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**Proterosis, Proteraesthesia and noticing a red Tint:
An Essay Concerning Franz Brentano's
Descriptive Psychology***

The following remarks were conceived in the course of my translation of the lectures on descriptive psychology¹ read by Franz Brentano in Vienna between 1887 and 1891, lectures which can justifiably be seen as the culmination of the work Brentano initially presented in the *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt*². My aim here is, in a first instance, to analyse two notions, namely 'proterosis' ('Proterose') and 'proteraesthesia' ('Proterästhesie'), as used in these lectures to describe certain psychical phenomena, and to suggest a symbolic notation as a means of representing the results of this analysis. This will be the topic of Part II. In Part III these results (and the notation) will be put to use in an interpretation of a uncharacteristically difficult passage of these lectures concerning the methodology of bringing someone to 'notice' something (in Brentano's special sense of the term). But first, in Part I, let me prepare the ground with some remarks about the doctrine which lies at the heart of Brentano's conception of psychical phenomena, the doctrine of intentionality.

I

In the third section of the chapter entitled 'Elements of Consciousness' (Brentano (1982), 10-28)³, Brentano discusses different kinds of what he calls 'distinctional parts', beginning with 'mutually pervading' ("sich durchwohnende", (ibid., 20)) parts and the 'logical' ones (ibid., 20 f.).⁴ The description of a third kind then follows in a paragraph headed by 'Parts of the Intentional Pair of Correlates' (ibid., 21 f.), in which he summarizes very succinctly his fundamental doctrine of intentionality.

In the following, I shall advocate an interpretation of the views put forward in this paragraph which will constitute the basis of the analysis in Part II.

Every 'psychical phenomenon' — by which I mean Brentano's 'actually separable parts of consciousness'⁵ — displays, as defining character-

istic, a certain relational structure, namely that of an 'intentional' or 'primary psychical' relation. Like every relational structure, a psychical phenomenon is thus meant to have two correlates. They are, in this particular case, an act of consciousness, say A , (which Brentano refers to as the 'subject' of the intentional relation), and that which A is 'directed upon', say C (the 'object' of the relation). In the examples put forward by Brentano in this paragraph, we find, amongst other, that the correlate to the act of seeing (das Sehen), say A_S , given in a visual experience S is described as 'what is seen' (das Gesehene), say C_S . At first, it might thus seem that C_S is taken to be the real object (say, the chair in front of the person who is seeing). But this is clearly not what Brentano had in mind here, for he tells us that the defining characteristics of intentional pairs of correlates (and hence implicitly of psychical phenomena) is that only the first correlates, i.e. the acts of consciousness, are real, and never the second ones. This obviously excludes the chair in front of the seeing person from being the second correlate, or 'immanent object', of his act of seeing.

The correct interpretation, in my view, can be derived from the fact that Brentano sometimes (e.g. in his *Psychology* (Brentano (1995), 88 f.)) paraphrases "direction upon an immanent object" by "reference to a content", while on other occasions two distinct uses of the phrase 'direction upon an object' can be differentiated, namely to indicate (i) an objective (transient, transcendent) reference; and (ii) a 'reference to an immanent object', i.e. the thought's reference to its content. The correlate C_S is thus nothing but the content of A_S . Hence when Brentano uses the (admittedly somewhat opaque) phrase 'the person being thought' (der gedachte Mensch) to talk about the correlate to an act A_T of thinking, he is not talking about a member of a peculiar kind of people, but about the content of A_T .⁶ His use of the terms 'thinking' and 'person' in this context is merely to indicate that the content in question (C_T) is a content of a thought about a person. Similarly, we are to interpret his use of 'the thinking of the person' (das Denken des Menschen) in referring to A_T as indicating that this act of consciousness is not merely an act of thinking, but indeed an act of thinking about a person.

Psychical phenomena — be they phenomena of thinking ('thoughts'), or seeing, or whatever — all possess a particular a-symmetrical relational structure, symbolically representable as $A\ C$, with (i) a particular act A of consciousness — e.g. of thinking, seeing etc. — and (ii) the content C of this act, as correlates. Indeed, Brentano saw this as the defining characteristics of what is psychical. It must also be emphasized that Brentano

saw these correlates occurring as parts of psychical phenomena as merely distinctionally separable from one another. It is thus impossible to have an act of consciousness without a correlated content and vice versa. Psychical phenomena (the actually separable parts of consciousness) are thus neither merely acts nor merely contents but wholes in which content and act are inseparably related through intentionality. This must be kept in mind even when Brentano himself chooses to refer to these phenomena merely as 'psychical acts'.

II

Brentano divides his 'fundamental psychical acts' — i.e. the ultimate actually separable parts of consciousness, which he conceives as containing an act of consciousness and a concrete sensory content qua intentional correlates — into sensory experiences and proteraestheses (Brentano (1982), 85, lines 1-4). He admits (ibid., XVIII) that his conception of 'proteraesthesia' will at first sight most likely be much less intelligible than that of 'sensory experience' (or, its short-form 'sensation' (cf. ibid., 85, line 30 and 95, line 3)). And, I believe it is probably fair to say that this situation is not improved by his initial characterisation of proteraestheses as being proteroses belonging to sensory experiences. (Ibid., 85, line 28)

So what exactly are proteraestheses and proteroses, and how are they related to one-another and to sensations? Sensations and proteraestheses are both fundamental psychical acts, and, as such, they share a certain (part of) their internal structure, for both have an act of presenting (say, A_P) as their 'subject' and a concrete sensory content — i.e. a concretum with certain mutually pervading parts (ibid., 89, line 1) — as primary objects. What are these pervading parts? All primary objects of fundamental psychical acts contain a spatial determination (say P for 'place'), or its analogue, and a quality Q (ibid., 89, line 10 f.). What about temporal determinations? According to Brentano we will indeed find that all primary objects of proteraestheses do have a temporal determination as a third pervading part, since each of them 'displays a past time interval', say T . Using the symbolic notation introduced in part I, we can thus represent the internal structure of a proteraesthesia as

- 1) $A_P < Q, P, T >$.

Is the same true of sensations? In section D.3 of the Second Part of his 1890/91 lectures, Brentano considers this question at some considerable

length. Even though he admits to being unable of refuting all the arguments in favour of temporal determination as a third part, (ibid., 95, line 23), he concludes that a sensation is nothing but a terminus extra (a boundary from outside) of some proteraesthesia, which means that — as far as temporal determination is concerned — sensations can be regarded as a type of 'zero-point', in the same way in which a body which is thrown up vertically can be regarded to reach in its highest position a type of 'zero-point' of rising and falling (ibid., 95 f.). To be quite clear, Brentano does point out that, in the same way in which this 'motion zero-point nature' of the body in the highest position of the trajectory does not permit the inference that the body is actually at rest, i.e. that it has nothing to do with determinations of motion (in this context Brentano evokes the presence of what he calls 'modes of continuity', which I believe can be understood as non-zero higher derivatives), in this same way we cannot infer from the temporal zero-point nature of sensations that they are free of any temporal determinations. However, the temporal zero-point nature of sensations does permit us to separate them (ficticiously) from proteraestheses, and thus to divorce them (ficticiously) from any temporal traits. Such a fiction, Brentano claims, is methodologically very advantageous in the same way as a mathematician's fictitious assumption of the body being at rest. Consequently, Brentano introduces sensations as possessing primary objects which are external boundaries of temporal continua, yet at the same time ficticiously separated from them. (Such a separation, in Brentano's scheme of things, can only be fictitious, for boundary points cannot exist in separation from the continua they belong to (ibid., 105).) In accordance with this fiction, we can thus represent the internal structure of sensations as

2) $A_p < Q, P >$.

But in what way is this fiction meant to be advantageous? Brentano explains:

12. [...] For us it carries a big representational advantage in that it allows us to begin with the more simple [things]. We want to describe the elements of inner life. In the case of the continuous, what else could this be than the individual boundary? — If this is not admitted, one would have to say that in this context there are no elements but only what in successive reduction approaches an element in the infinite.

13. The practical advantage, of which I am talking here, emerges even more forcefully [and] in its full significance if we take the following question into account:

Is the analogue of a concretum of quality and spatial determination [Örtlichkeit], which we called the primary object of sensory proterosis, exhaustively and with full accuracy described if one says it consists of past concreta of quality and spatial determination?

By careful scrutiny of the state of affairs one will find reasons for denying this.

One will find that what is given as the primary object of proteraesthesia is not directly a past quality and a past spatial determination thereof, but rather a past experience of the quality with its spatial determination. (Ibid., 97)

The symbolic representation of proteraestheses given in 1) thus no longer reflects the state of affairs which has emerged after adopting the fictitious separation, because it does not take into account that what is given in their primary object is not a past spatial determination (i.e. T directly pervading P), nor a past quality (T directly pervading Q), but rather a past sensation;

3) $< A_p < Q, P >, T >$,

where the sensation $A_p < Q, P >$ is pervaded by the (intuitively given!) timespan T . The idea behind this explication is, of course, that the 'modification' in the primary objects which Brentano evokes in his early conception of proteraesthesia (i.e. in his so-called 'modification theory') to explain the modifying character of the attribute 'past', is, as far as proteraestheses are concerned, simply an pervasion by the 'perceivable' (hence proteraesthesia) timespan T . And this leads directly to my interpretation of the term 'proterosis'.

A proterosis is, as I see it, nothing but any act of presenting 'a past something or other'. Proteraestheses, then are simply a sub-species of proteroses, for they are proteroses with a particularly strong link to sensations. When Brentano uses the term 'sensory proterosis', I thus take it that he refers to psychical acts of presenting past sensations. The fact that every proterosis is meant to contain a particular modifying temporal species (ibid., 95, line 38) enables us to divide sensory proteroses into 'intuitive' (= proteraestheses), and 'non-intuitive' ones, and so to extend the proposed explication of Brentano's modification theory to (sensory) proteroses in general: a sensory proterosis is an act of presenting directed upon a sensation, say again $A_p < Q, P >$, modified by being pervaded by a temporal species T , i.e. it is of the form

4) $A_p < A_p < Q, P >, T >$.

For Brentano, modifying temporal species were meant to be quantitative and capable of degrees, and the proterosis 4) would accordingly be described in terms of the particular modifying attribute 'past_T' (i.e. 'past-to-degree-*T*') as presenting a 'past_T sensation'. If the modifying species is (are) given intuitively, then we are dealing with a proteraesthesia, but how else could it (they) be given? It is here that Brentano's insistence on the intuitive determinations given in *T* containing, as he says, 'the earlier and the later' and on all other temporal determinations being arrived at in a non-intuitive manner bears its fruit: the temporal determinations given in *T* are meant to be fully sufficient for the formation of presentations like those I referred to as 'non-intuitive sensory proteroses'.

III

In Chapter III (ibid., 25-79), Brentano describes in detail the correct empirical method for descriptive psychology (or 'psychognosy', as he calls it). In order to achieve his aim, namely to determine

exhaustively [...] (if possible) the elements of human consciousness and the ways in which they are connected (ibid., 1) the descriptive psychologist (psychognost) must achieve a multitude of things.

- a) He has to experience (*erleben*),
- b) he has to notice (*bemerken*),
- c) he has to fix (*fixieren*) what he notices, in order to collect it,
- d) he has to generalize inductively;
- e) where the necessity or impossibility of a unification of certain elements becomes clear from the concepts themselves, he must intuitively grasp these general laws;
- f) finally, we can add that he has to make deductive use of what he gained, in one way or another, from general laws. By doing this, he will be able to solve many questions concerning the elements which otherwise he would scarcely have been able to answer. (Ibid., 28)

In the passage which shall be the focus of this concluding part of my essay, Brentano is concerned with the means by which someone can be brought to notice something genuinely:

41. [Let us] first [discuss] comparisons. What I have in mind here is best explained by a few examples.

- a) Let us assume that I have a colour in front of me which comes close to pure blue, yet which still displays a certain red tinge. And, assuming I wish to get someone to notice this peculiarity who has

not as yet done so, then I might be able to achieve my aim by proceeding in the following way: I show him a pure, and shall we say, equally saturated [and] strongly illuminated blue, [then, I] exchange it with the reddish one and ask him to compare the impressions. In many cases he will then recognise the difference with ease, and he will notice that the source of this difference is exclusively given in the reddishness of the second impression.

b) Another method which may immediately make the difference apparent to him is to have both colours adjacent to one another and to let their border pass through the region of clearest vision. The difference will then be noticed by him (reddish).

This method appears to be less recommendable, but only because of a coincidental circumstance.

[Namely when we are dealing with a] simultaneous contrast, in that the phenomena are changed on both sides. This means that reddishness is not actually noticed in the preceding phenomenon, but in another one. [...]

[S]imultaneous contrast [is] undeniably a disturbance. Apart from it, one could say that [the presently discussed] manner of comparing is perfectly adequate.

Indeed, [if it were possible to disregard this disturbance, then] the [present] method of comparison would essentially be the same [as the one looked at previously].

In both cases we had several phenomena being compared. At first, they are noticed as a whole. [Yet] some of them are different from others because they contain a part which the others don't, and thus the part is noticed.

Looking a bit more closely, the process of the second method appears, however, somewhat more intricate than I have just described it.

The two colour phenomena which I have side by side are not only different because the one is reddish and the other is not, but also because they are differently localized.

It would be better for the inducement of noticing the reddishness if this second reason for difference did not exist.

However, the malady is at least mitigated by the fact that [the difference of localisation can be made] to approach the unnoticeable (the infinitesimal) and by the fact that there are the same or bigger differences in the spatial determination without the difference given by reddishness.

Yet the only way to overcome these ills completely is to repeat the experiment several times by exchanging the positions of what has been put side by side in each repetition. By doing this one incorporates the method of succession.

We thus have an intricate method of comparison, which brings out part agreements, part differences.

Nota bene: The same kind of intricacy can actually also be found in the initially mentioned method of comparison. For, on closer inspection [of this method], one also finds several reasons for difference:

The reddishness,
the difference of the times in intuiting [die Zeitdifferenz in der Anschauung],

because one of the phenomena may be a phenomenon of memory (phenomenon of original association) [while the other isn't], or, if both are [phenomena of memory], because one modifies more than the other.

And here again [there are] mitigations:
for one, the [possibility of] infinitesimal temporal difference [between the two phenomena],

for another the existence of the same or bigger time differences without the difference of reddishness.

The obstacle will be made even less conspicuous by repeating the experiment in reverse temporal order. (Ibid., 49-51)

The two examples Brentano uses in this passage to explicate the kind of methods of comparison, which he suggests can be used to bring someone to notice something, are about noticing a sensory determination, namely a red tint in a reddish-blue sensation. They both involve the difference between the colour quality Blue ('B') and the colour quality Reddish-blue ('B+R').

In his description, Brentano emphasizes explicitly certain symmetries and a-symmetries between the two methods. Thus he stresses the symmetry (described in 41.b) that both methods involve the comparison of several phenomena (Erscheinungen) which are first meant to be noticed as a whole, and of which some contain the part to be noticed (i.e. the reddishness R) while the others don't.

These phenomena are either sensory experiences (sensations) or past sensory experiences (proteroses), i.e. they are all (psychical) acts of presenting. For the experimental subject S to be able to notice them collectively, these acts must occur simultaneously in the consciousness of S. Thus if we represent these collections, or 'wholes', as sets, we must always keep in mind that their elements ('parts') are meant to co-exist simultaneously. This means, for example, that the 'whole' which is meant to be induced in S by the sequential method (described in 41.d) does not contain two sensations, but either (i) a sensation (of B at P₁), i.e.

5) $A_P < B, P_1 >$,

and a past sensation (of B+R at the same place of the visual field, i.e. at P₁), i.e.

6) $A_P < A_P < B+R, P_1 >, T >$

— where T is meant to be a particular real number less than 0, representing one of Brentano's modifying quantitative time species — or, (ii) two such past sensations.

To simplify the symbolic notation somewhat, let me first omit the symbols representing the involved acts of presenting (i.e. A_P , A_P and A_P), and second, add the number 0 to the variable range of the Ts as a 'fictitious element' representing the present, in order to enable us to use $< B, P_1; 0 >$, and $< B+R, P_1; T >$

as uniform short-forms for 5) and 6), respectively. With these notational adaptations we can thus represent the 'whole' meant to be induced by the sequential method as

7) $\{ < B+R, P_1; T_1 >, < B, P_1; T_2 > \}$,

with $T_1 < T_2$; and that of the simultaneous method (described in 41.b) as

8) $\{ < B+R, P_1; T_1 >, < B, P_2; T_1 > \}$.

Most of the other 'symmetries' emphasized by Brentano concern influences which might be distracting in noticing R. Thus — in addition to the colour difference B (B+R) which is meant to give rise to the noticing of R — the phenomena involved in the sequential method 7) display a temporal difference $T_1 T_2$, whereas the ones in the simultaneous one 8) display a spatial difference $P_1 P_2$. The 'symmetry' between these two distracting factors even extends to the way in which their distracting influence can be diminished because both $T_1 T_2$ and $P_1 P_2$ can be made to approach the unnoticeable (the 'infinitesimal') without altering the colour difference B (B+R).

The only way of overcoming these distracting influences fully in the case of the simultaneous method is to mix it with the sequential one by exchanging the location of the spots, which leaves us with the following simultaneous-sequential 'whole':

9) $\{ < B, P_1; T_1 >, < B+R, P_2; T_1 >, < B, P_2; T_2 >, < B+R, P_1; T_2 >, \dots \}$.

In the case of the sequential method, Brentano tells us that the distracting influences (of temporal differences) can only be overcome fully by reversing the sequence in which the spots are presented, which leaves us with the following perfected sequential 'whole':

- 10) $\{ \langle B, P_1, T_1 \rangle, \langle B+R, P_1, T_2 \rangle, \langle B+R, P_1, T_3 \rangle, \langle B, P_1, T_4 \rangle, \dots \}$ (with $T_1 < T_2 < T_3 < T_4$).

Finally, let me briefly turn to Brentano's hesitation concerning the simultaneous method due to the possibility of 'simultaneous contrast'. Perceptual contrast, as it is understood in the psychology of perception, is the contrasting of two perceptual contents of the same kind together with the mutual influencing of the sensory experiences in the context of (i) the simultaneous stimulation of neighbouring sensory cells ('simultaneous contrast'), or (ii) the stimulation in quick succession of the same sensory cells ('successive contrast').⁷ Examples: a grey spot appears lighter in dark surroundings, and darker in light ones; in coloured surroundings it takes on the complementary colour to that of its surroundings.

My interpretation of this paragraph of Brentano's text is thus that, in using the simultaneous method, we may have that the initial phenomena (i.e. the sensations $\langle B, P_1, 0 \rangle$ and $\langle B+R, P_2, 0 \rangle$) are both ('on both sides') simultaneously and instantly qualitatively modified, such that we are not actually dealing with a 'whole' of the form

- 11) $\{ \langle B, P_1, T \rangle, \langle B+R, P_2, T \rangle \}$

which is collectively noticed, but rather one of the form

- 12) $\{ \langle B+S_1, P_1, T \rangle, \langle B+S_2+R, P_2, T \rangle \}$,

where S_1 and S_2 represent the qualitative modifications. And consequently, the reddishness R is not noticed in 11) (i.e. in the 'preceding phenomenon') but rather in 12) (i.e. in the 'other one').

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Notes:

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 1 Brentano (1995).
 2 Brentano (1874), ((1924/25) 2nd ed. (2 vols.) Leipzig: Meiner) ((1971) unaltered reprint Hamburg: Meiner); English edition: Brentano (1973), ((1994) paperback London: Routledge).
 3 Page numbers in the text will henceforth, if not otherwise indicated, be referring to the original German edition of these lectures Brentano (1982) since they also occur in the English translation.
 4 For a detailed discussion of Brentano's mereological views see Smith (1992/93).
 5 If not indicated otherwise, all quotations in the remainder of this initial part are from the mentioned paragraph.
 6 This means, in particular, that the 'terminus' of the (Brentanian) intentional relation given, say, in a visual sensation is the immanent coloured spot (a 'sense datum') and not the real coloured surface which might have caused it, as Husserl would have it. (See Kastil (1951), 406) Moreover, the fact that Brentano classified the immanent objects of, say again, sensations as 'physical' does not imply that they are anything but immanent objects. And so Husserl's objection (Husserl (1992), 864 (Appendix § 6)) — that Brentano is confused in allowing that 'an external object (a house)' and 'a content [...] present as a real part of a perception' are both 'physical phenomena' — is based on a misreading of Brentano. See also Kraus's remarks, in Brentano (1973), 80 and 393. See also (Bell (1990)).