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## The roots of intentionality in Aristotle's theory of psychology

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## INTRODUCTION

In modern philosophy of mind, we find a tendency to gain new inspiration from Aristotle's psychology, aiming to activate new interest in ancient texts as well as to enlighten contemporary research. Examples are the debate about Aristotle and functionalism (Hilary Putnam (1973), Martha Nussbaum (1978), Howard Robinson (1978), (1983), Christopher Shields (1988), (1990), M. F. Burnyeat (1992), Stephen Everson (1997), T. H. Irwin (1991), etc.); intentionality in Aristotle (Sorabji (1995), (2001), Burnyeat (1992), Caston (1998), Corcilius & Gregoric (2013), Shields (1994), etc.); Aristotle and emergentism (Caston (1997)). Connecting Aristotle with contemporary philosophy of mind is not only a way to refresh Aristotle's thoughts and revive his insightful theories, but also provides opportunities to introduce ancient perspectives into modern discussions. Except for the comprehensive investigation about intentionality in Aristotle by Victor Caston and Richard Sorabji, in other scholars the topic of Aristotle and intentionality is rather a by-product of other research interests. Generally speaking, the topic of intentionality in Aristotle has not been sufficiently studied.

The relevance of intentionality to the interpretation of Aristotle was first suggested by Brentano in his *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*. Brentano had a solid Aristotelian background and aimed to set up empirical psychology with the inspiration of ancient and medieval ontology and epistemology. As we know, Aristotle's psychology and philosophy of mind are mainly concentrated in his works *DA* and *PN*. *DA* sets out to clarify what the soul is, or the essence of the soul, but at an abstract level. More details are found in the collection of the *PA*. In order to deal with the essence of the soul Aristotle develops the relationship of soul and body as inseparable, thus opposing Platonic (and later Cartesian) dualism of body and soul. Aristotle believes that all our affections, such as anger, desire, love, pity, happiness, etc., are involved with the body, and he defines these affections as enmattered (*DA* 403a25).

Brentano has the reputation of introducing the notion of intentionality into modern philosophy of mind. However, Brentano does not use the term 'intentionality', but what Brentano uses is a modified Medieval term: intentional in-existence. According to Brentano's early idea, the distinct feature of mental phenomena is the intentional in-existence of the object, which means that every mental phenomenon is characterized by the intended object immanent in the mental act and the mental act is

directed to this immanent object. As revealed later, Brentano turned to a thesis of intentionality, which means the mental subject has the *Reales* as the object in his late stage.<sup>1</sup> Even though Brentano's early definition of intentional in-existence is somewhat ambiguous, and even though he changed this idea to some extent in his later work, it is this term that widely influences his contemporaries and later research.

Here we take our starting point from Brentano and investigate how Brentano's concept of intentionality is rooted in Aristotle, given that he refers back to Aristotle when he frames his notion of intentional in-existence.<sup>2</sup> How is it expressed in the ancient context, and does it indeed provide us with a new perspective on the modern philosophy of mind? Most importantly, what does it mean for our understanding of Aristotle's psychology if we approach his theory with the modern notion of intentionality in mind? Do the implications of intentionality in Aristotle reveal different aspects in Brentano's proposal? In this dissertation, I would like to investigate the roots of intentionality in Aristotle's psychology and make a comparison between Aristotle and Brentano on the topic of intentionality. In order to achieve this result, I will first set up a working definition of intentionality by tracing the development of "intention" along historical lines. Then I shall deal with Aristotle's psychology—perception, *phantasia*, memory, dream, recollection, and intellect one by one, to survey whether any sign of intentionality is revealed in these psychic activities and how. Finally, I would like to make a comparison between Aristotle and Brentano on intentionality based on Brentano's Aristotelian background and to survey the echo of Aristotle in modern philosophy of mind.

Chapter One aims to provide a definition of intentionality both from Brentano and from a general standpoint. Nearly all contemporary debate about intentionality dates back to Brentano, who developed and modified the Medieval Scholastic term "objective inexistence" to characterize the psychological phenomena and reintroduce the term of intentional in-existence into modern philosophy. Henceforth, a brief inquiry into Brentano's theory of intentionality is necessary for us as a starting point of our investigation. Following Brentano's reference, this term has a historical tradition through Aristotle, Philo of Alexandria, the Neoplatonists, Augustine, Anselm to Thomas Aquinas.<sup>3</sup> It is his particular reference to Aristotle that induces me to investigate the roots of intentionality in Aristotle. Therefore, the main aim of this

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<sup>1</sup> For Brentano's two stages of intentionality thesis and what does *Reales* mean, see p. 19, 21.

<sup>2</sup> "Aristotle himself spoke of this mental in-existence. In his books on the soul he says that the sensed object, as such, is in the sensing subject; that the sense contains the sensed object without its matter; that the object which is thought is in the thinking intellect." Brentano (2009), p.67. I shall use the abbreviation of *PES* for *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* in this dissertation.

<sup>3</sup> Brentano (2009), p. 67.

chapter is to investigate Brentano's proposal of intentionality, his thesis of intentional in-existence, and the doubts and influences it gave rise to. Then I shall walk along the historical route Brentano provides to survey how the figures Brentano refers to indicate or express the notion of intentional in-existence. What is more, are there any others who can be added to this historical line? Based on this new historical analysis, a more general working definition of intentionality is to emerge.

“Directedness” or “aboutness” is generally regarded as the symbol of intentionality in the contemporary interpretation, as the entry in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy states, “intentionality is the power of minds to be about, to represent, or to stand for, things, properties and states of affairs.”<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, to state a definition of intentionality without controversy is no easy task, given that there are so many different theories of intentionality. The etymology of intentionality: *intentio*, has a long tradition dating back to ancient times. The connotation and extension of it vary at different times, so a modest reading of intentionality should consider its historical background. Also, the investigation of the term “*intention*” is just one side of the story because “philosophers have sometimes possessed certain concepts before having the actual words to go with them.” If philosopher possesses the concept but not the word, it is usually “revealed by his periphrases or his general discussion of the subject”.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, a comprehensive investigation of intentionality concerns both sides.

Whereas I aim to reconsider intentionality from the standpoint of Aristotle's psychology, most contemporary discussions of intentionality deviate from the aim and the context I would like to reconstruct. Henceforth, I focus on the tradition of the development of intentionality up to Brentano. In this way, we will get closer to Aristotle instead of being confused by ever more complicated contemporary discussions of intentionality. Through a rough investigation of the development of intentionality from ancient times to Brentano, two obvious characteristics will appear: intentional directedness and immanent content. Armed with Brentano's notion of intentionality in the two stages of its development in Brentano, as well as a general working definition of intentionality, I shall be ready to deal with Aristotle's theory of psychology.

The project of chapter Two is to survey the root of intentionality in Aristotle's theory of perception. For the sake of clarity, I divide the investigation of perception into two parts: one part serves for the survey of intentional directedness and one part for the survey of immanent content. Aristotle's perceptual theory, starts from the

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<sup>4</sup> Jacob, Pierre, “Intentionality”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2019 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2019/entries/intentionality/>>.

<sup>5</sup> Hamlyn (1961), p. 2-3.

sensible object, which is composed of matter and form. It is the sensible form that acts on the medium, which further acts on the sense organ, during which event what is percipient receives the sensible form rather than its matter. From this general description, it is revealed that the occurrence of perception is initiated by the sensible object which affects the perceiving soul. Correspondingly, the perceptual soul is passive to be acted upon by the sensible object. As such, the perceptual soul cannot work as the mentally active subject, which refers to its object as Brentano and modern scholars state. We find roots of immanent content in that, first, the sensible forms that we receive directly specify the sensible content; second, we find Aristotle's proposal that the sensitive soul is identical with the sensible object in activity, which guarantees that the perceptual content provides reliable information about the perceived object; third, the whole activity is accompanied by awareness, which entails that we are aware of the sensible content being contained in the soul, so as to be called immanent content.

In Chapter Three, I investigate the role of *phantasia* in Aristotle's psychological framework, especially its role in explaining the immanent content in various cognitive activities, even when there is no corresponding external object. Considering that an active stimulator like the sensible object shall work as the formal cause to provide sensible information to the perceptual soul, we shall see that the *phantasma*, which is the inner image, acts as such a power when there is no external object to initiate cognition. Except for the function of presenting sensible material, *phantasia* is also designed to explain error and sense-illusion in cognition. In general, *phantasia* is used by Aristotle in several different meanings: it presents images for the cognitive activity to compose its immanent content, it explains the problem of error or sense-illusion, and accompanies desire in initiating intentional action in the practical sense. By presenting images, *phantasia* plays an essential role in cognitive activities, thus providing the possibility for immanent content in these cognitive activities.

Chapter Four aims to investigate the roots of intentionality in Aristotle's theory of intellect. The first step is to have a general interpretation of the mechanism of intellect, which has received numerous different interpretations; then I shall identify the possible correlation of intellect to intentionality from the perspective of immanent content and intentional directedness. On my interpretation, the initiating factors of thinking, i.e. the efficient cause of thinking, is not the active intellect, but a human being's power of soul. The intellectual activity rests on a combination of initiators: a human being by means of the active intellect. Therefore, the intentional directedness in intellect is not from the active intellect to the object. Instead, it is the human being who can pay attention to, select something based on a remaining image or previously acquired knowledge. The immanent content is composed by the passive intellect's reception of the intelligible object, which is provided by *phantasia*.

Chapter Five makes a thorough investigation of Brentano's Aristotelian background and aims to make a comprehensive comparison between Aristotle and Brentano on intentionality. I surveyed Brentano's work, such as *OSS*, *PA*, *DP*, *PES*. I will not go into these books in great detail, but pick out several parts which will be of interest to our investigation in the "being of intentional in-existence." Except for a comparison between Aristotle and Brentano that appears in this last chapter, I also delineate the echo of Aristotle in modern philosophy of mind.

