

The "-Ly Manner Adverb Opposability Theorem": A Critique of "Consciously" and "Nonconsciously"

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Abstract:

This paper introduces the "-Ly Manner Adverb Opposability Theorem," which states that any "-ly" adverb describing the *manner* in which an action is performed must possess a definable scalar opposite to carry semantic meaning. Applying this theorem reveals that "*consciously*" and "*nonconsciously*" fail the opposability test, rendering them linguistically and philosophically incoherent. Although the incoherence of terms like "*subconscious*" and "*unconscious*" was previously demonstrated by Franz Brentano, this paper focuses specifically on the linguistic structure of manner adverbs and the vacuity of "*consciously*" and "*nonconsciously*".

1. Introduction

Precise language is essential for clear philosophical and scientific thinking. This paper proposes a simple, formal test—the "-Ly Manner Adverb Opposability Theorem"—to evaluate whether manner adverbs meaningfully specify how an action is performed.

While past work (notably Brentano) has exposed conceptual problems with "*subconscious*" and "*unconscious*", the present contribution focuses exclusively on the linguistic failures of "*consciously*" and "*nonconsciously*" under this new framework.

2. The "-Ly Manner Adverb Opposability Theorem"

Definition:

An "-ly" adverb that describes the *manner* of an action must have a clear, definable opposite.

- If no opposite exists, the adverb does not differentiate a mode of action and becomes a rhetorically empty addition.

Examples:

- *Quickly* vs. *Slowly* → valid, informative contrast.

- *Carefully* vs. *Carelessly* → valid, informative contrast.
- *Consciously* → no coherent opposite (*nonconsciously* is a rhetorical construction, not a true opposite).

Thus, according to the theorem, "*consciously*" and "*nonconsciously*" fail to describe how something is done in a meaningful way.

3. The Failure of "Consciously" and "Nonconsciously"

"*Consciously*" and "*nonconsciously*" appear superficially to form a binary, but analysis reveals deep asymmetry:

- Labeling an action "nonconscious" does not create a natural opposite to "conscious" behavior; it merely negates without informative contrast.
- Furthermore, "consciously" often adds no real information because agency typically presupposes awareness by default.
- Actions cannot meaningfully be described simultaneously as both "conscious" and "nonconscious"—unlike other adverbial pairs such as "quickly" and "slowly," which describe relative degrees.

Thus, "consciously" and "nonconsciously" collapse into linguistic artifacts without genuine descriptive power.

4. Special Case: Time-Based "-Ly" Adverbs

Adverbs like "*hourly*", "*daily*", "*monthly*", and "*yearly*" are not manner adverbs but time-frequency markers.

- These terms specify *when* an action occurs, not *how* it is performed.
 - As such, they are **exempt** from the -Ly Manner Adverb Opposability Theorem.
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5. Philosophical Implications

By recognizing that "consciously" and "nonconsciously" fail the opposability test, we sharpen the language available for discussions of mind and agency.

This complements—but is distinct from—Brentano's prior critique of unconscious mental states by providing a **linguistic, not metaphysical**, argument.

Additionally, Brentano's insight can be extended:

- **Self-reporting one's conscious state is inherently impossible** because the act of reporting itself constitutes a new conscious event.
- Any attempt to describe the present consciousness **fails to account for the consciousness involved in the act of description itself.**
- Thus, consciousness, by its nature, **cannot be fully captured in self-observation**, but only approximated or inferred retrospectively.

Clearer language enables clearer thinking: philosophical progress demands we abandon empty terms that masquerade as precision.

6. Conclusion

According to the "-Ly Manner Adverb Opposability Theorem," "*consciously*" and "*nonconsciously*" do not meaningfully describe how actions are performed.

They lack coherent opposites and thus are rhetorically and philosophically vacuous.

A rigorous philosophy of mind should reject these terms in favor of language that specifies real distinctions.

References:

- Brentano, F. (1874). *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*.