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Citation

Schaar, M. S. van der. (2023). Judgement and intentionality in early Brentano. *Grazer Philosophische Studien*, 100(1-2), 151-172.
doi:10.1163/18756735-00000181

Version: Publisher's Version

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Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3620769>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).



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GRAZER PHILOSOPHISCHE STUDIEN 100 (2023) 151–172

Grazer
Philosophische
Studien
brill.com/gps

Judgement and Intentionality in Early Brentano

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Abstract

There are two notions of intentionality: the first contains the thesis that our acts of thinking, judging and loving have a content; the second that our mental acts are about something external to the act. Brentano uses the term ‘intentionality’ only in relation to the first notion; for him, intentionality does not function as a bridge between the mind and the external world. Is it possible for a phenomenologist like Brentano to give an account of the second notion of intentionality? It is argued that this is possible, but not without introducing the notion of judgement. A comparison with Mill’s distinction between connotation and denotation, and with Frege’s distinction between sense and reference shows how original Brentano’s theory is.

Keywords

intentionality – judgement – a phenomenological account of aboutness – the traditional intension / extension distinction – Mill’s connotation / denotation distinction – Frege’s sense / reference distinction

1 Introduction: Two Notions of Intentionality

In his *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt* (*Psychology*, 1874) Brentano writes that our acts of presentation are characterised by the fact that they have a content, that they are directed to an object (PES, 115¹):

¹ Page references are to the first edition of Brentano’s *Psychologie* (available online). The German spelling has been slightly adapted.

Jedes psychische Phänomen ist durch das charakterisiert ... was wir die Beziehung auf einen Inhalt, die Richtung auf ein Objekt ..., oder die immanente Gegenständlichkeit nennen würden.²

Examples of contents are a colour, such as the red as it appears to me, a tone or chimera, but a concept (*Begriff*) or characteristic (*Merkmal*), such as *learned man*, may also be the content of an act of presentation. Such contents are not to be understood as Platonic ideas independent of the act; they rather seem to be part of the act: 'Every mental phenomenon includes something as object within itself' (PES, 115; Brentano 1995, 68). Such a part-whole relation between the act and its content is not an ordinary part-whole relation, though, for the content of the act has the role of the act's internal object, as that to which the act is directed. The content has no existence apart from the act; the red as it appears to me has only intentional existence or inexistence (PES, 120): it exists only in the mind, and cannot stand in causal relations. Although act and content are dependent upon one another, they can be separated in thought. This makes it possible to vary the act and content independently in our thoughts; we may thus see that there are different kinds of mental acts or mental phenomena. In making a clear distinction between act and content, Brentano has made a step forward compared to the empiricist notion of idea. In Hume, for example, the notion of idea is still infected by an act/content ambiguity. This means that, for Hume, judgement is nothing but a special kind of idea. For Brentano, in contrast, there is a sharp conceptual distinction between presentations, ideas or thoughts, on the one hand, and judgements on the other. The act of judgement is *sui generis*.

As we have seen above, Brentano does not make a distinction between content and object of mental acts in his *Psychology*. In what sense can we then say that he gives an account of intentionality in the passage quoted above? The thesis that all thinking is intentional, that all thinking is *thinking of*, can be understood in two ways:

- I. All thinking has a content, understood as something internal to the act of thinking.
- II. All thinking is about an object that is independent of the act of thinking.

² 'Every mental phenomenon is characterized by ... what we might call ... reference to a content, direction toward an object ..., or immanent objectivity.' (Brentano 1995, 68).

Brentano's account of mental acts in terms of their immanent objectivity suits thesis I. The inner objectivity of an act is to be distinguished from the act's relation to something external to the act, as we can read in a later passage from around 1889, where the expression 'Objekt' is elucidated (DP, 22):

etwas innerlich Gegenständliches ist gemeint. Draußen braucht ihm nichts zu entsprechen.... Es ist dies etwas a) allgemein und b) ausschließlich dem Bewusstsein eigenes.³

The object in the act/object distinction that Brentano has in mind, is an immanent object to which nothing needs to correspond in the external world. Although Brentano allows for non-general objects of our mental acts, in standard cases, the immanent object is something general, like a form or species (*man* or *horse*). In the early *Logic Lectures*, a manuscript that Brentano worked on during the 70's and 80's, this view is confirmed: the content of logically relevant presentations is a concept (EL80, 13.024).⁴ Such general concepts or characteristics play an important role in Brentano's term logic.

Brentano's students Twardowski and Meinong are famous for giving an account of intentionality in terms of a three-fold distinction between act, content and object. Regarding the specific question what our acts are directed to, they answer the question in terms of thesis II. Every act has both a content and an object: the object is that of which we think; the content functions as mediator (Twardowski 1894, 18). Whereas they see the content as dependent upon the act, the object need not be understood that way. In Meinong's *Über Gegenstandstheorie* (1904), the object of the act is independent of the act, whether the object is actual, merely possible, or impossible. *All* acts of thinking are thus characterized by intentionality as explained by thesis II. Meinong is careful enough not to say that all these objects exist. He doesn't go as far as the freemason in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, who gives a semantic 'proof' for God's existence: when he wouldn't be there, we would not speak of him.

Brentano does not endorse Meinong's account of intentionality, as it is not in accordance with his method of empirical psychology. Central notions of empirical or descriptive psychology, like intentionality, should not be explained in terms of a metaphysical realm of actual and possible objects. The

3 'some internal object-like thing is meant. It need not correspond to anything outside.... This is something (a) generally and (b) exclusively characteristic of consciousness.' (Brentano 1995b, 24).

4 The edition of this manuscript concerns the logic lectures from the time in Würzburg, the early 70's.

phenomenologist is to give an analysing description of mental acts independent of any metaphysical issues.

Thesis II contains an important insight, though, at least, if we take a variant in which we are not committed to possible and impossible objects. My thought *that the moon is lighted by the sun* is not about the content of my act of thinking, but about the moon, the sun, or perhaps an event in the world. This insight is contained in a variant of thesis II:

II' Some mental acts are about an object that is independent of the act.

This brings us to the central question of the paper: Is Brentano able to account for the insight contained in thesis II'? When Brentano introduces the idea of intentional (in)existence as the distinguishing mark of the mental in his early *Psychology* (PES, 118), he has only intentionality as expressed by thesis I in mind; intentionality has for him a strict sense. In his *Logic Lectures* from the 70s, it seems that Brentano does acknowledge an external object explicitly: what we speak about is the external object. Brentano uses the term 'sprechen von', speaking about, as the context is a linguistic one. I will therefore speak of the aboutness of the act in relation to thesis II'. I prefer not to use the term 'reference' at this stage of the paper, as the term is already in use as a translation of Frege's term 'Bedeutung'. Is there a conceptual possibility for Brentano to give an account of the aboutness of our acts in his phenomenology independently of such linguistic contexts? And can we find such an account in his *Psychology* from 1874?

As I will argue in the next section, Brentano is able to give such an account by invoking the notion of judgement. I will make use of writings dating from the period until 1900, but the focus is on the early *Psychology* and other material from the seventies. We will see that the notion of aboutness is a more complex phenomenon than the notion of intentionality as Brentano understands it. One of the philosophical issues here is to make the notion of aboutness more precise, and, as I hope to make clear, Brentano's understanding of aboutness in terms of judgement may still be of value. In the third section, the question is raised to what extent Brentano's account of intentionality and aboutness adds something new to the traditional distinction between extension and intension of concepts or general terms. More specifically, a comparison with Mill's distinction between denotation and connotation will be made. In the final section, I will contrast Brentano's view with Frege's. We will see that Frege's notion of reference, dating from 1891, is more precise than Brentano's idea of aboutness as expressed by thesis II'. In the end, I will note an important agreement between the two philosophers, which can be traced back to their

common thesis that one needs to make a clear conceptual distinction between thinking and judging.

2 Judgement and Aboutness

By making a conceptual distinction between act and internal object Brentano is able to see where the distinguishing mark of judgement is to be found. Judgement is unique not because it has a special propositional content in which different terms or concepts are combined. Judgement is unique because it is a special way in which we may be directed to the internal object. In judging one acknowledges or rejects what is presented through an act of presentation or thinking (*Vorstellen*). All judgements are thus dependent upon an act of presentation or thinking; without the act of presentation there would be nothing to judge. Furthermore, all judgements are existential; the act of judging is an acknowledging-of-existence or a denying-of-existence. This is not to say that there are other forms of judging, in which there is no denying or affirming-of-existence. For Brentano, *existence* is not a predicate; it is not a categorematic term; the concepts of existence and non-existence can only be obtained by considering the act of judging (PES, 279). In the judgement *A is*, e.g. *‘Ein gelehrter Mann ist’*, one affirms that *A is*, that there exists a man, who has the characteristic of *Gelehrsamkeit*.

For Brentano, thinking (*Vorstellen*) and judging are radically different types of mental acts. Intentionality in sense I plays a role in our acts of thinking or presenting and thereby in judging, loving and hating, as well, because these acts depend on an act of thinking for their having a content. Does Brentano also give an account of intentionality in sense II or II'? In the passage in which he introduces the idea of intentional inexistence as mark of the mental, there is no sign that he allows for such an account. In order to answer this question, we need to go to Brentano's account of judgement. If one judges that God exists, the judgement is dependent upon one's thinking of the characteristics of God, such as being almighty. This accounts for the fact that our thinking and judging has a content (intentionality in sense I). In the next step of the judgement's analysis, the act of judging acknowledges the existence of (the characteristics of) God. If the judgement is correct, it is about God, the judgement's external object (intentionality in sense II'). We may also be mistaken in our judgement, and in that case there is no external object. Whereas the correct affirmative judgement is about an external object, the incorrect affirmative judgement is not about something. The incorrect affirmative judgement that Santa Claus exists has a content (intentionality in sense I): the characteristics

of Santa Claus as we take him to be, but the judgement has no external object; it is not about something. Not all judgements are about something. We may thus conclude that Brentano gives an account of aboutness in sense II', not in sense II. We see here that the notion of aboutness is explained in terms of the correctness of the affirmative judgement. When we merely consider affirmative judgements, one might be tempted to say that the aboutness relation in Brentano can be understood as a truth-maker relation. Intentionality in sense II' would then be explained in terms of the truth-maker of a judgement: the actual existence of the judgement's content. For Brentano, though, there are both affirmative and negative judgements.

Can one also speak of intentionality as aboutness in the case of negative judgements? Let me again give an example: Suppose, one denies the existence of tigers. This rejection we consider to be incorrect, insofar as we judge that there are tigers. This means that the negative judgement can also be understood as being about tigers, although here the idea of aboutness is dependent upon the corresponding correct affirmation. Incorrect rejections are thus about certain objects. But, if the negative judgement is correct, there is no object in the external world the judgement is about. One therefore cannot explain the aboutness of our acts in terms of the act's truth-maker. Brentano's thesis regarding intentionality II' is thus:

Only correct affirmations and incorrect denials are *about* external objects.

It might seem that the idea that the judgement that God exists is correct and the idea that the judgement that there are no tigers is incorrect, is to be understood in terms of the (actual) object the judgement is about. This would be in accordance with Brentano's realism, and his endorsement of the Aristotelian understanding of truth and falsity: 'a judgement is true if it if it says of something that is, that it is, and of something that is not, that it is not' (Brentano 1966, 23; WE, 27; § 57). Does this mean that the notion of aboutness is prior in the order of explanation to that of truth of a judgement? I don't think so. If we introduce the notion of the actual object the judgement is about, we cannot but understand it as the existing object, and this notion of existence is for Brentano a notion that we can only grasp when we grasp the notion of a correct affirmation. Brentano explains at the end of the 1889 lecture on the concept of truth that the correspondence definition of truth gives us only a nominal definition of truth (Brentano 1966, 25; WE, 29; § 59). It does not explain what truth is, for the notion of existence of the object cannot be understood independently of the notion of the judgement's truth. How are we then to obtain the idea of the truth of a judgement? In accordance with his phenomenological

method, this idea can only be obtained through concrete examples of true judgements that we experience as true, through the experience of judgements that are characterised by an inner rightness, as he puts it in another lecture of the same year (Brentano 1889, 19, § 23).

In his *Psychology*, Brentano gives inner perception as example of a judgement characterised by inner rightness: the objects of inner perception are perceived with self-evidence (*unmittelbarer Evidenz*, PES, 127). By comparing these self-evident judgements with judgements that lack such self-evidence, we obtain the notion of truth, and thereby we obtain the notion of an actually existing object. We know these objects of inner perceptions to have actual existence (*wirkliche Existenz*, PES, 127), insofar as these perceptions are self-evident. There is no way in which we can phenomenologically understand the notion of an actually existing object but through experiencing the actually existing object in an act of inner perception. Here, the notion of actually existing object, the object the judgement is about, is thus dependent upon our having a self-evident affirmative judgement and thereby understand the notion of the inner rightness of judgement.

Does this mean that, on Brentano's account, we can only make sense of the aboutness of our judgements insofar as our judgements are self-evident? I don't think so. If one judges that God exists, one takes the judgement to be about God as an external object of the act of judging.⁵ In judging that God exists, one takes one's own judgement to be correct, and this idea is a counterpart to the idea of taking our act to be about God as an external object. We cannot make sense of the latter without introducing the former. In an extended sense, I may then also take my love of God to be about God, and someone else's thoughts (*Vorstellungen*) to be about God as an external object. Whether there really *is* such an external object can, in most cases, not be determined within phenomenology. This is the reason why Brentano says so little about the external object of our acts in his *Psychology*. As we have seen above, for Brentano, only inner perception guarantees its object to exist.

Hamid Taieb (2017, 2018) has also argued that Brentano is able to make a distinction between the two notions of intentionality introduced in the former section, although his focus is on the writings of the later Brentano, from 1904

5 Brentano's example relates to a tone, which is for him the content of an act of hearing. If one believes that there is a tone in the external world that is the cause of what we hear, one believes that there is a tone, a tone as external object: 'je nachdem wir glauben oder nicht glauben, dass sie ausser uns eine ihr entsprechende Ursache habe, glauben wir, dass es auch in der Aussenwelt einen Ton gebe oder nicht.' (PES, 161) / 'depending on whether or not we believe that it has a corresponding cause outside of us, we believe that a sound does or does not exist in the external world as well.' (Brentano 1995, 95).

on. As Taieb writes, in these later writings, Brentano speaks of correspondence or similarity of a thinking being with the thing thought. Hamid takes these passages as starting point for Brentano's view on intentionality in sense II, which he calls 'reference': 'Brentano's relation of reference holds at the level of presentations, not of judgments' (Hamid 2017, 125).⁶ It is true that for Brentano presentations have a logical and ontological primacy over judgements, as Hamid writes, and this thesis is relevant in relation to intentionality in sense I. This thesis is not relevant, though, with respect to intentionality in sense II, at least, when we consider Brentano's writings of the earlier period. Strictly speaking, a phenomenologist cannot speak of a relation between a thinking being and an actual thing, unless the actual thing is an object of inner perception. We have also seen, though, that there is a possibility for Brentano to speak of an act's external object on a more general basis insofar as one affirms the act's content, that is, insofar as one acknowledges the content of the act to exist. The first person, who makes the judgement, then takes his own mental acts, and the acts of others, to be about the object that is acknowledged to exist.

The position I am attributing to Brentano is the one he is committed to by his strict phenomenological approach in his earlier writings. As I read Brentano, he is able to distinguish the two notions of intentionality while staying within phenomenology, that is, without giving up on his first-person methodology, by making a clear distinction between thinking and judging. Whether we consider our own thoughts and judgements or those of others, we may conclude that, on Brentano's early phenomenological account, aboutness is a more complicated phenomenon than intentionality in the strict sense, and that the notion of aboutness cannot be understood without introducing the notion of a correct judgement.

In his *Logic Lectures* from the seventies Brentano introduces a distinction between different functions of a name that is in agreement with the account of intentionality and aboutness presented above. One of the functions of a name is to express or manifest an act of presentation. Furthermore, the act of presentation has a content, and this content functions as the meaning (*Sinn, Bedeutung*, EL 80, 13.013 [4]) of the name. With reference to John Stuart Mill, Brentano raises an objection against his thesis that the content of a presentation is the meaning of a term (EL 80, 13.019 [2]):

6 I thank Hamid Taieb for a stimulating discussion after my talk in Salzburg.

Wenn ich sage, die Sonne geht auf, so meine ich nicht, der Inhalt meiner Vorstellung geht auf, ich spreche von einem äußeren Vorgang.⁷

Brentano's answer is (EL 80, 13.019 [2]):

Dazu genügt, dass das äußere Objekt das genannte ist, die Bedeutung ... ist vielmehr der Inhalt der Vorstellung Sonne, unter deren Vermittlung das Objekt genannt wird.⁸

There is thus a further function of a name: names name the object named. This means that a name, that is, a singular or general term, has two *semantic* functions:

- 1) it has a meaning (*Bedeutung*);
- 2) it names an object.

Brentano qualifies this second function (EL 80, 13.018):

Es ist das, was, wenn es existiert, äußerer Gegenstand der Vorstellung ist. Man nennt unter Vermittlung der Bedeutung.⁹

There cannot be a name without a meaning, for one can only name by mediation of such a meaning. It may be, though, that the name does not name an object, namely when there is no actually existing, external object. The last quoted passage contains a first argument to distinguish between meaning and object of a name. While the meaning of the name is always there, as intentionally existing in the act of presentation, the object named may not exist. In making the distinction between the meaning of a name and the object named Brentano does not introduce the notion of judgement, at least not in this first argument. Whether there is an object named by a name does not depend on someone's actually judging that the object exists. Whether the object exists can only be determined, though, by making a judgement. More important,

7 'When I say, the sun rises, I do not mean that the content of my presentation is rising, I speak about an external process.'

8 'For this, it is enough that the external object is what is named, the meaning ... is rather the content of the sun-presentation, under whose mediation the object is named.'

9 'It is that which, when it exists, is external object of the presentation. One names through mediation of the meaning.' Manuscript PS 81, pp. 13528–29, from the earlier period, makes the same distinction in the same way, adding that the content of the presentation of a man, being identical with the meaning of the word 'man', is a species. Manuscript PS 48, p. 52047, from the same period, makes the content / object distinction for presentations; the act of presentation may lack the object. See the manuscripts edited in (Brentano 2023, 37 and 21).

as we have seen above, the notion of existence of an object is for Brentano conceptually dependent upon the notion of correct judgement. So, although the passage above does not introduce the notion of judgement, we can only understand the notion of external object by introducing the notion of a correct judgement.

The passage also displays a second argument to distinguish between the meaning of a name and the object named: the meaning of a name functions as mediator; it is that through which the name applies to this object, and not to any other. The next passage in the manuscript may be understood as providing a third, or perhaps a variant of the second argument for the distinction between the meaning of a name and the external object named by the name. The same external object may have two different names, each having a different meaning. When Brentano formulates an objection to his thesis that names name the object named – that two singular terms standing for the same object would mean the same –, he answers (EL 80, 13.019 [5, 6]):

‘Sohn der Phänarete [Φαιναρέτη]’ und ‘der Weiseste der Athener’ ... nennen [dasselbe] unter Vermittlung verschiedener Bedeutungen.¹⁰

In the example ‘The son of Phaenarete is the wisest under the Athenians’ (EL 80, 13.013 [3]), two different characteristics, expressed by two names, are judged to be unique characteristics of the same external object. The cognitive value of the identity judgement is explained by the fact that the two singular terms name the same individual, Socrates, but have a different meaning. In the explanation of the third argument the notion of the cognitive value of an identity *judgement* thus plays a crucial role. We see here a similarity with Frege’s argument for the distinction between *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* of singular terms (Frege 1892). As Frege’s distinction dates from 1891, it cannot have had any influence on the early Brentano. We know, though, that Mill’s *A System of Logic* (1843) was of importance to Brentano, as he refers to it on a regular basis in his *Logic Lectures*. In the next section, I will explain in what sense Brentano’s semantic distinction can be seen as a renewal of the traditional distinction between intension and extension, and as an amplification of Mill’s semantic distinction between connotation and denotation, as well. But we will also see that, due to his method of descriptive psychology and his account of intentionality and aboutness, Brentano’s semantics has a unique character.

10 “‘Son of “Phaenarete” and “the wisest of the Athenians” ... name [the same] through mediation of different meanings’

3 Brentano, Mill, and the Traditional Distinction between Intension and Extension

As Brentano was familiar with Mill's semantics as presented in his *System of Logic*, we may get a clearer view on Brentano's distinction between the meaning of a name and the object named by understanding to what extent he differs from Mill.¹¹ Mill's distinction between the connotation and denotation of terms ('names') goes back to the traditional distinction between the intension and extension of general terms or concepts, a distinction well-known to Brentano.¹² According to this tradition, the intension of a term is formed by the characteristics on the basis of which the term applies to certain objects; the extension (*étendue*) is formed by the objects (*les sujets*) to which the term applies: say, the individual triangles for the term *triangle* (Arnauld and Nicole 1662, 59; Part I, ch. vi). This distinction between intension and extension is made only for general terms, as they alone are relevant in the traditional term logic.

As in the tradition, Mill distinguishes between the connotation and the denotation of a general term like 'white': it connotes the attribute whiteness, and denotes all white things (Mill 1843, I.1. §5, p. 34). The term 'man' denotes a class, all men, and connotes certain attributes: corporeity, animal life, rationality (Mill 1843, 35). Mill adds a new element to the tradition: singular terms also may have a connotation and denotation. Definite descriptions have both a denotation and a connotation, as they express certain attributes on the basis of which the term applies. Not all singular terms have a connotation, though. Proper names have only a denotation, for there are no attributes connoted by such names (Mill 1843, 34, 36). Mill's semantics thus allows for names to have a denotation without having a connotation. On what basis then does a proper name name its object? When Mill writes that 'Sophroniscus' and 'the father of Socrates' name the same object but differ in 'meaning', the term 'meaning' as applied to the proper name is not used in a semantical, but in a pragmatic sense. The difference merely points out a difference in 'purpose'; the proper name has the function to distinguish the man Sophroniscus from other persons spoken of (Mill 1843, 38). Brentano differs from Mill in this respect, for Brentano allows for both a meaning and an (external) object of the name

11 In his *Psychology*, Brentano uses the eighth edition of Mill's *A System of Logic* in the translation of Theodor Gomperz (PES, 279).

12 A famous thesis of this tradition is quoted by Brentano in his *Logic Lectures*: 'Der Umfang eines Begriffes hängt von seinem Inhalt ab. Verschiedene Begriffe können denselben Umfang haben.' / 'The extension of a concept depends on its content. Different concepts can have the same extension.' (EL 80, 13.086).

‘Sophroniscus’. If proper names have no connotation on Mill’s account, how can he explain that we understand the names ‘Santa Claus’ and ‘Jupiter’ to be different? According to Mill, ‘all names are names of something, real or imaginary’ (Mill 1843 I.1, §3, p. 32). Because Mill does not allow proper names to have a connotation, he has to distinguish between ‘Santa Claus’ and ‘Jupiter’ by giving them a different denotation: the imaginary object Jupiter differs from the imaginary object Santa Claus. He thus allows for imaginary objects in his semantics. This is indeed very different from Brentano’s account of the semantics of proper names.

Let me first point, though, to a more general difference between Brentano and the extension / intension tradition, including Mill. Brentano’s semantical account fully depends upon his phenomenological analysis of mental acts. The analysis of mental acts is prior in the order of explanation to semantics, because all philosophical issues have to be given a phenomenological foundation. The distinction Brentano has made within his descriptive psychology, the distinction between the content of the act and the act’s external object, form the basis for his semantics. As Brentano allows acts of presentation to have either a general or a singular content, his analysis of mental acts can be used to give a semantics for both general and singular terms. In this respect, Mill may have stimulated Brentano to go beyond the tradition, but there are also internal forces in Brentano’s thinking that helped him to make the distinction between the meaning of a name and the object named. For on Brentano’s view, judgements play a central role in his account of the external object named by the name, whereas the notion of judgement plays no role in Mill’s account of denotation. Furthermore, as Brentano allows for judgements to have both a content and an external object, he can make a distinction between meaning and external object with respect to declarative sentences (‘Aussagen’) as well, a thesis we don’t find in Mill or the tradition.¹³

Like Mill, and in contrast to the tradition, Brentano allows for a distinction between content and external object for singular terms. Unlike Mill, though, Brentano allows *proper* names to have a meaning. As Brentano allows singular acts of presentation to have a content, it is this content that may function as the meaning of proper names. Brentano allows for a wider application of the

13 In an early version of his *Logic Lectures*, Brentano allows for a special content of judgements: that the object is to be judged in a certain manner, to be accepted or rejected. See (Rollinger 2020, 68–70), and (Chrudzinski 2001, 62–66). In EL 80 (13.021 [2]), Brentano writes that the external object of a declarative sentence (*Aussage*) is the same as the object named, but that sentence and name do not have the same kind of meaning (compare Brentano 2023, MS EL 81, pp. 13530–38). In his *Psychology*, though, the content of a judgement is identified with the content presented by the founding act of presentation.

traditional distinction between intension and extension of terms because he does not explain the meaning of a term exclusively in terms of the characteristics on the basis of which the term applies. The meaning of a term functions as mediator, and, in contrast to Mill and the tradition, this mediator is identified with the content of an act of presentation. The meaning of 'John' may simply be the way the man John is presented to me in my imagination, after I have seen him yesterday for the first time.

Because Brentano thus allows proper names to have a meaning, he is not forced to allow for possible objects named by a proper name. Unlike Mill, for Brentano, names name an object only if the object exists. Because Brentano founds his semantics on his account of mental acts and the notions of intentionality, aboutness and judgement developed there, he goes beyond the intension / extension tradition, and beyond Mill as well.

4 Brentano's Notion of Aboutness and Frege's Notion of Reference

We have seen that there is already an important deviation from the traditional extension / intension distinction in Mill, which goes even deeper in Brentano. Today, we are familiar with a comparable distinction through the work of Frege. To what extent does Brentano's distinction between meaning and external object differ from the distinction between sense and reference in Frege's writings? Let me first explain in what sense Frege's distinction differs from the traditional distinction between the intension and the extension of a term, a distinction that Frege was familiar with, as we will see below. We will then be able to see where Brentano is closer to the tradition than Frege is, and where both deviate from the tradition.

As in Mill, in Frege, the distinction is primarily a semantic one. Whereas Mill extends the connotation-denotation distinction to definite descriptions, Frege applies the distinction between sense and reference to all expressions. Traditionally, the distinction primarily applies to categorematic expressions, that is, to terms like 'man' and 'white'. This means that the distinction is made only for terms that have a meaning independently of other terms. In Brentano this traditional thesis is given a new explanation: categorematic expressions are terms expressing a complete act of presentation; singular terms and general terms express an act of presentation, whose content functions as the meaning (*Bedeutung*) of the term (EL80, 13.009 [2]). In the tradition, syncategorematic expressions, like 'is', 'all' and 'not', express something only together with categorematic terms, and Mill and Brentano follow here the tradition. The subject and predicate terms of a premise or conclusion form the categorematic terms;

they express the matter of the judgement. The syncategorematic terms indicate the form of the judgement. They indicate whether the judgement has the form of affirmation or denial, or whether it is of general or particular form. This means that the intension / extension distinction, and the parallel distinctions in Mill and Brentano, do not apply to syncategorematic terms.

As Brentano puts it: such terms express not the matter or content of a judgement, but the acknowledgement or denial of existence. In Brentano's logic, the judgement that some horses come from Iceland is represented as + (HI), the acknowledgement of the existence of horses coming from Iceland, where the '+' sign can be understood as a syncategorematic expression. For a denial of existence Brentano uses the '-' sign. These two signs are unique, indicating, respectively, affirmation and denial, all that is left in Brentano of the traditional judgemental form. The '+' and the '-' sign in Brentano's logic can perhaps be understood as a forerunner of Frege's judgement stroke. As Anton Marty, Brentano's oldest student, has noted, by introducing the judgement stroke, Frege makes, just like Brentano, a clear distinction between the judgeable content and the judgement function, that is, the act of judgement (cf. Marty 1884, 56 ff).

It should be noted that the traditional distinction between the matter and form of a judgement is not completely parallel to the distinction between the judgeable content and the act of judgement. If we have a judgement with a certain matter and form, it may still be asked whether the judgement is actually judged or asserted, or whether it has the role of antecedent in a conditional. The '+' and the '-' sign in Brentano may be understood as either a mere sign of judgemental form, or as a sign of both the form of the judgement and of its actually being asserted. I assume with Marty that Brentano meant it in the second sense.

In Frege, the traditional distinction between categorematic and syncategorematic terms finds its place, primarily, in the distinction between the judgement stroke and expressions, which have a meaning. The judgement stroke, the '|' sign, indicates that a judgement is actually made. As Frege acknowledges only one form of judgement, acknowledging the truth of a judgeable content, there is only one such syncategorematic term left: the judgement stroke. This sign of assertion is unique, a pragmatic rather than a semantic sign. In a second sense, the distinction finds an echo in the distinction Frege makes between two kinds of expressions. There is for Frege a fundamental distinction between terms expressing a meaning by themselves, and terms that form essentially part of other expressions. The latter's dependency may be indicated by an empty place in the expression when we consider it in isolation. Corresponding to these two kinds of expressions there are for Frege two kinds

of entity: objects and functions. In contrast to objects, functions are incomplete (*unvollständig, ungesättigt*, Frege 1891, 6). For Frege, the incomplete expressions have a meaning, a sense and a reference. In Frege's logic, general terms or predicates are incomplete expressions. The term 'is a man' refers to a function, a concept, which gives for each object as argument the true or the false as value. Concepts are thus essentially incomplete entities, and relations are given a similar account. In the tradition, though, general terms are categorematic expression that may occupy the subject- or predicate place in a syllogistic argument; the general terms are complete terms, expressing ideas or concepts as self-subsisting entities. In this sense, Brentano is on the side of the tradition: general terms are categorematic expressions; their meaning is a *species*, as in the tradition.

Another point of difference between Frege and the tradition is that Frege extends his distinction between sense and reference to all kinds of expressions. For Frege, the distinction can be made for singular terms and sentences, which refer to complete entities, and for general terms and logical expressions, which refer to incomplete entities. Frege himself acknowledges the difference between his position and that of the tradition regarding the semantics of general terms. What traditional logicians have called the extension of a concept (*Begriffsumfang*) is in Frege's logic the course of values (*Wertverlauf*) of a function (Frege 1891, 16). The course of values of the concept ... *is a man* can be understood as the class of all men. In a letter to Husserl, dated 24.5.1891, Frege explains where he differs from the tradition, and from Husserl's *Philosophie der Arithmetik*, as well (Frege 1891b, 96). The general term 'is a man' (1) has a sense, the way the concept is understood; (2) it has a reference: the function or concept *being a man*; and, finally, (3) the concept determines the class of all men. If the class is empty, the term still has a sense and a reference. In the tradition, one is forced to say that there is no extension for the term 'unicorn'. The advantage of Frege's account is that the sentence 'there are no unicorns' can be given a truth-value, because all the terms, including the general term 'unicorn', have a reference. Regarding general terms, Brentano, and Husserl with him, have a more traditional view than Frege. If the class is empty, there is for them no extension.

Let me explain in what sense Frege's notion of reference is richer and more precise than Brentano's notion of aboutness. For Frege, if the sentence has a *Bedeutung*, each of the expressions in the sentence must likewise have a *Bedeutung*. Each of the terms 'being a man', 'being erudite', and, in the judgement 'John gives Mary a book', 'giving' and 'being a book' refer to a concept, or a relation, and each of the singular terms 'John' and 'Mary' refer to an object, precisely insofar as the sentence has a *Bedeutung*, a truth-value. There is always

a reference for these expressions, if the sentence is true or false. On Frege's account, there is thus a clear notion of aboutness explained in terms of the *Bedeutung* of the partial expressions of the sentence: aboutness is what determines the truth-value of the sentence. On Brentano's account, though, it is not so clear what the external object of the judgement 'John gives Mary a book' would be.

Frege's thesis that a sentence has a truth-value as *Bedeutung* is often criticized, but it contains an important insight if one understands *Bedeutung* as signification or value. In that sense, the *Bedeutung* of each partial expression can be understood as the contribution of that expression to the truth-value of the sentence as a whole. The contribution of the general term 'being a unicorn' to the sentence 'There are unicorns' is the concept the term refers to; if the second-order concept *existence* gives the false for the argument *unicorn*, the sentence is false. It is sometimes said that the context principle plays a role in Frege's early writings, as it is one of the three principles on which the *Foundations of Arithmetic* (1884) is built, but that it plays no role in Frege's mature writings. One may also say, though, that it still plays a role in these later writings, insofar as the expression's *Bedeutung* is to be understood as its contribution to the truth-value of the sentence of which the expression may form a part. In this sense, truth-values play a role in the explanation of the *Bedeutung* of all expressions. Furthermore, there is no way to understand the *Bedeutung* of general terms and logical terms like negation, implication, the horizontal or the existential quantor, without grasping the notion of truth-value; for, they all have as *Bedeutung* a function whose values are truth-values. For Frege, the central concept of logic is truth: 'Wenn es einem auf die Wahrheit ankommt – und auf die Wahrheit zielt die Logik hin – muss man auch nach den Bedeutungen fragen' (Frege 1895, 133)¹⁴. If one acknowledges that truth is the central concept of logic and that *truth-value* is the central concept in the notion of *Bedeutung* for all our expressions, one is no longer in need of a vaguer notion of aboutness.

For Brentano, descriptive psychology is foundational to all other sciences, including logic, semantics and metaphysics. Metaphysical questions can only be answered on the basis of concepts and distinctions made in descriptive psychology. For Frege, *logic* is the science that provides a foundation for all other sciences, including metaphysics (cf. Frege 1893, xix). The two philosophers thus give a similar role to what they take to be the foundation for all philosophical questions, but their answer on what this foundation is could not be wider apart. This difference explains that Brentano's distinction between content

14 'When it comes to the truth – and logic aims at the truth – one also has to ask for the references'.

and external object primarily applies to mental acts, and can only thereby be applied to linguistic expressions, whereas in Frege the distinction between sense and reference is introduced as a distinction pertaining exclusively to signs (Frege 1891, 4, note; cf. Frege 1892). Furthermore, Brentano's descriptive psychology is not committed to meanings or contents independently of our individual mental acts. Frege, in contrast, acknowledges that senses may form a common element in different acts of thinking and judging. Frege is, after all, a logical realist.

At the end of section 2, we have noted that Brentano and Frege are both able to account for the cognitive value of identity sentences. A more precise comparison between the two views will show some differences, but it will also make clear that there is an important philosophical insight that both philosophers share, notwithstanding their difference in method. When Frege introduces the distinction between sense and reference, *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*, in the paper devoted to the topic, he starts with drawing our attention to a difference in cognitive value (*Erkenntniswert*) between 'a=a' and 'a=b' (Frege 1892, 25). The *Sinn* of these sentences is different insofar as 'a' and 'b' express a different sense, a different way in which the *Bedeutung* of these terms is given. Each of these identity sentences expresses a different thought (*Gedanke*). Frege thus introduces the distinction between sense and reference in order to explain the difference in cognitive value between these sentences. The identity sentence 'a=b' has a cognitive value for us, only if we know *both* the thought expressed and its truth-value. Apprehending the thought expressed is not enough for obtaining the cognitive value (cf. Frege 1892, 50). As Frege puts it, 'der bloße Gedanke gibt keine Erkenntnis, sondern erst der Gedanke zusammen mit seiner Bedeutung, d. h. seinem Wahrheitswerte. Urteilen kann als Fortschreiten von einem Gedanken zu seinem Wahrheitswerte gefasst werden.' (Frege 1892, 35).¹⁵ If one of the terms of the sentence has no reference, if the objects named do not exist, the identity sentence can have no cognitive value, as the whole sentence is lacking a truth-value.

As for Frege, for Brentano, we can only speak of naming the same object, if there exists such an object. Brentano's example, as we have seen, is the judgement 'The son of Phaenarete is identical with the wisest among the Athens'. As in Frege, Brentano's distinction between content or meaning and external object allows him to account for the cognitive value of the identity judgement. Whereas Frege's analysis makes use of the identity sign, Brentano's

15 'the thought as such gives no knowledge; only the thought together with its reference, that is, with its truth-value. Judging can be understood as advancing from a thought to its truth-value.'

logic does not allow for such a sign. His formalization of the judgement ‘The Morningstar is identical to the Eveningstar’ has to be $\exists (A, B)$: there exists an object that has the individual characteristics of being the Morningstar and of being the Eveningstar. A and B are to cover both general and individual terms in Brentano’s logic. No doubt, Frege’s logic is better equipped than Brentano’s term logic, to give an analysis of sentences with singular terms and the identity sign.

There is an agreement, though, between Brentano and Frege on a more general level, a point that will learn us something regarding the notions of aboutness and reference. As we have seen in the former sections, for Brentano, the notion of external object is conceptually dependent upon the notion of correct judgement; it cannot be understood without introducing the latter. For Frege, the notions judgement, truth and reference are all primitive, these notions have to be understood in terms of each other; one cannot speak of a conceptual order. How then are we to understand the relation between these notions on Frege’s account? We get an idea of this in his remark that ‘It is the striving for truth that drives us always to advance from the sense to the *Bedeutung*.’ (Frege 1892, 33). Or, as Michael Kremer writes in his paper on sense and reference in *The Cambridge Companion to Frege*: ‘Judgement is that act in which we are directed to truth, and it is thereby that act in which we are led to ask for the reference of our words.’ (Kremer 2010, 268, 269). As judgement is an acknowledgement of the truth of a thought, we make in judgement ‘a step from a thought to its truth-value’ (Frege 1892, 35). If we then understand the *Bedeutung* of the partial expressions of a sentence as their contribution to the truth-value of the thought expressed, we see that the *Bedeutung* of our expressions has to be understood in relation to the *Bedeutung* of the sentence as a whole. If we connect this semantic thesis with the role of the judgement stroke in Frege’s logic and the elucidation of judgement as the acknowledgement of the *truth* of a thought, we see that Frege’s logic has to be a logic of *Bedeutung* (Frege 1895, 133). We will thus understand that the central role of the judgement stroke in Frege’s logic is directly related to the thesis that it is the reference of the terms that is essential to logic. This means that singular terms without a reference cannot be allowed in Frege’s logic. There would be no judgement in the full, logical sense of that term if one of the terms lacks a reference. We thus see that the notions of reference and judgement are tightly connected in Frege, just as aboutness and judgement are conceptually related in Brentano.

The role that the *Bedeutung* or aboutness of our expressions plays in logic and semantics cannot be understood without invoking the notions of

judgement and truth-value. One cannot understand what reference or aboutness is without introducing the notions of judgement and truth. This is not to deny that Frege or Brentano is a realist: the (external) objects and functions that are given the semantic role of the reference of our expressions are independent of our acts of judging. It is to deny, though, that possible objects can play a role in the account of aboutness or reference; logic and descriptive psychology should not assume a metaphysical realm of possibilities.

Both in Brentano and in Frege there is thus a conceptual, internal relation between judgement, truth, and reference or aboutness. This insight is made possible by their common thesis that a clear distinction is to be made between the notions of thinking and judging. In the analysis of mere thinking, reference or aboutness does not play a role. If we listen to the adventures of Ulysses, we do not ask whether Ulysses ever existed. The archeologist, though, who already has determined that there had been a town called 'Troy', investigates the truth of what Homer has written. For him, the question is whether Ulysses existed in ancient times.

No doubt, Frege's logic and his account of judgement, inference, sense and reference is more powerful than Brentano's. Perhaps, though, there is one issue on which Brentano has to say more than Frege. Sometimes we make judgements that regard fiction. We say such things as 'Jupiter is the king of the gods', and there is a sense in which we can call the sentence true without committing ourselves to there being a possible object Jupiter. The corresponding judgement extends our knowledge, although not our knowledge about the objects in the world. On Frege's account, if one considers the proper name 'Jupiter' to have no reference, one cannot make the judgement (Frege 1892, 32). In contrast to Frege, Brentano understands that we make here a judgement, and a correct one. In discussion with Mill, Brentano writes: 'The truth of the sentence does not demand that there is a Jupiter, but it does demand that there is something else' ('Die Wahrheit des Satzes verlangt nicht, dass es einen Jupiter, wohl aber, dass es etwas Anderes gebe.' PES 287, note). The judgement is correct, not because the two singular terms refer to the same object in the external world, for there is no Jupiter in the world, but because there exists something else in the imagination ('in der Einbildung'). Brentano's other example, coming from the discussion with Mill, is: 'A centaur is an invention of poets.' This judgement has the form 'There exists a poet's fiction of a centaur'. As the judgement is correct, there exists a fiction of a centaur as part of the poet's imagination. The term 'in the imagination' is for Brentano a modifying term, like 'dead' in 'dead man' (PES 288, note). Just as we cannot infer from 'Here is a dead man' that

there is a man here, we cannot infer from ‘There exists a fiction of a centaur’ that there exists a centaur, although we can infer that there exists a fiction of a centaur in the actual world. The two terms in the identity judgement ‘Jupiter is the king of the gods’ name the same object in Greek and Roman mythology, while expressing a different content; the identity judgement thus extends our knowledge of Greek mythology, it extends our knowledge of a certain fiction. The judgement is thus about Jupiter as fictional character. Of course, these judgements are not judgements within mythology; for within the story, no judgements are made. For Brentano, the judgements mentioned above are *about* fiction, not made within fiction.

5 Conclusion

Brentano’s strict notion of intentionality can be found in the thesis that all our mental acts have a content. The thesis that some of our acts are related to an external object is not contained in Brentano’s account of intentionality. The other notion of intentionality that we have introduced, the notion of aboutness, is for Brentano a complex phenomenon that can only be understood by invoking the notions of judgement and truth. Like Frege, Brentano makes a sharp distinction between the notions of mere thinking and judging. Mere thinking can be understood without the notion of judgement, but the notion of reference or aboutness is internally related to that of truth and judgement. This means that for both philosophers there is an internal relation between judging and reference or aboutness.

As far as singular terms are concerned, there is an agreement between Brentano’s notion of aboutness and Frege’s notion of reference. Here both philosophers can be contrasted with John Stuart Mill, who has also given a semantics of singular terms. For Mill, proper names always have a denotation, but never a connotation. This means that the denotation of a proper name may be a merely possible object, whereas for Brentano and Frege there is no reference or aboutness if the object does not exist. This means that on Mill’s account one can fully grasp the notion of denotation without introducing the notion of judgement.

Regarding the aboutness or reference of general terms, logical terms and sentences, though, there are important differences between Frege and Brentano; Brentano is here rather on the side of Mill and the extension / intension tradition. Furthermore, Frege’s logical-semantic point of view differs from Brentano’s phenomenological account of intentionality and aboutness.

Because of these differences between Frege and Brentano, it is less apt to speak of *reference* when we aim to understand Brentano's early view of aboutness.

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