

FRANZ BRENTANO'S REJECTION OF UNCONSCIOUS MENTAL PHENOMENA: THE ARGUMENT OF FUNCTIONAL RELATION¹

A rejeição dos fenômenos mentais inconscientes em Franz Brentano: O argumento da relação funcional

Tárik de Athyde Prata^{2 3}

RESUMO

No presente artigo, abordo o terceiro entre os quatro argumentos de Brentano contra a existência de fenômenos mentais inconscientes, a saber, sua réplica à alegação de que alguns fenômenos mentais são muito fracos para serem conscientes. Após uma breve discussão sobre a noção de inconsciente em Brentano (seção 2) e uma visão geral de seus quatro argumentos contra a existência de fenômenos mentais inconscientes (seção 3), discuto o argumento baseado em uma – alegada – relação funcional entre (a) nossa consciência de nossos próprios fenômenos mentais e (b) a intensidade deles. Minha conclusão é que o argumento não é convincente, porque ele faz uma inferência questionável a partir de (A) como os nossos próprios fenômenos mentais *aparecem* para nós em nossas experiências conscientes para (B) o que esses fenômenos *realmente são* (seção 4). A verdade é que a concepção de consciência de Brentano já contém os fundamentos da perspectiva que ele quer recusar (seção 5).

Palavras-chave: Consciência. Inconsciente. Intensidade. Relação Funcional.

ABSTRACT

In the present article, I address the third of Brentano's four arguments against the existence of unconscious mental phenomena, namely his reply to the claim that some mental phenomena are too weak to be conscious. After a brief discussion of Brentano's notion of unconsciousness (section 2) and an overview of his four arguments against the existence of unconscious mental phenomena (section 3), I discuss the argument based on an – alleged – functional relation between (a) our consciousness of our own mental phenomena and (b) their intensity. My conclusion is that the argument is not convincing, since it makes a questionable inference from (A) how our own mental phenomena *appear* to us in our conscious experiences to (B) that these phenomena *really are* (section 4). The truth is that Brentano's account

¹ <https://doi.org/10.51359/2357-9986.2023.258297>

² Universidade Federal de Pernambuco (UFPE). E-mail: tarik.de_athayde_prata@alumni.uni-heidelberg.de. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1065-9621>.

³ This article was written during my research stay (2022-2023) at the Department of Philosophy of the University College Cork (Ireland). I would like to thank my colleges at the Federal University of Pernambuco (Brazil), for their agreement with my research leave, and Dr. Alessadro Salice for his invitation to Cork.

of consciousness already contains the foundations of the view he wants to refuse (section 5).

Key-words: Consciousness. Intensity. Functional Relation. Unconscious.

INTRODUCTION

Franz Brentano is better known in contemporary philosophy as the rediscoverer of the medieval concept of *intentionality*, that is, the distinctive property of mental phenomena in virtue of which they *refer* to a content, or are *directed* to some object⁴. However, since the eve of the twentieth-first century, his philosophical work was approached from the point of view of the debate about *consciousness*⁵.

In the present article, I will discuss an aspect of Brentano's view about consciousness which is not so often approached in the literature, namely: his rejection of the existence of *unconscious* mental phenomena. Defending that all mental phenomena are consciousness of some object, he questions if there are mental phenomena which are *not* objects of consciousness⁶. His answer is *negative*. In his own words: "The question, 'Is there unconscious consciousness?', in the sense in which we have formulated it, is, (...), to be answered with a firm, 'No'." (Brentano, 1924, pp. 194; Brentano, 1995, p. 137).

In order to ground this claim, Brentano articulates very complex replies to the four kinds of arguments for the unconscious that he identifies in the literature (see section 3, below). Under these arguments, surely the most important⁷ for Brentano's account of consciousness is the last one: the claim according to which the denial of the existence of unconscious phenomena leads to an *infinite regress*. Indeed, there is a significant debate devoted to the discussion of Brentano's reply to this argument⁸.

⁴ Brentano (1924, p. 124); Brentano (1995, p. 88).

⁵ See, for example, Thomasson (2000); Hossack (2002); Zahavi (2004) and Textor (2006).

⁶ Brentano (1924, p. 143); Brentano (1995, p. 102).

⁷ As Suzan Krantz (1990, p. 746) puts it: "Brentano's response to the fourth type of argument seems to consolidate and complete the uniquely philosophical component of his response to the other three". See also Tassone (2012, p. 124).

⁸ See, for example, Kriegel (2002); Kriegel (2003); Kriegel (2018); Textor (2006); Textor (2017); Zahavi (2006).

However, I think it is also worthy to examine the other three of Brentano's replies, because all the four play a role in his attempt to refuse the existence of unconscious mental phenomena. Since Brentano's arguments against the existence of unconscious phenomena are arguments *to the best explanation*⁹ – not arguments based on logical analysis¹⁰ – all of them contribute to his effort to prove that all mental phenomena are conscious.

Therefore, in the present work, I will focus my attention on Brentano's reply to a lesser-known argument for the unconscious, namely: the claim according to which there is a *functional relation* between (a) our consciousness of our own mental phenomena and (b) their intensity, so that some of our mental phenomena are *too weak* to be conscious.

After criticizing the former attempts to formulate this argument, Brentano concedes that some circumstances give us reasons to believe in the existence of this functional relation. However, he sees the presence of a functional relation as a proof for the *opposite* view.

In other words, from the fact that (i) the intensity of our consciousness of a mental phenomenon is a function of (ii) the intensity of this phenomenon itself, we should conclude that *all mental phenomena are conscious*, because all of them have some intensity, and there must be some corresponding consciousness¹¹ to this intensity.

However, I believe that Brentano's argumentation about this issue is *not conclusive*, because the argument of the functional relation is formulated in terms of mental phenomena which are *already conscious*. His point is: from the fact that, in our *conscious experiences*, both intensities always correspond to each other, we should conclude that any mental phenomenon – since it must have some intensity – must have some level of consciousness accompanying it, in such a way that there are no unconscious mental phenomena.

⁹ According to Textor (2017, p. 57-58), Brentano offers “equally good explanations” of certain phenomena which do not posit unconscious presentations. Tassone (2012, p. 124) claims that Brentano tries to refute four possible explanations to defend the existence of unconscious mental phenomena.

¹⁰ I would like to thank Hamid Taieb (Humboldt University) and Alessandro Salice (University College Cork) for their remarks – in personal correspondence – about the peculiar character of Brentano's arguments.

¹¹ Brentano (1924, p. 170); Brentano (1995, p. 121).

However, the proposed inference from (A), the case of conscious phenomena, to (B), the impossibility of unconscious phenomena, is *uncertain*. Brentano himself concedes that unconscious presentations are, at least, *conceivable*¹², which means it is still logically possible that some mental phenomena do exist without being accompanied by any presentation of them. In other words, it is logically possible that some mental phenomena do exist without being known by us.

Furthermore, Brentano's refusal of the existence of unconscious phenomena is not compatible with some results of the contemporary research of the mind, which has a lot of evidence for the existence of unconscious mental phenomena¹³.

After a discussion of Brentano's remarks about the concept of unconscious (see section 2), and an overview on the other three arguments against the existence of unconscious mental phenomena (see section 3), I will present the argument of functional relation (see section 4). I defend that Brentano's account of consciousness already contains the foundations of the view he wants to refuse (see section 5).

2. BRENTANO ON THE NOTION OF UNCONSCIOUS

A very interesting point is, unlike many writers¹⁴, Brentano does not believe the concept of an "unconscious consciousness" to be contradictory¹⁵. He argues that we have to distinguish between an (i) *active* and a (ii) *passive* sense of the word "unconscious"¹⁶, that is, between "unconscious" as a predicate of (i) a *subject*, who is not conscious of something, and as a predicate of (ii) an *object*, of which someone is not conscious¹⁷.

¹² "A presentation of the sound without a presentation of the act of hearing would not be inconceivable, at least *a priori*" (Brentano, 1924, p. 180; Brentano, 1995, p. 128). It means that an unconscious presentation of the sound is perfectly conceivable.

¹³ See Rosenthal (1997, p. 733); Rosenthal (1993, p. 357); Maier et. al. (2004); Dijksterhuis (2004) and Bargh (2005, pp. 37-38).

¹⁴ See, for example, Sartre (1943, p. 18) and Sartre (1956, p. lii).

¹⁵ "[A] person who raises the question of whether there is an unconscious consciousness is not being ridiculous in the same way he would be had he asked whether there is a non-red redness. An unconscious consciousness is no more a contradiction in terms [*Contradictio in adjecto*] than an unseen case of seeing." (Brentano, 1924, p. 143; Brentano, 1995, p. 102).

¹⁶ Brentano (1924, p. 143); Brentano (1995, pp. 102-3).

His claim seems to be that, while it is contradictory to say of a subject that they are “unconsciously conscious” of something, it is not contradictory to say of an object that someone is not conscious of it – even if this “object” is itself the *presentation* of a further object.

In other words, Brentano seems to mean that the concept of (a) a presentation which is not the object of (b) a secondary presentation¹⁸ is logically consistent. Therefore, he seems to have in mind something similar to what Rocco Gennaro (1996, p. 5) calls “unconscious awareness”¹⁹.

It is noteworthy that even in the context of his main argument against the existence of unconscious mental phenomena, Brentano concedes that a presentation of an object without a presentation of this presentation is not inconceivable, at least *a priori*.²⁰ This claim is very significant, because it is made in a context in which Brentano is trying to show that both presentations – (a) the presentation of the object and (b) the presentation of this first presentation – belong to *the very same* mental phenomenon.

I believe this concession seriously *weakens* Brentano’s own view that all presentations of objects contain a presentation of themselves, because the conceivability of a presentation without another presentation directed to it is equivalent to the conceivability of *unconscious* presentations.

Here we have a significant difference between Brentano and Descartes. Both refused the existence of unconscious phenomena²¹. However, for Descartes, consciousness is *essential* for the mind; then, he defined the mind as a thinking thing (*res cogitans*)²², and thoughts (*cogitationes*) as “all there is in us in such a way that we are immediately *conscious of it* [my emphasis]”²³.

¹⁷ On this issue, see Tassone (2012, p. 123); Prata (2016, p. 44-45) and Antonelli (2022, p. 307).

¹⁸ On the concepts of (1) primary and (2) secondary presentations, see section 4, below.

¹⁹ Jürgen Schröder’s concept of *transitive consciousness* is somewhat similar to Gennaro’s concept of *unconscious awareness*. Schröder (2004, p. 219) characterizes transitive consciousness in terms of representations of objects and states of affairs, representations which can be *unconscious*.

²⁰ Brentano (1924, p. 180); Brentano (1995, p. 128).

²¹ Descartes explicitly claimed that “we cannot have any thought of which we are not conscious at the very moment when it is in us.” (*Fourth Set of Replies*, AT, VII, p.246; AT, IX, p.190; CSM, II, p.171).

²² See (*Third Meditation*, AT, VII, p. 44; AT, IX, p. 35; CSM, II, p. 30).

²³ See (*Second Set of Replies*, AT, VII, p. 160; AT, IX, p. 124; CSM, II, p. 113) – see also (*Principles of Philosophy, Part one*, §9, AT, VIII, p. 7; AT, IX, p. 28; CSM, I, p. 195).

On his turn, Brentano conceded that unconscious phenomena are conceivable. Therefore, it is more reasonable to assess his account of consciousness as conceiving it as a “*proper accident*” or “*proprium*” of mental phenomena. As Mauro Antonelli (2022, p. 308) puts it:

A *proprium* is a necessary but non-essential property of a species, deeper than an accident but not yet essential. As such, it does not appear in the real definition of a species, though it belongs to all its members and nothing else. In this sense, a *proprium* is an accident which follows or flows of necessity from the essence of a thing, but is not explanatorily basic and is not actually required for the continued existence of a thing. As such, it is nomologically necessary, but contingent in the ‘metaphysical’ sense.”

According to such an assessment, his attempt was to prove that consciousness is a property of all mental phenomena, although it is not an *essential* property. He aimed to prove it by refuting the arguments for the existence of unconscious phenomena, but this is a *risky* enterprise, as far as the existence of unconscious phenomena is coherently *conceivable*.

If Brentano’s replies to the four arguments fail – as I think they do – then the road is open for the acceptance of unconscious mental phenomena. They are not only conceivable, but also available to *indirect means* of research²⁴, so that we can infer their existence even though we do not have any experience of them.

In this regard, I agree with Simon Boag (2015, p. 241) when he claims that Brentano’s account allows a coherent conceptualization of unconscious mental processes, but I will not develop this issue in the present article²⁵. My focus here is on the difficulties of Brentano’s third argument against the unconscious.

3. BRENTANO’S ARGUMENT AGAINST THE EXISTENCE OF UNCONSCIOUS MENTAL PHENOMENA

²⁴ See Brentano (1924, pp. 147); Brentano (1995, pp. 105).

²⁵ In a work in progress, I approach this issue in more details than in the present article.

In the third section of the chapter about “Inner Consciousness”, in his book *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, Brentano summarizes the four kinds of arguments for the existence of unconscious mental phenomena – see Brentano (1924, pp. 147-48); Brentano (1995, pp. 105):

(1) “First, we could try to prove that certain facts given in experience demand the hypothesis of an unconscious mental phenomenon as their *cause*”²⁶.

(2) “Secondly, we could attempt to prove that a fact given in experience must bring about an unconscious mental phenomenon as its *effect*, even though none appears in consciousness”²⁷.

(3) “Thirdly, we could try to show that in the case of conscious mental phenomena *the strength of the concomitant consciousness is a function of their own strength*, and that, because of this relationship, in certain cases in which the latter is a positive magnitude, the former must lack a positive value”²⁸.

(4) “Finally, we could attempt to prove that the hypothesis that each mental phenomenon is an object of a mental phenomenon leads to an infinite complexity of mental states, which is both intrinsically impossible and contrary to experience”²⁹.

His own arguments against the existence of unconscious phenomena are direct replies to such arguments which he identifies in the literature. Through the chapter, Brentano presents what he sees as the requirements for the success of these arguments, and he argues that such requirements are *not satisfied*.

About the first argument – what he sees as the most frequently tried³⁰ – Brentano claims its success requires that (1.i) The facts which demand the hypothesis of an unconscious mental phenomenon as their cause must be

²⁶ “Thus, for example, if a person were suddenly able to recite poetry in a language she had never learned, the explanation might be that someone had recited the same poetry in her presence while she was in a coma.” (Krantz, 1990, p. 746).

²⁷ “The consideration here might be, for example, that the roar of the surf is an auditory experience made up of inaudible components – no droplet of water could be said to roar.” (Krantz, 1990, p. 746).

²⁸ “[I]t can be argued that the force of a mental phenomenon is related to the force of its cause in such a way that the phenomenon itself sometimes goes unnoticed. Just as certain things or events in the external world seem to go unnoticed by us, it may also be that our sensations of them are likewise so slight as to go unnoticed by us” (Krantz, 1990, p. 746).

²⁹ “Brentano’s response to this kind of argument is to agree that there is no such thing as an infinite regress, but to deny that the only way to rule out an infinite regress of conscious acts is to postulate an unconscious consciousness. (...) Thus, Brentano assimilates, e.g., the presentation of a sound to the presentation of the presentation of the sound, so that they form *one single mental act* [my emphasis]” (Krantz, 1990, p. 747).

³⁰ Brentano (1924, p. 148); Brentano (1995, pp. 105-6).

*sufficiently established*³¹; (1.ii) The hypothesis of an unconscious cause must *really explain* that fact³²; and (1.iii) That fact “cannot be understood, at least not without the greatest improbability, on the basis of *other hypotheses* [my emphasis].” (Brentano, 1924, p. 153; Brentano, 1995, p. 109).

About the second argument, Brentano claims its success requires that (2.i). We must exclude the possibility that the mental phenomenon in question actually did appear in consciousness, but was then *immediately forgotten*³³; (2.ii) it must be proved that the cause in this case – of (supposed) unconscious mental acts as effects – is *exactly of the same kind* of those causes in the cases of conscious mental acts³⁴; and (2.iii) it must be proved that the causes that prevented the accompanying consciousness did not prevent the very existence of mental phenomenon – as a (supposed) effect.³⁵

I think that Brentano’s remarks about these two first arguments are problematic, because he appeals to certain phenomena which are not subject of the contemporary scientific research³⁶ anymore and, moreover, he presupposes the necessity of a *homogeneity*³⁷ between (a) conscious and (b) unconscious phenomena, a homogeneity that I do not believe it to be plausible³⁸.

The fourth argument – as mentioned above – is based on the claim that the denial of the existence of unconscious phenomena leads to an *infinite regress*. The fact that Brentano aims to refute this regress led some people to see his argument as based on the notion of the infinite regress itself.³⁹ However, I agree with Mark Textor (2017, p. 55) when he claims that:

³¹ Brentano (1924, pp. 148-49); Brentano (1995, p. 106).

³² Brentano (1924, pp. 149-53); Brentano (1995, pp. 106-9).

³³ Brentano (1924, p. 163); Brentano (1995, p. 116).

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ For example, he mentions phenomena like *clairvoyance*, *presentiment*, *premonition* and *the accomplishments of geniuses* – see Brentano (1924, pp. 148-49); Brentano (1995, p. 106).

³⁷ Brentano (1924, p. 149); Brentano (1995, p. 107), as well as Brentano (1924, p. 163); Brentano (1995, p. 116).

³⁸ Given (1) the narrow limits of the focus of our attention and given (2) the enormous complexities of our mental states and processes, it is perfectly plausible to suppose that (3) our unconscious mental states and processes are far more complex than (and therefore very different of) the mental phenomena of which we can be conscious of.

³⁹ See Smith (1986, p. 149) and Kriegel (2003, p. 111).

The regress threat is an obstacle that needs to be removed to clear the way for accepting the view that every mental act is conscious; but it is not used by Brentano in an argument in favor of his positive view. Brentano's argument for his new view, I submit, is a development of Aristotle's duplication argument.

In his work *De Anima*, Aristotle examined the question of whether we perceive our own perceptions of objects by means of a further sense – the so called “inner sense” – or not. Furthermore, despite the fact that Aristotle sometimes accepts and other times refuses the inner sense, Brentano believes, in his *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*⁴⁰, that the Stagirite's actual position concerning the inner sense was *negative*.⁴¹

Based on Aristotle's remarks⁴², Brentano articulated his own argument for the claim that all mental phenomena include a presentation about themselves.⁴³ I would like to reconstruct Brentano's argument⁴⁴ as follows:

(P1) Sometimes, we are conscious of a mental phenomenon while it is present in us;

(P2) If we are conscious of a mental phenomenon, then either (a) we have *several presentations*, of different kinds, or (b) we have *only one presentation*;

(P3) If we determine the number of presentations *by the number of objects*, there is a multiplication of presentations, then the object has to be presented twice;

⁴⁰ Years before, in his book *Die Psychologie des Aristoteles* (1867), Brentano defended the inner sense view – see Textor (2017, pp. 52-54).

⁴¹ Brentano (1924, p. 185-86); Brentano (1995, p. 102). See also Textor (2017, p. 54).

⁴² For a detailed discussion of Aristotle's views about this issue, see Caston (2002).

⁴³ “In *Psychologie*, Brentano gave pride of place to Aristotelian arguments that speak against the inner sense theory.” (Textor, 2017, p. 54).

⁴⁴ Here I make an abridged quote of Brentano's own formulation of the argument: “There are undoubtedly occasions when we are conscious of a mental phenomenon while it is present in us; (...) in such a case, do we have several heterogeneous presentations or only a single one? (...) [If] we want to determine the number and the variety of presentations according to the number and variety of objects (...) [then] we would have several presentations (...) of different kinds (...). Yet this is not the case. Rather, inner experience seems to prove undeniably that the presentation of the sound is connected with the presentation of the presentation of the sound in such a peculiarly intimate way that its being at the same time contributes inwardly to the being of the other.” (Brentano, 1924, pp. 176-79; Brentano, 1995, p. 126-27).

(P4) Our inner experience shows that (i) the presentation of the object (primary presentation) contributes inwardly to the being of (ii) the presentation of the presentation of the object (secondary presentation);

(C1) The primary and the secondary presentation form *a single mental phenomenon*;

(C2) There is no infinite regress.

I believe this attempt to conciliate (A) the essentially conscious character of mental phenomena with (B) the absence of an infinite regress does *not* work. Besides the fact that Brentano concedes the logical possibility of primary without secondary presentations⁴⁵ – which seems to undermine the conclusion that both must belong to a single mental phenomenon⁴⁶ – this argument relies on the alleged *infallibility*⁴⁷ of our inner experience – which seems to be unsustainable⁴⁸.

But in the remainder of the present article, I will focus my attention on the argument based on an – alleged – functional relation between (a) intensity and (b) consciousness, in order to show its fundamental *weakness*, namely, the fact that Brentano aims to infer (I) the impossibility of *unconscious* mental phenomena from (II) the evidence of our *conscious* experiences.

4. THE ARGUMENT OF THE FUNCTIONAL RELATION BETWEEN (A) THE INTENSITY OF A MENTAL PHENOMENON AND (B) OUR CONSCIOUSNESS OF IT

⁴⁵ Brentano (1924, p. 180); Brentano (1995, p. 128).

⁴⁶ What the premise (P4) claims is that the primary presentation is a condition for the existence of the secondary presentation. However, if the primary presentation can exist independently of the secondary presentation – as Brentano concedes it – then it stands to reason that each presentation is a different mental phenomenon.

⁴⁷ Brentano (1924, p. 198-99); Brentano (1995, p. 140).

⁴⁸ For some interesting objections to the infallibility of our self-knowledge, see Armstrong (1968, p. 109-10) and Rosenthal (2018).

In the sixth section of the chapter about “Inner Consciousness”, Brentano formulates the argument of functional relation as follows:

[T]he existence of unconscious mental phenomena may also be regarded as certain, if one can prove that the consciousness of conscious mental acts is a function of their own strength, and if it is because of this relationship that in some cases where the latter is a positive magnitude the former would have to be without any positive value. (Brentano, 1924, pp. 167-68; Brentano, 1995, p. 119).

In other words, the idea is that some mental phenomena are *too weak* to be conscious. Exactly like certain things in our direct environment can go unnoticed by us, it can also be that some of our mental phenomena “are likewise so slight as to go unnoticed by us” (Krantz, 1990, p. 746).

These phenomena (supposedly) lack the intensity required to our being conscious of them. At first, Brentano claims that this proportional relation between (a) mental phenomena and (b) their accompanying consciousness was not proved by anyone⁴⁹. Furthermore, he recognizes that the inaccuracy of our psychological measurements can be seen as an insurmountable obstacle to such a proof⁵⁰.

Notwithstanding, Brentano affirms that a peculiar circumstance really seems to enable an exact and certain proof of the proportional relationship between those intensities. Namely, the circumstance that (i) the intensity of the act of presentation is – according to him – always *equal* to the (ii) intensity with which the presented object appears to us. In other words: the circumstance that (i) the intensity of a presentation and (ii) the intensity of the *phenomenon* which is the content of this presentation are always *the same*⁵¹.

According to him, this equality of intensities was widely taken as self-evident and, almost without exception, explicitly or implicitly accepted by psychologists and physiologists. From the (alleged) fact that the intensity

⁴⁹ “No one, however, will assert that Benecke or anyone else has offered a passably adequate proof for the existence of a dependent proportional relation between the two intensities.” (Brentano, 1924, pp. 168; Brentano, 1995, pp. 120).

⁵⁰ “We may also assume that the inaccuracy of our psychological measurements, which we spoke of during our investigation of psychological method, creates insurmountable obstacles to the exact determination of such a functional relation.” (Brentano, 1924, pp. 168; Brentano, 1995, pp. 120).

⁵¹ Brentano (1924, pp. 169); Brentano (1995, p. 120).

of the act of presentation is always equal to the intensity of the phenomenon, Brentano concludes that the same must be valid in the case of the relation between (1) a *primary* and (2) a *secondary* presentation, that is, the relation between (1) the presentation of an object and (2) the presentation of this presentation, which makes it conscious⁵².

In a decisive passage of his reply to the argument of an infinite regress, Brentano claims: “We can say that the sound is the *primary object* of the act of hearing, and that the act of hearing itself is the *secondary object*. Temporally they both occur at the same time, but in the nature of the case, the sound is prior.” (Brentano, 1924, p. 180; Brentano, 1995, p. 128, Brentano’s emphasis).

It seems perfectly reasonable to adapt this terminology and call the presentation of the sound – that is, the hearing – (1) a *primary presentation* – because it is immediately directed to an object – and call the presentation of this first presentation (2) a *secondary presentation* – because it presents the hearing just *incidentally*.

In other words, Brentano’s claim is that “the intensity of the presentation of a presentation must also be equal to the intensity with which this latter presentation manifests itself [*erscheint*]⁵³”. (Brentano, 1924, p. 169; Brentano, 1995, p. 120). He defends that this claim is confirmed by our *inner perception* of our own mental phenomena, a perception he sees as *infallible*⁵⁴.

In the same way we cannot confuse seeing and hearing, we cannot confuse a strong auditory sensation with a faint one. Therefore, when we have the experience of some mental phenomenon – which is always the presentation of some object – we can conclude that “the intensity of the presentation of every *conscious* [my emphasis] presentation is equal to the intensity of that presentation.” (Brentano, 1924, p. 169; Brentano, 1995, p. 121).

According to him, if we accept the truth of this claim, then we have a strong reason to *refuse* the existence of any unconscious mental phenom-

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ The word “*Erscheinung*” – derived from the verb “*erscheinen*” (to appear) – is a German synonym for “*Phänomen*” (phenomenon).

⁵⁴ See footnote 45 above.

ena, “for wherever there exists a mental act of greater or lesser intensity, it is necessary to attribute an equal intensity to the presentation which accompanies it and of which this act is the object.” (Brentano, 1924, p. 170; Brentano, 1995, p. 121).

His attempt is to infer the existence of the functional relation – between (a) consciousness and (b) the intensity of mental phenomena – from our *conscious* experiences⁵⁵. In other words, from the fact that we (allegedly) immediately perceive the presence of a functional relation in our *conscious* mental phenomena, we should conclude that (i) the intensity of their consciousness⁵⁶ always stand in correlation with (ii) the intensity of these phenomena themselves. Accordingly, from the fact that all mental phenomena must have some intensity, we should conclude that all of them are accompanied by some consciousness of a proportional intensity, so that there not can be unconscious mental phenomena.

In my view, Brentano’s argument of the functional relation can be reconstructed as follows:

(P1’) In our *conscious experiences*, we internally perceive that the intensity of secondary presentations is a function of the intensity of mental phenomena;

(P2’) All mental phenomena must have some intensity;

(C1’) All mental phenomena must have a secondary presentation directed to them;

(C2’) All mental phenomena are conscious phenomena.

However, I do not believe that Brentano’s argument for these conclusions is successful. Firstly, the inference from (A) the functional relation⁵⁷

⁵⁵ “[T]he intensity of the presentation of every conscious presentation [*jeder bewussten Vorstellung*] is equal to the intensity of that presentation.” (Brentano, 1924, p. 169; Brentano, 1995, p. 121). “We have already discussed the question of the existence of a functional relation between the intensity of conscious mental phenomena [*bewussten psychischen Erscheinungen*] and the intensity of the accompanying presentations directed toward them.” (Brentano, 1924, p. 188; Brentano, 1995, p. 133).

⁵⁶ Here I mean consciousness as a *property* of mental phenomena. This is what David Rosenthal (1997, p. 729) calls “state consciousness”.

⁵⁷ That is, the functional relation between (i) the intensity of state consciousness and (ii) the intensity of the mental state itself.

in the case of *conscious* phenomena to (B) the impossibility of unconscious phenomena is *uncertain*. How could we conclude that all mental phenomena must be accompanied by secondary presentations from the consideration of already *conscious* phenomena?

Our conscious experiences give us all direct knowledge we can have about our mental phenomena. Nevertheless, given the limitations of our capacities for knowledge, it is not recommendable to rely so heavily on them in our attempts to establish the real nature of entities. As David Rosenthal (1986, p. 330) puts it: “Consciousness seems central to mentality only because it is so basic to how we know our own mental states. But how we know about things is often an unreliable guide to their nature.” Reminding this limitation of our knowledge is especially important in the case of our mental phenomena, because we have so much evidence of their unconscious existence (see section 5, below).

Furthermore, Brentano’s concession about the *conceivability*⁵⁸ of unconscious presentations opens the logical possibility that some mental phenomena do exist *without* any presentation accompanying them.

In his main argument against the unconscious, namely his reply to the argument of an infinite regress, Brentano claims that our inner experience shows undeniably that “the presentation of the sound is connected with the presentation of the presentation of the sound in such a peculiarly intimate way [that its being at the same time contributes inwardly to the being of the other]⁵⁹.” (Brentano, 1924, pp. 176-79; Brentano, 1995, p. 126-27).

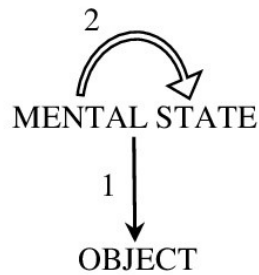
However, all that our inner experience (allegedly) shows is that the *secondary* presentation is ontologically dependent on the primary one. Since Brentano concedes that the existence of a *primary* presentation without a secondary one is not inconceivable – at least *a priori* – he is clearly committed with the logical possibility of unconscious presentations.

Let us represent⁶⁰ Brentano’s account of state consciousness – the property of mental states to be *conscious* states – as follows:

⁵⁸ “A presentation of the sound without a presentation of the act of hearing would not be inconceivable, at least *a priori*” (Brentano, 1924, p. 180; Brentano, 1995, p. 128).

⁵⁹ Mark Textor’s translation – see Textor (2006, p. 118).

⁶⁰ Similar pictures were proposed by Kriegel (2002, p. 525) and Jacquette (2004, p. 101).



Brentano conceives mental states as the peculiar interweaving (*eigentümliche Verwebung*)⁶¹, or fusion (*eigentümliche Verschmelzung*)⁶², of inner presentations and their objects. Given that the objects of inner presentations are themselves *presentations* of objects⁶³, we can reasonably reformulate his conception in terms of the fusion of (1) *primary* and (2) *secondary* presentations.

The central claim of his account of consciousness is that the presentation of the primary object and the (secondary) presentation of this first presentation “form a single mental phenomenon [*ein einziges psychisches Phänomen*]” (Brentano, 1924, p. 179; Brentano, 1995, p. 127).

This fusion of presentations is seen by him as the real justification for the existence of a functional relation between (a) the intensity of our mental phenomena and (b) our consciousness of them. In his own words:

If we see a color and have a presentation of our act of seeing, the color which we see is also present in the presentation of this act. This color is the content of the presentation of the act of seeing, but it also belongs to the content of the seeing. (...) The color, therefore, even though it is present to the mind both in the act of seeing and in the presentation of the seeing, is still presented only once. It is self-evident, therefore, that there can be no question of a difference of intensity. This explains very simply the origin of the common belief, which now appears fully justified, that the act of seeing and the presentation of this act do not differ from each other in intensity (Brentano, 1924, pp. 188-89; Brentano, 1995, p. 134).

In Brentano’s view, the fact that both presentations form a single mental phenomenon explains why (i) the intensity of our consciousness of a

⁶¹ See Brentano (1924, p. 179); Brentano (1995, p. 127).

⁶² See Brentano (1924, p. 183); Brentano (1995, p. 130).

⁶³ See Brentano (1924, p. 180); Brentano (1995, p. 128).

given mental phenomenon is always proportional to (ii) the intensity of this phenomenon itself. From such functional relation, he intends to conclude that all mental phenomena which merely exist, as far as they must have some intensity, must also be accompanied by some degree of consciousness.

However, what the inner experience (allegedly) shows is that the primary presentation “contributes inwardly to the being of the⁶⁴” secondary presentation. In other words, the primary presentation is (allegedly) shown by our inner experience as an ontological condition for the being of the secondary presentation. However, on the other hand, it is *a priori* conceivable that the primary presentation exists without a secondary presentation⁶⁵.

Referring to the figure above, we can affirm that while (2) needs (1) in order to exist, (1) can perfectly exist without (2). Therefore, it is always possible that, regardless of our knowledge, some mental phenomena do exist without being accompanied by any secondary presentation. The merely *epistemological* character of the third argument – as far as this argument is based on what we know about our mental phenomena in conscious experience – does not allow us to draw *ontological* conclusions, that is, conclusions about the nature of our mental phenomena.

CONCLUSION

In his denial of the existence of unconscious mental phenomena, Brentano was in syntony with the prevailing view through the history of philosophy⁶⁶, and most of the thinkers in the nineteenth century⁶⁷. However, he himself makes some significant concessions to the view he is opposing.

Brentano concedes not only that there is a coherent sense of “unconscious consciousness”⁶⁸, but also concedes that – despite their *inaccessibility* – (supposed) unconscious phenomena could be studied by *indirect means*⁶⁹.

⁶⁴ See Brentano (1924, pp. 179); Brentano (1995, p. 127).

⁶⁵ See Brentano (1924, p. 180); Brentano (1995, p. 128).

⁶⁶ Brentano (1924, p. 144); Brentano (1995, p. 103). Bargh and Morsella (2008, p. 73); Rosenthal (2009, p. 158).

⁶⁷ Smith (1999, p. 48).

⁶⁸ See Brentano (1924, p. 143); Brentano (1995, pp. 102-3).

⁶⁹ See Brentano (1924, pp. 147); Brentano (1995, pp. 105).

However, I think his main concession to the defenders of the unconscious is his acceptance that unconscious presentations are *not inconceivable*⁷⁰.

In my point of view, all these concessions combined are simply *fatal* for Brentano's Cartesian view of consciousness as *constitutive* of mental phenomena⁷¹. To recognize the coherence of the concept of unconscious mental phenomena exposes Brentano's own views to decisive objections.

In fact, I believe these concessions are, in principle, completely *correct*, given the huge amount of evidence for the existence of unconscious mental phenomena founded by contemporary research. As John Bargh (2005, p. 37-38) puts it: "recent experimental evidence points to a deep and fundamental dissociation between conscious awareness and the mental processes responsible for one's behavior; many of the wellsprings of behavior appear to be opaque to conscious access." The evidence for this view arose from several mutually independent research fields, such as *social psychology*, *cognitive psychology*, and *neuropsychology*.

In our times, a view like Brentano's does not seem very likely, since there is so much evidence for the opposing view that mental phenomena do exist unconsciously, not only in the case of *sensorial*, but also in the case of *intentional* phenomena.

For instance, the existence of (a) *intermittent sensations*⁷², (b) *peripheral vision*, (c) *subliminal perception*, and even dissociative phenomena like (d) *blindsight*⁷³, strongly suggest that some sensations do exist unconsciously, striped of any "what it is like"⁷⁴ features.

Moreover, some circumstances give us strong reasons to conclude that some intentional states are, in fact, unconscious. For example, phenomena like (a') *masked priming*⁷⁵ and (b') *unconscious reasoning*⁷⁶ suggest that certain presentations and the corresponding mental processes do exist unconsciously.

⁷⁰ See Brentano (1924, pp. 180); Brentano (1995, pp. 128).

⁷¹ See Mauro's Antonelli's (2022, p. 308) remarks about the concept of *proprium* in the section 2, above.

⁷² See Rosenthal (1997, p. 733).

⁷³ See Rosenthal (1993, p. 357).

⁷⁴ See Nagel (1974, p. 436).

⁷⁵ See Maier et. al. (2004).

⁷⁶ See Dijksterhuis (2004).

The problem is that Brentano remains in the grips of the traditional *Cartesian* view of consciousness as constitutive for the mind⁷⁷. His allegiance to this traditional view prevents him to develop the consequences of the fundamental reasonability of the acceptance of unconscious mental phenomena, a reasonability that he himself acknowledges.

Recebido em 21/04/2023

Aprovado em 05/05/2023

REFERÊNCIAS

ADAM, Ch.; Tannery, P. (Eds.). *Ouvres de Descartes – Meditationes de prima philosophia*. Paris: Vrin, 1996. (Vol. VII).

ADAM, Ch.; Tannery, P. (Eds.). *Ouvres de Descartes – Principia philosophiae*. Paris: Vrin, 1996. (Vol. VIII).

ADAM, Ch.; Tannery, P. (Eds.). *Ouvres de Descartes – Méditations et principes (traduction française)*. Paris: Vrin, 1996. (Vol. IX).

ANTONELLI, M. “Consciousness and Intentionality in Franz Brentano”. *Acta Analytica*, Vol. 37, pp. 301-22, 2022.

ARMSTRONG, A. *A Materialist Theory of Mind*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968.

BARGH, J. A. “Bypassing the Will: Toward Demystifying the Nonconscious Control of Social Behavior” In: *The New Unconscious*, pp. 37-58, 2005.

BARGH, J. A.; Morsella, E. “The Unconscious Mind”. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, Vol. 3, N° 1, pp. 73-79, 2008.

BOAG, S. “In defense of unconscious mentality”. In: Boag, S.; Brakel, L. A. W.; Talvitie, V. (Eds.). *Psychoanalysis and Philosophy of Mind: Unconscious Mentality in the Twenty-First Century*. London: Karnac Books, pp. 239-65, 2015.

BRENTANO, F. *Die Psychologie des Aristoteles: Insbesondere seine Lehre vom Nous Poetikos*. Mainz: Verlag von Franz Kirchheim, 1867.

⁷⁷ See in the section 2, above, the explanation of the difference between Brentano and Descartes

BRENTANO, F. *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt*. Zweite Ausgabe. Leipzig: Felix Meiner, Vol. I, 1924.

BRENTANO, F. *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1995.

CASTON, V. "Aristotle on Consciousness". *Mind*, Vol. 111, N° 444, pp. 751-815, 2002.

COTTINGHAM, J; Stoothof, R; e Murdoch, D. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Vol. I, 1984.

COTTINGHAM, J; Stoothof, R; e Murdoch, D. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Vol. II, 1984.

DIJKSTERHUIS, A. "Think Different: The Merits of Unconscious Thought in Preference Development and Decision Making". *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 87, N° 5, 586–598, 2004.

GENNARO, R. *Consciousness and Selfconsciousness: A Defense of the Higher Order Thought Theory of Consciousness*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing, 1996.

HOSSACK, K. "Self-knowledge and consciousness." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Vol. 102, N° 2, pp. 163–81, 2002.

JACQUETTE, D. "Brentano's concept of intentionality". In: Jacquette, D. (Ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to Brentano*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 98-130, 2004.

KRANZ, S. "Brentano on 'Unconscious Consciousness'." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 50, N° 4 (Jun.), pp. 745-53, 1990.

KRIEGEL, U. "Consciousness, Permanent Self-Awareness, and Higher Order Monitoring". *Dialogue*, 41, pp. 517-40, 2002.

KRIEGEL, U. "Consciousness as Intransitive Self-Consciousness: Two Views and an Argument". *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 33, No. 1, pp. 103-132, Mar., 2003.

KRIEGEL, U. *Brentano's Philosophical System: Mind, Being, Value*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

MAIER, M. A.; Bernierb, A.; Pekrun, R.; Zimmermann, P.; Grossmann, K. E. "Attachment working models as unconscious structures: An experimental test". *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, Vol. 28, N° 2, pp. 180-89, 2004.

NAGEL, T. "What is it like to be a Bat?" *Philosophical Review*, Vol. 4, N° 83, pp. 435-50, 1974.

PRATA, T. A. “As perspectivas de Brentano e Sartre sobre a auto-referencialidade da consciência”. *Rapsódia*, 10, pp. 42-62, 2016.

ROSENTHAL, D. “Two Concepts of Consciousness”. In: *Philosophical Studies* 49, pp. 329-59, 1986.

ROSENTHAL, D. “State Consciousness and Transitive Consciousness”. In: *Consciousness and Cognition*, 2, pp. 355-63, 1993.

ROSENTHAL, D. “A Theory of Consciousness”. In: Block, N.; Flanagan, O.; Güzeldere, G. (Eds.). *The Nature of Consciousness: Philosophical Debates*. Cambridge (Massachusetts): MIT Press, pp. 729-753, 1997.

ROSENTHAL, D. “Explaining Consciousness”. In: Chalmers, D. (Ed.). *Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 406-21, 2002.

ROSENTHAL, D. “Concepts and Definitions of Consciousness”. Banks, W. (Ed.). *Encyclopedia of Consciousness*. Oxford (UK); San Diego (USA): Elsevier, pp. 157-69, 2009.

ROSENTHAL, D. “Misrepresentation and Mental Appearance”. *Transformação*, Vol. 41, pp. 49-74, 2018.

SARTRE, J.-P. *L'être et le néant: essai d'ontologie phénoménologique*. Paris: Gallimard, 1943.

SARTRE, J.-P. *Being and Nothingness. An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*. New York: Philosophical Library, 1956.

SCHRÖDER, J. *Einführung in die Philosophie des Geistes*. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2004.

SMITH, D. W. “The Structure of (Self-)Consciousness”. *Topoi*, Vol. 2, pp. 149-156, 1986.

SMITH, D. L. *Freud's Philosophy of the Unconscious*. Dordrecht: Springer Science+Business Media, 1999.

TASSONE, B. G. *From Psychology to Phenomenology: Franz Brentano's Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint and Contemporary Philosophy of Mind*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012.

TEXTOR, M. “Brentano (and some Neo-Brentanians) on Inner Consciousness”. *Dialectica*, Vol. 60, pp. 411-432, 2006.

TEXTOR, M. “Brentano on consciousness”. In: Kriegel, U. (Ed.). *The Routledge Handbook of Franz Brentano and the Brentano School*. New York, London: Routledge, pp. 49-60, 2017.

THOMASSON, A.L. “After Brentano: A one-level theory of consciousness”. *European Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 8, N° 2, pp. 190–209, 2000.

ZAHAVI, D. “Back to Brentano?”. *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, Vol. 11, N° 10-11, pp. 66-87, 2004.

ZAHAVI, D. “Two Takes on a one-Level Account of Consciousness”. *Psyche*, Vol. 12, N° 2, (May), 2006.



Esta obra está licenciada com uma Licença
[Creative Commons Atribuição 4.0 Internacional](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).