

BRENTANO AND HIS SCHOOL: REASSEMBLING THE PUZZLE

1. INTRODUCTION

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.¹ 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? ² 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 our brief; we shall make only a limited number of remarks. However, what we wish to stress in particular is precisely the fact that two of the 20th century's most significant

¹ See also Poli 1994.

² Cf. Dummett 1988.

movements in scientific philosophy have, at the very least, a common thematic origin and a shared cultural background.

In clarification of this point, we shall approach our subject from the following point of view. Instead of tracing the declarations of the exponents back to their sources, we shall seek to show what transpires when we consider, 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, we shall take 1831, the year of Hegel's death, as our 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 19th 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. We 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 our argument.³

There are four general features of the philosophy developed in the German-speaking countries — Germany especially — from 1830 onwards that warrant particular attention.⁴

- (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 for 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. We 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 emphasising 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

³ For an excellent outline history of 19th century philosophy, see Tatarkiewicz 1973.

⁴ Melandri 1990.

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 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.⁵

- (4) The fourth and final point we wish to make concerns the nineteenth-century revival of Aristotelian 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, of whom we can only mention a few of them: Herbart, Trendelenburg, Bolzano, Lotze, Frege, Dilthey, Spranger, Mach and Avenarius. Obviously, we cannot give even the briefest treatment to all these philosophers, to their differences, and to the reasons why many of them are still extremely relevant today. And here arises our first problem, namely the problem of Brentano's invisibility.

2. THE PROBLEM OF BRENTANO'S INVISIBILITY

The problem of Brentano's invisibility is a phenomenon which seems to characterize his entire lifetime. Those asked to list the principal philosophers of the 19th century usually reply with the names already mentioned. Very rarely, however, do they mention Brentano. Given this state of affairs, one should consider whether the call for a 'Brentano revival' has the indisputable and indisputably circumscribed sense of an exercise in philosophical archaeology,

⁵ See Lotze 1852.

or whether this is a much more general problem which merits at least an attempt at a reply.

In order to account for Brentano's invisibility, we must begin with a number of general observations.

First of all, it is obvious that Brentano's invisibility has serious consequences on assessment of his philosophical theory. As is well known, the reconstruction of Brentano's thought is still flawed and incomplete. Some of the reasons for this are today quite obvious and very familiar. Consider the following five factors:

- (1) Brentano himself published very little during his lifetime compared with his vast and still largely unpublished *Nachlaß*.
- (2) A significant proportion of the posthumous works published under Brentano's name were composed, structured and even written by his pupils using methods which, to be charitable, we may call philologically improper. The essential fact, however, is that his unpublished works exceed both in quantity and, in certain cases, in theoretical importance his published *oeuvre*.
- (3) The great importance of the exercise-books used by Brentano's pupils to take notes at his lectures should also be mentioned. For many years these notebooks were the principal source of information for other pupils and friends. When many of them were lost during the Second World War, a void was created that has proved impossible to fill. This loss is particularly tragic because Brentano laid great emphasis on oral teaching, which he regarded as more important than his written production. In his introduction to the Italian translation of the second volume of *Psychology*, Puglisi stressed this very emphatically:

The vividness of his spoken words, the varied expression of his arguments, immediately evoked that impulse which was lacking in his writings. Hence it has been rightly said that the chief characteristic of Franz Brentano's teaching was that it was oral. Perhaps, like Socrates, he preferred to teach through speech, because thus one teaches not only philosophy but also how to philosophise, thereby spurring intellectual enquiry.⁶

- (4) Another important item in the Brentano puzzle is that most of his thought was set out in his correspondence: we need only cite the 1400 letters exchanged between him and Marty and which constitute a large part of his posthumously published work; or the fact that his letters addressed to one

⁶ Puglisi 1913, 8.

scholar were then passed on to others, who in turn intervened in the exchange of ideas.⁷

- (5) A further aspect of the problem is the blindness that afflicted Brentano in the last years of his life. Unable to write, he was forced to dictate his thoughts. Consequently, when he had to correct, modify or supplement previous writings or dictations, he found it easier to correct an already written text by dictating it anew. One thus often finds different versions of the same argument, sometimes with minimal changes, sometimes with much more substantial differences.

We therefore find ourselves in a curious situation: on the basis of the above considerations, it would be entirely improper to confine Brentano's thought to the text that was his intellectual legacy and with which his name is universally associated. Although *Psychology from an empirical standpoint* of 1874 contains a number of key components of his thought — the concept of intentionality, the distinction between physical and psychic phenomena, the evidence of inner perception, the division of psychic phenomena into three classes — it does not encompass the richness of his doctrine in its entirety.⁸

The above features — especially Brentano's emphasis on oral teaching, and the scantiness of his published work compared with the enormous quantity of his manuscripts and correspondence — are also of theoretical importance because they are rooted in Brentano's method of 'doing' philosophy. We know that the distinguishing feature of his philosophy was its empirical bias, its insistence on rigorous and partial answers rather than on the construction of systems *by self-definition* coherent and self-sufficient. Given these features, it comes as no surprise that the same problem should be examined on several separate occasions and that different solutions should be proposed for it.

This procedure has a certain amount of inner coherence. Although Brentano always began his analysis with specific topics and problems, he proposed solutions which then reverberated throughout the entire edifice of his philosophy. This, as we have seen, is a manner of philosophising which takes the natural sciences as its model. Puglisi wrote,

Franz Brentano did not write a system of philosophy. He addressed certain fundamental problems in the same way as scientists contribute to a slowly-developing science by means of the relatively small-scale study of individual laws... For Brentano it was a

⁷ Baumgartner 1993, 239.

⁸ *Psychologie*, moreover, was written also for reasons of career advancement.

contradiction to work according to the method of the natural sciences and to write a large quantity of bulky volumes.⁹

These factors also account for the different solutions that Brentano proposed for the problems he addressed. His thought, in fact, displays a continuity of method and a permanence of problems, but not a univocity of solutions. It is this aspect that allows one to talk of a *school of Brentano* among his pupils, to detect a ‘family resemblance’ among philosophers and scholars belonging to different disciplines. That is to say, the school is defined more by problems and the method used in their analysis than by their solutions in the strict sense. Accordingly, his *heterodox* followers, such as Carl Stumpf, Anton Marty, Alexius Meinong, Christian von Ehrenfels, Edmund Husserl and Kazimierz Twardowski, were more faithful to their master’s thought than the *orthodox* Brentanians like Oskar Kraus, Alfred Kastil and Franziska Mayer-Hillebrand.

Another component of the ‘Brentano problem’ is its constant reference to Aristotle. One notes with interest the distinct cleavage between theoretical and historical-philological attitudes. As already said, the second half of the 19th century saw an explicit philological revival of Aristotle and, as a matter of fact, Brentano’s first work on Aristotle, published in 1862, was dedicated to Trendelenburg. But Brentano was the only thinker at the time, or one of the very few, who offered a reading of Aristotle based on the source texts which conducted not only erudite philological exegesis, but analysis within a contemporary theoretical framework. Moreover, the ‘scholastic’ atmosphere of certain of his reflections, not to mention the explicitly scholastic topics (consider intentionality) that underpinned his theory, explain why, according to Tatarkiewicz, “among his contemporaries Brentano was at first regarded as an anachronism, a medieval remnant”.¹⁰ Tatarkiewicz also points out that “his whole manner of thinking was a novelty for his contemporaries, even when he only returned to old views”,¹¹ and that “Brentano accomplished something exceptional for the philosophy of the nineteenth century: he avoided a minimalistic limitation without falling into speculative metaphysics”.¹²

A different but not irrelevant factor is that a number of Brentano’s outstanding pupils achieved their own success and founded their own schools. Suffice it to mention Husserl’s phenomenology, Twardowski’s Lvov-Warsaw school and Meinong’s Graz school. The personal success and academic

⁹ Puglisi 1913, 16-17.

¹⁰ Tatarkiewicz 1973, 220.

¹¹ Tatarkiewicz 1973, 211.

¹² Tatarkiewicz 1973, 220.

recognition attained by these exponents of Brentano's school (in the broad sense) have come to obscure their common thematic origins.

This aspect is further emphasised by the classification of Brentano as the precursor of phenomenology, thereby relegating his thought to a minor and complementary role.¹³ One of the very few authors not to have committed this error is Wolfgang Stegmüller, whose work on the currents of contemporary philosophy correctly considers Brentano to be an independent thinker and characterizes his philosophy as the *philosophy of evidence*.¹⁴

3. BRENTANO BETWEEN ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY AND PHENOMENOLOGY

We have already said that at the beginning of this century, analyticists and phenomenologists occupied the same cultural territory. Although this may seem a somewhat crude overgeneralization, at least on the 'analytic' side, 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 and gnoseological 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 Höfler 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 Höfler held frequent meetings on the gnoseological 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.¹⁵

This long quotation is of particular interest, for a number of reasons. In fact as soon as one discovers that Meinong had been Brentano's pupil and that Höfler

¹³ Tatarkiewicz 1973; Spiegelberg 1984, 27.

¹⁴ Stegmüller 1978, 1-48; see also Stegmüller 1969.

¹⁵ *The Vienna Manifesto*, "Historical background" (our translation).

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.

The subsequent split between analytic philosophy and phenomenology generated, as a side-effect, the oblivion into which Franz Brentano's thought then fell. For this reason a necessary first step is to construct a 'map' of the Brentanists. This must be then followed by revitalized knowledge of the theoretical complexity of their debates, of their unitariness, beyond the partiality of individual schools, and of their style.

4. THE SCHOOL

Among Brentano's outstanding pupils, mention of Marty, Meinong, Husserl, Twardowski, Ehrenfels and Stumpf is obligatory. All these scholars exerted a profound impact on their fields of study. 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),¹⁶ logic (in particular the Lvov-Warsaw school founded by Twardowski),¹⁷ literature (here one need only mention Kafka and Musil),¹⁸ and economics with the neoclassical theory of value.¹⁹

Brentano's first pupils belong to his period in Würzburg. Most notable among his early fellow-scholars and friends were Carl Stumpf and Anton Marty.²⁰ But the largest group of his pupils — which Kraus divides between 'leftist' and 'rightist' Brentanists — formed during his lectureship in Vienna. In truth, Brentano rejected the notion of a school of Brentanists, and his relationships with his pupils were often difficult; nonetheless, he trained at least two generations of philosophers.²¹ His Viennese pupils included Graf

¹⁶ Smith 1988, Libardi 1993a and 1995.

¹⁷ Woleński 1989.

¹⁸ Smith 1981.

¹⁹ Grassl & Smith 1986.

²⁰ Among Brentano's pupils at Würzburg were also Ludwig Schutz, professor at the theological seminary of Trier, Kirschkamp, Johannes Wolff, later professor of philosophy at Trier and Fribourg, and the Viennese Ernst Commer, also a professor of philosophy.

²¹ Kraus 1929, 11-17.

Hertling,²² Hermann Schell,²³ Carl Stumpf, Edmund Husserl, Alexius Meinong, Kazimierz Twardowski and Thomas Masaryk.²⁴

Mention should also be made of Brentano's 'closest' pupils, those who edited various of his works both published and unpublished, and the most noteworthy of whom were Oscar Kraus, Alfred Kastil and Franziska Mayer-Hillebrand. The work of each of these followers, as a whole and with its ramifications, constitutes Franz Brentano's cultural legacy.

But in what sense can one talk of a school of Brentano?

To begin with, we should stress that the individuals listed above, and many others besides, as well as the numerous 'schools' which owe a specific intellectual debt to Brentano and his most outstanding pupils, developed theories that still today warrant examination. What instead seems to have disappeared is the effect of the whole, the presence of significant common aspects.

With the disintegration of the political and geographical unity of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and especially with the events that hastened its final collapse, also the sense of unity of this philosophical and scientific tradition was lost. After 1918, the centres of this tradition — principally Vienna, Prague and Lvov — belonged to different states, and the prolific network of exchanges, contacts and relationships which was one of the reasons for the cultural richness of the period, was dismantled. However, each individual component still preserved something of the philosophical style of its master, a set of features which today permit us to talk of 'Central European philosophy' or, in Melandri's apt expression, of 'Central-East-European philosophy'.

In summarizing the reasons that justify allusion to a putative 'school', it should again be emphasised that we are dealing here with a philosophy which lived, in the historiographical sense, only in a sequence of specific philosophical reflections which, although they were often mutually distinct and reached diverse conclusions, nevertheless shared a number of important features. These features were mainly methodological in nature and they concerned the choice of the problematics analysed and discussed.

²² Graf Hertling was a cousin of Brentano and often visited him at Aschaffenburg and Würzburg. He subsequently became a chancellor of decidedly conservative leanings. He also studied under Trendelenburg in Berlin and in 1871 published *Materie und Form und die Definition der Seele bei Aristoteles*, which closely resembles Brentano's *Psychologie des Aristoteles*.

²³ Hermann Schell, proponent of modernism and author of *Die Einheit des Seelensleben aus den Prinzipien der aristotelischen Philosophie entwickelt*, Freiburg i. Br., 1873.

²⁴ T.G. Masaryk published *Versuch einer konkreten Logik*, Vienna, K. Konegan Verlag, 1887, a study strongly influenced by Brentano's theory.

On methodological matters, Brentano and his pupils shared a fundamental view of how philosophical enquiry was to be conducted; a view also held by Mach, and which today is the 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. We shall describe those of its aspects that strike us as most interesting.

Brentano instilled in his pupils the conviction that philosophy should be rigorous, scientific, exact and clear.²⁵ He not only gave his pupils direct instruction on how to philosophize with rigour, he also combined this teaching with detailed historical observation of the ways in which philosophical enquiry had been conducted in the past. 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 followed the precept: 'First observe and consider, then read'.²⁶ 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 inquiry.

The immediate corollary to this methodology was the requirement that counter-examples should be provided. 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 the veracity of these theories and acting as a stimulus to their further development.

Examples also perform a crucial positive role. If the presence of examples is indicative 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:

The obscurity of the style in which some philosophers write is not an inevitable consequence of the factors inherent in the subject matter of their analysis, but has its source in the vagueness and obscurity of the way they think... An author who does not

²⁵ Mulligan 1986; Poli 1994.

²⁶ Meinong 1960, 116.

know how to express his thoughts clearly does not know how to think clearly either, and therefore his thoughts do not deserve our efforts to guess them.²⁷

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, is to set out a complete list of all positions and eliminate all of them 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.

This is obviously still the traditional Aristotelian method. And it has an immediate bearing on 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.

Not surprisingly, therefore, all the Brentanists explicitly preferred research that was partial, precise, specific, and addressed to well-defined and circumscribed problems.²⁸ Therefore, although the Brentanists were systematic thinkers, they had no liking for systems; or, put otherwise, they analyzed problems with extreme care but never sought to build philosophical systems on this basis.

A final and important point to make in this regard is that the Brentanists were zealous drawers of distinctions. Instead of looking for analogies (typical of the hermeneutic school) they stressed differences and introduced distinctions. This procedure was succinctly justified by Meinong as follows: 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 realized something that the other has not.²⁹

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

²⁷ Twardowski 1979, 2.

²⁸ It could be of some interest to note that all these features became a methodological programme in the first issue of *Analysis*.

²⁹ Meinong 1921, 115; Mulligan 1986, 91.

clearcut conceptual definitions, and its use of the least misleading language possible. That the work of the Brentanians was held in high regard by the analytics is frequently evidenced by the literature. We cite 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.³⁰

Further light is shed on the descriptive method briefly described above 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 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 Aristotelian).

In what follows we describe Brentano's most significant contributions to philosophy and then move to analysis of the aspect of his thought that most explicitly influenced the analytic position.

We concentrate upon Brentano's text *Psychology from an empirical standpoint*. Psychology in Brentano's definition 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 between the Aristotelian doctrine that psychology was the science of the soul, where soul is defined as the matter or the underlying substance of presentations, and the new doctrine that held that psychology was

³⁰ Russell 1973b, 22.

the science of psychic phenomena understood as such without it being necessary to resort to the device of an underlying substance. Note 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. they are directed towards something. According to Brentano, every psychic phenomenon is characterized by what mediaeval philosophers called the intentional in-existence 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 the noun manifests the physical phenomenon (the colour that is seen, the noise that is heard). The essential 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 it may 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). When we are 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. They are 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 phenomenon is a type of act, and the physical object is the object to which the act is directed. A mental act is the way in which a mind relates itself to an object; an object is whatever the mind has before it as the content of its act. Brentano gives the following clear statement of his position:

Every 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.³¹

Brentano divided psychology between two fundamental branches: genetic psychology (i.e. physiology) and descriptive psychology (non-physiological). He concentrated on 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.

When these various inquiries are considered jointly, one notes two elements common to them all: the primacy of inner perception over external perception, and the theory of parts and wholes.

It follows from the primacy of inner over outer perception that psychic phenomena are immediately given as evidence to consciousness. As we have said, consciousness is intentional in character; that is, it is always structurally consciousness of something. One of the theoretical problems which distinguishes Brentano from many of his pupils is the *ontological status* of this *something*, whether it is an internal object, an immanent object or a content.

By 'intentionality' Brentano simply meant the directing of consciousness towards something. His pupils — especially Twardowski and Husserl — distinguished among the various ways in which consciousness intentionally directs itself towards its objects. In this case, corresponding to the various psychic acts are different structures and different types of contents and objects.

With some degree of simplification, we may state that the discovery of the importance of the theory of the whole and its parts followed the formalization of the theory rather than preceded it. In particular, it was only after the construction of mereology by Leśniewski in the years 1916-1921 that an attempt was made to re-examine certain moments of the history of philosophy in the light of the parts/whole relationship.³² In effect, in the absence of an

³¹ Brentano 1874, 115.

³² Mereology or theory of parts, from the Greek *meros*, part. Leśniewski constructed four different axiomatizations of his mereology, respectively in 1916, 1918, 1920, 1921, which he set out in the first chapters of his treatise "On the foundations of mathematics". Cf. Leśniewski 1992b, I, 174-382. Leśniewski's axiomatization of the 'part-of' relation reveals a number of different influences: principally his encounter with Russell's antimony, which he read in Łukasiewicz's book on the principle of contradiction in Aristotle. The chief aim of the theory was to examine the meaning of the term 'class', the ambiguity of which was regarded as the

explicit thematization of this relationship, its importance had not previously been grasped. Secondly, the impulse to formalization — and to the specification of mereology as an independent area of theoretical enquiry — derived from certain specific theories, most notably psychology. Mereological considerations were given specific development within the school of Brentano, first by Brentano himself in relation to the problem of the unity of consciousness, and then by his pupils, especially Carl Stumpf, the *Gestalt* psychologists, and Kazimierz Twardowski. In particular, Brentanian experimental psychologists analysed the components of the act of presentation (act, object, content, conceptual correlate, aspects, etc.) and their laws of constitution.³³ The most consolidated theory to emerge from this tradition is undoubtedly Husserl's *Logical investigations*, which have been called “the single most important contribution to realist (Aristotelian) ontology in the modern period”.³⁴

5. BRENTANO'S SCHOOL AND AUSTRIAN PHILOSOPHY

In recent years, thanks to the work of Rudolph Haller and to the Manchester seminars, there has been renewed interest in so-called Central-European

true origin of Russell's well-known antinomy. Like Husserl, Leśniewski drew on the tradition of algebraic logic, in particular as developed in the works of Schröder. On this see Libardi 1993b. On the history of part-whole theories see Henry 1991, Burkhardt & Dufour 1991. On mereology in the school of Brentano see Smith 1982, in particular the table of influences on page 482. For observations on Twardowski and Ingarden see Poli 1992, §§ 17.4-17.10 e 17.12; as regards Twardowski see his 1894, esp. §§ 9-10; as for Stumpf see his 1873, § 5. On Husserl's part-whole theory see at least his 1901, 3rd Investigation. On the influence of Husserl, and in particular of the *Logical investigations* on Jakobson, see Jakobson 1963 and Holenstein 1974. The 4th Logical investigation, in which Husserl presents his so-called theory of the semantic categories, depends closely on the previous investigation: a sentence is not an accumulation of words; it is instead tied together by a nexus of foundation. This thesis was subsequently developed by Leśniewski 1992b (1929) and by Ajdukiewicz 1973.

³³ Practitioners of Brentanian psychology were Stumpf, Benussi and also the psychologists who belonged to the Italian school of De Sarlo. On this topic see Albertazzi 1993a, 1993b, 1993c. On the development of mereology within *Gestalt* theory see Köhler 1920; Grelling 1939; Grelling & Oppenheim 1938, 1939; Rescher & Oppenheim 1955; Smith 1982, 1988; Simons 1987.

³⁴ Smith & Mulligan 1982, 37.

philosophy.³⁵ In this reassessment, more accurate evaluation has been given to Brentano and to his thought. We have already cited the ‘political’ reasons why greater consideration was given to the parts of the school of Brentano than to the whole. There are, however, other components that should be mentioned.

In contrast to Germany, where philosophy was akin to a lay religion, in Austria — from an institutional and educational point of view — philosophy was a relatively minor sector of the country’s culture. An ‘official’ philosophy comparable to Kantian and Hegelian thought in Germany never existed in Austria. Catholic Austria had always been ‘free’ from the metaphysical idealism of Protestant Germany, and, in effect, the idealist philosophy of history and historicism never took root there. The idea of a historical cement, of a mission to accomplish — as philosophy had been represented to the German world from Fichte’s *Addresses to the German Nation* — was extraneous to the Austrian mentality.

One distinctive feature of Austrian culture was the priority it gave to analytic rather than synthetic inquiry, the latter being instead peculiar to German culture. Austrian philosophers concentrated on the particular and on disassembly, and they insisted on differences, contradictions, heterogeneity, multiplicity, rather than merging these phenomena into a totalizing system which arranged them into an overall synthesis. It was also because of this peculiarity of Austrian culture that classical German philosophy exerted so little influence over it, with the partial exception of Kant.

Indeed, although Kant’s *a priori* gnoseology was alien to the spirit of Austrian philosophy, the analytical and anti-metaphysical thrust of his thought was a major influence. However, this aspect should not be exaggerated, and the interpretation in Kantian terms of Habsburg culture propounded by Janik and Toulmin has no historical basis.³⁶ Haller has suggested that more accurate characterization of Austrian philosophy can be obtained by comparing analytic *Wissenschaftstheorie* — which originated in the Bolzano’s *Wissenschaftslehre* — with *Erkenntnistheorie*.³⁷

Whatever the case may be, contemporary Brentanism must come to terms with the presence of a transcendental element within an ontology which declares itself to be strongly anti-Kantian. Indeed, not only did a number of Brentano’s pupils admit, with some embarrassment, to the ‘curious’ similarity between certain theses of Brentanism and Kantian theory, there were others

³⁵ Haller 1979, 1986. A list of the meetings organized in Manchester by the “Seminar for Austro-German philosophy” in the academic years 1977-78 and 1978-79 is given on pages viii of Smith 1981 (the book contains a selection of the papers presented).

³⁶ Janik & Toulmin 1975.

³⁷ Haller 1979, 2.

who definitively broke with the formers' basic anti-Kantianism. Husserl is the most striking example, but evidence of it can be found in Meinong's theory of production and in Twardowski's ontology.³⁸

From a theoretical point of view, the aspects of Brentanism most compromised by Kantianism are the doctrine of inner time (which concerns the formal, categorial structure of the act of presentation) and the theory of objects, in particular Twardowski's theory of the general object and Meinong's theory of higher-order objects.

Besides Kant, the German philosopher to have exerted the most profound influence on Austrian culture was probably Nietzsche:³⁹ a Nietzsche read primarily as the precursor of the critique of the foundations, as anticipating Mach; and an analytic Nietzsche, as the dismantler of the concepts of metaphysics. It was under the joint influence of Nietzsche and Mach that Austrian literature gave us, in *Man without qualities*, one of the most radical confutations of the substantiality of the Self.

Rudolf Haller, to whom we owe the expression 'Austrian philosophy', identifies its distinguishing traits as a critique of language and an insistence on a scientific method analogous to that of the sciences in the empirical verification of the particular. Distinctive of Austrian philosophy — whose leading representatives were, apart from Brentano and his school, Bolzano, Mach and Wittgenstein — is its phenomenology of detail, its logical rigour, its prevalent analyticity and its lack of ideological posturing.

Thus, within the Austrian Empire of the nineteenth century, there developed of a scientific philosophy which did not identify itself with the philosophy of science but which applied the tools of exact thought not only to epistemology, but to ontology, to metaphysics and to ethics as well.

6. THE THEORETICAL INTEREST OF THE SCHOOL OF BRENTANO

There are various reasons for urging a revival of Brentano's thought. Even at a brief glance, the extent to which it spread its influence is astounding. Consider its most direct ramifications in Husserl's phenomenology, the theory of objects of Meinong and the Lvov-Warsaw school, and their various sub-branches. Consider also the split between the orthodox Brentanists (Kraus, Kastil,

³⁸ Cf. Albertazzi's and Poli's contributions to this volume.

³⁹ Cacciari 1976 and 1980.

Mayer-Hillebrand) and their non-orthodox opponents, and their academic activities in the leading European universities of the time: all thinkers, orthodox or otherwise, standing to the right or the left of Brentano, who made a major contribution to contemporary scientific debate in a wide variety of fields. Recall, moreover, movements like *Gestaltpsychologie*, the Prague linguistics circle, and marginalist theories. However, although we know the major ramifications of Brentano's thought, there is still much research to be done on its more distant affiliations, for example on the relationship between the Brentanists and the *Denkpsychologie* of Külpe, Selz and Bühler, or on the analytic development of Brentano's thought.

More in general, from Brentano onwards, Austrian philosophy has furnished contemporary philosophy with tools of analysis in the fields of ontology, logic, philosophy of language, and psychology.

The neo-Aristotelian perspective characteristic of the school of Brentano was taken up, for example, in the logical systems of Leśniewski. Kotarbiński was the first to point out that Leśniewski intended his ontology to resemble the science of being *qua* being presented by Aristotle in the 4th book of the *Metaphysics*.⁴⁰ In the words of Lejewski, one of Leśniewski's most outstanding pupils:

Many centuries after Aristotle the science of being as being was given the name of ontology. In the first decade of the 20th century it was revitalized by Meinong as the theory of objects (*Gegenstandstheorie*) only to return to its earlier name in Leśniewski's system of the foundations of mathematics.⁴¹

Ontology may therefore be interpreted as a formal system which is capable of describing the world, albeit at a high level of generality.

This interweaving of philosophical and formal strands of thought represented one of the principal characteristics of Brentano and his school, and although neither he nor his pupils made explicit use of logical tools (at least in the contemporary sense), their clarity of exposition, attention to the precision of concepts, and conception of philosophical activity as the specific and detailed analysis of particular problems paved the way for subsequent formal developments. Their influence over the Polish school of logic via Twardowski, and over the early Vienna School, is evident.

Also indicative is the debate-polemic between Meinong and Russell on non-existent objects; a controversy which was closely bound up with the birth of the theory of descriptions in the early years of this century. Although

⁴⁰ Kotarbiński 1966, 210-211.

⁴¹ Lejewski 1989, 34.

Meinong's position suffered what was apparently an outright 'defeat', it was recovered in the 1970s and formalized into what are today are known as Meinongian semantics. Similarly, only recently has sharper light been shed on the philosophical origins of Tarski's treatise on the concept of truth, considered by Woleński and Simons as "undoubtedly the most important result concerning truth in the Lvov-Warsaw school, indeed in the whole Brentanian tradition".⁴² Tarski himself, moreover, was well aware of the 'philosophical' value of his work.

But it is phenomenology which represents, at least in its early form, the most fertile point of contact between logic and philosophy. Not only were *Logical investigations* enormously influential, but Husserl's logical inquiry was entirely in harmony with the investigations that Frege was conducting at the same time. The phenomenological tradition also comprised a flourishing school of foundational research: suffice it to mention Husserl's *Philosophy of arithmetic*, Kaufmann's work on the infinite in mathematics, Ehrenfels' essay on the philosophy of mathematics, and above all Oskar Becker's analysis of the concept of mathematical existence and on the phenomenological foundation of geometry from an intuitionist perspective.⁴³

Subsequent phenomenological inquiry abandoned these themes and tended to indulge in an excess of scholasticism and philologism, thereby neglecting the exact sciences. Although Husserl's interest in the logical and mathematical disciplines was unwavering, his later emphasis on genetic aspects had a generally harmful effect on his disciples. Indeed, one might say that the weakness displayed by phenomenologists after Husserl was their assumption that, because their master had been interested in the subjective foundations of logic, it was not necessary to lose oneself in details of the formalisms of mathematical logic.⁴⁴

The outcome of this progressive closure was the prevalence of a hermeneutics of phenomenological origin and the growing influence of Heidegger. Thus, above all in European philosophy, hermeneutics, in its various and complex ramifications, came to resemble a real and proper *koinè*, a *natural horizon* for those who occupied themselves with philosophy, thereby neglecting other lines of theoretical research. The boundaries of an ideal map of hermeneutics mark out, in fact, an extremely broad territory which comprises a large part of French thought from Ricoeur to Derrida and in certain respects also Foucault and Deleuze, the majority of American departments of literature, dominated by

⁴² Woleński & Simons 1989, 408.

⁴³ Ehrenfels 1891, Becker 1927, Kaufmann 1930.

⁴⁴ Peruzzi 1988, 130.

the Yale critics, like De Man and Harold Bloom, an important sector of Italian philosophy, the legacy of Heidegger, and even the later developments of Wittgenstein's thought and the analytic schools associated with it. On closer inspection, however, this success seems also to have been a disadvantage: it was precisely the overwhelming predominance of hermeneutics, its universalization, that led to an impoverishment of philosophy, to its indeterminateness.

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. Indeed, midway through this century the analytic approach underwent profound change. Analyses of concepts — which provided analytic philosophers like Moore and Russell with their point of departure and whose explicit methodology brought them into immediate contact with the Brentanians and all the proponents of scientific philosophy — progressively ramified into general analyses of language. The now dominant assumption was that consciousness is 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 is naming. Whatever the details of the various approaches may have been, their focal point was the firm belief that analysis of language is 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.

This failure has provoked profound reflection, especially within the analytic movement as it rediscovers its 'origins' and achieves deeper historical awareness. This reflection coincides at least in part with the rediscovery of the exponents of the school of Brentano. In the United States it is above all due to the efforts of Roderick Chisholm that the theme of intentionality, in its original version propounded by Brentano, has been brought into the analytic domain. But it is from formal ontology, as the descriptive aspect of Husserlian philosophy, and in particular from the theory of parts which is currently its only formalized theory, that we may expect new insights to emerge.

7. CONCLUSION

From the foregoing discussion it should be clear that Brentano and his disciples shared many aspects of the analytic method. Further, if we consider the development both of the analytic school and of the best known of the various branches of Brentanianism, namely the phenomenological school, we realise that they not only spring 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 a 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 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 perceiving subject. And both movements eventually came to reject this objectiveness of concepts, finally assuming the position that concepts are the shared components of what is in some way common experience: a changed interpretation whose crucial contention is that concepts thus understood are incapable of conveying what things are really like beyond any effective human experience.⁴⁵

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⁴⁵ Willard 1991.

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