different. We embark here on a *regressus in infinitum* inside the very first-order mental act. In such a case, the mental act could not be performed at all, given that it would contain an infinite number of regressive internal conditions that could never be satisfied. Clearly, the infinite progress and the infinite regress are pretty different. The first is only potential and does not appear as a condition of the lower acts; the second is an actual

³ Let me try to express this progressive growth of elements inside the mental act: (i) there is a sound, (ii) there is the hearing of the sound, (iii) I am conscious of the sound heard and of the hearing of the sound, (iv) I know that I am conscious of the sound heard and of the hearing of the sound, (v) I am conscious that I know that I am conscious of the of the sound heard and of the hearing of the sound, etc.

one that prevents the accomplishment of the very first order act. Surely, our mental life has no such a type of (bad) complexity.

2. What Rosenthal does not say?

Rosenthal has a point, although he does not wind up the debate with it.

His point is: there are non-conscious mental states. My surmise is that the great majority of our mental life is constituted by such mental states. Indeed, should we, as living organisms, negotiate our transactions with the surrounding world with the few mental states of which we are conscious, dispensing with the mental routines that run its course unnoticed, then we would have disappeared as a living species a long time ago. After all, Brentano's definition of a mental state is question-begging. Mental states are those of which we are conscious and, if they are not, so they are not mental states. This amounts to a dramatic impoverishment of our mental life and to a limitation to the first-person access. The states about which we do not have a first-person access are not conscious for us, of course, but this is not tantamount to saying that they are not mental states at all. Clearly, we are in need of a non-question-begging definition of what a mental state is.

Armstrong's well-known example of the inattentive truck driver shows that, while having creature consciousness, one can be conscious of something without being in a conscious state (1997, 723). Certainly, everything that, in the example, the inattentive driver was not conscious during his trip (the red light he saw, the gear changes he done, the slowdowns he has done at the curves in the road, the proprioception he had of his body pulling to the opposite side of the curves, etc.) was something he *could* have been conscious. Moreover, it is by reference to the conscious mental states he has (seeing a red light, etc.) that he can afterwards "guess" and categorize the mental states he was not conscious of ("I must have seen the red light", etc.) This apparently restores the supremacy of mental state consciousness. By the same token, absorbed in writing, I suddenly pay attention to an irritating noise, and I realized that he had lasted for a while, and that the nervous way I was shaking my right leg was a consequence of it. The first conclusion is that I must have heard the noise long before my state consciousness of it, so that there was a mental state (a particular sensation) that was running its entire course non-consciously. However, the second conclusion contravenes the first: only after the

conscious mental state, and by reference to it, was I in conditions to talk about my previous hearing of a noise.

What is the lesson of these two rather contradictory trends? One possible answer amounts to saying that the hearing I was talking about was not a real hearing, but only a blend of physical phenomena pertaining to neurology and human motricity. We would be, thus, completely within the Cartesian split between matter and mind. In the very Cartesian formulation, the soul feels “*par occasion de*” certain physical phenomena occurring in the body, but these phenomena are not sensations until they become conscious: sensation is an actual, qualitative, conscious state of the mind; the underlying phenomena are not mental states in the pregnant sense. So I was hearing nothing; I was not hearing at all.

This is an odd conclusion. The opposite lesson is much more fruitful for a definition of a mental state and, what is more, for a definition of *consciousness*. First of all, it must be admitted that there are non-conscious mental states, if one intends to go beyond the old (and odd) Cartesian divide. Secondly, only after this move can we get a productive characterization of what a mental state is, paying attention to how it associates and blends with the overall functioning of the brain and the whole body, so that there is not a dividing line between neurological and mental phenomena, but only a functional definition of which part of the whole can be categorized *as* a mental state. Thirdly, only when we would arrive at a definition of mental states disregarding consciousness would we be in conditions to productively ask about what consciousness *is*, as a new dimension superimposed on some of them. However, we always fix the several types of mental states by reference to the conscious ones, could we say as an objection. This is true, certainly. Nevertheless, the lesson is that we must know these mental states, have a direct, first-person acquaintance in order to talk about them. But we also must be acquainted with insects in order to do taxonomical entomology; nevertheless, our acquaintance with them is not a part of the taxonomy we are making. I believe that the same holds for mental states.

Perhaps there is a third approach based on the Brentanian principle of the unity of consciousness, which Fiset emphasizes in order to deal with the problems regarding the relationship between primary and secondary objects. As he writes, quoting directly texts from *Psychology*, “the totality 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” (Fisette, 2015, 30; Brentano, 1995, 126). Thereby, mental phenomena are singled-out as “partial

phenomena of one single phenomenon in which they are contained as one single and unified thing” (*idem*). Perhaps this containment includes, in a total consciousness, at any time, the entire set of mental states we have, in such a way that they are not unconscious mental states, but, instead, states fused and blended together in a global consciousness. This is tantamount to saying that there is, at any time, a unique consciousness, with a focal attention detaching some features, while a peripheral attention gathers the others in a fuzzy way. But I cannot see how sensations, perceptions, thoughts, beliefs, and so on, could be blended together in a total self-consciousness. The blatant heterogeneity they exhibit prevents their inclusion, as partial-phenomena, in a putative “single phenomenon” containing them all. Besides that, to return to Armstrong’s driver, he simply *guesses* that he must have seen the red lights in the road. He cannot pick-up retrospectively, by analysis, these perceptions from a supposed global mental state he would remember. Against this hypothesis, my conviction is that the mind has, at any time, a plenty of mental states, which run their course in a parallel organization, without any monitoring center that could cover the entire complexity. Notwithstanding, it would be an odd thing to deny that there is such a monitoring center bringing, at any time, to consciousness *some* of the mental states that occur in the mind.

In fact, there is a clear phenomenological difference between non-conscious and conscious mental states. This difference is not explainable in Rosenthal’s framework, as a difference between a mental state transitively conscious of something and the fact that this mental state comes to be targeted as an object by another mental state. In a word, as Brentano saw, a conscious mental state includes something in it that is irreducible either to the transitive consciousness inside the first order-state or to reflective seizing by a higher-order thought.

To put the things in order, let us imagine a mental life such as ours which, as a matter of fact, would never perform higher-order thoughts targeting its first-order mental states. If we believe in Rosenthal’s account, this mind would be like a zombie or a robot, or it would be like the inattentive truck driver for all its mental states. But is this a reasonable hypothesis? However, it seems to me that it is unavoidable according to Rosenthal’s explanations. Against the inattentive driver example, I now propose to consider the example of the attentive listener. Suppose someone listening to a symphony in an audience hall; and suppose she is totally immersed, absorbed, in such a way that the perception of the surroundings and of her own body disappear almost completely from the focus of her attention, even if these mental states still continue in a “truck

driver's" way. In a word, for her, in such a state of self-forgetfulness, there are only these sounds that she listens to, and no higher-order thought about them breaks the ecstatic experience she is living in. Now, clearly she has perceptual states about the surroundings (the chairs, other people in the hall, etc.), and perceptual states about the music she listens to. All they are first-order mental states. Nevertheless, there is a notorious difference between the first-order perceptions of the symphony and the first-order perceptions of the other things in the audience hall. This difference, internal to the first-order mental states, is the difference between conscious and non-conscious mental states.

Thus, I agree with Brentano that this kind of consciousness is intrinsic. But I disagree with Brentano when he construes it as a case of *self-consciousness*. I think that, before self-consciousness, there is a difference in the very *mode of givenness* of the objects. What is, then, consciousness, as a mark of some mental states? Here, we have only intuitions, when it comes to propose a non-circular characterization, as it is the case when, for instance, we talk about "awareness" for explaining "consciousness". There are several proposals on the market: phenomenal-consciousness, what it is like, worldly versus experiential subjectivity, thin versus thick phenomenality, and so on. So let me express my intuition too. It is based on a strategic move. Why not asking the truck driver himself about what he feels bizarre when, astonished, he realizes that he has reached his destination?

First bizarre aspect: time elapsed unnoticed.

Certainly, his actions during the trip, like changing gears, slowdowns, and so on, were "just in time". Nevertheless, while all his movements occurred *on* time regarding the events, there was no representation *of* the time of the events. There was neither a perception of a "now", of a passed now, and of a now to come, neither the perception of a flowing of time. Events were not, in addition, put in a serial order, with a point of actuality beyond which there is a permanent anticipation of a net of possibilities for other events that will occur. In contradistinction, the attentive listener has a sharp perception of the time-order and of the time-flow of the sounds she listens to. This temporal organization of experience is not yet self-consciousness: rather, it is *the* consciousness of objects and events (with feelings, moods, proprioceptions, that are also events that join and are given together with the "external" events). Or, to put it differently, if we can talk of self-consciousness here, it has to do with the entrance of a zero-point of orientation for the organization of events which is centered on the "now" (this orientation-point

is, really, totally subjective). Nevertheless, as a consciousness of the now, of time-order, and time-flow, this self-consciousness is fused with the events it seizes. It just sets the stage for the rise of a phenomenal world. This world is “for me”, sure. But I am “out there”, in the middle of it.

Second bizarre aspect: he learned (and enjoyed) nothing.

As a matter of fact, all his responses occurred “automatically” in the trip. He was quite capable, no doubt. Nevertheless, his mental states were simply running routines already established. No new ability, apprenticeship, enrichment of the driver’s skills resulted from the trip. If there were in the journey some unmanageable event with the routines established (a neon light that suddenly flashes in the night), the alert will sound in his mind, and this unusual event will be phenomenally seized as something happening now, showing something new that is in need for a deliberate response. On the contrary, the driver says to himself: “nothing new, everything as usual, the trip was quite normal...” The temporal discrimination of events seems, thus, to have a close relationship with a center of decision able to rewrite routines or make entire new ones, as a learning process (my guess is that we also learn non-consciously, but in a rather slow, unremarked and cumulative way). This discrimination of events is not attention. Mental states truck-driver’s-like are also attentional states. The other way around, events can appear in this decision-center without capturing mind’s attention. The most striking situation is when we stare tediously at the passage of events in time, with nothing important to remark or to do. This center is rather something like a stage where events emerge and remain at disposal for inspection, direction and decision. It seems to be an interface, where perceptions, desires, beliefs, come together. It has a tremendous impact on the rapid adaptation of behavior. Nevertheless, almost all our behavioral connection with the surroundings has already begun in the deepest level of non-conscious mental life. This center is a linear, serial flow of events that remain at disposal for active control. It is the flow of our conscious life. It is rather discontinuous (somnolence, sleeping, fainting, coma) and varying in intensity, but able to join the disparate parts into a rather delusive continuous flow. It is this operation that brings about the Cartesian illusion of a permanent, immaterial I, able to know, survey and control all his mental life.

Third bizarre aspect: in a sense, he was elsewhere.

Where was he? Precisely, where there was an experience developing with conscious mental states about objects (as defined above), and higher-order thoughts about him as entertaining those mental states. For instance, in his remembrance of past dinners

with wife and kids, in his expectations about finally arriving at home, in the several thoughts that come to his mind while driving, as his longing for a beer at the next bar in the road and his decision to stop there. In a word, where there was an experience structured with the temporal organization of events at disposal of the interface where perceptions, remembrances or expectations mingle with desires, wills, beliefs, judgments, and so on, so that the “automaticity” of non-conscious mental states was substituted by a (very real) ability for pondering, inspecting, and making new decisions.

In a word, while having a point with his insistence that mental states may be non-conscious, Rosenthal does not seem to give an accurate account of consciousness, so that Brentano’s insistence on intransitive and intrinsic consciousness is, for me, a simple question of respecting the facts of our mental life. Particularly, when Rosenthal says that, for a mental state, to be conscious is to be targeted by another mental state, the question about what consciousness is remains unanswered. A robot or a zombie could target its mental states by higher-order mental states. Nevertheless, all those states would be non-conscious. The property of being (phenomenally) conscious for first-order mental states seems, for Rosenthal, to emerge by miracle with second-order mental states. It is hard to see why. We are still in need for an answer.

Looking into the other side, I ask why this consciousness must be from the outset construed as self-consciousness. It seems to me that it is rather a world-consciousness in the form of actuality (of course, with *qualia*). The fundamental is the position of a “now” (and a “here”), with its correlates, structuring the entire experience. They are actuality-makers and perspective-markers (not perspective-makers). Obviously, for a subject, to have before him an actual world structured with the subjective-dependent apprehension of a now and a here is tantamount to having a sense of itself as the center where a world-experience is displayed. But this sense *is not* yet to have a consciousness related to itself neither as an underlying subject, nor as a lateral consciousness of the mental states themselves. It is simply the experience of the world in such a form that it allows the later acknowledgment that this world, as it appears, is for it or from its point of view. Consequently, I think that the introduction of a perspective-point is legible on the things appearing and not on a kind of loop-like self-consciousness entrenched in the consciousness of things and events. It is the very conscious intentionality directed to things which is a perspective-laden relationship to those things. What is it like for a subject to see a red truck? I say: precisely seeing *this* red truck here and now. Where is the consciousness of seeing? It is in the thing actually seen. Then, self-consciousness

really carves out a niche there! No, it doesn't. It would be superfluous for marking a perspective: the subjective point of view is already embedded in the way of seeing. But seeing red has a certain "feel", you say. Of course: seeing red is not seeing blue or seeing green. So, it is different for the subject to see red or to see blue, you insist. I agree: this is what sensing is all about – sensing is a discrimination ability that puts before me something as red, and something as blue, and so on; I do not need to sense my sensation in order to know that this is (or "feels", or "smells" like...) red. Husserl has a very deep insight about this. When he talked about the double intentionality of the flow of consciousness, he remarked that the retentional maintenance of the past appearances allows the apprehension of a temporal object right now, and, supplementary, the appearance of the subjective flow correlated with the temporal object. This "longitudinal intentionality" (*Längsintentionalität*) was, thus, the place where, for the very first time, we could grasp, over and above the red object we saw, our own *seeing* of the red object. However, it is a second intentionality that we cannot confuse with the direct constitution of the temporal object and of its temporal phases: if we immerse into the intentional constitution of the temporal object, we see it as an objective unity of duration extending till the actual now, but we do not catch already our *seeing* of it.

3. What should I say?

The controversy about Brentano's thesis raises deep questions.

I wonder what image of human beings is conveyed by the Brentanian approach to mind. In a strong sense, Brentano is already a Cartesian, as he, defining mental states as conscious states, puts a clear dividing-line between the mental and the physical system that underlies it. Rosenthal's position, acknowledging the existence of non-conscious mental states, is to a certain extent beyond the Cartesian divide. Nevertheless, the mental is still taken as something with so clear a difference regarding the physical that one can always wonder how a physical system can "have" mental states. Physicalism, declaring that everything is physical or supervenes on it, says something that is certainly true, but, at the same time, poorly illuminating. If we question the philosopher of mind about what is a physical system, so that physical properties could be mental properties, he retorts to us: "well, ask the physicist". But, if we approach the physicist demanding what is physical reality in order for mental states to be (or supervene on) physical states,

he will say for sure: “ask the psychologist”. Nobody has an answer, and everybody thinks the other has.

In my opinion, the only productive starting point will be the whole living organism. The question would not be whether and how a physical system can have mental states, but how, in the global functioning of a living organism, we can trace a somewhat blurred line categorizing some functions as physical and other as mental. Intentionality is a productive, albeit tentative response. If we define an intentional state as both a capability for triggering a response and/or mapping the surroundings (including the temporal and spatial position of the organism), we get a concept of intentionality that intersects what we usually conceive as the physical and the mental realms, so that the definition of an intentional state can function as a bridge or, better, as an overthrow of the traditional divide. A bio-chemical reaction in the cells is not an intentional state. But a net of chemical reactions that maps into the environment, so that, for instance, a response of the organism for escaping from fire follows, then it can be accounted for as an intentional state. In such a measure, we cannot be greedy when it comes to recognize an intentional state and, thus, a mind. A dog has perceptual states and beliefs (namely, that its owner is a reliable source of food); but a butterfly or a fly have very sophisticated systems for discriminating their environments and triggering adaptative responses to them. Have they minds? If we feel inclined to say that they have, we are crossing the borders between a Cartesian-like conception of mind and an Aristotelian-like, where “souls” are not immaterial things with self-consciousness as an essential predicate, but instead patterns of high organization of bodily organisms.

Additionally, an organism does not live in the objective world (as described by natural science); an organism lives in a vital world, which is, we may say, a projection of its internal structure, a structure that results from a long and complex process of adaptation to its objective surroundings. The vital world of a human being is pretty different (and much more complex) from the vital world of a dog, a fly, or a bat. Certainly, they all dwell in the same physical, objective world. However, the kind of discriminations they can make, the type of behavior they can have, the kind of senses they use to scope around, the “palette” of responses they are able to choose, all this is specific of each organism, and this specificity determines its vital world. So, a bat inhabits a unique vital world: the world of a bat. Only a bat could inhabit this vital world; and inhabiting it is all “it is like to be a bat”.

However, one may wonder, assuming the definition of an intentional state that I am sketching now is tantamount to acknowledging that there are mental states that will never be conscious states. This is precisely what I mean. Rosenthal rightly stresses that there are non-conscious mental states. Nevertheless, it seems that all non-conscious mental states can turn into conscious mental states by the intervention of a suitable HOT. I will risk the more radicalized idea that there are also mental states that cannot be conscious states at all. This is not a simple conjecture. Think of the well-known case of blind-sight. Then, think of such familiar situations as this one: when, suddenly, your arms move rapidly to protect your head from a ball that is coming to you, before you can even realize what is happening, you say that the response was made “by instinct”; the same with our truck driver, when he moves the steering wheel to avoid an obstacle, before becoming aware of what he is doing. In such situations, the perceptive system prompts a response that we can never be conscious of. We simply realize afterwards that we have act “without thinking”, and we will never be in conditions to consciously recover the mental states we had, because they took place in an unconscious level. Considering that the top mental states, that can be conscious ones, float on a rather complex and intricate system of other mental states that will never be conscious, because they underpin the conscious ones and are covered by them, I propose to name them “pillar-mental-states”, like the pillars of a bridge. We catch a glimpse of them when, such as in the examples I gave above, the underlying system goes its way faster than the related system of conscious mental states.

All in all, against Brentano, I would say that consciousness is not the same as a mental state. Nevertheless, consciousness is not a superfluous or an elusive feature of our mental life. It is pretty real and terribly effective. It controls behavior, allows comparison, ponderation, and fast learning processes. It displays a sense of subjectivity which is the most sophisticated mark of human life. Nevertheless, the building of a subjective point of view starts much sooner in the complexities of our organic life, so that, when we say “I”, we are just expressing a point of view that grew out from a complex net of mental states that will never be accessible for reflection and introspection. They have prepared in advance a vital world where we, afterwards, consciously emerge as subjects of an actual experience. In a word, they are those “*petites perceptions*” or “*perceptions inaperçues*” Leibniz spoke about in one of the many “*aperçus géniaux*” of his brilliant mind.

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