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*Psychology from an
Empirical Standpoint*

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LONDON AND NEW YORK

5. What positive criterion shall we now be able to provide? Or is there perhaps no positive definition which holds true of all mental phenomena generally? Bain thinks that in fact there is none.* Nevertheless, psychologists in earlier times have already pointed out that there is a special affinity and analogy which exists among all mental phenomena, and which physical phenomena do not share.

Every mental phenomenon is characterized by what the Scholastics of the Middle Ages called the intentional (or mental)[†] inexistence of an object, and what we might call, though not wholly unambiguously, reference to a content, direction toward an object⁹ (which is not to be understood here as meaning a thing),¹⁰ or immanent objectivity. Every mental phenomenon includes something as object within itself, although they do not all do so in the same way. In presentation something is presented, in judgement something is affirmed or denied, in love loved, in hate hated, in desire desired and so on.[‡]

This intentional in-existence is characteristic exclusively of mental phenomena. No physical phenomenon exhibits anything like it. We can, therefore, define mental phenomena by saying that they are those phenomena which contain an object intentionally within themselves.¹¹

But here, too, we come upon controversies and contradiction. Hamilton, in particular, denies this characteristic to a whole broad class of mental phenomena, namely, to all those which he characterizes as feelings, to pleasure and pain in all their most diverse shades and varieties.¹² With respect to the phenomena of thought and desire he is in agreement with us. Obviously there is no act of thinking without an object that is thought, nor a desire without an object that is desired. “In the phenomena of Feelings—the phenomena of Pleasure and Pain—on the contrary, consciousness does not place the mental modification or state before itself; it does not contemplate it apart—as separate from itself—but is, as it were, fused into one. The peculiarity of Feeling, therefore, is that there is nothing but what is subjectively subjective; there is no object different from the self—no objectification of any mode of

⁹ Brentano here uses “content” synonymously with “object.” He later came to prefer the term “object.”

¹⁰ As we have noted, Brentano subsequently denies that we can have anything “irreal” as object; we can have as object only that which would be a substance or *thing* if it existed.

* *Lecture on Metaphysics*, I, 432.

¹¹ Brentano later acknowledged that the way he attempted to describe consciousness here, adhering to the Aristotelian tradition which asserts “the mental inexistence of the object,” was imperfect. The so-called “inexistence of the object,” the immanent objectivity, is not to be interpreted as a mode of being the thing has in consciousness, but as an imprecise description of the fact that I have something (a thing, real entity, substance) as an object, am mentally concerned with it, refer to it. There are more details on this point in the Supplementary Essays and the Introduction. The Table of Contents speaks more appropriately of “reference to an object.” See note 20.

¹² Here, too, we are concerned with the question already mentioned in Note 1, whether it belongs to the essence of every act of consciousness to be a consciousness of something. Opinions are still divided on this most elementary question in psychology. There is still a distinction drawn today, as there was before Brentano, between objective acts of consciousness and mere states of consciousness. Brentano assails this doctrine with arguments which have remained unrefuted and indeed have gone largely unnoticed. His *Untersuchungen zur Sinnespsychologie* has, in particular, been largely ignored.

self.”* In the first instance there would be something which, according to Hamilton’s terminology, is “objective,” in the second instance something which is “objectively subjective,” as in self-awareness, the object of which Hamilton consequently calls the “subject-object.” By denying both concerning feelings, Hamilton rejects unequivocally all intentional in-existence of these phenomena.

In reality, what Hamilton says is not entirely correct, since certain feelings undeniably refer to objects. Our language itself indicates this through the expressions it employs. We say that we are pleased with or about something, that we feel sorrow or grieve about something. Likewise, we say: that pleases me, that hurts me, that makes me feel sorry, etc. Joy and sorrow, like affirmation and negation, love and hate, desire and aversion, clearly follow upon a presentation and are related to that which is presented.

One is most inclined to agree with Hamilton in those cases in which, as we saw earlier, it is most easy to fall into the error that feeling is not based upon any presentation: the case of pain caused by a cut or a burn, for example. But the reason is simply the same temptation toward this, as we have seen, erroneous assumption. Even Hamilton recognizes with us the fact that presentations occur without exception and thus even here they form the basis of the feeling. Thus his denial that feelings have an object seems all the more striking.

One thing certainly has to be admitted; the object to which a feeling refers is not always an external object. Even in cases where I hear a harmonious sound, the pleasure which I feel is not actually pleasure in the sound but pleasure in the hearing.¹³ In fact you could say, not incorrectly, that in a certain sense it even refers to itself, and this introduces, more or less, what Hamilton was talking about, namely that the feeling and the object are “fused into one.” But this is nothing that is not true in the same way of many phenomena of thought and knowledge, as we will see when we come to the investigation of inner consciousness. Still they retain a mental inexistence, a Subject-Object, to use Hamilton’s mode of speech, and the same thing is true of these feelings. Hamilton is wrong when he says that with regard to feelings everything is “subjectively subjective”—an expression which is actually self-contradictory, for where you cannot speak of an object, you cannot speak of a subject either. Also, Hamilton spoke of a fusing into one of the feeling with the mental impression, but when carefully considered it can be seen that he is bearing witness against himself here. Every fusion is a unification of several things; and thus the pictorial expression which is intended to make us concretely aware of the distinctive character of feeling still points to a certain duality in the unity.

We may, therefore, consider the intentional in-existence of an object to be a general characteristic of mental phenomena which distinguishes this class of phenomena from the class of physical phenomena.

* *Lecture on Metaphysics*, I, 432.

¹³ The Supplementary Essays and the *Untersuchungen zur Sinnespsychologie* exclude sensual affects of pleasure from sensations of *hearing and seeing*, limit them, that is, to what Brentano called the “*Spürsinn*.” On this view, pleasure in hearing something is an affect of the “*Spürsinn*” which accompanies and is elicited by the hearing of it. [Translators’ note: Brentano classified the sense-modalities in such a way that sensations other than visual and aural ones were grouped under one heading, to which he attached this term. Any attempt at a literal translation would merely be misleading.]



9. Let us, in conclusion, summarize the results of the discussion about the difference between mental and physical phenomena. First of all, we illustrated the specific nature of the two classes by means of *examples*. We then defined mental phenomena as *presentations* or as phenomena which are based *upon presentation*; all the other phenomena being physical phenomena. Next we spoke of *extension*, which psychologists have asserted to be the specific characteristic of all physical phenomena, while all mental phenomena are supposed to be unextended. This assertion, however, ran into contradictions which can only be clarified by later investigations. All that can be determined now is that all mental phenomena really appear to be unextended.¹⁹ Further we found that the *intentional in-existence*, the reference to something as an object,²⁰ is a distinguishing characteristic of all mental phe-

¹⁸ This is another example of what Brentano means by “external perception” in the strict sense.

¹⁹ The definition is negative: we do not perceive mental phenomena to be extended.

²⁰ This form of expression: “reference to something as an object” is the one which characterizes the situation more clearly. Brentano continues to use it after he had recognized that “mental inexistence of the object” was a defective description. He is also accustomed to saying: I make (have) something (as) my object. See the Introduction and Note 11.

nomena. No physical phenomenon exhibits anything similar. We went on to define mental phenomena as the exclusive *object of inner perception*; they alone, therefore, are perceived with immediate evidence. Indeed, in the strict sense of the word, they alone are perceived. On this basis we proceeded to define them as the only phenomena which possess *actual existence* in addition to intentional existence.²¹ Finally, we emphasized as a distinguishing characteristic the fact that the mental phenomena which we perceive, in spite of all their multiplicity, *always* appear to us *as a unity*, while physical phenomena, which we perceive at the same time, do not all appear in the same way as parts of one single phenomenon.

That feature which best characterizes mental phenomena is undoubtedly their intentional in-existence. By means of this and the other characteristics listed above, we may now consider mental phenomena to have been clearly differentiated from physical phenomena.²²



²¹ That is to say, I bring the “mental phenomena” before my mind in presentation and believe in them in the secondary consciousness with a correct, indeed evident belief. It is a blind compulsion which makes me believe in the “physical phenomena” (colors, sounds, etc.), on the other hand. They exist only intentionally, i.e. as present to my mind, i.e. I exist as someone perceiving or having a presentation of them, but they do *not* exist. See notes 13 and 15 to I, 1 and note 2 to II, 1. (See the Introduction on Brentano’s appreciation of Comte, and p. 99.)

²² So in Brentano’s opinion the really characteristic property is *intentional* reference. The additional ones only “clarify” the definition of mental phenomena. That is to be noted as against Husserl’s *Logical Investigations*, II, 856.

* Cp. Überweg (*System der Logik*) in whose analysis not everything can be accepted. In particular, he is wrong when he asserts that the world of external causes is extended in space and time, instead of saying that it resembles one which is spatially and temporally extended.²³