

# BRENTANO STUDIEN

Internationales Jahrbuch der Franz Brentano Forschung

Band 15/1 (2017)

## DER FRÜHE BRENTANO



CYRIL McDONNELL

## Brentano's New Understanding of Psychology in Light of His Reading of English Empiricists<sup>1</sup>

### I. Introduction

Shortly after the completion of his habilitation thesis *The Psychology of Aristotle, in Particular His Doctrine of the Active Intellect* in 1866,<sup>2</sup> Franz Brentano, for the next several years, embarked upon an intensive course of reading of 'English empiricists' and 'modern English philosophers' in preparation for his next study *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* (1874).<sup>3</sup> The English authors that are cited or consulted by Brentano for *PES* extend to and include a number of English, Scottish and Irish philosophers, as well as advocates and theoreticians of natural science, such as, for instance: Isaac Newton, John Locke, David Hume, George Berkeley, Thomas Reid, Alexander

---

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Klaus Hedwig and William Baumgartner for their very helpful suggestions towards the writing of this article. I would also like to thank Elizabeth Valentine for a draft of her article on the 'British Sources in Brentano's *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, with Special Reference to John Stuart Mill' which she kindly gave me to read, and that is published in this volume.

<sup>2</sup> Franz Brentano, *The Psychology of Aristotle, in Particular His Doctrine of the Active Intellect*, trans. by Ralph George (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1977); *Die Psychologie des Aristoteles, insbesondere seine Lehre vom nous poiētikos* (Mainz: Kirchheim, 1867).

<sup>3</sup> Franz Brentano, 'Foreword', *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, trans. by Antos C. Rancurello, D.B. Terrell & Linda L. McAlister (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973; Routledge, 1995), p. xxviii and p. 11. *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt* (Leipzig: Duncker and Humblot, 1874). Henceforth, references will be to English translation, and abbreviated in notes as *PES*.

Bain, Thomas Brown, David Hartley, Herbert Spencer, George Henry Lewes, Henry Maudsley, George Boole, Sir William Hamilton, William Whewell, Charles Darwin, James Mill and John Stuart Mill.<sup>4</sup> By ‘modern English philosophers’ or ‘English empiricists’, then, Brentano principally means authors writing in English and those interested in the natural sciences, and though Brentano had a limited reading-knowledge of English — reading these authors mainly in either French or German translation, or in commentaries<sup>5</sup> — the influence which these ‘English empiricists’ exerted on his understanding of the science of psychology did not go unnoticed by him, for, as he informs his reader in the 1874 Foreword to *PES*,

just as there is no specifically German truth, there is no specifically national psychology, not even a German one. It is for this reason that I am taking into account the outstanding scientific contributions of modern English philosophers no less than those of German philosophers. [...] In these investigations and in those which will follow I assail quite frequently and with great tenacity even the most outstanding investigators such as Mill, Bain, Fechner, Lotze, Helmholtz and others, but this should not be interpreted as an attempt either to lessen their merit or weaken their power of their influence. On the contrary, it is a sign that I, like many others, have felt their influence in a special way and have profited from their doctrines, not only when I have accepted them, but also when I have had to challenge them.<sup>6</sup>

By his own testimony, therefore, the impact which these ‘modern English philosophers’ (and German writers) had on his new understanding of ‘psychology’ in the ‘investigations’ of the two books published for *PES* in 1874 (and in the later books III to VI planned for this study)<sup>7</sup> was exceedingly

---

<sup>4</sup> In *PES*, Brentano mentions a total of 23 English authors, with John Stuart Mill quoted most often (in 42 pages). See, Valentine, esp., ‘Table 4’.

<sup>5</sup> Oskar Kraus notes that Brentano, when quoting from Mill’s *System of Logic*, uses Schiel’s German translation published in 1849 on the basis of the first edition of Mill’s *Logic* (1843). *PES*, p. 64, (editor’s) n.

<sup>6</sup> *PES*, p. xxviii.

<sup>7</sup> Originally, Brentano had planned six books for *PES* (‘Foreword to the 1874 Edition’, pp. xxvii–xxix) but only published the first two: Book I ‘Psychology as a Science’ and Book II ‘Psychical Phenomena in General’. The remaining books were to deal with

strong for not only did he arrive at this understanding through agreement but also even in disagreement with these ‘investigators’.

In this article, I wish to examine some of the main ideas that Brentano borrowed in part or in full from those ‘most eminent English psychologists of the empiricist school’<sup>8</sup> that are of most relevance to an understanding and evaluation of Brentano’s new view of ‘psychology’ ‘from an empirical standpoint’. Of pivotal importance to the ‘investigations’ which Brentano unfurls in *PES* is a distinction which he draws between the ‘inner perception of physical phenomena’ and ‘outer perception of physical phenomena’, a distinction, as we shall see, he found in the ‘English empiricists’ whom he read. This has an important bearing on understanding Brentano’s famous re-introduction and appeal to ‘what the Scholastics of the Middle-ages called the intentional (or mental) in-existence of an object’ as the mark of ‘our own psychical phenomena’ in Book II ‘Psychical Phenomena In General’ of *PES* because, as Brentano explicitly remarks, ‘no physical phenomenon [by comparison to our own psychical phenomena] exhibits anything like it’.<sup>9</sup> In this article, therefore, I will first address the main reasons for Brentano’s general change of views about the science of psychology and then assess the significance of the ‘English empiricists’ in understanding and evaluating his use of the concept of intentionality to distinguish ‘psychical phenomena’ from ‘physical phenomena’.

## II. The Move from Aristotelian Empiricism to English Empiricism

In his habilitation thesis Brentano had investigated and defended Aristotle’s view of psychology as the science of the soul, with a particular focus on the nature and role of the ‘active intellect’ in cognition in the intellectual soul of the human being. In *PES*, however, Brentano no longer subscribes to the Aristotelian theory of the abstractive ability of the human intellectual soul in cognition. He accepts, instead, a ‘modern conception’ of psychology which secures its ‘experiential basis’ in the direct ‘inner perception of

---

the relation between the mind and the body, culminating in addressing the question of immortality (Book VI).

<sup>8</sup> *PES*, p. 145. See, also, pp. 13–14, p. 80, and p. 94.

<sup>9</sup> *PES*, pp. 88–89.

our own psychical phenomena', and he defines psychology in comparison to 'physics' which locates its experiential basis in the 'outer perception of physical phenomena'.<sup>10</sup> There are several reasons for this change in view of the science of psychology, but the two main ones for Brentano are: (1) his growing awareness and approval of the rise of the natural sciences (and rejection of what he took to be the antithesis of scientific philosophy that was exemplified, in his mind, in the windy speculation of post-Kantian German idealism) and (2) his general acceptance of a 'modern definition' of psychology that finds its empirical origins and epistemological justification in 'the inner perception of our own psychical phenomena'.

Accepting the cultural-intellectual rise in dominance of the natural sciences and subscribing to the view that psychology must be based upon 'the inner perception of our own psychical phenomena', nonetheless, are not necessarily mutually supporting positions to hold about the science of psychology, as Brentano himself notes in his 1874 study.<sup>11</sup> Some natural scientists, for instance, whilst rejecting as unscientific any Hegelian or Schellingian speculation on the evolution of spirit or mind, elaborate a natural-scientific approach to psychology that is exclusively based on observation, hypotheses and laboratory experimentation.<sup>12</sup> Thus the appeal to the 'inner perception of our own psychical phenomena' does not figure significantly in the methodological advancement or investigations of the science of psychology, as, for instance, in Wilhelm Wundt's seminal study *Principles of Physiological Psychology*, also published in 1874 and with which Brentano was acquainted.<sup>13</sup> Auguste Comte, in fact, Brentano remarks, dismisses entirely psychology as a genuine science based upon 'inner observation' since any act of 'inner observation' of one's own psychical phenomena

---

<sup>10</sup> See, *PES*, Book I, Ch. II 'Psychological Method with Special Reference to its Experiential Basis'. (§ 2 'Über die Methode der Psychologie, insbesondere die Erfahrung, welche für sie die Grundlage bildet'.)

<sup>11</sup> See, *PES*, Book I, Ch. III, 'Further Investigations Concerning Psychological Method. Induction of the Fundamental Laws of Psychology'.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, and cf., Franz Brentano, *Descriptive Psychology*, trans. by Benito Müller (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 5.

<sup>13</sup> Brentano quotes this study on several occasions in *PES* (see, p. 6), and the work of several other natural scientists or philosophers interested in natural-scientific endeavours (e.g., Fechner, Maudsley, Bain, Condillac, Helmholtz, Horwicz, Darwin, Lavoisier, the Mills).

by the scientist would itself have to be examined and this, in turn, likewise observed, and so on *ad infinitum*, thus rendering this science spurious.<sup>14</sup>

At the other end of the spectrum, however, Brentano acknowledges that there are psychologists who pursue psychology as a science but who could not take on board any natural-scientific developments in their understanding of this science simply because the modern natural science of empirical psychology did not exist during their own respective life times (e.g., Plato and Aquinas). Brentano admits, nonetheless, that some contemporary natural-scientific thinkers have attempted to engage in ‘the mixing’ of ‘physiological research’ and ‘psychological investigations’, but this, in his estimation, ‘seems by and large ill-advised in important areas’.<sup>15</sup> Nowhere, alas, does Brentano enumerate or specify precisely in *PES* those important areas where such ‘mixing’ of natural-scientific physiological psychology and ‘psychological investigation’ is strongly ill-advised. One area, however, where he is adamant that such ‘mixing’ is to be strenuously avoided, is in the task of clarifying the meaning of basic concepts that are used in the natural science of empirical psychology itself. Again, he has several reasons for this and that are of importance to understanding his changing views of what ‘psychology’ now means to him.

Firstly, Brentano tells us that in his reading of modern scientists he found ‘no unanimity’ among psychologists and scientists regarding what defines ‘physical phenomena’ and ‘psychical phenomena’, and this was leading to a blurring of the boundaries between physics and psychology which was unhelpful to the development of both of these sciences.<sup>16</sup> Secondly, he notes that ‘even important psychologists [citing Bain] maybe hard pressed to defend themselves against the charge of self-contradiction’ in their use and meaning of the terms ‘physical’ and ‘psychical phenomena’.<sup>17</sup> In Brentano’s view, then, such ‘lack of agreement’, coupled with ‘misuse’, ‘confusion’, and ‘self-contradiction’ by some eminent scientists in their deployment of these terms, is a hindrance to the advancement of the natural sciences in gene-

---

<sup>14</sup> See Brentano’s counter-argument to Comte’s, *PES*, Book I, Ch. 2, §II ‘Inner perception as the source of psychological experience. It is not to be confused with inner observation, i.e., introspection’.

<sup>15</sup> *PES*, p. 64.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

ral and the newly emerging science of empirical psychology in particular. Thus Brentano balefully concludes, 'it is a sign of the immature state of [the natural science of] psychology that we can scarcely utter a single sentence about psychical phenomena which will not be disputed by many people.'<sup>18</sup> The major problem, therefore, that seems to have arisen for Brentano, following upon his readings of modern psychologists and 'natural scientists', is that these investigators themselves are in no position to clarify for others the meaning of basic terms used in their sciences because these meanings are unclear and ambiguous *for them* and in dispute *among themselves* as well as by others.

In light of this obscurity, Brentano declares for Book II 'Psychical Phenomena In General' of *PES*,

our aim is to clarify the meaning of the two terms 'physical phenomenon' and 'psychical phenomenon', removing all misunderstanding and confusion concerning them. And it does not matter to us what means we use, as long as they really serve to clarify these terms.<sup>19</sup>

Since Brentano, nonetheless, cannot resolve this issue of the meaning of these two basic terms by appealing to any well-founded theory that has been elaborated or established in natural science, nor settle this dispute by drawing upon any (debatable) meaning which these terms may enjoy in any particular historical, philosophical or cultural understanding of the physical and the psychical, his only alternative, so he believes, is to check the meaning of these terms against intuition itself, that is to say, against the evident facts of our experience. What natural scientists study in their science, through their use of observation, scientific hypotheses and experimental techniques, is simply not the kind of knowledge that we can glean directly through 'the inner perception of our own psychical phenomena' and the 'outer perception of physical phenomena'. Thus, for the purposes of clarifying the meaning of these terms, Brentano declares, 'my psychological standpoint is empirical; experience alone is my teacher.'<sup>20</sup> In this regard,

---

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>20</sup> 1874 'Foreword' to *PES*, (p. xxxii). Brentano, indeed, uses this 'experiential basis' to assess various accounts of the 'psychical phenomena' of the human soul or mind given

Brentano returns, with Hume, and to the latter's celebrated 'first maxim, that in the end we must rest contented with experience'.<sup>21</sup> And it is with this kind of philosophical approach to the mind and its contents that Brentano found in his reading of 'English empiricists' — notwithstanding important differences that were elaborated by Locke, Hume, the Mills, Bain et al. — that Brentano *now* puts forward as *the only way* in which this dispute regarding the meaning of these pivotal terms of 'physical' and 'psychical phenomena' can be settled for all concerned *today*, whether those concerned are natural scientists, the ordinary 'man-in-the-street', historians of philosophy, or contemporary thinkers who mix up, wrongly, in Brentano's estimation, physiological and psychological investigations.

### III. The Establishment of Psychology as a Science of Psychical Phenomena

Towards the very beginning of *PES* Brentano draws attention to Aristotle's inauguration of psychology as 'the science of the soul'. By the soul, Brentano informs his reader, Aristotle means the 'first actuality' or principle of life of 'a living being'.<sup>22</sup> Thus plants, animals and human beings, insofar as all of these living beings exhibit signs of immanent self-perfective activity, all become the objects of the science of psychology. And so, 'after establishing the concept of the soul, the oldest work on psychology [*De Anima*] goes on to discuss the most general characteristics of beings endowed with vegetative as well as sensory or intellectual faculties'.<sup>23</sup> No sooner, however, does Brentano give us this account of the institution of psychology as a science than he remarks that psychology can *no longer* be defined in this broad Aristotelian sense due to developments in natural science. Various

---

by philosophers down through the ages (e.g., by Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Descartes, Kant, 'English empiricists', and also some contemporary natural-scientific attempts). See, *PES*, Book II, § V 'A Survey of the Principal Attempts to Classify Psychical Phenomena'.

<sup>21</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. by Lewis Amherst Selby-Bigge, M.A. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896) [1739], p. 60.

<sup>22</sup> *PES*, p. 4.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*



natural sciences, such as botany, zoology and physiology, have emerged and taken over the domains of plant-life activity and animal sense-life activity that were originally demarcated by Aristotle as part of the science of psychology. Thus,

On the assumption that it lacked consciousness, the entire realm of vegetative life ceased to be considered within the scope of their [psychologists'] investigations. In the same way, the animal kingdom, insofar as it, like plants and inorganic things is an object of external perception, was excluded from their field of research. This exclusion was also extended to phenomena closely associated with sensory life, such as the nervous system and muscles, so that their investigation became the province of the physiologist rather than the psychologist.<sup>24</sup>

Notwithstanding the *modern* gloss of Brentano's explanation for this change, in Brentano's review the entire field of exploration into both plant-life activity and animal-sense-life activity as well as into all organic and inorganic things, including the nature of human beings, insofar as all of these can be subjected to natural-scientific observation, hypotheses and experimentation, all *now* fall under the remit of established or newly emerging natural sciences other than psychology. This, nevertheless, does not mean that there is no subject-matter left over for the natural science of psychology to study. The excision, rather, of these investigations leaves untouched a more narrowly-focused domain of enquiry for psychology, namely, 'our own psychical phenomena' as objects of 'inner perception'; or, at least, so Brentano now asserts, for, as he stresses,

Psychology, like all natural sciences, has its basis in perception (*Wahrnehmung*) and experience (*Erfahrung*). Above all, however, its source is to be found in the *inner perception* of our own psychical phenomena (*der eigenen psychischen Phänomene*). We would never know what a thought is, or a judgement, pleasure or pain, desires or aversions, hopes or fears, courage or despair, decisions and voluntary intentions if we did not learn what they are through inner perception of our own phenomena. Note, however, that we said that *inner perception* (*innere Wahrnehmung*) and not introspection, i.e.

---

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

inner *observation* (*innere Beobachtung*), constitutes this primary (*erste*) and indispensable source (*unentbehrliche Quelle*) of psychology.<sup>25</sup>

Given Brentano's strong Aristotelian roots, one would think that he would disapprove of this reduction of the subject-matter of psychology to a study that is exclusively focused on the 'inner perception of our own psychological phenomena', irrespective of what disputes there may be and are over the meaning, nature and existence of our own psychological phenomena. This, however, is not the case because, in Brentano's estimation,

This narrowing down of the domain of psychology was not an arbitrary one. *On the contrary*, it appears to be an obvious correction necessitated by the nature of the subject-matter itself.<sup>26</sup>

Whether such a narrowing down of the domain of enquiry for the science of psychology is '*an obvious correction* necessitated by the nature of the subject-matter itself', or not, depends of course on one's view of that subject-matter. And by 1874 Brentano is clearly of the opinion that psychology can no longer be regarded as the study of all potentially embodied living beings, as Aristotle and the Aristotelians had held, but as the science of our own psychological phenomena. Thus in an allusion to Hume's position, even though Brentano disagrees with Hume's denial of the existence of the soul of a human being as the substantial bearer of 'presentations', he declares, *in agreement with Hume*, 'whether or not there are souls, the fact is there are psychological phenomena'.<sup>27</sup> These phenomena exhibit their own kind of unity and continuity that is amenable to reflective-scientific scrutiny, so Brentano now insists, just as both Hume and the Mills had argued.<sup>28</sup> Thus Brentano believes that he is justified in concluding, with J.S. Mill from his *System of Logic*, that psychology is a science that 'investigates the laws which govern

---

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 29, English trans. mod.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 4, my emphasis.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>28</sup> Cf., Brentano's direct quotation from Hume's *Treatise on Human Nature*, Book I, IV, Sect. 6, and his comments, prior to this in *PES*, pp. 16–17.

the succession of our mental states, i.e., the laws according to which one of these states produces another'.<sup>29</sup>

Though Brentano accepts — without giving us any supporting argumentation — Mill's definition of psychology as the study of the laws of our mental states, he does nevertheless recognise that there are different kinds of laws governing 'the succession of our mental states'. Laws of logic, for instance, are normatively prescriptive in character, directing us on how one ought to think correctly. Natural-scientific laws, by comparison, are descriptive in character, in the sense that they depict regularities of how things must be.<sup>30</sup> Thus Brentano never held the belief that the normative laws of thought that are exhibited in logic, ethics and aesthetics can be reduced to natural-scientific descriptive laws of fact, and points to Comte's erroneous attempt to 'utilize phrenology as an instrument of psychological investigation'.<sup>31</sup> This, however, does not mean that Brentano wishes to reject 'psychology from an empirical standpoint', as he understands it, that is, as an aid to clarifying concepts for both the natural and normative sciences.<sup>32</sup> On the contrary, all concepts must have a basis in experience. Thus if the 'modern conception of psychology' is one that advocates an investigation into 'our own psychical phenomena', this extends to and includes (in addition to the perception of objects of our external senses) those experiences of a valid normative logical, ethical and aesthetical consciousness

---

<sup>29</sup> *PES*, p. 12.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 98–99.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48, and see also, p. 33. Edmund Husserl, who attended Brentano's lectures at Vienna University from 1884 to 1886, tells us that one lecture-course he took with Brentano was called 'Selected Psychological and Aesthetic Questions [...] [which] was devoted mainly to fundamental descriptive analyses of the nature of the imagination'. E. Husserl, 'Reminiscences of Franz Brentano', *The Philosophy of Brentano*, ed. by Linda L. McAlister (London: Duckworth, 1976), pp. 47–55 (p. 47). Another course Husserl took with Brentano was, 'Elementary Logic and its Needed Reform', which 'dealt with systematically connected basic elements of a descriptive psychology of the intellect, without neglecting, however, the parallel elements in the sphere of the emotions, to which a separate chapter was devoted' (*ibid.*).

<sup>32</sup> This causes major tensions in Brentano's attempt to found the normative status of the disciplines of logic, ethics and aesthetics in descriptive empirical psychology. See, Theodorus De Boer's excellent account of this issue in 'The Descriptive Method of Franz Brentano: Its Two Functions and Their Significance for Phenomenology', in *The Philosophy of Brentano*, pp. 101–7.

*as such*. What marks these experiences is the necessity of their connections that are evidently true, irrespective of fallible, corrigible, empirical factual-psychological laws of thought. In this regard, Brentano is much closer to Kant's two-domain theory of human consciousness than he is to either Mill or Aristotle, in his insistence that natural-scientific consciousness and normative-scientific consciousness are irreducible to each other.<sup>33</sup> Yet this is why Brentano can be so adamant about the criticism that the validity of the normative sciences of logic, ethics and aesthetics cannot be founded on the basis of empirical inductive generalisations, 'an astounding confusion' that befell Mill himself.<sup>34</sup> Still, all psychical act-experiences that are characteristically lived by *human* beings are to become the 'subject matter' for 'psychology from an empirical standpoint'. This, then, opens up a vast area of research for 'psychology' (philosophy), just as Mill and Hume had believed.

In light of this understanding of 'psychology', it is understandable why Brentano is so enthusiastic about the promising prospects for this fledgling natural science of 'psychology' to become the 'science of the future', for,

The worthiness of a science increases not only according to the manner in which it is known [e.g., from alchemy to chemistry], but also with the worthiness of its object. And the phenomena of the laws of [psychical phenomena] which psychology investigates are superior to physical phenomena not only in that they [psychical phenomena] are true and real in themselves, but also in that they are incomparably more beautiful and sublime. Colour and sound, extension and motion are contrasted with sensation and imagination, judgement and will, with all the grandeur these [psychical] phenomena exhibit in the ideas of the artist, the research of the great thinker, and the self-dedication of the virtuous man. So, we have revealed *in a new way* how the task of the psychologist is higher than that of the natural scientist.<sup>35</sup>

Natural scientists, in other words, may well discover certain laws of natural-scientific empirical fact about light particles and sound waves in relation

---

<sup>33</sup> See, De Boer, 'The Descriptive Method of Franz Brentano', p. 102.

<sup>34</sup> Brentano, *Versuch über die Erkenntnis* (Leipzig: Meiner, 1925), pp. 57–58; quoted by De Boer, 'The Descriptive Method of Franz Brentano', p. 102.

<sup>35</sup> *PES*, p. 20, my emphasis.

to colours and tones, but what an artist feels, expresses, imagines, judges and wants in the use of colour and sound in her efforts is *qualitatively different* yet part of the experiences of the psychical. And these latter concerns belong to 'the task of the psychologist'. It thus now follows for Brentano that,

Let me point out merely in passing that psychology contains the roots of aesthetics, which, in a more advanced stage of development, will undoubtedly sharpen the eye of the artist and assure his progress. Likewise, suffice to say that the important art of logic, a single improvement in which brings about a thousand advances in science, also has psychology as its source. In addition, psychology has the task of becoming the scientific basis for a theory of education, both of the individual and of society. Along with aesthetics and logic, ethics and politics also stem from the field of psychology. And so, psychology appears to be the fundamental condition of human progress in precisely those things which, above all, constitute human dignity.<sup>36</sup>

Underpinning Brentano's confidence in this new development of 'psychology' to assure man's progress and human dignity, therefore, is his acceptance of Hume and Mill's view of psychology as a science that focuses attention on *the experiences of the human being*, whatever these may turn out to be, including the experiences of a normatively valid logical, ethical and aesthetical consciousness. And since this *includes* both natural-scientific and moral progress of human beings, in all of this Brentano believes that he is steadily following the model (and English translation by Schiel) of Mill's 'moral sciences' for '*Geisteswissenschaften*' that incorporates and promotes the methodology of the natural sciences (*Naturwissenschaften*) in the 'moral sciences'. Yet there are real philosophical tensions in Brentano's *dual* acceptance of the modern science of empirical psychology which deploys a method that is based upon sense observation, natural-scientific hypotheses-

---

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 21. Here, we may detect echoes of conversations that Brentano may have held with John Henry Newman, later Cardinal, whom he met on a visit to his Oratory at Edgbaston in England in 1872 and who was concerned with education (setting up the Catholic University in Dublin, Ireland, in 1851) and who had published his ideas on *The Idea of a University* (1852 and 1858). See, Brentano's letter to Herman Schell, in *Herman Schell als Wegbereiter zum II. Vatikanischen Konzil*, ed. by Josef Hasenfuss (Munich: Schönigh, 1978). See, also, Valentine.

es and experimentation and his desire to follow ‘modern English philosophers’ who argue that all of the concepts we deploy in human reasoning, including *a priori* laws and universal judgements of normative reasoning, must be founded in the ‘inner perception of our own psychical phenomena’. How these two methods — the method of the natural sciences and the method of the ‘inner perception of our own psychical phenomena’ — are supposed to come together in any unified conception of the modern science of ‘psychology from an empirical standpoint’ is simply not explained by Brentano in his 1874 study. Nor does he see any problem here. He hopes rather, optimistically, that the newly emerging natural science of empirical psychology will sort this issue out as it develops. Yet it is through following Locke and Hume’s *methodological* commitment to the way consciousness can access knowledge of itself through reflection on itself that Brentano actually establishes and elaborates his ‘psychology from an empirical standpoint’ in his 1874 study.

#### IV. The Distinction Between the Inner Perception of Our Own Psychical Phenomena and the Outer Perception of Physical Phenomena

Central to the ‘empirical standpoint’ upon which the science of psychology is to be built, as far as Brentano understands it in *PES*, is a distinction which he believes exists between the inner perception of our own psychical phenomena and the outer perception of physical phenomena. As he declares, in the opening lines of Book II ‘Psychical Phenomena In General’ of *PES*: ‘The entire world of our appearances can be divided into two large classes, i.e., into the classes of *physical* and *psychical* phenomena;<sup>37</sup> a division that he had already used, without any argumentation or explanation, throughout Book I ‘Psychology As a Science’. Nowhere, however, does Brentano tell us in *PES* from where he derives this division of ‘the entire world of our

---

<sup>37</sup> ‘Die gesamte Welt unserer Erscheinungen zerfällt in zwei große Klassen, in die Klasse der *physischen* und in die der *psychischen* Phänomene.’ Zweites Buch. Von den psychischen Phänomenen im allgemeinen. p. 108. Brentano’s original italics retained, and McAlister’s et. al. English trans. mod.: ‘All the data of consciousness are divided into two great classes — the class of physical and the class of mental phenomena.’ *PES*, p. 77.

appearances into two large classes'; or, why this is a valid distinction. He does hint at a possible source for this distinction in a gloss on Aristotle's analysis of the voluntary actions of human beings in Book III of *De Anima* where, 'he [Aristotle] dismisses the thought of investigating the organs that serve as intermediaries between a desire and the part of the body toward whose movement the desire is directed [...], sounding exactly like a modern psychologist, [saying] such an investigation is not the province of one who studies the soul, but of one who studies the body'.<sup>38</sup> This allusion, nonetheless, only indicates where a comparable distinction can be found and what the object of a *physiological conception* of psychology is and should be, namely, the human body and things that matter in it and to it. This is not an argument for 'the inner perception of our own psychological phenomena' as the exclusive subject-matter for 'a modern psychologist'. Brentano's distinction between what counts as the proper method and subject-matter of psychology, 'the inner perception of our own psychological phenomena', and Aristotle's rejection of a naturalistic reduction of voluntary acts of a human being to physiological explanations of the (human) body is more akin, rather, to Hume's distinction in *A Treatise of Human Nature* between *Hume's own psychological approach* to analysing the workings of the human mind and the way natural scientists conduct their science, for, as Hume writes,

The examination of our sensations belongs more to anatomists and natural philosophers [natural scientists] than to moral [philosophers]; and therefore shall not at present be enter'd upon.<sup>39</sup>

It is of course textually true that Hume explicitly announces that he is going to apply the method of 'reasonings concerning the body' in the natural science of anatomy to his own 'anatomy of the mind', saying,

'Tis usual with anatomists to join their observations and experiments on human bodies to those on beasts, and from the agreement of these experiments to derive an additional argument for any particular hypothesis. 'Tis indeed certain, that where the structure of parts in brutes is the same as in men, and the operation of these parts also the same, the causes of that ope-

---

<sup>38</sup> PES, p. 5.

<sup>39</sup> Hume, *Treatise*, p. 8.

ration cannot be different, and that whatever we discover to be true of the one species, may be concluded without hesitation to be certain of the other. Thus [...] the very same hypothesis, which in one species explains muscular motion, the progress of the chyle, the circulation of the blood, must be applicable to every one; and according as it agrees or disagrees with the experiments we may make in any species of creatures, we may draw a proof of its truth or falsehood on the whole. Let us, therefore, apply this method of enquiry, which is found so just and useful in reasonings concerning the body, to our present anatomy of the mind, and see what discoveries we can make by it.<sup>40</sup>

Yet it is precisely *not* a physiological method of enquiry that Hume applies to his ‘anatomy of the mind’. Hume, instead, appeals to what can be directly and evidently known through reflection on the mind itself and how it works with *its impressed contents* and, as is well-known, arrives at the startling discovery that the origin of our most popular idea of cause and effect that is so central to natural science and that we claim to know to exist between external bodies around us is but a (mere) mental (psychological) association of ideas in the mind, and not anything necessarily inherent in the nature of things themselves in ‘real existence’ and as pertaining to ‘matters-of-fact’.<sup>41</sup> Though the linkage in our minds of the idea of cause and effect between one thing and another is built up over time from impressions is psychologically *unavoidable*, for Hume, nonetheless, it is epistemologically *unjustifiable*. At any rate, though Hume does seem to accept a physiological theory of cognition, ‘this aspect of his thought is of little importance [to his manner of philosophizing], and is only reluctantly appealed to’.<sup>42</sup>

Brentano of course is not at all reluctant to appeal to natural science, or to assert its importance to ‘psychology’ in his 1874 study, and indeed, as many commentators point out, defended earlier the thesis that ‘the true method of philosophy is none other than the natural sciences’ as one of the 24 theses he presented for his public *disputationes* at Würzburg Universi-

---

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. pp. 325–326.

<sup>41</sup> See, *ibid.*, Section IV.: ‘Of the Connexion or Association of Ideas’.

<sup>42</sup> Matthew O’Donnell, ‘Hume’s Approach to Causation’, *Philosophical Studies*, 10 (1960), 64–99 (p. 65).



ty in 1866.<sup>43</sup> At this time, however, Brentano had not yet engaged in any serious reading of English and German philosophers interested in natural science. And he certainly did not apply the method of the natural sciences in his 1866 habilitation thesis on Aristotle's psychology. Brentano, therefore, clearly did not mean *then* that the philosopher must use observation, hypotheses, and laboratory experimentations in her science. He means, rather, that the nature of the object that is studied in any science is what must dictate the philosopher's approach to that object, in much the same way as Aristotle had argued that one must begin at first with a familiarity of the objects to be studied (*ta phainomena*) and then move to discern the nature of those objects themselves.<sup>44</sup>

By the time of his writing of *PES*, however, Brentano *had become* thoroughly aware of the natural-scientific approach to the study of 'cognition' from his reading of various writers, such as, Herbert Spencer's *Principles of Psychology*, as well as works by Wundt, Helmholtz and Fechner. In practice, nevertheless, Brentano follows the psychological empiricism of Locke and Hume in his conviction that the way the human mind or human consciousness can know itself is by direct reflection on *the experiences of one's own actual* consciousness itself and *its contents*. This approach includes 'physical phenomena' as given directly in sensation because, as Brentano tells us, by physical phenomena he means 'a colour [...] which I see, a chord which I hear, warmth, cold, odour which I sense; as well as similar images which appear to me in the imagination.'<sup>45</sup> This position is not one that is associated with Aristotle or the Medieval Aristotelians; but, it is one that originates with Descartes, where Descartes (famously) remarks in the Second Meditation,

---

<sup>43</sup> See, Carl Stumpf, 'Reminiscences of Franz Brentano', in *The Philosophy of Franz Brentano*, pp. 10–46.

<sup>44</sup> Brentano applies this to the nature of experiences themselves, in his attempt in *PES* at a 'natural classification' of 'psychical phenomena' into three classes of: acts of presentations, acts of (true or false) judgements, and acts that take an interest in an object (acts of emotion).

<sup>45</sup> *PES*, pp. 79–80. The terminological switch from 'physical *things*' in his 1866 habilitation thesis on Aristotle's psychology to 'physical *phenomena*' (*qua* 'secondary qualities') in his 1874 study of *PES* should alert commentators to the move in Brentano's philosophical position away from any Aristotelian view of psychology, and towards his newly-acquired Cartesian-Lockean-Humean conception of that 'science'.

I am the same [one] who feels, that is to say, who perceives certain things, as by the organs of sense, since in truth I see light, I hear noise, I feel heat. But[,] it will be said[,] these phenomena are false and I am dreaming. Let it be so; still [*and here is the important passage to note*] it is at least quite certain that *it seems to me* that I *see* light, that I *hear* noise, and that I *feel* heat. That *cannot* be false [doubted].<sup>46</sup>

It is *from within* this Cartesian frame of reference, what commentators now-a-days refer to as the classical foundationalists' notion of 'basic empirical beliefs' — and not *from outside of this frame of reference* — that Brentano distinguishes the experiencing of 'physical phenomena' from 'psychical phenomena', that is to say, the act of hearing a tone *qua* 'psychical phenomenon' and the content of the act of the actual experience (the tone *qua* 'physical phenomenon'). In the reality of the 'actual experience', there is an immediately self-evident and directly discernible 'natural unity' between the act of hearing and *its (intended) object* within that experience itself but the tone is not the act of hearing a tone.<sup>47</sup> Thus it turns out to be the case for Brentano that, 'the object of an *inner* perception is simply [the existence of] a psychical phenomenon [*qua* psychical *act*-experience and *its* object], and the object of an *outer* [sensory] perception is simply [the existence of] a physical phenomenon, a sound, odour or the like [*qua* intended object of that particular act experience]'.<sup>48</sup> Thus Brentano can now distinguish, *from a descriptive-psychological point of view*, the 'psychical phenomenon' *qua* act-experience from the 'physical phenomenon' *qua* directly intended object of that experience. None of this points to that which that lies outside of *the experience* and in extra-mental existence. It is a distinction that occurs *within* the experiencing itself. This is why Brentano can (famously) say, in Book II of *PES*, that what characterises 'psychical phenomena'/'conscious acts' in general is the 'intentional' or 'mental' or 'immanent objectivity' that is present in those 'psychical phenomena', and why Brentano is correct to say that his use of the terms 'intentional', 'mental' and 'immanent objectivi-

---

<sup>46</sup> René Descartes, *Key Philosophical Writings, Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. by Elizabeth S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (Ware: Wordsworth, 1997), p. 143 (my emphasis).

<sup>47</sup> See, *PES*, Book II, 'On the Unity of Consciousness', pp. 155–176, esp., pp. 162–164.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 209–210.

ty' are all synonymous expressions qualifying the kind of existence of the (intended) objects of *those acts* themselves.<sup>49</sup>

The objects that consciousness is a consciousness of, then, turn out to be the actual *experiences themselves* (and *their* intentional objects, if they exist) which the 'mentally active subject' enjoys or endures.<sup>50</sup> In this respect Brentano is clearly subscribing to some version of Hume's doctrine of ideas in

<sup>49</sup> In addition to noting the intentional (or mental or immanent) indwelling of *an object* in consciousness, Brentano also identifies 'reference to a content' and 'direction towards an object' as features of 'psychical phenomena' in the famous 1874 passage from *PES* (p. 88). He takes these expressions concerning the directedness or relation (*Richtung, Beziehung*) of *the act* of consciousness towards its object to be synonymous with each other too. It was only sometime *after* the publication of *PES* that Brentano began to refer to this relation of the *acts* of consciousness to its objects as an 'intentional relation'. See, Brentano, *Descriptive Psychology*, p. 23 and Franz Brentano, *The Origin of our Knowledge of Right and Wrong*, trans. by Roderick M. Chisholm & E. Schnerwind (London and New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 14. These *two* features of 'psychical phenomena', the immanence of objects in consciousness and the directedness of the acts of consciousness towards an object which Brentano had originally spotted in his 1874 passage, express nonetheless different things about the psychical, and so, they should be 'carefully distinguished', as Theodore De Boer has pointed out (*The Development of Husserl's Thought*, trans. by Theodore Plantinga (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978), p. 6). Brentano later relinquished the thesis of intentionality he had emphasised in the 1874 passage denoting the immanence of objects in consciousness 'during what Brentano scholars call the crisis of immanence (*Immanenzkrise*) of 1905', but retained the second thesis of intentionality denoting the directedness or relation of the acts of consciousness towards their objects (however the latter are to be understood). Herbert Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement: A Historical Introduction*, 3rd rev. and enlarged edn (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1994), p. 48, n. 19.

<sup>50</sup> Brentano, therefore, can play on the literal meaning of the German word '*Bewusstsein*' — 'the term "consciousness", since it refers to an object which consciousness is conscious of (*von welchem das Bewusstsein Bewusstsein ist*)' (*PES*, p. 102) — as corroborating his (earlier) definition of the essence of consciousness as intentional, 'i.e., [as having] the property of the intentional [=mental] in-existence of an object, for which we lack a word in common usage' (*PES*, p. 88) since what consciousness *is* a-consciousness-of is *to be (sein)* aware (*Bewusst*). Later, Martin Heidegger will unravel the etymology of this same term '*Bewusstsein*' (as others did before him, e.g., Karl Marx) to stress that it implies some 'meaning of Being' *first*, and that this is what determines the meaning of 'being aware' ('consciousness'), and not the other way around. This, of course, *misconstrues* the point that *Brentano* wishes to make, namely, that *consciousness* cannot be denied consciously as it evidently affirms itself self-referentially. In this, Brentano follows *philosophically* Descartes, Locke and Hume's starting-point, i.e., the experience of reflection of consciousness on itself, and not the German or English

which it is held that the mind, in all of its operations and transactions, never has directly available to itself anything *but its own perceptions*. As Hume puts it,

Nothing is ever present to the mind but its perceptions; and [...] all the actions of seeing, hearing [...] fall under its denomination. The mind may never exert in any action which may not be comprehended under the term perception<sup>51</sup>

Brentano, then, is quite certain, as was Descartes, Locke and Hume before him, that when one confines attention to reflection on one's own actual experiences themselves it seems to him that he feels warmth, hears sounds, and sees colours. Brentano, nevertheless, does not quite follow Descartes, Locke and Hume down this road entirely.

### V. Brentano's Scientific Materialism and His Deviance from Hume and Locke's English Empiricisms

According to Brentano, whilst we are infallible knowers of the actual acts of experiencing (psychical phenomena) in inner perception, we are not infallible knowers of *the objects* of the actual acts of outer perceptual-sense experience, that is, of 'physical phenomena' themselves. On the contrary, for Brentano, acts of outer (sense) perception are *inherently* false and *necessarily* misleading *per se*, not because, on some occasions, we succumb to sense illusions, as Descartes noted, or because we misinterpret the subjective nature of those experiences as objective qualities of the object perceived, as Locke had noted and demonstrated through his famous experiment of putting one cold hand and one warm hand simultaneously into a basin of water of the same temperature to produce different experiences of 'warmth in one

---

language (which does not have the same etymological support for 'consciousness'), nor the Medieval Aristotelians.

<sup>51</sup> Hume, *Treatise*, p. 456. It is this 'modern definition' and 'modern conception' of psychology that originates from the inner perception of one's own actual psychical phenomena (*PES*, pp. 18–19) that dominates Brentano's understanding of psychology (philosophy) as a science throughout the 1870s, 1880s and into the early 1890s. Brentano returns to his interest in Aristotle in the early 1900s.

hand and cold in the other, and thus proved that neither warmth nor cold really existed in the water.<sup>52</sup> Brentano, rather, argues further than Locke, in maintaining that the way in which sensorially perceivable qualities such as warmth, sound and colour *really* and *truly* exist extra-mentally — that is to say, in themselves (outside of our direct awareness of them) — are as ‘molecular movements’, ‘atoms’, ‘light rays’, ‘forces’ and so forth. Brentano, alas, *also* calls these theoretically constructed objects of natural science ‘physical phenomena’, even though these are precisely things that *never appear directly to (or in) consciousness*. Since Brentano, nonetheless, understands these latter ‘physical phenomena’, that is, the objects of physics, as having, in truth, *actual* existence and not phenomenal existence, he has to qualify what he means in his definition of physics as the science of ‘physical phenomena’, asserting,

I believe that I will not be mistaken if I assume that the definition of natural science as the science of physical phenomena is frequently connected with the concept of forces belonging to *a world which is similar to the one extended in space and flowing in time*; forces which, through their influence on the sense organs, arouse sensation and mutually influence each other in their action, and of which natural science investigates the laws of co-existence and succession. If those objects are considered as the objects of natural sciences, there is also the advantage [over ‘physical phenomena’ considered as sensorial objects of actual acts of outer sense perception, as is evident from the context] that this science appears to have as its object something that really and truly exists.<sup>53</sup>

To understand and be fair to Brentano’s position here, therefore, we must recognise *two different* meanings that Brentano operates for the one term of ‘physical phenomena’ in *PES*.

‘Physical phenomena’, in sense<sup>1</sup>, are Lockean so-called secondary qualities, that is, sensorially perceivable qualities (colours, sounds, odours, warmth etc.) which exist as the objects of *those actual experiences*. These exist *only as long as the actual experience occurs*, and so, they enjoy *only* phenomenal existence. They exist as ‘immanent objects’ of actual acts of outer

---

<sup>52</sup> *PES*, p. 6.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 99–100, my emphasis.

perceptual-sense experience. As Locke's experiment demonstrates, warmth only exists in the experiencing and not as actual objective properties of things existing extra-mentally (water).

'Physical phenomena', in sense<sup>2</sup>, are the theoretically constructed objects of natural science (light particles, sine waves, forces, etc.). When considered from a natural-scientific-theoretical point of view, these 'physical phenomena' enjoy actual existence in a world that is hypothesized by the natural scientist as one that is 'extended in space and flowing in time', whether we are made aware of their actual existence through natural-scientific means, or not.

It now follows, for Brentano, that since we think the colours that we see and the sounds that we hear ('physical phenomena' in sense<sup>1</sup>) *really and truly* exist like that outside of the experience in the objects of those experiences, but the way these phenomena really and truly exist are as has been uncovered by *natural-scientific investigations* (i.e., as 'physical phenomena' in sense<sup>2</sup>, as molecular movements, light particles, sine waves, atoms, forces etc.), then our everyday natural acts of outer sense perception are inherently mis-leading. The correct view of outer sense perception is that sensorially perceivable *phenomenal* objects (colours and sounds) are 'signs' of an extramental reality that really and truly exists as *determined by natural-scientific fact*, i.e., as light rays and sound waves.<sup>54</sup> This is why Brentano feels justified in concluding that,

we have no right, therefore, to believe that the objects of so-called outer perception really exist as they appear to us. Indeed, they demonstrably do not exist [as properties of the objects] outside of us [as shown through natural science, as is evident from the context]. In contrast to that which

---

<sup>54</sup> If we assume that natural science will provide the 'basis' for all such knowledge claims, then this is a version of what Timm Triplett calls 'Theoretical Basics Foundationalism', in his paper, 'Recent Work on Foundationalism', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 27 (1990), 93–116 (p. 98). Triplett remarks that this particular version of foundationalism (that Cornman identifies), 'would hold that the theoretical statements of science are basic, being epistemologically prior to propositions about subjective psychological states and to ordinary singular propositions about the external world. However, I do not find any clear advocacy of such a view in the literature' (ibid.). It seems to me, however, that this is the position that Brentano endorses and advocates in *PES*. See, 'the scientific task of the natural sciences' in Brentano's quote *infra*, in n. 56.

really and truly exists [‘physical phenomena’, *qua* molecules, light particles], they [‘physical phenomena’, *qua* colours] are *mere* phenomena. [...] We have no experience of that which truly exists [*qua* objects of physics], in and of itself, and that which we do experience [*qua* sensorial perceivable qualities of an object] is not true. The truth of physical phenomena is, as they say, only a relative truth.<sup>55</sup>

We could put Brentano’s understanding of the task of the natural scientist this way. The natural scientist begins with the phenomena (or the objects) of our immediate experience, say, seeing a green leaf on a tree, in order to inform us that that is not how the greenness of the leaf *actually exists* independently of our experiences; in terms of its colour, rather, the green leaf exists as actual light-particles or wave-lengths or wavicles, or as an upside-down image residing in the retina of the eye stimulating certain C-fibres in one’s brain and so forth. These objects, the objects of natural science, have ‘real’, ‘actual’, ‘true’ and ‘absolute’ [= independent] existence, outside of the mind.<sup>56</sup> By comparison to *these* objects of physics, the sounds and colours that we experience exist *only as long as* the actual act of hearing and seeing occurs. Thus the ‘physical phenomena’ of sounds and colours do not have ‘real’, ‘actual’, ‘true’ or ‘absolute’ existence, outside of the mind’s activity. They depend upon the actual psychical act-experiences for their existence. They only have a kind of ‘relative’ existence *to actual* psychical act-expe-

---

<sup>55</sup> PES, p. 10 and p. 19, my emphasis.

<sup>56</sup> ‘We could express the scientific task of the natural sciences by saying something to the effect that they are those sciences which seek to explain the succession of physical phenomena connected with normal and pure sensations (that is, sensations which are not influenced by special mental conditions and processes) on the basis of the assumption of a world with resembles one which has three dimensional extension in space and flows in *one* direction in time, and which influences our sense organs. Without explaining the absolute nature of this world, these sciences would limit themselves to ascribing to its forces capable of producing sensations and of exerting a reciprocal influence upon one another, and determining for these forces the laws of co-existence and succession. Through these laws they would then establish indirectly the laws of succession of the physical phenomena of sensations, if, through scientific abstraction from the concomitant mental conditions, we admit that they manifest themselves in a pure state and as occurring in relation to a constant sensory capacity. We must interpret the expression ‘science of physical phenomena’ in this somewhat complicated way if we want to identify it with natural science.’ PES, pp. 98–99.

riences. They have *only* mental (or intentional) existence and *only* phenomenal existence since they exist only as long as the experiencing subject is having such experiences. When, however, the natural scientist decrees that the objects of his science really and truly *exist*, whereas the physical phenomena (of sounds and colours) do *not really and truly exist as they are in our experiencing of them*, that natural scientist turns into a metaphysician of sorts, or, perhaps more accurately speaking, into a metaphysician of the natural-scientific-materialist variety. Thus both in his account of ‘physical phenomena’ (colours sounds) and in his defence of the way natural science uncovers the reality of these phenomena (as molecular movements), Brentano, like so many of his contemporaries, is a natural-scientific materialist. Yet it is of importance to distinguish this natural-scientific materialism from the philosophical materialism of a Thales or a Democritus or an Aristotle or a Descartes or a Hume since these latter philosophical materialisms are based on philosophical reflection and philosophical speculation, and not on the established facts of natural science.<sup>57</sup>

In all of this, however, it is the positivism of the ‘modern English philosophers’ to which Brentano is committed in his view of *psychology* because the primary objects that are perceived as they are in themselves are one’s own actual experiences. ‘Inner perception’, Brentano re-iterates in *The Origin of our Knowledge of Right and Wrong* (1889), ‘tells me that I am now having such-and-such sound or colour sensations, or that I am now thinking or willing this or that.’<sup>58</sup> Whether one wishes to emphasize the point that it is ‘I’ who am having such and such sensations, or that there exists acts of thinking or willing or sensing this or that, or that the objects of such particular psychical act-experiences are the directly intended objects of sensation, cognition and volition, it is the actual psychical act-experiences as *particular experiences themselves* that, in Brentano’s view, constitute the origin upon which all empirical and normative judgements are based.<sup>59</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup> See, John Passmore, *A Hundred Years of Philosophy* (London: Penguin, 1968; 1980), p. 35.

<sup>58</sup> Brentano, *On the Origin of our Knowledge of Right and Wrong*, pp. 19–20.

<sup>59</sup> Brentano never relinquishes this position after *PES*. See, *PES*, Appendix XII, pp. 311–314. ‘Thinking is Universal, Entities are Individual [Dictated November 21, 1917.]’ This erroneous date was taken over from the German 1924 edition, p. 199. For the correct date [21.02.1917] see the index, *ibid.*, p. VII.



## VI. Some Conclusions and Evaluations of Brentano's Change in Views on the Science of Psychology and his Discovery of the Intentionality of Consciousness

Sometime between 1866 and the writing of *PES* Brentano turns away from his originally-held Aristotelian approach to psychology as a science of the soul, and adopts *instead* a 'modern conception' of psychology that stresses the ability of our consciousness to reflect directly upon its own operations as the first and foremost reality to be studied in and for that science. Since this 'psychology' is interested in focussing its attention on describing this 'subject matter', questions pertaining to the causal origins of such 'conscious acts' or 'psychical phenomena' can be set aside in this science of 'descriptive psychology' or 'psychognosy', as Brentano later coins the term. Causal-hypothetical investigations belong to that part of the natural science of empirical psychology which Brentano calls 'genetic psychology', for, as Hume had earlier put it, such concern 'belongs more to anatomists and natural philosophers [natural scientists] than to the moral [philosophers]'.<sup>60</sup> Brentano, in other words, in the elaboration of his new science of 'descriptive psychology' has switched his *philosophical allegiance* away from both Aristotle and contemporary natural scientists, and chosen instead to follow *Hume*.

'Another important difference' which Brentano stresses that exists between the kind of science that is to be pursued in the descriptive part of the empirical science of psychology in comparison to 'genetic psychology', the natural-scientific component of psychology, is that descriptive psychology 'is an exact science, and that in contrast, genetic psychology, in all its determinations, in an inexact one'.<sup>61</sup> By an exact science, Brentano means those 'sciences which can formulate their doctrines sharply and precisely', such as, for instance, 'a mathematician doesn't say: the sum of the angles of a

---

<sup>60</sup> 'Psychognosy [...] teaches [us] nothing about the causes that give rise to human consciousness [...] [and will] never mention a physico-chemical process in any of its doctrines (*Lehrsatz*). [...] For, correct as it is to say that such processes are preconditions for consciousness, one must resolutely contradict the person who, out of a confusion of thought, claims that our consciousness in itself is to be seen as a physico-chemical event, that it itself is composed out of chemical elements.' Brentano, *Descriptive Psychology*, p. 4.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4–5.

triangle is often, or usually, equal to two right angles. But he says that this is always and without exception the case'.<sup>62</sup> Descriptive psychology seeks this kind of precision and accuracy in its knowledge-claims. By distinction, all natural-scientific investigations, including genetic psychology, seek knowledge-claims that are true for the most part, but such truths are *never* necessarily true, and so, the 'stimulation of a retinal part [of the eye] by a light-ray of a certain frequency [which] induces the phenomenon of blue' does 'not always' induce the phenomenon of blue 'as it is not true in case of (a) colour-blindness, (b) interruption of the conductor, severance of the nerve, (c) losing in competition (*Besiegtwerden im Wettstreit*), (d) replacement by a hallucination'.<sup>63</sup>

This division of the sciences by Brentano into exact and inexact sciences corresponds, by and large, to the epistemological distinction that Hume famously draws between knowledge-claims pertaining to 'matters of fact' and those pertaining to 'relation of ideas', and before Hume, to Leibniz's distinction between 'truths of fact' and 'truths of reason'.<sup>64</sup> Descriptive psychology seeks '*vérités de raison*', that is to say, items of knowledge that are eternally true. Descriptive psychology does not seek inductive, hypothetical, empirical generalisations the truth of which could always turn out to be otherwise than it is. In this respect, it is worth stressing the point that Brentano, like Hume, *never* employed the method of the natural sciences in his actual *descriptive-psychological* philosophizing.<sup>65</sup> What natural scientists study and find through their method of observation, scientific hypotheses

---

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6–7.

<sup>64</sup> See, Oskar Kraus, 'Introduction to the 1924 Edition [of *PES*]', in 'Appendix' to *PES*, pp. 369–408 (p. 370).

<sup>65</sup> How non-hypothetical, intuitively demonstrable *a priori* knowledge-claims about consciousness and its objectivities are exactly related to, or complemented by natural-scientific knowledge-claims that are hypothetically ascertained, empirically verifiable and, by nature, corrigible and probably true of the physical world about us, including ourselves as hypothesized 'things' in and of that world, does not feature as problematic in Brentano's thought. This problematic, however, occupies Husserl's attention greatly in the development of his thought. See, Ch 2., § 40 "Primary" and "Secondary" Qualities. The Physical Thing Given "In Person" a "Mere Appearance" of the "True Physical Thing" Determined in Physics', in Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book, General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, trans. by Fred Kersten (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff

and laboratory experiment is simply not the kind of knowledge that we can and do arrive at both in and through direct reflection on our experiences themselves, that is to say, through what Brentano calls the ‘inner perception of our own psychical phenomena’. *Unlike Hume*, however, Brentano believes that we can gain incorrigible insights into the nature of those experiences themselves that are both necessarily true of those experiences and of epistemological significance. Thus, in practice, Brentano employs a more *mathematical* model of reasoning in his new descriptive-psychological method (and so, in this regard one can understand why Husserl was so *taken* with Brentano’s ‘style’ of philosophizing at Vienna University in the early 1880s).

Even though the term ‘descriptive psychology’ is not employed by Brentano in his 1874 *PES*, the task for the descriptive psychologist in this work is to pick out those essential features that are intuitively demonstrable in all of our psychical act-experiences and *their* immanent objects that *cannot*, in an *a priori* manner of speaking, be known *to be* otherwise than they *are*. According to Brentano, the object-relatedness of all conscious acts, the ‘intentionality of consciousness’, is just one such intelligible structure that is evidently true and discernible in the nature of psychical act-experiences themselves. Like all descriptive-psychological items of knowledge, this item of knowledge, the object-relatedness of all psychical act-experiences, expresses, for Brentano, a ‘*truth of reason*’. It is grasped ‘at one stroke and without induction.’<sup>66</sup>

This, then, explains, to a certain degree, why it was a new discovery *for Brentano* — even though he did not think it was a new discovery himself, but a mere re-introduction by him of the Scholastic concept of the intentional in-existence of an object — to note that the object-relatedness of our actual experiences is an essential feature of those experiences themselves by comparison to physical phenomena (e.g. tones, colours etc.) *which the ‘English empiricists’* whom he had read had *failed to note and to distinguish*. No such discovery is possible within an Aristotelian view of psychology. And since Brentano no longer accepts the ‘agent intellect’ and its abstractive

---

Publishers, 1982). Cf., Theodore de Boer, ‘The Meaning of Husserl’s Idealism in the Light of His Development’, *Analecta Husserliana*, 2 (1972), 322–332.

<sup>66</sup> Kraus, ‘Introduction to the 1924 Edition [of *PES*]', p. 370. ‘This point’, Kraus continues, ‘was made by Brentano in his work *The Origin of Our Knowledge of Right and Wrong* in 1889’. *Ibid.*

power as playing any explanatory role in our knowledge-claims about the world about us, the object-relatedness that is characteristic of the activity of consciousness, as Brentano understands it, denotes, *as it did for Hume*, the passive possession of consciousness of its objectivities. The *impressed* contents are distinct, but related to the activity (= passivity) of the acts that bears them. This relatedness between the activity (passivity) of psychological act-experiences and *their* contents that Brentano identifies is nonetheless found, albeit in embryonic fashion, in Hume, and not in Aristotle and the medieval Aristotelians.<sup>67</sup> Hume, after all, does inform us about what ‘impressions’ *are not*:

By the term of impression I would not be understood to express the manner, in which our lively perceptions are produced in the soul, but merely the perceptions themselves; for which there is no particular name either in the *English* or any other language, that I know of.<sup>68</sup>

The impression in the soul, for Hume, then, ‘is *not* the act of impressing a perception on the soul, but the “impress”, its result’.<sup>69</sup> Here, as O’Donnell comments, Hume is *distinguishing* perceptions that refer to *impressions* alone, the impress, from Locke’s view that all perceptions are ‘ideas’.<sup>70</sup> And it is *from within* a focus on *the impress* — that is to say, on a sound as heard, a colour as seen, an odour as smelt and so forth — that Brentano *makes the further descriptive-psychological-analytical distinction between the directly intended objects of those experiences (a tone, a colour) and the psychological act-experiences themselves that contain those objects* ‘for which’, like Hume, Brentano remarks, ‘we lack a word in common usage [in English or in German]’, but which Brentano did find in the Medieval-Latin terminology of the ‘intenti-

---

<sup>67</sup> Thus Philip Bartok’s reiteration that ‘(H)e [Brentano] insisted that the central doctrines of his psychology, the doctrines of intentionality and inner perception, were doctrines that had clear precedents in the work of Aristotle and the Scholastics’, is a reiteration of Brentano’s own, and often misleading, self-interpretation. Philip J. Bartok, ‘Brentano’s Intentionality Thesis: Beyond the Analytic and Phenomenological Readings’, *Journal of History of Philosophy*, 43 (2005), 437–60 (p. 454). Cf., also, Bartok’s corresponding references at p. 454, n. 59.

<sup>68</sup> Hume, *Treatise*, p. 2, note.

<sup>69</sup> O’Donnell, p. 65, my emphasis.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 7.

onal (or mental) in-existence of an object' that is *opposed* to any kind of real, natural, substantial existence of a thing outside of the mind.<sup>71</sup> The passive possession of 'our own actual psychical phenomena' (i.e., of our actual psychical act-experiences *and their* objects) is the starting point for Hume, as it is for Brentano. All of this, nonetheless, is premised on Hume's assumption that access to consciousness (and its impressions) is peculiarly direct and certain when compared to anything else and on Locke's dualistic-metaphysical view of human subjectivity as comprising a lucid mind and an opaque body, but these presuppositions do not invalidate the descriptive-psychological tenet that consciousness *is always*, in an *a priori* manner of speaking, a consciousness *of something*, a tenet that Brentano originally arrived at and discovered *for himself* in his efforts to understand and follow somewhat in agreement, and somewhat in disagreement, the significant 'scientific contributions of modern English philosophers'.<sup>72</sup>

---

<sup>71</sup> PES, p. 102. For a treatment of Brentano's deviance from the Scholastic concept of intentionality, see, Cyril McDonnell, 'Understanding and Assessing "Brentano's Thesis" in Light of His Modification of the Scholastic Concept of Intentionality', *Brentano Studien XIII* (2015), 153 – 182.

<sup>72</sup> Husserl evaluates Brentano 'as a path finder' (*als Wegbereiter*) in his 'discovery' of this structure of consciousness for a new descriptive science of intentional consciousness and its objectivities. See, Edmund Husserl, *Phänomenologische Psychologie, Vorlesungen Sommersemester 1925, Gesammelte Werke*, Husserliana (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1968), Vol. IX, ed. by Walter Biemel, '§ 3d Brentano als Wegbereiter für die Forschung in innerer Erfahrung – Entdeckung der Intentionalität als Grundcharakter des Psychischen', pp. 31–5; *Phenomenological Psychology. Lectures, Summer Semester 1925*, trans. by John Scanlon (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977), 'Section (d) Brentano as pioneer for research in internal experience – discovery of intentionality as the fundamental character of the psychic', pp. 23–27.