

Franz Brentano on the Ontology of Mind

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Preprint version of a review of Franz Brentano's *Deskriptive Psychologie* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1982), published in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 45 (1985), 627–44.

Franz Brentano's 'philosophy of mind' still means, as far as most philosophers are concerned, no more than a peculiarly influential account of intentionality. In fact, in his *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, Brentano has provided an account of mental phenomena which ranks with any to be found in the literature of philosophy. It differs as much from the concept-centered Kantian approaches to 'reason' or 'understanding' as from more recent approaches, centred on the language used to report or to express 'propositional attitudes', in being an *ontology* of mind, concerned with the description of the entities which are involved in mental experience and of the relations between them.

With the posthumous publication of a series of lectures given in Vienna in 1890-91¹ we now possess a clear account of the ontology, and of the methods, underlying Brentano's numerous and subtle descriptions of mental phenomena, at least at one highly fruitful stage in his career. What follows is a detailed exposition of this work, together with a brief critical coda. It is divided into the following parts:

1. Descriptive Psychology
 - 1.1 Descriptive vs. Genetic Psychology
 - 1.2 Epistemology of Descriptive Psychology

2. Noticing, or: The Method of Descriptive Psychology

¹*Deskriptive Psychologie*, ed. R. M. Chisholm and W. Baumgartner (Hamburg: Meiner, 1982.) pp. xxvi + 189. The volume also contains selections from two earlier versions of the same series of lectures, together with a useful introduction and notes supplied by the editors (pp. ix-xxi, 162-77). All page references are to this volume, unless otherwise indicated.

3. Elements, Modes of Connection and Types of Part
 - 3.1 The Unity of Consciousness
 - 3.2 Separable Parts
 - 3.3 Distinctive Parts
 - 3.4 Logical Parts
 - 3.5 Modificational Quasi-Parts
4. On the Necessary Features of the Objects of Sensation
5. The Experience of Time
6. Critical Remarks
 - 6.1 The Fiction of ‘Reality’
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§1. Descriptive Psychology

§1.1 Descriptive vs. Genetic Psychology

Brentano begins with a distinction between *descriptive* and *genetic* psychology. Since it is the development of this distinction that underpins all Brentano’s work on mental phenomena, and indeed that of all his pupils (and very often of their pupils, too), we shall set out in some detail just what, on the evidence of the *Deskriptive Psychologie*, it involves.

Descriptive psychology ‘seeks as far as possible to determine exhaustively the elements of human consciousness and their modes of connection with one another’. Brentano’s hope is that — as he himself was to put it in 1895 — descriptive psychology would

display all the ultimate psychic components from whose combination one with another the totality of psychic phenomena would result, just as the totality of words is yielded by the letters of the alphabet (quoted on pp. x-xi).

Thus the project of describing the ultimate psychic components is to serve as the basis for a *characteristica universalis*, almost exactly as this was envisaged by Leibniz and by Descartes before him.² And this project, once realised, would yield the basis not only of genetic psychology but also of logic, ethics, aesthetics, political economy, politics and sociology, too (p. 76). Moreover, descriptive psychology will introduce us to the structures of our own selves, and so to what is most ‘noble’ in all experience.

The laws of descriptive psychology are supposed to be exact and exceptionless (on their epistemological status we shall have something to say in §1.2). Certainly,

they may exhibit a gap here and there, as is indeed also the case in mathematics; doubt about their correctness may not be out of place . . . but they allow and require a precise formulation, as for example in the law: the appearance of violet is identical with that of red-blue (p. 4).

Genetic psychology, on the other hand, seeks ‘to specify the conditions with which the individual phenomena are bound up causally’ (p. 1). Because its subject-matter is the physiological and chemical processes, the anatomical and other material conditions with which mental phenomena are causally connected, genetic psychology can only yield laws that are inexact.

Brentano gives as an example of an inexact law the thesis that the stimulus of a point on the retina by a light-ray with vibrations of a particular frequency produces the appearance of something blue (p. 5). This law loses its appearance of absolute generality once we take into account the possibility of colour-blindness, or of the severing of a nerve, or the case where hallucination obtrudes, etc. The laws governing the association, the causal order and the coming-to-be and passing-away of psychological phenomena are never free of exceptions. Brentano’s argument for this point re-

² As Descartes formulated it in a letter to Mersenne of 20 November 1629: “if someone were to explain correctly what are the simple ideas in the human imagination out of which all human thoughts are compounded, and if his explanation were generally received, I would dare to hope for a universal language very easy to learn, to speak, and to write. The greatest advantage of such a language would be the assistance it would give to men’s judgment, representing all matters so clearly that it would be almost impossible to go wrong” (quoted on p. 77; English translation from Descartes, *Philosophical Letters*, A. Kenny, ed. [Oxford: Blackwell, 1970], p. 6).

sembles arguments being put forward simultaneously by Ernst Mach,³ the difference being that for Mach the realm of the inexact, of ineliminable variability, usurps the whole of psychology (indeed the whole of science), where for Brentano there remains a domain of exact and exceptionless psychological laws.

§1.2 Epistemology of Descriptive Psychology

The laws of descriptive psychology are fundamental, for Brentano, also in an epistemological sense. They are not merely exact and exceptionless, they are characterised also as having a privileged epistemological status: we can know them immediately, or apodictically, or with absolute evidence. Our knowledge of the propositions of genetic psychology, in contrast, is always lacking in evidence. Such propositions can only be known (at best) presumptively.

Certainly, some knowledge of genetic psychology may be of contingent assistance to the descriptive psychologist. But the contributions a knowledge of descriptive laws can make to genetic psychology are ‘incomparably greater’ (p. 9). Indeed such knowledge is indispensable, and Brentano reserves some of his most scathing criticisms for those who attempt to do genetic psychology without first doing the necessary minimum of descriptive psychology:

What a lamentable state of ignorance . . . one often finds in scientists who take on the task of research in generic psychology, an ignorance which has as a result the failure of all their efforts. One finds for example someone inquiring into the *causes* of memory-phenomena who knows nothing of the most central *characteristic features* of memory (p. 9, our emphasis).

One such characteristic feature, says Brentano, is the peculiar modification whereby ‘that which presented itself on an earlier occasion as present is regarded (and judged) as past’ (loc. cit.) — a feature whose description, as we shall see, involves Brentano in considerable theoretical contortions. The ignorant genetic psychologist treats this as though he was concerned with the explanation of a phenomenon which completely resembles the earlier one,

³ *The Analysis of Sensations* (New York: Dover, 1959), p. 329ff.

or as if it were simply a somehow weaker, less intense or less vivid model or image of the earlier phenomenon.

Yet another genetic psychologist

concerns himself with the genesis of error and delusion but has not achieved any sort of clarity about what a judgment, the evidence of a judgment, an inference, its manifest validity, is (p. 9).

We see here perhaps the earliest manifestation of an attitude towards experimental psychology on the part of philosophers which has since been repeated in various forms. As Wittgenstein puts it:

The confusion and barrenness of psychology is not to be explained by calling it a "young science"; its state is not comparable with that of physics, for instance, in its beginnings . . . For in psychology there are experimental methods and *conceptual confusions* (*Philosophical Investigations* [hereafter: PI], p. 233).

But where, in the writings of Wittgenstein and neo-Wittgensteinians, such worries about experimental psychology are associated with little, if any, attempt to use 'grammatical remarks' about the way the mind works as building blocks of some properly theoretical enterprise in the foundations of psychology, Brentano attempts to develop an exact science of psychic phenomena, seeing it as 'one of the most important steps towards opening up a truly scientific genetic psychology' (p. 9).

§2. Noticing, or: The Method of Descriptive Psychology

Brentano is quite clear about the way descriptive psychology should be done and sets it out in some detail.⁴ The basis of the method is first of all inner perception, i.e., the awareness we have of the acts of seeing, hearing, thinking, judging, hating, which make up our conscious experience. This

⁴ That other great Austrian writer on descriptive psychology had a comparable confidence that he had at least discovered the right *method*: "This material I am working at is as hard as granite but I know how to go about it." (Ludwig Wittgenstein. *Personal Recollections*, ed. R. Rhees [Oxford: Blackwell, 1981], p. 173 and cf. p. 125.)

awareness is present (as a constituent part) in every act, according to Brentano, since otherwise experience would not *be* conscious experience.

Every act, then, has both a primary object (discussed in §4 below), and a secondary object, the act itself. Now the awareness of such secondary objects which is granted by inner perception is distinguished crucially from that access to acts which we can gain, e.g., in memory (or by reading the confessions of the inner lives of others): it possesses a different order of reliability. The immediate proximity of perception and object in an inner perception — an inner perception which is, remember, a *part* or the very act of seeing, hearing or judging which it is a perception *of* — makes possible a kind of *absolute evidence*. Immediate proximity of this kind ought in principle to leave no room for error, though ‘in spite of this evidence, inner perception is often misinterpreted in the crudest possible fashion’ (p. 8f.).

Inner perception, to serve as the basis for descriptive psychology, should be as rich and as varied as possible. But if he is to pick out the ultimate psychic components the descriptive psychologist must also take pains to *notice* (*bemerken*) what is involved in what he perceives. For there are many features of experience, even features which are recurrent and by no means in principle unnoticeable, which are hardly ever noticed. (We could perhaps learn how to minimise this danger if we knew under what conditions *noticing* occurs, but this is a problem that belongs to genetic psychology.)

Noticing is important because, as it will turn out, the psychic constituents which descriptive psychology seeks to describe come in a number of subtly different *kinds* and they stand to each other in relations which are by no means simple. And whilst all of these constituents are in a certain sense present to us in experience (otherwise they would not *be* psychic constituents), not all of them are noticed. As Brentano himself puts it:

Perception is an acceptance or recognition (*Anerkennung*). And if what is accepted is a whole which has parts, then the parts are in a certain sense all co-recognised together with the whole. For were one of them denied this would conflict with the recognition of the whole. But the individual part is not thereby already expressly recognised (p. 34).

Noticing, Brentano says, is ‘an explicit perception of what was implicitly included in perception’ (p. 33). He distinguishes sharply between ‘to notice’ and:

‘to find conspicuous’,
‘to keep or bear in mind’ (*sich merken*),

and

‘to attend or pay heed to’ (*aufmerken*).

Consider, first of all ‘to find conspicuous’. Unlike ‘to notice’, this refers to a *state of mind* (*Gemütszustand*) and should be compared to: ‘to find something odd or strange’, differing from this only in degree (where noticing does not admit of degrees at all). Attention, on the other hand, is certainly closely related to noticing: only what has been noticed can attract our attention. But something can be noticed without attracting our attention. And paying attention is *not* a necessary precondition for noticing.

Brentano’s account of the act of noticing explicitly what had previously been only implicitly perceived would repay close comparison with Wittgenstein’s account of noticing aspects. Brentano proceeds in just the way Wittgenstein condemns: ‘Do not try to analyse your own inner experience’.⁵ Brentano writes: descriptive psychology is ‘an analysing description of our phenomena . . . To be a phenomenon something must be in one (*in sich*). All phenomena should be called “inner” . . . ‘ (p. 129).

In his discussion of noticing an aspect, Wittgenstein stresses that this experience occupies an unusual position between simple seeing and thinking. But Brentano is able to go further by providing a taxonomy of the different sorts of judgment, predication [*Prädizieren*] or determination [*Bestimmen*] with which acts of noticing are intimately bound up (pp. 34, 37, 48). The most basic sort of noticing is, as we have seen, an acceptance or recognition of a content and is itself, in Brentano’s terms, a variety of judgment (p. 34). More complex cases would include, for example, those involving predication, noticing that something is or is not the same as something else (positive and negative predication: p. 37). As the editors point out, this taxonomy becomes considerably richer in Brentano’s later theory of judgment (n. 14, p. 171f.). Wittgenstein’s conclusion with respect to the experience of noticing aspects was that such an experience must be founded on custom, on upbringing-

⁵ ‘Versuche nicht, in dir selbst das Erlebnis zu analysieren!’ (PI, p. 204).

ing, on the mastery of a technique. In view of the huge differences between the activities Brentano and Wittgenstein took themselves to be engaged in, it is remarkable that Brentano, too, should have arrived at a comparable result. Brentano argues that a range of different habits and training are necessary preconditions of noticing, in the context both of teaching others to notice and of the acquisition of the ability to notice on one's own behalf. In an interesting excursus into genetic psychology (pp. 31-65), he describes the different sorts of comparisons that must be made if someone is to learn to notice something, comparisons that must be familiar as a result of habit and training if noticing is to occur at all. Indeed Brentano writes that it is comparisons, amongst other things, that make up 'the processes in the life of every mature individual that must be called primordial' and by which 'we are first led explicitly to notice certain individual parts within the complex of our consciousness' (p. 54f.).

Brentano describes also the difficulties in the way of noticing certain phenomena (p. 124) — why were blind spots never noticed before Mariotte? — distinguishing four different cases where noticing can fail (compare Wittgenstein's remarks on aspect-blindness [PI, p. 213f. and elsewhere]). When Wittgenstein says that a pupil can only see one part of a triangle *as* its apex if he is thoroughly conversant with ways of using the figure, he adds that this point is not an experiential proposition (PI, p. 208). And now for Brentano, too, it will be remembered, the fact that noticing has certain determinate preconditions is a matter of descriptive psychology (even though the investigation of these conditions is a matter for genetic psychology). A big difference remains: for Brentano the activities that form the basis for noticing essentially include certain mental acts, albeit very simple ones such as comparison. In Wittgenstein's work, in contrast, it seems that the techniques to be mastered are deliberately contrasted with any sort of mental act. The latter drop out as unimportant.

§3. Elements, Modes of Connection and Types of Part

§3.1 The Unity of Consciousness

In Brentano's definition of the subject-matter of descriptive psychology there lies an explicit reference to the concept of a part. For if descriptive psychology searches for the elements and modes of connection of human consciousness then the latter must constitute a 'multiplicity of parts' (p. 10). This point is introduced in the context of a discussion of the claim that consciousness is unitary. With Hume, Brentano denies that the soul (mind, *Seele*) is simple. But Brentano is not so simpleminded as to conclude from this that consciousness lacks all unity. He has at his disposal a theory of parts, wholes and unity which is powerful enough to recognise that an entity or structure can have parts without thereby falling apart into the separate and individual elements of a mere heap. We do not have

a multiplicity of things, but, in a most unequivocal way, one thing that embraces the whole of a real human consciousness (p. 11).

What is this theory of parts, wholes and unity?

§3.2 Separable Parts

Although the parts which are the elements of consciousness

never appear in the side-by-side fashion of parts of a spatial continuum, it remains true of many of them, as it does of parts of such a continuum, that one of them can actually be cut loose or separated [*losgelöst*] from another in that the part that earlier existed with the second part in the same real unity continues in existence when that other part has ceased to exist (p. 12).

Examples given by Brentano of such separable parts co-existing together are: a seeing and a hearing, a seeing and a remembering that one has seen, a seeing and a noticing, presentation and desire, concept and judgment, premise and inference (loc. cit.). As he points out, the notion expressed by 'a can exist without b', or 'a is separable from b' may be one-sided or two-sided. Seeing and hearing are reciprocally or mutually separable, as are the parts of a continuum existing side by side with each other in such a way that each can be annihilated without detriment to the remainder. But concept and judgment, seeing and noticing, premise and inference stand in the relation of one-

sided separability only, and this implies that a certain type of unity obtains in each of these cases, a type of unity that is absent where objects exist merely side by side.

In the light of this we can see that mental acts fall into the categories of (relatively) fundamental or basic acts and what Brentano calls superposed acts (*supra-ponierte Akte*). The former stand to the latter in a relation of one-sided separability, ‘a relation which is similar to the relation both have to the psychic substrate’ (p. 84). This is an extremely important point. The relationship between my wish to take a trip must be based on a presentation or idea of a trip: and the relationship between wish and presentation, Brentano says, is like the relation both have to the subject who has the wish and presentation. And, Brentano goes on to add, the chain of relations may well be even more complex: fear or hope are based on presumption (*Vermutung*), this in its turn on a presentation, and all are based on a subject. More interestingly still, as he points out in a sketch from 1901, remorse and resolution stand in a special relation of dependence to temporal differentia in the presentations and judgments on which they are based (p. 151; cf. also the discussion of motivated vs. unmotivated love on p. 150).

Brentano makes a further claim about the nature of the (primary) objects that ultimate, basic or fundamental as opposed to superposed acts must have. These objects must, he claims, be sensible phenomena. Acts of the given kind must ‘contain as their primary relation a presentation of a sensible concrete content’ (p. 85: see §4 below).

§3.3 Distinctive Parts

The unity of one-sided inseparability is not, however, the only kind of unity recognised by Brentano. For even if we continue piecing the parts of what is composite (in particular in the domain of consciousness), i.e., separating out as much as is possible in such a way as to arrive at elements which are somehow ultimate from this point of view, we can ‘in a certain sense still speak of further parts.’

If someone believes in atoms he believes in particles [*Körperchen*] that cannot be dissolved into smaller bodies, but even in the case of such particles he may speak of halves, quarters, etc.: parts which, although not really separable, are yet distinguishable. We can call these lat-

ter distinctive [*distinktionelle*] parts. In human consciousness, too, there are also, apart from separable parts, mere distinctive parts. And, in so far as the distinguishing continues further than real separability, one might speak of parts (or elements) of elements (p. 13).

In order to illustrate his notion of a distinctive part, which has obvious parallels to the notion of distinctive feature in phonology, Brentano considers at some length the following example of the sort of 'reality' which external perception seems to present us with. (We shall return in §6 to consider what Brentano says about the *status* of this example.) 'Out of what parts would this reality show itself to be composed?' (p. 14). Clearly this reality will contain mutually separable spatial parts, but also parts of a very different sort. Consider a visual field containing two blue patches, one grey patch and a yellow patch. Between the two blue patches we find a difference of spatial position and an agreement of quality; between the blue and the yellow patches we find both a spatial *and* a qualitative difference. In the blue patch

a colour-determination [*Besonderheit*] and a spatial determination are to be distinguished, and so are really contained in it, are distinctive parts . . . (p. 15).

We may, too, Brentano argues, identify differences of brightness. Thus we have space-, colour(or, more generally: quality-) and brightness-determinations.

Why are these not separable parts? Can the blue patch not be moved, resulting in a change of spatial determination, without ceasing to be blue? And would it not then lose its particular spatial determination whilst its qualitative determination would remain unchanged? Or alternatively: can the blue patch not be transformed into a red patch whilst its spatial position remains the same? In order to see the mistake here, Brentano warns his readers, 'careful attention is necessary'. He claims that when the position of an individual blue patch is changed we have a new blue patch, i.e., a patch with a *new* blueness-determination,

which is as different from the first as two spatially distinct but simultaneous blue patches are distinct from one another (p. 16).⁶

⁶ Compare Wittgenstein (*Blue and Brown Books*, p. 55): "We can use the phrase 'two books have the same colour' but we could perfectly well say: 'They can't have the *same* colour, because, after all, this book has its own colour, and the other book has its own colour too'. This .

One does indeed need to pay attention here. To understand the concept of distinctive part one has to grasp a concept of parts

which do not occur in a spatially side-by-side fashion, but are connected in a quite different way, which so to speak reciprocally or mutually interpenetrate one another [*sich sozusagen wechselseitig durchdringen*] (p. 17).

It is not as if a blueness determination is simply hanging around, waiting for some spatial determination and some brightness determination to join up with it; or as if it could move on from one spatial or brightness determination to another, in such a way that it would remain (numerically) the same. Similarly, it is not as if spatial determinations are hanging around, waiting to be filled by colour and brightness determinations (and perhaps by determinations of other sorts): space *is*, just, what gets filled by quality. A spatial extension only exists, according to Brentano, to the extent that there are space-filling qualities which this extension is the extension *of*. A spatial boundary only exists to the extent that there is something qualitative which it bounds.

If Brentano is right then there are at least two very different sorts of elements of consciousness, at different levels, and two different modes of connection between them. But our account of Brentano's taxonomy of parts is by no means complete.

§3.4 Logical Parts

If the blue and yellow patches in front of me differ with respect to their spatial determination, brightness and quality, it is nevertheless the case that with respect to quality there is *some* sort of agreement between them: they agree (e.g.) in that they are both *colours*. Brentano's account of this mysteri-

. . . would be stating a grammatical rule; a rule, incidently, not in accordance with our ordinary usage." Wittgenstein is here rejecting, like Moore before him, the notion of an individual property, the 'accidents' of the tradition – called *Momente* by Brentano and his heirs. Arguments on behalf of these entities are presented in Smith, ed., *Parts and Moments* (Munich: Philosophia, 1982) and in Mulligan, Simons and Smith, "Truth-Makers," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 44 (1984): 287-321.

ous relation of partial agreement is at its clearest in a contrast he develops between this case and the case of the relation between quality and spatial determination. Given determinations of quality and space in a single patch of colour are mutually penetrating instances of *distinct species*, species which have, as it were, nothing (except this) in common. In the case of partial agreement of two colour patches, in contrast, we have two colour-determinations which are separate (non-interpenetrating) instances of species which are distinct, but are yet species of a *single common genus*. We have here two distinct determinates of the single determinable: *colour*. This is a case of what Brentano calls a *logical* part-whole relation. The two individual colour determinations, which are instances of the species *blue* and *yellow*, each contain logical parts which are instances of the common species *colour* (as if there is something, in addition to these logical parts, which would make individual instances of sheer *colour* into individual instances of *blue* or *yellow*, respectively).

The relation of logical parts to their whole is, Brentano claims further, distinct from — though in different ways parallel to — the relations manifested in cases of one-sided separability and of distinctive parts.

To see how it is distinguished from the case of one-sided separability consider, for example, the relation between a thinking of a given concept and the judging that there is something which falls under this concept. That which makes the thinking into a judging can be really separated out: a judging can give way to a mere thinking of a concept; the former may cease to exist although the latter remains in existence. But now consider, in contrast, the relation between a thinking of a concept and that which makes it a *thinking*. There is no way in which the latter (logical part) can be separated out. Or consider Brentano's example of the relation between an occurrent desire for apples and the simultaneous presentation or thinking of apples. Clearly the former can be cut away from the latter in such a way that there is simply a presentation that is no longer associated with a desire. But there is no way in which that logical part which makes a presentation of apples a *presentation* can be cut away from the mental phenomenon in question to leave that element in virtue of which the phenomenon is apple-directed.

Logical parts are distinguished from distinctive parts in the strict sense ('*durchwohnende Teile*') by the fact that the logical part is an instance of a species which is superordinate to that of which its whole is an instance.

This is never the case in regard to distinctive parts (a coloured patch which I see has a given spatial determination as one of its distinctive parts but it does not itself instantiate the species *spatial determination*).

Of course, relations such as that which holds between *thinking* and *thinking of a concept* or between *desiring* and *desiring apples* are ‘logical’ also in a sense which has nothing at all to do with the ontology of part and whole, but merely reflects certain purely analytic relations between the given concepts. This makes Brentano’s talk of ‘parts’ here somewhat difficult to understand. With a little exercise of the imagination, however, it is possible to consider the given relations as relations between corresponding elements in the phenomena in question, and indeed to see these elements as the *fundamentum in re* in virtue of which it is appropriate to apply concepts like *thinking* or *desiring* to the given phenomena at all.⁷

§3.5 Modificational Quasi-Parts

There is a further phenomenon or element of consciousness which is distinguished by Brentano from those which have been listed so far in being described as his own discovery. We shall draw attention to it only briefly here.

Recall Brentano’s doctrine of the intentional inexistence of the object of a mental act. How is this intentionally in-existent object to be understood? What, in particular, is the relation between this object and ‘real’ objects? Suppose, more particularly, that I see a colour. What is the relation between the seen colour on the one hand and any real colour, on the other? What Brentano has to say is:

‘seen colour’ contains colour, not as a distinctive part in the proper sense, but only as a part that may be carved out by a *modifying distinction* (p. 27, our emphasis).

⁷ Frege’s ‘marks’ (*Merkmale*) are described by him as ‘logical parts’ of the associated concepts (cf. E. H. W. Kluge, ed., *On the Foundations of Geometry* [London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971], p. 35). The properly ontological conception of logical parts is discussed briefly by Husserl in §1 of his 3rd *Logical Investigation*.

By a ‘modifying distinction’ Brentano has in mind a distinction which is not a real distinction, carving out *real parts*, at all: there is no colour present in seen colour *except in a modified sense* (something like the sense in which we might say, e.g., that the number 2 is present in the fraction $\frac{1}{2}$ or in which we might say that, whilst Pierre himself is not really present, still his *absence* is present). Thus we can designate ‘parts’ of the kind in question as ‘modificational quasi-parts’. They shall receive a more adequate discussion in our treatment of Brentano’s account of the experience of time, below.

§4. On the Necessary Features of the Objects of Sensation

The primary objects of basic acts, i.e., of acts of sense-perception, exhibit various structural features, as do acts themselves, and the present volume provides detailed accounts of the more important of these.⁸

What Brentano has to say on this topic is of the first importance, both historically and for its own sake, although the investigation of the structural features of the objects of basic acts has sunk into almost greater oblivion, in contemporary philosophy, than has the investigation of the structures of mental acts themselves.

We have already seen something of what the investigation involves in our discussion of distinctive and logical parts above. Brentano claims that every object of sensation has a perceptual *quality* and this occupies (fills) a perceivable space. Quality (colour, tone . . .) and spatiality are two distinctive (‘interpenetrating’) parts. (This law was the subject of detailed investigation by Stumpf in his *Über den psychologischen Ursprung der Raumvorstellung* [Leipzig: Hirzel, 1873].) We shall concentrate here on the structures of perceptual quality (pp. 89ff., 115-120).⁹

⁸ Some of them are discussed by Brentano also in the *Untersuchungen zur Sinnespsychologie* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1979), reprinted from the edition of 1907.

⁹ On the structure, e.g., the dimensional structure, of perceptual space — which will clearly be different for different sensory modalities — cf. the compressed discussion of continua in general and of spatial continua in particular on pp. 104-15. This discussion usefully complements Brentano’s arguments in *Philosophische Untersuchungen zu Raum, Zeit and Kontinuum* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1976).

Qualities are internally complex. Every quality contains both a feature belonging to the series bright/dark and a feature belonging to the series saturated-unsaturated, or to analogues of these. Before we look at this claim in a little more detail, however, something should be said about the nature of the project Brentano was involved in. The project of setting out exact and necessary truths concerning the constituents of sense-fields has become almost totally incomprehensible to philosophers. In part this is due to the victory of the dogma that ‘content is incommunicable’.¹⁰ Yet the project of a descriptive psychology or ‘phenomenology’ of objects of sense perception that would consist of necessary material truths was common to Brentano, Hering, Marty,¹¹ Stumpf, Köhler, Selz, Meinong, and Husserl (whose contribution to this ‘phenomenology’ in the narrower, descriptive sense, was unfortunately overshadowed by his later metaphysics). The idea is even traceable in the writings of the middle Wittgenstein.

The project is still very much alive in at least one sphere outside philosophy, however. Brentano’s bold generalisation, formulated within his theory of parts and wholes, to the effect that every sensible quality (and not only visual but also, e.g., auditory qualities) exhibits the two dimensions of brightness and saturation, makes him an important precursor of modern phonology. For it was this generalisation, theoretically refined and placed on a secure experimental footing by Stumpf and Köhler, that was taken over by Roman Jakobson in his formulation of some of the most important laws and distinctions in the domains of phonology and acoustics.¹²

Let us look in some detail about what Brentano says about these two necessary features of the qualities of the objects of sensations. Every sensible quality contains a moment of brightness and darkness (*Helligkeit und Dunkelheit*). Brentano emphasises (p. 115) that the difference between *Helligkeit* and *Dunkelheit* in the sphere of colour perception makes its appearance

¹⁰ B. Harrison, *Form and Content* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1973) is an excellent critique of this dogma, inspired by recent work on universals of colour perception.

¹¹ In *Die Frage nach der geschichtlichen Entwicklung des Farbensinnes* (Vienna: Gerold, 1879), Marty uses Brentanian distinctions to criticise the view that our sense of colour — as distinct from our judgments and from what we notice about colour — is subject to any sort of evolution.

¹² Cf. C. Stumpf, *Die Sprachlaute* (Berlin: Springer, 1926), esp. pp. 98-103, 276-80, and chap. 13; R. Jakobson, *Child Language, Aphasia and Phonology* (Paris and the Hague: Mouton, 1968 [translated from the German of 1940/42]), chap. 3, §§25f.

in relation to all sensory modalities. It makes itself felt, e.g., in the relation between tones of higher and lower pitch and in regard to heat sensations ('what is cool is brighter than what is warm': *ibid.*). It is of course not the case that any colour is brighter than any tone, or that a colour or tone is brighter or less bright than a warmth or a coldness. But while there is no unitary species for brightness and darkness, there is always at least a relation of similarity between the differences which hold between the various different kinds of brightness and darkness: the relation of *brighter than* between two colours resembles the relation of *brighter than* between two tones, even though the absolute brightnesses and darknesses do not resemble each other. Brentano quotes approvingly Helmholtz's remark that we have to do here with two degrees of difference — a difference of kind and a kind of difference, we might say. We can use the number of different kinds of brightness and darkness that there are to determine the number of different sensory modalities (p. 116).

What holds of brightness holds, too, of saturation. ('Colouring' [*Kolorit*] is another term suggested by Brentano for this feature.) Thus Brentano argues that this distinction, familiar from the realm of colour perception, is manifested in the realm of acoustic phenomena in the opposition between sound (or what is *Klanghaft*) and mere noise (p. 89).

The relationship between the moment of brightness and the moment of saturation or colouring is an example of the relation we have already met of distinctive (or mutually interpenetrating) parts (cf. p. 120). Brentano now considers the possibility that the primary objects of sense perception might exhibit other, additional distinctive features, for example, *intensity* (p. 90). On this question the editors usefully point out that Brentano's concept of intensity is different from that of his contemporaries, most of whom 'identified differences in the brightness of a visual sensation with differences in the intensity of this sensation' (p. 174):

On Brentano's view of the matter, the intensity of a given quality is a function of the quantity of perceivable space that is filled with this quality. As soon as a quality loses in intensity yet keeps its extension, unnoticed parts of the sense-field within the domain of this extension have lost in quality. If the quality gains in intensity, then several parts of the field of perception within this domain have taken on this quality (*ibid.*).

Note the important role that is played, once again, by the concept of *noticing*: ‘when a quality loses in intensity we cease to *notice* the places that are no longer filled with this quality’ (p. 175). Intensity, on this conception, cannot be an additional feature of a sensory quality, since it is merely a ‘derived magnitude’, ‘a function of that quantity of space which is filled with that quality’. Similarly, Brentano denies that sense-qualities exhibit a special feature or moment from the series: pure-impure or mixed-unmixed (pp. 90f., 120).

§5. The Experience of Time

Brentano rejects the idea that temporal determination is, like spatial determination, a further feature of the primary objects of basic acts. His positive account, as here presented, is the first of two detailed accounts of *temporal modification* that he developed and is the view against which Husserl reacted in his lectures on the phenomenology of the consciousness of inner time but to which Stumpf adhered and developed further.¹³

Brentano issues warnings about the difficulty of understanding his account of the way temporal dimensions are given. These warnings relate not merely to the peculiar terminology of ‘*Proterose*’, ‘*Proteraesthesia*’ (‘original association’ or ‘original intuition of time’), which he introduces. Indeed his warnings about the difficulty of understanding what he is getting at (cf. the quotation supplied by the editors on pp. xviii) resemble nothing so much as Husserl’s warnings to his readers about the difficulties of understanding his ‘transcendental reductions’, and they raise the same suspicions in the reader.

The source of our concept of time is, Brentano tells us, an experience of original association which accompanies all perception but is distinct from it. Not only when we hear a melody but even when we look at a perfectly stationary object we experience succession. We experience, for example, that one and the same object remains precisely where it was. ‘This experience

¹³ Further details are provided in the pieces edited by Oskar Kraus as “Toward a Phenomenology of Time Consciousness,” and in Stumpf’s “Reminiscences of Brentano,” both translated in L. L. McAlister, ed., *The Philosophy of Brentano* (London: Duckworth, 1976).

shows us a past temporal stretch' (p. 92). Brentano claims that the great similarity between this experience and corresponding sensations, and the close genetic connection between them, is responsible for the fact that sensations have nearly always been confused with *Proteraestheses* or original associations.

The phenomenon of perceived succession raises the following general problem. How can I perceive anything at all as being past? How can something *have* the attribute pastness if it no longer exists? Here, as in so many other places, Brentano's solution begins by making a logical or syntactic distinction.

'Past', he tells us, is a modifying, not a genuine, attribute (pp. 19, 94). It belongs to the same category as 'so-called', 'former', 'alleged', 'pretended'. This class of adjectives was studied in detail by Brentano and his pupils, and in Husserl's *Logical Investigations* the theory of modifications is developed and put to work in a systematic way. Modifying uses of expressions are not arbitrary, Husserl argues; they are governed by syntactic rules. But these rules are not identical with the syntactic rules that govern the build-up of expressions used in normal, i.e., non-modified ways.

When we hear a tone, what we hear endures (as we would normally say) for a certain period of time, however short. Thus we experience not merely the sensation of a tone, but also a *Proteraesthesia*. But where the object of hearing is a tone, the object of the *Proteraesthesia* is, Brentano tells us, not the past (segments of the) tone but the (just) past sensing (*Empfinden*) of these segments (p. 98). More precisely, the primary object of the *Proteraesthesia* is not the primary object of the sensation, but something which belongs to the secondary object thereof, namely, 'the modified [i.e., past] intentional relation to the primary object' (ibid.). Sensation has as its secondary object a present sensing: *Proteraesthesia* has as its primary object a past sensing (ibid.).

This does not, of course, get Brentano out of his difficulty. For a past sensation or a past intentional directedness are themselves as much past and therefore (as one says) 'non-existent' as past tones or past kings.¹⁴

Brentano's view as expounded in these lectures therefore remains obscure. Brentano appears to claim that a *Proteraesthesia* involves as its object a

¹⁴ Cf. Kraus, op. cit., p. 227, n. 7.

nonexisting thing to which we attach modifying attributes. But the point about modifying attributes is that they imply that something does exist, indeed something related in a quite determinate way to what the unmodified predicate normally relates to. A forged bank-note has to be made of paper; a mock fight has to involve bodily movements, and so on. This point was made by Twardowski. It seems to us to provide a stronger objection to the modification theory than the objection mentioned by the editors on p. 165f., who point out that sentences containing modified expressions can be translated into sentences without the modifying expression. Thus a sentence about false gold can be translated into a sentence about an object that is not gold but is such that it could be assumed to be gold. Chisholm and Baumgartner point out that Brentano saw that this sort of translation will not work for future and past. It seems to us that this criticism overlooks the fact that modified referring expressions always imply something quite determinate about the make-up of an object. Brentano cannot be right about a past colour when he says, in effect, that it is a non-existent object, since there has to be something really in common between a past colour and a present colour, if the modification involved is to be understandable as a modification, just as there has to be something really in common between the forged bank-note and the real bank-note, or between the ordinary use of a term to refer to an object and the modified use of the term in which it refers to itself.

The appeal to the syntactic device of modification plays an important role in Brentano's ontology. In fact, the sort of modification that takes us from 'tone' to 'past tone' is a member of a family, one other member of which, as already noted, takes us from 'colour' to 'seen colour' — and thus lies at the heart of Brentano's theory of intentionality or 'immanent existence'. Another member of this same family, singled out for some attention in the introduction to the present volume, lies at the heart of Brentano's later reism. Brentano was able to back up his absolute rejection of an ontology that distinguished between accidents and substances by appealing to the type of modification that takes us from 'John sees the horse' to 'John is a horse-seer' — a type of modification that yields what Chisholm has nicely called a notion of concrete predication. If 'John sees the horse' has the canonical form 'John is a horse-seer' then, or so Brentano argues, the temptation disappears to refer to individual mental accidents such as John's seeing. It is striking that in most of the formulations in the present work Brentano does not appeal to this latter type of modification.

He talks directly about relations between mental accidents. Indeed he talks directly about relations between a host of different kinds of peculiar non-substantial parts. Evidence of his later reductionism is pleasantly sparse.

§6. Critical Remarks

§6.1 The Fiction of ‘Reality’

We have seen what the major structural relations were that Brentano was prepared to employ and what sorts of elements these relations connected. And we have also said something about how, in his view, the descriptive psychologist should proceed in describing both elements and relations. We have been silent about a major limitation introduced by Brentano which applies to his entire descriptive project. Brentano is an unreconstructed Cartesian. He is not simply an ontologist who is interested in describing the realm of the mental with his ontological tools — tools which could equally well have been used to describe, say, the realm of physical objects, or the objects of linguistics, or works of art, or human actions. Rather, his views about the type of knowledge we can have of the mental sharply constrains the scope of his ontology. Thus in introducing the distinction between separable and inseparable parts with respect to ‘external relata’, Brentano warns his readers as follows:

Man has an inborn tendency to trust his senses. He believes in the real existence of colours, tones, and whatever else a sensible presentation may contain. For this reason some people have spoken of external perception and ranked this with respect to its trustworthiness on a level with inner perception.

Those with more experience, and in particular the scientifically enlightened, no longer have this trust (p. 14).

But, Brentano says, he is prepared to *pretend* that external perception presents us with what is real, in order to answer the question, already discussed in §3.3 above: ‘out of what parts would this reality show itself to be composed’ (ibid.).

Brentano is concerned in the present work simply to introduce and illustrate his basic ontological apparatus of parts, (in)separability, etc.; he gives

no argument for his restriction on the scope of his ontology. Accordingly we shall content ourselves with the remark that, since this ontology works so well on the assumption of (a quite naive) realism, Brentano's ideas might find convincing applications also in this direction — the direction taken by early realist pupils of Husserl such as Ingarden and Reinach, if not by the early Husserl himself.

§6.2 Synchronic/Diachronic

A second, related flaw or one-sidedness in Brentano's approach is his insistence that descriptive psychology and the ontology of wholes, parts and unity which underlies it can apply only to what exists simultaneously in consciousness. For there is no reason in principle why the structural principles elucidated by Brentano in his *Aufbau* of human consciousness should not be put to work also in relation to what is not simultaneous. And, indeed, the conceptual pressure leading Brentano to restrict their application in this way is responsible for many weaknesses in what he says. Let us begin with a small but significant example. Brentano talks frequently of a 'psychic act' which he calls *belief (Glaube)*. His favourite illustration of the relation between a superposed and a basic act is indeed the relation between a belief and a presentation (e.g., p. 84). He even speaks of 'assertoric beliefs', as if the distinction between belief and assertion were not as absolute as is the distinction, e.g., between belief and presentation (p. 83). But belief is a *state*: it can, for example, die away; assertions and presentations, in contrast, are *events*. And clearly a philosopher who attempts to give an ontology of the mental but restricts himself to the make-up of synchronously existing mental events must face the criticism that ontological relations between mental events and mental states fall outside his purview. Yet it seems clear that an episodic assertion stands in just that relation to an enduring belief that an episodic wish stands to an episodic presentation, that is to say, in each case we have a relation of one-sided separability.¹⁵

¹⁵ The ontology of the mental states and events involved in judgment is set forth in great detail — alongside criticisms of Brentano's own approach — by Reinach, in his masterly "Zur Theorie des negativen Urteils" (English translation in Smith, ed., *Parts and Moments* [Munich: Philosophia, 1982], pp. 315-400).

A further consequence of Brentano's restriction is that he cannot deal, within the framework of descriptive psychology, with any ontological relations between mental events or mental states not existing simultaneously: all such relations have to be downgraded to the level of the merely causal or empirical. In general terms, Brentano must deny that the relations between distinctive and detachable parts can ever be *diachronic*: all diachronic relations fall outside the scope of his *a priori* theory of part, whole and unity. Thus his framework is incapable of dealing adequately with the surely not merely contingent relations between, say, the memory of an event in the past and the presentation (perception) of that event as it occurred. And Brentano is forced to claim also, for example, that genuine remorse depends not on a past action, but on presently experienced temporal differentia in certain presently existing presentations and judgments on which the remorse is based (p. 151).

Contortions of this sort — and indeed the contortion which is Brentano's entire theory of time as developed in this volume — could and should have been avoided. And the working out of a more adequate descriptive psychology of diachronic relations amongst mental elements would have led to a significant enrichment of Brentano's basic ontology.

Brentano's restriction of the realm of exact and necessary truths of psychology, and of ontology, to the realm of truths about instantaneous mental episodes meshes with his other fundamental assumption of Cartesianism: necessary truths are truths of which a subject must be capable of having *Evidenz*, the subject at that time. But Brentano's contribution to analytic ontology should not stand or fall with his epistemology, and his recognition of the possibility of a descriptive science of exact and necessary psychological laws should not be overlooked simply because it is accompanied by the insistence that these laws be capable of being grasped infallibly.