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# Hume's "Bundle of Perceptions" and the "Problem of the I" in Brentano's *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*

**Abstract:** In *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* (1874), Brentano defines psychology as the science of psychical phenomena rather than study of the soul. As such, he does not address Hume's objection regarding the existence of the soul as substantial bearer of human experiences or his conclusion that the "self" is merely "a bundle of perceptions." Yet Brentano has an implicit understanding of the self that radically challenges various conceptions of self by Hume, Kant, Mill, Comte and others. This paper explains how Brentano circumvents Hume's "problem of the I," by calling into question his views on causality and outlines certain features of Brentano's account of the self that are most relevant to its understanding and evaluation. In conclusion, it argues that there is another "problem of the I" in Brentano's understanding of the self in PES, to which he is oblivious, but which some of his followers struggled to resolve.

## 1 Introduction

Even though Franz Brentano does not respond directly to David Hume's (in)famous argument in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739) for the reducibility of our idea of a self to "a bundle of perceptions," he does hold quite a definitive philosophical view of the self in his *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* (1874) which, in many ways, challenges the accounts of the self that are found in the philosophies of Hume, Immanuel Kant, John Stuart Mill, Auguste Comte, and many others with which he was well acquainted and to which he alludes.<sup>1</sup> Not surprisingly, therefore, Brentano's different understanding of the self in PES enables him, in some important respects, to circumvent the particular "problem of the I," as commentators commonly refer to it today, which Hume had identified and which others, following in his footsteps, sought to resolve.

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<sup>1</sup> From the bibliometric details compiled for PES, Valentine (2017, p. 296) notes that, next to German writers, British authors are the most frequently cited, with John Stuart Mill being the most highly cited British author, in third place overall, after Aristotle and Kant.

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Brentano's understanding of the self, nonetheless, underpins his view of psychology and philosophy in PES, although it is more implicitly than explicitly elaborated in PES; or, at least, so shall I argue in this paper. The aim of this paper, therefore, is to explain, firstly, why the particular "problem of the I" that Hume had identified in the *Treatise* does not figure directly or ostensibly in Brentano's PES, before elaborating on some of the main features of his philosophic view of the self in that study that are of most relevance to its understanding and evaluation. Brentano's understanding of the self in PES, nevertheless, contains a "problem of the I," different from the one that Hume had identified, and about which Brentano himself is oblivious. In conclusion to this paper, therefore, I will note, briefly, how some of Brentano's followers, such as Edmund Husserl, took this "problem of the I" that underpins his view of psychology in PES seriously, but found it much harder to resolve than the problem of the self as "a bundle of perceptions" that Hume had bequeathed to the tradition of modern philosophy.

## 2 The Disappearance of the Humean "Problem of the 'I'" in *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*

Even if Hume is correct in his rejection of the existence of a soul as substantial bearer of one's own psychical phenomena in his section on "Personal Identity" of his *Treatise*—and Brentano believes he is not—"whether or not there are souls," Brentano remarks, "the fact is there are psychical phenomena" (PES, p. 18). This is Brentano's starting point in PES, and it is one with which Hume, of course, would entirely agree. Brentano also agrees with Hume that access to "our own psychical phenomena," by way of what Brentano calls "inner perception," is peculiarly direct and certain in comparison to anything else, including any act of "outer perception of physical phenomena." Relying, in fact, on the literal etymology of "*Wahrnehmung*" as "true-grasping (*wahr-nehmen*)," Brentano stresses the point that "[I]n the strict sense of the term, they [psychical phenomena] alone are perceived. On this basis, we proceeded to define them as the only phenomena [in comparison to physical phenomena] which possess *actual* [*wirklich*] existence in addition to intentional existence" (PES, pp. 97–98, additions C. McD.). For Brentano, then, because psychical phenomena *are* what they appear, and this is grasped truthfully in inner perception, these phenomena have

actual or real existence (PES, pp. 92, 97f).<sup>2</sup> By comparison, "physical phenomena," such as colors that are seen, warmth that is felt, or sounds that are heard, have *only* intentional or phenomenal existence, for they do not actually exist as they appear to exist in outer (sense) perception as properties of the perceived external objects. Here, Brentano draws our attention to Locke's famous experiment of warming one hand, before putting both hands into a bucket of water, whereupon one hand feels colder than the other in the same water, which thus "proved that neither warmth nor cold really existed in the water" (PES, p. 9). Any act of *outer* (sense) perception of "physical phenomena," therefore, for Brentano, is inherently mis-leading (*falsch-nehmen*), and so, strictly speaking, not perception (*Wahrnehmung*) at all. Accepting Locke's experiment, Brentano now argues that, because "physical phenomena," such as warmth, exist only in the experiencing of these phenomena, but these phenomena do not actually exist outside of the experience, as objective properties of the objects perceived (e.g., water), as we think they do in outer perception, our "physical phenomena" have *only* intentional existence by comparison to our experiences (psychical phenomena), which have actual (*wirklich*) existence. This, therefore, is "why, to Brentano as to Hume, psychology stands first among the sciences" (Passmore 1966, p. 178).<sup>3</sup>

Far from rejecting Hume's (and Locke's) approach in the philosophy of mind in PES, then, Brentano embraces it and, indeed, argues further than Hume in maintaining that, if we define psychology as primarily the science of psychical phenomena, we do not need to discuss at all the traditional concept of the soul that instituted the science of psychology, and so, this modern definition "frees us from general preliminary [metaphysical] researches [into the nature of the soul] which the other [older conception of psychology] would oblige us to undertake" (PES, p. 18).<sup>4</sup> By thus delimiting "our own psychical phenomena,"

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2 See McDonnell (2011) for analysis of Brentano's ambiguous usages and different meanings of "inner perception" and "physical phenomena" and some implications this has for understanding Husserl's phenomenology.

3 Why Brentano chooses to align philosophy with the natural science of psychology as queen of the sciences in PES has baffled some commentators, given his previously held Aristotelian conviction of metaphysics as first philosophy. Yet Brentano does have much more time for the science of psychology than Comte. For the major influence, nevertheless, which Comte's reflections on the classification of the sciences exercised on Brentano, see, Ion Tănăsescu, "Brentano and Comte: the Theory of the Stages and the Psychology," pp. 45–137 of this volume.

4 Despite this, in PES Brentano accepts that the question of the immortality of the soul after death of the body still belongs to the field of psychology, but in a modified fashion and within a modern framework, as "the question whether our mental life somehow continues even after

from the outset, as the definable field of enquiry for the science of psychology, Brentano feels justified in concluding that,

Nothing, therefore, stands in our way if we adopt the modern definition [of psychology as the science of psychical phenomena] instead of defining psychology as the science of the soul. Perhaps both are correct. The differences, which still exist between them, are that the old definition contains metaphysical presuppositions from which the modern one is free [...]. Consequently, the adoption of the modern conception simplifies our work. Furthermore, it offers an additional advantage: any exclusion of an unrelated question not only simplifies, but also reinforces the work. It shows that the results of our investigations are dependent on fewer presuppositions, and thus lends greater certainty to our convictions (PES, pp. 18–19, additions C. McD.).

By the time of his writing of PES, therefore, Brentano has decidedly set aside his earlier Aristotelian view of psychology defended in his 1866 habilitation thesis on *The Psychology of Aristotle, in Particular His Doctrine of the Active Intellect* (1867) and embarked, instead, upon some version of Hume's empiricist line of enquiry and his particular focus on our experiences themselves as the starting point for psychology (philosophy) in PES.<sup>5</sup> Nor does Brentano relinquish this "indispensable source" (*unentbehrliche Quelle*) (PES, pp. 40–44) of "the inner perception of our own psychical phenomena" in his later career, for, as he succinctly puts it in his next publication which examines our ethical manner of reasoning: "Inner perception tells me that I am now having such-and-such sound or color sensations, or that I am now thinking or willing this or that" (OKR, pp. 19–20). In sum, if psychology as a science is to focus on "psychical phenomena" themselves, then we can set aside the issue of who or what this "me" or "I" or "self" is that is having such experiences. No science of this individual "I" is, at any rate, possible because science only deals with general cases, which, in this instance, means only with "psychical phenomena in general" (PES, Book II).

Because psychology, as Brentano now understands it, starts with the irrefragable existence of our own psychical phenomena, any issue concerning either proving or disproving their existence does not arise in PES. Such would be simply nonsensical, or more accurately speaking, for Brentano, self-referentially inconsistent, for, if tried by anyone, would entail either an act of denial or of affirmation for that individual, which is a psychical phenomenon. Similarly, any questions or examination of what causes our experiences, such as sensations, to come into existence in our consciousness, really belong to "anatomists and

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the destruction the body, [...] though it would be more appropriate to call it immortality of life than of the soul" (PES p. 13).

<sup>5</sup> See McDonnell (2017).

natural philosophers," as Hume had called them, that is, to natural scientists and their physiological theories of cognition, than to "moral philosophers," that is, to those concerned with the philosophy of the human mind, as Hume is, and so such investigations "will *not* be entered upon" (Treatise, 1, emphasis, C. McD.).<sup>6</sup> Brentano, too, acknowledges physiological theories of the mind in his PES, but they, too, like Hume, do not play an important role in his philosophy of mind. Later, Brentano will re-iterate this position to his students in his lectures on *Descriptive Psychology* at Vienna University in the 1880s, explaining:

Psychognosy [Descriptive Psychology] [...] teaches [us] nothing about the causes that give rise to human consciousness [...] [and will] never mention a physico-chemical process in any of its doctrines [*Lehrsatz*]. [...] For, correct as it is to say that such processes are preconditions for consciousness, one must resolutely contradict the person who, out of a confusion of thought, claims that our consciousness in itself is to be seen as a physico-chemical event, that it itself is composed out of chemical elements (DP, p. 4, additions C. McD.).

Both in his Vienna lectures on DP and in his earlier views of psychology in PES, therefore, Brentano adheres to Hume's distinction and division between physiological theories of the causal mechanisms involved in our cognitive process and the descriptive-psychological (philosophical) task of clarifying the origins of our *knowledge* of anything in (conscious) experience. This, indeed, is reflected in Brentano's explicit division of the science of psychology in his lectures on DP, sometime after PES, into the two component parts of a descriptive and genetic (natural-scientific) psychology.

The upshot of this view of psychology for Brentano in PES (and DP) is that psychology, as a science, no longer needs to take the soul, considered as the principle of life of any living being (plants, animals, human beings), as the principle concept underpinning its basis. Instead, it must concentrate its attention on the human mind and *its* "impressions," as Hume calls them, for these "are perceptions which enter with the most force and violence" and with most "vivacity,"<sup>7</sup> that is, "sensations, passions and emotions *as they make their first appearance in the soul*" (Treatise, 1; my emphasis, C. McD.). Hume, therefore, is very careful to explain to his readers that,

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6 "The examination of [what causes] our sensations belongs more to anatomists and natural philosophers [natural scientists] than to moral [philosophers]; and therefore shall not at present be enter'd upon." (Treatise, p. 1, additions C. McD.).

7 In addition to distinguishing "impressions" from "ideas" in terms of their "vivacity," O'Donnell (1960, p. 71, n. 51) notes that Hume deploys throughout the *Treatise* "a whole host of synonyms: 'force'; 'liveliness'; 'strength'; 'violence'; 'solidity, firmness, steadiness'; 'clear and evident'; 'clear and precise.'"

By the term of impression I would not be understood to express the manner in which our lively perceptions are produced in the soul, but merely the perceptions themselves, for which there is no particular name in either English or any other language that I know of (*Treatise*, p. 2, n.).

The “impression,” therefore, which occurs in the soul (of the human being) that is of concern to Hume is *not* the causal act of impressing such “perceptions” on our soul (or on our body, this makes no difference here to Hume), but its “*impress*,” “the result” (O’Donnell 1960, p. 65). Our “ideas” are generated from these “perceptions” or “impressions.” Here, then, Hume is *distinguishing* perceptions that refer to *impressions* alone, the impress, from Locke’s view that all perceptions are “ideas” (O’Donnell 1960, p. 65, n. 7). Such “impressions” as “perceptions of the soul,” for Hume, are, “what is present to the mind” (*Treatise*, p. 342). Brentano, too, believes that our experiences are always “present to the mind,” that is, immediately perceived the way they are in “inner perception,” and so, describes these “perceptions of the soul” as Hume had named them, as “psychical phenomena.” This, of course, also echoes Locke’s (1689) views—“Consciousness is the perception of what passes in a man’s own mind” (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter 1, p. 19.)—and explains why Brentano, following Locke, can maintain that since whatever is in consciousness must be conscious, we can do without “the hypothesis of the unconscious” in the science of “psychical phenomena”/“conscious acts” (PES, Book II, § 2, “Inner Consciousness,” pp. 101–137).<sup>8</sup> In PES, nevertheless, Brentano does recognize, without investigating further, that there is some connection between consciousness and the body and that consciousness can modify the psychical, for example, becoming conscious of anger through observation changes the experiencing of anger (PES, p. 30). What is of concern to Brentano in PES, as it was to Hume in the *Treatise*, nonetheless, are our experiences themselves, *first and foremost* as they are “present to the mind” or “perceived.” This, then, is why Brentano informs us that, as he uses these terms in PES, “conscious act,” “consciousness,” “psychical act,” “mental act” and “psychical phenomenon” are all “synonymous expressions” for our experiences themselves (PES, p. 102). From a strictly descriptive-psychological perspective, this *also* applies to what Brentano calls the outer perception of physical phenomena—even if the *outer* perception of physical phenomena (a colour), because of the results of scientific inference

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<sup>8</sup> The question of the relationship between our consciousness and the unconscious (and pre-conscious) is not directly addressed by Brentano, but it was taken up by Sigmund Freud, one of Brentano’s later well-known students from his Vienna period, and others. See Fancher (1977).

and experimentation (actual light particles, light waves), is later found out to be mis-taken—for, as Hume notes:

I hear of a sudden *a noise of a door* opening upon its hinges [...] I have never observed that this noise could proceed from anything but the motion of the door, and therefore *conclude* that the present *phenomenon* is a contradiction to all past experiences unless the door [...] be still in being (Treatise, p. 196; my emphasis, C. McD.).

Irrespective, therefore, of what external source may have caused these "impressions," or "perceptions," or "psychical phenomena," or "physical phenomena" to be imprinted and appear (in the soul, mind, or body of an individual human being, such makes no difference, in this context, to Hume and Brentano's position), these "perceptions" (imprinted experiences) are all that we have to go on when reflecting philosophically on the nature of the human being.

What we have direct access to and start out with, first and foremost, therefore, are the impresses of our immediate experiences. These, for Hume, are the basic experiences behind which we cannot go (*unhintergebar*), as it were, when thinking about ourselves and our knowledge of anything; that is, behind which we are not permitted to think in any philosophy of mind. From this point of view, therefore, it is of importance to note that Hume accepts the existence of unobservable causes about which we may never know, or ever can know anything (O'Donnell 1960, pp. 91–93). Brentano, likewise, as we shall shortly see, will agree with Hume in arguing that causality in nature cannot be observed; but he will also argue against Hume on the necessity of the working of causality in nature and the immediate visibility of causality in the mental realm of human normative reasoning. It is, nonetheless, this general Humean approach to our experiences that Brentano adopts, when he tells us in PES that by "a psychical phenomenon" he means,

Hearing a sound, seeing a coloured object, feeling warmth or cold, [...] similar states of imagination, [...] the thinking of a general concept provided such a thing actually does occur, [...] every judgement, every recollection, every expectation, every inference, every conviction or opinion, every doubt, [...] [and] every emotion: joy, sorrow, fear, hope, courage, despair, anger, love, hate, desire, act of will, intention, astonishment, admiration, contempt, etc. (PES, p. 79).

It is, therefore, fair to conclude that, in PES, Brentano has definitively turned away from following Aristotle's approach to the soul, and chosen instead to follow Hume's approach to the mind and the latter's philosophic view that the meaning of all concepts and ideas that are connected to whatever we claim to know about anything must be traced back to the "impressions" or "perceptions"

(imprinted experiences) from which they arose, and this, for Brentano means, if not to actual acts of outer perceptual-sense experiences of physical phenomena, then to actual acts of inner perception of our own psychical phenomena.<sup>9</sup>

In an important respect, then, Brentano's exhortation in PES for the science of psychology to go back to the facts of actual experiences themselves in the clarification of the meaning of any of the concepts it uses in that science is, in effect, an invocation to others and himself to follow Hume's celebrated philosophic "first maxim, that in the end we must rest contented with experience" (*Treatise*, p. 60). Yet, despite following this philosophic line of enquiry in PES, Brentano is not led back to Hume's (in)famous conclusion in the *Treatise* that the knowledge that I appear to have of my self in my mental life, when traced back in our actual experiences, is nothing more (or less) than "a bundle of perceptions." Nor is Brentano led to the well-known conclusion of what Hume called the "chief argument" of his *Treatise* (Abstract, p. 4), that causality, when traced back in our actual experiences, is not a power in a cause to produce *its* effect among external objects, but merely "a felt compulsion" in the mind; a mental expectation that a certain event will be followed by another event with which it has been habitually and initially associated in our experience. I will return to Brentano's critique of Hume's views on causality later as this forms part of the basis of why he need not address Hume's "problem of the I" in PES. The important point to note, for now, is that Brentano believes that there is plenty of evidence in our experiences to show that the experiences which we have both of nature and of our mental life, when these are traced back in our actual immediate experiences, exhibit some kind of real, natural, continuity between them and *for me*, and so, these are not reducible to mere mental association. Irrespective, then, of whatever conception I may be able to have of my self (as embodied or disembodied consciousness), if our experiences themselves cannot be reduced to the nominal unity of discrete experiences ("perceptions" in Hume's sense), then even if the traditional question concerning whether the soul of the human being as substantial bearer of presentations continues to exist after death of the body, or not, "has fallen into disrepute" and the very concept of the soul rejected in contemporary natural science, "with or without a soul, you cannot deny that there is a certain continuity of our mental life here on earth" (PES, p. 12).<sup>10</sup> We shall shortly see that, for

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<sup>9</sup> Under the influence of Brentano and his reading of the British empiricists, Husserl too, in his early career, begins with this basis, but in developing his theory of the intuition of essences and taking the radical step of introducing "ideal objects" in *Logical Investigations* (1900–1901), "breaks with this sensualist pattern he had picked up in his career" (De Boer 1978, pp. 151–152).

<sup>10</sup> In the "Foreword to the 1874 Edition," Brentano tells us that he has planned six books for PES (pp. xxvii–xxix); but he only publishes the first two: Book I, *Psychology as a Science*



Brentano, this continuity of our mental life here on earth is linked to some kind of causality operative in the phenomena of our mental life as much as the laws of natural science, in his view, are linked to some kind of causality operative in nature, even if we cannot observe the why or whither of such causality in nature and in natural science (as Hume had also noted). Brentano's views on "causality," then, are of importance to understanding his view of the self, whatever that is, and his running but implicit critique of Hume's views on the self and causality.

A further point, in relation to this, that needs to be mentioned briefly in passing, for now, is that Brentano is well aware of the fact that the particular experiences of the individual human being who hears and sees is simply neither reducible nor comparable to the conjunction of the mental activities of a blind man hearing and a deaf person seeing. This is because "the cognition which compares them is a real objective unity, but when we combine the acts of the blind man and the deaf man, we always get a mere collective and never a unitary real thing" (PES, p. 122). It thus follows for Brentano that "[O]nly if sound and colour are presented jointly, in one and the same reality, is it conceivable that they can be compared with one another" (PES, p. 122). That "one and the same reality" is "the self," and however this unity of consciousness of the individual human being is to be explained, the self, as Brentano understands it, is linked to that.<sup>11</sup> Thus the "self," for Brentano, is clearly not any kind of (formally logical) "I think" that has to (freely) accompany our conceptual experiences as Kant (and Fichte) had argued; nor is it any "positive conception of Self" that is found in acts of memory and inner observation as J. S. Mill had argued in his *An Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy*.<sup>12</sup> Ruling out what "the self" means for Brentano, nevertheless, does not of course tell us what it is; so, what is the self, as Brentano understands it, that is invariably present, albeit implicitly, in the experience of the unity of consciousness which is a fact of my consciousness?

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and Book II, *Psychical Phenomena in General*. Remaining books were to deal with the relation between the mind and the body, culminating in addressing the question of immortality (Book VI). See Rollinger (2012, pp. 269–278) for an account of Brentano's treatment of the theme of the immateriality and immortality of the soul during his Würzburg lectures on psychology leading up to the publication of PES and Brentano's plan of his final and sixth book (pp. 289–296).

<sup>11</sup> This is Brentano's consistent position throughout his lectures delivered at the Universities of Würzburg and Vienna from 1868–1891. See EG, §§447 and 448.

<sup>12</sup> Brentano studied this text of Mill, which is quoted often in PES.

### 3 The Re-Appearance of the “Problem of the I” in Brentano’s *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*

Philosophically, Brentano’s declaration in the Forward to his 1874 study of PES that “my psychological standpoint is empirical; experience alone is my teacher” (p. xxxii),<sup>13</sup> is, in many respects, a rejection both of ancient Greek Aristotelian philosophical psychology and of natural-scientific empiricism in favour of Hume’s “first maxim, that in the end we must rest contented with experience” (Treatise, p. 60). In this approach, Hume is arguably one of the most original, important and influential philosophers of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. And it is *through this very approach* that Hume arrives at his (in)famous argument (referenced by Brentano in PES) that no matter how much we would like to think or claim to know that there is a self, or a soul substance that lies at the root of all our experiences, when we take a closer look at the origin of this belief in our actual experiences, we find out that “the cognitions”—the plural is of importance—which we claim to have of ourselves,

are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement. [...] The mind is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their appearance; pass, re-pass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations. There is properly no simplicity in it at one time, nor identity in different [times], whatever natural propensity we may have to imagine that simplicity and identity. The comparison of the theatre must not mislead us. They are the successive perceptions only, that constitute the mind; nor have we the most distant notion of the place where these scenes are represented, or of the materials of which it is composed (Treatise, p. 252, my additions, C. McD.).

What Hume, therefore, would like to argue for, and defend, is the position that *in reality* there is no fixed, permanent, persistent, identifiable *real object*—be it a substance, a subject, a soul, or a self—to be found in our experience that corresponds to the idea of a self that is naturally generated by us out of the cognitions which we may actually have of ourselves (as an object, or a self, or a subject) at any given time in any given place in our experiences and in the complexities of those everyday experiences. Nor are our experiences themselves comparable to representations of representations that we see happening on a stage in a theatre

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<sup>13</sup> See, PES, Book II, §5, “A Survey of the Principal Attempts to Classify Psychical Phenomena,” pp. 177–193.

because our experiences ("perceptions") *represent nothing other than themselves*. Our experiences can of course be *analogously* compared to the role of many actors ("perceptions") coming and going and criss-crossing on stage, over times and places, in an effort to represent a story or a character or an event, but, *in reality*, our experiences ("perceptions") do not unite in any such fashion over time(s) and in time(s) or over space(s) and in space(s) *to represent anything other than themselves*. They are what they are, discrete "perceptions," no more, no less. Hence, Hume must issue a caveat to his reader *not to take his "analogy" of the theatre too far* as this will misconstrue the nature of our "perceptions" (experiences) of the self and the conclusion that he wishes to argue for, that what we do know of the self, in truth and in existence, corresponds to nothing more or less than "a bundle of perceptions." In sum, there is no real object (in existence) of *a persistent self* to be found that corresponds to *the idea* of the self that we may or can have psychologically generated of *the self* from our "perceptions" (impressed experiences).

It is of importance to note, therefore, that by "perceptions of the soul" Hume *does not mean* normal sense perceptions, such as the actual act of seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, or tasting something. He means instead *the impress*, the impressed contents of actual experiences that befall us and "ideas" that we generate based on such experiences ("perceptions"). Ideas themselves, therefore, are not separate and distinct from impressions, but "derived from" "impressions," or "fainter copies" of "impressions." If, however, Hume is correct about this, then such derivation of "ideas" from "impressions" is causation, or, at least such derivation requires some understanding of an association or an associative quality that is *productive of the existence* of the idea, even if Hume's later theory of causation in the *Treatise* would like to argue against any such real or necessary connection between cause and effect.<sup>14</sup> In other words, Hume seems to rely upon the very theory of causation that his later discussion in the *Treatise* is designed to refute (O'Donnell 1960, p. 83).<sup>15</sup>

Brentano, however, does not raise this objection to Hume's theory of the self as "a bundle of perceptions" because he agrees and insists on the point that, "whether or not there are souls, the fact is there are psychical phenomena."

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14 This is O'Donnell's main critique of Hume's approach to causation (O'Donnell 1960, p. 83). It is of importance to note, however, that "the acceptance of the point of view [...] in no way determines the correctness or incorrectness of Hume's criticisms of the notion of causation as 'power' or 'efficacy'" (O'Donnell 1960, p. 84).

15 In addition to this, O'Donnell (1960, p. 99) points out that in the *Treatise* Hume operates with several causal theories, no less than six, including some notion of the existence of "unknown causation," and that is not "observable."

Like Hume's "perceptions," Brentano's "psychical phenomena" (experiences) are passively acquired by "the mentally active subject." As an empiricist, therefore, Brentano accepts the tenet that we can attempt to order and classify our experiences, but we cannot call our experiences to order. Yet Brentano's objection to Hume's views on causality is based precisely on the causal power of derivation that is operative in any action of a cause and the *existence* of its effect. For Brentano, a cause is productive of the existence of its effect; it brings it about, or, at least, it has a role to play in bringing about the existence of the effect. This, presumably, is why Brentano later refers to the natural science of psychology as "*genetic* psychology" (DP, pp. 3ff.), since it investigates what brings about the existence of "physical" and "psychical phenomena," and why he defends such a conception of psychology as a science of "psychical phenomena" in PES too. The *mere* succession of one event with another is simply not causality (seeing someone eating ice-cream and seeing that it is a nice sunny day does not mean eating ice-cream causes the sun to shine, nor do we think this). The very meaning of the concept of causality, Brentano notes, cannot be understood in terms of the *mere succession* of a cause and an effect, for, a cause *also is said or is seen* to impart existence to its effect. Hume, after all, requires both the succession of an impression and the *existence* of its "idea" to follow, however "fainter" the idea may be, irrespective of whatever his celebrated theory of causality concludes about causality not being a power in a cause and its effect, but the mere mental association of one event followed by another event in expectation that such will happen again. Thus, for Brentano, causation applies across board in all our mental activity and experiences and in nature, for, as he summarily puts it in his lectures on the existence of God at Würzburg and Vienna:

In every conclusion we notice that it is produced by the thought of its premisses, in every choice it is effected by its motives. Also, every mental act, such as our seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, is maintained not by analogy to the law of inertia but only by a continually renewed causation (EG, p. 287).

Unlike Hume's psychological theory of causation as (mere) succession of (discrete) mental events, Brentano clearly believes that causality is a "force" in nature where "the laws of co-existence and succession" (PES, pp. 98–99) are operative absolutely, that is to say, causality exists, whether we know or can know about such causality, or not; and this also holds good even if Hume is correct, and Brentano believes he is, in this theory and analysis, that *as a matter of fact* we psychologically associate *unavoidably* the idea of a cause with an effect (necessarily) in our mind about external objects, but without any *epistemic* justification. Brentano, then, is a determinist in this sense, that causal laws apply

necessarily. Thus, Brentano has no need to turn to Kant's elaborate explanation and defence against Hume of the necessity of causality as an *a priori* feature of *our human mind*. Nor does Brentano need to subscribe to Kant's approach to nature and natural science where, for Kant, nature is nature *only* in so far as we know it by natural-scientific means. When Kant, for instance, stresses in § 14 of his *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (1783) that "*Nature is the existence of things, insofar as that existence is determined according to universal laws,*" he is arguing that the very notion of nature *as an area of scientific scrutiny* is already an outcome of us, human beings, being able to postulate causality as the defining feature of what constitutes an "object" and "reality" (or "real object") of scientific investigation in the first place; that is to say, for Kant, we cannot admit of any lack of necessary connection or break in the link between a cause and its effect not happening *under conditions of natural-scientific law-governedness* without, therein, giving up the very notion of "object" and "real object" in *natural science* in the first instance. This is why Kant concludes, emphasizing the point, that "(I)f nature meant the existence of things *in themselves*, we would never be able to cognize it, either *a priori* or *a posteriori* [...]. My understanding, and the conditions under which alone it can connect the determinations of things in their existence, prescribes no rules to the things themselves; these do not conform to my understanding, but my understanding would have to conform to them" (*Prolegomena*, p. 46).

Brentano rejects any such idealist(ic) theories of causality, nature and natural science as this simply does not square up with our experience of causality in nature, in our mind, or in natural science, that is, with *either* the absolute laws of "co-existence and succession," whether we know these or not, *or* the nature and limits of natural science itself in its knowledge-claims about such causality. For Brentano, rather,

We could express the scientific task of the natural sciences by saying something to the effect that they are those sciences which seek to explain the sequence of physical phenomena connected with normal and pure sensation (that is, sensations which are not influenced by special psychical conditions and processes) on the basis of the assumption of a world which resembles one which has three dimensional extension in space and flows in *one* direction in time, and which influences our sense organs. Without explaining the absolute nature [*Beschaffenheit*] of this world, these sciences would limit themselves to ascribing to it forces capable of producing sensations and of exerting a reciprocal influence upon one another, and determining for these forces the laws of co-existence and succession. Through these laws they would then establish indirectly the laws of sequence of the physical phenomena of sensations, if, through scientific abstraction from concomitant mental conditions, we admit that they manifest themselves in a pure state and as occurring in relation to a constant sensory capacity. We must interpret the expression 'science of physical

phenomena' in this somewhat complicated way if it is to be equated with the meaning of natural science (PES, pp. 98–99).

The natural scientist, then, as Brentano argues (in agreement with Comte and Mill) does not and cannot explain the absolute structure of the world—that is the remit of theological and metaphysical philosophy. The natural scientist, instead, *assumes*, from the outset, that there is a world existing absolutely “out there,” as it were, and of which we are a part, and that scientist endeavours to ascertain certain laws of physical forces that act on our sense organs and produce our sensory phenomenal impressions. The natural scientist thus seeks to establish, through observation, hypothesis and experiment, the laws of “succession and existence” pertaining to these forces that are productive of the existence of those experiences and, therefore, for the phenomena we experience.

In opposition to both Hume and Kant, then, Brentano maintains that causality is a necessary feature of the world, even if it is ultimately unknowable in-itself. The law of gravity, Brentano notes, in his 1869 paper on “Auguste Comte and Positive Philosophy,” necessarily applies under certain conditions, whether we know anything about it, or not, and we cannot know how gravity works, producing its effect, from a natural-scientific perspective, without observation, mathematical hypothesis and experimentation. *That* there is causality operative in nature and in the nature of my own will—Brentano uses the example of directing his pen to write (AC, p. 18)—cannot be denied, even if we do not know *how* or *why* causality is, or why causality is *operative at all*: “neither I nor anybody else can say” (AC, p. 18). Empirical inductive generalisations that are characteristic of natural science deal in probability, and so, at best, “trace a particular case back to a general [mathematical-hypothetical] law, establishing a connection between a specific phenomenon and a more general fact” (AC, p. 16, my additions, C. McD.). The general laws of natural science must always and constantly be tested against the facts of experience, a specified phenomenon, that is to say, for Brentano, against our outer perceptions of “physical phenomena.” This is how they work and the limit of their validity. In such cases, nonetheless, “we know that some thing or other is causally operative, we also know that the cause lies in this or that thing, but without actually understanding or explaining the how or why [of such causality]” (AC, 16, my additions, C. McD.). None of the theories of natural science, therefore, are promoted or held up to be absolutely certain, or as discovering eternal laws, or claim to be such in any positive modern-scientific view of the world. Natural science is not a religion, even if the search for eternity, characteristic of human religious experience, still continues to have its influence in other spheres of the human spirit. This much, Brentano

had already argued in his 1869 paper on "Auguste Comte and Positive Philosophy" before reiterating this position in his PES and DP.

Curiously, however, in PES, as well as in his earlier and later lectures, Brentano uses examples taken from the domain of the normative disciplines of logic and ethics to demonstrate the visibility (knowability) of the necessity of causality.<sup>16</sup> He notes that, when we see that a conclusion follows of necessity from the premises, the premises of a valid argument are not *merely associated* with the conclusion of that argument but its *existence* is "caused" by the premises, "we see this causation" that is "motivated" by the premises (DP, p. 177, n. 7).<sup>17</sup> Again, when we choose to do something, to bring about something through the exercise of one's own will, "we notice not only that the one desire precedes the other but also that—through the co-operation of a certain reflection—it produces the desire in us" (VE, p. 117). In the planning of any action, the end necessarily promotes the existence of the desire for the means to attain it, and, if successful, the existence of the completed action is necessarily brought about by the person in the planning and execution of that action. Part of the way things exist, from a moral perspective, is because we want them to exist. If such mental activity were to follow a pattern of mere association of discrete mental events that happened to bring about the desired outcome, with no necessary actions following upon each other, such an experience could never be ascribed to, or ever indicate to the doer of that moral action that she is the doer, that is, *the author* of that action, as opposed to a (mere) observer of unconnected mental events. If my actions were completely undetermined (free) in this manner, I would never know "*myself*" as the author of any action or of "the perceptions of the soul," as Hume, the writer himself, Brentano notes, assumes *we are and have to be* (PES, p. 18).

We know, then, what "the self" is not for Brentano. It is not some absolutely free subjectivity but has some measure of agency in the doing of whatever it does within absolute laws of necessity and determinism. Causality, in other words, for

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16 See, De Boer (1978, pp. 112–113) and his remarks on Brentano's "undifferentiated application" of this theory of causality across natural science, ethics and logic, and the problems this bequeathed to Husserl.

17 For earlier, see, AC, pp. 15f. Because the purpose of logic is to bring about correct judgment and it prescribes directives for attaining this goal, Brentano believes that it can be classified as a practical science and not a purely theoretical science, like arithmetic and geometry. Hence, Brentano believes that "a single improvement" in logic as "an art," like medicine, "brings about a thousand advances in science" (PES, p. 21). Brentano, therefore, takes logic in the broad sense as "the theory of the art [*Kunstlehr*] of correct judgment" just as he defines ethics as the study of "the art of correct loving" involved in moral-evaluative scientific judgments (OKR).



Brentano, is not a subjective, psychological fabrication, or a projected discovery by natural scientists and natural scientists alone (as Kant seems to think); it exists, rather, absolutely in nature and in acts of human normative reasoning, even if such causality in nature and in normative reasoning are radically different, one directly visible, the other never. And all of this is entirely compatible and consistent with the proof of the necessity of God as creator of the contingency of the world in its existence. If things are, need not be at all, yet are, then this clearly implies the necessary existence of God upon which this contingent existence depends for its existence. It cannot depend upon itself or nothing to come into existence. Thus the argument from contingency does not argue to *the idea* of a necessary being (as Kant misrepresents it), which then has to be proven to exist, therein, invoking the fallacious ontological argument (as Kant thinks it does), but to the necessary *existence* of God as creative cause (*schöpferische Ursache*) from *the fact that the world is at all*, for those of us who can see this (EG, §§ 420–434). Thus, “the proof from contingency [of the world to the necessary existence of God as creator] is even simpler than the proof from motion” (EG, p. 285, my additions, C. McD.).

In his later life, Brentano continues to hold this view, which he held in PES and throughout his lecturing career, on the necessity of the absolute laws of nature and the absolute normative laws applicable to human beings as co-existing, for, as he writes in a letter to Husserl on January 19<sup>th</sup>, 1905, “[A]nyone who judges in a truly evident way truly *knows* and is certain of truth. And this has nothing to do with the fact that as judging [...] he is caused and is dependent in particular on the organization of the brain [...]. Anyone who believes that this is contradictory is deceiving himself” (TE, pp. 91–95).

Brentano, therefore, clearly has or sees no problem with the view that the same psychical phenomenon (“a self-evidently true act of judgement”) that is subject to absolute normative laws is, at the same time, subject to absolute laws governing the necessary brain activities of the human being. It is, of course, true that Brentano does maintain that when we, as descriptive psychologists, choose to investigate the laws of logic, we can and must abstract from issues connected to any empirical causal explanation of such psychical phenomena in the organisation of our brains in favour of a focus on the self-evident features of the experiences of *a valid normative logical consciousness as such*. Yet such description of “psychical phenomena” must be followed by explanation, since Brentano himself believes in PES that the natural science of psychology is the end point of this endeavour. This was not Brentano’s view all of the time, but it certainly is his view at the time of his writing of PES because in this study he regards psychology as “the crowning pinnacle” of the natural sciences and as “the science of the future,” influencing aesthetics, educational pedagogy,



logic, moral, political and social science (PES, pp. 3, 25).<sup>18</sup> Unlike his contemporary, Wilhelm Dilthey, for Brentano, all of the human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) must be brought in line with the natural science of psychology.<sup>19</sup> In sum, "psychology," in Brentano's estimation, "appears to be the fundamental condition of human progress in precisely those things which, above all, constitute human dignity" (PES, p. 21).<sup>20</sup>

In PES, then, Brentano believes that psychology, as a natural science, promises to complete the picture of the mind in the normative disciplines of logic, ethics and aesthetics, whilst still maintaining, after his 1874 PES in the 1880s (and thereafter), that the validity of the absolute norms of ethics, logic and aesthetics cannot be reduced to norms associated with matters of fact (OKR).<sup>21</sup> This position, however, leaves open the possibility that the self of the human being who is the bearer of psychical phenomena and subject both to the necessity of the laws of nature and to the laws governing normative principles, is reducible in theory, if not in practice to some kind of explanation by a natural-scientific psychology. The being of "the self" that underpins the mind-body source of our experiences accessible in inner perception—"Inner perception tells me that I am now having such-and-such sound or color sensations, or that I am now thinking or willing this or that"—may well indeed be interpreted and treated "in the future" as an object in natural science that is determinable by the method of observation, hypothesis and experimentation.

A complicating factor, however, in this general picture that Brentano paints, albeit implicitly, of the "self" and the natural science of psychology in PES is his insistence in that study that the self cannot be an object of any kind of observation. Brentano, indeed, argues further than Hume, and in explicit agreement

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**18** Because psychology also takes the question concerning our continued existence, after death, as a genuine question, psychology also "becomes, in another sense, the science of the future" (PES, p. 19).

**19** In this, Brentano believes that he is steadily following the model (and English translation by Schiel) of J. S. Mill's "moral sciences" for "*Geisteswissenschaften*" that incorporates and promotes the methodology of the natural sciences (*Naturwissenschaften*) in the "moral sciences" (PES, p. 48).

**20** Here we may detect echoes of conversations which Brentano may have held with John Henry Newman, later Cardinal, whom he met on a visit to his Oratory at Edgbaston in England in 1872 and who was concerned with education (setting up the Catholic University in Dublin, Ireland, in 1851) and who had published his ideas on *The Idea of a University* (1852 and 1858). See, Valentine (2017, p. 293).

**21** In OKR, Brentano argues that the positivists as well as the historians and legal jurists who reduce the normative status of absolute valid moral norms to social and historical facts are also guilty of this genetic fallacy.

with Comte, that the very ability to construct the *idea* of a self from any kind of (inner) observation of the self (in memory or introspection) is *impossible* because “[i]t is a universally valid psychological law that we can never focus our *attention* upon the object of inner perception [...]. It is only when attention is turned toward a different object that we are able to perceive, incidentally, the psychical processes which are directed towards that object” (PES, p. 30). Brentano, nevertheless, does not draw the conclusion that Comte did from this, that since we cannot observe any self as an object for investigation, we must rule out psychology as a science at all. I will return shortly to those parts of Comte’s views with which Brentano does (and does not) agree that are of relevance to determining Brentano’s implicit understanding of the “self,” but the important point to note, for now, is that Brentano sides with Comte in maintaining that we cannot produce even *an idea* of the self from any kind of observation of the self that allegedly occurs in one’s own memory. In his agreement here, Brentano explicitly singles out and disagrees with Mill’s position in PES.<sup>22</sup>

Mill had argued that,

The fact of recognizing a sensation [...] remembering that it has been felt before [...] and the inexplicable tie [...] which connects the present consciousness with the past one [...] is as near as I think we can get to a positive conception of Self. That there is something real in this tie [...] I hold to be indubitable [...]. Whether we are directly conscious of it in the act of remembrance [...] or whether, according to the opinion of Kant, we are not conscious of a Self at all, but are compelled to assume it as a necessary condition of Memory, I do not undertake to decide [...]. As such, I ascribe a reality to the Ego—to my own Mind—different from that real existence as a Permanent Possibility, which is the only reality I acknowledge in Matter: and by fair experiential inference from that one Ego, I ascribe the same reality to other Egos, or Minds (Mill 1865, 1979, pp. 207–208).

For Mill, then, it is only because I do as a matter of fact—and so, *can*—recognise experiences as my experiences *in an act of memory* that I have some notion of *the self* as a reality, that is, “that there is something real in this [inexplicable] tie.” This reality is thus not reducible to the real existence of inert matter as it is only on this basis that I have any concept of my own mind or of my self and ascribe such a reality to other human beings and to other minds that are equally not reducible to inorganic chemical matter, or lifeless mechanical operations.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Of a total of 23 authors writing in English mentioned by Brentano in PES, J. S. Mill is quoted most often (on 42 pages). See, Valentine (2017, Table 4, p. 296).

<sup>23</sup> For Mill’s distinction between the forms of mechanical and organic orders and his attempt to argue that the human social order is not reducible to either of these, see, Nicholas Capaldi,

Mill's argument, therefore, would seem to be this, that whether we need to *postulate* a self as an "I think" that *formally* accompanies all our acts of reasoning in order to "justify" in the first place such a conception, as Kant argues (for his own philosophical purposes of "transcendental philosophy"), or not, such is of no consequence or relevance because, in reality, as a matter of fact, the closest that we "*can get* to a positive conception of Self" is on *the fact of memories* and through our acts of memory. Herein is where we identify our self as the source of our own experiences, whether we are directly attentive of this, or not, and whilst we are engaged in any specific act of memory or self-observation, or not. Yet Brentano denies this origin to our conception of the self too.

We know what "the self" is not, for Brentano. It is not an object of inner observation (in memory) or of outer (sense) perception, nor a floating "I think" of an unknowable soul substance existing in-itself, as Kant would have it. Brentano, rather, would like to argue that we need to describe first, and properly, the way in which one's own mental life exhibits a natural continuity before addressing the issue of the "self" and our knowledge of the "self." Hume (and others) either fail to account for this or ignore it. It is, therefore, precisely because there is some real, natural unity in human consciousness of its own psychical activities and the irrefragable existence of *its* effects, that an empirically-derived descriptive science of the law determining the multiplicity of all of those mental acts (psychical phenomena) as a unity is possible. This unity of consciousness needs to be understood first before Brentano's implicit view of the self can be approached. So, what is Brentano's views on the unity of consciousness and what implicit *positive* view of the "self" can we find in PES?

## 4 Brentano's Understanding of the Unity of Consciousness and Implicit View of the Self in *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*

In PES, Brentano notes that any conscious act (of sensation, volition, cognition, judgment, fear, hope, etc.), which a mentally active subject experiences, is also accompanied, as a matter of fact, by an "incidental awareness [*nebenbei Bewusstsein*]" of itself as a conscious act (PES, p. 132). This feature of a conscious act is an "essential ingredient" in any presentation (*Vorstellung*) and is "connect-

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"Comte, Mill, and Brentano on the Intellectual status of Philosophy and Its Relationship to History" in this volume, pp. 9–30.

ed [...] in such a peculiarly intimate way that its very existence constitutes an intrinsic prerequisite of the existence of this presentation” (PES, p. 127). That a conscious act *contains an incidental awareness of itself as a conscious act*, is part and parcel of the very existence of a psychical-act experience. This is why Brentano remarks that incidental awareness is an “accessory [added] feature *included [given] in the act itself*” (PES, p. 141, my emphasis, C. McD.). It thus would be self-referentially inconsistent for anyone to deny such incidental awareness because a conscious act of denial, as a fact of experience, presupposes its validity. Hence, “the truth of inner perception [as incidental consciousness] cannot be proved in any way,” but this is because “it has something more than proof; it is immediately evident” (PES, p. 140).

Though immediately evident, such “[incidental] awareness,” as one commentator correctly notes, is “restricted, to be sure, to the immediate present,” and so, “would seem to be infinitesimally small” (Spiegelberg 1994, p. 36). It is, nevertheless, an essential ingredient of a conscious act without it itself being a self-sufficient conscious act. Such incidental consciousness, therefore, is not an act of reflection, or of perception, or of attention, or of any definable conscious act (e.g., of introspection); it thus should not be identified or compared with these. Nor is this feature a definable object of any intended object of an experience. It is certainly not an object of outer (sense) perception, “a physical phenomenon.” Incidental awareness, therefore, is neither “a psychical phenomenon” (a psychical-act experience) nor a “physical phenomenon” as Brentano defines these terms in PES.

Because a conscious act in our human consciousness has identifiable features that are present in that individual conscious act or psychical phenomenon itself, Brentano can argue that “(T)he unity of consciousness does not require either the simplicity or the indivisibility of consciousness” (PES, p. 171). On the contrary, a unity of multiplicity exists in consciousness. In a conscious act of hearing, for instance, there is (1) the object of that conscious act, the sound *qua* “physical phenomenon,” which is why Brentano describes such an object as an “immanent,” “intentional,” or “mental” object or content *of that mental act experience* (hence, these three descriptions are all synonymous expressions in PES, p. 88); (2) the act of hearing, as long as it occurs (the psychical phenomenon); and (3) the incidental awareness of the conscious act of itself. Hence, it follows for Brentano that, although “we divide it [i.e., a conscious act of hearing, as is evident from the context] *conceptually* into two presentations [of the act of hearing and of the tone heard]” (PES, p. 127; my emphasis, C. McD.), *in reality* this presentation is one unitary presentation. When Brentano, therefore, re-introduces and deploys the medieval-scholastic concept of “the intentional inexistence of an object” in an actual psychical act-experience to define “psychical

phenomena in general" in the famous passage of PES (p. 88), he is using this concept to *distinguish* the psychical phenomenon itself (e.g., the act of hearing a sound) from the physical phenomenon itself (e.g., the sound as heard sound).<sup>24</sup> The intentional (mental) indwelling of an object (the heard sound) in the mental act-experience (psychical phenomenon) is an essential feature of the act itself, it is not a feature of the sound, nor of the external cause of the sound phenomenon as examined by natural scientists. The feature of incidental awareness, which is *also included in* a conscious act, is *another dimension* or *another feature* of any conscious mental act that *also* distinguishes it, the psychical, from the physical (phenomenon). Such additional consciousness, nonetheless, does not and cannot have any separate or independent existence from any conscious mental act; it is not self-sufficient; it is, rather, parasitic on the conscious act. So, where did Brentano discover this feature of our consciousness?

In PES, Brentano is crystal clear about where he learned of this doctrine of "incidental awareness." He did not find it in Descartes, Locke, Hume, or Aquinas, but in Aristotle, and points exactly to where Aristotle's remarks in Book Lambda of his *Metaphysics* that,

Knowledge, sensation, opinion and reflection seem always to relate to something else, but only incidentally to themselves (PES, p. 132, quoting Aristotle, *Metaphysics* XII, 9).<sup>25</sup>

Some commentators see in this quote not only Brentano's faithful adherence to Aristotelian philosophy but also the Scholastic roots of Brentano's *realist* thesis of the intentionality of consciousness in PES, that is, his view that consciousness is always related to something other than itself (Marras 1976, p. 136). This, however, is *not at all* Brentano's tenet of intentionality in PES, for, what consciousness is a consciousness of, as seen from within inner perception, is actual psychical acts themselves and their *immanent* objects and contents ("perceptions of the soul"). In his PES passage on intentionality, Brentano is not following Aristotle but reproaching the British empiricists for not distinguishing in their philosophies of mind between the act (hearing a tone) and the object of the act impressed (the heard tone) within their commitment to starting with "perceptions of the soul" or "impressions" or "ideas." The arrow of intentionality in "Brentano's thesis," as it is most often referred to today (Bartock 2015), therefore, stays

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<sup>24</sup> This famous passage has produced much interpretation (and misinterpretation). See McDonnell (2006).

<sup>25</sup> See, also, Brentano, DP, p. 25 ("*geht nebenher auf sich selbst*"), though Brentano does not supply the textual reference here, as he does in PES.

within consciousness itself. “Incidental consciousness,” by comparison, is an entirely different feature of our consciousness to the intentionality of consciousness. This, nonetheless, is likewise present in an experienced conscious mental act.

The context in which Brentano discusses “incidental consciousness,” therefore, is quite different from Aristotle’s. Here, Brentano is not using this feature, as Aristotle does, to distinguish human knowledge from the kind of self-thinking thought that marks divine knowledge. Aristotle’s point in Book Lambda is that it is only because our acts of knowledge, sensation, opinion and deliberation relate to something outside of those activities, yet incidentally to themselves, that we, as mere mortals, can actually have a thought, or sense, or have an opinion, or deliberate upon anything at all in the first place, but this is *unlike* the divine activity of a self-thinking eternal and immortal God that can and does *think itself*. But how can *we*, as mere mortals, *know this*, that is impossible? Aristotle leaves this, our ability to know the way in which the divine intellect works, in *aporia*. Without *aporia*, nevertheless, we know, by comparison, how our own conscious acts of sensation, volition, cognition and discursive activity work. They all contain this feature of the incidental awareness of themselves as conscious acts, or, at least, this is the feature of our human consciousness that catches Brentano’s attention.

Although Brentano does not provide the metaphysico-theological context of Aristotle’s remarks in the *Metaphysics* in PES, and prescind entirely from any speculation about a self-thinking God in PES, he does not deviate from Aristotle’s view that the activity in every *human* conscious act of presentation, whether it is sensing, judging, withholding judgment, fearing, loving, hating, hoping or being interested in something, is aware of itself incidentally. Nor does Husserl disagree with Brentano on this matter, for in his commentary on this part of Brentano’s philosophy in his “Appendix: External and Internal Perception: Physical and Psychical Phenomena,” to his *Logical Investigations* (1900–1901), he stresses the point that such incidental awareness is “no second, independent act supervening upon a relevant psychic phenomenon,” but insofar as “the act directly intends its primary object, it is also subsidiarily directed upon itself. In this way,” Husserl concludes, in agreement with Brentano, “one avoids the endless complication of all psychic phenomena” (Husserl 1970, p. 858).

Martin Heidegger too draws the attention of his students to this “enigmatic property” of our conscious acts in his 1951–1952 lecture course on *What is Called Thinking?*, remarking:

When we attempt to learn what is called thinking and what calls for thinking, are we not getting lost in the reflection that thinks on reflection? Yet all along our way a steady light is

cast on thinking. This light is not, however, introduced by the lamp of reflection. It issues from thinking itself, and only from there. Thinking has this enigmatic property, that it itself is brought to its own light—though only and as long as it is thinking, and keeps clear of persisting in a ratiocination about ratio (Heidegger 1968, p. 28).

Central as this "incidental awareness" is to the existence of any conscious act of sensation, volition, cognition, judgment, fear, hope and so forth, it is not an attentive act, or an act of reflection, and so, it drops out of Husserl's new phenomenological science that focuses exclusively on the intentionality of consciousness that Brentano noted that is characteristic of the activity of the acts and objects of consciousness itself. It also, however, cannot provide us with any avenue to approach or information about the conception of the self that Brentano does subscribe to in PES. It does, nevertheless, play a significant role in Brentano's exclusion of some of the approaches to the self, in particular Comte's, but Brentano also appeals to this feature to reject Aquinas' attempt to render knowledge of the self as a product of acts of inner reflection on one's own mental activity because such would lead to an infinite number of acts of reflection.<sup>26</sup>

Since Comte is famous for his rejection of psychology as a spurious science based upon inner observation of a self, Brentano feels he has to address this criticism in particular to psychology as a science in PES. Brentano, indeed, agrees completely with Comte's view, that we cannot observe our own psychical phenomena as this would require the observer to divide itself (physically) into two parts, one that observes and the other that is observed (PES, p. 32). Any inner observation of a psychical phenomenon is impossible, but Brentano argues that whilst there is an act of outer (sense) observation, the act is aware of itself incidentally, *i.e.*, is secondarily directed to itself (PES, p. 30). Whereas there can be no inner observation, we have an evident perception in inner consciousness of the act of outer (sense) observation and perception (and as mine). Real observation, nonetheless, Brentano notes, can only occur in immediate memory and not in the currency of the time that the mental act is lived and experienced. Our acts of memory, however, are fallible, and so, we have no epistemological warranty or guarantee that we are knowing anything, for certain, in any of our (outer) observations of anything, or about our consciousness, or our self (as the bearer of psychical phenomena) in this manner. On this matter, Brentano agrees with Hume. Thus, we are left, Brentano concludes, with a subject-matter for psychology (philosophy), namely, the very existence of our mental acts and

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<sup>26</sup> See, Brentano, PES, Book I, Chapter 2, § II, "Inner perception as the source of psychological experience." It is not to be confused with inner observation, *i.e.*, introspection.

their immanent objects, that can be directly analysed and serve as the exclusive concern for the empirical-descriptive psychologist, but no self for *that study*. If we confine psychology to the study of our experiences themselves, we can establish psychology as a science, with or without a soul. No explicit view or treatment of the self, or soul, therefore, is needed, or to be found in PES. This, nevertheless, does not mean that Brentano has no understanding of the self in PES. He does. We know that Brentano believes that the self is the bearer of its experiences (“perceptions of the soul”) and that this self is governed, absolutely, by both laws in nature and normative laws in logic, ethics and aesthetics and depends absolutely for its very contingent existence on the necessity of God’s existence as its creative cause.

## 5 Conclusion

Although Brentano sets aside the issue of the soul as substantial bearer of presentations in PES, it is quite clear that at the time of his writing of this study he does regard the individual human being as a self who is *the* bearer of such presentations, however the latter and the mind-body interaction of that self’s being is to be determined metaphysically. The descriptive psychologist, nonetheless, need not be concerned with this issue but with the nature and classification of “psychical phenomena in general,” and so, can—and, indeed, must—abstract from this source in order to focus exclusively on “the inner perception of our own psychical phenomena.”<sup>27</sup> These are the limits of the enquiry that Brentano sets for the two published books of PES.

In conclusion, therefore, it is fair to say that, in PES, Brentano is not attempting to address an issue that Hume had raised regarding the source of our knowledge of the self and personal identity. Yet it is also fair to say that because Brentano accepts Hume’s approach to the mind and the primacy of its “perceptions of the soul” or “psychical phenomena,” he can regard the “modern conception” of psychology as a science whose “investigations are dependent on fewer [metaphysical] presuppositions” which the “older conception” of psychology, as the

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<sup>27</sup> Karl Marx (1818–1883), Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), whom Paul Ricoeur aptly names the “three masters of suspicion,” are critical of this transparency theory of consciousness, assumed in “the inner perception of our own psychical phenomena,” regarding human self-consciousness and its self-determination. Existential phenomenologists are also critical of the implicit dualistic metaphysics of a lucid mind and an opaque body assumed for human subjectivity in this transparency theory of human consciousness, as found in Descartes, Locke, Hume and somewhat in Brentano’s 1874 PES.



science of the soul, contains. This, however, does not mean that Brentano's (and Hume's) investigations are free from *all* metaphysical presuppositions; they are not. They contain rather several metaphysical presuppositions about the nature of the human being and our human consciousness that is outside of the limits of this paper to address in detail. Brentano, nonetheless, does have a definitive view of the "self" in PES, albeit implicit, but it gives rise to a particular "problem of the I" that is not found in Hume's *Treatise* but which is of relevance to an understanding and evaluation of Brentano's implicit view of the self in PES that we outlined above.

Just as morality extends to what is inside the mind as well as to what is outside the mind, from private thoughts of wishing my neighbour ill to acts of almsgiving to the poor, so, too, for Brentano, our experience of causality extends to what occurs both inside and outside of the mind. The "laws of co-existence and succession" apply both in the natural world about us and in the normative world of specific human, moral, ethical and logical activity. Brentano, therefore, can reject both the exclusively subjective reduction of causality to the mental realm (Humean or Kantian) and the exclusively objective reduction of causality to the physical realm in natural-scientific materialist accounts. Instead, he begins with the point that whatever we have responsibility for, is a matter of morality, but this requires causation to work, objectively and necessarily, in both the natural world and the human mind; or, at least, this is Brentano's position.

Brentano, therefore, sees no problem in holding the view of the human being as a being in nature that is both determined by causal laws and required to act in a normatively justifiable manner that *changes* that being's natural mode of being. I cannot act morally and automatically. Furthermore, if I make the moral judgment, for instance, I ought not to have done that, this does not mean that I, as a matter of fact, did not do it, or did not want to do it, or had no interest in doing it. Moral judgments are not factual judgments, and so, they cannot be reduced to judgments of fact. Being forced to act (for better or worse) reduces one's responsibility for authorship of any such human action, and so, diminishes the moral quality of any human action. Acting morally, in other words, requires freedom as an essential attribute of an individual human being's *existence*, but any such concept of "freedom" can play no part in any natural-scientific hypothesis about nature or in Brentano's understanding of causality.

From an early point in his career onwards (see his inaugural address on Comte in 1869), Brentano thought rationalism implies determinism and thus believed that individual freedom cannot be the defining feature of the nature of a human being as this would render any philosophic science of the human condition unscientific, atheistic and supporting indeterminism. And, for Brentano,

whatever philosophy is, it is a science (*Wissenschaft*) or it is nothing at all. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Jean-Paul Sartre will draw the opposite conclusion from this same thesis on the human condition, arguing, that because every individual human being is absolutely free to fashion that being's own moral existence and nature—"existence precedes essence"—the philosophic science of the human self must be unscientific, atheistic and supporting indeterminism.

The problem with both of these views, however, is that they do not rule out the possibility that since the human being is a being that is subject *both* to normative laws *and* to natural-scientific laws, there will always be the argument that human consciousness is but an epiphenomenon of the physical world, and so, in the end, reducible to natural-scientific explanation. "The naturalization of consciousness," alas, as one commentator succinctly puts it, "is the philosophical death of consciousness" (Natanson 1959, p. 53). It is in reaction to this very possibility of the naturalisation of consciousness and the implications which this has for any understanding of the human "self" (as an ethical-religious being) within Brentano's idea of an empirical psychology that Husserl (of the transcendental reduction) attempts to demonstrate, with considerable intellectual effort, that the natural world, considered as the totality of things given to outer perceptual-sense experience "lying present out there" (*vorhanden*) in "thing-perception," and in which we find ourselves part of, as assumed in "the thesis of the natural attitude" of his fellow natural scientists (including his mentor Franz Brentano), is both a phenomenologically unjustifiable hypothesis and a fictional account of the absolute mode of being of the world. The knowability of the very existence of the world of things given to my actual acts of outer perceptual-sense experience, depends, rather, on the factual harmony (*Zusammenhang*) of my own actual intentional consciousness (Ideas I). When one's own experiences of the world of things, however, actually harmonize—and, most times, as a matter of fact, they do, *Dei gratia*—there is no reason to doubt the appearing of the world of things in existence to my acts of outer perceptual-sense experience; but this is not a necessity; the harmony, rather, is a contingent facticity, holding together what Hume no doubt would say is "the bundle of perceptions."<sup>28</sup> This radical resolution to the problem of the "I," "the natural world about us," and "pure consciousness" in Husserl's development of phenomenology, however, takes us to the source of a major dispute between Husserl and *both* his followers

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**28** See, Husserl (1913), *Ideas* I, § 39, "Consciousness and Natural Actuality. The 'Naïve' Human Being's Conception" and § 46, "Indubitability of the Perception of Something Immanent, Dubitability of the Perception of Something Transcendent." Husserl thus distinguishes "empirical indubitability" and "apodictic indubitability." See his added note in Copy A (*Ideas* I, p. 101, n. 232).

and his rejectors (including Brentano) of his development of phenomenology in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This, therefore, is why Brentano's implicit view of the "self" and "the problem of the I" that was to emerge within his definition of psychology as a natural science of all of our "psychical phenomena," including the experiences of normative consciousness as such, in PES, is a more difficult and complex problem for his followers to solve than is the "problem of the I" as "a bundle of perceptions" for Hume in his *Treatise*, which, after all, is solely the concern of the moral philosopher and not the anatomist and natural philosopher.<sup>29</sup>

## References

### Abbreviations

- AC | Brentano, Franz (2022): "Auguste Comte and Positivist Philosophy." In: Tănăsescu, Ion, Bejinariu, Alexandru, Krantz Gabriel, Susan, and Stoenescu, Constantin (Eds.): *Brentano and the Positive Philosophy of Comte and Mill. With Translations of Original Writings on Philosophy as Science by Franz Brentano*. Berlin: de Gruyter 437–456.
- DP | Brentano, Franz (1995): *Descriptive Psychology*. Benito Müller (Ed. And Trans.). London: Routledge.
- EG | Brentano, Franz (1929, 1987): *On the Existence of God. Lectures given at the Universities of Würzburg and Vienna (1868–1991)*. Susan F. Krantz (Trans.). The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.
- OKR | Brentano, Franz (1889, 1969): *The Origin of Our Knowledge of Right and Wrong*. Roderick M. Chisholm and Elizabeth Schneewind (Trans.). London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- PES | Brentano, Franz (1973, 1995): *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*. Oskar Kraus and Linda L. McAlister (Eds.). Antos C. Rancurello, D.B. Terrell, and Linda L. McAlister (Trans.). London: Routledge.
- TE | Brentano, Franz (1966): *The True and the Evident*. Roderick M. Chisholm, Ilse Politzer, and Kurt Fischer (Trans.). London: Routledge.
- VE | Brentano, Franz (1925, 1970): *Versuch über die Erkenntnis*. Alfred Kastil (Ed.). Leipzig, Felix Meiner.
- Treatise | Hume, David (1739, 1896): *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Lewis Amherst Selby-Bigge (Ed.). Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Ideas I | Husserl, Edmund (1976): *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologische Philosophie. Erstes Buch: Allgemeine Einführung in die reine Phänomenologie. Husserliana III/1*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff. / Husserl, Edmund (1983): *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*. Fred Kersten (Trans.). The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.

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- CW IX | Mill, John Stuart (1979): *An Examination of Sir W. Hamilton's Philosophy* (1865). John M. Robson (Ed.). Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Routledge & Kegan Paul.

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