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Brentano's Mind: Unity Without Simplicity

Introduction

My concern in this paper is with Franz Brentano's conception of the unity of consciousness as it is exposed in his *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* (hereafter PES). As Brentano himself notices¹, the phrase 'unity of consciousness' traditionally refers to the unity of mental life *at a time*. Therefore I will not address the continuity of mental life *over time*, and I will restrict myself to the question as to what kind of unity is displayed by simultaneously existing mental phenomena – as when a subject sees, hears, judges, and desires at the same time. Furthermore, I will not consider Brentano's mature view according to which every mental act (seeing, hearing, judging, and the like) should be conceived of as the accident of a soul, a self or a substantial bearer. Not only does this idea play no role in his early empirical considerations about the unity of consciousness, which are utterly neutral as to the existence of the soul², but it is also unclear whether Brentano's later assumption of a substantial owner or bearer changes anything as regards his way of solving the problem of the unity of consciousness³.

¹ F. Brentano, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* (hereafter PES), Engl. trans. by A. C. Rancurello *et al.*, London, Routledge, 1973, 2nd ed. 1995, p. 102 (all page numbers refer to the 1995 edition).

² PES, pp. 18-19.

³ See G. Fréchette, *Brentano's Soul and the Unity of Consciousness*, "Argumentos", VII/13, 2015, p. 71.

Roughly speaking, the problem at issue lies in the following question: taken for granted that the various mental acts or states of the subject at a time are somehow unified, in virtue of what is it so? How are we to account for this synchronic unity? I take it that Brentano's solution boils down to a simple and straightforward idea: various mental phenomena occurring at a time are unified in virtue of being *parts of one overall mental phenomenon*. Phenomenologically speaking, they are "partial phenomena" (*Theilphänomene*)—phenomena which by nature belong to a unitary whole⁴. Ontologically speaking, they are "divisives" of one single basic entity. In this respect, Brentano's view qualifies as mereological⁵ and bears strong resemblance to the position recently called *subsumptive mereological theory*⁶.

As the above-mentioned formulations suggest, Brentano's mereological solution to the problem of the unity of consciousness in PES is cast in both phenomenological and ontological terms. My goal in this paper is to explore some implications of Brentano's solution for the ontology of the mind⁷. Hence I will focus on the ontological aspects of his view. My plan is as follows. In section 1 I will sketch the ontological distinctions between thing, collective and divisive, and in section 2 I will offer a more detailed formulation of the unity problem in light of those distinctions. In section 3 I will review Brentano's pro-arguments. Eventually, in section 4 I will briefly address some Jamesian objections to the mereological approach to consciousness and suggest a way of understanding the notion of 'parts' that resists the objections.

⁴ PES, p. 155 (transl. modified).

⁵ See A. Dewalque, *Brentano and the Parts of the Mental: A Mereological Approach to Phenomenal Intentionality*, "Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences", XII/3, 2013, pp. 447-464.

⁶ See T. Bayne and D. Chalmers, *What Is the Unity of Consciousness?*, in *The Unity of Consciousness: Binding, Integration, Dissociation*, ed. by A. Cleeremans, Oxford, OUP, 2003, pp. 23-58; T. Bayne, *The Unity of Consciousness*, Oxford, OUP, 2010, pp. 20-21.

⁷ On the idea that Brentano's mental mereology may be seen as an "ontology of the mind", see K. Mulligan and B. Smith, *Franz Brentano on the Ontology of the Mind*, "Philosophy and Phenomenological Research", XLV, 1985, pp. 627-44; B. Smith, *Austrian Philosophy. The Legacy of Franz Brentano*, Chicago/LaSalle, Open Court, 1995, pp. 44 f.

1. Things, Collectives, and Divisives

On Brentano's view, it is the overall function of language to express mental acts⁸. This does not mean, however, that each and every word of language is the expression of a mental act. There are *syncategorematic* terms – terms like 'and', 'but', 'not', 'which', etc. – which do not and cannot correspond to any mental act as long as they are taken in isolation. Such terms need to be combined with other, *categorematic* or *autosemantic* terms. For example, the word 'and' does not express an act of presentation, nor does it trigger such an act – for what would be the content of this act? Yet, when it is adequately supplemented, like in 'Bonnie and Clyde,' the resulting phrase may perfectly well be regarded as the expression of an act of presentation. On this view, thus, a *name* is a *categorematic* term or phrase which typically expresses an act of presentation on the side of the speaker and triggers an act of presentation in the listener.

The details of this theory do not need to concern us here. Suffice it to note that, depending on the kind of thing one is intentionally directed at, various kinds of names may be distinguished. Call *thing names* names which correspond to the presentation of a thing or independent unitary entity. Plainly, not all names are thing names. At the beginning of the chapter on the unity of consciousness in PES, Brentano mentions two kinds of names that do not refer to independent entities, namely *collective names* and *divisive names*. They are real names in the sense that they correspond to an act of presentation, but they are not thing names, because the presented object is not a thing or a single independent entity. In the case of collective names, it is a "collective", viz. a collection of independent entities (e.g., a forest)⁹. In the case of divisive names, it is a "divisive", viz. an abstract part obtained

⁸ See F. Brentano, ms. EL80, *Logik*, Würzburg lectures, Winter Semester 1869-70 and 1870-71, ed. online by R. Rollinger, URL = <<http://gams.uni-graz.at/context:bag-nachlass>>, page 13.008; K. Twardowski, *Zur Lehre vom Inhalt und Gegenstand der Vorstellungen. Eine psychologische Untersuchung*, 1894, reprint München, Philosophia Verlag, 1982, p. 10; A. Marty, *Untersuchungen zur Grundlegung der allgemeinen Grammatik und Sprachphilosophie*, Bd. 1, Halle, Niemeyer, 1908, pp. 226 f.

⁹ Cf. F. Brentano, *Religion und Philosophie. Ihr Verhältnis zueinander und ihre gemeinsamen Aufgaben*, ed. by F. Mayer-Hillebrand, Bern, Francke, 1954, p. 225: "A collective is a plurality of parts, each of which being an independent thing, gathered together from one unitary point of view".

by dividing an independent entity (e.g., the half of an atom). In sum, Brentano writes, “just as we can use one term to cover a number of things taken together, we can also consider each part of a thing as something in itself and call it by its own name. But just as in the first case the object to which the term is applied is not a thing, but a mere collective, the object will not be a thing in this case either [...]. We shall call this a divisive”¹⁰.

In PES, Brentano gives several examples of collectives and collective names. A herd, he writes, is not a thing but rather a multiplicity or collection of animals of the same species, each of them being a distinct and independent entity. Similarly, a city is a collection of buildings, shops and houses, which exist in and for themselves¹¹. It is important to insist that a collective has some kind of unity. It is just not the unity of a single entity or thing (*res*), it is not a “real unity” but a “nominal” unity, a unity which results from the acts of presentation and nomination themselves, or from an “improper unification”¹². This, of course, does not mean that a collective’s unity is purely arbitrary. Picking out a collection of entities by a name is an activity that usually is motivated by practical or theoretical considerations, and there is nothing arbitrary about that. For example, we may regard a cluster of trees as a forest because they are close in space, or a cluster of soldiers as an army because they have the same uniform and look similar¹³.

2. *The Problem and its Solution*

With those distinctions in mind, let us now return to the problem of the unity of consciousness. What does the problem consist of, exactly? Like ‘mind’, ‘consciousness’ arguably is a categorematic term, a term which corresponds to an

¹⁰ PES, p. 157.

¹¹ PES, p. 156.

¹² B. Smith, *Austrian Philosophy*, cit., p. 45.

¹³ F. Brentano, *Religion und Philosophie*, cit., p. 225.

act of presentation and does not need to be supplemented¹⁴. The issue is: is 'consciousness' a *collective name*, like 'herd', 'forest', 'army', and the like? Or is it the name of a single unitary entity – a *thing name*?

For the sake of illustration, suppose you are attending a concert of your favourite jazz band, and let us call ' $E(t)$ ' your overall experience at time t ¹⁵. Suppose $E(t)$ is identical to a highly complex act of consciousness C which involves the experiences of seeing the pianist playing, hearing the notes, judging this is a masterful execution of the song, and desiring to buy the last disc of the band so as to be able to listen to the song again back home. On Brentano's view, your overall consciousness at t may be said to exhibit a double kind of complexity¹⁶. First, it is intentionally directed at various objects or states of affairs: the pianist, the notes, the execution of the song, and the possession of the disc¹⁷. Second, it is directed at those objects through many different 'intentional relations': seeing, hearing, judging, desiring. Accordingly, the structure of your overall experience might be modelled as follows:

$$E(t) = C (\text{seeing } o_1, \text{ hearing } o_2, \text{ judging } o_3, \text{ desiring } o_4)$$

It is no question that C exhibits some kind of unity. In PES, Brentano claims that this unity is proper to mental phenomena insofar as they are apprehended in inner consciousness. Unlike simultaneous physical phenomena, simultaneous mental phenomena are always experienced as a unity¹⁸. While the pianist and the sounds, for example, are experienced as distinct entities, the acts of seeing and hearing, by

¹⁴ Oskar Kraus suggests that, on Brentano's mature view, 'consciousness' rather should be considered an incomplete expression which actually stands for 'someone with something before his mind' – only the latter being a categorematic phrase (O. Kraus, "Introduction to the 1924 Edition", in PES, pp. 407-8; quoted by G. Fréchette, *Brentano's Soul*, cit., p. 70). However, I will not expand on this reading here, which is tied to Brentano's so-called 'reistic turn'.

¹⁵ I will assume that time t necessarily has a minimal duration, otherwise it would arguably be impossible for the subject to experience anything (cf. D. Seron, *La conscience a-t-elle des parties?*, in *Esthétique de la complexité*, ed. by L.-J. Lestocart, Paris, Hermann, 2017, pp. 23-49).

¹⁶ PES, p. 157; see also A. Marty, *Deskriptive Psychologie*, Würzburg, Königshausen & Neumann, 2011, p. 30.

¹⁷ Note, however, that on Brentano's view two acts may be directed at the same object: desiring o_1 , for instance, simultaneously involves presenting o_1 .

¹⁸ PES, p. 96.

contrast, are experienced as a unity. But how are we to conceive of this unity? Is C a mere collective? Or is it a unitary, independent entity?

Brentano argues for the latter. His claim is that C is not a collective: “All mental phenomena which occur within us simultaneously such as seeing and hearing, thinking, judging, and reasoning, loving and hating, desiring and shunning, etc., no matter how different they may be, all belong to one unitary reality only if they are inwardly perceived as existing together. *They constitute phenomenal parts of a mental phenomenon*, the elements of which are neither distinct things nor parts of distinct things but belong to a real unity”¹⁹. More simply put, $E(t)$ is a single *concretum* and has nothing to do with a “group of atoms”²⁰.

As I suggested above, the problem of the unity of consciousness thereby receives a mereological solution. Various mental phenomena occurring at time t are unified simply in virtue of being part of *one mental phenomenon*. Interestingly, Brentano considers this to be a necessary and sufficient condition. Nothing else is required for the phenomena to form a real unity. Especially, no reference to a unitary self is needed, hence the partially Humean character of this solution²¹. Like Hume, Brentano agrees that $E(t)$ is not simple and always involves a multiplicity of mental phenomena. But unlike him, he refuses to think of the unity of $E(t)$ as that of a mere bundle²². On Brentano’s view, indeed, the bundle metaphor is inaccurate for two reasons²³. First, the notion of bundle suggests some extra factor that binds the mental phenomena together, and the experience reveals nothing of that sort. It reveals no “phenomenal glue”²⁴. Second, the bundle metaphor suggests that

¹⁹ PES, p. 164, my emphasis. See also A. Marty, *Deskriptive Psychologie*, cit., p. 31.

²⁰ A. Marty, *William James: The Principles of Psychology*, “*Zeitschrift für Psychologie und Physiologie der Sinnesorgane*”, III, 1892, p. 323.

²¹ See K. Mulligan and B. Smith, *Franz Brentano on the Ontology of the Mind*, cit., pp. 632-3; M. Textor, *Unity Without Self: Brentano on the Unity of Consciousness*, in *Themes from Brentano*, ed. by D. Fisette and G. Fréchette, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2013, p. 73.

²² See D. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature. A Critical Edition*, vol. 1, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2007, p. 165 (= *Treatise* 1.4.6.4).

²³ F. Brentano, *Descriptive Psychology*, engl. trans. by B. Müller, London, Routledge, 1995, p. 14.

²⁴ B. Dainton, *Brentano on the Unity of Consciousness*, in *Handbook of Brentano and the Brentano School*, ed. by U. Kriegel, London, Routledge, 2017, p. 63.

simultaneous mental phenomena are merely juxtaposed, which contradicts the various dependence relations that obtain between at least some of the parts of $E(t)$.

3. Brentano's Arguments

In PES, Brentano presents at least three arguments for the mereological view. Call them the *Dependence Argument*, the *No Duplication Argument* and the *Argument from Relational Properties*.

The two first arguments rely on the existence of dependence relations between *some* parts of $E(t)$. Consider again the example of the jazz concert. It is impossible to judge that the song is masterfully executed without having a presentation of the song. Similarly, it is impossible to desire to buy the last disc of the band without having a presentation of it and judging that it exists. Between judging and presenting, there is what Brentano calls in his lectures on descriptive psychology a relation of one-sided separability²⁵. To put it differently, some parts of $E(t)$ cannot possibly exist in isolation. They have no independent existence and cannot be considered independent entities. The same holds true, *mutatis mutandis*, for merely 'distinctional parts,' like the act of seeing the pianist and the inner consciousness of this act, which are connected together in the most intimate way or even "fused into one"²⁶.

The dependence argument simply runs like this:

1. If $E(t)$ would be a collective, there would be no dependence relations between its parts (in virtue of the definition of a collective).
2. There are dependence relations at least between some parts of $E(t)$.
3. Therefore $E(t)$ is not a collective.

²⁵ F. Brentano, *Descriptive Psychology*, cit., p. 15.

²⁶ PES, p. 130, 144-5.

The second argument is neatly summarized by Marty: “If the judgement would be a second mental act, then the presenting should be given twice, the first time as particular act, and the second time as an aspect involved in the act of judging. But this conflicts with the experience”²⁷. What we experience rather is a single unitary act—the act of judging—enveloping within itself the presentation of the object judged about. The act of presentation is not independent from the act of judging: it is incorporated in it and may be distinguished only abstractly or conceptually. Here is a reconstruction of the no duplication argument:

1. If $E(t)$ would be a collective, then the act of presenting would be experienced several times.
2. It is not the case that the act of presenting is experienced several times.
3. Therefore, $E(t)$ is not a collective.

So far so good. Yet, not all the parts of $E(t)$ are involved into dependence relations. What about seeing the pianist and hearing the notes? It is quite conceivable that the act of seeing ceases at t' (for example, if you close your eyes) while the act of hearing continues without being altered, or at least there is no reason to think it is altered. This would correspond to the following situation:

$$E(t) = C (\text{seeing } o_1, \text{ hearing } o_2, \text{ judging } o_3, \text{ desiring } o_4)$$
$$E(t') = C (\text{hearing } o_2, \text{ judging } o_3, \text{ desiring } o_4)$$

This scenario presents us with a case of partial persistence. One part of $E(t)$ is altered while the others are not. In Brentano’s terminology, seeing and hearing are mutually separable elements²⁸. The real challenge for Brentano is to show that, despite their separability, such parts nevertheless form a real unity and not a collective. Textor aptly formulates the issue: “[Brentano’s] main problem is to argue

²⁷ A. Marty, *Deskriptive Psychologie*, cit., p. 31. Brentano formulates the argument in terms of the same *object* being presented twice – a view which is “contrary to experience” (PES, p. 159). The same argument was used previously in PES to demonstrate that inner consciousness and the innerly conscious mental act form one single act (see PES, p. 127).

²⁸ F. Brentano, *Descriptive Psychology*, cit., p. 15.

that *ontologically independent* mental acts belong to one unity that is prior to them”²⁹.

The argument designed to meet this challenge is the argument from relational properties. Relational properties are the kind of properties that are apprehended by means of an act of comparison, and no comparison is possible without a unitary act encompassing the compared terms. The key idea, thus, is that, in order to grasp a relational property instantiated by two terms, the related terms have to be apprehended by means of *one* unitary act of consciousness. Consider the relation of simultaneity: “When a person is aware of seeing and hearing, he is also aware that he is doing both at the same time. Now if we find the perception of seeing in one thing and the perception of hearing in another, in which of these things do we find the perception of their simultaneity? Obviously in neither of them” (PES: 160). The same holds true for the spatial distribution of colours in a picture, for instance. In looking at a picture, I have a presentation of different colours and of the order thereof. This simple fact speaks for the unity of consciousness: “It is impossible that one thing sees the one, another thing sees the other, a third thing sees the third. For, which [would be] a noticing of the order?”³⁰. Accordingly, the argument from relational properties may be reconstructed as follows:

1. If $E(t)$ would be a collective, it would not present us with relational properties.
2. $E(t)$ presents us with relational properties.
3. Therefore, $E(t)$ is not a collective.

This argument certainly requires more unpacking. Yet it is clear that, in Brentano’s view, the fact that my act of hearing may continue while my act of seeing stops does not threaten in any way the real unity of $E(t)$. This argument is important, for it shows that Brentano’s mereological solution to the unity problem does not dramatically depend on the existence of dependence relations. Indeed, the “real

²⁹ M. Textor, *Unity Without Self*, cit., p. 81. See also B. Dainton, *Brentano on the Unity of Consciousness*, cit., pp. 66 f.

³⁰ F. Brentano, *Descriptive Psychology*, cit., pp. 14-5.

unity” of $E(t)$ is quite compatible with looser modes of togetherness or connectedness between the parts of $E(t)$: “It would also be *going too far to say that* if the unity of consciousness does not require simplicity, *it is only compatible with a plurality of parts which are inseparable* from one another. On the contrary, as revealed by experience, we have seen that some of our activities often cease while others persist”³¹.

The last, implicit premise reads:

4. Either $E(t)$ is a collective or it is one unitary entity.

From 3 and 4, it follows that

5. $E(t)$ is one unitary entity. Q.E.D.

4. *Parts, Similarities and Contrasts*

Because unity is not to be conflated with simplicity³², Brentano maintains that the “real unity” of $E(t)$ is compatible with $E(t)$ ’s having parts: “Even if one real thing cannot be a multiplicity of real things, it can nevertheless contain a multiplicity of parts”³³. Unlike Brentano’s arguments for the unity of $E(t)$, this last claim—the claim that $E(t)$ has parts—has been challenged by a number of authors, starting with William James.

In chapter six of his *Principles of Psychology*, James tackles a view he calls “the mind-stuff theory,” which is pretty much like what we call today the mereological approach to consciousness. The mind-stuff theory rests upon the metaphysical assumption that “*our mental states are composite in structure, made up of smaller states conjoined*”³⁴, an assumption James takes to be untenable and indeed unintelligible. Drawing from Brentano himself, James maintains that a plurality of

³¹ PES, p. 165, my emphasis.

³² See PES, p. 157.

³³ *Ibidem*. See also A. Marty, *Deskriptive Psychologie*, cit., p. 31.

³⁴ W. James, *Principles of Psychology*, London, McMillan, 1890, p. 145.

experiences is not the experience of a plurality: "Take a sentence of dozen words, and take twelve men and tell to each one word. Then stand the men in a row or jam them in a bunch, and let each think of his word as intently as he will; nowhere will there be a consciousness of the whole sentence"³⁵. Yet, unlike Brentano, James suggests that $E(t)$ is *phenomenally simple*. The complexity, he claims, is in things, not in mind: "A higher state is not a lot of lower states; it is itself"³⁶. More recently, Searle took a similar route by suggesting that it might be good to get rid of the notion of parts when it comes to understanding consciousness: "The urge to think of consciousness as likewise made of smaller building blocks is overwhelming. But I think it may be wrong for consciousness. [...] Indeed, maybe it is wrong to think of consciousness as made up of parts at all"³⁷. A similar line of thought has been advocated by Michael Tye, who goes so far as to claim that purely visual or purely auditory experiences are nothing but "the figments of philosophers' and psychologists' imaginations"³⁸.

Taken literally, the rejection of mental parts amounts to saying that $E(t)$ is simple. Call this the *Simplicity Hypothesis*. The Simplicity Hypothesis conflicts with Brentano's view, according to which the consciousness always is unitary without being simple. To my mind, the main trouble with the Simplicity Hypothesis is that it does not seem to be consistent with the sheer possibility of describing mental phenomena. James is probably right to state that "a higher state is not a lot of lower states; it is itself." Yet, if we take $E(t)$ to be absolutely simple and unanalysable, what else can we say of it except that "it is itself"? Such an identity statement hardly is a description of $E(t)$, and of course it cannot serve the purpose of psychological investigations aiming at identifying the main features of mental phenomena and dividing the latter into classes. There would be just as many classes of mental phenomena than there are unitary experiences, each of which being identical to itself and incomparable to any other experience. As Brentano puts it, psychologists

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 160.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 162 fn.

³⁷ J. Searle, 2002, *Consciousness*, in *id.*, *Consciousness and Language*, Cambridge UK, CUP, p. 56.

³⁸ M. Tye, *Consciousness and Persons: Unity and Identity*, Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 2003, p. 28. See also D. Seron, *La conscience a-t-elle des parties?*, cit.

who claim to apprehend themselves as something simple “could not maintain a consistent position because, *as soon as they described their inner life*, they found that they were mentioning a large variety of different elements”³⁹.

The point is that describing $E(t)$ precisely is nothing but identifying elements, parts or aspects of $E(t)$, elements which might be picked out by means of divisive names and regarded as recurrent within one’s stream of consciousness. As Marty rightly insists in his review of James 1890⁴⁰, this possibility of identifying recurrent types of parts is crucial to the program of descriptive psychology. Without postulating such recurrent ‘elements,’ the whole project of descriptive psychology, and whith it the foundation of scientific psychology, collapses. A similar point is made by Bayne: “Suppose that this stream [of consciousness] contains one instance of headache phenomenology at its beginning and another towards its end. It is natural to say that this stream of consciousness contains two headache experiences. Indeed, *it becomes very difficult to describe the internal structure of a stream of consciousness* if we insist on identifying experiences with entire streams of consciousness”⁴¹.

Does this mean that we are committed to the mind-stuff theory (James) or the building-block theory (Searle)? I don’t think so. It is my contention that there is a rather innocuous use of the notion of parts. My suggestion is that talking of the parts of $E(t)$ —be it separable or nonseparable parts—may be regarded as tantamount to talking of the differences and similarities between $E(t)$ and, say, $E(t')$ ⁴². In sum, *the notion of ‘part’ would be derivative from the notion of similarity*. As far as I know, Brentano himself didn’t explicitly put it that way. Yet, if this suggestion is correct, then talking of parts does not necessarily commit us to the building-block theory.

Carl Stumpf’s earlier remarks about the psychological analysis of sensory contents might help flesh out this noncommittal reading of the mereological view. In his 1873, Stumpf precisely suggests that talking of ‘parts’ of sensory contents just is a

³⁹ PES, p. 96, my emphasis.

⁴⁰ See, e.g., A. Marty, *William James: The Principles of Psychology*, cit., pp. 320 f.

⁴¹ T. Bayne, *The Unity of Consciousness*, cit., p. 23, my emphasis.

⁴² A similar suggestion has been made by D. Seron (*La conscience a-t-elle des parties?*, cit.), who takes it as a reason of getting rid of the mereological approach.

convenient way of referring to *potential variations* of the contents. For example, the distinction between, say, the quality and the intensity of a coloured patch, he writes, is the result of a “thought projection” (*hineindenken*) which relies on the possibility of variations in various directions. I can modify my presentation of the patch of colour as to obtain a patch of a different shade of blue, a different form, a different hue, etc.

This view is attractive, for it suggests that the psychological analysis of a sensory content has not to be thought of as a decomposition into smaller contents, but may be conceived of as a “quasi-analysis”⁴³. Accordingly, the ‘parts’ obtained by comparison and distinction are not independent entities, but only distinctional or conceptual parts—call them *parts**⁴⁴. The key to this view is the notion of possible or *potential variation*, which refers to (combinations of) similarities and differences. Importantly, whereas the parts* thus obtained are not entities in any sense of the term, they are not arbitrary, since the similarities and differences are founded in the nature of the sensory contents. The following passage by Stumpf helps us think of the status of such distinctional parts: “The dismantling of the [sensory] content itself is nothing but an *apparent* one [nur ein *scheinbare*]. And yet, it is nonetheless *not arbitrary*, but necessary. For every similarity and every difference is forced upon us by the content itself. We are making, to use an expression coming from the Scholastic, a *distinctio cum fundamento in re*”⁴⁵.

Whether this model can be generalized to every kind of psychological analysis is, of course, an open question⁴⁶. I do not intend to take stance about Brentano’s position in this debate. I just want to suggest that there is one way of understanding the

⁴³ C. Stumpf, *Tonpsychologie*, Bd. 2, Leipzig, Hirzel, 1890, p. 79. See also D. Seron, *Ce que voir veut dire: Essai sur la perception*, Paris, Le Cerf, 2012, pp. 166 f.

⁴⁴ It is true that we are not ordinarily tempted to express every similarity relation in terms of parts. Yet, it is unclear to me whether this difficulty is more than merely verbal. There are other words, like the German term *Moment* and the French term *aspect*, that might be equivalent to the notion of *part** as it is used here.

⁴⁵ C. Stumpf, *Über den psychologischen Ursprung der Raumvorstellung*, Leipzig, Hirzel, 1873, p. 139.

⁴⁶ Stumpf later came to revise this view as regards the perception of the sounds. See C. Stumpf, *Tonpsychologie*, Bd. 2, cit., pp. 21 f. Moreover, there has been huge discussions on that matter between Brentano and Stumpf. A historical reconstruction of those discussions is far beyond the scope of this paper.

mereological approach that seems to be compatible with Brentano's declarations and might resist the Jamesian objections. On the proposed reading, my overall experience at t is one single "basic entity"⁴⁷. The distinction between the act of seeing and the act of hearing—a distinction I make when *describing* $E(t)$ —does not mean that $E(t)$ really is a made up of 'smaller' independent experiences. Rather, the so-called parts* mentioned in my description of $E(t)$ refer to *potential variations* of $E(t)$. After all, the partial persistence scenario itself simply refers to the *possibility* that the visual act ceases while the auditory act continues. Ontologically speaking, nothing more is required.

5. Conclusion

Brentano's solution to the problem of the unity of consciousness in PES is particularly economical, since it avoids any reference to an extra unifying factor like the self. As we have seen, this solution goes hand in hand with a certain conception of the structure of the mind. From an ontological point of view, the mind—or, at least, the overall mental state of the subject at a time—never is a mere *collection*, or bundle, of mental phenomena; it is one single mental phenomenon within which parts* of various kinds may be conceptually distinguished for the purpose of description. I have argued that such mereological distinctions are best conceived of as conceptual distinctions *cum fundamento in re*, in the sense that they are grounded in similarity and contrast relations obtaining between total mental phenomena.*

⁴⁷ The notion of "basic entity" is used in the same sense by B. Dainton, *Brentano on the Unity of Consciousness*, cit., p. 67.

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Summary. Brentano's Mind: Unity Without Simplicity

This paper offers a reconstruction of Franz Brentano's mereological solution to the problem of the unity of consciousness and explores some implications of this solution for the ontology of the mind. In section 1 I sketch Brentano's ontological distinctions between things, collectives, and divisives. In section 2 I present Brentano's mereological solution and in section 3 I review his main pro-arguments. Eventually, in section 4 I consider some Jamesian objections to the mereological approach. I argue the notion of 'mental parts' can be given a rather innocuous meaning by being conceived of as the expression of conceptual distinctions grounded in similarity and contrast relations between total mental phenomena.

Keywords: Consciousness, Unity, Mereology, Brentano, James.