Précis of *Brentano's Philosophical System*

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Here is a rather difficult two-part question: How may we grasp (a) the nature of reality and (b) the nature of value? As I understand the man, answering this question was the principal, overarching aim of Franz Brentano's philosophical work. More specifically, he wanted to provide an answer that respected a self-imposed theoretical constraint, namely, that our grasp of a thing's status as real or as valuable be ultimately grounded in direct encounter with certain aspects of our conscious experience. The purpose of my book *Brentano's Philosophical System: Mind, Being, Value* (henceforth, BPS) is to reconstruct Brentano's attempt to answer his question, present a partial defense of the answer, offer some potential improvements on it, and also point to persistent difficulties it faces.

Below, I (a) speed-explain Brentano's self-imposed constraint and its motivation, (b) reconstruct Brentano's account of the real in light of it, and (c) reconstruct Brentano's corresponding account of the valuable. These three tasks correspond roughly to BPS's three parts: 'Mind,' 'Being,' and 'Value.'

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One might hope to answer the how-may-we-grasp question by offering *definitions* of such predicates as 'is real' and 'is valuable.' For Brentano, the problem with this is that such definitions would analyze the notions of reality and value in terms of some other notions, but unless we already grasp those other notions, the analysis would not help us grasp the notions of reality and value. We may of course proceed to offer definitions of the notions in terms of which we defined 'real' and 'valuable,' but the problem would recur for those definitions. Ultimately, thinks Brentano, the nature of *some* phenomena must be grasped not through definitions, but somehow *directly*. Direct grasp of those phenomena could then ground (via a web of definitions/analyses) grasp of all other notions.

If we enjoyed direct encounter with abstract essences in something like rational intuition, we could hope to directly intuit the essence of realness and the essence of value. But Brentano denies that there are such abstract entities as Reality-as such and Value-as-such. He also denies that *sensory perception* affords us any direct grasp of its objects, for fairly traditional empiricist reasons: who knows what (e.g.) *yellow* is really like in and of itself, independently of its appearance to us? Fortunately, though, there is one mental capacity that does grant us direct grasp of its objects, namely, our 'inner perception' of our ongoing conscious experiences as we live through them.

Why and how inner perception affords direct grasp of its objects is a complex matter (see BPS Ch.1 for detail). But what all this leads to is the following requirement: if we are to grasp what it is to be real and what it is to be valuable, there must be some experiential phenomena that (i) can be directly grasped in inner perception and (ii) can be used to analyze what it is to be real/valuable. This is Brentano's aforementioned self-imposed constraint: the nature of the real and the valuable must be appreciated by analysis into inner-perceptible experiential elements. No genuine philosophical illumination of realness and value can be achieved otherwise.

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Obviously, much of what is real is outside of our mind. Flowers are real, for instance, but we cannot hope to directly grasp them in inner perception. How may we nonetheless grasp their reality? Brentano's basic strategy is to seek a specific type of conscious experience that it is appropriate or fitting to have just toward the real. By directly grasping the nature of this type of experience, and by analyzing the nature of the relevant appropriateness or fittingness in terms of something which is likewise directly graspable, we would then be in a position to grasp the nature of the real.

Brentano identifies the right kind of experience as what he calls 'acknowledgement' (*Anerkennung*). In Ch.4 of BPS, I propose to construe acknowledgement as *the conscious act of believing-in*. A typical adult's acceptance of the existence of flowers is tacit and unconscious. But it is also possible to bring up to consciousness the question of whether flowers exist and mentally answer in the positive. This conscious exercise is essentially the performance of a conscious act of believing in flowers. For reasons I belabor in the relevant chapter, it is important to

Brentano that believing-in be a sui generis non-propositional state, such that belief in *x* is not analyzable in terms of belief that *x* exists.

The distinctive character of consciously believing *in* something can be directly grasped, according to Brentano, when we contrast it with experiences of *dis*believing in something and of *entertaining* something. Juxtaposing the experiences of consciously believing-in, disbelieving-in, and entertaining brings into inner-perceptual relief, so to speak, the distinctive nature of belief-in. When we do so, we notice that what characterizes belief-in is an inbuilt commitment to its object's existence (in contrast with disbelief-in, which carries an inbuilt commitment to nonexistence, and entertaining, which is 'existentially silent'). By 'inbuilt commitment to existence,' I mean commitment that need not be explicitly specified in the belief-in's content, because it is 'baked into' the very act of believing-in. As I put it in the book, 'acknowledgement' of *x* does not represent *x* as existent, but rather represents-as-existent *x*. Representing-as-existent is the very *nature* of belief-in. (Note well: in saying that belief-in is characterized by 'inbuilt commitment to existence,' I do not mean that we should *define* belief-in in terms of such notions as existence and commitment. The idea is rather that such expressions help fix the mind on the experiential characteristic that distinguishes belief-in from disbelief-in, entertaining, and all other types of conscious act.)

The real is not, of course, simply that which we believe in. It is that which it is *right*, or *fitting*, to believe in. So what we must grasp next is the nature of fittingness. Here Brentano's strategy proceeds in two steps (see BPS Ch.5). First, there is a kind of *experientially manifest* fittingness in the phenomenon of self-evidence (*Evidenz*). Each of us believes in his or her own existence, cogito-style, in a way that feels quite different from our belief in flowers: there is a self-evident character that attaches to the former but not the other. For Brentano, the distinctive nature of this kind of self-evidence can again be grasped directly through inner-perceptual contrast, notably between self-evident and non-self-evident acts of belief-in. The second step of Brentano's strategy is to analyze fittingness in terms of self-evidence, as follows:

> S's belief in *x* is fitting iff: *if* S could form either a self-evident belief in *x* or a self-evident disbelief in *x*, what S would form is a self-evident *belief* in *x*.

Correspondingly, S's belief in *x* is *unfittingly* just in case if what S would form in the same circumstance is a self-evident *disbelief* in *x*.

To summarize, true grasp of what it is for something to be real is reached through a combination of conceptual analysis and exercises of contrastive inner perception. The real is analyzed as that which it is fitting to believe in, fittingness is analyzed in terms of self-evidence, and both belief-in and self-evidence are grasped directly in contrastive inner perception. Thus we anchor our ultimate understanding of realness in direct inner-perceptual grasp of self-evidence and belief-in. Importantly, this is not intended to capture what realness ontologically *consists in*. For Brentano, realness is ontologically primitive – you cannot 'get underneath' it. The project is to offer a way for us to 'wrap our mind' around this ontological primitive.

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Brentano's strategy for grasping a thing's status as valuable has a similar structure. The initial insight is that the valuable is that which it is fitting to love (*lieben*), where 'love' is understood very widely to cover any form of consciously *favoring* something. (This is quite akin to the modern notion of a 'pro attitude' – but construed as a conscious act rather than a tacit/standing state.) The next step is to bring the nature of favoring into inner-perceptual relief by contrasting conscious acts of favoring *x* with conscious acts of disfavoring *x* and conscious neutrality with respect to *x*. As for the *fittingness* of favoring, it is not the same fittingness as that of believing-in, since the latter is analyzable in terms of self-evidence, but self-evidence is a characteristic of beliefs, not pro attitudes. Still, Brentano claims that there is an *analogue* of self-evidence in the domain of pro attitudes: my preference for joy over sadness, for instance, feels manifestly and incontrovertibly fitting in a way my preference for representative democracy over constitutional monarchy does not. Curiously, nowhere does Brentano give this analogue a name; I call it 'self-imposingness' (BPS C.8). By inner-perceptually contrasting self-imposing favoring and non-self-imposing favoring, we come to grasp directly the nature of self-imposingness. We can then analyze the fittingness of favoring in terms of it:

> S favors *x* fittingly iff: if S could either self-imposingly favor *x* or self-imposingly disfavor *x*, what S would do is self-imposingly *favor x*.

Thus the valuable submits to ultimate analysis in terms of the notions of favoring and self-imposingness, both of which can be directly grasped through appropriate exercises of contrastive inner perception. Here too, it is not part of Brentano's view that being

valuable ontologically consists in being hypothetically self-imposingly favored. He only aims to offer a way to 'get in cognitive touch' with a thing's status as valuable.

Brentano's accounts of the real and the valuable are not supposed to be neutral on what we should say *is* real and *is* valuable. On the contrary, they pave the way to substantive ontological and ethical doctrines. In particular, Brentano argues for am austere nominalistic ontology according to which ours is a world of massively coincident concrete particulars (see BPS Ch.6); and for a specific form of pluralistic consequentialism according to which a thing's value is a function of its promoting the occurrence of four intrinsic goods (pleasure, knowledge, fitting attitudes, and experience) and demoting the occurrence of three intrinsic evils (pain, ignorance, and unfitting attitudes) (see BPS Ch.9).

The result is an intellectual edifice that tells us both what is real and what we are truly saying when we say that something is real, as well as what is good and what we are truly saying when we say that something is good. It is this intellectual edifice that I refer to as Brentano's philosophical system, as it combines both a theoretical philosophy that attempts to illuminate the ultimate nature of reality and a practical philosophy that ventures to tell us how to live. Intriguingly, it is a system that assigns a foundational role to the philosophy of consciousness, insofar as true appreciation of realness and value is based ineluctably on direct grasp of conscious phenomena. No philosophical understanding of reality and value can be attained, for Brentano, that does not pass through direct inner awareness of one's own lived conscious experience.