

Intentionality and (Un)Consciousness: Freud's Debt to Brentano

Fábio Jesus Miranda, Goiás, Brazil

Intentionality is a concept which was introduced into philosophy by Franz Brentano. In Brentano's conception there is no psychological phenomenon without intentionality. Therefore, intentionality is highlighted as an essential property of human life; it is the property that establishes our relationship with the world.

From the perspective of a philosophy of language (Searle 1982), a causal intentionality is imperative for comprehending human actions. However, Searle postulates that not all mental states would accomplish intentionality as a logical necessity. As examples, he mentions some forms of anxiety, excitement, nervous tension and panic, given that there is no answer to the question: *Why are you so anxious, excited, nervous, and frightened?*

This is precisely the unanswered question that is very often brought to psychoanalytical clinical situations. If observable facts are confronted in the context of psychoanalytic treatment, it is possible to arrive at an interpretation that differs from that of Searle. So, if intentionality is missing in the context of consciousness, psychoanalytical work can restore it in the context of unconsciousness. But it must be admitted that Searle's study is restricted to an analysis of the intentionality of ordinary situations of everyday life, and for this reason, we cannot expect any concern about the phenomena observed in the framework of psychoanalytic interest. In addition, Searle has already declared himself to be unaware of the application of his theory to such a context (John Searle, personal communication, February/2000).

Basing himself on many observable facts, in the *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, Freud (1901) describes actions in which the aims explicitly intended could not be accomplished and were substituted by others that had not been intended and were even rejected most of the time. In these cases, Freud hypothesizes the presence of an unconscious intentionality which is realizing a desire supposedly repressed or denied.

In everyday situations, where a person finds himself dislodged from a position of control over what he does or says, something paradoxical happens. In a speech-mistake event (*Fehlleistung*) the representation of the act, the reasons for executing it, the evaluation of its possible consequences and its intentionality are all missing, as well as the decision to act or not to act. Only after reflection can these elements be understood as governed by an unconscious intention, a wish struggling for a specific defined end.

Although the term "intention", associated with a conscious or unconscious qualification, appeared numerous times throughout Freud's work, the same does not hold for the term "intentionality". The latter term appeared on only two occasions (Freud 1901 and 1922). In these two passages, it can be observed that the term "intentionality" is not used in the sense in which it is normally used in philosophy, where it can be replaced by the term "intention" without leading to any misunderstanding.

According to Searle (1982), having an intention is only one variety of intentionality among several others. In this

sense, the concept of intention would be contained within that of intentionality. In his view, intention is directly related to the context of action. In addition, it becomes impossible to give meaning to an action unless intentionality is attributed to it. In view of the fact that speech acts are a type of human action, Wittgenstein, in his *Philosophical Investigations* (1953/1999), emphasizes that if we exclude intention from language, then its entire function collapses. In this sense, the intrinsic intentionality of the speaker is transferred to the words he uses, the phrases he constructs and in general to all the language games he plays.

Thus, in the accomplishment of a speech act, the speaker necessarily expresses a corresponding intention associated to what is said. In this sense, the liar just as much as the person who tells the truth maintain their commitment to telling the truth. What is evident here is the notion of an internal link involving the speech act and its intentionality. Consequently, intention is an essential element of the accomplishment of speech acts. Wittgenstein detects this condition in a precise statement that states that intention is the spirit of words (1953/1999). In this way, the link between the speech act and intentionality allows us to infer the intentionality by answering this question: What is the speaker trying to do?

Thus, the theory of action affirms the notion of the existence of an individual who exercises dominion over his actions, by means of desire and rational control. In this perspective, rationality and consciousness occupy a referentially privileged place in human action and intentionality. But, what can be said about the following declaration of the President of the House of Deputies as he is about to open the work session: *Honored Sirs! I announce the presence of so many gentlemen, and therefore declare the session "closed"?* (Freud 1901, pp.64-65).

There is no doubt that in this case the President tried to fulfill his duties and declare the session open. What could a theory of action say about this speech-mistake (considering its internal criteria of analysis)? Is it enough to consider: the Parliamentary President, in performing the procedure and pronouncing the statement, would have had an awareness of his thoughts or feelings? Does his act reflect his conscious intentionality?

It is said that the ensuing general merriment first attracted his attention, leading him to correct his mistake. This demonstrates that the president did not himself become aware of the speech-mistake. From the President's point of view, he had actually performed his intentionality and Freud would say that he had accomplished it absolutely. We should not hesitate to simply admit that he uttered those words with unconscious intention. The behavior of the speaker in this case certainly speaks against conscious intentionality, and thus excludes it.

Phenomena like this exceed the role of consciousness in the accomplishment of intentionality and should help us contemplate the boundaries of an understanding of intentionality and consciousness. Thus, if it is desirable to stay on the right track, we must, like Freud, adhere completely to Brentano's assertion that there is no psy-

chological phenomenon without intentionality, even if it is unconscious.

References

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