

## **Brentano and neo-Brentanian theories of consciousness**

### **Abstract (500 words)**

Brentano's theory of consciousness is currently attracting considerable interest in the philosophy of mind. Uriah Kriegel, for example, claims that Brentano's theory of consciousness is actually a leading option in philosophy of mind:

In recent years, it has turned out that Brentano still has much more to teach us. His account of consciousness in terms of self-directed intentionality has been developed and defended by a variety of authors, and is now among the leading options for a philosophical theory of consciousness in analytic philosophy of mind. (U. Kriegel, Ms.)

Recent discussions on the so-called neo-Brentanian theories of consciousness, i.e. mainly Kriegel's self-representational theory of consciousness and Rosenthal's HOT theory, relate in part to their viability in light of current debates on qualia and phenomenal consciousness, and partly on exegetical questions regarding their understanding of Brentano's views on consciousness and mind. I address the question whether and to which extent these theories can be considered as neo-Brentanian and whether Brentano can respond to the objections raised against higher-order and self-representational theories of consciousness.

My talk is divided into four parts. The first part is a short presentation of Rosenthal's HOT theory. It addresses Rosenthal's Aristotelian (or intentionalist) strategy that consists in defining consciousness in terms of non-conscious intentional states. According to Rosenthal, consciousness is an extrinsic and relational property, which relates a state to a higher order thought. A mental state will qualify as conscious only if a creature is (transitively) conscious of that state. Rosenthal calls this principle the Transitivity principle: A mental state *M* of a subject *S* is conscious iff *S* has another mental state, *M\**, such that *M\** is an appropriate representation of *M*." The second part is concerned with Rosenthal's interpretation of Brentano's theory of mind, which he associates with the Cartesian tradition in that it defines the nature of mind by consciousness and the latter by intentionality. Rosenthal's diagnosis can be formulated through what Kriegel calls the Cartesian coextension thesis: All and *only* conscious states are mental states. This principle

has a direct bearing on the accepted view since Chisholm according to which the key concept of Brentano is intentionality. In the third part, I briefly examine four interpretations of Brentano's theory of consciousness, and more specifically with his theory of primary and secondary objects: Some associated it with a HOT or with a "disguised HOT" theory, while others attributes to Brentano a concept of intransitive self-consciousness intrinsic to mental states. A third interpretation is based on an adverbial theory of consciousness according to which the intrinsic nature of consciousness is an adverb. Another interesting interpretation, which is directly inspired by Rosenthal, is that of U. Kriegel who defines his own theory as a neo-Brentanian theory of consciousness. Kriegel recognizes that the term Neo-Brentanian should not be taken literally because he denies some basic principles of Brentano's descriptive psychology. What makes this theory of consciousness a neo-Brentanian theory is first and foremost the Self-Representation Thesis according to which all and only conscious states are self-representational states. Some passages of Brentano's Psychology seem to corroborate the interpretation of his theory in terms of self-awareness, i.e. to use Brentano's favorite example, that the presentation of the presentation of the sound is one and same act (or vehicle) that is directed both to its primary object and toward itself as its secondary object. But I argue that this interpretation not only raises several conceptual problems, but it does not seem to be consistent with Brentano's views on consciousness. That is why, in the fourth part, I opt for a mereological interpretation of Brentano's theory and argue that it raises what I call the problem of complexity, which Brentano aims at solving through his doctrine of the unity of consciousness that is part of his solution to the problem of consciousness as a whole. I will briefly conclude with the question whether Brentano can respond to the main objections raised against reflexive conceptions of consciousness.