Intentional Directedness and Immanent Content: Aristotle and Brentano on Intentionality

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ABSTRACT: This paper will investigate the roots of intentionality in Aristotle's theory of perception and assess the accuracy of Brentano's proposed location of intentionality in Aristotle. When introducing intentionality into contemporary philosophy, Brentano attributed it to Aristotle, whose theory of psychology he believed to reveal the characteristics of intentional inexistence. After setting up a working definition of intentionality that stresses such features as immanent content and intentional directedness, I will then clarify Aristotle's theory of perception with regard to these two characteristics. I draw the conclusion that we can only find the roots of immanent content in Aristotle's perceptual theory. For him, directedness moves from the sensible object to the sensitive soul, and thus it does not correspond to what contemporary philosophers define as intentional directedness.

IN *PSYCHOLOGY FROM AN EMPIRICAL STANDPOINT*, Brentano introduces the idea of intentionality into modern philosophy of mind. There he sets up "intentional inexistence" as a basic characteristic of mental phenomena. By this phrase he means that it is a specific characteristic of mental phenomena to refer to the intended object that is immanent or inexistent in the mental state. After Brentano intentionality became a central topic in phenomenology, analytic philosophy, and philosophy of mind. My purpose is to investigate the sense in which we can say that the roots of intentionality can be found in Aristotle's theory of perception. To do this I will first set up a working definition of intentionality and then consider whether both of these characteristics of intentionality are revealed in Aristotle's theory or not. Additionally, I will offer a brief comparison between Aristotle and Brentano on intentionality.

Brentano's notion of intentional inexistence applies to all mental phenomena, including perception, thinking, memory, and desire. In this paper I focus primarily on his investigation into the roots of intentionality in Aristotle's account of perception. I will provide a comparison between Brentano and Aristotle on intentionality in the field of perception. One may treat the perceptual part separately from other cognitive phenomena since Brentano locates the foundations of intentionality in Aristotle's theory of perception when he states that the sensed object is in the sensing subject.[1]

[1]Franz Brentano, *Psychology from An Empirical Standpoint*, trans. Antos C. Rancurello, D. B. Terrell, and Linda L. McAlister (London UK: Routledge, 2009), p. 67, hereafter abbreviated as PES.

International Philosophical Quarterly Vol. 60, No.1, Issue 237 (March 2020) pp. 23–36
doi: 10.5840/ipq202013144

1. A WORKING DEFINITION OF INTENTIONALITY

To set up a general definition of intentionality, we return to Brentano to see how it is first defined. The widely quoted paragraph about Brentano's description of "intentional inexistence" reads as follows:

> Every mental phenomenon is characterized by what the Scholastics of the Middle Ages called the intentional (or mental) inexistence of an object, and what we might call, though not wholly unambiguously, reference to a content, direction towards an object (which is not to be understood here as meaning a thing) or immanent objectivity. Every mental phenomenon includes something as object within itself, although they do not all do so in the same way. In presentation, something is presented, in judgment something is affirmed or denied, in love loved, in hate hated, in desire desired and so on.[2]

Intentional inexistence is characteristic exclusively of mental phenomena. No physical phenomenon exhibits anything like it. We can, therefore, define mental phenomena by saying that they are the phenomena that contain an object intentionally within themselves.

This paragraph implies that "intentional inexistence" is to be interpreted as carrying two senses, the inexistence of the intended object and a directedness towards the immanent object.[3] The characteristic of intentional inexistence is regarded as belonging to all mental activities. For instance, according to Brentano, whenever we are undergoing sensory impressions or any other mental acts, there will be a specific immanent object to which our cognitions will be attending, such as the cases of seeing a bird, desiring a bottle of water, imaging an unicorn, and so on, in which a perceived bird, a desired bottle of water, and the imagined unicorn are the intentional objects. It would be errant to say that I am perceiving or thinking when nothing is being perceived or thought.

It turns out that the insistence of the "object-like-immanence" inevitably tends to implications of a relational mode constituted between mental acts and the immanent objects.[4] But this means that Brentano needs to envision some sort of barrier between mental activity and the external world. A tendency towards idealist dogmatism seems to be inevitable, or as Dale Jacquette called it, an epistemic idealism.[5] There would, on this view, be a barrier between actual things and our interpretations of the things of the external world because the immediate objects of our mental acts are phenomena whose existence is constituted by us and thus may have no correlation with the external world. Since there is a direct relation between the mental act

[2]PES 68.

[3]At the first stage (in the 1874 edition of PES) Brentano pays attention primarily to the immanence or inexistence of the intentional object in the psychic activity. But in the 1911 edition of PES he abandons "inexistence" and emphasizes a reference to a real thing (not an immanent object).

[4]Brentano depicts the immanent object as just an appearance or phenomenon. It is thus not difficult for him to embrace the view that a non-existent object (the unicorn) is a mental existence.

[5]Dale Jacquette, "Brentano's Concept of Intentionality" in *The Cambridge Companion to Brentano*, ed. Dale Jacquette (Cambridge UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004).

and the immanent object, the external object or the external world will always be secondarily cognized, if cognized at all, on this reading of Brentano's view.

Furthermore, it seems that there is a danger of doubling the objects that we intend by the need to grant a counterpart in the psychic realm. These difficulties will give rise to such questions as what the ontological status of the intentional object is, what we are really concerned about, and what the difference is between immanent object and external object.

Responding to such critiques, Brentano rectified his early formulation and claimed: "I am no longer of the opinion that a mental relation can have something other than a real thing as its object."[6] There he emphasizes that a mental act can only be directed to a particular individual thing, not a universal, a species, a genus, state of affairs, or values.[7] According to McAlister,

> Brentano later acknowledged that the way he attempted to describe consciousness here, adhering to the Aristotelian tradition that asserts "the mental inexistence of the object," was imperfect. The so-called "inexistence of the object," the immanent objectivity, is not to be interp[8]reted as a mode of being that the thing has in consciousness, but as an imprecise description of the fact that I have something (a thing, real entity, substance) as an object, am mentally concerned with it, refer to it.

More accurately in this later formulation then, intentionality is "the reference to an object."

There are several approaches to the interpretation of intentionality in contemporary philosophy. One is to interpret intentionality as the capacity of a mental state or act to be directed to (refer to) something. This feature of intentionality, that is, directedness, aboutness or of-ness, seems to be generally accepted.[9] As Dermot Moran points out, many mental states have a property called "directedness" or "aboutness." Even "though there is no agreement on the terminology, there is a general recognition that mental states are directed towards, invoke, or refer to something beyond or transcendent to the subjective, phenomenal experience of the state itself."[10]

[6]In the new Foreword to the 1911 edition of *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*.

[7]Linda McAlister, "Chisholm and Brentano on Intentionality," *Review of Metaphysics* 28 (1974): 331.

[8]McAlister's comment in the footnote to *PES* (2009), p. 68.

[9]There is not a rigid notion of intentionality, and scholars try to comprehend it from different angles. For example, in "The Intentional Structure of Consciousness" in *Consciousness: New Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. A. Jokic and Q. Smith (Oxford UK: Oxford Univ. Press, 2003), Tim Crane interprets it as characterized by directedness and aspectual shape, and in his opinion, intentional states involve presentations of intentional objects with aspectual shape. See Deborah L. Black, "Intentionality in Medieval Arabic Philosophy," *Quaestio* 10 (2010): 65–81. Black focuses on three common proponents of intentionality: object-directedness, consciousness of mental existence, and knowledge of non-existents. See Charles Siewert, "Consciousness and Intentionality" in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2017), ed. Edward N. Zalta, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2017/entries/consciousness-intentionality/. Siewerth takes it as directedness/aboutness/of-ness; conditions of satisfication; having content; Dale Jacquette defines that to say thought is intentional is to say that it intends or is about something, that it aims at or is directed upon an intended object, thus intentionality is the aboutness of thought, the relation whereby a psychological state intends or refers to an intended object; etc., and many others.

[10]Dermot Moran, "Intentionality: Some Lessons from the History of the Problem from Brentano to the Present," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 21 (2013): 317–58.

It is worth noting, however, that referring merely to "directedness, aboutness, or of-ness" as intentionality, without any further clarification, is very ambiguous. It seems to me that these terms could create different and quite distinct implications. On the one hand, "directedness" implies a strong relational mode between mental states and something else, such as something existing outside of psychic life, but it can also imply a relation between a mental state and what Brentano called an immanent object.

Neither of these two relational formulations seem helpful in generalizing a concept of intentionality. One variety might be called an external-object theory. By contrast, the cases in which the mental act is directing attention to the immanent object might be called inner-object theory. This latter claim has a popular tradition lying behind it: idealism. Brentano took this approach early in his thinking.

But there are problems with both of these two positions: the external-object theory confronts the problem of non-existing objects and the internal-object theory has the doubling-object problem and the raising of barriers between the psychic world and the external world. Despite these imperfections, we see that the characteristic of "directing" and of actively "referring" is endemic to how intentionality has been understood in theoretically, and this consistency can thus be taken to lie at the root of the theory. I would therefore cautiously adopt this characteristic of "directedness" or "reference" while abandoning both the external-object and the inner-object interpretation. I shall emphasize intentional directedness as a mind-directed act referring to something else.[11] This formulation stresses the active power of mental act.

On the other hand, "aboutness" or "of-ness" can be broadly interpreted as a mental state's being about or of something in general. In my view, this approach emphasizes the content of a mental state. What especially characterizes this terminology is its non-relationality. It enables the mental state to be about or of an object by virtue of the immanent content, even a non-existing object, while avoiding the challenge that the relational mode has when directed to a non-existing object. In addition, the "aboutness" or "of-ness" of something is in one sense subject-dependent, which means that different subjects can have quite different mental content with regard to the same object.

Regarding the view that interprets intentionality as a mental state merely having content, I take "immanent content" to be something that is especially composed or formed in the psychological life. The immanent content is usually described as representational or informational content. It is composed in our mind on the basis of the particular situation or object or event that we care about. It can also be interpreted as answering to the question of "what are you thinking about." The attempt then to turn to "immanent content" is a strategy that one may follow to avoid controversies

[11]For Tim Crane, it is a group of unspecific objects such as ordinary objects, properties, events or states of affairs. For Pierre Jacob, it refers to things, properties and states of affairs. See Jacob Pierre, "Intentionality," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2014), ed. Edward N. Zalta, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/ win2014/entries/intentionality/. For Dermot Moran, it is something beyond or transcendent to the subjective, phenomenal experience of the state itself. Deborah Black takes it as objects distinct from the perceiver.

that the relational mode of intentionality introduces. We are aware of the object by virtue of the immanent content, and it is this peculiar content that makes our act intentional. The content approach is also taken by such analytic philosophers as Russell and Frege when they focus on the representational or informational content.[12] In my view, the terminology of "aboutness" and "of-ness" can accommodate this approach.

The two basic characteristics of intentionality are intentional directedness and immanent content. To generalize, intentional directedness implies a state/act's directedness or reference to the intentional object. Immanent content refers to the mental content in a conscious state/act that is about an object or state of affairs.

With this distinction in hand, my next step is to investigate Aristotle's theory of perception with two aims, first, to probe whether there are or are not implications about the general definition of intentionality I have put forward here in Aristotle's perceptual theory, and second to see how it illuminates Brentano's early and original formulation of intentional inexistence.

2. THE ROOTS OF DIRECTEDNESS

There are several components of perception in Aristotle's theory: the sensible object, the medium, and the sense organ. The sensible object, which is composed of matter and form, is in his view the "agent" of a perceptual experience because its existence initiates a perceptual experience and stimulates the passive sense organ. The medium works as the transmission channel, without which the form of the object cannot be transmitted. The sense organ is our peripheral bodily organ that has the capacity of sensation. The activity of perception occurs when the present object stimulates the corresponding sense organ by transmitting its form through a medium to the sense organ, resulting in the reception of the sensible form, which can be interpreted as what defines the sensible object or the core qualities or properties of the object. From this general description of perception, we get a sense that the directionality of perception runs from the perceptible object to the perceiving soul. I will now flesh out this intuition.

Setting out to explicate sensuous activity, Aristotle articulates his perspective by raising this question: "Why do we not perceive the senses themselves, or why without the stimulation of external objects do they not produce sensation?"[13] He replies that sensation is passive and potential, and can only be effected by the active agent: "It is clear that what is sensitive is so only potentially, not actually. The power of sense is parallel to what is combustible, for that never ignites itself spontaneously, but requires an agent which has the power of starting ignition."[14]

For Aristotle, sensation is held to be a qualitative alteration,[15] which implies that there must be a mover that affects the motion/alternation, and such a mover

[12]For more, see Siewert, "Consciousness and Intentionality."

[13]*DA* 417a3–4. All citations from Aristotle are taken from *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1984).

[14]*DA* 417a6–417a8.

[15]*DA* 415b25.

will be the active agent that ignites the passive sense. As a mover, either it contains the origin of motion or it is the last agent prior to the patient.[16] The sensible form's motivation for motion is instantiated in Aristotle's clarification of singular sense. For instance, he writes: "every color has in it the power to set in movement what is actually transparent; that power constitutes its very nature."[17] And again, "What has the power of producing sound is what has the power of setting in motion a single mass of air which is continuous up to the organ of hearing."[18] It can be reasonably inferred that the power of the sensible form to initiate movement lies in its own innate nature. So, it should be noted that the origin of motion/the mover as well as the active power in sensation are attributed by Aristotle to the sensible form.

In addition to the active initiation of the sensible object in sensory activity, the spatial priority of the perceptible is also addressed in the *Categories*, in a passage which I think best reveals the prerequisites of perception:

> The perceptible seems to be prior to perception. For the destruction of the perceptible carries perception to destruction, but perception does not carry the perceptible to destruction. For the perceptions are to do with body and in body, and if the perceptible is destroyed, body too is destroyed, and if there is not body, perception too is destroyed; hence the perceptible carries perception to destruction. But perception does not carry the perceptible to destruction.[19]

The external condition of perception is illustrated here by showing the perceptible as an independent being or entity that precedes perceptual activity and directionally accounts for perception. The presence of the perceptible is regarded by Aristotle to be temporally and existentially the first condition of perception. In the sequence of time, the perceptible exists before perception can happen. Even with no perceiving soul, the perceptible still has its own independent being. This is shown by the contrapositive circumstance, namely, when the perceptible thing is destroyed, the possibility of its perception is destroyed with it, and obviously the perceptible is not destroyed by perception. Perception does not happen without the perceptible, while the perceptible can always exist regardless of perception. However, when there is no perceptual activity, the perceptible is just the perceptible in potentiality.

Now both ends, so to speak, of sensation have been elucidated. On the one hand, what is sensitive is depicted as passive and potential. On the other hand, the sensible object is described as initiative and active, though also potential as a perceptible object. The particular formulation of potentiality/actuality constitutes one basic explanation for sensation. Potentiality means the possibility for sensations to take place, though these are not realized yet in the absence of a sensible object. Actuality is a state in which what is sensitive has fulfilled that potentiality, or when the capacity of sense takes effect. That is to say: potentiality is the senses' power to see or

[16]*GC* 324a25.
[17]*DA* 418b1.
[18]*DA* 420a6.
[19]Cat. 7b35–8a4.

hear, while actuality is a realized state when the sense is actually seeing or hearing. The change of sense from the potential state to its actual state is not autonomous because the potential sense needs to be activated. This explains why the occurrence of sensation requires the sensible object, which is active in perceptual activity.

Therefore, perception is in the state of potentiality until it confronts the perceptible. Even though the perceptible is also potential before it contacts the perceptual soul, but because it possesses the innate active nature to initiate motion, it is the perceptible that acts on the perceiving soul in their encounter, and then they become actualized at the same time. During this event the perceptible as perceptible becomes actualized because of the encounter with the percipient soul, while the percipient soul becomes actualized because it receives the perceptible form from the active sensible object. Otherwise the perceiving soul will persist only in its potential state.[20]

To summarize, for Aristotle, the complete occurrence of perception should consider both the external and inner conditions: the external condition temporally and causally requires the prior presence of the perceptible. Its presence can be interpreted as a spatial encounter with the percipient soul.[21] For example, the visual sensation of a tree can only occur if a tree appears in the field of vision. If there is no tree within the field of vision, additional conditions should be set so as to make the encounter between eyes and tree possible. Perception is best interpreted by recourse to the formulation of potentiality/actuality. Before the encounter happens, both the percipient soul and the perceptible are in their potential states, but once the external condition is satisfied, both of these two potential states become actualized because of the innate nature of the perceiving soul and the perceptible object.

Up to now, it is at least clear that the initiative power of perception lies not within the perceptual soul but in the perceptible. This is not what a general definition of intentional directedness means. For Aristotle, perception starts when the perceptible is present and works as the initiating agent. The initiative/active power of the sensible object derives from its form, which acts as the efficient cause for setting in motion the transmission of its perceptible form through a medium which is the next agent that directly acts on the sense organ. It is therefore here that the roots of directedness are to be found in Aristotle's theory of perception, and it is not in intentional directedness, because intentional directedness should be driven by the subject's perceiving soul. So conservatively speaking, Aristotle does not make anything equivalent to the notion of intentional directedness in his theory of perception.

[20]The fact that the occurrence of sensation requires the encounter between the percipient soul and the perceptible is also mentioned by Theodore Tracy, who identifies two conditions: (1) there is contact between agent and patient; (2) the agent and the patient are opposites. See Theodore James Tracy. *Physiological Theory and the Doctrine of the Mean in* Plato and Aristotle (Chicago IL: Loyola Univ. Press, 1969).

[21]The necessity of the encounter between the percipient soul and the perceptible can also be seen from Ursula Coope, "Aristotle's Account of Agency Phys. III.3," *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 20 (2005): 201–21, and Daryl M. Tress's "Commentary on Coope," pp. 222–27.

3. THE ROOTS OF IMMANENT CONTENT

I have explained the modern notion of immanent content as the "aboutness" or "ofness" of the particular psychic object. Systematically speaking, to say that P is an immanent content is to say that (1) P is possessed by a conscious subject S; (2) P is something S itself constitutes when S is concerned with a particular P′; (3) P is the content about or of P′. Anything that could be reasonably called immanent content in Aristotle's theory of perception can be found by virtue of a few formulations. For Aristotle, first, the forms that constitute the immanent content are received from the sensible object without possessing matter. Second, what is perceiving is identical with the perceptible object in actuality. Third, this is accompanied with perceptual awareness.

"Receiving form without matter" is a basic and fundamental principle of cognition on Aristotle's account. According to Aristotle, "about all perception, we can say that a sense is what has the power of receiving into itself the sensible forms of things without the matter."[22] That is to say, what leaves an impression on the sense organ is just the sensible form, but not the material substance of the thing perceived. The reception of the sensible form marks that the cognitive subject gets defined by the *logos* of the sensible object[23] and exemplifies the information coming from outside, given that "the mover will always transmit a form, either a 'this' or such or so much, which, when it moves, will be the principle and cause of the motion."[24] What is percipient is potential to be perceiving and has the capacity to receive the perceptible form. In the perceptual activity of receiving form without matter, the potential perceptual soul becomes actualized and the sense organ suffers a qualitative alteration by the sensible form. By virtue of the qualitative alteration, the sensory state is prepared with the sensory content about that particular sensible object, thus getting defined by the form of that sensible object. In actualization, what appears to the sensitive soul is not an isolated sensible quality or property, but a new perceptual state or content that is of the received sensible quality or property.[25] Indeed, it is where the notion of "aboutness" or "intentional content" has its roots

Brentano's proposal of intentional inexistence is rooted in Aristotle's comment that "the sensed object, as such, is in the sensing subject." Brentano regards what is immanent as the intended object. However, can the received sensible form be re-

[22]*DA* 424a17–18.

[23]The proposal of the form as *logos* is supposed by Hicks, who said that "such a form is properly called a *logos* because it alone can be rationally defined or (in other words) is the content of the definition" (p. 418). Meanwhile, he proposed that it is also a *dynamis*, which represents what a thing is good for, or is able to effect or be (p. 418). See R. D. Hicks, ed., Aristotle, *De Anima*.

[24]*Phys*. 202a8–10.

[25]This can be seen by answering the question about what you are perceiving. When we answer, we are actually depicting a kind of perceptual content that tells "about" this perceptual object. The reason why I say the perceptual state or content is of the received sensible quality or property, can be referred to *DA* 418a3–6, where it is described that perception is in some way the perceptible things. However, the perceptual soul is not the thing itself, but rather a collection of sensible forms, like the hand is a tool of tools. Moreover, nothing exists apart from the sensible information, even the intelligible form should be picked out in abstraction from the sensible information. It implies that what is stored in us is the much more abundant sensible content.

garded as an immanent object? I am reluctant to say so, considering that in sensing activity, what is provided is actually the affection caused by the sensible form. The affection in sensation is the actualization of the potential state, with the potential sensing subject becoming actualized and assimilated with the object in activity, and the sense organ suffers a qualitative change.[26] In *The psychology of Aristotle*, Brentano adopts a spiritual interpretation of the alteration in sensation and depicts the sensible form existing objectively as the cognized object in the subject.[27] From this perspective, we can better understand why Brentano refers intentional inexistence to Aristotle. I agree with him that there is psychic immanence in sense perception, but as to the details about this psychic immanence, it is not easy to accept that the received sensible form is an intended object.[28]

Furthermore, Aristotle's epistemology derives from his ontological framework. It is not appropriate to pick up one independent principle of perception as articulated in Aristotle and regards it as fundamental on its own without considering the comprehensive ontological background that Aristotle offers. As for this specific case, it is true that, for Aristotle, through the reception of the sensible form we get a corresponding alteration in sensation. But before applying this principle to serve Brentano's ambitious goal of proposing intentional inexistence so as to set forth the distinction between mental phenomena and physical phenomena, we had better survey broadly how this principle works in Aristotle, and ask ourselves whether any other concomitant principles play a role in Aristotle's theory of perception as well. In my view, the pure principle of "receiving form without matter" is not enough to interpret how perception proceeds for Aristotle, let alone to adopt it in an isolated fashion for another project. As Mark Eli Kalderon writes, "sheer receptivity is insufficient for sensory presentation. It requires, as well, the assimilation of the sensory object."[29] I would like to claim that it is the three principles ("receiving form without matter," "the assimilation of the percipient sense to the perceptual object," and "the unity of senses underlying perceptual awareness and perceptual discrimination") that work together in contributing to the formation of perception and only together

[26]A comprehensive elaboration of the alteration in sensation is in my dissertation "The roots of intentionality in Aristotle's psychology."

[27]"But we do not sense the cold insofar as we become cold; otherwise plants and inorganic bodies would also sense. Rather, we sense the cold insofar as the cold exists objectively, i.e., as cognized object within us, hence insofar as we take in the cold without being ourselves its physical subject" (*The Psychology of Aristotle*, pp. 54–55). Brentano also addresses that the sensing body feels something warm because it has a warmth objectively within itself. "Whereas, a warm object, for instance a warm cup, has warmth physically, materially within itself" (p. 54). See Brentano, *The Psychology of Aristotle*, trans. R. George (Berkeley CA: Univ. of California Press, 1977).

[28]When it comes to the intended object, it at least implies that there is a mentally active subject that is intended for this object. However, the perceiving soul is not a mentally active subject. Besides, from my elaboration of "receiving form without matter," I would like to elaborate that what the perceiving soul receives is the information coming from the sensible object, which constitute a new sensing state or content, but it is not correct to say that the sensible form is the intended object.

[29]See Mark Eli Kalderon, *Form Without Matter: Empedocles and Aristotle on Color Perception* (Oxford UK: Oxford Univ. Press, 2015), p. 172.

serve as the roots of immanent content in perception. Brentano spells out the latter two points in *The Psychology of Aristotle*.[30]

The assimilation between what is percipient and the perceptible object in actuality is addressed by Aristotle in this way:

> What has the power of sensation is potentially like what the perceived object is actually; that is, while at the beginning of the process of its being acted upon the two interacting factors are dissimilar, at the end the one acted upon is assimilated to the other and is identical in quality with it.[31]

> The activity of the sensible object and that of the percipient sense is one and the same activity, and yet the distinction between their being remains. Take as illustration actual sound and actual hearing: a man may have hearing and yet not be hearing, and that which has a sound is not always sounding. But when that which can hear is actively hearing and which can sound is sounding, then the actual hearing and the actual sound are merged in one (these one might call respectively hearkening and sounding).[32]

The claim that, even though what is sensitive and the sensible are joined in one activity and actualization, their respective beings are different is crucial. Take the case of learning and teaching, hearing and sounding as examples. It implies that the two distinct agents share one and the same activity. That is to say, the two agents are inalienable from each other in accomplishing an activity. Without a learner, teaching is nonsense; without sounding, there is nothing to hear. One and same activity provides a platform for these two agents to function. An identical assimilation that is formulated between what perceives and the external agent is what enables us to avoid the error of making subjective what is objective. Most importantly, it spells out that what is percipient and the perceptible object are in that sense identical, rather than involved in a relation directed from the perceptual soul to the perceptible object.

The process of perceptual awareness is first proposed by Aristotle in *De anima* III 2. This text turns our attention to sensuous awareness or reflexivity.[33] Here we encounter the view that one kind of sense can only sense a specific group of sensible qualities, for example, the sense of sight can only sense colors, hearing can only receive the form of sound, taste the flavor, touch the temperature or texture, smell the odor. On this basis, to which sense organ should the capacity of sensing

[30]The depiction of such a unity of senses in Aristotle drives Brentano to say that "there is an inner sense differing from all external senses, of a special sense directed toward the inner movements of the sensitive part itself. It must be this sense that perceives not only what we sense, but also the remaining sensitive operations, for example, sensual desire, and that gives us self-consciousness to the extent to that it belongs to the sensory part." Brentano, *The Psychology of Aristotle*, pp. 63–64. The distinction of inner sense and external sense as well as the sensory-consciousness Brentano attributes to Aristotle foreshadow his description of an immediate conscious experience and "inner perception" for his proposal of empirical psychology.

[31]*DA* 418a3–6.

[32]*DA* 425b26–426a1.

[33]Charles H. Kahn, "Sensation and Consciousness in Aristotle's Psychology," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 48 (1966): 43–81; L. A. Kosman, "Perceiving that We Perceive: On the Soul III.2," *The Philosophical Review* 84 (1975): 499–519. Victor Caston "Aristotle on Consciousness," *Mind* 111 (2002): 751–815.

the sensation itself be attributed? If it is not the previously formulated five single senses but a sixth sense, then this will not only contradict Aristotle's claim that there are only five senses, but also will result in an infinite regress. Hence, the role of sensing the sensation itself must still fall within the purview of the five senses, and this resonates with the explanation that there is no extra sense responsible for common sensibles and incidental sensibles in *De anima* III.1.

To better explain this perceptual capacity, Aristotle explains further that by the sense of sight we sense the color. Meanwhile, by the sense of sight we discriminate darkness from light, even when no sensible object is present.[34] We can infer that sense has two different roles: one is its conventional activity of sensing the specific sensible object that it is capable of sensing; the other is the capacity of discernment or discrimination, even for sensing the sensation itself.

Even though it seems that it is by virtue of the singular sense that we perceive the sensation itself as well as make distinction among sensibles, I would like to probe into an underlying issue. I wish to make two points. First, Aristotle sets forth that there are only five senses and each sense is responsible for one specific group of sensibles, among which there is no sensation of its own sensing apart from the sensation of the sensible object. Second, when Aristotle addresses the issue of distinguishing among different sensibles, he implies that there must be at least two senses. The singular senses can only distinguish sensibles of their own kinds, but cannot distinguish among sensibles of other kinds. Henceforth, he provides the metaphor of the dot, which is the unity of all the five senses. With this metaphor, sense is depicted as a dot with five diffusing lines. Therefore, when we perceive with a specific sense, it appears that it is the specific line that does the exact work, but the common power of discrimination and awareness that are differentially but still generally shared among the five senses cannot be ignored. Without the converging point, discrimination and perceptual awareness is not possible.

In *On Sleep*, Aristotle attributes the role of perceptual awareness to a common power that every sense shares:

> Now, since every sense has something special and also something common; special, as, e.g., seeing is to the sense of sight, hearing to the auditory sense, and so on with the other senses severally; while all are accompanied by a common power, in virtue whereof a person perceives that he sees or hears(for, assuredly, it is not by sight that one sees that he sees; and it is not by taste, or sight, or both together that one discerns, and that sweet things are different from white things, but by a part common to all the organs of sense).[35]

By adopting Kahn's suggestion that *De anima* and *Parva naturalia* are an integrated exposition and thus closely related,[36] we can see that the explanation of the common power of sense can be applied to these issues in *De anima*. This common power

[34]*DA* III.2.425b20–23.

[35]*On Sleep*, 455a14–21.

[36]Charles H. Kahn, "Sensation and Consciousness in Aristotle's Psychology," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 48 (1966): 61.

of sense is not a separate sense. It is what all senses have in common and plainly accompanies each of the five single senses. That is to say, when each single sense works, it not only plays the role of receiving the corresponding sensible object, but also exhibits the capacity of sensing sensation itself as well as discriminating and discerning different sensibles by virtue of the common power of sense. As clarified by *On Sense and Sensible Objects*:

> We must assume also, in the case of the soul, that the faculty of perception in general is in itself numerically one and the same, but different in its being: different, that is to say, in genus as regards some of its objects, in species as regards others. Hence too, we may conclude that one can perceive numerically different objects simultaneously with a faculty which is numerically one and the same, but not the same in its account."[37]

There are then several functions of the perceptual faculty. One is to perceive the perceptual object. For example, when I am looking at a red apple, my sense organ is acted on by the redness and there is a qualitative alteration such that my eye apparatus is affected by the redness. Another is perceptual awareness. It is what the various senses share by virtue of the common sensibility behind it. The other is perceptual discrimination, it is enforced by the unity of senses. The three functions are different in their beings but they all belong to the one and same faculty of perception. To generalize, the perceptual faculty is able to perceive the ongoing sensible activity and acquire an awareness of the perceptual experience, as well as discriminates the differences among sensible objects. It is by virtue of the underlying common power of sense that I believe the sensory content composed on the basis of sensory input is perceived and got aware of, discriminated, insofar as the sensory content is to be called immanent content.

A comprehensive picture of Aristotle's perceptual theory can be summarized in this way. By virtue of both efficient and formal causation, the sensible object transforms its sensible form to the percipient sense by acting upon it, which results in a qualitative change in sensation. The relation between what is percipient and the external perceptual object is best interpreted as the result of the assimilation principle, a principle that clarifies that what is percipient and the external perceptual object is an identity between them in activity. The diversity of sensible objects and the complexity of sensible circumstances require a multi-level perceptual faculty, which can perceive both the sensible object and sensation itself as well as discern among different sensibles. In this way it can be said that the percipient sense is aware of the sensible content.

After elaborating the roots of intentionality in Aristotle, we can make a full comparison between Aristotle and Brentano on intentionality. On the one hand, Brentano points out the different kind of being the sensing subject has compared to that of the sensible object in actuality, and he attributes to the immanent object a different mode of being from Aristotle. Meanwhile, we can trace Brentano's phil-

[37] *On Sense and Sensible Objects* 449a13–19.

osophical roots of inner perception can be traced back to Aristotle's formulation of the unity of senses, which is responsible for perceptual discrimination and perceptual awareness as I addressed. Brentano adopts this to depict the first-person access to what appears to mind and the immediate conscious experience in *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*.

On the other hand, we have already clarified the considerable difference between Brentano's notion of "intentional inexistence" and the received form in sensation in Aristotle. In Aristotle, it is the affection in actualization rather than the pure immanence of sensible object as Brentano refers to, even though Brentano is right in pointing out the characteristic of immanence in Aristotle. Brentano's deviation from Aristotle starts from his classification of mental phenomena. Brentano holds a modern conception of mind, which owns both the capacity of perception as well as thought, and projects this conception onto Aristotle's formulation of the soul, thus attributing to perception many features that are not possible in Aristotle, especially the capacity of the mental act to be actively directed to or reference to something as object. A modern depiction of mind portrays it as an active subject in carrying out all kinds of mental activities. But when it comes to Aristotle, the roles ascribed to the modern mind can only at best be attributed to the intellectual soul. Brentano's intentional inexistence implies a reference from the mental act to the immanent object. However, Aristotle does not envision any reference from the perceptual faculty to the received sensible form. We do find Aristotle positing a general notion of perceptual awareness, but for him this only means that we are aware of sensation itself. It is untenable to ascribe to perceptual awareness an active power of intentionality when describing Aristotle's theories.

In his comments on Aristotle's psychology[38] Brentano is fully aware of Aristotle's formulation of perceptual activity, the principle of receiving form without matter, the assimilation of the perceptual soul and its object in actuality, etc. But Brentano adopts an object-interpretation of immanence as to the reception of form without matter and formulates a relation directing from mental act to this immanent object which is otherwise an identity between what is percipient and the perceptible in actuality in Aristotle, thus resulting in the criticism of Brentano as an advocate of psychologism. In my view, Brentano does this on purpose because he has a different framework from Aristotle. Brentano's aim is to set up a distinction between physical phenomena and mental phenomena, and "intentional inexistence," which is mental-dependent and may have no correlation with external reality, and is regarded by him as the particular characteristic of mental phenomena.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, with a general definition of intentionality (intentional directedness and immanent content) in hand, we can see that, for Aristotle, there is only a directedness from the sensible object to the percipient sense, and it is not what modern philosophers of mind call intentional directedness. Regarding the Aristotelian roots

[38]Brentano, *The Psychology of Aristotle*.

of immanent content, we can say that, on the one hand, we receive in the soul the sensible forms so as to specify the sensible content. On the other hand, we are perceptually aware of the sensible content. To get to the roots of immanent content in Aristotle's theory of perception, we can only claim that in perception, the content that is "about" the perceptible object is "within" us by virtue of the assimilation of what is percipient to the perceptible. This inner dimension is known to perceptual awareness, and we call it immanent content. It is this specific formulation of "immanent content" that we can say lies at the roots of intentionality in Aristotle.

It turns out that Brentano's formulation of "intentional inexistence" in his early writings in a sense rightly draws upon Aristotle, and we can certify this point from the explication of "the roots of immanent content." But it must be noted that Brentano does not give an explanation of the correlation between the immanent object and the external world that follows Aristotle's account with any fidelity. Aristotle, for his part, has more to say about the sensible content, and it is especially in virtue of the assimilation of the percipient soul and the sensible object that Aristotle will be free from the relation problems that Brentano faces. Brentano's later position, which claims an active directedness of mental state to the thing has no correlation to Aristotle's theory of perception whatsoever.[39]

[39]I note that a shorter conference version of this paper entitled "The Roots of Intentionality in Aristotle's Perception" was presented at "The World Congress of Philosophy, 2016." My initial conference paper did not address the problem of the comparison between Brentano and Aristotle, and the part about the argument and conclusion about the roots of intentionality in Aristotle's perception has been considerably developed.