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# MENTAL LIFE AND CONSCIOUSNESS

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## *abstract*

*Based on the concept of intentionality, I argue for an integrative view of mental life as a higher function of the living organism, beyond the classical oppositions and dualisms between mind and body. Next, I claim in thesis that Phenomenology has never truly isolated and addressed the problem of consciousness, given the persistent confusion between it and intentionality. Similarly, I also isolate attention from consciousness and argue, based on experience, for the existence of both conscious and unconscious mental processes. In the third section, I attempt a phenomenological description of consciousness as such, showing its high impact on mental life. Finally, some remarks are made about the difference between the concept of consciousness I propose and the classical analyses on qualia and sentience.*

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## *keywords*

*consciousness, mental life, intentionality, attention, phenomenology*

### 1. The general approach

The phenomenological concept of *intentionality*, stemming from the works of Brentano and Husserl, is an acceptable criterion for identifying mental life. A process *X* is “mental” if it has *aboutness*, i.e., if it is *by itself* directed to something *Y* which, typically, does not belong to the mind, while, by a higher-order mental process, the *Y* about which *X* is can be another mental process as well. This latter meta-consciousness or higher-order mental process is named an act of *reflection* by the phenomenological tradition. In general terms, is it conceivable that a mind would have only first-order intentionality without being able for higher-order mental processes that could be further iterated (a reflection on a reflection, and so on)? That question requires further elaboration. Because of that, I will not address it here.

While furnishing an identification criterium for mental life, intentionality entails neither an operational separation nor a substantial independence of the mind in relation to the living body. This non-commitment regarding all kinds of dualism (founded on metaphysic, transcendental, or psychological arguments), despite some Cartesian roots both in Brentano and Husserl, is the appropriate stance for a phenomenological approach. Firstly, it opens the domain of pure description, without previous biases, in the first-person stance. Secondly, it allows for an integrative and functional view of mental life. Indeed, whatever one is willing to defend about the relation of the mind with the body, the fact is that mental life *appears* as a functional qualitative difference in the whole living organism, to the extent that some phenomena are named “mental” not because they are something over and above organic life, but because they are a higher function *within* and *of* the very organic life. As a result, instead of an “embodied soul,” I always prefer to talk of an “ensouled body.”

In light of the approach I am proposing, mental phenomena called “intentional” always come up in a larger framework of contents that are *necessary conditions* of intentionality itself and are embedded in almost all intentional acts. Let’s call them the “pre-intentional” or, better, “para-intentional” stuff because they can be there without necessarily triggering an intentional act (Husserl named them the pre-intentional *hyle*, in contradistinction to the intentional *morphe*). Usually, one only focuses on the *aesthetic* dimension, i.e., on the sensorial background of intentionality, guided by the simplified intentional model that goes from sensation to perception. Though, there is more on the board. Namely, the *thymic* element also supports mental life and intentionality, i.e., the net of moods, sentiments, and emotions within which intentional life is triggered. One also finds the drives that come from desire or will, which I call the *orectic* element underpinning intentionality. Typically, these aesthetic, thymic, and orectic elements are put apart as building blocks for a phenomenology of cognizance,

evaluation, and will, as one finds in Husserl (in contrast, Brentano blends the thymic and orrectic elements, while differentiating presentation and judgment, i.e., belief). However, while productive, the division thus established conveys the illusion that they are not always mingled together in a close net of interdependency. At the bottom of them all, one must add, there is the constant proprioception of the body regarding its position, its articulations, the kinetic sensations, the idiocentric orientation of the parts of the body in relation to each other, and the egocentric orientation of the body as a whole relative to the surrounding world. Excepting Merleau-Ponty's reflections on what he names "*le schéma corporel*," these latter elements are seldom considered in phenomenological research. However, they allow for an integrative vision of mental function as something based on the sense of a bodily background and this latter sense (the Husserlian *Leib*) on the body itself.

So, in a rather Aristotelian way, I contend that one must approach intentionality as a higher function of the whole living organism in the larger framework of para-intentional, subsidiary contents that belong to its necessary conditions. Indeed, there is no longer a clear divide between mind and body if one takes intentionality as the mark of the mental and if, next, one further takes intentionality as necessarily based on the para-intentional dimensions I have highlighted, which plunge their roots into bodily states. I also contend that the features of intentionality I will discuss are not a private possession of human beings. Arguably, they belong to plenty of forms of animal life.

One thesis that seems to me inaccurate is the often-made conflation between intentionality and consciousness; another is the conflation between consciousness and attention. In my opinion, they must be carefully distinguished so that one can talk about intentionality with or without consciousness and attention with and without consciousness. The clear distinction of modalities of mental life with and without consciousness allows for raising important questions about what consciousness is, after all, or better, about the *function* of consciousness as an even higher dimension of mental life itself. Phenomenology has never delimited consciousness *as such* as a field of particular research, given its permanent fusion with intentionality.

Regarding this conflation between intentionality and consciousness, Brentano is a case in point. In fact, he describes intentionality, *Intentionalität*, as a consciousness of something, a *Bewusstsein von etwas*. Using the expression "*Bewusstsein von*" for intentionality, it is almost obvious that the consciousness of something must be itself conscious, *bewusst*. However, Brentano did not give in to the false appearance of entailment between *Bewusstsein von*, in the transitive, intentional sense of being conscious *of* something, on the one hand, and *bewusst sein*, being conscious, in an adjective, or instead, as I will say from now on, *consciously* being conscious of something, in an adverbial sense, on the other hand. Indeed, he expressly recognized that the two things are not necessarily linked and that an intentional act could be non-consciously performed. As a matter of fact, it took a whole long chapter of his *Psychology* to show that all intentional acts are accompanied by a concomitant (*nebenbei*) consciousness, which he construed as a case of *self*-consciousness. Nevertheless, even if he refused the fact of being *unconsciously* conscious of something, the interesting lesson of his approach is that, in terms of principle, no unbreakable law prevents an intentional act, a *Bewusstsein von...*, from being in itself non-consciously performed, i.e., *unbewusst*. As he stressed in a passage of his *Psychology*, "The one who raises the question of whether there is an unconscious consciousness is not being ridiculous in the same way as the one who wanted to know whether there is a non-red red; an unconscious consciousness is no more a *contradictio in adjecto* than an unseen seeing" (Brentano, 1973, p. 143).

One might expect this Brentano's thesis to be followed by a luminous description of what

## 2. Clearing up some confusions and mismatches

*consciously* being conscious of something would add to simple transitive intentionality. However, to this adverbial sense of consciousness, i.e., to the sense of being *consciously* aware of this or that, which, for short, I will name the C-property of some, not all, intentional acts, Brentano gives not a good answer at all. The reason why boils down to the fact that he describes the C-property within the intentional framework of transitive consciousness. Indeed, he presents it as a *second intentional relation*, as something that accompanies the directness to the primary object of an intentional act, construing it as an intentionality directed to the act itself as a secondary object. Hence the interpretation of the C-property as both intentional and self-presenting, i.e., as a quasi-reflection. He even frames a particular mereological theory, where parthood is differentiated into *separable* and *distinctional*, non-separable parts, to avoiding the infinite regress his thesis seemingly entails: The second act must itself be the intentional target of a third act for being conscious, and so on. In a nutshell, besides treating consciousness in the adverbial sense in the intentional framework, which seems wrong to me, Brentano is also transforming the C-property into a proto-form of self-consciousness. His first-order theory of intentionality becomes, thus, a quasi-higher-order theory. Against this, I will sustain that the C-property *is not* an embryonic form of reflection. It is not a reflection at all. In addition, I will sustain that the intentional model of transitive consciousness does not fit the peculiarities of the C-property.

I will not enter the endless discussions this theory has raised in the Brentanian scholarship. My point is that Brentano is on the wrong track when affirming that all intentional acts *display* the C-property and that this can be accounted for as a *form of intentionality*. There is plenty of evidence for denying the first thesis, which can be caught in our own experience. Consider, for example, the situation where we suddenly move our head to avoid a ball coming straight at us, and only after this movement are we consciously aware that we have avoided a severe accident. In that case, the oculomotor perceptual system acted even before we become aware of the situation. Only afterward did we realize what had happened. Consider one more example, which is even more profound concerning the possibility of separating intentionality and consciousness. I am referring to the celebrated case of the truck driver given by Armstrong (1997, p. 723). The truck driver is driving, absorbed in his thoughts, has an episodic awareness of only a few parts of the trip, and ends up noticing with surprise that the trip has passed in a flash, that he has reached the end of the journey. Certainly, everything that the driver was not conscious of on the trip was something that he could have been conscious of. Namely, the red lights he saw, the gear changes he had done, the proprioception of his body pulling to the opposite side of the curves, and so on. Thus, perceptual intentionality comes in two flavors, so to speak: consciously seeing a red light and hitting the brake, and non-consciously seeing the very same red light but hitting the break as well. Blindsight and somnambulism are other conspicuous cases of perception without consciousness. But they are *perceptions anyway*, i.e., intentional mental states in the transitive sense. Indeed, neuroscientific evidence reinforces this claim made from our own experience that what we had performed unconsciously could also have been consciously performed. As Nani puts it, “[...] research provides evidence that the initial steps of the conscious perception [...] occur in the very same areas [of the brain] that are activated when the perception [...] is unconscious” (Nani *et al*, 2019, p. 5). The good question is, thus, a question that Brentano could never have asked: What *varies* between the two conditions, or what is the *impact* and *function* of the C-property when combined with intentionality?

Additionally, the very same examples give one a clear insight into the difference between consciousness and attention. It is impossible not to recognize that the truck driver was *attentive* to what was going on the road, even if, at the end of the journey, he had only some disparate remembrances of what happened during the whole trip. That is a case of

unconsciously being attentive to something, i.e., of attention *without* the C-property. The cases where this happens are not confined to the aesthetic field, which is simply constituted by the passive and involuntary reception of stimuli. Orectic drives can also unconsciously concentrate attention. For instance, when one is attentive to the possible ringing of the doorbell while consciously directed to other things because the desire to see a friend coming soon drives a persistent ray of attention even though there is no permanent consciousness of it. In such a case where the orectic element is projected over the aesthetic field, there is an attentional, selective expectation of an aesthetic stimulation yet to come and not a simple involuntary reception of perceptual stimuli to which one consciously or unconsciously reacts. As a matter of fact, the aesthetic and perceptual field is permanently embedded in desires, moods, and emotive and sentimental elements that attentionally filter and organize its underlying involuntary dimension, whether these orectic and thymic elements are conscious or not.

However, the issue concerning attention is even more complex and requires further elaboration. A distinction between two different directions of attention is worth stressing. Attention can be prompted by the “lower,” pre-intentional dimensions of mental life, as when, for example, sudden aesthetic phenomena (a thunderclap, an abrupt pain) or thymic phenomena (a euphoria) capture the attentional ray. This is a kind of bottom-up organization of attention. Monitoring this lower background and triggering perceptual, evaluative, and practical intentional acts is a source of attentional direction that is essential to the self-preservation of any organism and is exercised permanently while not continuously. The other way around, there is also a top-down direction of attention. It comes from higher forms of intentionality, which may contain logical and linguistic structure, and then be projected to the lower strata till the perceptual intentionality and its aesthetic background, like when we search the room for that object that we remember having left there yesterday, for example. Whereas bottom-up attention is often involuntary, top-down attention is almost always voluntary.

Regarding the relationship between attention and consciousness, it seems that bottom-up attention somehow *precedes* consciousness, whereas top-down attention *follows* almost always consciousness, as Nani has pointed out (Nani *et al.*, 2019, p. 3). However, one can find deviant cases as well. Namely, top-down attention without conscious perception, as in the well-known impairment of blindsight, and bottom-up attention without consciousness of the lower stratum, as when, for instance, there is a background song that one has lost consciousness of, but that still triggers a constant foot tapping to its changing rhythms.

Perhaps one will consider it odd to speak of a *phenomenological* exhibition of the “unconscious.” If there is no consciousness of an intentional act or an attentional ray, how could one describe it from the *first-person* stance? As we are commonly told, we can only oscillate between first and third-person perspectives. Verification of the existence of intentional or attentional acts without the C-property would be possible, say, by monitoring the respective brain areas. However, this is beyond the realm of phenomenology. Still, there is a third way that is compatible with phenomenological analysis. Indeed, what if one adopts neither a third nor a first, but what I will call a second-person perspective? It combines the third-person stance, based on the objective verification of a specific behavior, with the first-person stance, as the behavior verified is referred back to the corresponding mental acts or states. This second-person perspective entails a threefold condition: First, to interpret a given corporeal movement as a unity of sense, i.e., as a behavior; second, to infer the existence of a correspondent mental act or state as the reason that accounts for the behavior’s existence; third, to attribute a precise mental act or state to a person based on a transposition by analogy (or by empathy; it does not matter here) with our own mental life with the C-property. as it is

accessed in the first-person perspective. The security of the attribution is, thus, dependent on the accuracy of the interpretation, the rightfulness of the inference, and the relevance of the analogical transfer. As it is easy to understand, this is not an awkward stance. Indeed, it is the most trivial way of understanding others in a face-to-face relationship. Though, it is effective not only for understanding others. It can also be applied to ourselves, provided the respective behaviors can be objectively established. This is, for example, the case of Armstrong's truck driver I mentioned early, who can conclude with complete certainty that he must have seen the red lights on the road, that he must have put on the gears, etc., if he arrived home after all, which in fact he did. It is also the case for all the other examples I gave. In fact, for all of them, the existence of a mental act was inferred from the certainty of having or having had a certain behavior. This second-person perspective is not only consistent with phenomenological analysis but can also be an important complement to it. Indeed, it uncovers or recovers plenty of acts and states that bypass the C-property and thus allow us to get a more concrete view of the totality of our mental life.

**3. What is consciousness, after all?**

If I am right, intentionality, attention, and consciousness are three variables that are largely independent. Though, they also are strongly connected. Brentano conflated intentionality and consciousness, as I stressed, while clearly differentiating intentionality and attention by means of his distinction between implicit and explicit noticing, *bemerken* (Brentano, 2002, p. 25-26).

Though, one can find several different combinations of them. There is conscious intentionality with attention, of course (this is even the leading case for the standard intentional analyses). But there also are cases of conscious intentionality without attention (the phenomenological concept of the internal and external *horizon* has its roots here). At last, there are also cases of unconscious intentionality with attention, as I remarked, and even unconscious intentionality without attention, such as the constant haptic sensations and perceptions of our skin against our clothing, which, however, often go wholly unnoticed.

It is time, thus, to address the central question: What is consciousness, after all? What is the C-property, which can be joined or not to intentional and attentional acts? Or better, what is the *distinctive function* of consciousness in mental life when one *consciously* intends something or *consciously* pays attention to something?

In contemporary literature, the expressions "phenomenal experience" and "what it is like to be" (Nagel, 1974) appear as defining consciousness. However, it seems that we simply go around in circles, from one uninformative term to another uninformative term, because it is unclear what "phenomenal" means, and it is also unclear how one can characterize this "what it is like to be." They just seem like suggestive metaphors, as the ancient metaphors of "Spirit," "Light," or even the "Olympic Fire," stolen and given to men by Prometheus. This is the reason why I will try a *functional* approach instead of a conceptual definition based on the almost inefable feeling of subjectiveness.

The first thing to retain is that consciousness or the C-property is both a matter of simple yes or no, and a matter of degree. Coma, general anesthesia, REM sleep, and fainting, are clearly under the thresholds of consciousness. There is a critical point of crossing this lower limit, which can be called *awakeness*. It can be generally defined as the *capacity* to be consciously aware of mental events and processes. Husserl had an insight into this issue when he, in his late writings, distinguished between *dunkles* or *dumpfes Leben* and *waches Leben*, i.e., between dull and awake life. However, there are degrees of consciousness over this limit of waking life. Light dreaming near wakefulness, fatigue, drowsiness, or even drunkenness are examples of levels below the top of a fully vigilant consciousness. In addition, toxically induced changes, even hallucinations, are a wide spectrum of wakefulness variations that we cannot explore. As a result, not only the C-property comes by degrees from a wakefulness

crossing point, but it also has regular interruptions (daily sleep period, at least) and strong variations across the whole organic life.

Secondly, the most significant element of C-property is *connection*. Indeed, Intentional processes, like the one of the truck driver I referred to, have a modular organization. The oculomotor system runs its routine while driving, independently of other concomitant mental processes, like hearing a song, adjusting the body for counterbalancing the pulls to left and right on the curves, remembering this or that, and so on, which are also modular. All of them are processed in parallel. This means that they run their course simultaneously. However, there is no central function for putting them together as simultaneously occurring. This is the function of the C-property. How do the processes below the conscious level reach it? For what was following its course parallelly to jump into a central connection area, all it takes is, returning to the example, for something to happen on the road that the routine of the driving system cannot handle, such as an unexpected neon light flash. Suddenly, an integrative conscious area links this unexpected occurrence with other aesthetic stimuli, with global perceptions of the situation, desires, and beliefs relevant to handling the situation (the *selective* relevancy criterium remains a deep enigma, anyway). As a result, there is the consciousness of these relevant elements as simultaneously present in *one* now. The C-property, which has a connecting function, is thus tantamount to having an explicit temporal consciousness of an encompassing present where many things that have run parallelly are put together. Brentano had an insight into this qualitative change in mental life when he was inclined to think that the “intentionality” he called secondary (my C-property) was not relative to each act in isolation but that it was instead a consciousness that put a multiplicity of intentional acts as occurring simultaneously in a consciousness of the now. This qualitative element in mental life has been named a “global workspace” (GWT, see Baars, 1988). It is based on an overall temporal synthesis and is strongly linked with reasoning, decision-making, and fast learning, which can afterward modify the underlying non-conscious routines. From this synthesis, bringing together *some* but not *all* intentional contents, springs the ray of consciously paying attention. It is intensely involved with the processes of decision-making. However, attention is a serial process. Its ray goes from one or a set of intentional contents to others in a temporal sequence. This inclusion of a serial organization in a now of simultaneous contents goes along the *flowing* temporal horizon of consciousness: While the ray of attention is focused on one content at a time, the others are held in a lateral consciousness, to be taken up possibly in later thematic attention. This is the play of the proto-impressional, retentional, and protentional structure, or simply the *flow* of time-consciousness, with the horizon structure of conscious attentional experience, which Husserl so incisively described in several works. This time organization of experience, centered on a flowing *now* of simultaneity, is one of the most remarkable features of C-property. The now functions as the connection operator for putting together the relevant contents. And they are kept together, some fading away and others entering, by the temporal flowing form of consciousness. No need to say, what becomes temporally conscious in a flowing now of simultaneity, i.e., what has the C-property, is only a part and not all of the mental life of a living organism. Most of the whole stuff of mental life develops below this highly important connecting center.

Strongly linked with this feature, a third point must be underlined. I said that the connective aspect of the C-property has to do with the consciousness of an encompassing now and with its flow. But not only. Associated with it as a non-independent part, there also emerges a consciousness of a *here*, as a consciousness of the *relevant* aspects of the bodily connection with the surrounding world. It has not only to do with the simple consciousness of “having” a body. It is instead a consciousness of how the body is actively engaged in the surrounding world. The consciousness of a here triggers, thus, the relevant features of the underlying

idiocentric orientation of the parts of the body to each other, of the egocentric orientation of the body in the perceptual world (to the left, right, to the top, etc.), together with the relevant beliefs, drives for acting, anticipations, and so on, that are important for finding one's way in each situation. In a nutshell, contrary to those who think they can separate the mental from the corporeal and speak of a temporal flow of consciousness independent of its connection with the corporeal "here," I affirm that the "now-here" is a unique system of global mental connection, proper not of a mind that "has" a body, but of a mind that is a higher function of an organic body. In so being, the C-property, as a connecting function, is simultaneously a consciousness of what happens *here and now*. No need to say again: only a part of the whole mental life becomes consciously present in the relevancy system of the "hear *and now*."

To finish my tentative account of the C-property, let me briefly address only two more characteristics I consider crucial.

One is the *qualitative* aspect of conscious experience, both in regard to intentionality and attention. As a matter of fact, consciously sensing displays a qualitative experience of hearing a sound, seeing a color, and so on. This is the "phenomenal experience" or the "what it is like to be" stuff. Someone with a more Cartesian bent will even affirm that this is the crossline between the physical and the mental. However, I think not. As I stressed, there is non-conscious (or not yet conscious) intentionality, as well as non-conscious attention. Thus, the "mental" (whatever it may *be*) has deeper roots than that distinction. In my view, what we call the *qualitative* aspect is instead the way *contrasts* between sensations become apparent. Imagine that we hear only a single, uniform sound below the "just noticeable difference" (JND), as it is called. Imagine a smell that is also unique, continuous, long-lasting, and uniform. Imagine also that our visual field was filled with a single continuous, uniform, and persistent color. My guess is that at some point, we would stop hearing the sound, smelling the smell, and seeing the color, and that their conscious qualitative element would fade away completely. If I am right, the so-called qualitative element has instead to do with *contrast*; better, it is the *conscious form* of establishing contrasts. In fact, conscious sensible fields are governed by merging and detaching rules. Only what is presently the object of a thematic perceptual and attentional intentionality has this qualitative wrapping, while the rest is fused more or less to the limit of indistinctness. However, the mind manages to put the other qualitative elements alongside the present ones to reconstruct the complete phenomenal scene. Husserl brilliantly described this structure of qualitative experience in his lectures on passive syntheses. His guiding concepts were precisely those of *fusion*, *detachment*, *contrast*, and *similarity*, governed by the concept of *stimulus* (*Reiz*), relatively to which the ability to be receptive makes the difference between dull and awake life (*conscious*, in my adverbial sense). The lesson to be drawn is simple but profound, I suppose. What we call "qualitative experience" is something real, indeed. But it has everything to do with consciously making sensible similarities or differences between aesthetic contents, a process that has a sharp point of acuteness, while the rest of the contents are present in greater or lesser forms of fusion. A color on a wall pops out into prominence against a background. We pay attention to it, and by paying attention, we become progressively sensitive to its various shades, to the differences among lighter or darker parts of it, which were undifferentiated in their first prominence as a whole. Therefore, my thesis is that the qualitative dimension is equivalent to the process of structural differentiation and that it would fade away if, in our sensible experience, all contrasts between contents disappeared before the presence of one and only one homogeneous, persistent, and undifferentiated content.

The other important issue I will address briefly concerns the fact that this C-property I have discussed is not an embryonic form of reflection but only prepares it. As a matter of fact, for a higher-order reflective act to take place, there must be a lower-order act with the

C-property, i.e., with the property of belonging to the Here-Now conscious center. Reflection focuses on these contents because they are the ones that are internally objectifiable and reportable. This also marks the limit of reflection: Mental contents without the C-property are unreachable except through the indirect way of the second-person perspective I described earlier. Thus, *pace* Brentano, the C-property is not self-consciousness but rather a higher function of mental life by which some contents entering the Here-Now center receive further elaboration by a detachment under contrast and a mutual connection with other mental contents, *which are not of the same kind* (for instance, beliefs, thymic and orectic contents, memories and expectations, and other relevant intentional acts). The first mistake lies in confusing the whole of mental life with the few contents that are selectively brought to this higher function of consciousness in the adverbial sense. Indeed, the mental content as a whole is wider than that shrunk *conscious* mental content. The second mistake lies, in accordance with the first, in taking that shrunk content of the flow of consciousness as a self-enclosed realm, as something that has unity on its own. Making that latter step is tantamount to presupposing that there is always a surreptitious self-consciousness accompanying all mental life, for, here, *being* a unity amounts to being *aware* of it as a unity. Hence the epoch-making Cartesian illusion that a mental process is defined by *the consciousness of having it at the very moment* in which it takes place. Actually, to think of the conscious mind as a separate or separable unity, one must think of it as always self-conscious. Therefore, only those mental processes with the C-property constitute the “mind” in this illusory and ultimately narrow view. However, if, as for Descartes, to think is to know that one thinks (“*penser c’est savoir qu’on pense*”), and if thinking is the essential attribute of the mind, then one must sustain that “*l’âme pense toujours*” and, consequently, fall into the absurdity of presupposing that there is always a self-consciousness, even when there is neither awake life nor conscious intentionality or attention. In his own way, Brentano did not escape this illusion either: The descriptive autonomy of his psychology was based entirely on this assumption that only what is conscious is mental or that all mental is self-conscious so that the mind was a self-contained realm, a thesis that, for him, was in the service of a more veiled metaphysical and theological agenda. Indeed, the last planned chapter of his *Psychology* would be devoted to the “immortality of the soul.”

I stressed that there can be intentionality and attention without consciousness in the adverbial sense. However, the other way around, consciousness without intentionality is also a possibility. Heidegger made a whole doctrine of the verification that a thymic phenomenon like anguish (*Angst*) is *about nothing*, i.e., does not have something definite as its object (besides the “Nothing” and the “World as such,” see Heidegger, 1976, p. 246-253). Levinas, for his part, devoted some inspired pages to the phenomenon he called “*jouissance*,” in which things dissolve into sensible “*éléments*” without substantiality by a pure subjective appropriation without objectifying intentionality (Levinas, 1971, p. 142-149). That aesthetic, thymic, and orectic processes can become conscious without triggering an intentional act is a well-attested possibility in our conscious life. It stresses in another way the correctness of conceptually separating intentionality and consciousness.

When totally disconnected from intentionality, this feature is described as the “*sentience*” phenomenon. The pure “feeling” of aesthetic qualities (sounds, colors), of thymic phenomena (anger, joy), as well as orectic ones (hunger, thirst) as something that is experienced but not intentionally interpreted is, in fact, an undeniable dimension of our mental life. For this reason, I said at the beginning that the *hyle*, being *pre-intentional*, also was *para-intentional*. However, if mental life just boiled down to that, it would not be the experience of a world. Nor would it be a conceptually loaded experience of an “I.” In fact, Levinas’ enjoyment

#### **4. A final remark and a glimpse beyond**

(*jouissance*) as a purely subjective experience without objectual meaning is already a result of reflective consciousness. It is by means of a reflection neither noematic nor noetic, but, let me say, *hyletic*, that the I knows itself as the subject of a plain experience of desubstantialized “elements.” Without this reflective self-take, there would not be the unity of an “I.” Indeed, pure sentience, radically considered, would neither be the experience of an objectual world nor the knowledge of a unified *I*. As far as I know, the one who went deeper into this disintegration of the world and the ego in the experience of pure sentience was the poet Fernando Pessoa in his heteronym “Alberto Caeiro” (Pessoa, 2015). It is, however, a limit-experience that cuts two elements which, being different, constantly intersect, and partially overlap: consciousness in the adverbial sense and intentionality. Indeed, regarding the intersection, it is a trivial case of our mental life. As far as the non-overlapping is concerned, one can also easily verify that, even in the intentional experience of a surrounding world, there are always plenty of hyletic data which exceed those that are “animated” by an actual objectifying intention.

Thus, we would have to speak of consciousness in the adverbial sense without intentionality, just as we spoke before of intentionality (and attention) without consciousness. Nonetheless, sentience, even if it were, by simple hypothesis, wholly disconnected from intentionality, would not be all mental life. In fact, a living organism could not find its way into the surrounding world if an underlying intentionality was not, in that hypothetical case, operating at a completely non-conscious level. Regarding the world to which it would be intentionally directed, that organism would be like a zombie with that “blind” functionality that Husserl also captured in his analyses by the concept of an anonymous “*fungierende Intentionalität*.”

However, my concept of consciousness in the adverbial sense does not fit the opposition between sentience and intentionality. In my view, the C-property, far from being limited to hyletic contents, encompasses both sentient elements and intentional acts and states. Regarding the former, there are cases where, for example, a thymic element, say, a feeling of anger, is present without being conscious, and we only retrospectively realize that we were indeed angry. By the same token, pre-intentional content like a sound may itself be unconscious. When we actually feel it and notice that we had already been hearing it for a while, it acquires the C-property: This is sentience and the *quale* of the specialized literature. But sentience is not all consciousness in my characterization. The C-property is much broader and functionally differentiated so that it does not identify with these “raw” and almost ineffable *qualia*. Rather, it has to do with what is suited to be connected, then, reflected upon, and reported: It encompasses both aesthetic, orectic, and thymic contents as well as states and intentional acts, provided they reach the working space of the Now-Here system.

All in all, I meant that our mental life begins far beyond our conscious experience, that this conscious experience plays a crucial role, and that it is an element that is not unique to human minds. If one asks what other living beings have consciousness in that adverbial sense, one would be asking an embarrassing question. For me, I can only tentatively answer: All living beings that exhibit a capacity for quick learning and, therefore, show malleability and high adaptability of behavior are probable candidates for mental life *with* consciousness. In addition, I also wanted to emphasize that if our mental life was only those limited contents that have the C-property and therefore belong to what one usually calls the “stream of consciousness,” if our mental life were that poor, restricted to what can be reportable, we, humans, would long ago have disappeared as a living species.

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