



BRENTANO ON PSYCHOLOGISM AND THE BACKGROUND OF PHENOMENOLOGY

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Abstract:

In a text entitled, *On Psychologism (Vom Psychologismus)*, which was only published as an appendix to the second edition of *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint (Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt)* in 1911, Franz Brentano positioned himself about “the controversy about psychologism” (*Psychologismusstreit*) by expressly refusing the label of psychologist given to him by Edmund Husserl, one of the most influential names in what would later become known as the Brentano School. The development of this paper, which aims to analyze the *Psychologismusstreit* from the Brentanian perspective, is divided into three sections. In the first section, I present Brentano’s textual response to Husserl. In the second section, I draw on the recent results of Porta’s investigations into the status of psychological method in philosophy in the nineteenth century and make explicit how this method presented itself in the context of the formulation of the Brentanian theory of knowledge as it was developed between 1874 and 1891 (PES and PD). In the third and final section, taking

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as a basis the assumptions of Brentano's theory of knowledge formulated in his *Descriptive Psychology*, I present two reasons sustained by Brentano to refuse the label of epistemological psychologism supposedly attributed to his theory of knowledge: a) Husserl was mistaken about his definition of truth; b) Husserl was also mistaken about his psychic description of the act of judging and, therefore, was unable to understand the relation between psychology, logic, and the theory of knowledge. I will leave open the question about the plausibility of the Brentanian thesis, given the later formulations and reformulations of Husserlian phenomenology as well as the development of the *Psychologismusstreit*.

Keywords: Psychologism; Descriptive Psychology; Phenomenology; Brentano; Husserl

BRENTANO ACERCA DO PSICOLOGISMO E O BACKGROUND DA FENOMENOLOGIA

Resumo:

Em um texto intitulado *Vom Psychologismus*, que só foi publicado como um apêndice da segunda edição da *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt* em 1911, Franz Brentano posicionou-se sobre a *controvérsia acerca do psicologismo (Psychologismusstreit)*, recusando expressamente o rótulo de psicologista que lhe fora atribuído por Edmund Husserl, um dos nomes mais influentes no que viria a ser conhecido como a Escola de Brentano. O desenvolvimento deste trabalho, que visa analisar a *Psychologismusstreit* exclusivamente a partir da perspectiva brentaniana, está dividido em três seções. Na primeira seção, apresento a resposta textual de Brentano a Husserl. Na segunda seção, eu recorro aos resultados recentes das investigações de Porta sobre o status do método psicológico em filosofia no século XIX e explico como este método se apresentou no contexto da formulação da teoria do conhecimento brentaniana, tal como foi desenvolvida entre 1874 e 1891 (PES e PD). Na terceira e última seção, tomando como base as suposições da teoria do conhecimento de Brentano formuladas em sua *Psicologia descritiva*, apresento duas razões sustentadas por Brentano para recusar o rótulo de psicologismo epistemológico supostamente atribuído a sua teoria do conhecimento: a) Husserl estava equivocado acerca da sua definição de verdade; b) Husserl também estava equivocado acerca da sua descrição psíquica do ato de julgar e, portanto, era incapaz de compreender a relação entre psicologia, lógica e teoria do conhecimento. Deixo aberta a questão sobre a plausibilidade da tese brentaniana, dadas as formulações e reformulações posteriores recorrentes da fenomenologia Husserliana, bem como o desenvolvimento da *Psychologismusstreit*.

Palavras-chave: psicologismo, psicologia descritiva, fenomenologia, Brentano, Husserl

In a short text entitled, “On Psychologism,” which only became public in the Appendix of the second edition of *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* in 1911, Franz Brentano positioned himself regarding “the controversy about psychologism” (*Psychologismusstreit*) by vehemently refuting the label of *psychologist* attributed to him by Edmund Husserl.² Husserl was one of the most influential names in what would later become known as the Brentano School. The development of this presentation, which aims at analyzing the *Psychologismusstreit* exclusively from the Brentanian perspective, is divided into three sections.

In the first section, I present Brentano’s textual response to Husserl in support of the following hypothesis: Brentano interpreted the Husserlian critique against his theory of knowledge, not as a critique of an *ontological psychologism*, but as a critique of a specific type of *epistemological psychologism* which may be referred to as relativism. This hypothesis assumes the thesis defended by Porta (2021, p. 456), who argues that, around 1900, the use of the term ‘psychologism’ in Germany differed from Husserl’s use of the term in the *Logical Investigations*. In this context, *psychologism* would be a tendency—a program or a thesis that, in its *epistemological* version, reduced a given discipline to psychology and, in its *ontological* version, reduced a certain set of entities or phenomena to psychological entities or phenomena. In both versions, the term ‘psychologism’ critically described a mode of “reductionism” which implied both ignorance of some kind of specificity or relativism and denial of objectivity. In the second section, I build on the recent results of Porta’s (2018, 2019, 2021) investigations into the *status of psychological method* in philosophy in the nineteenth century. I make explicit how this method presented itself in the context of the Brentanian theory of knowledge as it was developed between 1874 (PES) and 1891 (PD). This historical exposition of the relation between *psychological method* and *philosophy* allows us to highlight not only the reasons why Brentanian *psychology* could not be conceived as a science independent from *philosophy*, but the philosophical character of the *psychology* that Brentano called *Phänomenologie* or *Descriptive Psychology*. In the third and final section, taking as a basis the assumptions of Brentano’s theory of knowledge in his *Descriptive Psychology*, I present two reasons put forth by Brentano to refuse the label of *epistemological psychologism* attributed to his theory of knowledge. These reasons are: (a) Husserl was mistaken about his definition of truth; and (b) Husserl was mistaken about his psychic description of the act of judging and, therefore, was unable to understand the relation among psychology, logic, and the theory of knowledge. I will leave open the question about the plausibility of the Brentanian thesis, given the later formulations and

² In his letter to Husserl, Brentano states that the suspicion of such an accusation was based on clarifications about the work “Logical Investigations,” which had been the subject of an exchange of letters in 1905. However, Brentano maintains his position, even though Husserl took advantage of another exchange of letters in 1911 to reject the accusation. Brentano does not exonerate Husserl from his reputation as a psychologist, although he suggests that he personally did not consider Husserl to be a psychologist (cf. Husserl, 1994, p. 52).

reformulations of Husserlian phenomenology as well as the development of the *Psychologismusstreit*.

2. BRENTANO ON PSYCHOLOGISM

2.1 The context of the text “On Psychologism”

Brentano’s position in the “controversy about psychologism” (*Psychologismusstreit*), as he defended it in the Appendix to the second edition of *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* (PES) in 1911, was part of a set of clarifications presented in response to the attacks that the first edition of PES (1874) had received. The publication of these clarifications in the form of an Appendix was part of a strategy adopted by Brentano, and that strategy had two objectives. The first objective was to present the innovations and improvements that Brentano had developed for his theory during the thirty years that followed the publication of the first (1874) edition. However, as Brentano himself pointed out, it was necessary to note about such innovations that “the later investigations have not substantially altered the views expressed in it, although they have led to further developments or, ... to improvements on some rather important points” (2009b, p. XXIII). The second objective was to maintain the original form of his work which had first influenced his contemporaries. Taken together, these objectives shed some light on Brentano’s explanation that he was led to follow this procedure by the realization that “many eminent psychologists who had shown great interest in my doctrine, were more inclined to rally to it in its first form, than to follow me in my new lines of thinking” (2009b, p. XXIII). Therefore, although it was of the utmost importance to preserve the text of the first edition in its original form out of respect for the psychologists who took it as a starting point, the set of texts that made up the Appendix to the second (1911) edition explicitly challenged the criticism against the first version of his theory of knowledge. This dual purpose was explicitly stated by Brentano in the following terms:

So I decided to reprint the old text with practically no changes, while at the same time supplementing it with certain observations which are to be found partially in footnotes, but mainly in an Appendix. These observations contain a defense against certain attacks on my doctrine from various sources, and they develop those aspects of my doctrine which, in my own judgement, needed revision. (2009b, p. XXIII)

This dual purpose of the Appendix in the 1911 edition set the stage for the basis of the psychologism rejected by Brentano as well as the defense put forward by Brentano challenging the misconceptions that would have led Husserl to such an interpretation.

2.2 THE TEXT “ON PSYCHOLOGISM”

In “*On Psychologism*,” Brentano said that it was an “accusation” that his theory of knowledge was labeled *psychologism*. Then, he expressed the lack of knowledge shared among the philosophers of his time, resulting from the vagueness and multiplicity of meanings of the term ‘psychologism.’ Using a metaphor, Brentano first said that ‘psychologism’ was “a word which has lately come into use and when it is spoken many a pious philosopher — like many an orthodox Catholic when he hears the term Modernism — crosses himself as though the devil himself were in it” (2009b, p. 238).

Interestingly, it was not Johann Eduard Erdmann (Porta, 2021, p. 467), but Husserl, whom Brentano considered responsible for introducing the term ‘psychologism’ in the German philosophical debate. He said, “during a friendly encounter, I sought an explanation from Husserl, and then, as the opportunity arose, from others who use the newly introduced term by him” (2009b, p. 238; 1971a, p. 180). The set of responses received by Brentano to his request for clarification was systematized as a definition of psychologism: “Psychologism means a theory which contests the general validity of knowledge, a theory according to which beings other than men could have insights which are precisely the opposite of our own” (2009b, p. 238). Defined in these terms, Brentano defended himself by saying, “understood in this sense, I am not only not now an advocate of psychologism, but I have always very firmly rejected and opposed such absurd subjectivism” (2009b, p. 238).

Brentano’s later considerations about the outcome of this friendly conversation showed his disappointment with the fact that he could not dispel the suspicion of psychologism that rested on his theory of knowledge. However, the explanations received would have been sufficient to explain the fragile support for the charges that claimed the existence of a psychologism in his theory of knowledge presented in 1874.

2.3 ONTOLOGICAL PSYCHOLOGISM AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL (ANTI)PSYCHOLOGISM

By 1900 in Germany, as Porta’s thesis states, the use of the term psychologism defined a mode of “reductionism,” assuming as a rule that psychologism implied ignorance of some kind of specificity or relativism and the denial of objectivity. This was exactly the point of Husserl’s “accusation” of the Brentanian theory of knowledge. However, psychologism could be understood from two versions: a) as “a tendency, program, or thesis that epistemologically reduced a given discipline to psychology.”; or b) as “a tendency, program, or thesis that ontologically reduced a given set of entities or phenomena to psychological entities or phenomena” (2021, p. 456). Based on these two versions, it is possible to understand that Brentano’s strategy consisted, first, in identifying elements of *ontological psychologism* in the Husserlian “accusation” and, then, in demanding the recognition of the *epistemological (anti)psychologism* of the structure of his theory of knowledge developed as *Descriptive Psychology*, which had founded *philosophy* on *psychology*, but without this implying the reduction of *philosophy* to psychology.

Precisely for this reason this distinction is fundamental, since it corroborates Brentano's own assertion that Husserl had forgotten his descriptive anti-psychological solution, by wrongly accusing him on the basis of *pseudo-ontological* problems.

LET'S LOOK AT THE DETAILS OF THIS "CONTROVERSY"

According to Brentano, Husserl had claimed that the supposed suppression of the unity of universal truth, which would characterize the psychologism of his theory of knowledge, resulted from absence of the presupposition of a producer of truth. In this way, Brentano understood that the structure of the critique of his theory of knowledge would be as follows. The following definition of "truth as correspondence" is established as universal truth:

- a) Truth consists only in the fact that true judgment corresponds to something outside the spirit (*Geist*), which is one and the same for everyone who judges.
- b) It establishes the extent of the concept of true judgment and excludes negative judgments, modal judgments, etc.:
 - i) In the case of negative judgments as well as judgments that describe something as possible, impossible, past, or future, this something could not, however, be a thing.
- c) It turns out that the Brentanian theory of knowledge does not respect the established criterion of truth:
 - i) Brentanian theory holds as something existing, alongside things, also indeterminate non-things, non-beings (*Nichtsein*), possibilities, impossibilities, past-beings, future-beings, etc.
- d) It is concluded:
 - i) The Brentanian theory of knowledge misses here, and therefore suppresses, the unity of universal truth.

In analyzing the structure of this critique, Brentano recognized that there was a fundamental error in the charge leveled against his theory, namely, *the denial of the exclusivity of correspondence to something outside the spirit*. But it is interesting to note first two points about this "charge" that Brentano recognized as erroneous:³

- a) Brentano acknowledged that the first edition of PES allowed such misinterpretation, since it stated there that he "sets up sentences, which in their conclusions would have to lead to *psychologism*" (1971a, p. 180).

However:

³ The following passage is not fully translated in the 1971 English edition: "I answer that, even if the abolition of the general validity of knowledge would lie in the consequence of that denial, it would still not do to call me a psychologist, since I myself do not draw this conclusion. One could only say, for instance, that I set up sentences which, in their consequences, would have to lead to psychologism." ("Ich antworte, daß, selbst wenn in der Konsequenz jener Leugnung die Aufhebung der Allgemeingültigkeit der Erkenntnis läge, es noch immer nicht anginge, mich als Psychologen zu verschreien, da ich selbst diese Konsequenz nicht ziehe. Man dürfte nur etwa sagen, ich stelle Sätze auf, die in ihren Folgerungen zum Psychologismus führen müßten") (Brentano, 1971a, p. 180).

- b) Brentano also stated that, in the first edition, he did not explicitly point out that the *elimination of the universality of knowledge* was a consequence of the “denial of such exclusivity (of correspondence to something outside the spirit)” (1971a, p. 180).

Taken together, and even if points (a) and (b) were merely circumstantial considerations about the “erroneous accusation,” Brentano felt that these two reasons would be sufficient to absolve him of the charge of psychologism. Therefore, he said, “even if the elimination of the general validity of knowledge were a consequence of such a denial, it still would not do to call me down for being an advocate of psychologism, because I myself do not draw this conclusion. One could only say, for example, that I put forward propositions which, in their consequences, would have to lead to psychologism” (2009, p. 238; 1971, p. 180).

Considering Frechette’s (2013, 2016) analysis of the concept of intentionality revisited, we can claim that many of the psychologistic interpretations of PES (1874) stemmed from the incompleteness of the work. In fact, the Brentanian theory of truth as evidence was not developed in 1874. Its presentation, in the form of a lecture as well as its publication, occurred in 1889, in the context of his elaboration on the papers that made up the book *Descriptive Psychology*.

In his most forceful argument and refutation of the Husserlian “accusation,” Brentano pointed out that his theory of knowledge, founded on *descriptive psychology*, allowed a distinction between the question of law (logical validity) and the question of fact (genetic necessity). Accordingly, his theory of knowledge allowed for a description of the nature of truth as evidence. Still, for Brentano, it was inadmissible to accept that Husserl did not know or had forgotten the foundations of his theory of knowledge:

This by way of defense against the defamatory talk which I can scarcely believe has really come from the lips of one of my own students. In order not to put an even worse interpretation on it, I must assume that this is an indication of an extraordinarily poor memory. I, at least, both in my lectures and my writings, have always very firmly distinguished between lawfulness in the sense of natural necessity and in the sense of the correctness of an activity. Indeed, no one before me and not one after me (Husserl included) has been able to express himself with greater clarity and emphasis on this matter than I have. (Brentano, 2009a, p. 239)

The above quotation is sufficient to present the textual basis of my hypothesis. According to my hypothesis, Brentano interpreted the Husserlian critique of his theory of knowledge as a critique of a specific type of *epistemological psychologism*. I will consequently present, from Brentano’s own theory of truth, the textual corroboration of this hypothesis as well as Brentano’s way of refuting this criticism. However, I will reserve this task for the last part of this paper because its plausibility requires that I first present the function of the *psychological method* in Brentano’s *Phänomenologie* or *Descriptive Psychology*. In other words, I must first present how Brentano restructured the psychological method to ground philosophy in psychology and, thus, to structure his proposal for descriptive psychology.

3. PSYCHOLOGICAL METHOD

Porta's recent investigations (2018, 2019, 2021) into the historical development of psychologism, especially prior to the publication of Husserl's *Logical Investigations*, show that much of the "controversy about psychologism" (*Psychologismusstreit*) resulted from the divergence between various conceptions of the notion of psychological method. In any case, but specifically for the context of Brentano's descriptive psychology, Porta says, "it is conceptually and historic-philosophically more appropriate to understand the notion of *psychological method* in a neutral way, as a thesis that makes *psychology* the fundamental discipline of *philosophy* (and that does not reduce the latter to the former) [emphasis added]" (Porta, 2021, p. 247). In this sense, the notion of *psychological method* is neither to be confused with that of *psychologism* in its epistemological nor in its ontological version.

According to the historical systematization developed by Porta in *Brentano and the Psychological Method*, "what is characteristic of Brentano's relation to the *psychological method* is that, at the same time that he takes up elements of it, he develops them, deepens them and, in short, produces something essentially new" (2018, p. 337). Brentano presents nine fundamental characteristics, which allowed the Brentanian reconstruction of the *psychological method* to structure *philosophy* as *descriptive psychology*. Let us see:

1. Two fundamental theses of Brentanian philosophy were at the basis of the proposals of the "psychological method" since its reception in the Germanic environment.
 - a. Psychology is the basic discipline of philosophy.
 - b. The true method of philosophy is none other than that of natural science.
2. Brentano continues a tradition already underway in the Germanic sphere.

Two points in common with the psychological method:

 - a. The enemy, which in Brentano, certainly extends from speculative idealism to idealism, including the Kantian sort.
 - b. The positive proposal, that is, the founding of philosophy as a science through experience, taking the method of the *Naturwissenschaft* as a model.
3. Not merely the theses, but even their specific mode is Germanic:
 - a. That philosophy must follow the method of *Naturwissenschaft* implies at the same time:
 - i. a reflection on the notion of "empiricism" appropriate to empirical science.
4. In Brentano's conception, the proper and specific method of *Naturwissenschaft*:

- a. is not the mathematical construction,
 - b. but to fit the nature of its object.
- 5. In the case of psychology, this adequacy implies that:
 - a. To be empirical science, this experiment is characteristically descriptive and not inductive.
 - b. Brentano thus adheres to the majority trend of German psychological empiricism, which, since Fries, has differed from English empiricism and its eventual culmination in Mill.
- 6. Germanic empiricism does not understand inductivism as a necessary consequence.
- 7. Brentano's empiricism radicalizes the psychological method by making it an exclusively descriptive procedure. This implies that:
 - a. It not only distinguishes between external and internal perception but bases descriptive analysis on the latter.
 - b. The psychic is now characterized by INTENTIONALITY, its intrinsic property, and no longer by its mode of access.
- 8. *Descriptive psychology* is now understood as *act psychology* (*Aktpsychologie*).
- 9. The presupposition of the "Principle of Immanence" (PI) plays an essential role as the basis of the argument that leads to the grounding of philosophy in psychology.
 - a. PI is the Cartesian-Lockean thesis that the only direct and immediate objects of consciousness are its own representations (*Vorstellungen*, ideas).
 - i. I will deal with PI in the last section when I present the concept of presentation as the basis of the act of judging with evidence.

In light of the nine points presented above, Porta (2018, p. 340) concludes that the book *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* is within the tradition of the psychological method, sharing with it its fundamental objectives and presuppositions. These fundamental objectives and presuppositions include the reorientation of philosophy towards natural science and promoting a new type of empiricism that is typically Germanic, characterized by its non-inductivist tendency, but Brentanianly intentionalist. However, despite this common starting point, which will ultimately become a foundation for philosophy in psychology, the fundamental point is that:

the understanding of psychology itself, no longer defined solely by its introspectionist approach, but by its intentionality and its new correlative understanding of inner perception, presents characteristic differences, with Brentano being the first to link the proposal of the psychological method to a strict and consequently descriptive approach. This approach, which at first bears fruit in the idea of a psychology of the act, will nevertheless continually lead, and through the very division of the analysis of intentionality, to the overcoming of this determination in the sense of a phenomenology of its own, which will integrate into its scope elements that transcend this sphere without, however, falling into the confusions, pointed out by neo-Kantism, in the sense of an overlapping of psychological and epistemological planes. (Porta, 2018, p. 340)

All the points presented from this historical systematization allow us to understand not only the context of Brentano's 1874 work, but also his fundamental assumptions that later became explicit in some of the works that made up his *Descriptive Psychology* (1889–1891). This is the case for point (9), in particular, which deals with the Brentanian reception of the PI. It has been described by Porta (2018) as the point that plays the essential role in the basis of the argument that leads to the grounding of philosophy in psychology. Through the descriptive specificity of its method, it can serve as a touchstone in characterizing the originality of the fundamental theses of the Brentanian theory of knowledge. Let's see.

While it is true that, in assuming the psychological method, Brentano presupposes the PI, that is, the Cartesian-Lockean thesis that the only direct and immediate objects of consciousness are its own representations (*Vorstellungen* or *ideas* in Descartes' sense), it is also true that he does so in a way that is different from his interlocutors. In other words, Brentano embraces the psychological method and, at the same time, reformulates the fundamental concept of the PI presupposed in it. This fundamental concept is the concept of *Vorstellungen* (*ideas*), which in Brentano, is more appropriately expressed as *presentation*.

Presentation, in the Brentanian sense, is the most fundamental class of mental acts perceived immediately as *psychic phenomena*. Its originality requires some clarification, as Boccaccini (2021, pp. 255–256) rightly points out in his analysis of the translation of the term '*Vorstellung*' by '*presentazione*' into Italian.⁴ The clarification of the concept's proper meaning is based on the following four points:

- (i) For Brentano, this class of mental acts is analogous to the simple naming of a thing on the level of language.
 - a. Brentano therefore uses *Vorstellung* to refer to something that manifests itself to consciousness, in the sense of being before the mind:
 - i. in the sense of something that is present, placed in front (*stellen vor*) of consciousness,
 - ii. and not in the sense of being in the mind, that is, an internal state or mental content of the subject or their thought.
- (ii) By *Vorstellung*, Brentano means all mental phenomena in which the object is simply present to us, the object appears without any attitude on our part:
 - a. These are all sensitive presentations, whether simple sensations, but also mnestic or fictional presentations, and noetic or conceptual presentations.
- (iii) Therefore, the elementary and foundational status of *Vorstellung* in Brentano's psychology does not necessarily derive from its sensory origin, but rather, from the fact that it is the first thing in the world:
 - a. firstly, of its function of identifying or *presenting* the object of the mental act (the object of which can be of a non-sensible nature, for example, a mathematical or theological object).

⁴ On this interpretation, see Boccaccini (2019, pp. 356–373).

- b. A *Vorstellung* is therefore not just the *sensible impression* of the classical empiricist tradition.
- (iv) For this reason, the choice of translating *Vorstellung* as *presentazione* (following the corresponding Italian term *presentazione*) is intended to underline the way in which this concept in Brentano represents an act of the mind that is in line with the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition and not a mental representation, a notion closer to the Cartesian-Lockean line of modern philosophy.

Describing a *presentation*,⁵ that is, an *act of presenting*, as well as an *act of judging* or an *act of loving and hating*, were the fundamental results achieved by Brentano. They were characterized as psychic phenomena due to the way in which psychology was constituted as a psychological method, without this implying a reduction of philosophy to psychology. However, the fundamental point here was to recognize that this possibility of describing psychic phenomena, guaranteed by this psychology of the act (*Aktpsychologie*), was not based on the mode of access to such psychic phenomena. Rather, it was based on their fundamental intrinsic property, namely the *intentionality* that constituted them, since this property radicalized *introspectionism* by allowing the description of the immediate apprehension of psychic phenomena by internal perception. From a historical point of view, this thesis was confirmed by Porta based on the differences between the projects of Fries, Beneke, Meyer and Lipps, in addition to the Brentanian project.

Only in Brentano does the psychological method become purely descriptive, something that, despite the empiricism expressed, was never done before in Fries, Beneke, Bona Meyer or Lipps, although in each case for different reasons. All of them are radical “introspectivists” and claim to be based on a specific internal perception that is different from the external, reacting equally against the reduction of psychology to physiology or the replacement of a subjective perspective with an objectivist perspective of any kind. In all of them, however, internal perception is far from being the basis of a purely descriptive analysis. (Porta, 2018, p. 238)

Although the ambiguities of Brentano’s work from 1874 (PES) were the fulcrum of Husserl’s criticism, as Brentano suspected, the historical analysis of Porta presented above corroborates Brentano’s own defense of the objectivity of his theory of knowledge from 1874 (PES). Furthermore, Porta’s historical analysis sheds light on the subsequent reformulations presented by Brentano which aimed to reformulate the ambiguous concepts of his earlier theory of knowledge. In this sense, it is possible to recognize that the mereological description of the constituent parts of the *intentional relation*, characteristic of each of the three types of psychic phenomena (act of presenting, act of judging, act of loving

⁵ The fundamental importance of the term ‘presentation’ for the Brentanian definition of psychic phenomena is evident in the following quote: “But we want to try to give an explanation of psychic phenomena in another and more uniform way. To this end, we have a definition that we have already used, saying that by the name of psychic phenomena we designate presentations, as well as all those phenomena for which presentations form the basis. That we don’t mean here what is presented, but rather the presenting, hardly needs comment. This *presenting* forms the basis not only of judging, but also of desiring, as well as any other psychic act. Nothing can be judged, nothing can be desired, nothing can be hoped for or feared unless it is presented. Thus, the definition given encompasses all the examples of psychic phenomena just presented and, in general, all the phenomena belonging to this field”. (Brentano, 2008a, p. 97).

and hating) was presented by Brentano (around 1889–1891) with a particular purpose. That purpose was to eliminate the aforementioned ambiguities and guarantee the epistemological foundation of his theory through the reaffirmation of the following two points:

- a) the primacy of internal perception over external perception, due to the *straight and oblique* mode of direction and apprehension characteristic of the *intentional relation*.
- b) The philosophically empirical *point of view* of Brentanian psychology, in other words, Brentano's empiricism in its radical form.

Finally, the fundamental reformulation of the PI, as well as its later formulation of the Brentanian concept of presentation, found fertile ground in another characteristic reformulation of empiricism that was conceived by Brentano. Although strongly influenced by Mill, the exclusively descriptive characteristic of the Brentanian psychological method replaced the inductivist pretension of empirical science as well as the associationism that underpinned it. It managed to do so by also reformulating the concept of physical phenomenon that was received from the Kantian tradition. However, it was not a question of formulating a new concept, since Brentano had already incorporated the interpretation of the Comtean concept of *phenomenon*, elaborated in the summer of 1869, into the criteria for defining the method of psychology presented in his PES thesis (1874). In Comte's view, when defending the legitimacy of positive philosophy, phenomenon is not what appears, but the explanation of the facts themselves (*faits*). Therefore, "the explanation of facts, traced back to their actual meaning, is nothing more than establishing the connections (*Verbindung*) between the different, specific phenomena and several general facts, the number of which latter scientific progress always strives to reduce." (Brentano, 2019, p. 10; 2022a, p. 440). Brentano then assumes the Comtean criterion which ensures that, only in this sense, can a simple phenomenon, such as the weight of bodies on the surface of the Earth, be expanded into a general fact and characterized as an explanation of the general phenomena of the universe, as the law of gravitation established by Newton does. In this way, Brentano emphasized:

Above all, as far as the expression phenomenon is concerned, it is not to be understood in our philosopher as it is in Kant. We would be mistaken if we took Comte's *phénomène* to mean a Kantian *φαινόμενον* [*phainomenon*], an appearance behind which the *νοούμενον* [*noumenon*], the thing in itself, is hidden and inaccessible. This may even serve as a sign that by phenomenon Comte often means the same as what the expression "fact" indicates, as, e. g., when he says, "the explanation of the facts (*faits*) is, for the positive thinker, nothing but the establishment of the connection between the different specific phenomena (*phénomènes*) and some general facts (*faits*)." (Brentano, 2019, p. 16; 2022a, p. 445)

Two points stand out from the above quote.

- (a) If the Comtean definition of phenomenon assumed by Brentano showed recognition of the results of differential and integral calculus by preserving for *physical phenomena* the description of a fact, describable in algebraic equations, as particular cases of general facts (that is, laws *derived from* the first equations), then the description of such a phenomenon would make explicit the structure that took the individual case no

longer as an instance of induction, but as an example of a type instead.

- (b) If the description of the *psychic phenomenon of judgment* as a phenomenon that contained within itself a *presentation of a physical phenomenon* (we'll see later), or rather, the mereological description of the constituent parts of the *intentional relation* between the *act of judging* and the *correlate of the act of judging*, were adequate to the nature of the object, then the description of such a phenomenon would make explicit the *intentional mode of the relations* (substitutes for induction) of this same structure between the constituent parts and the whole of the *act of judging* that immediately perceives the evidence of a law.

This is effectively the way Brentano conceives the identity between the methods of the natural sciences and psychology, as announced in his famous *4th Habilitation Thesis*: "*Vera philosophiae methodus nulla alia nisi scientiae naturalis est*" (2017, p. 161).⁶

The above analysis about the *psychological method*, as well as its descriptive criteria characteristic of its anti-psychological orientation, is enough for us to present the description of the concept of self-evident truth, as Brentano considered it to be sufficient to refute the Husserlian criticism leveled against his theory of knowledge.

4. THE THEORETICAL CONTEXT OF THE PSYCHIC DESCRIPTION (PHÄNOMENOLOGIE) OF TRUTH

At this final point in the paper, based on the presuppositions of the Brentanian theory of knowledge presented in the previous section, I analyze the *theoretical-philosophical* context of the *psychic description (Phänomenologie) of the act of judging truth* in which Brentano explained the origin of the concept of *self-evident truth*. This description was presented, in parts, in his communication to the Vienna philosophical community in March 1889. It was entitled, *On the Concept of Truth (Über den Begriff der Wahrheit)*, and it was published as the first chapter of the work *The True and The Evident (Wahrheit und Evidenz: Erkenntnistheoretische Abhandlungen und Briefe)*. Thus, my hypothesis that Brentano refuted the label of psychologism, attributed to his theory of knowledge by Husserl, is supported by the fact that such a *psychic description (Phänomenologie)* offers plausibility for the following two theses:

- a) Husserl was mistaken about the Brentanian definition of truth because he assumed that it was the concept of truth *as correspondence* and therefore based his criticism on the absence of a *truth-maker* in the fundamental form of true judgment described by Brentano's theory of knowledge. However, the Brentanian definition of truth in question, on which his theory of knowledge was based, dealt with the concept of truth *as evidence* and, therefore, the description of the *evident true judgment* consisted of philosophically explaining the judgment itself as a *truth-bearer*.

⁶ Adopting different perspectives of analysis, the following investigations corroborate this description: Curvello, 2021, p. 664; Fisette, 2018, pp. 78, 94; Tănăsescu, 2017, pp. 335, 342–343, 352–353, 358.

b) Husserl was also mistaken about Brentano's psychic description of the *act of judging evident truth* and was therefore unable to understand the relation proposed by Brentano between psychology, logic, and the theory of knowledge.

So, let's look at each of these two theses, which underpin my own hypothesis, starting with (a), since (a) demands an analysis about the nature of this misunderstanding.

4.1 EQUIVOCITY AND MULTIPLICITIES OF BEING SAID TO BE TRUE

The fundamental point of Brentano's refutation of the Husserlian critique was not merely that Husserl had been mistaken about the Brentanian concept of truth, but that Husserl had also failed to recognize the fundamental role that the equivocity of the concept of truth played in the Brentanian theory of knowledge. Brentano understood that the limitation of the Husserlian critique was in *not* realizing that the equivocity of the concept of truth had been its starting point—not an erroneous point of arrival. In addition, as I summarize the results of previous investigations in the following paragraphs (Brito, 2012a, 2018), the Brentanian analysis, developed in his text *On the Concept of Truth* (2009), adopted the classic Aristotelian definition of truth understood as *adaequatio rei et intellectus*. This analysis, which opposed the traditional interpretation of this Aristotelian concept of truth as correspondence, was guided by the definitions, distinctions, and classifications presented by Brentano himself in his doctoral thesis (1862). In his doctoral thesis, he developed an interpretative theory about the *multiple meanings of Being enunciated as true according to Aristotle*. In this way, Brentano continued to maintain in 1889, as he had maintained in 1874 based on Aristotelian presuppositions, that truth and falsity taken in their proper sense were to be found in judgment, whether positive or negative (Brentano, 2009c, p. 4). It is interesting to note, more specifically, that Brentano's analysis was punctual and directly indicated what would be the primary Aristotelian definition of truth, by mentioning and interpreting one of the main passages of *Metaphysics* as follows:

The preceding investigation has shown that Aristotle uses the words "true" and "false" in several senses; hence it will now be important to determine in which of these meanings it is employed when he deals with being in the sense of being true and non-being in the sense of being false. It does not seem difficult to decide this question since, in Met. VI. 428 Aristotle explains himself with a clarity that leaves nothing to be desired by saying that the *on hos alethes* and the *me on hos pseudos* occur only in judgments, either affirmative or negative. "Being as the true and non-being as the false are found in combination and separation, and both together in the division into contradictories, since the truth has affirmation when there is combination, and negation when there is separation, while the false in each case has the contradictory opposite ... For the true and the false are not in things ... but in the understanding, and not even in the understanding where simple concepts are concerned." Obviously, it is the judgment which is here called true and false, hence to be or not to be. (Brentano, 1975, pp. 22–23)

The delimitation of judgment as a place of truth and falsity understood in its proper sense, as Brentano showed he had found in Aristotelian theory, served as the touchstone for the Brentanian description of judgment as a psychic act of attributing truth and falsity (or valuing the *presentation* of *something* as true or false). This description was characterized by the fact that judgment, analyzed from the point of view of Brentano's descriptive psychology of 1889, had a structure and, furthermore, this structure consisted of the existential predication of a *presentation* (*act of presenting something*), whether it was simple [(A)is] or compound [(A is B)is]. Brentano explained and exemplified the act of judging in the following terms:

The judgment itself is the subject to which being belongs as a predicate. Hence the being of which he here speaks is not the copula which connects subject and predicate in the sentence itself, especially since a negative judgment, too, is said to have being, and an affirmative one non-being. Rather we are concerned with a being which is predicated of the entire, fully articulated judgment. This may be clarified through an example. Let us suppose somebody wanted to demonstrate to someone else that the sum of the angles in a triangle is equal to two right angles, and that he requires as a starting point of the proof the assumption that the exterior angles are equal to the opposing interior angles. The question now is whether this is or is not [the case], i.e., is it true or is it false? It is! i.e., it is true. (Brentano, 1975, p. 23)

It's worth pointing out that Brentano developed his analysis of the Aristotelian concept of truth based on the foundations of his description of the psychic phenomenon of judging, defined from 1889 onwards, as a primary and secondary psychic relation (*Diploseenergie*) (Brito, 2012a, p. 106; Curvello, 2016, p. 17; Carvalho, 2021, p. 271). In these terms, judgment was described as a psychic act intentionally directed towards *presentation* and this, in turn, was described as a psychic act intentionally directed towards an *immanent object*. Because of these theoretical orientations, Brentano assumed that the correct definition of truth could be established by analyzing the Aristotelian answer to the following question: "when is a judgement true, and when is a judgement false?" (Brentano, 2009c, p. 4). As the following quotation shows, the answer to this question is the starting point for Brentan's analysis:

His answer is this: a judgement is true if the one who makes the judgement is related to things in a way which corresponds to them, and a judgement is false if the one who makes the judgement is related to things in a way which is contrary to them. "He who thinks the separated to be separated and the combined to be combined has the truth, while he whose thought is in a state contrary to that of the objects is in error" (Metaphysics IX, 10, 1051, b 3). And so it was that truth was explicated as being a kind of agreement or correspondence obtaining between things (*wirklichen Dingen*) and judgement. (Brentano, 2009c, p. 4)

In presenting the Aristotelian definition above, Brentano's analysis recognized the need to clarify the misunderstandings surrounding the notion of *correspondence* due to the confusion caused by the terms 'real things' (*wirkliche Ding*) and real things (*reales Dinge*).

For this reason, Brentano presented at least two very important warnings about the fundamental point:

- (i) "The fact that we will no longer look for more than is really given in the definition than what is in reality given is itself of considerable value [...] e are protected from conceptual confusions and from the blunders to which so many have been led as a result of misunderstanding the definition (*Ist schon dies von Belang, daß wir fortan hinter der Definition nicht mehr suchen, als in Wirklichkeit gegeben ist. Auch erscheint die Bestimmung jetzt nicht eigentlich wertlos [...] So sind wir denn jetzt vor Begriffsverschiebungen und dadurch vor noch manch anderem, weiterem Mißgriffe bewahrt, zu welchem viele durch Mißverstand der Definition sich verleiten ließen*)" (2009c, p. 16).
- (ii) "Finally, we shall not be tempted, as so many have been, to confuse the concept of a thing with the concept of an existent (*Wir werden endlich nicht, wie es immer und immer wieder geschieht, den Begriff des Realen und den des Existierenden zu verwechseln versucht sein.*)" (2009c, p. 16).

So, let's continue our analysis with these warnings in mind.

It is a shared strategy among scholars of Brentanian theory to make explicit the ontological status of the immanent object in order to support the theory of truth. In other words, in order to describe the foundations of evident true judgment, we commonly resort to explaining the *existing* and *non-existing* character of the *immanent object* as *realia* or *irrealia* (Porta, 2022, pp. 6–7), as well as its corresponding *affirmation* and *negation*, as the case may be, which is characteristic of the act of judging (Brentano, 1974, p. 25; 2009c, p. 15). However, in order to elucidate thesis (a) of my hypothesis, it is opportune to consider the problem from the point of view of the relation between judgment and a real thing (*ein reales Ding*), as Brentano himself proposed in his work *On the Concept of Truth* (2009c). After all, the point was to recognize that the immanent object, as a correlate of the act of presenting, which is the basic act in every act of judging, is not always a real thing (*ein reales Ding*). For this reason, Brentano warned:

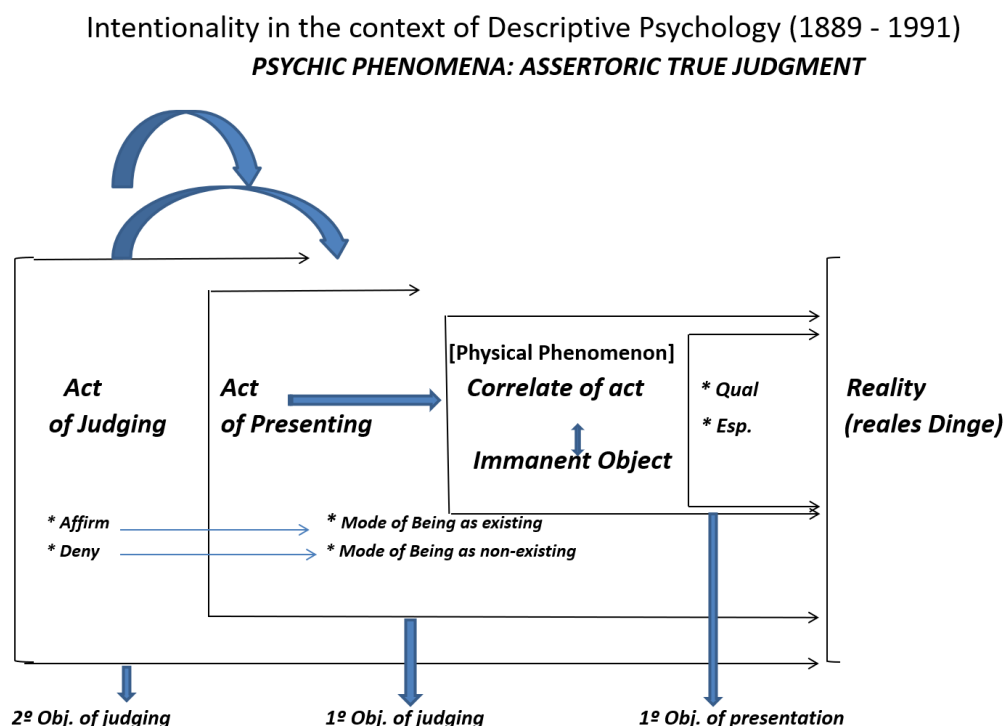
Nor are we likely to think, as so many foolishly do, that whenever one is aware of the truth one must compare a thing (*ein reales Ding*) with a judgement. People who think in this way do not realize that our judgements are not always concerned with things that are real (*reales Dinge*). And they do not realize that when our judgements are concerned with what is real, we could not compare the judgement and the thing unless the thing were already known to us. The theory would thus lead to an infinite regress. (2009c, p. 16)

In fact, by taking judgments under the descriptive criteria of his *Phänomenologie*, Brentano made explicit the three classic types of the theory of judgments: assertoric judgments, problematic judgments, and apodictic judgments. However, the same descriptive criteria of his *Phänomenologie* also made it clear that only assertoric judgments were made up of real things (*reale Dinge*) as one of their parts. For this reason, Brentano

said with respect to his classification, “if we now ask about the relation between truth and reality, we find a very simple answer” (2009c, p. 15):

(1) For one class of true judgements, there is, so to speak, a direct relation between their truth and something (*etwas Realem*) or other; these are the judgements which are such that the idea or thought which is at their basis has a thing as its object (*realen Gehalt*). Clearly the truth of the affirmative Judgement — and, in the inverse sense, that of the negative — depends upon the existence, the coming into being, or the passing away, of the thing (*die betreffende Realität*) to which the judgement pertains. The judgement itself may not undergo any change; but it will become true if the thing in question comes into being, and it will cease to be true if the thing (*die betreffende Realität*) is destroyed. (2009c, p. 15)

In Brentanian terms, therefore, we have above the definition of assertory judgments, that is, the type of judgment in which *res judicata* is real, as illustrated in the diagram below.



In addition to assertoric judgments, but, above all, because of the fundamental difference with them (namely, “judgments in which the *presentation* has no real content [*realen Gehalt*]”⁷), there are two other types of judgments. One of these types is the problematic judgment, that is, the type of judgment in which the thing judged is possible and therefore not real. Such judgments are described in the following quotation:

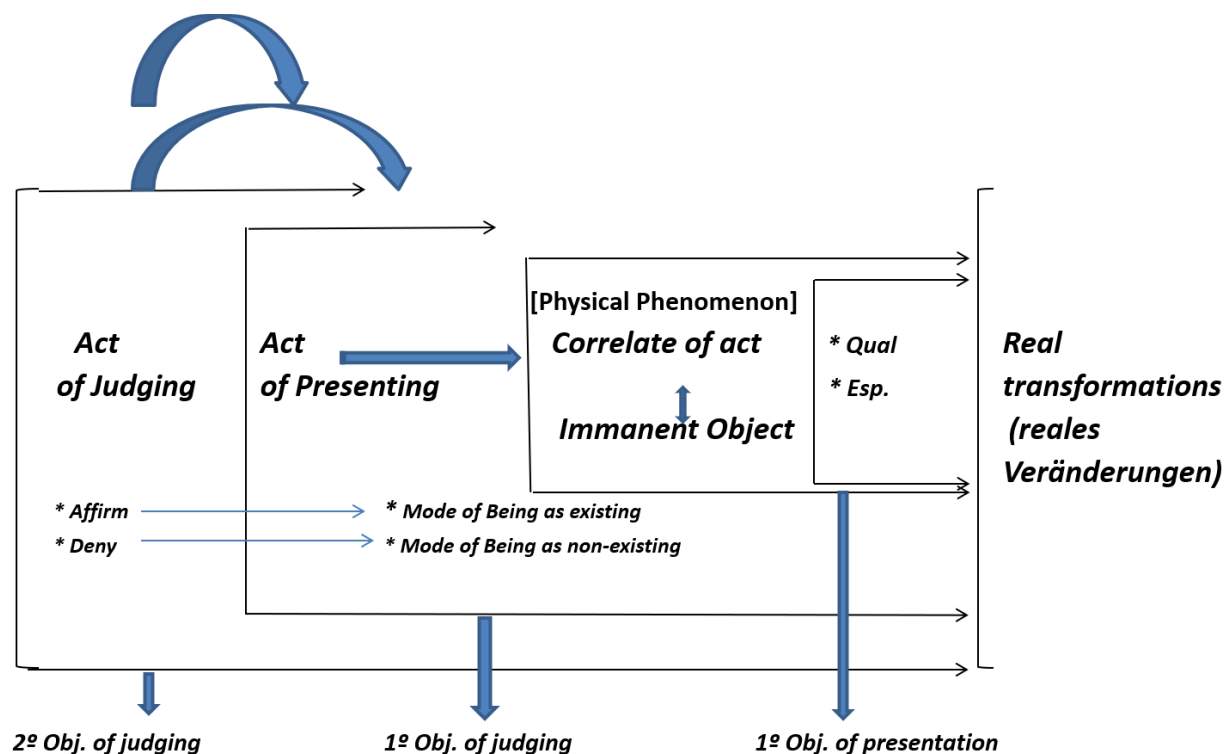
⁷ It is always good to emphasize the Brentanian indistinction between content and object, whenever it comes to the correlate of the act of presentation.

It may be that the judgement is not directly dependent upon a thing (*von einer Realität*), but is indirectly dependent upon a thing (*von einer Realität*). The object of the presentation or thought underlying the judgement is not itself a thing (*obwohl die Vorstellung keinen realen Gehalt hat*); yet it may be said to exist, or not to exist (*daß ihr Gegenstand zum Existierenden oder Nichtexistierenden gehört*), as a result of the fact that a certain thing (*eine gewisse Realität*) - or things (*gewisse Realitäten*) — happens to exist, or did exist, or will exist. Consider an empty space, any kind of lack, deficiency, or deprivation, a capacity, an object of thought, or the like: these exist, and come into being and pass away, as the result of alterations among objects that are things (*realen Veränderungen*). (2009c, p. 15)

This definition of problematic judgment, expressed in Brentanian terms, establishes that the distinguishing feature of this type of judgment lies in its dependence on real transformations and, therefore, even indirectly on reality (*Realität*), as the diagram below illustrates.

Intentionality in the context of Descriptive Psychology (1889 - 1991)

PSYCHIC PHENOMENA: PROBLEMATIC TRUE JUDGMENT



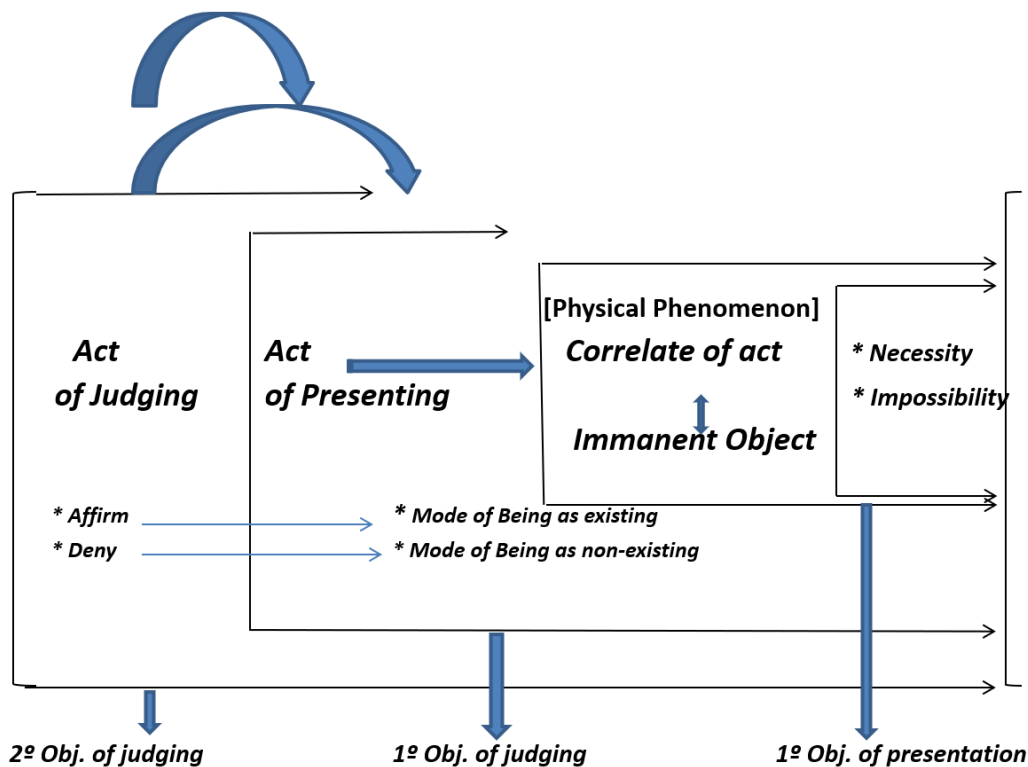
In addition to assertoric and problematic judgments, Brentano described apodictic judgments. This was the type of judgment in which *res judicata* is necessary. Therefore, he said:

It may be that, so far as truth is concerned, the judgement is not at all dependent upon any thing (*von einer Realität*). This may be said of those judgements whose objects (*Gegenstand*) are in themselves necessary or impossible. The law of contradiction, and with it all analytic judgements, belongs to this category. (2009c, p. 15)

In fact, the touchstone here is the very necessity (or impossibility) of the *immanent object presented*, which underlies the act of judging as part of the act of *presenting that* constitutes it, as the following diagram also illustrates.

Intentionality in the context of Descriptive Psychology (1889 - 1991)

PSYCHIC PHENOMENA: APODICTIC TRUE JUDGMENT



Here, the fundamental point to emphasize is the following: It is the psychic description (*Phänomenologie*) of the evident true judgment which, by making explicit *the relation* between the act (of *affirming*) and its correlate (*necessary*), as well as the act (of *denying*) and its correlate (impossible), makes explicit the ontological status of the latter. Precisely for this reason, the description of this type of judgment played a fundamental role in Brentano's theory of knowledge. We'll revisit this point in the last section.

It is now only important to consider that the analyses presented make it plausible to hypothesize that (a) Husserl was mistaken about the Brentanian definition of truth, because he did not understand (or forgot, as Brentano suggested) that the psychic description (*Phänomenologie*) of an *apodictic judgment* makes the judgment itself explicit as a *truth-bearer*.

4.2 THE RELATION BETWEEN PSYCHOLOGY, LOGIC AND THE THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

Finally, we must justify thesis (b), which argues that Husserl's misunderstanding of the Brentanian psychic description of the *act of judging the obvious true*, as explained in the previous section, implied a misunderstanding of the relation between psychology, logic, and the theory of knowledge.

The argumentative strategy I will adopt here will consist of following the structure of Brentano's own definition of psychic phenomena. Brentano's definition of this concept made it possible to explain an individual case as an example of a type, without having to resort to a process of induction. In this way, I will try to present the Brentanian description of that *individual act of judging in a true and evident way*, which could be taken as an example of that truth recognized as a type or general law. In other words, I will try to describe, in Brentanian terms, that individual act of judging as capable of exemplifying the *principle of non-contradiction*.

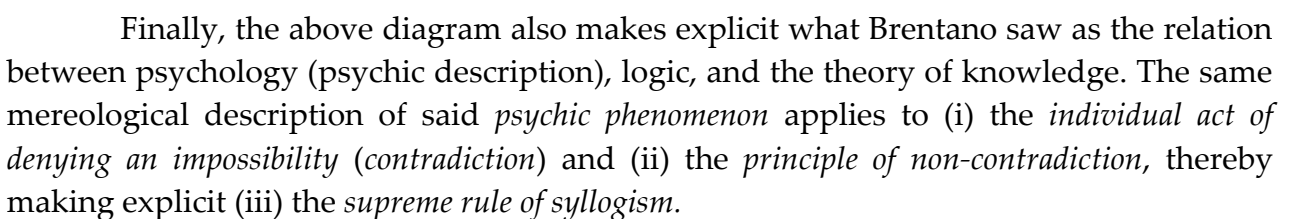
It is interesting to remember that, for Brentano, every act of judging is based on a presentation (*Vorstellung*) and, as explained above from the very Brentanian definition of presentation, the status of presentation is derived from its function of identifying or "presenting" the object of the mental act, which can also be a mathematical object (Boccaccini, 2021, p. 255). This is a fundamental presupposition because only the *presentation of a logical object*, such as a contradiction ($A \wedge \neg A$), can support an *act of judging that is true and evident*.

Now, according to the descriptive foundations formulated in the development of Brentanian *Phänomenologie* (1889–1891), each and every individual act of denying a contradiction can be described as an act of judging that denies an impossibility. For this very reason, such an act makes explicit the truth that it carries with it, exclusively from the relation between the parts that make up the act. Thus, the constituent parts of such individual acts of judging can be described as follows:

- The individual basic act of *presenting* where the contradiction ($A \wedge \neg A$) is the correlate of the immanent act/object *presented*.
- The *act of denying* (*judging negatively*) the basic act of *presenting* the contradiction *presented*: $\neg (A \wedge \neg A)$.

The following diagram illustrates the individual case of the negation of a contradiction, according to the model for apodictic judgments.

PSYCHIC PHENOMENA: APODICTIC TRUE JUDGMENT



The analysis of the *Psychologismusstreit*, developed in this paper from the Brentanian perspective, supported the interpretation that Brentano's textual response to Husserl was characterized by an effort to refute the accusation that a specific type of epistemological psychologism linked his theory of knowledge with relativism.

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Psychology (1889–1891). As noted at the beginning, I left open the question of the validity of this interpretation in light of the subsequent development of Husserlian criticism of *psychologism* after the publication of *Logical Investigations* as well as Brentano's *reist* turn.

However, I believe that the above argument is sufficient, making sense of the Brentanian thesis. By assuming knowledge as a judgment belonging to the domain of psychology, the Brentanian thesis assumes that, if beings other than us share knowledge with humans, what they share must be in the human psychic domain and directly accessible to the scientific investigation proposed in terms of a descriptive psychology.

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