The Epistemology of Intentionality

Notional Constituents vs. Direct Grasp

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Abstract. Franz Brentano is well known for highlighting the importance of intentionality, but he said curiously little about the *nature* of intentionality. According to Mark Textor, there is a deep reason for this: Brentano took intentionality to be a conceptual primitive the nature of which is revealed only in direct grasp. Although there is certainly textual support for this interpretation, it appears in tension with Brentano's repeated attempts to analyze intentionality in terms of 'notional constituents' – aspects of intentionality which cannot come apart in reality but which *can* be conceptually distinguished. After bringing out this tension, I explore some options for resolving it, ultimately offering my own favored interpretation.

I. Intentionality Primitivism and Revelation

Brentano is well known for arguing that intentionality is fundamental to mentality: it is what *makes* mental phenomena mental. But what is the *nature* of intentionality itself? Brentano says very little on this, and subsequent attempts at capturing the nature of intentionality have consistently run into difficulties. Three broad approaches may be discerned: Chisholm's linguistic-analysis approach, the naturalist-externalist research program so prominent in late twentieth-century philosophy of mind, and the phenomenal-intentionality research program that has flourished more recently.

Chisholm (1957) offered an analysis of intentionality in the 'formal mode of speech.' The approach may be factorized into two components. First, intentional

properties are properties picked out by *intensional verbs*. Second, intensional verbs are verbs that do not support certain inferences which other verbs do support, notably existential generalization ('*a* is F, therefore there is an *x* such that *x* is F') and truth-preserving substitution of co-referential terms ('*a* is F, *a* = *b*, therefore *b* is F').

The main problem with this 'analysis' is that it really tells us nothing about the nature of intentionality itself – all it does is offer (allegedly) reliable linguistic symptoms that we might use to tell when a property is intentional. What we learn here is that intentionality is whatever underlies certain inferential failures. But we learn nothing about the *nature* of that which underlies these failures.

Dretske (1981), Millikan (1984), and Fodor (1990) are some of the heroes of a monumental achievement of late twentieth-century philosophy of mind: the identification of several candidate highly specific relations, all 'naturalistically kosher,' that connect brain states with environmental conditions just when intentionality occurs. These relations were offered as capturing the 'underlying nature' of intentionality, such that theses of the form 'intentionality is nothing but natural relation R' putatively constituted Kripkean necessary a posteriori truths.

The main problem with this program is that it never managed to produce a satisfactory account of misrepresentation and other cases of 'intentional inexistence' (e.g., imaginative representation). My own view, which I will not argue for here (but see Kriegel 2011 Ch.3) is that this repeated failure is due to the simple fact that in some cases of misrepresentation there is nothing for us to stand in *any* relation to, kosher or otherwise.

According to the phenomenal intentionality program, intentionality (or at least 'underived' intentionality),[1] is a phenomenal feature of conscious experiences. If this is right, then the nature of intentionality is a phenomenal, qualitative nature. How might we go about trying to capture theoretically this kind of phenomenal nature? Elsewhere in the philosophy of consciousness, we often use the method of phenomenal contrast: we juxtapose experiences which exhibit the relevant phenomenal feature with experiences that differ only in failing to exhibit that feature. Something like this is tried for intentionality, for instance, by Farid Masrour (2013), who contrasts experiences that exhibit what he calls 'objectual unity structure' with experiences that do not.

One problem with this approach, however, is that intentionality is commonly thought to be an *invariant* feature of *all* experiences. This is not beyond controversy, of course, but if intentionality does turn out to be ubiquitous in our experience, then there is no hope for a contrast between experiences that exhibit it and ones that do not. There may be a contrast between experiences and things that are not experiences, of course, and intentionality may prove to occur only on the side of experience. But even if this turns out to be the case, there is no reason to suppose that the presence or absence of intentionality is the *only* difference there. Even Brentano, renowned for taking intentionality to be the mark of the mental, recognized five other systematic differences between experiences and things that are not experiences (see Brentano 1874 Bk. II Ch.1).

Some authors have claimed that Brentano was a proponent of phenomenal intentionality (Potrč 2002, Dewalque 2013). I agree: for Brentano, intentionality is not some theoretical posit of 'folk' or scientific psychology, but a kind of felt endogenous directedness manifest in conscious experience (Kriegel 2018: 52-3). Given that Brentano takes intentionality to be a phenomenal constant in our conscious life, he faces the problem that phenomenal contrast is unavailable to bring out the nature of intentionality (a problem he was well aware of – see Brentano 1982: 63). How, then, might he go about offering an informative account of the nature of intentionality? Curiously, although Brentano is well known for highlighting the *importance* of intentionality, there is next to nothing in the Brentanian corpus on the *nature* of intentionality. What are we to make of this?

Mark Textor (2017 Ch.3) offers a brilliant explanation: Brentano held a combination of two fascinating theses that make a substantive, informative account of the nature of intentionality both 'impossible' and 'superfluous' (2017: 73-4). The first thesis is 'intentionality primitivism': intentionality is conceptually primitive and thus unanalyzable. The second is a *revelation thesis*: 'intentionality is fully revealed to us in its instantiation,' in that 'we know *what intentionality is* by attending to our mental life and comparing and contrasting it with physical objects guided by metaphorical prompters' (2017: 74, 73; my italics). Textor's idea is that primitivism makes a substantive account of intentionality impossible, while revelationism makes it superfluous.

We can see what Brentano may have in mind here by considering paradigmatic versions of primitivism and revelationism.

Consider first Moore's (1903) primitivism about goodness. The goal of Moore's open-question argument was to show that the notion of goodness is 'elemental': it cannot be analyzed into more basic constituents. Suppose I tell you that Jimmy is a bachelor, and when you express skepticism, I establish to your satisfaction that he is both a man and unmarried. You cannot sensibly ask 'yes, but is he a *bachelor*?' In contrast, for any combination of features F, G, …, claims Moore, I can establish to your satisfaction that democracy (say) is F, G, … and you could still perfectly sensibly ask 'yes, but is democracy *good*?' For Brentano, the same holds of intentionality. For any features F, G, …, we may ask of anyone or anything that features them 'Yes, but does he/she/it enjoy that endogenous directedness distinctive of conscious experience?' Thus an open-question argument can be run about intentionality that would demonstrate its unanalyzability. And indeed, in a little-read manuscript published under Brentano's name almost 40 years after his death, we find the claim that like all other elemental notions/features (*elementare Begriffe/Merkmale*), the notion of intentionality cannot be elucidated (*verdeutlicht*) otherwise than by ostension of instances (Brentano 1954: 190-1, quoted in Textor 2017: 72).

If Textor is right, then for Brentano it is by apprehending the right phenomenon in direct grasp that we come to appreciate the nature of intentionality. Mark Johnston (1992) famously entertained the idea that the nature of *colors* may be best appreciated, not by digesting the right philosophical theory, but by *looking* in the right place (under the right conditions). Who says that only the intellect – 'the understanding' – can disclose the essences of things? Perhaps some phenomena present their nature rather to *vision*; colors would be prime candidates for this. Some contemporary philosophers of mind hold that whether or not this is true of *color* properties, it is certainly true of *phenomenal* properties – their nature is directly present to us (see, e.g., Goff 2017 Ch.5). Brentano's position seems to be that the nature of at least *one* phenomenal feature, intentionality, presents itself to direct acquaintance: the nature of intentionality is *revealed* in what he calls 'inner perception.'[2] Philosophical writing about intentionality can be useful, but only by way of helping the reader direct her attention onto the right phenomenon. By setting out certain contrasts and using perceptive metaphors, we may bring into sharper inner-perceptual relief the nature of intentionality. But this is not to

be confused for substantive theorizing. It is just an attempt to make revelation more likely for the reader. For 'just as it would be impossible to make clear to a blind man the concept of red, it is impossible to make clear to someone … who has never apprehended himself as a thinker the concept of thinking' (Brentano 1966: 339, quoted in Textor 2017: 73).

The combination of primitivism and revelationism about a phenomenon is not the philosopher's go-to hypothesis. Typically, we prefer to articulate substantive theoretical accounts that capture the 'real definition' of the phenomenon. Only after a long history of failed attempts do philosophers start increasingly to explore primitivist and/or revelationist approaches. Perhaps Brentano foresaw in the blink of an eye the kinds of difficulty the linguistic-analysis, naturalist-externalist, and contrastive phenomenal-intentionality approaches were likely to face. More likely, he took intentionality to be one of the most fundamental notions in his philosophical system, and generally thought such notions were conceptual primitives graspable only by direct acquaintance (Kriegel 2018: 149). From this perspective, the intensionality of mental verbs is a *symptom* of the intentionality of mental events, rather than its underlying nature; and the broadly teleo-informational relation trusted by naturalists is but a correlate of successful (veridical) mental acts, something they may not share with failed (falsidical) ones.

Textor cites four immediate advantages of the primitivist-revelationist approach he attributes to Brentano (2017: 75-6). However, he also finds deficient Brentano's own attempts to 'focus the mind' on the right phenomenal feature, especially through the invocation of the locution 'having an object' and its variants. Textor argues that this locution does not offer a useful characterization of a whole slew of apparently intentional phenomena, namely, the propositional attitudes (2017 §3.3). More precisely, Textor argues that insofar as we take the locution to make manifest a certain notion of intentionality, that notion would fail as a mark of the mental, since propositional attitudes are mental phenomena but do not exemplify the relevant notion of intentionality (2017: 84).

Even if Textor is right about this, though, it would not – not directly, at any rate – constitute an argument against the primitivist-revelationist approach as such. Rather, it would be an argument against one specific attempt to use words to 'focus the mind' on

the right feature – one attempt to make vivid to the reader the nature of the feature that, according to Brentano, is the mark of the mental. For all Textor has said, it is possible that other words would do a better job, and it is also possible that no words are suited to the task even though that felt endogenous directedness really is common and peculiar to conscious experiences.

II. The Notional Constituents of Intentionality

What is the evidence that Brentano supported the primitivist-revelationist approach to the nature of intentionality? The two passages that Textor cites, snippets of which are quoted above, are unambiguous in their support; no 'creative interpreting' is needed to find these ideas in them. Still, an objector might protest that two bits of unpublished text is relatively little to go on. Moreover, one of these texts is of questionable origins (as Textor acknowledges). According to the German editor, Franziska Mayer Hillebrand, the text was in fact composed by Brentano's student Alfred Kastil twenty years after Brentano's death, though "on the basis of" various "drafts and writings" of Brentano's (Brentano 1954: x).

More deeply, one problem with Textor's interpretation is that in *other* bits of text, Brentano does develop quite lengthy analyses of intentionality, distinguishing various aspects of it and bringing out quite an articulated *structure* in intentionality. Moreover, these analyses are not meant as off-the-cuff improvisations but as contributions to a longstanding Aristotelian tradition that Brentano very much took himself to work within and belong to. There are of course many ways to understand Aristotle himself and the tradition he has spawned, and we cannot get into the details here, but as *I* see things, this tradition is characterized by two connected ideas.[3] First: for all the talk of an intentional relation between an act and an object, there is in fact no ontological distinction between the two, and accordingly intentionality is in reality not a relation at all, but an intrinsic modification of a conscious subject. Second: despite its ontological intrinsicness, intentionality does have a certain *structure*, insofar as we can analyze it in terms of certain *notional constituents* – constituents that cannot be separated *in reality* but which nonetheless can be distinguished *in thought*. In contributing to this tradition, Brentano is working squarely within the project of analyzing intentionality after all, rather than merely *pointing* to some phenomenon. This

creates at least a prima facie tension with the primitivist-revelationist reading. The purpose of this section is to bring out this tension. In the next section, I will consider some approaches to it.

Brentano is all but explicit that intentionality is a non-relational property that simply resembles relational ones in some respects. I develop the full case for this in Kriegel 2018 Ch.2, but some central elements may be aired here. First of all, 37 years after the appearance of the *Psychology*, Brentano republished the last few chapters (somewhat edited) under the title *The Classification of Mental Phenomena* (Brentano 1911), and added a number of appendices, of which the first is explicitly concerned with the nature of intentionality. It is titled 'Mental Reference as Distinguished from a Relation in the Strict Sense' and rhetorically expresses 'doubt whether we are dealing with something relational here, and not rather with something relation-like (*einem Relativen Ähnliches*)' (1911: 272). The basic reason to think that intentionality is non-relational, for Brentano, is simply that intentional directedness can occur even when the presented object does not exist. He is adamant, in this text, that it makes no sense to say that a two-place relation is instantiated when one of the two relata does not exist.[4] When we speak in this way, as when we say that Bigfoot is bigger than a gorilla, what we mean strictly speaking is that *if* Bigfoot existed he would be bigger than a gorilla. But when we say that Jane is thinking of Bigfoot, we do *not* mean that *if* Bigfoot existed Jane would be thinking of him. So our statement in this case cannot be genuinely relational (1911: 273). According to Brentano, what we are really doing when we say that Jane is thinking of Bigfoot is that we characterize Jane, we describe the kind of thinker she is at a certain moment – we *classify* her as Bigfoot-thinker (see Brentano 1933: 18, 22).

Although intentionality is a monadic characteristic of subjects, Brentano thinks we can characterize it by bringing out its constituent structure. Brentano's ontology distinguishes in fact two kinds of constituent, which we may call *actual* and *notional*. (Brentano himself speaks of 'parts,' and calls the two kinds *separable* and *distinctional* parts. But his notion of parthood is very odd, allowing for example that *a* is a proper part of *b* even though *b* has no other proper part. I think it is much more plausible that what Brentano had in mind is constituency rather than parthood – cf. Chisholm 1978: 202.) A house has several actual constituents: doors, walls, windows, and so on. They are *actual* constituents because each can exist without the others, so the house can in

principle be broken into its several constituents. In contrast, the two-dimensional *surface* of the three-dimensional wall, although it is a distinguishable element of the wall, cannot exist without the wall. It is a merely *notional* constituent (what Brentano calls a 'distinctional part' or sometimes a 'divisive'). In Brentano's paradigmatic example, we can consider a basic physical constituent of matter – a partless subatomic particle – and distinguish between its left and right halves; these, too, are merely notional constituents of the particle (Brentano 1982: 16).

I belabor this point because it is central to Brentano's understanding of intentionality that he takes the intentional act and the intentional object to be distinguishable *notional constituents of intentionality* (Brentano 1982: 23-4; see Dewalque 2013). If they were *actual* constituents, they would be two numerically distinct entities, and so intentionality would have to be a relation between them. Because they are merely notional constituents, however, no genuine relation is involved. All the same, there is *structure* there, structure we can characterize in terms of these notional constituents. What really exists is simply the subject, variously modified depending on the intentional state she is in. But we can characterize these modifications informatively by bringing out their notional-constituent structure.

This notional structure features not only the act and the object, but also other elements, notably elements of 'intentional mode' (what we today call more often 'attitude,' as opposed to 'content'). A belief that *p* is different from a desire that *q* not only insofar as *p* is different from *q* but also insofar as believing is different from desiring. As Brentano puts it, believing has an 'affirmative quality,' and this element too is discernable among the notional constituents of an intentional act of believing something (Brentano 1982: 22). Moreover, an intentional state's structure may feature both determinate and determinable modes as notional constituents. Suppose that wondering whether *p* is one determinate of thinking about *p*; then every instance of wondering will feature both the 'wondering quality' and the 'thinking quality' as notional constituents (1982: 23).

To summarize: Although intentionality is an intrinsic, *ontologically* simple feature, by distinguishing in thought its various notional constituents we articulate an intelligible, informative structural description of it. This seems to be in tension with the idea that intentionality is a *conceptually* primitive, unanalyzable notion the nature of

which can only be grasped in direct inner perception, not through a substantive theoretical account.

III. Notional Constituents and Direct Grasp

We have encountered two ideas which seem to be in tension with each other, but which both (i) seem to be co-endorsed by Brentano and (ii) have a certain intrinsic plausibility to them. The first idea is that introspective analysis can yield an informative structural description of intentionality. The second is that intentionality is a conceptual primitive the nature of which cannot be grasped through theory but only when revealed in personal experience. What are we to make of the tension between these two independently intriguing ideas?

One option is that the two are in fact incompatible and Brentano simply floated them at different times, 'trying out' different views so to speak. This is of course an epistemic possibility, but I think it is implausible in this case. For as we will see later, there is an interpretation that finds the right role for both direct grasp and analysis into notional constituents.

A more interesting interpretation is that although introspective analysis yields an informative structural description of intentionality, the structure thereby described does not quite lie in the *nature* of intentionality. It characterizes intentionality, but not essentially so to speak. This too is problematic, however, insofar as it is hard to envisage intentionality *without* act (state), object (content), mode (attitude), and the other notional constituents identified by Brentano. These seem to be *necessary* aspects of intentionality, and their necessity is at least (defeasible) *evidence* of their essentiality, that is, of their lying in the *nature* of intentionality.

A third interpretation is that what is revealed to us in personal experience is only *which phenomenon intentionality is*. The deep nature of that phenomenon, though, is *not* thus revealed – it is only to be appreciated through the theoretical analysis in terms of notional constituents. In other words, inner perception *isolates* the relevant phenomenon, but does not present its *nature*. It identifies an explanandum, but does not offer an explanation of it. On this interpretation, what theoretical reflection cannot

do without the help of inner-perceptual direct grasp is fix on the right phenomenon. Once the right phenomenon is revealed to us, though – that is, once inner perception identifies the explanandum – we need philosophical reflection to develop a theory that captures its nature. This third interpretation strikes me as very much consistent with the passages Textor relies on in arguing for primitivism-cum-revelationism. The only drawback in it is its sharp distinction between which-phenomenon-it-is and what-is-its-nature. I do not mean that this is *in general* a problematic distinction; often identifying an explanandum and developing an explanatory theory capturing its nature are two separate affairs. Rather, my thought is that in the special case of intentionality, as Brentano seems to think of it, when we directly grasp the endogenous directedness of our experiences, we do obtain a measure of insight into its nature.

My favorite interpretation, for which I will argue in the remainder of this paper, is this: Although inner perception does present to us the nature of intentionality, it presents it *incompletely*; and it is only the introspective analysis into notional constituents that provides us with a *complete* grasp of the nature of intentionality. It is a consequence of this interpretation, I will argue, that neither primitivism nor revelationism is strictly speaking true of intentionality.

To appreciate this interpretation, we need to dive into Brentano's account of the relationship between perceiving (*wahrnehmen*) and noticing (*bemerken*), especially as it pertains to conscious experience (see especially Brentano 1982: 34-66). On Brentano's view, every conscious experience includes within it an inner awareness of its own occurrence and character, and this inner awareness is perceptual rather than intellectual or cognitive in nature. In this way, every experience, and every aspect of every experience, is guaranteed to be 'perceived' by the subject. However, not every aspect of every experience is guaranteed to be *noticed* by the subject. Our overall conscious experience at a time is typically quite complex and involves many intermingled components or aspects. Currently I am visually aware of the laptop before me, as well as the Spanish textbook to its left; am olfactorily aware of the coffee in the kitchen; auditorily aware of the indistinct hum of car engines outside; have tactile perception of the soles of my shoes and the chair on which I am sitting; am thinking about what to write next; am in a vaguely melancholic mood, and so on. Although the experience as a whole is manifest to my inner perception, its internal structure – its various components and their interrelations – is not so manifest; I need to pay attention to my experience to

bring out this structure. In general, thinks Brentano, our experiences present themselves to inner perception as structured wholes not every part of which is necessarily noticed.

What is it to *notice* a part of an experience? What Brentano (1928: 21, 1982: 36) tells us about this is a bit underwhelming: to notice *x* is to move from implicit perception of *x* to explicit perception of *x*. Every aspect of every experience is perceived, but typically it is merely *implicitly* perceived; to notice an aspect of an experience is to graduate to *explicit* perception of it. Unfortunately, Brentano nowhere (to my knowledge) elucidates the distinction between implicit and explicit perception. Nonetheless, intuitively this proto-account of the difference between noticing and (mere) perceiving resonates. Consider, in the realm of visual (rather than inner) perception, the famed Sperling experiments, where subjects are briefly presented with displays of nine letters arranged in three rows of three. When the display lasts the right amount of time, it will be right to say that the subject sees all nine letters but does not *notice* each letter. To notice each letter, she would normally need to have sufficient time to *attend* to each letter. For example, the display may be too brief for her to take full notice of the K in the upper right corner. One dimension of this is that although the subject sees the K, she does not see it *as a K*, that is, does not notice *that it is a K*. For Brentano, it is not quite *constitutive* of noticing something that one notices what kind of thing it is (1982: 50-1); nor is it constitutive of noticing that it is the outcome of attending (1982: 39). Nonetheless, *typically* noticing *x* results from attending to it and enables one to perceive it *as an* x. Regardless, just as we can draw a distinction between (merely) perceiving something and noticing it for visual perception, so we can draw this distinction for inner perception – perception of our own experiential life. The way Brentano would put it is that, in the Sperling experiment we envisage, the subject first has an implicit visual representation of the K, but only given sufficient time may graduate to *explicit* visual representation of the K; and similarly, though the subject is guaranteed to have an implicit *inner* representation of her visual-experience-of-K, certain further conditions would have to be met for her to acquire an *explicit* inner representation of her visual-experience-of-K.

We can see how this framework of noticing vs. (mere) perceiving is applied by Brentano to intentionality and its notional constituents. Obviously, these are always present to inner perception, but being such ubiquitous, structuring principles of

conscious life, they are not easy to *notice*. (Compare: it is specially hard to notice the air-conditioning's hum *because* it is constant; it is precisely when it stops that we notice it.) The way we notice intentionality is by contrasting our conscious states with everything else. More interestingly, the way we notice intentionality's notional constituents is by varying them relative to each other (Brentano 1982: 54-5). Hoping for ice cream and liking ice cream have the same object but differ in mode; hoping for ice cream and hoping for a vacation have the same mode but different object. Although the notional *determinables* (object, mode) are invariant (there is always an intentional mode, always an intentional object), ruling out a phenomenal contrast between their presence and absence, their notional *determinates* (hoping, liking; ice cream, vacation) do allow for phenomenal contrast, since they can vary independently of one another. We thus grasp the notional determinates through phenomenal contrast, and grasp the determinable, presumably, by grasping the commonality among its determinates.

It is important to appreciate that the epistemological order here goes from (1) undifferentiated perception of the stream of consciousness, to (2) noticing of intentionality as such, to (3) noticing of its notional constituents. Whereas theoretically disinterested inner perception may present a relative booming and buzzing experiential confusion, and whereas a certain measure of inner-perceptual zooming-in is required to explicitly represent (read: notice) intentionality, a further degree of inner-perceptual zooming-in is required to explicitly represent the internal constituents of intentionality: act, object, mode, and so on. This suggests that analysis in terms of notional constituents does *go deeper* into the nature of intentionality than simple direct grasp of intentionality as such.

Despite the fact that analysis into notional constituents goes deeper into the nature of intentionality, however, inner-perceptual direct grasp of intentionality is *indispensable* for understanding its nature. For, on the one hand, intentionality is encountered *only* in inner perception, never in sense perception or in any other way. But, on the other hand, the notional constituents of intentionality never occur 'outside' or independently of it, and therefore we cannot hope to have an independent handle on them. We can elucidate what a bachelor is by defining it in terms of unmarried man, but only because we have an independent understanding of the notions of man and unmarried. Both the unmarried and the manly are not restricted to the context of bachelorhood and occur outside it: some unmarried things are not men and some men

are not unmarried. This enables us to have an independent grip on the (real, separable) constituents of bachelorhood, which constituents we can then bring together to form a conception of a bachelor. If intentionality were a relation between an intentional act and an intentional object, and we had an independent grip on what an act and an object were, we would be able to elucidate what intentionality is in a similar way. However, while the relevant notion of act may well be the notion of something that could occur outside the context of intentionality, the relevant notion of object is not. For the adjective 'intentional' in 'intentional object' is a *modifying* adjective: an intentional object is not a kind of object any more than a toy soldier is a kind of soldier (on this see notably Twardowski 1894 Ch.4.) Accordingly, we cannot leverage an independent understanding of the notion of intentional object to come to understand the notion of intentionality. In this sense, the analysis of intentionality into its constituents, although possible, does not provide quite the same kind of epistemic benefit that analysis of bachelorhood into its constituents does: we cannot *start* by grasping the constituents and use this grasp to come to understand what intentionality is. On the contrary, we grasp intentionality as such *first*, and only then, through further cognitive effort, we notice its notional constituents. This means that understanding the nature of intentionality is impossible without direct inner-perceptual grasp of it. For without direct inner-perceptual grasp of intentionality, we can never come to grasp the notion of intentional object.

The peculiar relationship between intentionality and its notional constituents thus brings together two important truths. On the one hand, it is impossible to appreciate the nature of intentionality without direct grasp. At the same time, direct grasp of intentionality does not deliver an exhaustive appreciation of its nature. Deeper appreciation is possible by bringing out explicitly the variety of intentionality's notional constituents and their interrelations. As long as one has failed to notice these notional constituents, one's grip on the nature of intentionality remains *incomplete* – even if one enjoys direct grasp (even *explicit* direct grasp) of intentionality itself.

This, then, is my favored interpretation of the relationship between direct grasp and analysis into notional constituents as manners of understanding the nature of intentionality. This interpretation puts in question primitivism and revelationism as characterizing Brentano's position. Primitivism is the thesis that intentionality is conceptually primitive in the sense that it is unanalyzable. On our interpretation, on the

contrary, there is a kind of analysis of intentionality's notional structure that is not only possible but necessary for a complete appreciation of its nature. As for revelationism, this is the thesis that the nature of intentionality 'is fully revealed to us in its instantiation' (Textor 2017: 74). Whether this is true on our interpretation depends on what one means by 'fully revealed.' If the term 'revealed' is taken to imply that no cognitive effort needs to be mobilized, it is clearly not true that the nature of intentionality is revealed to us. But nor is it true if no cognitive effort is demanded that goes beyond noticing intentionality itself. For on our interpretation, a *full* appreciation of the nature of intentionality requires the kind of cognitive effort that would go deeper into the structure of intentionality and bring out its notional constituents.

At the same time, our interpretation *can* make sense of the two key passages supporting Textor's primitivist-revelationist interpretation, those where Brentano writes that 'the notion of intentionality cannot be elucidated otherwise than by ostension of instances' (1954: 190-1) and that 'just as it would be impossible to make clear to a blind man the concept of red, it is impossible to make clear to someone … who has never apprehended himself as a thinker the concept of thinking' (1966: 339). For upon rereading, all these passages insist on is that direct grasp of intentionality is a *sine qua non* for appreciating the nature of intentionality. They contain nothing to exclude the possibility that such direct grasp, unsupplemented by analysis into notional constituents, may yet offer an *incomplete* portrait of the nature of intentionality. But this, on our interpretation of Brentano, is precisely what happens with intentionality: direct grasp of intentionality is (i) indispensable but (ii) incomplete. Complete understanding of the nature of intentionality requires noticing in inner perception not only intentionality as a whole, but also its notional constituents and their interrelations.[5]

Historical Appendix: Intentionality in the Aristotelian Tradition

I mentioned that the analysis-by-notional-constituent approach to understanding the nature of intentionality is not simply a line of thought that Brentano floats in some of his

writings, but instead reflect a deep commitment to a core idea of a longstanding Aristotelian project. In this appendix I briefly offer two philosophical snapshots of this tradition's unfolding.

We know that Aristotle was Brentano's philosophical hero. (Brentano wrote his doctoral dissertation on Aristotle's ontology and his *Habilitationsschrift* on Aristotle's psychology – see Brentano 1862, 1867.) Interestingly, in Aristotle's discussion of perception and its relation to the perceptual object, we find again the two ideas we found in Brentano: that the perceptual subject and object of perception are only notionally distinguishable from each other, and relatedly that the only *real* element here is the modification of the subject. Consider this passage from *De Anima* 3.2:

> [1] The activity of the sensible object and that of the percipient sense is one and the same activity, [2] and yet the distinction between their being (*logos*) remains. [3] Take as illustration actual sound and actual hearing: a man may have hearing and yet not be hearing, and that which has a sound is not always sounding. [4] But when that which can hear is actively hearing and that which can sound is sounding, then the actual hearing and the actual sound are merged in one. . . [5] If it is true that the movement, both the acting and the being acted upon, is to be found in that which is acted upon, both the sound and the hearing so far as it is actual must be found in that which has the faculty of hearing; [6] for it is in the passive factor that the actuality of the active or motive factor is realized… ($425^{b}26$–$426^{a}5$)

In [1], Aristotle claims that the relations of perceiving and being perceived (i.e., what the subject does and what the object does when perception occurs) are one and the same whenever they are instantiated or actualized. This makes sense: when *x* perceives *y*, there are not two relation-instantiations, *x*'s perceiving of *y* and *y*'s being perceived by *x* (e.g., *x*'s hearing of *y* and *y*'s 'sounding' to *x*). Rather, there is only one relation-instance, which can be *thought of* alternatively as *x*'s perceiving of *y* and *y*'s being perceived by *x*. The reason we can distinguish between the two, suggests Aristotle in [3], is that when they are *not* actualized – when they are merely *in potentia* – they are distinct: the *disposition to perceive* inheres in the subject, whereas the *disposition to be perceived* inheres in the object. Because of this *real* distinction between the two dispositions, there is a *logos* distinction between occurrent perceiving and occurrent being-perceived – this is what Aristotle asserts in [2]. But having a distinct *logos* is not the same as being two numerically distinct things; on the contrary, Aristotle is very clear

in [4] that occurrent perceiving and occurrent being-perceived are one and the same. What, then, does it mean that perceiving and being perceived are logos-distinct? I think it is best understood in terms of Brentano's notion of divisiva, what I have called notional constituents. Later in the passage, in [5]-[6], we learn that although the disposition to be perceived inheres in the object, actual being-perceived inheres in the subject, coinciding as it does with the subject's actual perceiving (which naturally inheres in the subject). This suggests that occurrent perceiving/being-perceived is not really a relation, as 'both' the perceiving and the being perceived occur in the subject. There is one event taking place, but there is a distinction to be made *in thought* between two notional constituents (e.g., the act of hearing and the object sounding).

This Aristotelian picture is endorsed with remarkable faithfulness by the main medieval Aristotelians. Obviously we find it in Averroes' *Long Commentary on De Anima* (see especially §§140-1), where the line between what is expounded and what is propounded is not always clear. But perhaps the clearest endorsement and development of the approach in medieval philosophy is in Maimonides. Similarly to Averroes before him in Islamic philosophy and Aquinas after him in Christian philosophy, Maimonides' project was to reconcile Aristotelian philosophy with the religious teachings of his community. According to Maimonides, the core principles of Jewish belief are three: God exists (this distinguishes the Jew from the atheist); He is one (this distinguishes the Jew from the polytheist); He is incorporeal (this distinguishes the Jew from the Christian, who countenances the incorporation of God in the person of Jesus). The second principle, however, is in tension with a variety of phenomena that challenge the absolute oneness of God.[6] In section 68 of Book 1 of *Guide to the Perplexed*, Maimonides struggles with one such challenge, and appeals centrally to Aristotle's account of perceptual intentionality, or rather to an analogous account of intellectual intentionality, to solve the problem. The problem is that God is intellectually active – obviously – and thus knows and understands many things. This is problematic because it seems to imply a certain plurality built into intellectual activity: there is the intellectual act, but also the intentional object of that act, as well as the subject in whom the whole thing takes place. Many responses may be envisaged, but Maimonides' is thoroughly Aristotelian:

> [1] You are acquainted with the well-known principle of the philosophers that God is the *intellectus*, the *ens intelligens*, and the *ens intelligibile*. [2] These three things are in God

> one and the same, and do not in any way constitute a plurality. . . [3] [For] the intellect is not a thing distinct from the thing comprehended. [4] It is therefore clear to you that the thing comprehended is the abstract form of the tree, and at the same time it is the intellect in action: [5] and that the intellect and the abstract form of the tree are not two different things, [6] for the intellect in action is nothing but the thing comprehended. . . [7] [Further, a]ll intellect is identical with its action: the intellect in action is not a thing different from its action, [8] for the true nature and essence of the intellect is comprehension, [9] and you must not think that the intellect in action is a thing existing by itself, separate from comprehension, and that comprehension is a different thing connected with it. . . (p. 100)

The basic shape of the response is laid out in [1-2]: in God, the subject, the intentional act, and the intentional object are one and the same. But what interests us here is the underlying reasoning, which relies on two identifications about intellects in general. The first is stated in [3] and more precisely in [6]: when an intellect is active, its act and its object are one and the same thing. This is to identify the act and the object of intentionality. There is no numeric distinction between the act of grasping and that-which-is-grasped. The second identification is stated clearly in [7]: when an intellect is active, it just *is* its activity. This is to identify the subject and the intentional act. The subject is not some kind of container in which the act takes place (see [9]). For, we are told in [8], it is the intellect's very essence to grasp or comprehend, so when it does, its existence *consists* in the occurrence of the grasping. Later in this section, Maimonides uses this general account to establish the perfect unity of God. The identity claims concern *active* intellects. As in Aristotle, the reason we can nonetheless distinguish between subject, act, and object in the ordinary case is that our intellects are not *always* active. When a person is asleep, say, her intellect is inactive – no grasping actually occurs. The key fact about God, claims Maimonides, is that He is always intellectually active, hence always occurrently grasping. God does not go to sleep or zones out between intellectual episodes like we do. Therefore, for God there is perfect unity of subject, act, and object.

We can see, then, that Maimonides wheels out the entire Aristotelian framework on intentionality to get himself out of his theological hot water. What matters for our purposes is that if the intellectual subject, act, and object are one and the same *in reality*, but may be distinguished from each other *in thought*, then they must be *notional constituents* of the intellectual episode.

In this respect Brentano's structural analysis of intentionality in terms of notional constituents does not come out of nowhere. To be sure, there are important differences within this tradition: Maimonides distinguishes notionally between the subject and the act in a way Aristotle does not (at least in the passage quoted above), and Brentano stresses the intentional mode as a notional constituent in a way neither Aristotle nor Maimonides does. Still, the methodological gambit is the same: we obtain a richer understanding of the nature of intentionality when we isolate different notional constituents and appreciate their interweaving in a standard intentional experience.

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[1] The notion of underived intentionality alludes to the idea that although many things have aboutness, some things have it by courtesy of other things whereas some have it in and of themselves, that is, nonderivatively. For example, a traffic signs means 'rail crossing ahead' because we decided that that is what it would mean, whereas the decision is about what it is about in and of itself. Not everybody accepts this distinction, of course, but here I assume it.

[2] Brentano's notion of inner perception is not quite the same as introspection. But the various differences between introspection and inner perception will not matter for us here.

[3] The two ideas can be found in Aristotle himself, in my opinion in $425^{b}26$–$426^{a}5$ (in *De Anima* 3.2), but also, for instance, in section 68 of Book 1 of Maimonides' *Guide to the Perplexed*. These matters are of course controversial (see Taieb 2018 for a recent development of a completely different perspective on the Aristotelian tradition). I cannot go into these historical matters here with any seriousness, but see the appendix for very preliminary discussion.

[4] Full disclosure: there are other texts – not many, but some, mostly from 1915 – that are more sympathetic to a relational account. For discussion, see Kriegel 2018: 62-3.

[5] For help with developing the ideas in §3 of this paper, I am grateful to Anna Giustina. For incisive comments on a previous draft, I am very grateful to Hamid Taieb.

[6] For instance, God's omnipotence is distinct from His omniscience. Maimonides handles this by adopting 'negative theology' (see *Guide* Book 1 §§51-59), the notion that we can only know what God is not, not what He is. Accordingly, all we assert when we say that God is omnipotent, according to Maimonides, is the *negative* judgment that there is no potency God lacks. And ditto for other alleged characteristics of God.