

From Mental Phenomena to Propositional Attitudes: The Transformation of the Concept of Intentionality from Brentano to Chisholm

[Dos Fenômenos Mentais às Atitudes Proposicionais: A Transformação do Conceito de Intencionalidade de Brentano para Chisholm]

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Abstract: The article presents a historical but mainly conceptual comparison of two (quite) different views of intentionality: one introduced by Franz Brentano and based on a descriptive- psychological perspective of mental life, and another conducted by Roderick Chisholm and ruled by a logico-linguistic viewpoint. In spite of Chisholm's continuous references to Brentano, I will claim that the former conceptually breaks with the latter, as he introduces several (clearly non-Brentanian) conceptual tools mainly borrowed from Bertrand Russell's philosophy, which exerted a decisive influence on some theoretical decisions taken by Chisholm. This is the case, for instance, of using the (Russellian) concept of propositional attitudes for understanding intentionality. I will argue that this interpretation is based on a strong logico-linguistic commitment, which is not merely a methodological strategy, but it is also grounded on a fully different philosophical standpoint other than the one first inaugurated by Brentano.

Keywords: Intentionality. Propositional Attitudes. Brentano. Russell. Chisholm.

Resumo: O artigo apresenta uma comparação histórica mas principalmente conceitual de duas visões (bastante) diferentes da intencionalidade: uma introduzida por Franz Brentano e baseada em uma perspectiva descritiva-psicológica da vida mental, e outra conduzida por Roderick Chisholm e regida por um ponto de vista lógico-linguístico. Apesar das contínuas referências de Chisholm a Brentano, afirmarei que o primeiro rompe conceitualmente com o segundo, pois ele introduz várias ferramentas conceituais (claramente não-brentanianas) principalmente emprestadas da filosofia de Bertrand Russell, que exerceram uma influência decisiva em algumas decisões teóricas tomadas por Chisholm. Este é o caso, por exemplo, do uso do conceito (russeliano) de atitudes proposicionais para a compreensão da intencionalidade. Argumentarei que esta interpretação se baseia em um forte compromisso lógico-linguístico, que não é apenas uma estratégia metodológica, mas também se baseia em um ponto de vista filosófico totalmente diferente daquele inaugurado por Brentano.

Palavras-chave: Intencionalidade. Atitude Proposicional. Brentano. Russell. Chisholm.

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Introduction

There is a very broad understanding of the concept of intentionality as the ‘aboutness of the mind’. But this ‘aboutness’ can mean very different things depending on the theoretical position one supports and on which side of the gap between analytic philosophy and (pre)phenomenology¹ (‘continental philosophy’ is a way too general term) one stands. Franz Brentano (who was undoubtedly one of the main influential sources for Husserl’s phenomenological project) was responsible for (re)introducing the medieval concept of intentionality in 19th century philosophy. On a closer look, one can easily realize that Brentano’s concept of intentionality is rather different than the one usually presented in analytic philosophy. Broadly speaking, both Brentano and, *mutatis mutandis*, Husserl understood intentionality based on the idea of ‘consciousness of’ as the way of the mind of being directed towards (or even related to) something. As I will show, unlike most of the analytic accounts of intentionality, they do not refer to propositional attitudes or to any kind of linguistic or predicative structures at the most basic level of the intentional life of consciousness. On the other hand, intentionality presents a quite different picture when presented

in the analytic world, commonly based on a logico-linguistic account of it. And this is a tendency we may trace back to Chisholm seminal works on this topic in the 1950s.

It is not my attempt to present here a full-fledged comparison between these two philosophical traditions, which also present different accounts of intentionality even inside each tradition. Instead, my goal is restricted to highlight a point in the history of philosophy, which I consider to be fundamental one, since it introduced the concept of intentionality in analytic philosophy by means of a radical transformation of Brentano’s (original) account of it. As said, this transformation was first performed by Roderick Chisholm in the 1950s: before that there are almost no references (much less theories) to intentionality in the analytic world; but after Chisholm’s founding contribution to this topic in the 1950s and 1960s, intentionality became one of the main topics in analytic philosophy of mind. Furthermore, many of Chisholm’s main contentions laid the ground for the general way of addressing this concept throughout decades—independently of the differences among theories. As I will argue this view implies a very limited way of understanding intentionality, as it reduces this concept to logico-linguistic struc-

¹I use the prefix here to refer not only to the philosophical school inaugurated by Edmund Husserl, but also to some of the previous philosophical positions which contributed to the origin of phenomenology, such as those of Franz Brentano and some of his followers (like Kazimierz Twardowski, Alexius Meinong, among others).

tures, mainly to propositional attitudes. Of course, this massive influence of Chisholm is something I will attempt to show just indirectly by emphasizing some his main concepts, but which in this limited frame I cannot address at length.

Based on these methodological and historical restrictions, I will be focus on certain concepts as presented by three fundamental ‘players’ in this conceptual history: Franz Brentano, Bertrand Russell, and Roderick Chisholm. First, I will present a brief account of Brentano’s main concepts as presented in his *Psychologie von empirischen Standpunkt*, but deliberately emphasizing certain fundamental aspects which are either neglected or directly dismissed by Chisholm’s new account, mainly regarding the philosophical-psychological (descriptive) method of addressing mental phenomena, the difference between mental and physical phenomena, the very concept of intentionality, the fundamental role played by presentations, and some considerations of Brentano’s original theory of existential judgments. This treatment will allow to show the main differences with Chisholm’s new position. Second, in order to understand the transition to Chisholm’s seminal

works, I will briefly address some of Bertrand Russell’s concepts which had an overwhelming influence not only in analytic philosophy in general, but specifically on Chisholm’s way of how to do philosophy, as acknowledged even by Chisholm himself. In this context, I will focus on Russell’s concepts of propositional attitude and belief, and on his general methodological stance, based on a logico-linguistic analysis as well. Third, I will focus on Chisholm’s introduction of his concept of intentionality, again, pointing out the main differences with Brentano, mainly as regards his propositional understanding of intentionality and the idea of attitudes based on verbs such as ‘believe’, which imply at least two propositional levels: the main proposition as an ‘intentional sentence’ and the proposition introduced by the clause which works as a ‘propositional object / content’ of the intentional reference. I will show that these considerations are due to a philosophical method based on a logico-linguistic commitment, which, incidentally, determines his new concept of intentionality, most certainly based on a quite different approach than the one presented by Brentano.² As a final reflection, I will briefly mention a current (and highly relevant to this topic) analytic

²It might be objected that Chisholm’s concern was to develop his own philosophical theory and therefore he did not have any obligation to be ‘respectful’ with Brentano’s original account. This is a quite legitimate claim and I will not argue against it. But one historical problem (which, as we will see, is *not the main problem*) is that Chisholm and many analytic philosophers make some explicit references to Brentano’s original position and to some alleged ‘connections’ with it, and then they present theories completely unrelated with the one introduced by Brentano.

debate on the differences between propositionalism and objectualism.

It shall be pointed out that even when I will address some historical issues which definitely have important historical implications, my aim is rather to present a conceptual comparison of two (quite) different accounts of intentionality: one based on a descriptive psychological (perhaps even pre-phenomenological) perspective and another one ruled by a logico-linguistic standpoint. I am convinced that these two different approaches enclose the main conceptual differences between two different traditions, especially as regards the concept of intentionality.

1. Departing from Brentano

1.1. Brentano on Intentionality

Much has been written about Brentano's theory of intentionality (or 'intentional inexistence'), so I will try to avoid some obvious repetitions. Instead, I will present a survey of some of his main concepts but emphasizing those aspects that will show the conceptual contrast with Chisholm's position.

As is well known, Brentano introduced the medieval concept of 'intentional inexistence' in the first volume of his *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt* from 1874. A first point to remark is that, as the title indicates, this is a psychology from an empirical standpoint. So, the philosophical standpoint is based on psychology and on a psychological access to conscious life. Unlike some approaches from this time based on a more experimental third-person access to psychological experience, Brentano's psychology from an empirical standpoint³ — later called by him 'descriptive psychology' — is a first-person perspective based on the inner experience of one own's mind.⁴ Brentano defines his standpoint as "empirical", which means based "solely on experience" and on "ideal intuitions" (PES I, p. 1).⁵ He specifies that his focus is on the "soul", understood here just as the "substantial bearer of presentations (*Vorstellungen*) and other attributes" which are "only perceptible directly through internal experience (*innere Erfahrung*)" (PES I, p. 8).⁶ But then he adds that the aim of this investigation is not the soul as a bearer, but rather mental (or psychic) phenomena (*psychische Phänomene*) (cf. PES I, p. 16), since

³Cf. TITCHNER, 1921.

⁴The very idea of a first-person (or a phenomenological-like) perspective does not imply per se a sort of historical anachronism. We shall keep in mind that even before Brentano many important empiricists understood philosophy based on such first-person access to experience. One eminent example is that of David Hume and his idea of a 'science of man', which is nothing but the philosophical project of a description of one's own way of experiencing the world (cf. HUME, 1739-40, Introduction), usually wrongly depicted as a form of 'naturalism' by some analytic philosophers.

⁵The Bibliographical References are at the end of the article.

⁶Mental phenomena can "only be perceived in internal consciousness (*im inneren Bewusstsein*)" (PES I, p. 128).

mental appearances are in my mind independently of whether there is an underlying soul or not (cf. PES I, p. 27). At least in a restricted sense, this can be understood as a Humean move (cf. PES I, pp. 23 ff.).

Once outlined his research method, Brentano defines the object of his psychological-philosophical research. He then arrives to the fundamental—although conceptually not always clear—difference between physical and mental (or psychic) phenomena. Physical phenomena are colors, figures, or landscapes I see; a chord I hear; warm, heat, or cold I sense (*empfinde*), etc. Mental phenomena refer to presentations (*Vorstellungen*), but with a quite precise remark that the reference is to the *act* of presenting, i.e., for instance, to the act of hearing a tone, of seeing a color, etc., and not to that which is heard or seen (cf. PES I, pp. 111-112). While physical phenomena do not belong to the research field of (this) psychology, as they refer to external affections, only mental phenomena are the proper object of Brentano's psychology. In either case, we shall keep in mind that both are *phenomena*, i.e., even physical phenomena do not amount to external things or qualities of things, but rather to the physical affections of things to my body.

As said, mental phenomena are presentations (*Vorstellungen*), but also judgments (*Urteilen*) and phenomena of love and hate (*Gemütsakte*). I will focus

here on the first two classes. Presentations are particularly important, because for Brentano they constitute the basis (*Grundlage*) for the other two classes (cf. PES I, p. 120). In other words, there can be no judgments (or phenomena of love and hate) without presentations. It is important to remark here that presentations as such do not imply the perception of an actual existent object. For Brentano, to assert existence is only possible by means of a judgment, as we will see in the following sub-section. The presentation (of something) only means the appearance (of something) to internal consciousness (cf. PES I, p. 114). In the other words, a presentation is merely the act of intending something as an object by the mind. This implication of a 'something' by the presentation, in other words, the 'aboutness' implied by the mind, is precisely that which defines mental phenomena as such. As Brentano says, unlike physical phenomena, mental phenomena are characterized by their intentionality, or, in his own words, by the intentional inexistence of its object.

The famous 'intentionality thesis' holds that every mental phenomenon is characterized by the intentional (or mental) inexistence of an object (*Gegenstand*), which consists—Brentano confesses here that expressions is equivocal—"in the relation to a content (*die Beziehung auf einen Inhalt*), the direction towards an object (*die Richtung auf ein Objekt*), or the immanent object-

ality (*immanente Gegenständlichkeit*”); this mental immanentism of the object is defined by the idea that “every mental phenomenon contains something as an object in itself (*etwas als Objekt in sich*)”. But the most important aspect for us is what Brentano adds next, namely, that not every mental phenomenon contains its object in the same way, for “in the presentation something is presented, in the judgment something is recognized (*anerkennt*) or rejected (*verworfen*), in love, hate, and desire [something is] loved, hated, or desired, etc.” (PES I, pp. 124-125). This is not just a minor remark, because Brentano emphasizes that there are *different ways of intending* an object depending on the nature of the mental phenomena in question. Correlatively, *that which is intended as such varies* depending on the phenomena implied. I purposely used the expression ‘that which is intended as such’ for referring to *the correlate* of the phenomenon in question *as a whole*, since for Brentano the intended object is always the same and ‘that which changes’ is the way of intending to this object: in a presentation the object is just presented as it appears, in the case of a judgment it is posited as existent or eventually rejected as non-existent, and in the case of feelings, the object is loved, hated, desired, etc. In other words, this is a direct conse-

quence of the idea that there is always a presentation (of an object) presupposed at the base of every mental phenomenon. So, the object in question is always the object of presentations. What changes is just, as said, the intending act of the mind.⁷

This is a fundamental insight, since for Brentano that which is intended is first and foremost an *object*, i.e., the correlate of a presentation, and not something like a *Sachverhalt* or even less a proposition. Furthermore, as we will see in what follows, the correlate of judgments as a whole, i.e., the object cum its existential position, is not something propositional for Brentano either, as it will be later contended by Chisholm and most analytic philosophers.

1.2. Brentano on Judgments

As is well-known, the philosophical tradition since Aristotle has understood (in general) judgments mainly as categorical judgments with a predicative or synthetic structure of the kind S is P, i.e., subject / copula / predicate. In contemporary philosophy, the concept of judgment has been virtually abandoned, being replaced by the more logical concept of ‘proposition’ as the meaning or logical content of a linguistic sen-

⁷“Nothing is judged (*beurteilt*), without being previously presented (*vorgestellt*); but (...) when the object of a presentation becomes the object of an accepting or a rejecting judgment, consciousness enters into a fully new way of relation to [this object]” (PES II, p. 38; my emphasis).

tence.

But if we go back to the tradition, one of the best-known examples is that of Kant's characterization of judgments in his *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. For our purposes, it is important to remark that when Kant analyzes the predicative nature of being as a copula, he is aware of the existential import (i.e., beyond the mere predicative nature) of this verb, but he dismisses it as meaningless for philosophy. Therefore, he asserts that "being is evidently no real predicate (*kein reales Prädikat*), i.e., a concept of something, which may supervene to the concept of a thing. It is the mere position (*Position*) of a thing" (KANT, 1787, B 627). For Kant, being qua position does not add anything to the conceptual level of real predicates, as showed by the well-known example of the (real and possible) 100 thalers. This leads Kant to assert that the main feature of being is as the copula of a judgment of the form S is P (cf. B 626-628). Brentano was well aware of the limitations of Kant account of existential judgments (cf. PES II, p. 53).

Already Johann Friedrich Herbart put into question this primacy of the predicative sense of being and of predicative judgments, by emphasizing the positing role of the *Setzung*, i.e., of exist-

tential judgments, in order to attain reality and being as such.⁸ Brentano was well aware of Herbart's contribution to this topic, which he also grants to Trendelenburg (cf. PES II, 54). Nonetheless, he also believes that Herbart was not able to reach the true nature of existential judgments as the basis of every judgment (cf. PES II, pp. 57, 187).⁹

Indeed, existential judgments not only constitute the basis of Brentano's theory of judgments, but he also introduces the more radical thesis that all judgments can be reduced to existential judgments (cf. PES II, p. 60). So, for instance, categorical (or synthetic) judgments can be turned into an existential (orthetic) judgment by means of a linguistic transformation (*sprachliche Umwandlung*) or a reduction / conduction (*Rückführung*) (cf. PES II, pp. 56-57). A sentence like 'The table is green' can (and even must) be reduced to 'There is a green table'. This original account, which will be then further developed by Anton Marty, goes certainly beyond the outcomes formerly obtained by Herbart.

It shall be remarked that this position is based (and this will be more evident after the so-called 'reistic turn') on Brentano's commitment to individuals, i.e., to concrete objects or *realia*,

⁸Herbart asserts that existential judgments are prior to categorical judgments (cf. HERBART, 1829, pp. 60-61). And in his *Lehrbuch*, he points out that in the existential proposition (*Existentialsatz*) being is not used as a predicate (i.e., as a copula), but rather as an expression of the existential nature of that which is affirmed (cf. HERBART, 1837, p. 111).

⁹"It is not even correct to assert that all judgments imply a connection or a separation of presented attributes (...) When we say: 'A is' this sentence is not (...) a predication in which existence as a predicate is connected with A as a subject" (PES II, pp. 48-49).

and his (Aristotelian-like) rejection of *irrealia*, among which we shall consider *entia rationis* such as propositions or states of affairs (*Sachverhalte*). Leaving aside some historical considerations about the evolution of Brentano's thought—which I cannot address here (i.e., the movement from a pure psychological and immanentist to a more ontological and reist conception of the object of intentionality¹⁰) — we may say that individual objects are the actual objects for Brentano. In that sense, the only actual object is the *object of a presentation*, which is then posited as existent by a judgment. Before the judgment, we might only say—borrowing a phrase from Meinong—that the object is beyond being and non-being.

Two things shall be pointed out in this context: first, judgments are not first and foremost (synthetic) propositions, but rather (thetic) positions, and the former are based on the latter. And as regards the correlate of judgments, for Brentano there are no special objects for them, i.e., neither propositions, as they will involve ipso facto a synthetic and predicative structure, nor states of affairs (as some of Brentano's followers held), for they will imply the existence of categorial entities such as 'the existence of god' or 'the greenness of the table' (cf. BRENTANO, 1930, pp. 94-95).

2. Chisholm and the (Russellian) Logico-Linguistic Approach to Intentionality

Without the fame and recognition of other philosophers of his time, such as Quine or Davidson, Roderick Chisholm was, nonetheless, one of the leading figures in American analytic philosophy with some outstanding contributions to the philosophy of mind, metaphysics, theory of knowledge, etc. In that sense, it is not my attempt to deny Chisholm's outstanding philosophical accomplishments. He was undoubtedly a brilliant thinker. And beyond that, he was (among others) one of the leading editors of the original German works of Brentano and then translator of some of his major works into English. In that sense, he was perhaps the main responsible for the name 'Franz Brentano' to be known at all in the analytic world.

Yet, I find one very important problem as regards his theory of intentionality. My claim is that he introduced a very personal and non-Brentanian account of intentionality in analytic philosophy, and this interpretation became mainstream and model for almost every analytic account of intentionality ever since he introduced this concept in the 1950s. Since Chisholm presented this (namely his) concept of intentionality together with many references to Brentano's work, many analytic philo-

¹⁰I address this topic at length elsewhere, cf. NIEL, 2019/2020.

sophers have a wrong picture of Brentano's philosophy. In any case, in the end, this would be just another example of a flawed and unilateral account of the history of philosophy, sometimes very common among analytic philosophers. Yet, what I consider to be the main problem is his introduction of a questionable way of addressing and understanding intentionality, based on a propositionalist interpretation of this concept. And this goes beyond of just another misconception of the history of philosophy¹¹, since, as far as I conceive the problem, it is founded on a commitment to a logico-linguistic way of interpreting of philosophy in general and intentionality in particular, which wrongly depicts the very nature of intentionality as a mental phenomenon. This (just methodological or even metaphysical?) 'logico-linguistic commitment' — as I called it elsewhere¹² — is based on a very rigid interpretation of the mental concept of intentionality by means of the linguistic concept of propositional attitudes.

2.1. *Bertrand Russell on Beliefs, Propositional Attitudes, and the Logical Analysis of Mind*

An important historical issue to re-

mark is the influence of Bertrand Russell's philosophy in the formation of Chisholm's concept of intentionality. It is not my attempt to present here an exhaustive historical reconstruction of Chisholm's philosophical background, but instead I would solely focus on some fundamental concepts introduced by Russell for understanding Chisholm's theory of intentionality.¹³ As briefly mentioned above, Chisholm developed his theory of intentionality taking as a (just symbolical) point of departure Brentano's idea of 'intentional inexistence', but (only implicitly?) basing his understanding on some important Russellian concepts, such as that of psychological or propositional attitude, i.e., the attitudes which imply verbs like desiring, hoping, wishing, believing, etc., a move which got him closer to Carnap's concept of intensionality (whit-an-s) rather than to Brentano's intentionality (with-a-t). The influence of Bertrand Russell can be understood in both a broad, general sense, and in a narrow, more specific sense.

1. In a broad and general sense, the influence of Russell is explicitly acknowledged by Chisholm as he recalls in his Autobiography that he first read Brentano (and Meinong) inspired by Russell's references to their works in

¹¹Incidentally, in the case of Chisholm I believe this misleading reading of Brentano is due more to his personal philosophical interests in presenting *his own work* as a sort of continuation of the Brentano's historical point of departure, and certainly not to a lack of knowledge, since Chisholm knew Brentano's work very well.

¹²Cf. NIEL, 2020. For more on this topic, see below.

¹³Evidently, I do not deny the influence of other philosophical figures, such as Frege or Carnap, as I will occasionally mention.

The Analysis of Mind (cf. CHISHOLM, 1997, pp. 8, 13). But, as it will be clear in what follows, Russell only knew very few things about Brentano, and he usually understood these few things in a wrong way. Of course, this is not the main point, for later, Chisholm got much more acquainted with Brentano's work than Russell ever did. On the contrary, the point is that Chisholm adopted some Russellian concepts for his understanding of intentionality 'allegedly' based on Brentano.

Although Russell's *Analysis of Mind* (1921) — based on some lectures — is not precisely his most influential philosophical contribution, it established his main views on the philosophy of mind and psychology, and certainly had an important impact on Chisholm, as attested by his manifold references to this work. Russell's goal in this work is "to reconcile the materialistic tendency of psychology with the anti-materialistic tendency of physics", something previously done by William James, who left behind the classical dichotomic thought of 'either mental or material', by asserting a "neutral stuff" (RUSSELL, 1921, p. iii). In this context, the explicit attempt is to refute the idea that "the essence of everything mental is a certain quite peculiar something called 'consciousness', conceived either

as a relation to objects, or a pervading quality of physical phenomena" (RUSSELL, 1921, p. 1). His first target is clearly Brentano, who is then explicitly mentioned together with a literal reference to the famous 'intentionality passage' (p. 4). Russell's arguments against Brentano are sometimes superficial and always presented along with an explicit defense of William James' theory. Based on this, Russell rejects not only the "unnecessary and fictitious" concept of 'act', but also the concept of I as such; it is astonishingly how Russell accuses Brentano of being a sort of Kantian-like defender of a strong concept of I, when it would have been much more accurate to have targeted Husserl's transcendental phenomenology. Furthermore, this whole criticism ends up by basing his account on the non-less problematic concept of 'person' with its ethical background. And then Russell shows one of his main cards: the concept of *belief*, by means of which we can gain knowledge, determined as either true or false (cf. p. 3).¹⁴

So, *belief* stands for the classical concept of *judgment*. At the same time, he replaces the idea of a "relation of content and object" (attributed to both Brentano and Meinong) with the idea of a "reference of thoughts to objects", which is mainly based on his concept of

¹⁴"Just as words are characterized by meaning, so beliefs are characterized by truth or falsehood. And just as meaning consists in relation to the object meant, so truth and falsehood consist in relation to something that lies outside believe (...) What makes a belief true or false I call a 'fact'. The particular fact that makes a given belief true or false I call its 'objective', and the relation of the belief to its objective I call the 'reference'" (RUSSELL, 1921, p 139).

belief (cf. RUSSELL, 1921, p. 7). Yet, even though Russell rejects the (Brentanian) distinction of act / content / object in the case of *presentations*, he maintains, nonetheless, a “very similar” analogical differentiation in the case of *belief*, namely, “the believing, what is believed, and the objective” (an ‘objective’ is the particular fact or ‘state of affairs’ which works as a sort of ‘truth-maker’ for beliefs). It is outstanding how Russell admits and justifies this distinction in the case of beliefs, for they are “an actual experienced feeling”, but, on the other hand, he rapidly dismisses this distinction in the case of presentations for being just “something postulated” (sic) (RUSSELL, 1921, p. 40).

Leaving aside other critical remarks about Brentano, for our purposes it suffices to underline probably his main idea that “‘consciousness’ is not the essence of life or mind” and, furthermore, that the purpose of these lectures is that “this term [i.e., consciousness] will disappear until we have dealt with words, when it will reemerge as mainly a trivial and unimportant outcome of linguistic habits” (RUSSELL, 1921, 20). This categorical statement not only anticipates the well-known ‘linguistic turn’ in philosophy, but it also makes explicit Russell’s move: philosophy (of mind) is not a research about consciousness, but it is a linguistic research based on words. Departing from this general philosophical outlook, the hu-

man mind can only be analyzed by means of an account of language. And this exactly Chisholm general methodological standpoint.

2. In a more specific sense, Chisholm even confesses in his Autobiography that he understands intentionality by means of Russell’s concept of propositional attitude, as if this move did not add anything meaningful to the original Brentanian concept. So, when characterizing epistemic certainty, he points out that: “Intentional properties include (...) what Russell had called ‘propositional attitudes’, for example, believing, thinking, and considering” (CHISHOLM, 1997, p. 22). Of course, this might be a plausible philosophical explanation, but this is certainly more related with Russell than with Brentano.

But if we focus on his understanding of intentionality, we will find more remarkable coincidences between Russell and Chisholm. Indeed, leaving aside some historical antecedents, it was Russell who first introduced in the analytic world the fundamental (at least for *this* tradition) concept of propositional attitude. In his famous lectures on logical atomism from 1918, Russell calls ‘propositional verbs’ those verbs such as ‘believe’ or ‘whish’, because they are “verbs which have the *form* of relating an object to a proposition.” And he adds: “you might call them ‘attitudes’, but I should not like that because it is a psychological term, and although

all the instances in our experience are psychological, there is no reason to suppose that all the verbs I am talking of are psychological" (RUSSELL, 1918, p.227). His goal is clear: even when these 'attitudes' are (in some sense) psychological verbs, the focus is rather on the logico-linguistic structures they express. And this shows which was Russell's intention all along: not to do a sort of psychological philosophy (like the one Brentano did), but instead a philosophical analysis of the mind based on a logico-linguistic enquiry of the structures of our thought.¹⁵ Thus, 'propositional attitudes' are sentences, which use some propositional verbs like 'believe' to refer to a clause which expresses a propositional content. The analyses of these attitudes are not psychological, but logico-linguistic; and the latter must replace and render obsolete the former (i.e., psychological analyses), at least in the field of philosophy.

To sum up, on all points outlined above, i.e., the role played by the verb 'believe' and other akin to it¹⁶, the concept of propositional attitude, and in general the attitude that philosophy must deal with words and language and not with consciousness or any mental phenomena, Chisholm clearly follows Russell and not Brentano. The-

refore, not only I do not share Sanford's opinion that "Chisholm defends [regarding intentionality] what Russell and others combat" (SANFORD, 1997, p.201), but, quite the opposite, I believe that Chisholm presents a non-Brentanian account of intentionality based on Russell's concepts, even when Russell never spoke about intentionality.¹⁷

2.2. *Chisholm on Intentionality*

As mentioned above, Chisholm was responsible for introducing the concept of intentionality in analytic philosophy of mind in the 1950. There were other philosophers who at that time also made some contributions to this topic (such as Gustav Bergmann or Elisabeth Anscombe), but Chisholm took the first step for introducing intentionality as a fundamental theoretical concept for the analysis of mind. From the 1950's to the 1990's Chisholm wrote an important number of publications about it, of course with some changes depending on the period in which they were written. Yet, his most influential contributions were those between the 1950's and 1960's, when intentionality was still a relatively unknown concept

¹⁵In any case, we shall not forget that for Russell, like for Frege, language is only tool to reach logical structures but not an end in itself.

¹⁶Although there are some slight differences regarding the verb 'believe' between both thinkers, for our purposes they can be neglected. It suffices to indicate that for Chisholm's 'believe' has also some cognitive implications (cf. CHISHOLM, 1957, 16-17).

¹⁷In the same line, I evidently also disagree with Dale Jacquette's thesis that Chisholm developed a sort of American Neo-Brentanism (cf. JACQUETTE, 2017).

in the analytic world. Following the paths opened by his seminal works, since the 1970s there has been an exponential increase of different approaches and theories (many even opposed with each other). Among his main early contributions, one shall mention his two articles from 1952 and 1956, his well-known book on perception (cf. CHISHOLM, 1957), and his now canonical and referential article on intentionality for the Edwards' Encyclopedia of Philosophy (cf. CHISHOLM, 1967a). Since it is impossible to address here all his works, I will focus on the Encyclopedia article, as it was perhaps the most succinct and precise formulation of his general understanding of intentionality, and I will occasionally complement the analysis with some references to other writings.

In the Macmillan Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Chisholm presents his *linguistic conception* of intentionality. It is fair to remark that Chisholm never hid this theoretical decision and he acknowledged that he was reformulating Brentano's thesis (cf. CHISHOLM, 1956, p. 125; 1957, p. 172). But he begins his article by referring to Brentano's thesis (and to Husserl's phenomenology) — a historical reference which became standard (as well as merely symbolic and empty) for most following accounts of intentionality in analytic philosophy — as if he were just following Brentano's path and fully disregarding the fact that this was a clear

move away from Brentano's standpoint. Indeed, as we will see, Chisholm introduces and develops his concepts together with continuous references to Brentano, in a confusing overlap in which the reader never really knows what actually belongs to Brentano and what is Chisholm's own position.

Chisholm finds in Brentano's 'intentionality-passage' an ontological and a psychological thesis. The ontological thesis is about the nature of certain objects of thought (and of other psychological attitudes), which are objects that do not imply existence. The psychological thesis emphasizes the distinction between mental and physical phenomena, and then asserts that all mental phenomena and only mental phenomena are intentional, i.e., they refer to an object. Up to this point everything seems to be (in a certain sense) Brentanian, but the treatment of these concepts will show that it is not.

Certainly, the ontological thesis presents a problematic issue (as it was once for Brentano and most of his followers), which is the question about the nature of intentional objects as such, as it asks whether this is a special kind of object other than, for instance, real objects (a question which found many different answers among Brentano's followers). But the way of addressing this problem is completely different in the case of Chisholm, because for him the issue arises with the question about "what is involved in having thoughts, beliefs,

desires, purposes or other intentional attitudes, which are directed upon objects that do not exist” (CHISHOLM, 1967a, p. 201). The (eventual) non-existence of the intentional object is an actual problem for any theory of intentionality. But the additional conflict introduced here by Chisholm’s formulation is the reference to intentional attitudes and intentional verbs which allegedly provides an account of these ‘intentional objects’ which, as we will see, incidentally, *are not actually objects, but rather propositions*.

And if the psychological thesis is considered, we may see that it is related to this concept of intentional object as well. Following Chisholm’s interpretation, that which defines a mental phenomenon is the necessary relation to an object that may not exist, unlike physical phenomena which do imply the existence of an object. But the main problem here is not only the accuracy of this characterization of mental and physical phenomena¹⁸, but rather the translation into an intentional language, according to which we have either intentional sentences (i.e., mental) or non-intentional sentences (i.e., physical). According to him, the latter necessarily imply an object, as depicted by the following example: ‘John is riding a horse’, which is a non-intentional sentence, because it conveys a physical

phenomenon whose object must therefore exist. On the contrary, ‘John is thinking of a horse’ is an intentional statement which depicts a mental phenomenon since it contains an object in itself (psychological thesis) and this object may or may not exist (ontological thesis). I repeat, independently of the accuracy of the understanding of these basic concepts, the characterization itself implies a big move away from a (descriptive) psychological (or even a phenomenological) account of intentionality. First, it departs from a third-person perspective, namely, its perspective is that of an (external) observer who speaks about John. Second, intentionality is explained in terms of a linguistic sentence only implied by certain numbers of verbs which, incidentally, are precisely those verbs corresponding to propositional attitudes. To sum up, intentionality is understood in terms of the so-called ‘logic of intentional linguistic statements’.

So, if we have an ‘intentional sentence’ like ‘John believes that there are men on Mars’, following Chisholm, we may reformulate or formalize this sentence as follows: $M(p)$, where M is the intentional sentence or the ‘intentional prefix’ (‘John believes’) and (p) the intentional content (‘there are men on Mars’) referred by using the relative clause (cf. CHISHOLM, 1967a, p. 203).

¹⁸Indeed, we shall leave aside Chisholm’s highly problematic equation between non-intentional languages (sentences about non-mental or material things) and physical phenomena. As mentioned above, physical phenomena do not amount to material things, since they merely refer to the affections of something as indicated above (cf. BRENTANO, PES I, p. 111).

In order to reach the logical and grammatical structures, this (just?) methodological move circumscribes intentionality to *intentional statements*, i.e., not to presentations or to other kinds of mental experiences, but simply to *sentences*; in Brentano's terms, judgments, besides, to a very specific kind of judgments, namely propositional judgments. I will come back to this topic.

2.3. Chisholm's Criteria for Defining a Sentence as 'Intentional'

In *Perceiving* from 1957, Chisholm presents three criteria according to which a sentence (we shall not forget that it is always about *sentences*) can be defined as intentional; in other words, these are criteria to differentiate intentional from non-intentional sentences¹⁹:

(1) *Failure of existential generalization*, i.e., the non-existential implication or independence from existence. This criterium defines that a sentence is intentional if the content of the relative clause does not imply existence, as in the case of 'John believes that dragons exist'. According to Chisholm this amounts to Brentano's idea of 'intentional inexistence' of the intentional object, interpreting ipso facto the prefix *in-* of *inexistence* as a negative a not

as a locative, as usually held by most interpreters of Brentano. Hence, the sentence is intentional independently of the existence of dragons. Therefore, intentionality is a peculiar kind of relation since "one can be 'intentionally related' to something which does not exist" (CHISHOLM, 1957, p. 170).

(2) *Failure of substitutivity salva veritate or truth-value independence*, i.e., a sentence is intentional if neither the sentence nor its contradictory sentence implies the truth or falseness of the relative clause. Hence, 'John believes that dragons exist' is not dependent on the truth-value of the clause, since to believe that dragons exist, do not imply the existence of dragons.

(3) *Failure of the substitutivity of coreferential terms*, i.e., indirect reference or opacity of reference (cf. CHISHOLM, 1957, pp. 170-171). In other words, a sentence is intentional, if the truth-value of the relative clause changes, when the name (or description) referred by the relative clause is substituted by another name.

As I discussed in detail elsewhere²⁰, both the first and the second criteria coincide with the usual criteria for defining the intensionality (with-an-s) of sentences, i.e., for defining intensional contexts. But this leads us again to Carnap's distinction between intensionality and extensionality rather than to

¹⁹These criteria had already been presented before by Chisholm (cf. CHISHOLM, 1956, pp. 125-129).

²⁰Cf. NIEL, 2020. It is fair to mention that Chisholm later considered that the failure of existential generalization was an unsatisfactory criterion for intentionality (cf. CHISHOLM, 1967a, p. 203).

Brentano's difference between mental phenomena qua intentional and physical phenomena as non-intentional. And this an ungrounded superposition not only of two quite different philosophical traditions, but more specifically of two conceptual schemas which are quite distinct from each other: the former is a semantic and the latter psychological one.²¹ It is indeed very hard to find any actual connection between these two concepts, without employing many ad hoc arguments.

And there is one further problem for Chisholm which I can only briefly mention here. For him, cognitive activities—introduced by cognitive verbs such as perceiving, seeing, or knowing—are intentional, even though they necessarily imply the existence of their objects and a truth value as well. In other words, the first and second criteria presented above cannot be applied for these cases. Yet Chisholm is convinced that, for instance, perception is intentional. Therefore, only the third criterion can be used for cognitive activities, as it affirms that a sentence is intentional if the name (or description) contained in the relative clause is re-

placed by an extensionally equivalent name (or description), and the truth-value of the sentence changes. The problem is that this criterion merely shows that a cognitive sentence is intentional if: it is formed by a cognitive verb (e.g., knowing), it refers to a certain propositional object²², and the substitution of the name of the object (referred by the propositional clause) by an extensionally equivalent name, changes the truth value of the sentence. This makes sense, but: in which sense is this related at all with the (classical) concept of intentionality?

3. (Chisholm's) Propositionalism vs Non-Propositional Intentionality: Some Final Reflections

As seen throughout this article, despite the explicit attempt to present Brentano's thesis "more exactly" (CHISHOLM, 1957, p. 169), Chisholm (and a whole tradition based on these dogmas) took a completely (both methodological and conceptually) different path from the one taken by Brentano. This is an important

²¹The wrong identification between intentionality (with-a-t) and intensionality (with-an-s) was first pointed out by James Cornman in an excellent article from 1962. He categorically points out that "the class of intentional sentences and the class of intensional sentences are not co-extensive" (CORNMAN, 1962, p. 49). In spite of these early warnings from Cornman, the overlap of these two concepts has been a common coin in analytic philosophy of mind. Only more than 20 years later, in 1983, it was John Searle who turned popular this distinction (*with-a-t* and *with-an-s*) in his book on intentionality—following the line opened by Cornman, but without even mentioning him. As regards this point, Searle correctly asserts that this is "[o]ne of the most pervasive confusions in contemporary [we shall add: analytic] philosophy" (SEARLE, 1983, p. 24). In any case, even when both, Cornman and Searle, did find the 'symptom', none of them got to the bottom and the cause of the problem, namely the superposition of two highly different conceptual schemas which stem from two different philosophical traditions with quite distinctive standpoints.

²²The clause must refer to a *propositional* object for applying the third criterion, since otherwise the relative sentence cannot be considered either true or false, because *terms* (such as names) are neither true nor false.

philosophical shift in the way of understanding the most basic structures of the human mind. Indeed, not only he defines 'intentional inexistence' by using the Russellian concept of 'attitudes', i.e., the attitudes which imply verbs such as desiring, wishing, believing, etc., but he also steadily refers to this concept of 'attitude' as if it were a Brentanian concept (cf. CHISHOLM, 1967b, pp. 4, 7, 11, 15, 20, 22). This is not meaningless move, because it implies the understanding that the intentional content (or object) and even intentionality itself has propositional structure. This leads to a very peculiar characterization of the very concept of intentionality by using logico-linguistic devices. To sum up, intentionality is understood through this propositional-attitude-structure logic and based on verbs such as 'believe'. This makes possible Chisholm's logico-linguistic analyses, which, according to him, allegedly can avoid all potential problems caused by a psychological analysis, as the one presented by Brentano. This was perhaps the motivational background for transforming a mental concept into a semantic sentence.

If we now explicitly contrast Chisholm's model, i.e., intentionality as a propositional attitude that can be presented by the formal sentence $M(p)$, with Brentano's concept, namely, intentionality as the most fundamental mark of mental phenomena which appear in

my internal experience, me may realize how different are the conceptual schemas rooted on two different philosophical traditions, which, as shown, is paradigmatically represented by Brentano and Chisholm. Some of the most noteworthy conceptual differences can be summarized as follows.

1. *The absence of presentations.* For Brentano, the most basic and elemental form of intentionality is that of a presentation (*Vorstellung*), which constitute the basis of all mental phenomena including judgments. But, due to their very nature as *pre*-propositional experiences (or mental phenomena), presentations as such cannot be addressed by means of Chisholm's logico-linguistic schema. In other words, the reduction of intentionality to a propositional level implies that presentations as such are directly dismissed from every logico-linguistic consideration, perhaps for being just an anachronistic remaining of an old 'introspective' psychology. In other words, Brentano's most fundamental basis of intentional, mental life is completely absent of any consideration by this logic of intentional statements. Conversely, for Chisholm, intentionality basically amounts to propositional attitudes with their propositional (or judgmental) structures, i.e., both, the very sentence $M(p)$ and the propositional object related to the main clause are precisely propositions.

2. *Judgments (and correlates of judgments) vs. intentional statements.* The

former point leads us to a further problem: as it is evident, Chisholm analyses are based on propositions, namely, a (relatively) analogical term for Brentano's concept of judgment.²³ But this theoretical decision of focusing on intentional statements as consisting of propositions presents several problems. First, since presentations are not even considered, the objects given by them are simply presupposed without further inquiring. Second, since Brentano's judgments are *existential* judgments, i.e., thethetic assertion of the existence of an object, this places the focus in a quite different dimension than the one chosen by Chisholm for whom an intentional sentence consists of the referential relation of one proposition, i.e., $M(x)$, to another proposition, i.e., (p) .²⁴ Third, there seems to be a further confusion between the correlate of judgments (such as Brentano's thetic positing of an object or even Carl Stumpf's states of affairs) and proposi-

tions. Propositions cannot be considered as an objective correlate of judgments, but at most just a content of a judgment. But to assert that a proposition is the correlate of an intentional statement, it seems to imply that this just an internal game within language, namely, sentences or propositions which refer to other sentences or propositions.²⁵ This form of propositionalism presents quite another fundamental difference with Brentano's descriptive psychology approach.

3. *Two philosophical approaches and two concepts of Intentionality.* As it should be clear by now, unlike Brentano's treatment of intentionality by means of a descriptive psychology, Chisholm defined intentionality by following strictly logico-linguistic criteria. This led to two quite different concepts of intentionality. So, as shown throughout the article, Chisholm attempt of "re-express[ing] Brentano's thesis—or a thesis resembling that of

²³"Chisholm does not speak of judging; he speaks, instead, of believing a proposition (...) Both [judging and believing] are intellectual psychic events, *the acceptance of a proposition*. They seem to be the same thing (...) [T]he term 'judgment' as used traditionally, namely as naming an internal act of assertion, is an older way of expressing what Chisholm expresses with the term 'belief'" (SCHUBERT KALSI, 1997, pp. 654-655). This account not only shows the connection between Brentano's judgment and Chisholm's belief (as an intentional sentence), but it also emphasizes the latter's (unlike the former's) commitment to propositionalism, i.e., to believe (or to accept) something is to believe that X, being X a proposition.

²⁴Chisholm occasionally differentiates his propositionalist position with both Brentano's and Anton Marty's existential accounts of judgments: "What we might call a *thetic affirmation* is a judgment which (...) affirms the existence of certain *entia realia*. An example is the judgment which we would express *propositionally* by saying 'He believes that there are horses'. But this thetic affirmation, according to Brentano's theory, may be put in nonpropositional form by saying 'He accepts horses'" (CHISHOLM, 1976, p. 92, my emphasis). So, not only Chisholm reduces judgments to a third-person formulation, but he also turns the '*something*' of a mere existential recognition (i.e., an *ens reale*) into another propositional formulation.

²⁵This might be understood as a confusion between propositions and the correlates of judgments (as Anton Marty's *Urteilsinhalt*, or, *mutatis mutandis*, Carl Stumpf's *Sachverhalt*, or Alexius Meinong's *Objektive*). This is not an uncommon confusion in analytic philosophy, as expressed, for instance, by John Searle, since, for instance, his example that 'a dog seeing that it's raining' is clearly something not linguistic is correct, but he denies the fact this is *something non-propositional* either (cf. SEARLE, 2018, p. 263). A dog seeing that it is raining is an objective situation, at most a state of affairs or a fact (which is a more usual analytic concept), but not a proposition. Only in a strange analogical sense we can understand that propositions amount to the correlates of judgments.

Brentano” (CHISHOLM, 1957, p. 172) is actually, in the background, a much deeper decision of committing to a logico-linguistic model, based on the philosophical tradition inaugurated by Bertrand Russell among others.²⁶ Not quite unexpectedly, this move necessarily leads to a clear break with Brentano’s philosophical way of addressing and understanding mental phenomena, and, based on this, to a break with his concept of intentionality as well, even when many still see that there is a continuation between Brentano and Chisholm.

Of course, Chisholm’s attempt might be a highly original one, made possible by the methodological ‘tools’ of the new analytic philosophy and its logico-linguistic analyses. But this move had (and still has) several meaningful (both historical and conceptual) consequences. First, from a historical perspective, this is straightforward rupture with most (or at least the most important) aspects of Brentano’s position. Second, this implies not only a methodological but also a philosophical commitment to a certain way of addressing and understanding the mind and reality in general, which can certainly be considered a commitment to a metaphysical way

of seeing the world. Third, this was the inaugural landmark which sowed the seeds of the main conceptual features in the way of conceptualizing intentionality by most analytic philosophers which came afterwards; and this is perhaps the most important issue, as it introduces a very limited way of understanding intentionality, which wrongly depicts the sense of the original concept. Indeed, Chisholm’s starting point was the (sometimes unaware) unavoidable landmark upon which the mainstream understanding of intentionality in analytic philosophy was founded; a tendency based on the elimination of every reference to a first-person experience, on the consideration of this experience from an external and linguistic position, and on the reduction of the experience of an object to a certain complex of propositional structures, hence, by transforming the very ‘intentional object’ into a proposition.

Roderick Chisholm was the founder of a new tradition. He was the first of a large number of analytic philosophers who assumed the methodological (and even metaphysical) decision of committing to a philosophical perspective that reduces reality to that which is analyzable in terms of a logical language,

²⁶This thesis I present was in some sense anticipated in the past—of course, based on a positive assessment quite different from my critical approach—by Jaegwon Kim, who was quite close to Chisholm’s philosophy. According to Kim, Chisholm defended “the crucial claim that the notion of an ‘intentional sentence’ can be defined *in terms of logico-linguistic concepts alone, without recourse to any mentalistic, or intentional, terms*. This is tantamount to the claim (...) highly provocative, that *the notion of mentality is at bottom a logico-linguistic one*, and that there is no need to invoke such potentially problematic concepts as subjectivity and absolute epistemic certainty in characterizing the mental (...) [This was possible by means of] the application of the newly available philosophical tools of logic and linguistic analysis” (KIM, 1997, p. 361; my emphasis).

in order to introduce a completely new concept of intentionality. Only very recently emerged some critical voices in the analytical world putting into question this very understanding of intentionality in terms of propositional attitudes, as expressed, among others, by Michelle Montague and Tim Crane.²⁷ In a very recent collective publication from 2018, edited by Alex Grzankowski and Michelle Montague, it is argued in favor of a theory of a non-propositional intentionality, moving away from the mainstream tendency in analytic philosophy. This new approach is based on the conviction that “[p]ropositionalism has been so pervasive that ‘intentional attitude’ and ‘propositional attitude’ have come to be used interchangeably” (GRZANKOWSKI; MONTAGUE, 2018, p. 1). This is a remarkable contribution which might lead to reduce the gap between analytic and ‘continental’

philosophy. Yet many questions—all of which I cannot present here—still remain open. Some are more general, as the question, for instance, whether the debate between propositionalism vs objectualism can be related, respectively, to the very nature and method of analytic philosophy, on the one hand, and to Brentano’s philosophy (and the phenomenological school), on the other hand. Some other questions are more specific, such as whether objectualism as such does not imply a necessary reference to presentations (*Vorstellungen*). In any case, this is at least the sign of a newborn critical stance towards a tradition first inaugurated by Chisholm, which might even be an important step towards bringing together different reflections coming from both the Rhine and the Danube, using the famous and accurate metaphor from Michael Dummett.

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²⁷Cf. MONTAGUE, 2007 and CRANE, 2013, Chap. 5.2. Tim Crane presents an account of intentionality which seems to be removed from this logico-linguistic burden. Some also consider that John Searle also moved away from propositionalism, ever since he published his famous book on intentionality in 1983. This may be plausible up to a certain point, but there are several elements in his theory of intentionality—which I cannot address here—that still show some remaining ‘linguistic commitments’ (cf. SEARLE, 1983).

²⁸I first give the year of the original publication (depending on the edition under consideration), and then I provide in parentheses the year of the edition used for the current article.

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