

*At the Origins of Analytic Philosophy**

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I begin with a concept taken from genetics, the biological discipline. In genetics a distinction is drawn between dominant and recessive features. This distinction is used in those cases where contact between two elements does not generate a new element which is, so to speak, intermediate between the two (in the way that the mixture of white and black yeilds grey), but where one of the two elements assumes a dominant role while the other recedes into the background. This second element is still present, it performs its role, but it is restricted to a subordinate position. I begin with this distinction between dominance and recessiveness because theoretical disciplines may also be classified using this distinction. For example, if we consider mathematics, we may safely say that it is a dominant discipline: when mathematics comes into contact with other disciplines, it moulds them to its own features, it 'mathematizes' them. On the other hand, philosophy is certainly a recessive discipline: when it comes into contact with other disciplines, philosophy takes on their features and is thus, so to speak, dominated. To simplify an otherwise much more complicated argument, we may state that when philosophical speculation is accompanied by literature it becomes a form of literature, and when it is accompanied by science it becomes a form of science. This analogy gives insight into at least one reason why philosophers belonging to different schools of thought find it so difficult and laborious to communicate with and understand each other. If what I have said is plausible, then between a philosopher of the first type (philosophy plus literature) and a philosopher of the second type (philosophy plus science) there will evidently be considerable differences of language, of conceptual apparatus, and of cognitive styles. Since my task here is to address a number of themes regarding analytic philosophy, my focus will obviously be on those aspects and those currents of philosophical thought that most explicitly interrelate with the disciplines of various kinds that we conventionally call 'scientific'. In order to set out my argument with sufficient clarity, I shall have to resort to a further simplifying convention. In very general terms, by analytic philosophy in the strict sense of the term I mean the analysis of language. More precisely, analytic philosophy accepts certain of the principal models of the philosophical tradition and uses them to unravel the various levels and components that characterize linguistic expressions by transforming ontological and gnoseological topics into semantic ones. We may therefore assert that a characteristic feature of analytic philosophy is the conviction (i) that philosophical explanation of thought can be conducted through philosophical explanation of language, and (ii) that this is the only way any comprehensive explanation of thought can be possible. This position is based on a remark by Frege to the effect that although language is a distorting mirror, it is the only mirror we have. Among the predecessors and founders of analytic philosophy, we may certainly list Moore, Russell, Wittgenstein, the Vienna Circle, the Cambridge School (Wisdom), and the Oxford School (Ryle). My procedure now will be

* Expanded version of the speech presented at the Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, May 1991.

to consider the analytic movement *en bloc*, treating it in some way as an undifferentiated and uniform whole so that I can uncover what lies at its roots. In particular, both to make the comparison more stimulating and because we have precise and celebrated material to hand, I shall examine the origins of the Vienna Circle.

Among the theses that contributed to the specific theoretical stance of the Vienna Circle there was the conviction that no question is insoluble, only perhaps ill-formed, and the profound belief that all the sciences can be unified into an organic whole. For these reasons the Vienna Circle's manifesto stated explicitly that the scientific conception of the world is distinguished not so much by distinct theories, as by the underlying orientation, the perspective and the direction of research.

If we use the device of treating complex and ramified movements of thought as somehow unitary points of reference, then the main distinction to be drawn in twentieth-century scientific philosophy sets analytic philosophy against phenomenology — two movements which waged outright war against each other for more than half a century and which only recently called a truce. And here we meet our first surprise. If we go back to the origins of these two movements, we find something that perhaps we were not expecting. If we may legitimately consider Frege to be the grandfather of analytic philosophy and Husserl the father of the phenomenological school, what would have been the reaction of a German student reading Frege and Husserl in, say, 1903? He would certainly not have considered them to be two radically antagonistic thinkers. Indeed, despite their differing interests, he would have believed that they largely shared the same point of view. The split between the two movements that drew on Frege and Husserl for their insights and arguments only came later; their common basis remained unchanged. Giving detailed treatment of the reasons for the distinction first, and the split later, between analyticists and phenomenologists would be beyond my brief; I shall make only a limited number of remarks. However, what I wish to stress in particular is precisely the fact that two of the twentieth century's most significant movements in scientific philosophy have, at the very least, a common thematic origin and a shared cultural background.¹

In clarification of this point, I shall approach my subject from the following point of view. Instead of tracing the declarations of the exponents back to their sources, I shall seek to show what transpires when we investigate, in purely historical terms, the state of philosophical investigation some decades before the birth of the two movements that concern us here. For the sake of convenience, I shall take 1831, the year of Hegel's death, as my point of departure. We can assume that Hegel's death marked the end of a particular period of thought. We all know full well, of course, the names of the major thinkers of the nineteenth century. The century began with Schopenhauer, Schleiermacher and Herbart; then Marxian thought and materialist theories of various kinds took the stage; then Kierkegaard, followed by Nietzsche, and so forth ... there is no need to spell the sequence out. I wish instead to cite a number of names and to give a quantity of information that, perhaps, are less well-known but nevertheless extremely relevant to my argument.²

¹ Cf. Dummett 1988.

² For a synthetic excellent history of XIXth century philosophy, see Tatarkiewicz 1973.

There are four general features of the philosophy developed in the German-speaking countries – Germany especially – from 1830 onwards that warrant particular attention.³

1. A first, frequently overlooked, feature is that, when the inebriating excesses of idealism died away, philosophy apparently underwent a significant period of crisis. Perhaps the most persuasive evidence of this is the fact that university chairs of philosophy were now increasingly and systematically awarded to psychologists, a process attended by the founding of the first laboratories of psychology.

2. The second development was the spread of profound philological interest in language and the simultaneous birth of linguistics. I need only mention Humboldt, the Grimm brothers, Bopp, Hermann and Steinthal.

3. The third feature was what we might call the revival of Kant in the form of neo-Kantianism. Of course, when we start using labels with a prefix like 'neo-', we are emphasizing not only links and similarities, but also and especially differences. Characteristic of the neo-Kantians, precisely because they were neo-Kantians and not simply Kantians, was their rejection of certain important aspects of Kantian thought. In particular, they were sceptical of the doctrine of the forms of intuition as pure forms (space and time) of intuition. We should not forget that it was these years that saw alternative forms of geometry – non-euclidean geometries to be precise – achieving full scientific legitimacy. A form of intuition that claimed to be pure but which was simultaneously grounded in only one specific form of geometry was certainly not one to be relied on. We should also bear in mind Lotze's discovery that spatial knowledge originates in the localization of sensations. This localization was topical not geometrical, and it was neither metric nor projective. Therefore which geometry it was predestined for was impossible to say. According to Lotze's discovery, our knowledge of space derives from a progressive logical organization of topically distinct points which generates, through trial and error, an overall geometry.⁴

4. The fourth and final point I wish to make concerns the nineteenth-century revival of Aristotelean studies. In the second half of the century new editions of, and commentaries on, Aristotle were published by Schwegler, Bonitz, Tricot and others. In addition, there was Prantl's history of logic, Steinthal's history of grammar and ancient logic, Trendelenburg's history of the doctrine of the categories. All these studies, many of which resulted from a new philological sensibility, laid the basis for the modern study of Aristotle.

The four features outlined briefly above were merged together in significant fashion by several outstanding thinkers of the time. Here I shall only mention a few of them: Herbart, Trendelenburg, Bolzano, Lotze, Frege, Dilthey, Spranger, Mach, Avenarius. Obviously, I cannot give even the briefest treatment to all these writers, to their differences, and to the reasons why many of them are still extremely relevant today. I shall instead concentrate on only one of these philosophers, and on the school, in the broad sense of the word, that grew out of his teachings. I refer to Franz Brentano and to the school that first took the name of descriptive psychology. The reasons for my choice of Brentano and his

³ Cf. Melandri 1990.

⁴ Lotze 1852.

school – which I regard in many respects as a unitary whole – are by no means self-evident. Hence, before moving to biographical data on Brentano which will serve to give at least a general outline of the main features of his thought, I must first justify my choice – given that we are concerned here with the origins of the analytic movement and in view of my argument that, at the beginning of this century, analyticists and phenomenologists occupied the same cultural territory.

That Brentano was one of the founders of the analytic movement and in particular of the Vienna Circle, was explicitly stated in the Vienna Circle's manifesto. The section devoted to the historical background of the circle declared:

The commitment of physicists like Mach and Boltzmann to the teaching of philosophy testifies to the then dominant interest in the logical andgnoseological problems of the foundation of physics. From this fundamental theme also arose the requirement to renew logic; and it was at Vienna, although he moved from an entirely different direction, that Franz Brentano had opened the way. As a Catholic priest, Brentano was well-versed in scholastic philosophy, and he undoubtedly took from it its logical doctrines together with Leibnizian contributions for a reform of logic, while he left aside Kant and the systematic idealist philosophers. The appreciation by Brentano and his pupils of the work of scholars like Bolzano and others who sought to give a rigorous foundation to logic became more and more apparent. Alois H÷fler stressed this aspect of Brentanian philosophy before a public which comprised, because of the influence of Mach and Boltzmann, numerous adherents of a scientific conception of the world. The philosophical society directed by H÷fler held frequent meetings on thegnoseological and logical aspects of the foundation of physics at the University of Vienna ... During roughly the same period (1870-1882), at work within Brentano's Viennese group was Alexius von Meinong (subsequently professor at Graz), whose *Gegenstandstheorie* had a certain affinity with the modern theory of concepts and whose pupil Ernst Mally likewise conducted research in the field of the logic.⁵

This long quotation is of particular interest for a number of reasons. In fact as soon as one finds out that Meinong had been Brentano's pupil and that H÷fler and Mally had in turn been Meinong's, one realizes that many of the names cited above belonged to what was in many respects a unitary research group. Among the outstanding pupils of Brentano, apart from the already-mentioned Meinong, at least Marty, Husserl (who dedicated his first book to Brentano), Twardowski, Ehrenfels and Stumpf should be mentioned. These were scholars who all had a profound impact on their fields of study.⁶ In effect, Brentano's influence was manifest not only in philosophy, as is obvious from names like Husserl and Meinong, but in other disciplines as well: psychology (with Stumpf, Ehrenfels and Meinong again),⁷ logic (in particular the Lvov-Warsaw school founded by Twardowski),⁸ literature (here one need only mention Kafka and Musil),⁹ and economics with the neoclassical theory of value.¹⁰

⁵ *The Vienna Manifesto*, Historical background.

⁶ For a general picture of the point, see the forthcoming Albertazzi Libardi Poli 1993.

⁷ Smith 1988.

⁸ Woleński 1985.

⁹ Smith 1981.

But how was it possible for just one individual to exert such a wide and profound influence? To explain the phenomenon, even superficially, some biographical details are in order.

Franz Brentano was born in 1838 and died in 1917. He belonged to a family of intellectuals: He was, for example, the grandson of Clemens Brentano and Bettina von Arnim. His brother Lujo was a celebrated economist. In 1864 he joined the priesthood. In 1866 he obtained his university teaching qualification, discussing twenty-five theses, one of which bearing the title *Verae philosophiae methodus nulla alias nisi scientia naturalis est*. The novelty of his method (which we shall explore later) and the content of his theses made his lectures enormously successful: so much so that one of his colleagues at Würzburg had to cancel his own course for lack of students. In 1869, on the request of Archbishop Ketteler he wrote a memoir attacking the dogma of papal infallibility for the Conference of Fulda. In 1873 he abandoned the priesthood and renounced the Catholic Church. In 1874 he became full professor at Vienna, where he met and fell in love with Ida von Lieben. However, the couple were unable to marry because of Brentano's status as an ex-priest: his only option was to renounce his Austrian citizenship, and as a consequence lose his professorship at the university. He stayed on in Vienna as Privatdozent, where his lectures were now so successful that the university had to hire a theatre to accommodate the students who thronged to listen to him. In 1884 Brentano's wife died. He stayed in Vienna for another year and then moved to Italy. He took Italian citizenship and remained in Italy for twenty years. When Italy went to war against Austria he emigrated to Switzerland, where he died in 1917. The richness and power of Brentano's personality is evident even from this brief outline of his life.

I wish now to describe one or two of Brentano's contributions to philosophy and then move to analysis of the aspect that most explicitly influenced the analytic position. We will focus upon Brentano's text *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*. Psychology in Brentano's sense is empirical but not experimental. Although he did not exclude the role and value of experimental investigation, Brentano concentrated in particular on the identification and classification of the features that make up the psychic phenomenon. His work marks the transition point between the Aristotelean doctrine that psychology is the science of the soul understood as the matter or underlying substance of presentations, and the new doctrine that held that psychology was the science of psychic phenomena understood as such without having to resort to the device of an underlying substance. It is worth pointing out that Brentano distinguished between physical and psychic *phenomena* (understood as acts), not between physical and psychic *objects*. One of the main features of *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* is its thesis that mental acts are characterized by intentionality, i.e. by being directed towards something. According to Brentano, every psychic phenomenon is characterized by what mediaeval scholars called the intentional inexistence of an object, that is by its relation to a content or its direction towards an object. We may legitimately say, therefore, that we are frightened of something, or that we are amused by something, but not that we are simply frightened or amused. A grammatical criterion is of use here, one which perhaps does not apply in every case but which is nevertheless illuminating. Consider expressions such as 'see a colour' or 'hear a noise'. In these cases the verb manifests the psychic phenomenon (respectively seeing and hearing) and

¹⁰ Grassl Smith 1988.

the noun manifests the physical phenomenon (the colour that is seen, the noise that is heard). The basic difference between these two kinds of phenomena is that whereas we may be mistaken over physical phenomena (for example, the colour we see may depend on an optical illusion or be the effect of special lighting and therefore differ from the colour of the object), psychic phenomena are absolutely evident and impervious to error (we cannot be mistaken over the fact that we are *seeing* a colour or that we are in fact seeing). In being conscious of a presentation, we are simultaneously conscious of the fact that it is present to ourselves. We cannot hear a noise without being aware of both the noise and the act of hearing it. Hearing and being aware of hearing are not two different acts, but one act with two different objects: (the sound (in recto) and the act (in obliquo, as a type of reflexive object).

Thus for Brentano the mental is a type of act, and the physical is the object to which the act is directed. A mental act is the way in which a mind is related to an object, an object is whatever the mind has before it as the content of its act. Brentano's words are quite clear:

öEvery mental phenomenon is characterized by what the scholastics of the Middle Ages called the intentional (and also mental) inexistence (Inexistenz) of an object (Gegenstand), and what we could call, although in not entirely unambiguous terms, the reference to a content, a direction upon an object (by which we are not to understand a reality in this case), or an immanent objectivity. ... This intentional inexistence is exclusively characteristic of mental phenomena. No physical phenomenon manifests anything similar. Consequently, we can define mental phenomena by saying that they are such phenomena as include an object intentionally within themselves.ö.¹¹

Brentano divided psychology between two fundamental branches: genetic psychology (i.e. physiology) and descriptive psychology (non-physiological). He concerned himself with the latter.

The point on which Brentano perhaps seems most outdated is his theory that inner observation is systematically neutral and therefore passive. Freud, who attended Brentano's lectures for two semesters, used the method of free association to show the 'tendentiousness' of consciousness and hence its active role. A different, though not conflicting interpretation of this point can be found in Husserl's distinction between the passive and active components of the layers of consciousness.

Brentano and his pupils shared a fundamental view of how philosophical enquiry was to be conducted; a view also held by Mach, and one which today is an acknowledged standard for all the versions and traditions of exact philosophy. Given its now widespread and unquestioning acceptance, the benefits brought by the introduction of this new level of exactness are easily underestimated. I shall describe those of its aspects that strike me as most interesting.

Brentano instilled in his pupils the conviction that philosophy should be rigorous, scientific, exact and clear. He not only gave his pupils direct instruction on how to philosophize with rigour, he also combined this teaching with detailed historical observations of the ways in

¹¹ Brentano 1960, 50-1.

which philosophical enquiry had been conducted in the past.¹² One of the chief and most celebrated of Brentano's methodological theses was his contention that description should take precedence over any kind of explanation as to the birth, development or articulation of a phenomenon. This distinction between description and genetic explanation was common to all his pupils, who developed great skill in giving detailed and accurate descriptions of the domain of phenomena being studied. We might perhaps say that they all obeyed the motto: 'Before you think, look long and look carefully'.¹³ Explanation and theory should be preceded by the painstaking and perhaps laborious work of description; a method that was to be applied to all areas of enquiry.

The immediate corollary to this methodology was the requirement that counter-examples should be given. Theories distilled from analyses of the data must be verified, not only by the univocity and precision of the theoretical and non-theoretical terms used, but also by reference to a set of possible counter-examples constituting proof of their veracity and acting as a stimulus for their further development. Examples also perform a crucial positive role. If the presence of examples is an index of the degree of exactness of an argument, their absence leaves matters nebulous and unresolved.

Apart from the accurate description of phenomena and the search for relevant examples and counter-examples, exact formulation must be given to all components of the theory. In this sense, Twardowski's words are exemplary:

I tend to believe that the lack of clarity in the style of some philosophers is not an inevitable effect of the object of their enquiries, but that it derives from the vagueness and lack of clarity of their way of thinking. It may be the case that clarity of thought and expression proceed hand in hand, so that those writers who think clearly write clearly, whereas those who do not write clearly must be said not to think clearly either.¹⁴

Development of correct theories is also made possible by the careful consideration of rival theories. Here Stumpf adds that the method learnt from Brentano, and before him from Aristotle, with a view to providing direct proof of a theory is to set out a complete list of all positions and eliminate them all except the correct one.

We can therefore summarize the Brentanian method as follows:

1. accurate description of the phenomena
2. gathering of examples and counter-examples
3. listing theories
4. eliminating theories that do not match the data described.

¹² Perhaps it is worth reminding ourselves that the search for exactness and a rejection of ornamentation were two of the principal features of intellectual and artistic movements under the Austrian monarchy. One remembers, for example, Robert Musil or developments in music.

¹³ And its cognate: 'First observe and consider, then read'. Cf. Meinong 1960, 116.

¹⁴ Twardowski 1979, 2.

It should be easy to see that this is still the old Aristotelean method. All this links with the requirement for an ideal language or for a calculus that systematically interconnects the phenomena of the domain under examination. It is here that the necessity to express philosophical arguments in the form of definitions arises.

At this point it comes as no surprise to learn that all the Brentanists explicitly preferred research that was partial, precise, specific, and addressed to well-defined and circumscribed problems. It could also be of some interest to note that all these features became a methodological programme in the first issue of *Analysis*.

The Brentanians were all systematic thinkers, but they never liked systems. That is, they analyzed their problems with extreme care even if they never constructed systems.

A final point to make before I conclude is that the Brentanians loved distinctions. This is an important point. Instead of looking for analogies (typical of the hermeneutic school) they stressed differences and introduced distinctions. Justification for this was stated succinctly by Meinong: between two people one of whom makes a distinction and the other does not, it is usually the case that the one who introduces the distinction has seen something that the other has not.¹⁵

The whole of the foregoing discussion is immediately applicable to the analytic movement. Characteristic of the analytic position, in fact, is its emphasis on the collection and careful discussion of examples and counter-examples, its attempt to give detailed description of the field of investigation, its search for clearcut conceptual definitions, and its use of the least misleading language possible. That the work of the Brentanians was valued by the analytics is frequently evidenced by the literature. I shall give just one example taken from an essay by Russell. Writing on Meinong, Russell declares:

Although empiricism as a philosophy does not appear to be tenable, there is an empirical manner of investigating, which should be applied in every subject-matter. This is possessed in very perfect form by the work we are considering. A frank recognition of the data, as inspection reveals them, precedes all theorising; when a theory is propounded, the greatest skill is shown in the selection of facts, favourable or unfavourable, and in eliciting all relevant consequences of the facts adduced. There is thus a rare combination of acute inference with capacity for observation. The method of philosophy is not fundamentally unlike that of other sciences: the differences seem to be only in degree.¹⁶

New light is shed on the descriptive method I have briefly described when we remember that it was regarded by the Brentanians as the application of the more general method of variation. Let us consider a simple example. If we take a quantity of gas and alter the pressure applied to it, we obtain differences in volume and in temperature. This much is obvious. Observation of the co-variations leads us to believe that the behaviour of the gas depends on certain rules or laws. Brentano and his followers worked in exactly the same way. They took a certain phenomenon, they examined it from various points of view, they noted the changes that occurred in it, and they tried to tie all these variations together with a

¹⁵ Meinong 1921, Mulligan 1986, 91.

¹⁶ Russell 1973, 22.

set of dependence rules. This procedure, one realizes, was firmly rooted in the history of exact thought. It was in fact a variant of the aporetic method, which consisted in pushing a concept to its extreme limits, to the point, that is, where it became another concept (and this, too, is Aristotelean). It should therefore be clear that Brentano and his disciples share many aspects of the analytic method. Further, if we consider the development both of the analytic school and of the most known of the various Brentanian branches, that is of the phenomenological school,¹⁷ we can realise that they not only derive from the same origin, but they also have histories with numerous features in common. Both movements were born as a reaction against the idealistic, or at least anti-realistic, standpoint. They both eventually collapsed into some sort of idealism not entirely unlike the theory they initially rejected. They both came into being as an attempt to explain the problem of concepts and meanings, understood as objective realities which manage to enter the flux of experience without losing their objective status or their ability to reveal the objective world to us – the world as it would be even if there were no subject to perceive it. And both movements finished up by rejecting this objectiveness of concepts, finally to assume the position that these are the shared components of what was in some way common experience: a changed interpretation where the crucial aspect was that concepts thus understood are incapable of conveying to us what things are really like beyond any effective human experience.¹⁸

The main point of contrast between the Brentanians taken as a whole and the analytic philosophers, also taken as a whole, is the differing emphasis they placed on the role of language. For the analyticists, in fact, all issues were by nature linguistic, and their analysis necessarily entailed the use of a linguistic filter. None of the Brentanians went as far as this. In point of fact, midway through this century the analytic approach underwent a transformation. Analyses of concepts – analyses which provided analytic philosophers like Moore and Russell with their point of departure and analyses whose explicit methodology brought them into immediate contact with the Brentanians and all the proponents of scientific philosophy – progressively turned into general analyses of language. The dominant assumption became that consciousness was essentially linguistic in character. The meanings present in consciousness were taken to be reducible to linguistic meanings. To which an immediate corollary was the conviction that the fundamental process whereby meanings are attributed to referents was naming. Whatever the details of the various approaches may have been, their focal point was the firm belief that analysis of language was the same thing as analysis of consciousness. The weak point in this change of analytic perspective seems to have been the reasons adduced for the view that a linguistic sign may function, as a linguistic sign, in identical fashion both in the public domain and within an individual act of consciousness or individual speech act. The point on which the analyticists have been most unconvincing lies precisely in their failure to provide conclusive proof for this view.

¹⁷ Strictly speaking, all the three main branches that come out from the influence of Brentano, that is Husserl's phenomenology, Meinong's theory of objects and Twardowski's School in Lvov, can be seen as more or less æhereticalÆ. What matters here is the fact that all the Brentanians shared the methodological points I have summed up in the preceding pages.

¹⁸ Willard 1991.

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