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Brentano's Mature Theory of Intentionality

Uriah Kriegel

The notion of intentionality is what Franz Brentano is best known for. But disagreements and misunderstandings still surround his account of its *nature*. In this paper, I argue that Brentano's mature account of the nature of intentionality construes it, not as a two-place relation between a subject and an object, nor as a three-place relation between a subject's act, its object, and a 'content,' but as an altogether non-relational, intrinsic property of subjects. I will argue that the view is more defensible than might initially appear.

Brentano's Mature Theory of Intentionality

Uriah Kriegel

1. Introduction

The notion of intentionality is what Franz Brentano is best known for. It is striking, though, just how little there is in Brentano's main work, the *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* (Brentano 1874), about the nature of intentionality. Long discussions are dedicated to arguing that intentionality is the mark of the mental, but to say this is not yet to say anything about what intentionality *is*. On the issue of the nature of intentionality, all we find in the *Psychology* are the 97 words (in the German original) constituting the 'intentionality passage.' Here is the paragraph in full:¹

Every mental phenomenon is characterized by what the Scholastics of the Middle Ages called the intentional or mental inexistence of an object (*Gegenstandes*), and what we might call, though not wholly unambiguously, reference (*Beziehung*) to a content (*Inhalt*), direction (*Richtung*) toward an object (*Object*) (which is not to be understood here as meaning a thing/entity (*Realität*)), or immanent objectivity/objectness (*Gegenständlichkeit*). Every mental phenomenon includes/contains (*enthält*) something as object (*Object*) within itself, although they do not all do so in the same way. In presentation, something is presented, in judgment something is affirmed or denied, in love loved, in hate hated, in desire desired and so on. (Brentano 1874, 124–25 [88])

¹Quotations cite page numbers from (Book I of) Kraus' 1924 edition of the *Psychology*, with page numbers in the 1973 English edition in brackets. For the most part the translations are mine.

On the basis of this passage alone, interpretive debates have flourished in more than one philosophical tradition. The dominant interpretation, thought to require the least interpretive 'creativity,' ascribes to Brentano an 'immanentist' account of intentionality. According to this, intentionality is a relation between subjects' intentional acts and immanent objects, objects that exist only 'in the subject's head.' That is, when *S* perceives a tree, there is (i) a perceptual act taking place in *S*, (ii) a 'mental tree' or 'tree-idea' in *S*'s mind, and (iii) a primitive intentional relation that (i) bears to (ii). Perhaps partly because this immanentist theory is taken to suffer from fatal flaws,² some have attempted to reinterpret the passage so as to ascribe to Brentano a more plausible account (e.g., Moran 1996; Chrudzimski 2001).³ Proponents of the immanentist interpretation tend to dismiss these endeavors as 'twisting Brentano's words' (Smith 1994, 40; see also Crane 2006).

My own view is that the passage is too short and underdeveloped to discriminate among a number of importantly different accounts: many accounts of the nature of intentionality will be compatible with Brentano's 97 words. The choice of interpretation is thus strongly underdetermined by the textual evidence. Moreover, it is not implausible that at that early stage of his career, Brentano had simply not yet worked out anything very specific, perhaps had not even appreciated the multitude of theoretical options. What is clear, in any case, is that by 1911 Brentano had developed a much more textured account

²There are ontological, epistemological, and phenomenological worries: ontologically, it is unclear what to make of the notion of a 'mental tree'; epistemologically, it is thought to raise a 'veil of appearances' between the subject and the external world; phenomenologically, it is in conflict with the so-called transparency of experience, the observation that when attending to our own experience it is hard to pick up on anything other than what the experience represents.

³The other option would be to defend the immanentist theory, or a slightly modified variant, against the objections to it (see, for example, Brandl 2005).

of the nature of intentionality. In 1911, the last four chapters of the *Psychology* were reprinted, in slightly reedited form, along with eleven appendices, under the title *The Classification of Mental Phenomena* (Brentano 1911). In the first of these appendices (1911, 133–38 [271–75]), Brentano presents a more determinate and worked out account of intentionality, to which I will refer as the ‘mature account.’ My goal in this paper is to defend the following thesis about it:

Intrinsicness Brentano’s mature account assays intentionality as an intrinsic property of subjects.⁴

The thesis Intrinsicness ascribes to Brentano has two important elements: (i) it assays intentionality as an intrinsic, non-relational property and (ii) it construes that property as a property not of intentional *acts*, but of *subjects*. I start by developing more fully this interpretation of Brentano’s mature theory (§2), then present Brentano’s argument for it (§3). I then defend the ascription of the relevant view to Brentano against interpretive objections (§4), and finally defend Brentano’s view, as here interpreted, against philosophical objections (§5).

2. Brentano’s Mature Theory of Intentionality

A first step toward understanding Brentano’s view is a correct appreciation of his conception of the intentional object. The notion of an intentional object involves a tangle of substantive and

⁴I use the expression ‘intrinsic property,’ as is common, to denote a property that something has not in virtue of bearing a relation to anything else independent from it. This allows two scenarios: where the thing does not bear a relation to anything, and where it bears a relation to a part of itself (as when a person is intrinsically legged in virtue of having a leg as part). Sometimes the expression ‘intrinsic property’ is used to denote a property that something cannot exist without having—the property is thus ‘intrinsic’ to the thing’s nature. However, I prefer to use ‘essential property’ to denote that kind of property.

terminological issues. With deliberate artifice, let us pretend that it is a matter of simple terminological decision whether when subject *S* veridically perceives a tree, the expression ‘intentional object’ will be used to denote (a) the external tree targeted by *S*’s perception or (b) a different entity which might be called the-presented-tree or the-tree-qua-presented. On this terminological issue, it is clear that the mature Brentano chose the first route. In a 1905 letter to Anton Marty, he writes:

It has never been my view that the [intentional] object is identical to the *presented object* (*vorgestelltes Objekt*). A presentation, for example a horse-presentation, has as its [intentional] object not the *presented thing* but rather the *thing*, in this case not a *presented horse* but rather a *horse*. (Brentano 1930, 87–8 [77])

This ‘decision’ raises, however, three important questions: (i) how to understand the status of the intentional object in non-veridical experiences, (ii) how to understand the nature of the relation between the intentional act and the intentional object, and (iii) whether the intentional relation involves also a third relatum, sometimes called ‘content.’

Debates among Brentano’s students (Twardowski 1894; Meinong 1904), and Brentano’s own reflections on the various theoretical options in the area (see Chrudzimski 2001, chaps. 2–7), have concerned mostly these issues. Perhaps through witnessing the various options’ travails, in particular as concerns the accommodation of radical error and hallucination, Brentano, as I read him, had by 1911 come to the position that intentionality is not a relation at all, but a non-relational property of the intentional act, or rather of the subject performing that act.

The title of the relevant 1911 piece already suggests this notion: ‘Mental reference (*Beziehung*) as distinguished from relation (*Relation*) in the strict sense.’ This suggests that, *strictly speaking*, intentionality is not a relation.⁵ The point is articu-

⁵This title does contain some ambiguities, insofar as (i) mental reference

lated most clearly here:

The terminus of the *so-called relation* does not in reality need to exist at all. For this reason, one could doubt whether we really are dealing with something relational here, and not rather with something in certain respects *relation-like* (*Relativen Ähnliches*), something which might therefore be called quasi-relational/relational-ish (*Relativliches*). (Brentano 1911, 134 [272])

The English translators chose to translate *Relativliches* as 'quasi-relational,' but the expressions 'relational-ish' and 'relation-like' may in truth be more felicitous. The expression 'quasi-relational' suggests a status curiously intermediate between those of being relational and being non-relational. As the rest of the passage shows unequivocally, however, Brentano's idea is rather that intentionality bears some important *similarities* to a relation but strictly speaking is not a relation. This is why Brentano refers to a 'so-called relation' and voices 'doubt whether we are really dealing with something relational' (where this seems to be a stylistically guarded negative assertion rather than genuine doubt). As Moran (1996, 11) puts it, by *Relativliches* Brentano 'seemed to mean that it [intentionality] only looked like a relation.' *Strictly speaking*, intentional properties are non-relational, monadic properties. Brentano works out the similarities between intentional properties and relations in the sentences immediately following this passage, but consistently refers to them as mere similarities.⁶

might yet be a relation in some loose sense and (ii) it is not immediately transparent that mental reference is the same thing as intentionality. But the passage I discuss in the text next seems to me to remove these ambiguities.

⁶The similarity, according to Brentano, is that both when we think of a (two-place) relation and when we think of intentionality, we have in mind two objects, and we think of one of them directly (*in recto*) and of the other indirectly (*in obliquo*). Thus, thinking that Jim is taller than Jane and thinking that Jim is thinking of Jane both involve having two objects in mind, Jim and Jane, and representing Jim directly and Jane indirectly. This is the crucial similarity between intentionality and bona fide relations, according to Brentano.

The expression 'relation-like' is thus apt, as it suggests something non-relational that resembles relations in some respects (rather than some intermediate status between relational and non-relational).

What does it mean to say that intentionality is not a relation? Clearly, the surface grammar of 'S is thinking of dragons' is relational. Perhaps the idea is that such a statement also has a (very different) 'deep grammar,' one that reflects more accurately the ontological structure of its truthmaker. The goal, then, is to find the kind of paraphrase whose 'surface grammar' would be the same as the 'deep grammar' of 'S is thinking of dragons' and that would manifest the non-relational character of the latter. The 'deep grammar' claim boils down to this, then: (i) 'S is thinking of dragons' is paraphraseable into some statement *P* whose grammatical structure is non-relational, and (ii) the ontological structure of the truthmaker of 'S is thinking of dragons' is more accurately reflected in *P*'s grammatical structure. The question is: what exactly is *P*?

Several options are available. One is *adverbialism*, where 'S is thinking of dragons' is paraphrased into 'S is thinking dragon-ly' or 'S is thinking dragon-wise.' Here the grammar suggests that the subject, *S*, is engaged in a certain *activity*, thinking, and is engaged in it in a certain *manner*, namely dragon-wise. There is no relation between *S* and a separate entity or group of entities, only a first-order monadic property (thinking) of *S* and a second-order property (occurring dragon-wise) of the first-order property (or of *S*'s instantiating of the first-order property).⁷

Some scholars ascribe such adverbialism to Brentano (Moran

(For what it is worth, it strikes me personally that this claim of similarity is fraught with difficulties, but that other claims in the vicinity would indeed show important similarities between the non-relational property of intentionality and paradigmatic relations and relational properties.)

⁷For a more detailed development of the adverbial machinery, and a hesitant defense of the underlying philosophical idea, see Kriegel (2011, chap. 3).

1996; Chrudzimski and Smith 2004). Presumably, however, what they have in mind is primarily the non-relational construal of intentionality. The adverbialist technique for rendering that construal intelligible is only one option. Another option is what we might call *hyphenism*, where ‘S is thinking of dragons’ is paraphrased into ‘S is thinking-of-dragons.’ The purpose of the hyphens is to intimate that ‘thinking-of-dragons’ is a grammatically simple, unstructured predicate, of which ‘dragons’ is a merely *morphological*, but not *syntactic*, part. Compare: ‘apple’ is a morphological but not syntactic part of ‘pineapple.’ Accordingly, something’s being a pineapple does not involve an apple as part or component. Likewise, someone’s thinking-of-dragons does not involve as part dragons: dragons are not constituents of the truthmaker of ‘S is thinking-of-dragons.’ The only constituents of the truthmaker are S and its monadic property (which, misleadingly, is denoted by a composite-sounding predicate).⁸ As in adverbialism, there is no relation involved. Unlike in adverbialism, no second-order property is invoked either.

Brentano himself appeals neither to adverbialization nor to hyphenation. The closest he comes to adopting a specific paraphrase technique is in describing the subject, especially in his metaphysical writings (esp. Brentano 1933), as *this kind of thinker* or *that kind of thinker*, in the sense of that-which-thinks (*Denkendes*). This can be developed into what we may call *subjectism*, where ‘S is thinking of dragons’ is paraphrased into ‘S is a dragons-thinker.’ Here the grammar suggests a monadic property of the subject, that of being a particular species of the genus Thinker. Brentano writes:

‘There is’ has its strict or proper meaning when used in connection with genuine logical names [i.e., expressions used to refer to enti-

⁸We could obtain the same result with ‘sequencing’ instead of hyphenation: we could write out ‘S isThinkingOfDragons,’ or even ‘S is TOD’ for short.

ties], as in ‘There is a God’ or ‘There is a man.’ In its other uses, ‘there is’ must not be taken in its strict sense ... [Thus,] ‘There is something which is the object of thought (*ein Gedachtes*)’ may be equated with [paraphrased into] ‘There is something which thinks (*ein Denkendes*).’ (Brentano 1930, 79 [68])

More generally:

... not the contemplated round thing, but the person contemplating it is what is in the strict sense. This fiction, that there is something which exists as a contemplated thing, may also prove harmless, but unless one realizes that it is a fiction, one may be led into the most glaring absurdities ... Once we have translated [paraphrased] statements about such fictive objects into other terms, it becomes clear that the only thing the statement is concerned with is the person who is thinking about the object. (Brentano 1933, 8 [18])

Here Brentano holds that intentional truths require as truthmakers only subjects (thinkers) and their taxonomizing into kinds; only careless constructions in public language mislead us into thinking there are further constituents in these truthmakers.⁹

A word on the issue of taxonomizing. A dragon-thinker is a species of a thinker, and a green-dragon-thinker is a subspecies of it. For Brentano, in asserting ‘S is thinking of a green dragon,’ we talk of an object (a green dragon) to indirectly classify the subject. This phenomenon is more familiar from other parts of our mentalistic discourse. It is often remarked that we have no better way to describe our visual experiences than indirectly, in terms of the color and shape properties of the objects of which they are experiences. Asked to describe your visual experience of a Mondrian, you are likely to fall back on terms which strictly

⁹The *reason* Brentano prefers subjectism over adverbialism and hyphenism seems to do with his ‘reist’ ontology. Discussing reism and how it supports subjectism will take us too far afield, but see Kriegel (2015) for a detailed discussion of reism.

speaking denote properties of the Mondrian you see, not properties of the seeing. If you are hallucinating the Mondrian, it is still true that your experience has the kind of qualitative character that it would have if it veridically presented an horizontal red rectangle at the bottom right corner, a vertical white rectangle next to it, and so on. That is, it is still true that your experience is *as of* an horizontal red rectangle at the bottom right corner, a vertical white rectangle next to it, etc. For Brentano, we essentially use the same strategy to classify our thoughts, judgments, desires, and other intentional states: we describe them indirectly by using terms for properties of what they are about (or would be about if they were veridical). Thus, we have no better way to describe a thought than by noting that it is *of dragons, or about the financial crisis*. More generally:

And so when we wish to state how one thinking individual differs from another, it is natural to characterize the thinker by reference to that which he is thinking about and to the way in which he relates to it as a thinker. We thus speak as though we were concerned with a relation between two things. ... Our language in these cases treats the object of thought as though it were a *thing* along with the person who is thinking. (Brentano 1933, 15 [22])

For Brentano, then, every intentional state is but an intrinsic modification of a subject, and we parasitically use expressions originally designed to pick out worldly items to indirectly describe these intrinsic modifications. A correct thought is accurately described by describing its object; an incorrect thought is accurately described by describing the object it would have if it were correct. Thus, in a 1911 letter to his *Enkelschüler* Franz Hillebrand, Brentano writes:

[W]e can say that a centaur, if it were to exist, would be a creature whose upper parts are like those of a man and whose lower parts are like those of a horse. ... [I]n such a case, it would be better to say that one is describing, not a centaur, but someone who is thinking about a centaur ... (Brentano 1930, 114 [101])

Ultimately, it is this reliance on terms for external objects' properties to indirectly describe the intrinsic properties of subjects that has misled philosophers to construe thought as an honest-to-goodness relation between a subject and an object.

It is part of Brentano's view that, in cases of non-veridical presentation, strictly speaking there *are* no intentional objects. Conscious states involve intentional acts, which are intrinsic modifications of the subject, and intentional-object talk is just a device for characterizing different modifications. Importantly, intentional-object talk is still useful in classifying and describing a non-veridical intentional state. For we can still classify an intentional state according to the intentional object there would be if it were correct. Call this kind of 'would-be intentional object' a *merely-intentional object*. The present point could be summarized as follows: it is hard to classify or describe an intentional state without mentioning its intentional or merely-intentional object; all the same, strictly speaking there are no merely-intentional objects. Thus, in a 1904 fragment Brentano writes that 'there is nothing other than things, and "empty space" and "object of thought" (*Gedachtes*) do not name things' (Brentano 1930, 79 [68]). There are certainly objects which are intentional, namely, regular objects when targeted by some intentional act. But there are no objects which are *merely* intentional, that is, ones that have no other existence except insofar as they are targeted by some intentional act. To that extent, merely-intentional objects are useful fictions: there are no such things, but it is useful to cite them to indirectly describe and classify intentional states. In a 1916 dictation, Brentano explicitly describes intentional objects as useful fictions:

Obvious examples of such fictions are so-called *intentional beings* [i.e., merely-intentional objects]. We speak of 'a contemplated man,' or of 'a man who is thought about by this or that thinker,' and our statements are like those in which we actually do speak of a man. But in such a case what is presented *in recto* ['directly'] is [just] the person thinking of the man. (Brentano 1933, 19 [24])

Regardless of whether the man that *S* contemplates exists, what is really going on when *S* contemplates the man is that *S* exists and is intrinsically modified in a specific way, so that he can be described—classified—as a man-contemplator.

3. Brentano's Argument

What is Brentano's *argument* for the non-relational account of intentionality? Much of the 1911 piece is dedicated to an analysis of statements about relations among nonexistent putative entities, outside intentional contexts. Brentano's mature position is that such statements are elliptical:

I am not unmindful that some people nowadays, in opposition to Aristotle, deny that both things must exist in order for something to be larger or smaller than another thing. [But ...] Someone who says that three is less than a trillion is not positively asserting the existence (*Existenz*) of a relation. He is saying, rather, that if there is a plurality/multitude (*Menge*) of three and a plurality/multitude of a trillion, that relation must obtain (*bestehen*) between them ... (Brentano 1911, 134–5 [273])

The passage presupposes a mathematical nominalism according to which talk of numbers is just talk of pluralities or multitudes. But the main point does not depend on such nominalism. It is that a categorical statement such as 'Hobbits are cuter than dragons' only *appears* to assert (read: has a surface grammar suggesting) the obtaining or holding (*bestehen*) of the cuter-than relation. In reality, it is merely elliptical for the hypothetical statement 'If there were hobbits and dragons, the former would be cuter than the latter.' The hypothetical statement does not assert the obtaining, the actual instantiation, of any relation—it only says that *if* certain conditions were met, *then* that relation would obtain/be instantiated. Similarly when only one relatum exists: 'Dogs are cuter than dragons' is elliptical for 'If there were dragons, dogs would be cuter than them.' The point is

that the paraphrasing hypotheticals are true but do not require relation-instances among their truthmakers. At the same time, the unparaphrased categoricals are strictly speaking false, so do not require *any* truthmakers. Either way we are spared the need for relational *truthmakers*.

Consider now an intentional expression, such as 'thinking of.' The view that thinking of *x* is a matter of bearing a certain relation to *x*, the thinking-of relation, leads to odd results. First, by Brentanian lights, it requires us to reinterpret 'S is thinking of dragons' as elliptical for 'If there were dragons, S would be thinking of them.' Secondly, it requires us to consider the unparaphrased categorical 'S is thinking of dragons' as strictly speaking false. But both consequences are implausible. Therefore, we should reject the view that thinking-of is a relation. Instead, we should construe it as a non-relational property of the subject, misleadingly denoted by a transitive verb.

The argument, then, is that *categorical* statements about intentional states can be true even where the 'intended object' does not exist, so intentionality cannot be a relation between an intentional state and an intentional object.

We may summarize Brentano's argument as follows. Let *S* be a statement composed of terms or expressions T_1, \dots, T_n plus logical vocabulary. Let *N* be a proper subset of T_1, \dots, T_n , whose members ostensibly refer to concrete particulars, and let *M* be the complement of *N* in T_1, \dots, T_n . How can we tell whether *S* is a *relational statement*? A superficial criterion might require *M* to include a 'relational term' as member, where *T* is a relational term just if a grammatical statement involving *T* must involve at least two other terms. The problem with this criterion is that it gets the extension wrong: it correctly classifies as relational the statement 'Jimmy argued with Johnny,' but incorrectly classifies as relational 'Jimmy argued with conviction.' A deeper, more semantic criterion might require *M* to include a member that successfully refers to a relation, or require *S* to

have a relation among its truthmaker's constituents. That sort of criterion is surely right, but is dialectically unhelpful in the present context: we want to know whether 'Jimmy is thinking of dragons' is a relational statement, but only because we want to settle precisely the question of whether thinking-of is a relation. What would be useful for us would be a partly semantic criterion that does not presuppose knowledge of whether a relation is involved. In a way, this is what Brentano offers us. His proposed criterion may be put as follows:

S is relational iff: (i) M includes a relational term and
(ii) for S to be both categorical and true, every member of N must successfully refer.

If some member of N fails to refer, S is either false or hypothetical (or else non-relational). For example, if 'Johnny' fails to refer, then the categorical 'Jimmy argued with Johnny' is false, though the hypothetical 'If Johnny existed, Jimmy would have argued with him' may be true. The key to Brentano's argument is the claim that some intentional statements are categorical and true even though some of the terms ostensibly referring to concrete particulars ('ostensibly singular') in them fail to refer. For example, 'Jimmy is thinking of Bigfoot' is true and categorical even though 'Bigfoot' fails to refer. Therefore, 'Jimmy is thinking of Bigfoot' is *not* a relational statement. And *therefore*, we have no reason to think that its truthmaker involves a relation as constituent.

Brentano's argument for the non-relational assay of intentionality may be represented as follows, then:

1. For any relational statement S , necessarily, if S is true and categorical, then all of S 's ostensibly singular expressions successfully refer;
2. For any intentional statement S^* , possibly, S^* is true and categorical, but some of S^* 's ostensibly singular expressions fail to refer; therefore,

3. For any intentional statement S^* and any relational statement S , $S^* \neq S$.

This seems to me, on the face of it, a very strong argument indeed. Let us consider some objections, then, to the view I ascribe to Brentano (§5), but also to the ascribing of it (§4).

4. Objections to the Interpretation

To the ascribing, it might be objected that another interpretation of '*Relativliches*' is possible: intentionality *is* a relation, but a special kind of relation, where only one of the relata need exist. Perhaps this is what a 'quasi-relation' is: a relation whose occurrence or instantiation does not require the existence of all relata.

There is no doubt that Brentano seriously entertained this alternative account. In some of his unpublished fragments, he clearly expounds the idea—see esp. Brentano (1933, 167–69 [126–27]), a dictation from 1915. One view might be that Brentano simply changed his mind sometime between 1911 and 1915 (Moran 1996). Another, however, is that Brentano wanted to let the idea play out in private writings but what he *published* should still be taken as his considered view. Regardless, I would argue, charity exhorts us to focus on the 1911 view, because the envisaged notion of quasi-relation is forsooth not altogether intelligible. As far as I can see, saying that a dyadic relation can be instantiated even if only one relatum exists is no more plausible than saying that a monadic property can be instantiated even where there is no instantiator of it. On the face of it, it is absurd to think that the property of having mass m can be instantiated even if there is no object whose mass is m . (I am assuming here that mass is monadic.) It should strike us as equally absurd that some relation R might be instantiated in the absence of an appropriate number of relata.

An objector might insist that the 1915 dictation, being poste-

rior to the 1911 appendix, must be taken to represent Brentano's final, considered position. My main response to this is that if we accept this reasoning, I would simply contend that Brentano took one final wrong turn, and would have done better to stick with his 1911 view. But it is not clear that we have to accept this reasoning. For it is significant, in this context, that Brentano *published* the 1911 piece but not the 1915 piece. For all we know, then, the 1915 piece is just an attempt to let a view play out and see where it goes and how it might be defended.¹⁰

Another objection to the ascription of a non-relational view to Brentano is that Brentano clearly thinks that in thinking of a tree, one is *aware of* a tree-idea. The tree-idea is the *content* of one's thought. So even if the intentionality of one's thought does not involve a relation to a tree, it does involve a relation to this tree-idea. One way to put this is to say that intentionality is a relation to a content even if it is not a relation to an object. Another way is to say that intentionality is a relation to an immanent object even if it is not a relation to a transcendent object. However we put this, a relation is involved after all.

This objection relies on a confusion. The expression 'tree-idea' can be read in two ways. One is as denoting a kind of mental tree that resembles worldly trees in some respects but exists only in the subject's mind. So construed, the notion of a tree-idea is both ontologically and phenomenologically suspect. A more plausible construal is that a tree-idea is simply an idea of a tree. But in this construal, the idea seems to be the intentional act, not the object (immanent or transcendent). Now,

¹⁰This is particularly relevant given that Brentano apparently instructed his students to publish sparingly, and only material in genuinely good shape. It is well known that Husserl was Brentano's student in Vienna from 1884–86. In 1889 letter to his teacher, Husserl writes: 'My behavior to this point has demonstrated that the ambition to see my name in print as quickly and as often as possible has not driven me to premature publications. I am certain of your approval in this matter. I will only publish what I deem really useful (*nützlich*) ...' (Ierna 2015, 71)

it is true that in Brentano's picture one would still be *aware of* the tree-idea, but this is simply because for Brentano every intentional act is intentionally directed at itself (Brentano 1874, 179–80 [127]). Insofar as it is its own intentional object, then, the intentional act is something the subject is aware of. Nonetheless, it is still just the intentional act of the tree thought—not the thought's content or (primary) object!

A third objection to the ascription might appeal to Tim Crane's (2006) unusual basis for an immanentist interpretation of Brentano. Crane does not rely primarily on the intentionality passage. Rather, his main reason for ascribing to Brentano an immanentist theory of intentionality is that for Brentano the intentional objects of perceptual experiences are Kantian appearances 'which are signs of an underlying reality but which are not real themselves' (Crane 2006, 23) (and instead 'only exist in the mind' (2006, 25).

Crane relies on passages from the opening chapter of the *Psychology*, where Brentano says, for example, that 'light, sound, heat, spatial location ... are not things which truly and really (*wahrhaft und wirklich*) exist' (Brentano 1874, 28 [19]). Consider a visual experience as of a yellow lemon. Brentano takes the yellow lemon presented by the experience to be a Kantian phenomenon (as opposed to a noumenon). However, Brentano nowhere says that such Kantian phenomena 'only exist in the mind.' On the contrary, he says very explicitly (including in the sentence just quoted) that they *do not exist at all*—not in the mind and not elsewhere. In ascribing the immanentist view to Brentano, Crane is *presupposing* that Kantian phenomena are immanent objects that exist only in the mind. This is quite a common view, of course, but it may not be Brentano's. The only view we can ascribe to Brentano is that Kantian phenomena are mere intentional objects of our conscious states. Since Brentano takes talk of intentional objects to be a roundabout way of describing the species of intentional act the subject is perform-

ing, this is how he would take talk of Kantian phenomena as well. This explains why he says that Kantian phenomena do not 'really and truly exist.' After all, his view—as interpreted above—is that *merely-intentional objects* do not really and truly exist. They are useful fictions and not *entia realia*.

In addition, Crane's interpretation does not extend to non-perceptual experiences, since those are not directed at Kantian phenomena. But Brentano's theory of intentionality is supposed to apply to non-perceptual acts such as judgments and decisions. So Crane's interpretation has no real chance of applying generally.

5. Objections to the View

Let us assume that Brentano's mature theory really was as I claim. I want to end by considering objections to the theory itself.

An immediate objection is that the view ascribed to Brentano fails to do justice to the pull of the relational conception of intentionality. It is not just English or German that have a relational surface grammar for intentional ascriptions; all known languages do. Surely there is some underlying reason why they are all forced to do so.

I have already indicated the reason Brentano is likely to proffer for this phenomenon. The elusiveness of conscious experience forces us to describe its phenomenal character indirectly. There is a kind of 'direct-ineffability' of conscious states, in the sense that such 'effability' as they admit is always indirect. One might wonder why *that* should be the case, but perhaps the contrast between the private character of conscious states and the public nature of language could be the explanation here.

One way to appreciate the pull of the relational conception is this. One symptom of the fact that carrying is a relation is that the active-voice 'Jimmy is carrying Johnny' seems to mean

the same as the passive-voice 'Johnny is carried by Jimmy.' Remarkably, the same holds for intentional statements: 'Jimmy is thinking of Johnny' means the same as 'Johnny is thought of by Jimmy' (or indeed 'Johnny is the object of Jimmy's thought'). This suggests that thinking-of is just as relational as carrying.

In response, however, Brentano could deny that 'Jimmy is thinking of Johnny' means the same as 'Johnny is thought of by Jimmy'—when left unparaphrased. Statements S_1 and S_2 cannot mean the same if they differ in truth value: given that the world is the same, they must be saying something different about it if one ends up true and the other ends up false. It is significant, then, that 'I am thinking of Bigfoot' and 'Bigfoot is thought of by me' have different truth values: the first is true but the second untrue. On Russell's (1905) view, 'Bigfoot is thought of by me' is false, as is 'The present king of France is bald'; on Strawson's (1950) view, 'The present king of France is bald' has a third, 'neutral' truth value intermediate between truth and falsity—and so does 'Bigfoot is thought of by me.' Using the term 'untrue' to cover both falsity and the neutral truth value (if there is one), we can say that on all standard semantic views 'Bigfoot is thought of by me' is untrue (unless paraphrased, of course). Accordingly, it cannot mean the same as the true 'I am thinking of Bigfoot.'

Another objection in the same spirit is that there is still something hard to swallow in the non-relational account. For the phenomenology of being in an intentional state often involves a feeling of bearing a relation to something in the outside world. This is most obvious with perceptual experience: the phenomenology of having a visual experience of a yellow lemon is a phenomenology of bearing a distinctive perceptual relation to an object standing before one (a *Gegenstand* indeed).

It is hard to know how Brentano would respond to this objection, but here is one possible line. We may concede this: when I have a visual experience of a yellow lemon, I experience

a *feeling of perceptually connecting* to the lemon. In a way, the experience's overall phenomenology says more than 'here is a yellow lemon'; it says something like 'here is a yellow lemon I am perceptually connecting to.' Thus if I am hallucinating a yellow lemon before me, but there happens to be a lemon of the same color, shape, and size just there, it is natural to assess the experience as *non-veridical*, and non-veridical purely in virtue of its phenomenology (Searle 1983; Kroon 2013). If so, the feeling of perceptually connecting to the lemon is a component of the experience's overall phenomenology, in addition to the yellow-lemon component. So it is true that perceptual experience includes a phenomenology of perceptual connection to an object. However, as just noted, this feeling of perceptual connection, like any feeling, may or may not be veridical. And when it is non-veridical, the subject need not *in fact* perceptually connect to anything. Thus although this is a phenomenology *as of* bearing a relation to something, *having* the phenomenology does not require actually bearing a relation to something. The having of a phenomenology never guarantees that the phenomenology is *veridical*. To that extent, the fact that the experience of being in an intentional state involves a phenomenology as of bearing a relation to something does not tell against a non-relational metaphysics of intentionality. The non-relational account can readily admit that intentional states involve such a phenomenology but insist that a relation is actually instantiated only when this phenomenology is veridical. Since what makes an intentional state the intentional state it is, and an intentional state at all, is independent of whether the state is veridical or not, the fact that a veridical intentional state involves a relation does not imply that what makes that state the intentional state it is (and an intentional state at all) is that relation.

Perhaps the most formidable objection to Brentano's mature theory is due to Moran (1996). Adapting Jackson's (1977) argument against the adverbial theory of perception, Moran (1996,

9–10) claims that Brentano's 'adverbial view' faces a 'daunting problem': it cannot account for the similarity or type-identity among some intentional states. I have suggested that Brentano does not *have* an adverbial view, but a 'subjectist view'; nonetheless, Moran's objection can be reformulated to target that. Compare (a) a dragon-visualizer, (b) a unicorn-visualizer, and (c) a horse-seer. Clearly, (a) resembles (b) more than it resembles (c). The most straightforward explanation of this would be that (a) and (b) share an aspect or component that (c) lacks. But since 'visualizer' is not a syntactic part of 'dragon-visualizer' and 'unicorn-visualizer' (think of 'apple' and 'pineapple' again), Brentano cannot identify a component that (a) and (b) might share. He thus lacks the resources to explain, or even accommodate, this resemblance fact.

One might respond that incomposite, structureless states can also resemble, and the way in which they do could apply to the case of (a)–(c). Someone who believes that colors are simple, monadic, structureless features can still admit that red is more similar to orange than to yellow. Being a dragon-visualizer might resemble being a unicorn-visualizer more than being a horse-seer in the same way. One problem with this response is that the objector may reverse it to claim that a monadic conception of color has no resources to explain resemblance facts. But the main problem is that it seems to misrepresent how one could grasp what a *horse-visualizer* is. On the face of it, once we possess the concepts of dragon-visualizer and horse-seer, we can 'put together' the concept of a horse-visualizer, without having to go through a separate process of concept acquisition.¹¹ But if subjectism is true, we would have to acquire the concept of a horse-visualizer in the same laborious way as the

¹¹This capacity is related to, or parallels in some way, what Fodor (1975) called the 'productivity' of thought: the fact that any subject who grasps the proposition that John loves Mary has all the resources needed to grasp the proposition that Mary loves John, needing no further learning or acquisition process.

concepts of dragon-visualizer and horse-seer. For 'visualizer' is not a component of 'dragon-visualizer' and 'horse' is not a component of 'horse-seer,' so they could not be separated and recombined.¹²

A better response to the objection is to claim that although in Brentano's picture a state such as (a) has in some sense no components, it nonetheless has a *structure*, indeed potentially combinatorial structure. The obvious problem with this response is that it is unclear how it might work: normally, we think of an entity's *structure* as precisely a matter of its having different parts, or components, bearing certain interrelations. It is unclear, then, how the property of being a dragon-visualizer could have a structure despite having no components. However, Brentano's mereology (his theory of part-whole relations) provides him with surprising resources to address this problem.

Brentano's mereology differs from modern-day Classical Mereology in several important respects. The one that will concern us here is that while Classical Mereology operates with a single notion of parthood, Brentano's distinguishes two notions:

[O]ne may be able to distinguish parts that are actually *separable* from one another, until one reaches parts where such ... separation can no longer take place ... However, even these ultimate actually separate parts, in some sense, can be said to have further parts ... To differentiate these from others, we may refer to them as *distinctional* parts. (Brentano 1982, 13 [16]; my italics)

¹²Observe that in the case of colors, it is *not* plausible that we acquire the concept of orange by 'putting together' the concepts of red and yellow. Rather, we seem to require going again through the laborious process of acquiring the concept of orange 'from scratch.' (This claim is compatible with the possibility of acquiring a concept of a missing shade of blue in the more direct way; the point is that this cannot work for such concepts as orange, which are 'too distant,' in some sense, from red and yellow to be acquired in the same way.) In this respect, we can see that the cases of color concepts and intentional-state concepts are disanalogous.

Brentano distinguishes between *separable* and *distinctional* parts, then. Here is one example in which these come apart:

Someone who believes in [mereological] atoms believes in corpuscles which cannot be dissolved into smaller bodies. But even so he can speak of halves, quarters, etc. of atoms: parts which are distinguishable even though they are not actually separable. (Ibid.)

By 'atoms' Brentano means not the entities referred to as atoms in physics, but the entities genuinely admitting of no physical division. A physics' atom with one proton and three electrons does have separable parts, since we can separate the electrons from the proton—we can 'split the atom.' The proton too has separable parts—the quarks making it up. But the electrons have no separable parts. It is impossible to 'split the electron.' Still, even though we cannot separate *in reality* different parts of electron *E*, we can distinguish *in thought* different parts of it. We can call the top half of *E* 'Jimmy' and the bottom half 'Johnny.'¹³ Jimmy and Johnny are thus *distinguishable* parts of *E*, but not *separable* parts. Brentano calls them *distinctional* (*distinktionelle*) parts, or sometimes *divisiva*.¹⁴

There are also cases of *bilateral* mere distinguishability. Brentano offers as an example an individual blue dot at location *L* (Brentano 1982, 14 [18]). According to Brentano, the dot's particular blueness and its particular *L*-locatedness are mutually inseparable. The very same individual dot could not be located elsewhere, nor differently colored (1982, 15 [19])—a differently colored dot would be a different dot, and likewise for a differently located dot. Accordingly, the dot's particular blueness cannot survive the dot's loss of *L*-locatedness and vice versa. It follows that that particular blueness trope and that particular

¹³More precisely, since *E* has a determinate mass *m*, we can divide *m* by half and consider each of *E*'s two halves independently.

¹⁴For more details on Brentano's mereology, see Baumgartner and Simons (1994) and Kriegel (2017).

L-locatedness trope are mutually inseparable parts of the dot.¹⁵ Another example, perhaps more compelling, draws on Aristotle's discussion in the *Physics* of the relationship between *A*'s agency and *B*'s patiency when *A* acts upon *B*. In a dictation from 1908, Brentano seems to treat these as mutually inseparable parts of the transaction between *A* and *B*:

Aristotle said that an action and a passion are the same: 'A brings about *B*' and '*B* is brought about by *A*' appear to say the same thing. In such cases, the same accident would be ascribed to two things, though in a different way to each. (Brentano 1933, 55 [49])

Note that in such cases of bilateral mere distinguishability, it is natural to consider that in reality we have only one entity on our hands: one dot, one transaction. This stands to reason: since distinctional parts are parts that can be distinguished in thought but not separated in reality, in reality what we have in these cases is just the whole.

This notion of bilateral mere distinguishability may shed new light on the Jackson-Moran problem—the problem of how to account for similarity among intentional states by appeal to combinatorial structure. One way to make sense of this may be to hold that although intentional states do not have *separable parts*, they do have *distinctional parts*. This is what their *structure* consists in. On the standard view, intentionality is a relation between an intentional act and an intentional object, construed as mutually separable. An alternative picture, however, may construe the intentional act and the merely-intentional object as two mutually merely distinctional parts of a single whole. In that scenario, the intentional state has no *components*, in the sense of separable parts, but it does have *structure*, in the sense

¹⁵I am using here the modern notion of a trope to speak of a particular, dated property instantiation (Williams 1953). This is similar to—perhaps the same as—the Aristotelian notion of an 'individual accident.' The mature Brentano rejects the existence of tropes and properties alike, but I avail myself of these notions here to make sense of his view of intentionality.

that we can *distinguish* different aspects of it. We can *think* of it in different ways, just as we can think of a causal transaction as *A* acting on *B* or as *B* being acted upon by *A*. These distinguishable aspects of an intentional state constitute its structure, and explain, or at least enable, purely combinatorial concept acquisition. A subject who acquired the concepts of dragon-visualizer and horse-seer, could *distinguish* within these concepts (i) an act-aspect to do with visualizing or seeing and (ii) an object-aspect to do with dragons or horses. She could distinguish these even if these are not separable components of the relevant intentional states. She could then 'put together' these aspects in different combinations, thereby acquiring the concepts of a horse-visualizer and dragon-seer. The suggestion is speculative, of course, but the model it offers does recover combinatorial concept acquisition while insisting on the non-relational nature of intentionality.

Is there any evidence that Brentano took the intentional act and the merely-intentional object to be mutually merely distinguishable? It would seem so:

As in every relation, two correlates can be found here [in intentionality]. The one correlate is the act of consciousness, the other is that which it is directed upon ... The two correlates are only distinctional parts from one another. And so we have here again two purely distinctional parts of the pair of correlates, one of which [the act] is real, the other [the merely-intentional object] is not. (Brentano 1982, 21–2 [23–4])

When *S* visualizes a yellow lemon, we can distinguish *in thought* a visualization element and a yellow-lemon element. Even if *in reality* there are not two separate entities here, we can tell apart these two distinctional parts of the experience. We should be able, accordingly, to acquire the concept of a visualization experience and the concept of a lemon-ish experience. Once we have, we can recombine these concepts with others like them.¹⁶

¹⁶It might be objected that the quoted passage only undermines the non-

Jackson's (1977) original objection to adverbialism pressed the compositionality of adverbial paraphrases from another angle as well. Adapted to the subjectist context, we might put Jackson's objection as follows: from 'S is thinking of a dragon,' one can validly infer 'S is thinking'; but from 'S is a dragon-thinker,' one *cannot* infer 'S is a thinker.' For 'dragon-thinker' is a syntactically unstructured predicate, so making this inference would be akin to inferring 'x is an apple' from 'x is a pineapple.'

In response, note first that although 'x is a pineapple, therefore x is an apple' is a bad inference, 'x is a strawberry, therefore x is a berry' is a good one—even though they seem superficially similar. What makes the latter inference good, it seems, is the availability of a certain bridge premise, which we may formulate as 'A strawberry is a species of berry' (contrast 'An apple is a species of pineapple'). The question, then, is whether a similar bridge principle is available to Brentano. And the answer seems positive: 'A dragon-thinker is a species of thinker' is as plausible as 'A strawberry is a species of berry.' Accordingly, it is possible to correctly infer 'S is a thinker' from 'S is a dragon-thinker.' The point is that although 'dragon-thinker' is syntactically simple, it is not true that its *only* relation to 'thinker' is morphological. Another relation is the genus/species relation: 'dragon-thinker' picks out a species of what 'thinker' picks out.

relational reading of Brentano, since it speaks of a *relation* between the act and the object. But this is a 'relation' between two merely distinct parts of a single entity. As noted, *in reality* there are not two separate entities here. To take another Aristotelian example, we can distinguish in thought between the road from Athens to Thebes and the road from Thebes to Athens, and we can speak of 'relations' between these (the relation of collocation, for example); but obviously, in reality there is only one road, not two. And since there are not two roads, there can be no genuine *relation* between them. Why, then, does Brentano speak of an intentional *relation* in this passage? It may well be that at this point Brentano's conception of intentionality was somewhat unstable, employing both relational thinking and the notion that intentional acts and intentional objects are not actually two separate entities, and that all this got ironed out later on.

It is this further relation that licenses the inference.¹⁷

6. Conclusion

I conclude that the subjectist version of intrinsicism about intentionality can withstand the main objections against it. In the first half of the paper, I have argued that this view was Brentano's mature theory of intentionality. On this view, intentional statements do not state that a relation holds between a subject and an object. Rather, they state that a subject undergoes an intrinsic modification; intentional-object talk is just an indirect way of describing such intrinsic modifications and classifying subjects according to them.

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¹⁷It might be objected that 'S is a dragon-thinker' still fails to recover the exact inferential profile of 'S thinks of a dragon,' since the latter supports an inference to 'S thinks' *without* need of a bridge principle, whereas the former does not. This seems right to me, but it also seems like a minor liability on the paraphrase. Arguably, it is permissible for a paraphrase to be *somewhat* revisionary—indeed, this is often the *point* of the paraphrase.

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