The Soul and Its Parts:

A Study in Aristotle and Brentano

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While much has been written about the theory of intentionality that is sketched by Brentano in his *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* of 1874, comparatively little effort has been invested in Brentano's other works, in spite of the fact that the *Psychology* itself reveals new and interesting perspectives when viewed within the wider corpus of Brentano's writings. In what follows I shall attempt to show that interpretations standardly imposed upon Brentano's text mask the peculiar nature of his thinking at the time of the *Psychology*, and that the key to a more correct interpretation can be derived from an examination of Brentano's earlier attempts to come to grips with matters of psychology.

The Psychology of Aristotle (1867)[1]

The overarching context of all Brentano's writings is the psychology of Aristotle and the ontology of material and immaterial substance that goes together therewith. Our present remarks will accordingly consist in an account of Aristotle, and more specifically of Aristotle's conception of the soul, as seen through Brentano's eyes. Since we are concerned above all with the question as to how Aristotle was understood by Brentano, we shall need to consider neither the correctness of Brentano's interpretation nor the coherence of the underlying ideas.

The soul is, as Aristotle says, 'in a way all existing things; for existing things are either sensible or thinkable, and knowledge is in a way what is knowable, and sensation is in a way what is sensible'. (431 b 21) *Materia prima* can become everything material, and does not exist except as something material. In an analogous way, the soul can become everything sensible and intelligible, and does not exist except insofar as it receives the form of something sensible and intelligible. In each case what gets

1. All references to Aristotle in what follows are to *De anima* unless otherwise indicated.

added is of a formal nature, and it is the fixed stock of forms or species which informs both the realm of thinking and that of extended (material, corporeal) substance. For Aristotle, as for Brentano, these two realms are, as it were, attuned each to the other.

Forms or universals exist, accordingly, in two different ways: within the soul, and within corporeal substance. Within the former they are actual whenever the soul cognises a species. Within the latter they become actual whenever a thing of a given species comes into existence. Otherwise they are potential only. Outside the soul, moreover, actualised forms are always and inextricably bound up with matter.[2]

Aristotle, one could say, conceived the link between mind and corporeal substance further as a sort of spiritual nourishment. The sensory and intelligible parts of the soul *take in* sensory and intelligible forms, in something like the way in which the body, through the agency of the vegetative soul, takes in matter in the form of food. The basic psychic processes within, whether sensory or intellectual, result in an *extraction or abstraction of forms* from the substances without. 'By a "sense",' Aristotle writes, 'is meant what has the power of receiving into itself the sensible forms of things without the matter.' (424 a 18) When the soul is affected by what is corporeal, then it is as if there occurs a transfer of form, so that agent and patient become to this extent alike.[3] Two senses of affecting must however be distinguished. On the one hand there is affecting in the strict or proper sense, which involves a real alteration of the affected thing, as when a piece of wax takes on the impress of a seal. On the other hand there is affecting in an extended or improper sense, which involves no real action on the side of the agent and no real alteration on the side of the patient, but merely an actualisation in the latter of something that is present there already in potency. Sensing and thinking are cases of affecting in this second, improper sense.

The piece of wax takes on the form of the seal; but this occurs in a way that is largely indifferent to the particular metallic constitution of the latter. Similarly, Aristotle says, 'the sense is affected by what is coloured or flavoured or sounding, but it is indifferent as to what in each case the substance is'. (424 a 23) The wax, however, acquires a form that is merely *like* the form of the seal. The sense, in contrast,

2. Soul (potential) plus forms (actual) yield the microcosm; matter (potential) plus forms (actual) yield the macrocosm. Cf. George 1978, p. 254. Brentano was to the end of his life impressed by Aristotle's doctrine here. (See e.g. 1933, p. 158, Eng. pp. 119f.; 1976, Part Two, V.)

3. Cf. the discussion of cognition as 'similarising' in my "Brentano and Marty" (forthcoming).

takes in the very same form as is present in the object sensed. Yet sensing red is different from being red, just as feeling warmth is different from having warmth in oneself 'materially' or 'physically'. When I *am* warm, then I am changed, affected in the proper sense, by the thing that warms me. When I *feel* warmth, however – when, in the scholastic terminology, I have warmth in myself not materially but *objectively* or *as an object* – then I am affected only in an extended sense. As Brentano himself puts it:

> It is not insofar as we become cold that we sense what is cold; otherwise plants and inorganic bodies would sense; rather it is only insofar as what is cold exists within us objectively, i.e. as known, that it is sensed, that is, insofar as we take coldness in, without ourselves being its physical subject. (Ps.d.A., p. 80, Eng. pp. 54f.; cf. 425 b 20)

This affecting in the improper sense involves, we said, a mere actualisation of what is already present in potency. The reference to 'potency', here, reflects an attempt on Aristotle's part to distance himself from Plato's view that the soul has within itself the ideas themselves already at birth. For Aristotle, in contrast, the soul has (or is) merely the power (faculty, *Vermögen*) of sensing and thinking. It is, so to speak, only the *possibility* of the ideas. The intellectual soul is in a sense potentially whatever is thinkable. When it is not thinking, it is at best merely the *power* or *capacity* to take on certain forms.[4]

Everything in external reality, as Aristotle conceives it, both form and matter, both what is sensible (sensible forms) and what is thinkable (intelligible forms), belongs to 'sensible spatial magnitudes': 'the objects of thought are in the sensible forms, viz. both the abstract objects and all the states and affections of sensible things.' (432 a 4)

The intelligible forms, insofar as they exist outside the soul, are, that is to say, locked away inside sensible matter. This implies, for Aristotle, that nothing can be thought or learned (no form can be actualised within the soul) except through the assistance of sense. But if all basic psychic processes are, as we claimed, processes that result in an extraction (or abstraction) of forms, then it follows that the intellect is dependent upon some analogue of matter from out of which its intelligible forms can be extracted. It is our senses which provide this analogue of matter, and thinking is in this sense dependent on sensing. Sensing leaves traces in the sense organs, traces which constitute a new sort of power or

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4. Otherwise, Aristotle says, it has no nature of its own: 'that in the soul which is called mind (by mind I mean that whereby the soul thinks and judges) is, before it thinks, not actually any real thing.' (429 a 22)

disposition and which are contrasted with the 'act' or 'making actual' of sensing and thinking in being not episodic but enduring.

Such traces, now, are able to become once more actualised. They can be stimulated through other sensory presentations in such a way that the earlier sensible form returns to sense as an 'image' or 'phantasm'. Whatever appears in imagination was earlier, if in different connections, taken in through sense perception.

Thinking, now, relates to such images or phantasms as sensing relates to the external sensible things:

> Sense receives its images, in that it turns to the external objects; the intellect receives its ideas by gazing, as it were, upon images; and just as seeing and hearing are no longer possible when the seen or heard object disappears ..., so thinking is no longer possible when the appropriate images are no longer present in the senses. As sensation is a kind of passion or being affected by what is sensory, so thinking is a kind of passion or being affected by what is intelligible, and what is intelligible is ..., as Aristotle says, *in* the sensory presentations.[5]

It is in terms of this idea that knowledge itself may come to be understood as a lasting endowment of the soul. Just as actual sensing leaves traces which make possible the actual having of images, so actual thinking leaves traces (what we call 'knowledge' or 'learning'), which become actualised in subsequent active thinking.

The fact that, as Aristotle puts it, 'there is nothing outside and separate in existence from sensible spatial magnitudes' (432 a 3) has far-reaching ontological consequences. The world, we might say, is made up of realia and non-realia: the proper objects of sensing and thinking, respectively. These do not, however, as on Plato's view, constitute two distinct realms of objects. Non-realia (forms or universals) exist only as immanent to realia, exist only *in* something else, either in what is mental or in what is material. Normally, as we have seen, non-realia exist only as bound up with matter and their existence *as* non-realia is then potential only. Sometimes however non-realia exist as non-realia actually, namely in the

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5. Ps.d.A., p. 146, Eng. p. 96.

mind. For thinking *is* the actualisation of forms as such. And when the mind is actively thinking, then it *is* the universals which it thinks.

Actualisation is in a certain sense a separation. Again, however, it is not a real separation, but a separation in an improper or extended sense: ‘when thinking the objects of mathematics, the mind thinks as separate elements which do not in fact exist in separation.’ (431 b 17) As existing in the thing, forms or universals are tied to matter in what we might conceive as a sort of mutual pervasion. They may, however, exist also as freed or separated, and this either in a proper or in an improper sense. As actualised in sensation, they are separated only in an improper sense from their material complements and thus are still individuated thereby. The resultant actualised universals (the warmth of this fire, the redness of this rose) are still founded on their respective matters, are still experienced as *in* the respective things. As actualised in thought, on the other hand, universals are freed from their material complements in a double sense: they are separated *and* independent. Where sensation apprehends what is external and individual, knowledge apprehends free universals, and the latter exist entirely within the orbit of the soul. ‘That is why a man can exercise his knowledge when he wishes, but his sensation does not depend upon himself – a sensible object must be there.’ (417 b 24)

But how, more precisely, are we to understand this talk of ‘free’ and ‘bound’ universals? When I see a red object, then I see something that is composed of matter and form. What I take in is the form alone, but it is in fact still connected to (and thus individuated by) its matter. What I know intellectually, on the other hand, is not the object, nor what is individuated by the object, but the form itself, for example the redness. One must not, however, conclude that what is taken in by sense, and what is taken in by the intellect, relate to each other as numerically different objects. The view of Aristotle and Brentano is that they differ not as one thing from another thing, but as one thing from itself when it stands or behaves or is connected or situated differently (for example when a stick is pulled straight after having been bent).

> Plato held that we know flesh and the being of flesh in that we take into ourselves two different things, indeed two things which are separated from each other in their substances, for the idea is for him a thing for itself and subsists in separation from what is material. (Ps.d.A., p. 133, Eng. p. 86)

For Aristotle, in contrast, the flesh which is grasped by the senses, and the being of this flesh, which is grasped by the intellect, are not merely one insofar as they are both in one body; they are essentially identical. The same thing is taken up in the sensory and in the intellective soul, but *in a different condition*: in the one case it is still tied to its matter; in the other case it is abstract, a free universal. But the universal that is here free is still the same universal as is there bound. When the universal *flesh* is taken up into the intellect, it is 'the same sensory-corporeal flesh which is in the senses, but the condition is different in which it is in the one or in the other faculty.' (Ps.d.A., p. 134, Eng. p. 87)

The job of the scientist is, after all, to get to know the crystals and plants and other bodies which he finds here on Earth. Thus, 'if the intellect knows the being of flesh, then it is not something other and immaterial that is taken into him, but the very same object that is in the senses; only, in the intellect it is abstract, in sense concrete with individual matter.' (Ps.d.A., p. 135, Eng. p. 88) A line which was bent is, after having been made straight,

> still the line which it was, only it is other, it has become simpler; and so the corporeal object that was in the senses is also in the intellect still one and the same, only its condition is different. Like the line, it has become simpler, its individual differences have been evened out. (Ps.d.A., p. 135, Eng. p. 88)

Even in the case of mathematical concepts, the intellect does not grasp something more immaterial than what is grasped by sense: it does not take into itself something incorporeal or non-sensory. For the very same thing that is in the intellect is also in the senses, merely, as Brentano puts it*, in anderer und anderer Weise sich verhaltend*.

Forms or concepts, then, exist originally as parts (in an extended sense) of external objects. The mathematical concept of a curve is already in my sensory presentation of a snub-nosed thing. Mathematical concepts do not exist outside the mind in separation from sensory bodies. They are in them, as also are the physical concepts. The intellect therefore knows, when it grasps mathematical concepts, not something that is separate from sensible matter: 'it only knows *in a separated way* something not separated therefrom.' (Ps.d.A., p. 150, Eng. p. 98) The corporeal thing itself remains something material when it is taken up into the intellect; but it is in the intellect in an immaterial way. Outside the intellect a thing is individually determined; for after all something general without its individual difference cannot

exist. But in the intellect it has lost its individual determinateness. The broken line has been pulled straight, ‘and in this state, alien to its original state, what is bodily can now also be in the intellect.’ (Ps.d.A., p. 138, Eng. p. 90) But even in the intellect what is bodily retains forms pertaining to what is material; only such things as are free of matter in and of themselves could be free of materiality in the intellect.

Only one sort of essence is, as far as Aristotle is concerned, of itself free of materiality in this sense and therefore also supersensory: the essence *mind* or *intellect*. Of this essence, and of the concepts abstracted therefrom, we can have knowledge other than via sensory images.[6] The intellect is graspable just as it is; echoing Averroes, we can say that its last individuating difference is also its last specific difference. The general concept we have of our mind or intellect is also an individual consciousness of self. The essence *mind* or *intellect*, then, is a *heccaeitas*, a form that is both intelligible and individuating. And something similar presumably holds of the essence *God*.

Mind or intellect is, as Brentano puts it, ‘completely and with the highest intelligibility completely intelligible’. (Ps.d.A., p. 136, Eng. p. 90) Psychology, accordingly, enjoys a peculiarly noble status within the system of the sciences. Corporeal things, in contrast,

> allow only an indefinite general knowledge and are not knowable equally in all their determinations. We know them the more certainly and the more clearly and thus have them in us the more intelligibly, the more they have become alienated through abstraction from their natural mode of existence. This is why mathematics is more intelligible than physics, and why metaphysics is more intelligible than mathematics; also the more general physical concept is more intelligible than the more special, the genus more than the species, and the higher genus more than the lower. (Ps.d.A., p. 136, Eng. p. 90)

Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint (1874)

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6. Brentano initially goes along with Aristotle here, and in his later works he even generalises Aristotle’s view, for example by admitting as non-sensible substances also topoids of four and more dimensions. However he insists at the same time that we can have no positive knowledge of such topoids (just as, for the later Brentano, we can have no positive knowledge of the soul).

Sensing and thinking, for a (Brentanian sort of) Aristotelian, is accordingly a form of taking in. And it will by now, I hope, be clear how one has properly to interpret Brentano's thesis in *the Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* to the effect that 'Every mental phenomenon is characterized by what the Scholastics of the Middle Ages called the intentional (or mental) inexistence of an object'. (P.E.S., p. 124, Eng. p. 88) As Brentano himself puts it in the very next sentence: 'Every mental phenomenon includes something as object within itself'. This thesis is, I suggest, to be taken literally – against the grain of a seemingly unshakable tendency to twist Brentano's words at this point, a tendency manifested most recently in Dummett's book on the *Origins of Analytic Philosophy*. Brentano's 'most familiar positive thesis', Dummett tells us – the thesis that acts of consciousness are characterised by their intentionality – consists in the claim that all such acts are 'directed towards external objects'. Indeed, the object of a mental act is, for Brentano, 'external in the full sense of being part of the objective world independent of the subject, rather than a constituent of his consciousness.' (Dummett, p. 39) This interpretation, apart from making of Brentano's thesis something self-evidently false, is also quite simply incompatible with Brentano's text. Indeed one will find no coherent interpretation of the principle of intentionality so long as one remains within the framework of our usual, commonsensical notions of both the mind and its objects. This is not only because Brentano's principle operates with quite special, Aristotelian notions. It is also, I suggest, because Brentano's very formulation of the principle was a response to a hidden incoherence in these commonsensical notions.

Brentano in fact appends a footnote to the intentionality passage in the *Psychology* to the effect that

> Aristotle himself spoke of this mental in-existence. In his books on the soul he says that the sensed object, as such, is in the sensing subject; that the sense contains the sensed object without its matter; that the object which is thought is in the thinking intellect.[7]

And he goes on to remark that 'St. Augustine in his doctrine of the *Verbum mentis* and of its inner origin touches upon the same fact.'

7. P.E.S., p. 124n, Eng. p. 88n.

In this light it is clear that Rolf George has hit the nail on the head when he points out that it is in the context of Brentano's discussion of two ways of *taking in* (corresponding to the two senses of 'being affected') in the *Psychology of Aristotle* that

> the notion of intentional inexistence ... occurs for the first time in Brentano's writing. It is not yet used as a criterion for psychical phenomena, nor does he emphasize or perhaps even notice that one can here speak of an intentional *relation*. He prefers to follow Aristotle's terminology, saying that the intellect (or the organ of sense) *is* what it thinks (or senses). The relational mode of expression is eschewed in favour of qualified predication: 'is-physically', 'is-objectively'. (George 1978, pp. 252f.)

It is not only classical sources which spark Brentano's immanentistic views however. Brentano had been impressed also by Comte's critique of the metaphysics of transcendent substance and had sought, like Comte, a science of the 'phenomena' or '*Erscheinungen*'. [8] He had been impressed also by corpuscular theories of the physical world and of sensation, theories which imply that what is in the act of sensation as object bears no similarity to the putative outer world by which, as we commonsensically suppose, sensation is caused. Brentano wanted to give a *true* description of what is involved in mental directedness, not a merely commonsensical one (which for him would be simply one that is based on a certain sort of prejudice). Colours and so on do not exist in the way we commonsensically suppose. They are something like secondary qualities as described by Locke, in the sense that they are contributed by the mind and are such that their being is exhausted by their being in the mind. From this it follows of necessity that we can have no presentation of the world as it really is in the sense of a world transcendent to the mind. Certainly we may assume that there are physical objects which cause our sensations. But as Philipse has rightly pointed out:

> the idea of their existence is doomed forever to be a hypothesis for us (or a metaphysical assumption, as Brentano says), for physical objects can never be the 'direct objects' of sense perception. (Philipse 1986/87, p. 298)

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8. Cf. Münch (forthcoming).

From this it follows, too, that the judgments involved in outer perception are always false. Only inner perception is a *Wahr-nehmung*.[9]

Philipse goes too far, however, in assuming that the being of immanent objects of 'outer sense' is no sort of being at all, that Brentano is simply employing a certain *façon de parler* in his talk of 'immanent existence'. Philipse, too, has allowed himself to be misled in his interpretation of Brentano by alien (commonsensical) considerations, since at the time of the *Psychology* Brentano affirms explicitly that physical phenomena like experienced colours and sounds exist in the mind as parts of consciousness and that the intentionality of outer perception is therefore a relation between two mental entities, the act of sensation and the quality sensed. Brentano, it is true, accepts a version of corpuscularism. But he wants also to maintain the conviction that experienced sounds and colours have a diminished sort of existence, an existence 'in the mind'. As we have seen, they are not *real*, but this does not mean that they are merely nothing. Rather, they are non-real parts of a real substance, a thinker,

Now there are, it has to be admitted, similarities between Brentano's doctrine as set out above and that of Kant. These similarities are however superficial only. Thus where for Brentano the link between inner activity and putative outer world is constituted by mere (simple and honest) hypotheses, Kant calls in aid synthetic *a priori* forms or categories which come down in the end – or so Brentano argues – to nothing more than prejudices.[10] Moreover where Brentano is admirably clear about the opposition between act and (immanent) object – his doctrine of intentionality is, in the end, nothing other than an account of the relation between these two – Kant is in this respect still subject to just those unclarities which had characterised the thinking of the British empiricists.

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9. Note, however, that it does not follow from this that outer *presentation* is untrustworthy; for trustworthiness as an issue arises only when to presentation there is added judgment, which ascribes existence to the object of presentation.

10. See his 1925, esp. Part I, dated 1903, which is entitled "Down With Prejudices!".

The Unity of the Soul

A literal reading of Brentano's thesis to the effect that every mental phenomena includes within itself something as object will help us to understand Brentano's deliberations on the unity of the soul in Book II of the *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*. Here, too, Brentano is inspired by Aristotle. For while Aristotle recognises that the soul has different kinds of parts[11] – above all, it has a sensitive part and an intellective part – he recognises also that it is none the less a unity. Even though the soul is divisible in the sense that one part thinks, another desires, still, there must be something that holds these parts together. But what can this be?

> Surely not the body; on the contrary, it seems rather to be the soul that holds the body together; at any rate, when the soul departs, the body disintegrates and decays. If, then, there is something else which makes the soul one, this unifying agency would have the best right to the name of soul, and we shall have to repeat for it the question: Is *it* one or multipartite? If it is one, why not at once admit that 'the soul' is one? And if it has parts, then once more the question must be put: What holds *its* parts together? And so *ad infinitum*. (411 b 8)

Brentano, too, accepts a version of this argument. And he, too, faces the problem of reconciling the complexity of consciousness with what he sees as its necessary unity.[12] That the activities of mind are always manifold and complex is clear. But this, Brentano insists, should not mislead us into supposing that such activities constitute a mere plurality or heap – as is assumed by those who defend a 'bundle' theory of the mind of the Humean sort. Rather, Brentano insists, it is a quite special sort of unity which marks conscious experience in every instant, however complex such experience might be. Here two sorts of complexity must be distinguished, with correspondingly different sorts of unifying mechanism. First, is

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11. Aristotle himself offers in different contexts different sorts of partition: metaphysical, functional, logical, ethical, and so on, though it would be unreasonable to see in this any conflict with Brentano's views (*pace* Ando 1965, pp. 91, 97).

12. Thus Brentano, commenting on the just-quoted passage in Ps.d.A., writes similarly:

> far from it being possible to assume e.g. a plurality of souls in man which are bound into a certain unity as a result of their domicile in the same body. Rather, we must say that it is the human soul which gives unity to the parts of the body (pp. 54f., Eng. p. 36f.).

This makes explicable why 'it is always only bodies of a certain constitution which have a soul ... [for] it is the soul itself which determines the essence of its body' (Ps.d.A., p. 47, Eng. p. 32).

the sort of complexity which arises where a number of psychic activities, for example presenting, judging and desiring, are directed towards a single object. Second, is that sort of complexity which arises where a number of psychic acts, directed toward distinct objects, occur simultaneously within a single consciousness. Both of these two sorts of complexity involve a certain sort of independence: in the one case, as Brentano says, we have a one-sided, in the other a mutual, independence.[13] But neither, Brentano argues, leads to any breaking up of the real unity in which they are involved. If, then, as Brentano argues, these are the only ways in which complexification can occur (the only ways in which we can build up more complex experiences out of simple parts), then it will follow that no matter how complex a given experience is, its unity will be unaffected.

That unity obtains in the first sort of case turns precisely on the fact that presentation, judging and desiring share a common object. This common object of presentation constitutes as it were an axis around which the acts of judging and desiring turn, and must necessarily turn, for it is in every case presentation that provides such acts with their objects. Clearly however the presence of a common object can serve to unify experiences in this way only if the object is immanent to those experiences. If Jules and Jim in some sense share an object, then this can by no means serve to unify their acts into a single consciousness. And if two experiences of mine are such as to be directed toward what is *merely per accidens* a single object (as when I see my neighbour and think about the murderer, in ignorance of the fact that they are one and the same), then this is clearly insufficient to guarantee that these experiences belong to the framework of a single consciousness. Rather, presentation, judgment and desire are unified because *the very same object* that is immanent to an act of presentation is affirmed or judged to exist in an act of judgment and valued positively in an act of desire.

That unity obtains in the second sort of case is seen in the fact that, though the objects of the respective acts are not identical, they are still in a very strong sense *comparable*. This comparability is not merely accidental; it does not rest for example on any contingent side-by-sideness or accessibility of the objects concerned, for the act of comparison can take place in every case automatically and without further ado. A man can exercise such knowledge when he wishes, where a comparisons of the more usual sort does not depend upon himself alone – the objects of comparison must first be sought after. Thus I can

13. P.E.S., p. 224, Eng. p. 158, which however has 'partial' for '*einseitig*'.

for example apprehend automatically that what I now see and what I now hear (the objects currently presented to me in these experiences) are non-identical, and again: this is conceivable only if the objects here are immanent to the act. Their necessary comparability is all of a piece with the necessary comparability of the relevant acts themselves. When, for example, I simultaneously see and hear, then I grasp this simultaneity immediately and automatically, in a way which would be impossible if the two acts constituted a mere plurality.[14]

How, now, is this peculiar unity of consciousness to be understood from the ontological point of view? Conscious phenomena, we can provisionally affirm, are mere 'divisives' or 'partial phenomena'.[15] A divisive is, simply, an entity that is not an entity in and of itself, but only as part of something else. A divisive is, we might say, the result of an abstract division of a whole, i.e. of a division 'in the improper sense' that is not in fact carried out. (Recall our treatment of 'separation in an improper sense' above.) A collective, similarly, is the result of an abstract or improper unification into a whole; and the early Brentano follows Aristotle in the thesis that a real thing and a collective of real things in this sense are never identical. Certainly a collective may become a thing (for example when one thing digests another); but then where there had been parts of a collective are now merely divisives. Similarly, a thing may become a collective through real division or dissolution or parturition; but then where there had been mere divisives within a thing are now things in their own right. The latter take the place of the former.

Divisives are distinguishable as it were abstractly *in* the thing of which they are divisives. And it is this common belongingness to a single actual thing of the results of merely abstract division that constitutes the unity of consciousness in Brentano's eyes. The case of simultaneous seeing and hearing shows that we may have a single actual consciousness whose divisives can in principle come to be really separated from each other in the sense that either can continue to exist when the other has ceased. But such mutual separability does not affect the unity of the original whole. This Brentano shows by means of a thought-experiment resting on the supposition that there are physical atoms (entities with no really separable parts) and that these atoms have some finite extension. Within such atoms we can distinguish

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14. Consider also the making of complex plans, engaging in complex processes of deliberation, and so on. If the acts in such processes were mere parts of a plurality, then the given phenomena would be rendered inexplicable. (P.E.S., p. 227, Eng. p. 159.)

15. P.E.S., p. 221, Eng. p. 155. The term 'partial phenomenon' is taken from Stumpf 1873.

‘quantitative parts’: for example, any pair of hemispheres. Each atom comprehends such quantitative parts as divisives. But it comprehends as divisives also certain individual properties. Many of these, too, may be incapable of being lost. This may hold of the atom’s individual shape, for example.

> Yet of others clearly this does not hold, although they themselves are not to be regarded as things. The atom goes, for example, from rest to motion and from motion to rest. Yet notwithstanding this, the motion which obtains in the thing is not itself a thing, otherwise it would be conceivable that it should survive in separation from the atom. (P.E.S., p. 230, Eng. p. 162, trans. amended)

One is able to imagine here a plurality of parts which belong to a single actual thing in such a way that there obtain between these parts more and less intrinsic relations. This does not however mean that any of the given parts could exist outside the context of the given whole. For a motion and a rest are always individual properties of and distinguishable only in some specific individual thing. The thing can be separated e.g. from the motion (by being brought to rest). But the motion cannot be separated from the thing. And what holds of motion and rest holds of shape and colour, too.

So it is also, Brentano now argues, in the case of psychic acts and states. The relation of hearing to seeing is less intrinsic than, say, that between desire and presentation. But one cannot derive from this any argument against their belonging to a single real unity, any more than in relation to, say, the motion and temperature of the atom. To affirm the unity of consciousness is to affirm only that all the psychic phenomena that we experience, however different they may be, constitute merely partial phenomena within the framework of a single whole. Hence unity is guaranteed not by the presence of some extra unifying element: Brentano is at the time of the *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* in fact sceptical of any such substantial ‘carrier’ or supporting substratum, just as he is sceptical of atomism as regards the outer world. His view at this stage is indeed consistent both with the idea that ‘different groups of psychical phenomena’ could be bound up with a continuous corporeal mass – as in the case of corals – and with a view of souls as being governed by other souls in a complex hierarchy along the lines of Leibniz’s monadology.

It is further possible that a single presentation (for example of a landscape) should manifest some analogue of spatial extension, as it is possible that different presentations should exist side-by-side in a quasi-spatial way. There are, however, restrictions on the extent to which we can think the psychic

activities which belong to the unity of a single consciousness as quantitatively distributed in this sort of way. It is above all 'not possible that in *one* quantitative part seeing should be found, in another the inner presentation directed thereto or the perception of or the pleasure in the seeing.' (P.E.S., pp. 235f., Eng. pp. 165f.)

Brentano's view would even be consistent with the possibility that one consciousness might come to be split into two, for example as a result of certain sorts of surgical operations. For the fact that there are two or more souls, in whatever relation, does not prove that any single soul might fail to form a unity (P.E.S., pp. 232f., Eng. p. 164). Thus it is clear that the unity of consciousness in which Brentano is interested is synchronic only: he is concerned only with *unity at a time*. Certainly it is true that, 'as inner perception shows us only one really unified group of psychical phenomena, so memory shows us directly not more than one such group for every moment of the past.' (P.E.S., p. 237, Eng. p. 167) That memory shows us always such unified groups is something that we know, Brentano claims, with evidence. But it is not evident that this succession of 'groups' – and Brentano's repeated use of this word in the present context is significant – must have been part of the same unitary thing as that which comprehends our present psychic appearances.

Certainly it is not to be denied that, leaving aside occasional gaps, memory shows us a continuum, a temporally progressing series of groups, between the successive phases of which there typically obtains a certain similarity. This makes it understandable that we tend to suppose that it is the same real unity which comprehends all the successive groups of appearances and brings about their similarity. But we cannot affirm this with evidence, as we can, for example, affirm with evidence that our present memories belong to the same real unity as our other present psychic acts, our evidence here resting on the immediate and automatic comparability discussed above.

Indeed, because in relation to any putative diachronic identity of or involving unified groups, evidence is unavailable, Brentano at the time of his *Psychology* sees it as 'an open question whether the perseverance of the ego is the survival of one and the same unitary thing or the succession of different things, of which the one would connect itself to the other and as it were take its place.' (P.E.S., p. 239, Eng. p. 168) The self might even be a special bodily organ, and the stuff of this organ be continuously renewed, so that the unity of consciousness would be, as Brentano says, 'like that of a river.'

Descriptive Psychology (1889/90)

As his rather loose talk of ‘groups’ of psychic phenomena makes clear, Brentano is at the time of the *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* in possession of little more than the germ of an ontological theory of the different types of parts of consciousness and of the ways in which these join to form a unity. Certainly he has seen that there are certain sorts of entities – ‘divisives’ or ‘partial phenomena’ – which can exist only within the context of a certain sort of whole. But he does not, at this stage, recognise the possibility of extending this insight to yield a general account of the types of parts and of the relations between them. That is, he does not see the possibility of transforming the material ontology of the *parts of consciousness*, a theory constructed for specifically psychological purposes, into a formal ontology of the types of parts and of unity in general. By the time of his lectures on descriptive psychology given in Vienna University in 1889/90, however, such a formal ontological theory of parts and of unity has been developed. Indeed descriptive psychology as Brentano here understands it seems precisely to consist in a psychology that will issue in an ontologically sophisticated theory of different types of parts of such a sort that the specification of parts will be at the same time a specification of the ways in which these parts are fitted together into wholes. As Brentano himself puts it, he seeks to construct a psychological *characteristica universalis*, whose letters and words would reflect the different mental constituents or elements, and whose syntax would reflect the relations between these constituents in larger complex wholes. Brentano has, in other words, the goal of providing an instrument which will enable the mapping of instantaneous cross-sections through the territory of the mind, of providing snapshots, as it were, of the different parts of some individual consciousness at some given time. And his ideas here can be seen to stand at the beginning of a tradition which results *inter alia* in Husserl’s development of the formal ontology of parts and wholes in the *Logical Investigations*, in the Graz and Berlin schools of Gestalt psychology, and in Les’niewskian mereology and categorial grammar.

For our present purposes, however, it is important only to note that in *the Descriptive Psychology*, too – which is to say in a context where Brentano sought to develop explicitly and in detail the ontology underlying the ideas on intentionality presented in *the Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* – there prevails a resolutely immanentistic view of the objects of our mental acts.

Of course even if all of the above is granted, the problem still remains as to how mental acts are able, on occasions, to achieve a directedness to transcendent objects in the world. And the fruitfulness of Brentano's philosophy shows itself not least in the ways in which it led his students and disciples to try out new and interesting solutions to this problem. The latter should not, however, be allowed to lead us astray when we are engaged in the task of working out the nature of Brentano's own original achievement.

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