Franz Brentano:

Central Ideas

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Preface/Note to the Reader

If you're a professional philosopher, you've probably heard of Brentano as the thinker who reintroduced the notion of intentionality into modern philosophy. If you're not a professional philosopher, you've probably never heard of him. But Brentano's philosophical work expands far beyond the theme of intentionality and constitutes in fact a complete philosophical system, with well worked out and strikingly original theories in every major area of philosophy. The purpose of this article is to provide a panoramic yet digestible overview of Brentano's contributions in most areas of philosophy, with greater focus on theoretical philosophy. For Brentano, though, all branches of philosophy have their roots in a proper understanding of the mind, so we start with his work in this area.

The article is written to be understood without any background in philosophy, and in fact may double as an introduction to the various branches philosophy itself. Each section covers Brentano's core ideas in one branch of philosophy, starting with the briefest exposition of the branch itself. This exposition occurs before the subsections of each sections begin, and may be skipped by more advanced readers. Note also that the sections are fairly modular, so the article need not be read in its entirety to make sense. For instance, sections 2-5 constitute something of a self-standing text, as do sections 5-8.
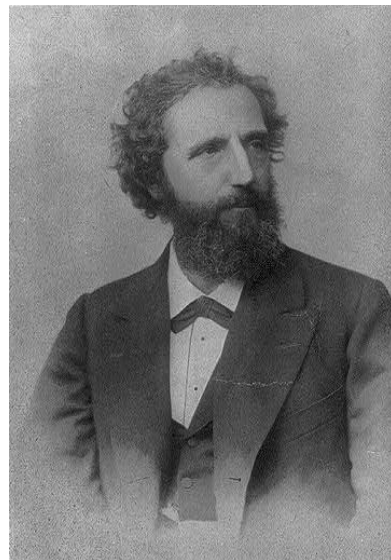
1. Brentano's Life and Work

Franz Clemens Honoratus Hermann Brentano was born in 1838 to a well-off, well-educated, extremely religious family. His father was a businessman and minor essayist and his mother a teacher and translator of devotional literature. (His father's brother, Clemens Brentano, was a towering figure of German Romanticism and his many stories – especially fairytales – are still taught in German schools.) Little Franz grew up under the thumb of his pious mother and, like many children of well-established families at that time, was mostly home-schooled. He then studied philosophy, theology, mathematics, and history at a series of universities and received his doctorate at the age of 24 from the University of Tübingen. Two years later he was ordained as a Catholic priest, an event which started a highly tumultuous relationship with the Catholic establishment.

In Germany, there is a special book one has to write to "graduate" from doctor to professor; it's called a "habilitation." Brentano wrote his habilitation in 1866, at the age of 28. For the occasion of his habilitation defense, he presented 25 theses he was prepared to defend (Brentano 1866), theses that clearly irrigated much of his later philosophical work. For example, the fourth thesis states that there is no categorical difference between the method of philosophy and the method of natural science (an idea nowadays called "naturalism") and the thirteenth states that there is nothing in our intellect that doesn't come originally from sense perception (an idea often called "empiricism"). These are foundational ideas for Brentano's philosophy, as we will see in due course.

At the age of 29, Brentano started teaching at the University of Würzburg. At the beginning he was mostly teaching logic and history of philosophy. Three years later, however, a major personal crisis hit him. The Catholic Church adopted the dogma of papal infallibility, according to which the Pope never says anything false, and Brentano, appalled by the utter implausibility of this notion, as he saw it, started digging into the history of Catholic dogmas, eventually penning a spirited critique of the entire practice and demonstrating the mutual inconsistency of some dogmas. In 1873, he decided to withdraw from the priesthood – quite the scandal at the time – and this cost him his position at Würzburg.

This series of events was dramatic for the young scholar, but a great fortune for Western philosophy. Brentano wrote a lot in his lifetime, but he published

relatively little, because he hated the "secondary work" associated with publication, such as proof-reading, indexing, and so forth (Bergman 1965: 94). In view of his resignation from his Würzburg professorship, however, and in order to secure a professorship in Vienna, Brentano found it necessary to write – apparently, in some hurry – what was later to become his most important work: *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* (Brentano 1874). The book's two volumes present methodological and conceptual foundations for a science of consciousness – what Brentano called "psychology" (the word has changed meaning somewhat since his day – see §3 below). The first volume fixes the subject matter, aims, and method of such a science; the second volume develops (i) a more principled delineation of the sphere of relevant phenomena and (ii) a high-level taxonomy of these phenomena into three groups (more on this, again, in §3).

Brentano's original plan for the book – and a long-term research plan for the coming decades – involved *six* volumes. Volumes 3-5 were each supposed to develop a framework for understanding one of the three big parts of our mental life (as Brentano saw them): very roughly, thoughts, beliefs, and emotions. Volume 6, meanwhile, was going to speculate on the question of the immortality of the human soul. Unfortunately for us, Brentano's appointment at Vienna was quickly confirmed and these further volumes were never published – most were not even written (though we do have a rather developed draft of Volume 3, on the nature of thoughts, or what Brentano called 'presentations' – this is manuscript MS XPs53 in the Brentano Archives).

The ensuing period of academic security was short-lived, however. In 1880 Brentano was embroiled in a new scandal: he married a colleague's sister – Ida von Lieben, a woman of the local Jewish bourgeoisie. What was scandalous about it was not that the bride was a colleague's sister but that the groom used to be an ordained priest. For as far as the Church was concerned, you can take the boy out of the priesthood but you can't take the priesthood out of the boy. The main consequence of all this was that Brentano again had to resign his position, this time his professorship in Vienna. Nonetheless, Brentano appears to have led a happy life in those years. He continued teaching in Vienna on an essentially voluntary basis and lived with his wife, as well as her two siblings and their spouses and children, in a nice house on Vienna's *Ring*, just next to the *Burgtheater*. He was very involved in his nieces' and nephews' upbringing, always trying to infect them with his love of chess and playing piano for them. On Thursday evenings all the children gathered eagerly in his study for Uncle Franz's animated weekly readings, by a single lamp's greenish glow, of fairy tales, adventure stories, and poems (Winter 1927). In 1888, Ida gave birth to their own child, Johannes. Around that time, Brentano composed

some of his most important essays, typically delivered first as lectures to various Viennese cultural societies and later published as (often novella-length) books or essays. Notable among them is Brentano's lecture on the foundations of value and morality, soon thereafter published as *On the Origin of Our Knowledge of Right and Wrong* (Brentano 1889); a related and important lecture on the notion of truth, published only posthumously (Brentano 1930 Ch.1); a lecture on the nature of genius, published as a little book titled *Genius* (Brentano 1892); and a lecture on the history of philosophy writ large, published under the title *The Four Phases of Philosophy and Its Current State* (Brentano 1895).

In 1894, however, Ida fell ill and died quite suddenly. On her deathbed, she begged Brentano to remarry, so their son could grow up in a family context (Schell 1978: 77). Brentano left Austria the following year, spending some months in Switzerland and then settling in Florence, remarrying soon as he had promised Ida. His interests slowly migrated from mind to metaphysics, and from October 1903 he started developing an austere metaphysics that we know about mostly from letters and manuscripts Brentano never published. His eyesight started deteriorating and from 1907 he was functionally blind. He continued to dictate important notes and essays to the many students willing to take them down, though. In 1915, Brentano moved to Switzerland as a protest against Italy's entry into WWI. He died in Zurich two years later, aged 79. Some of his most important works on the foundations of mathematics, along with some bold cosmological speculations, were dictated during the last couple of years of his life.

Brentano left behind him an immense collection of unpublished manuscripts, referred to in German as *Nachlass* ("literary estate"). These materials were liberally edited and published by a succession of devoted students and students' students, mostly from Prague in a first wave and Innsbruck (an alpine city in western Austria) in a second wave. A first spurt of successive volumes concerned epistemology (Brentano 1925, 1928, 1930), metaphysics (Brentano 1933), and philosophy of religion (Brentano 1922, 1929). One of Brentano's students at Vienna in the 1870s was Thomas Masaryk, who later became an influential intellectual and Czechoslovakia's first president. Masaryk helped set up a Brentano Archive in Prague in 1932, but the archive was destroyed when Nazi Germany invaded Czechoslovakia in 1939. The *Nachlass* was then spirited away to England and in 1950 moved on to the US, where his son had become a physics professor at Northwestern University. It's been housed at Harvard's Houghton Library since. Another set of edited volumes followed: on moral philosophy (Brentano 1952), logic and language (Brentano 1956), aesthetics (Brentano 1959), metaphysics (Brentano 1966), as well as on religion (Brentano 1954) and the foundations of mathematics

(Brentano 1976) and of psychology (Brentano 1982). Brentano's early lecture notes for courses on the history of philosophy were published, heavily edited, in three volumes: one on Ancient Greek philosophy (Brentano 1963), one on Medieval philosophy in Christendom (Brentano 1980), and one on Early Modern philosophy (Brentano 1987).

Brentano was apparently an extremely inspiring teacher, with an almost messianic conviction in the indispensable and irreplaceable value of philosophy. His students include notably the influential philosophers Edmund Husserl and Alexius Meinong, but also Gestalt Psychology pioneers Carl Stumpf and Christian Ehrenfels; the prominent Swiss philosopher Anton Marty; Kazimierz Twardowski, godfather of modern Polish philosophy; Hugo Bergman, godfather of Israeli philosophy; and a variety of other Central-European figures enjoying some stature in their day, despite being virtually unknown in today's English-speaking world. Many of them have had their own prominent, broadly Brentanian students. Prague and Innsburck were "Brentanian franchises" of sorts for many years, featuring weekly meetings dedicated to what we might call "Brentano studies"; apparently Franz Kafka participated in several such meetings at *Café Louvre* in Prague. Characters as diverse as Sigmund Freud and Rudolf Steiner (he of the Waldorf-Steiner educational approach and "anthroposophy") claim to have been blown away by Brentano's courses in Vienna (see Merlan 1945 and Steiner 1917 respectively), Freud even describing himself as a Brentano student in one letter (though this may be mostly because that was a cool thing to be – Brentano himself shows no awareness of him).

It is an interesting question why this entire philosophical tradition – the "Brentano School," as it is still known in Central Europe – has disappeared from contemporary philosophy. The role of Germany's National-Socialist craze, that bizarre and still ill-understood period of Western Civilization, cannot be underestimated. In 1933 German was still more prominent than English in international research, but had become a fringe language for research by 1945. While many members of the so-called Vienna Circle, being Jewish, emigrated to the English-speaking world just in time to exercise untold influence on the development of Anglo-American philosophy, this kind of transition did not occur with the Brentano School, which accordingly wilted into obscurity after WWII. Another possible factor, however, is the insufficiently critical attitude of members of the Brentano School toward the master's teachings. Brentano appears to have tolerated very little dissension, carrying tense relationships with the more creative members of his "school," *especially* Husserl and Meinong.

2. Philosophy of Mind

Substance Dualism and a Self-Representational Theory of Consciousness

The expression "philosophy of mind" has come into widespread use only in the 1960s, as many issues pertaining to the most fundamental mental categories parceled out of traditional metaphysics. Nonetheless the main themes in the philosophy of mind have always been unified around a single organizing problem: *the mind-body problem*. It concerns the ultimate relationship between mind and matter, or more broadly between mental phenomena, such as feeling sad or thinking about what to eat for lunch, and physical phenomena, such as tables, trees, and butterflies.

<u>a. The Mind-Body Problem</u>

There are many different views on the mind-body problem, but they can be profitably divided into three basic approaches, which we may call "matter first," "mind first," and "no priority." According to the "matter first" approach, often referred to as *materialism* (or *physicalism*), the universe is ultimately entirely material – it's just a huge field of physical particles dispersed through space and time and coming together in certain ways so as to generate macroscopic entities. In this picture, thought and consciousness either are a pure illusion or exist only thanks to properly organized collections of physical particles. In other words, mental phenomena are "metaphysically dependent" on physical phenomena.

The opposite view, the "mind first" approach, is known as *idealism*; this is the view that the universe is ultimately just consciousness. Material entities, from subatomic particles through tables and trees to the cosmos as a whole, are either a grand illusion or something that's real but that exists only because of (perhaps *in*) the mind. Here it's physical phenomena that are construed as metaphysically dependent on mental phenomena.

The third approach, which I called "no priority," holds that neither mind nor matter is more fundamental than the other. Here two importantly different versions may be distinguished. [*Dualism*](#) is the view that mind and matter are *metaphysically independent* of each other. On this view, thoughts and feelings are one thing, tables and trees are another thing, and they each exist in their own realm. Of course, they

may *interact* with each other (e.g., taking a physical pill like Prozac and digesting it in your physical stomach can lead you to feel sad less often). But neither mind nor matter *owes its existence* to the other. The other version of "no priority" holds on the contrary that mind and matter are mutually metaphysically *dependent* on each other: neither can exist without the other. In many versions this is because they both arise out of a single underlying type of process which is in itself neither mental not physical but at the same time is both proto-mental and proto-physical. This view is often called *neutral monism*.

We can organize these options along a grid according to whether they accept or deny that mind metaphysically depends on matter and/or vice versa.

	Mind depends on matter	Mind does not depend on matter
Matter depends on mind	Neutral monism	Idealism
Matter does not depend on mind	Materialism	Dualism

Table 1. Main options on the Mind-Body Problem

Where on this grid does Brentano fit? The answer is unequivocal: Brentano is definitely a dualist. He takes mind and matter to be mutually *metaphysically* independent, even though mental phenomena are *causally* dependent on physical (in particular, neurophysiological) phenomena (Brentano 1874: 47-8). What this means is that physical phenomena drive the processes that determine which particular mental phenomena take place, but these mental phenomena are nonetheless separate occurrences and do not simply *consist in* the occurrence of physical phenomena. (Compare: the occurrence of rain causally depends on the presence of clouds but does not simply *consist in* the presence of clouds.) Their metaphysical independence is for him a manifest fact: the two kinds of phenomena

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are categorically different, or as Brentano puts it, "absolutely heterogeneous" (1874: 50-1). Mental phenomena are *just too different* to be considered ultimately physical. Furthermore, he argues that a taxonomy of mental phenomena cannot be obtained from a taxonomy of neurophysiological ones, and the laws of mental life cannot be deduced from the laws of neurophysiology (1874: 47), two points which again express the metaphysical independence of the mental realm from the physical realm.

Now, modern discussions of dualism distinguish crucially between two kinds: *property* dualism and *substance* dualism. The latter is by far the stronger claim, holding that there are two different kinds of *things* in the world – physical things (material objects) and mental things (minds) – which are made of different kinds of *stuff* (matter and "mindstuff"). Property dualism is a more modest claim: it posits only one kind of stuff in the world – matter – and merely insists that material objects have two distinct and mutually irreducible sets of *properties*, namely, physical properties (such as being made of meat or weighing 200 pounds) and mental properties (such as thinking of a spider or feeling embarrassed).

b. Brentano's Stance on the Mind-Body Problem

Brentano is a *substance* dualist. In fact he doesn't consider property dualism a kind of dualism at all, instead referring to it as "materialism of the subject," as it takes subjects of consciousness like you and me to be material objects that just happen to have non-physical properties (1954: 217-8). For Brentano, on the contrary, a conscious subject is *connected* to a material body, but is not *the same thing* as this material body. Each of us is in its essence a mental substance, an immaterial self, he thinks. Accordingly, there are two kinds of substances in the world: physical substances, which Brentano referred to as three-dimensional objects, and mental substances, which he considered to be "zero-dimensional objects" (1933: 119, 1954: 221).

Why is Brentano a substance dualist and why does he think we should be too? In other words, what is his *argument* for substance dualism? It's perhaps not surprising that such a religious man would turn out to be a substance dualist. But at the same time, as we saw Brentano was not dogmatic in his religiosity, and anyway, the second of his 25 habilitation theses mentioned in §1 states clearly: "Philosophy must oppose those who demand that it borrow its principles from theology" (1866: 137). So why then was he a substance dualist? The answer is that we have no clear argument for this in Brentano's writings. Perhaps this is because Brentano thought it too obvious or axiomatic that the mental and the physical are *just too different*. Still, one thing we do find in Brentano's *Nachlass* are various fragments and drafts

that his devoted student Alfred Kastil collated and combined into a single longish essay written in Brentano's voice. What we get in this essay is not really a direct argument *for* substance dualism, but an argument *against* all the main *competitors* of substance dualism. This sort of "argument by elimination" is a legitimate and recognized argumentative strategy. Let me briefly present the gist of the Brentanian argument by elimination for substance dualism.

We can organize the argument in two steps: first, knocking out dualism's competitors, namely (a) materialism, (b) idealism, and (c) neutral monism; second, knocking out (d) property dualism, to leave only substance dualism "standing." This is not Brentano's (or Kastil's) own organization, and not even their own terminology. But since what we have here is an argument by elimination, *we* can organize it like that.

First, then, there is materialism. As we have seen, Brentano thinks that mental and physical phenomena are "absolutely heterogeneous"; so for him it makes no sense to say that mental phenomena are deep down *nothing but* physical phenomena. However, this leaves open one materialist possibility, namely, that mental phenomena are just an illusion and in reality there is no such thing as thoughts and feelings. This option is what Brentano calls "extreme materialism" and is nowadays called "illusionism" (Frankish 2016). Brentano argues, however, that this view is in truth self-contradictory: an illusion, or "mere appearance" as he puts it, is always an appearance *to someone*, or more precisely, *to a conscious subject*. Thus for consciousness to even *appear* to exist it would have to appear to exist *to consciousness*. And this means that while for most things we can say that they appear to exist but in fact do not, meaning by that that some consciousness is under the impression that they exist when in reality they do not, with consciousness it's different: if consciousness appears to exist then it must exist, because it means that there is some consciousness it appears *to*. And so saying that consciousness merely appears to exist is tantamount to saying that consciousness suffers the illusion of consciousness's existence. But for consciousness to suffer any kind of illusion, consciousness has to exist. This is why illusionism/extreme materialism is *self-contradictory* (1954: 196-7).

Next we get an argument against "spiritualism," which clearly corresponds to what we call today idealism. The argument is essentially that the hypothesis of a material world offers the best explanation of our perceptual experiences' unfolding (1954: 200). Brentano (or Kastil?) is willing to concede that the existence of matter is not self-evident in the way the existence of mind is – it's not self-contradictory to hold that matter is just an illusion, as philosophers such as George Berkeley have

done. Still, almost everything there is in the world is such that it may not have existed. The reason to believe in such things is always the same: that the supposition that they exist is part of the best explanation of our experience as a whole. For example, why do I think that my dog Julius exists? Because when I wake up one of the first experiences I have is of a Julius-y shape moving in Julius-y ways, and then experiences of the same shape, and the familiar bark, and so on show up with predictable regularities throughout the day and across different days. It would be the most improbable miracle if these orderly patterns of Julius-ish experience happened to be a very coherent illusion. It's *possible*, of course – there's no proof to the contrary. But something can be possible without being probable. The most *probable* thing is that there is a dog outside my mind, roughly of the shape and size and sound of my dear Julius, who causes me to have these Julius-ish experiences. According to Brentano, the same is true of matter more generally: the supposition that there are material objects outside our consciousness makes most sense of the *contents* of our consciousness, that is, of the specific experiences we undergo.

As regards neutral monism – or what Brentano calls "correlativism," because it holds that conscious experience and brain processes are "two sides of the same coin" – Brentano offers two arguments. First, he says, differences in conscious experience outrun and are finer-grained than differences in brain activity: there are uncountably many shades of experience, whereas there's a hard ceiling on how many processes the physical brain sitting inside your skull can undergo. This argument is based on empirical speculations that appear highly questionable from the vantage point of current neuroscience, so let's set is aside. Brentano's second argument is a lot more probing: he points out that conscious experiences are always *directed at objects*, in that when you feel or think, there is always *something* that you feel and *something* that you think; whereas brain processes are what they are and don't "point to" or are "directed toward" anything beyond them (1954: 212). This is a much more intriguing and more principled argument. Note that it applies with equal force to materialism as well. As soon as the mental and the physical are *identified*, whether in the manner of materialism or in the manner of neutral monism, the question arises of how something endowed with inherent directedness could be identical with something devoid of inherent directedness.

This set of considerations, taken together, recommends to Brentano the adoption of dualism at the expense of materialism, idealism, and neutral monism. The next step of the argument is to see what recommends substance dualism at the expense of property dualism. Recall that Brentano called property dualism "materialism of the subject," because the view really combines materialism about *substances* with dualism about the *properties* of those substances. Now, Brentano's

argument here is super-complicated and in my humble opinion not particularly convincing, so we won't dwell on it either. The basic idea is that materialism of the subject, or property dualism, doesn't have a good explanation of the unity of consciousness, the fact that conscious experience is unified, in some sense, both across time and at a time (1954: 227-8).

<u>c. Brentano on Consciousness and on Intentionality</u>

Now, 20th-century philosophical thinking on the mind-body problem was decidedly materialistic. As a result, the issue loomed large of how there could be something like object-directedness, or "intentionality" in technical parlance, in a purely physical world. This was among the defining topics of debate in the philosophy of mind of the second half of the 20th century, often precisely under the label "Brentano's Problem" (Field 1978: 9). In a way, around 1980 the original mind-body problem was split into two sub-problems: the consciousness-body problem and the intentionality-body problem. The underlying idea was that the mental exhibits two features that make it hard to see how it could fit in a physical world: consciousness and intentionality, or more precisely, the felt quality of subjective experience (consciousness) and the mind's capacity to direct itself onto something (intentionality). Each poses a distinctive challenge to the materialistic worldview whereby everything is ultimately just agglomeration of brute matter. It just seemed unclear how such agglomerations could either be conscious or direct their mind at something outside the head.

At the time, the "philosophical mood" in the English-speaking world was like this: phenomena from our everyday "manifest image of the world" seem time and again to succumb to reductive explanation in terms of microscopic phenomena from the "scientific image of world"; so it would be reasonable to expect that the same will happen with mental phenomena. But intentionality and consciousness seem to present principled obstacles to such reductive explanation, insofar as they seem to be something it's *impossible* for a purely physical system to have. So, much of late 20th- and early 21st-century work in philosophy of mind has been dedicated to the nature of intentionality and the nature of consciousness, typically with a view to understanding how, if at all, they could be fitted into the natural world as portrayed by natural science. Let me close this section, then, with brief remarks on Brentano's main ideas about the nature of consciousness and intentionality.

Brentano developed quite a sophisticated theory of <u>consciousness</u>, which is most comfortably seen as presaging current-day "self-representational" theories of consciousness (see Kriegel and Williford 2006). On Brentano's view, every conscious experience, feeling, or thought presents two things: (i) some primary

object and (ii) itself. A visual experience of a cirrocumulus cloud, for example, presents both (i) the cloud – its shape and color – and (ii) one's seeing of the cloud, that is, the very experience of the cloud's shape and color (see Brentano 1874 Bk.2 Ch.2-3). When it comes to the question of the exact relationship between the two presentational aspects – the object-directed aspect and the self-directed aspect – Brentano's answer is simple: what there is *in reality* is just one thing, one experience or presentation, but we can distinguish *in thought* between those two dimensions of it (1982: 25, 27). This is a bit like a nature trail from the parking lot to the waterfall and the trail from the waterfall back to the parking lot – we can distinguish them *in thought*, but *in reality* there is just one trail.

In current philosophy of mind, Brentano is best known for the notion of [intentionality](#), in the sense of mental directedness (*not* the sense of forming an intention to act). More specifically, he is known for claiming that intentionality is the "mark of the mental," that is, is what demarcates the mental most deeply from the non-mental. However, when it comes to the *nature* of intentionality, what it *consists in*, Brentano wrote very little (and very cryptically), and accordingly interpretations of his views are all over the place. Some think he thought intentionality is a relation between the mind and an *external* object (Taieb 2018); others that it's a relation between the mind and an "immanent" object, that is, an object that exists *only in the mind* (Brandl 2005, Crane 2006); and some people think that for Brentano intentionality is not a relation at all but just a way of being a mentally active (Moran 1996, Kriegel 2018 Ch.2). In fact, some scholars think Brentano constantly changed his mind on this (Chrudzimski 2001). And some think Brentano held you couldn't give a *theory* of intentionality at all, you could only *experience* intentionality and grasp it directly in your experience (Textor 2017 Ch.3).

3. Philosophy of Psychology

Empiricist Foundations for a Science of Consciousness

Much of Brentano's philosophy of mind takes place within the context of what is for him a more basic project in the *philosophy of psychology*. It might seem weird that there's even a distinction between philosophy of mind and philosophy of psychology. But there's a reason for it: today, philosophy of mind is to some extent an application of metaphysics to mental phenomena, whereas philosophy of psychology is more like an application of philosophy of *science* to the science of the mind. However, Brentano wrote *before* psychology became a recognized science, and so his project was not the same as that of today's philosophers of psychology. His project was to lay down potential foundations – *conceptual* and *methodological* foundations – for a *future* science of the mind.

This is the express goal of Brentano's great work, his 1874 *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*. Written just before the advent of modern experimental psychology, and in fact on the cutting edge of the intellectual movement toward it, the book can be organized around three principal questions:

1) What is the *subject matter* of psychology?
2) What is the *aim* of psychology?
3) How might psychology *achieve* its aims?

The first question is about the *topic* of psychology, the second about the *point* of it, and the third about the correct *methodology* to use in it. Below, I present Brentano's answers to each of these questions.

a. Brentano on the Subject Matter of Psychology

Brentano's first stab at the subject-matter question is to claim that psychology is the study of mental phenomena. This seems pretty trivial, but in fact envelops a double contrast: (a) mental phenomena as opposed to *physical* phenomena, and (b) mental phenomena as opposed mental *substances*. To understand Brentano's idea, we need to understand both these contrasts.

The distinction between mental and physical phenomena Brentano draws as follows. Phenomena, for him, are appearances – the intentional objects of our

perceptions. Crucially, however, we have two fundamentally different kinds of perception: *external* perception (sight, touch, etc.), which presents to us the external world around us, and *inner* perception, which presents to us our own stream of consciousness. What appears to external perception is for Brentano physical appearances, or physical phenomena, while what appears to inner perception is mental phenomena. Thus, when you're sad and notice that you're sad, noticing the specific quality of sadness you experience is a form of inner perception, and the specific quality of your sadness appears to your inner perception; that sad quality is a mental phenomenon. In contrast, when your dog barks and you hear him or her bark, you're using external perception – so a bark is a physical phenomenon. Psychology, for Brentano, "is the science of people's inner life, that is, the part of life which is captured in inner perception" (Brentano 1982: 3).

But mental phenomena differ not only from phenomena which are not mental, but also from mental things that are not phenomena, notably mental *substances*. As we have seen, Brentano very much believes in the reality of mental substances. However, he realizes that this is controversial, and he thinks psychology's official subject matter should not be something controversial. Controversies should emerge *within* a science, and not be settled in advance by the very definition of the science. Since it's possible to want to know about the mind without believing in mental substances, Brentano reasons, the very definition of what psychology studies must remain neutral on the existence of mental substances. The conception of psychology as the science of mental *phenomena* is neutral enough (1874: 19).

It's true that some people don't believe even in mental phenomena (i.e., the aforementioned "extreme materialists" – today's "illusionists"), but presumably those people don't think there's any place for a science of the mind in the first place. For them, psychology would be a subject without subject matter. This in fact shows that if you think psychology does have a subject matter, you must believe that there are mental phenomena. So defining psychology as the science of mental phenomena is the appropriate way to proceed.

Once we have this pre-theoretic characterization of psychology as the science of mental phenomena, however, Brentano looks for a more theoretically robust demarcation of this field of phenomena. What is the deep mark of mental phenomena, that which separates them from physical phenomena? Brentano's view on this is actually pretty involved, but ultimately he thinks intentionality (the directedness of mental states) is what "best characterizes mental phenomena" (1874: 98). Strangely, he doesn't tell us *what* makes it "best."

Importantly, Brentano also thinks that all mental phenomena are phenomena *of consciousness.* That is, he denies the existence of unconscious mental life – not dogmatically, but on the basis of careful argumentation (1874: 102-30). So at bottom, what he thinks psychology will study is *conscious* phenomena – lived experiences as they appear to inner perception. With this in mind, his contributions in the philosophy of psychology are best understood as aiming to secure conceptual and methodological foundations for a *first-person science of consciousness*, that is, a science of conscious experience as it appears to us internally. This is of course still very much a "hot topic" among both scientists and philosophers. Although we already have today a *third-person* science concerned with consciousness, it really only studies various *correlates* of consciousness: neural correlates of consciousness primarily (in neuroscience), as well as cognitive and behavioral correlates of consciousness (in cognitive psychology). Of course, this is all that *can* be studied third-personally (i.e., without the explicit help of private inner perception). We can't see (or hear, or taste) someone else's thoughts and feelings. Even if I look at a live brain scan of you at the exact moment you're eating chocolate, I don't of course *see* or *taste* your chocolate-y experience. The point is that the neuroscience of consciousness we have today is really not a science of consciousness itself, but of some of its correlates. What Brentano sought were foundations for a science of *consciousness itself* (or rather of conscious phenomena, as opposed to conscious substances), something that we still don't properly have a century and a half later.

b. Brentano on the Aim of Psychology

So much, then, for the question of the *subject matter* of psychology. Our next question concerns the *aim* of psychology – what the point or goal of this science of consciousness is supposed to be. The aim of science in general is to produce knowledge, and when a science's subject matter is *x*, its aim, naturally, is to produce knowledge of *x*. So at a most basic level, the aim of psychology (as Brentano conceives of it) is to produce knowledge of conscious phenomena. But Brentano distinguishes two *kinds* of knowledge we might want to have here: *descriptive* (concerned with what the conscious phenomena *are*, as they present themselves to inner perception) and *causal* (or "genetic," i.e., concerned with the origins or genesis of mental phenomena). Accordingly, Brentano distinguishes two branches of the science of consciousness: "descriptive psychology" and "genetic psychology" (1982: 3-11). The former aims to provide knowledge of what the conscious phenomena are, the second of how they come about.

More specifically, descriptive psychology faces two challenges. The first is analytic: to discover the ultimate "elements of consciousness" – the building blocks

of our conscious experience, combinations of which build up our entire experiential life (1874: 45-6). The second is taxonomic: to discover the natural classification of conscious phenomena, thus imposing initial order on the domain (1874: 44). The double aim of descriptive psychology, then is to (i) provide an "analysis" of conscious phenomena into their elemental building blocks and to (ii) provide a general and principled classification phenomena of consciousness. Meanwhile, the aim of *genetic* psychology is to (iii) discover the most general causal laws that govern the unfolding of conscious phenomena over time (1874: 47, 1982: 6).

On these three fronts, Brentano's most developed contributions concern the taxonomy of conscious phenomena. Because what distinguishes conscious (mental) phenomena from physical phenomena most deeply is intentionality, says Brentano, what distinguishes different *kinds* of conscious phenomena from each other must be the different *kinds of intentionality* they exhibit (1874: 197). And, according to Brentano, there are three basic kinds of intentional directedness: truth-directedness, value-directedness, and sheer directedness. (Note well: these are not Brentano's labels, but mine.) Consider the difference between (a) *believing* that tomorrow the weather will be nice, (b) *hoping* it will be nice, and (c) *imagining* that it will be nice. When you believe that tomorrow will be nice, you represent to yourself tomorrow's weather being nice, but you represent it to yourself *under the guise of the true*, that is, as how things really are, were, or will be. In contrast, when you *hope* that tomorrow the weather will be nice, you represent the same thing – tomorrow's weather being nice – but this time you represent it *under the guise of the good*, that is, as something that may or may not be the case but that it'd be *good* if it were the case. Meanwhile, if you just *imagine* that tomorrow's weather will be nice (and don't on that basis move on to any other mental representation of tomorrow's weather), you represent tomorrow's weather being nice under no special guise – you represent it, so to speak, "without commentary" on either the truth or the value of tomorrow's weather being nice. These, for Brentano, are the three basic "modes" of intentionality (that *is* his label). Every mental state exhibits one and only one of these. Accordingly, mental states (conscious phenomena) divide naturally into three mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive categories, which Brentano (1874: 198) calls "judgment" (belief is the paradigm), "interest" (hope is an example), and "presentation" (e.g., imagination).

c. The Method of Psychology

What about the third question we started with, regarding how to *achieve* psychology's aims? For Brentano, the answer is that a science of consciousness, like every science, must proceed empirically: there will be observational data, and there

will be a method for generating knowledge on the basis of these observational data. Now, the *method* Brentano envisages here is the standard scientific method of inductive inference. What separates the science of consciousness from the natural sciences (physics, chemistry, etc.) is not the method it uses but the *data* involved, i.e. the observations relevant to it. For the natural sciences, it's the observations provided by external perception that deliver their data, whereas what delivers the data for the science of consciousness is *inner* perception.

More specifically, for Brentano there are three sources of evidence in a science of consciousness, although they all presuppose inner perception in the end. First, there is the observation of other people's behavior – seeing someone "act angry," or "look embarrassed." Second, there is recollection of one's own past experiences, including experiences that one had five seconds ago. Thirdly, there is the inner perception of one's concurrent experiences *as they go on*. Inner perception is most fundamental, though, because the use of the other two (observation of behavior and recollection of past experiences) *depends* on it (1874: 43). Recollection of one's past experiences requires that one was aware of (i.e., "perceived") these experiences when they originally took place – otherwise there'd be nothing for one *to* remember. And the interpretation of others' observed behavior passes through an analogical inference from what one's own behavior indicates about the experiences that cause that kind of behavior to what that behavior must indicate about others' inner life.

Here we must pause to consider the difference between inner *perception* and inner *observation*. For Brentano, they are not the same thing (1874: 29-30). Inner observation, a.k.a. *introspection*, requires that one deliberately turn one's attention to one's concurrent experience and keep attending to it as it unfolds. Inner perception of an experience is not attentive in this way, and requires no action from the subject; indeed, it is built into the occurrence of any experience (as per the self-representational theory of consciousness). This is important because inner perception, although not attentive and sustained, at least presents the subject's experience as it is in its lived reality. Introspection, in contrast, distorts and destroys experience – or so Brentano argues. Suppose you're furious about something, and then decide to introspect your experience in order to study the felt character of fury. As soon as you take this introspective distance from your lived experience, your fury loses its edge, its special *furiousness*: you are no longer absorbed in the infuriating event, but on the contrary enter a more detached and contemplative ("introspective") state. This is an extreme example, which is why Brentano himself brings it up (1874: 30), but it's indicative of a general problem with introspection: you can never be sure what the experience you're introspecting was like *before* you

started introspecting. For this reason, Brentano shuns direct introspection – though he allows for "indirect introspection" of *recalled* experiences – and rests psychological knowledge (knowledge of conscious experience) on inner *perception*.

In conclusion, Brentano's philosophy of psychology attempts to provide foundations for a science of consciousness: a science of conscious phenomena (characterized essentially by their intentional directedness), based on inner perception and inductive inference, and aiming to produce descriptive as well as causal knowledge of (i) the fundamental building blocks of experience, (ii) the classification of conscious phenomena, and (iii) the causal laws governing the unfolding of conscious life over time.

4. Epistemology

Cartesian Foundationalism and the Correct-Belief Analysis of Knowledge

As we go about our everyday life in our uncritical, pre-philosophical mindset, we feel we have some knowledge of reality. We don't go through life totally clueless, with no conception of anything that's going on around us. On the contrary, we feel that we know a bunch of things: for instance, that there's a world outside our head, and that it's got people and houses and cars and trees and dogs in it. When you collect facts like this, it looks like we know quite a bit about what the world is like. Of course the world is full of unknowns, both at the microscopic and at the cosmic level. But as far as the medium-sized macroscopic world we "live in" is concerned, we have a pretty good grasp of it. Don't we?

Well, there's a longstanding philosophical challenge to this set of convictions, a challenge that goes by the name "skepticism." At bottom there's not much more to this challenge than asking "How do we know we're not all in some virtual reality fed to our brain by a superior intelligence while we float clueless in a vat in some military basement?" The thought, both in ancient and contemporary skepticism, is that once we get clear on what's involved in knowing something – *anything* – we see that in fact we know essentially nothing. We may represent this piece of reasoning as the following argument:

Premise 1: For me to know that I am really sitting my office now, I'd have to know that I'm not just a brain in a vat.
Premise 2: I don't know that I'm not just a brain in a vat.
Conclusion: I don't know that I am really sitting in my office now.

Responding to this skeptical challenge has been a core preoccupation of traditional epistemology – the philosophy of knowledge. To respond to this challenge is to produce a *vindication* of our belief system (not in every detail perhaps, but in broad outlines). Once we have a philosophical vindication, or reconstruction, of how we know the most elementary things – that there is a world outside our head and that it looks more or less the way it seems to – we can build on that toward a more refined, more scientific knowledge of the world. But without securing justification for our most basic beliefs we can't do that. You can't have any scientific knowledge, for

example, if you don't even know that there are labs, measuring instruments, and other scientists outside your head. So first we have to secure the justificatory status of these foundational ordinary beliefs if we are to have any hope of securing fancier types of knowledge.

Addressing the skeptical challenge just described requires dealing with two issues. The first is to offer an analysis of what [knowledge](#) *is*, what it means to say that someone knows something. When I say that Jimmy is a bachelor, what I am saying is that Jimmy is an unmarried adult male. But when I say that Jimmy knows that the sky is blue, what am I saying? Second, once we have a clear definition of what it means that someone knows something, we have to go on to show that, by the light of that definition, someone actually knows something, indeed that many of us know quite a few things – along the lines of those aforementioned basic propositions: there is a world outside my head; it contains many people, most of whom are between 5 and 7 foot tall; it contains cars and houses and mountains and rivers and horses; and so on.

a. Brentano's Analysis of Knowledge

How does Brentano deal with these two parts of the challenge? Let's start with the analysis of knowledge – the question of what knowledge consists in. There is a tradition, going back to Plato's dialogue *Theaetetus*, that identifies knowledge with a (kind of) *justified true belief*. First of all, to know something, you need to *believe* it. If you don't *believe* that 2+2=4, you have no chance of *knowing* that 2+2=4. Second, the belief must be *true*. Nobody can be said to *know* that the earth is flat, because it's not *true* that the earth is flat. (This is so, incidentally, even if you're totally blameless for believing this, say because you live 10,000 years ago or just have been brainwashed by a flat-earth cult.) Finally, to count as knowledge, your true belief must be *justified*, which traditionally means you must have a *good reason* for believing what you do. Suppose I tell you that the atomic number of gold is 79, but when you ask me where I have read or heard this, I say "nowhere, I just looked up the last two digits of my Social Security number, which is gold." Then you'd say that although I ended up with a true belief, it's really because of an incredible coincidence, not because I actually knew what I was talking about.

Since the mid-1960s, there have been fierce debates among philosophers about whether having justified true beliefs *ensures* having knowledge or some further conditions must be met (Gettier 1963); and if further conditions are needed, which (see Goldman 1967, Lehrer and Paxson 1969). This web of issues has been the organizing framework for the analysis of knowledge since. Brentano, however, rejects this approach altogether. What he objects to is defining knowledge partly in

terms of truth. His objection goes something like this. If, in order to say that I know that the sky is blue, I must accept that my belief is true, in the sense that the color I believe the sky to have is the color the sky really has, then to establish that I really know that the sky is blue, I would have to compare the color I believe the sky to have, on the one hand, with the color the sky really has, on the other hand. But to perform this comparison, I would already have to be in possession of knowledge of what color the sky really has (Brentano 1930: 24, 111). Yet the whole issue is to show that I really do have such knowledge.

Note that Brentano is not exactly denying that knowledge does consist in justified true belief. What he denies is that you can use this kind of definition as part of the project of securing justification for our foundational beliefs. We must come up with some other definition, or analysis, one that would not presuppose that we know anything we're not yet entitled to suppose we know.

Brentano's alternative suggestion is to define knowledge as *correct belief*, where a belief's "correctness" is not defined in terms of its corresponding to how things really are, but in a different way, though one that does ensure the belief will in fact so correspond. To understand Brentano's notion of correct belief, let's work through an example. To know that there are three kinds of orangutan, for Brentano, is to believe that there are three kinds of orangutan and for that belief to be correct. But what is correctness? The key move in Brentano's account is to analyze correctness as follows: your belief that there are three kinds of orangutan is correct if, and only if, anyone who could judge *with self-evidence* on whether there are three kinds of orangutan *would* judge that there are in fact three kinds (1925: 150, 1930: 122). Here correctness is analyzed in terms of the more basic notion of self-evidence. So the next question is: what is it for someone to judge on some matter with self-evidence, or in a self-evident way?

According to Brentano, there are only two types of self-evident judgments: analytic judgments and inner-perception judgments (1925: 151, 1930: 130). Analytic judgments are *logical* truths (e.g., "nothing is both square and not square"), *conceptual* truths (e.g., "a kitten is a baby cat"), and anything that can be derived a priori from such truths. Inner-perception judgments are judgments about one's concurrent conscious experience as it appears to one in inner perception (e.g., "I am feeling sad right now"). Any judgment of these two kinds is self-evident. Because it's self-evident, thinks Brentano, it's guaranteed to be true (it's "infallible"), it's guaranteed to be justified (it's "incorrigible"), and it brings with it absolute certainty (it's "indubitable"). Importantly, however, its being self-evident does not *consist in* its being infallible, incorrigible, and/or indubitable. On the contrary, infallibility,

incorrigibility, and indubitability are mere *symptoms* of self-evidence, which is the more fundamental phenomenon here and *underlies* all these features (1930: 126).

What, then, *is* self-evidence? According to Brentano, it's impossible to *analyze* self-evidence. With the notion of self-evidence, we reach epistemological bedrock – something so fundamental that we can't get "underneath it." The only way to "get" what self-evidence is, for him, by comparing and contrasting instances of one's self-evident beliefs with instances of one's non-self-evident beliefs. While you contemplate such instances in your mind, "live" and side by side so to speak, you might directly grasp that ineffable "something" that's present in one case but not in the other. That's the only way to *get* self-evidence (1928: 4, 1930: 125).

This, then, is what knowing consists in, according to Brentano: a subject S knows a proposition *p* if and only if (1) S *believes* that *p* and (2) either (2a) S judges on whether *p* with self-evidence or (2b) if anyone *else* judged with self-evidence on whether *p*, they would believe that *p* (1930: 122). Notice that this analysis of "S knows that *p*" retains the notion of belief from the traditional Justified True Belief account, but does not explicitly mention either truth or justification. However, insofar as Brentano's notion of self-evidence ensures that a self-evident belief will *necessarily* be true and will *necessarily* be justified, it seems that Brentano's notion of correctness ensures that a correct belief will *de facto* be true and will *de facto* be justified.

b. Brentano on Knowledge and Skepticism

If the only things we can know with self-evidence are analytic truths and our current experiences, it follows that any contingent empirical fact that concerns anything *other* than our current experience is something we *can't* know with self-evidence. This complicates considerably the task of showing that we know some things about the external world and what it contains, that is, of meeting the skeptical challenge. Take any random contingent fact about the external world – say, that cats like milk. Our belief that cats like milk is not self-evident for Brentano. So to show that this is something we know about cats and milk, Brentano must show that anyone who *could* judge on matters of feline beverage preferences with self-evidence *would* come to believe that cats like milk. What Brentano must give us is some *reason* to think that this is so, that is, a reason to think that someone in a position to judge on such matters with self-evidence would indeed believe that cats like milk.

There is at this point a general problem, which is actually quite notorious in the annals of epistemology (it goes back to Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*, Book I ch. 2-3). Suppose you believe that *p* and an epistemologist friend asks you what reason

you have to believe that *p*. You might cite some other consideration, *q*, and say that you believe that *p* on the basis of *q*. But your epistemologist friend is stubborn: now she asks you what reason you have to believe that *q*. You might answer: why, the fact that *r* clearly shows that *q*. But now your friend asks you on what basis you to believe that *r*. And so on and so forth. In everyday life, you might at some point dismiss your friend with a comment like "come on, be serious – everybody knows that *r*!" But of course in epistemology the whole issue is what justifies us in believing the most fundamental things we believe. So to say this to your friend is just to say that you don't want to bother your pretty little head with epistemology.

Brentano did bother himself with epistemology. Many epistemologists have thought that the only viable approach to this regress of reasons-to-believe is to posit some beliefs at the foundation of our belief system that anybody would be entitled to believe: as soon as you think them up, you see they must be true. This strategy is called "[foundationalism](#)," for obvious reasons, and Brentano too was a foundationalist. For him, the chain of reasons supporting any belief must bottom out in something that we're somehow entitled to believe without having any reason *for it* (1925: 145). What could that be? For Brentano, the foundational beliefs, the ones that provide the ultimate justification for all our other beliefs, are our *self-evident beliefs*. You don't need a *reason* to believe something self-evident – its being self-evident is enough to give you the right to believe it.

In fact, Brentano thought that our self-evident beliefs were not only *sufficient* to serve as foundations for our belief system, they were also *necessary*. As long as you cite some belief that's not self-evident in justifying something you believe, your epistemologist friend would always be within her right to ask "but why should we believe *that*?" And if you include in the foundations of our entire belief system anything that's not self-evident, such that there would be no guarantee that it's true, this would be tantamount to resting our entire belief system on *prejudice* (1925: 5, 11-14). Brentano argued that some very prominent epistemologists in the history of philosophy were guilty precisely of this – founding our belief system, essentially, on blind prejudice. This includes notably Immanuel Kant, with his "synthetic a priori" principles, and Thomas Reid, with his reliance on "commonsense beliefs." The special thing about self-evident beliefs, says Brentano, is that they don't require any further reason to accept them – that's the beauty of self-evidence! So, for Brentano, all knowledge *must* rest ultimately on self-evident beliefs. This kind of view is sometimes called "Cartesian foundationalism." It's "foundationalist" in the sense that all knowledge rests on secure foundations. And it's "Cartesian" in the sense that the secure foundations consist primarily of knowledge of one's own current

experiences, as Descartes held, as well as certain a priori logical and conceptual truths. (Brentano himself claimed the Cartesian heritage – see 1925: 4.)

The task for Brentano, then, is to show how our self-evident beliefs can give us a reason to believe most of what we believe, including such propositions as "cats like milk." *If* Brentano can show that beliefs about our own conscious experiences (and perhaps also about analytic truths) can give us a reason to believe that cats like milk, he would thereby have shown that we are justified in believing – nay, that we *know* – that cats like milk.

How might that work? Here's a Brentanian sketch. First, a reason to believe that cats like milk is that (1) when we give them milk they keep drinking it and (2) when someone keeps drinking something it means they like it. But why should we believe (1) and (2)? A reason to believe (1) is that (3) when we have a visual experience as of a cat and a bowl of milk nearby, we typically next have a visual experience as of the cat going over to the bowl and starting to drink the milk. A reason to believe (2) is that (4) when *we* like drinking something, we feel a desire to keep drinking it. But now, why should we believe (3) and (4)? A reason to believe (3) might consist in a list of specific instances when we inner-perceived ourselves to have a cat-facing-milk experience followed by a cat-drinking-milk experience. A reason to believe (4) might consist in a list of specific instances when we inner-perceived ourselves to have a yum-drink experience followed by a want-more experience. And now we have reached something we know by inner perception of our own experience: namely, that on such-and-such occasions we had a cat-facing-milk experience followed by a cat-drinking-milk experience, and on such-and-such other occasions we had yum-drink experiences followed by want-more experiences. Since inner perception of such experiential episodes is self-evident, we have managed to ground our reasons for believing that cats like milk in self-evident beliefs.

For Brentano, everything we know about the external world – the better part of our belief system – is ultimately justified this way, that is, on the basis of self-evident inner perception (sometimes aided by analytic truths). We meet the skeptical challenge, vindicating – by and large, at least – our knowledge of external reality, when we show how it's ultimately based on such inner-perceptual foundations.

5. Metaphysics

A World of Concrete Individuals

If epistemology is the part of philosophy that's concerned with our knowledge of reality, metaphysics is the part concerned with *reality itself*: what is real, and what it is like, independently of how it appears to us. Of course, it's not *just* metaphysics that's interested in what is real – straight physics is also interested in that, and for that matter so are chemistry, biology, and so on. All of these disciplines are interested in reality as it is in itself. But metaphysics is concerned with what is real *at the highest level of abstraction*.

What does it mean to be interested in what is real "at the highest level of abstraction"? Think of it this way. Each other discipline studies specific objects, the specific properties they have, the specific processes they undergo, and so on. Nuclear physics, for example, is interested in atoms and the sub-atomic particles making them up; those are the *objects* nuclear physics studies. And it tries to figure out these objects' *properties* – mass, charge, spin, etc. – and the various processes of attraction etc. they undergo. Now, when you put together atoms in the right way, you get a *molecule*. This is the kind of object *chemistry* is interested in. Chemistry then studies the properties molecules and compounds of molecules – solubility, conductivity, etc. – and the chemical processes they undergo. Likewise for other disciplines: each tells us what such-and-such objects are, what properties they have, and what processes they undergo. But none of these disciplines is interested in the question of what an *object as such* is, or what a *property as such* is. No science is in the business of figuring out what (if anything) is in common to *all* objects, *all* properties, *all* processes, much less in what might be common to entities *across* all these categories and characterizes *being qua being*. This is where metaphysics comes in.

a. Brentano on Being qua Being

Brentano's doctoral dissertation was in fact about Aristotle's notion of being (Brentano 1862), and so we can see that he set his sights on metaphysics early on. Despite the historical focus on Aristotle, Brentano's approach to the study of what is real is quite original. Recall that in Brentano's epistemology knowledge of reality consists in having correct beliefs. If you flip this idea, you get that reality, or what is

real, is whatever can be correctly believed. What does it mean to say that butterflies are real but unicorns aren't? For Brentano, it means that the correct attitude to take toward butterflies is that of *believing in them*, while the correct attitude to take toward unicorns is that of *disbelieving* in them. This, for Brentano, is the most general thing that can be said about all beings in their capacity as beings: "'the existent' . . . comes to the same as 'something which is the object of correct affirmative judgment [belief]' or 'something which is correctly accepted or affirmed'" (Brentano 1930: 68).

b. Brentano's Nominalistic Ontology

The next question, then, is *what* can be correctly believed in? That is, what is real? As we address this question, we must keep in mind that metaphysics is not interested simply in a laundry list of what there is. If I ask you what's real, and you answer "butterflies, cats, trees, houses, the moon, …" and keep on talking until I fall asleep, you haven't said anything false, but you also haven't said anything *metaphysical*. What metaphysics seeks is a statement of the basic *kinds* of beings, the fundamental "ontological categories." We mentioned above a number of natural candidates: objects, properties, processes, etc. But some metaphysical systems will accept only some of these as real and dismiss others as illusions. Others will add more categories on top of these. What categories did Brentano accept in his metaphysics? As Brentano would put it, what are the fundamental categories we can correctly believe in?

The answer is that Brentano accepted in his metaphysics *only objects* – concrete individuals such as tables, trees, and persons (1930: 82, 1933: 24, 1966: 347). Everything that's real is concrete and individual – a "thing," as he liked to put it. Plato notoriously argued that the world of concrete individuals we see around us is in some sense an illusion, and what is most real is actually *abstract universals* (things like wisdom-as-such, love-as-such, etc.). Aristotle then tried to combine concrete individuals and abstract universals in his metaphysics, claiming that things like wisdom and love exist, but only *in* things like Socrates and Xantippe. Brentano's metaphysics is more radical: he denies the very *existence* of wisdom, love, and any other abstract universal – he finds the whole notion "absurd" (1933: 52). For him, the world of concrete individuals that Plato dismissed as least real is actually the only thing there is.

A metaphysical system that accepts only one category of beings is sometimes called a "monocategorial" or "one-category ontology." And when the single accepted category is that of concrete individuals, we call this today a "nominalist" ontology. But this terminology is modern. In the Middle Ages, nominalism was understood as

the claim that we can't even *think* of or *represent* anything in universal terms. Whether Brentano believed *that* is very questionable (see for example Brentano 1956: 50). For this reason perhaps, Brentano's view was often referred to by his followers not as nominalism but as "reism" (*res* is "thing" in Latin) – see Kotarbiński 1966.

Although Brentano's metaphysics is austere in accepting only one category of being, that of concrete individuals, it's a bit profligate in the *kinds* of concrete individuals it includes. There are two special kinds we must underline here – things that are different from the straightforward butterflies, tables, etc. that we mentioned. First, keep in mind that, as a substance dualist, Brentano includes among the concrete individuals making up the world not only material objects but also *immaterial souls*. Although such souls don't exist *in space* like material objects do, they are nonetheless concrete (as opposed to abstract) objects and exist *in time*. My soul, for example, came into being in 1973. It's true that, having come into being, Brentano thinks my soul is now immortal. But existing from 1973 to all eternity is not the same as existing from the dawn of time to all eternity (i.e., being omnitemporal) or existing outside of time altogether (i.e., being atemporal). Abstract objects, such as the number 3 and the form of squareness are taken to be, don't exist in time like this. The number 3 did not come into being in 1973, nor at any earlier time. If it exists at all, it's existed *always*. My soul is different, and that's a symptom of its being a *concretum*.

Secondly, and more radically, Brentano thinks that whenever we look somewhere and seem to see just one object, in reality there are a gazillion different objects that just happen to occupy the same region of space. When you look at the Eiffel Tower, for example, you seem to see just one thing – the Tower. But in reality there are at least a billion different objects there. This is not *only* because every *part* of the Eiffel Tower is itself an object – every strip of iron, every arbitrary chunk of metal, and every subatomic particle. All these objects are there as well. But *in addition*, there are many, many objects that coincide *perfectly* with the Eiffel Tower. Because they coincide with the Eiffel Tower so perfectly, we don't *notice* that they are in fact different objects. But certain thought experiments can help us see that they are. Let me explain this somewhat mind-bending idea in two steps. First I'll show you that there can be *two* different things occupying the exact region of space where the Eiffel Tower is. Then I'll tell you what are the gazillion objects Brentano thinks are there.

Okay, so the Eiffel Tower is made up of *a lot* of strips of iron. Call the whole collection of iron and other materials the Eiffel Tower is made of "Matt." It might

seem silly to give this collection of materials a new name – isn't it already called the "Eiffel Tower"? But consider this. Suppose every night I go steal one strip of iron from Eiffel Tower, which I replace with a very similar strip (so that nobody notices), and the original one that I stole I put in my backyard. After many years of sleeping during the day and stealing iron strips from the Eiffel Tower at night, I finally own *all* of the original iron strips of the Eiffel Tower, which are lying in an enormous heap in my (improbably huge) backyard. I then ask a friend of mine who is a sculptor to build an enormous sculpture of me from all this stuff in my backyard, and she does. Remember, though, that through this whole process I diligently replaced every bit I stole from the Eiffel Tower with an indistinguishable bit. Question: should we say that although before I started all this stealing the Eiffel Tower was in Paris's "Champ de Mars" (as that park is called), and looked a bit like a huge A, the Eiffel Tower is now in my backyard and looks like me? Or should we say instead that the Eiffel Tower is where it's always been, and looks the way it's always looked, but is now made of very similar but technically different chunks of matter? I think intuitively we would all say the latter. Although I stole a lot of stuff, no one would say that what I stole is *the Eiffel Tower*. What I stole just the stuff the Tower was made of. In other words, what I stole is not the Eiffel Tower but *Matt* – and that is why it's not silly to give the matter that makes up the Eiffel Tower a separate name. But now, we can see that, even if I never do in fact steal Matt (I don't plan to, I confess), we should still distinguish two objects where the Eiffel Tower is: the Tower and Matt. What makes them two rather than one? The fact that they *could* come apart and exist separately. The fact that they *could* exist separately shows that although in the real world they exist together, perfectly collocated as they are, they are nonetheless two separate things that could, in principle, exist separately.

Once we accept the very possibility of there being more than one thing in the very same place, many metaphysicians believe, we will need to accept that there are really very many of them. This idea, called nowadays "material plenitude" or sometimes "neo-Aristotelian plenitude" (see Bennett 2004; Hawthorne 2006; Leslie 2011 for some modern defenses), was also shared by Brentano. He takes his cue from Aristotle, who claimed that where Socrates exists, there are also the following but distinct objects: Wise-Socrates, Greek-Socrates, Philosophical-Socrates, and so on. If Socrates decides to stop doing philosophy and become a dentist, then Philosophical-Socrates would stop existing and a new object, Dentist-Socrates, would come into being. Each of these objects is slightly different, in that the conditions that would make it come into being or go out of existence are slightly different – even though they are all perfectly collocated in space.

That's Brentano's view. The point of the view, incidentally, is to allow Brentano to avoid having properties and facts in his metaphysics – remember, he wants the world to be made up *only* of concrete individual objects – and yet make all the distinctions that people who accept properties and facts can make. Where they distinguish between the *facts* that Socrates is wise and that Socrates is Greek, by distinguishing two different *properties* Socrates has, being wise and being Greek, Brentano will simply distinguish two different *objects* in the exact region where Socrates is: Wise-Socrates and Greek-Socrates. In this way, he can reproduce in his metaphysical picture of the world all the structure that other metaphysicians have in their metaphysical pictures, but without acknowledging the existence of anything other than concrete individuals. It's a different way of seeing the world, a way that's not very natural to us. But it has the advantage of avoiding all the metaphysical conundrums associated with understanding what properties and facts *are*.

Now, although Brentano thinks there are a gazillion objects where Socrates is, he also thinks that Socrates is *special*. More specifically, he says that Socrates enjoys "independent existence" whereas Greek-Socrates and Wise-Socrates don't. For Greek-Socrates to exist, Socrates must exist first, but Socrates can exist without Greek-Socrates existing (e.g., if Socrates changed nationality and became Macedonian). In this way, Greek-Socrates is "ontologically dependent" upon Socrates but Socrates is not ontologically dependent on Greek-Socrates. On the contrary, Socrates is ontologically *independent* of Greek-Socrates. And what's true of Greek-Socrates is true also of Wise-Socrates, Philosophical-Socrates, etc. Using Aristotelian language, though using it in an unusual way, Brentano says that Socrates is a "substance" whereas all these other objects are "accidents." What's unusual in the way Brentano uses this terminology is that for him an accident is a concrete individual just like a substance (1933: 28).

c. Brentano's Mereology

Accordingly, when Brentano lists the most basic kinds of things there are, he includes "every substance, every multiplicity of substances, every part of a substance, and also every accident" (1933: 19). This list features four types of thing. The first and fourth we've just encountered: substances and accidents. The second and third are new: they are parts of substances (that's the third item) and wholes made up of multiple substances (second item). To complete his metaphysical theory, then, Brentano adds *parts and wholes* to substances and accidents (and he thinks that parts of concrete individuals, and wholes made up entirely of concrete individuals, are also concrete individuals, with the result that everything there is is a concrete individual).

The theory of parts and wholes (which is studied by metaphysicians, logicians, and mathematicians) is called "mereology." Brentano was in fact a pioneer of mereology, and developed quite a sophisticated mereological system. His system has a number of interesting features, but one feature that's relatively uninteresting, insofar as many mereological systems do the same, is that it accepts what is now called the "axiom of unrestricted composition." This is the idea that any collection of individuals, however bizarre, makes up a whole. Compare a pride of lions composed of 2 lions, 5 lionesses, and 8 lion cubs, on the one hand, and a motely collection composed of the moon, the Eiffel Tower, and your left ear. There is no question the former is in some sense more "natural" than the latter, but from the point of view of Brentano's mereology, both are equally real wholes. Importantly, both are also *concrete individuals*. They are individuals whose parts are disjointed and discontiguous, but that's fine – the state of Hawaii is no different! It's this acceptance of unrestricted composition that gives Brentano his second item in the above list ("every multiplicity of substances").

One curiosity of Brentano's mereology is that it rejects what is nowadays called the "axiom of supplementation." This axiom says that if *A* is a proper part of *B*, then *B* must have some other proper part that supplements *A*, to make *B* whole so to speak. This seems pretty obvious: my bedroom is a *proper* part of my house, so my house must have some other parts. If my house consisted only of my bedroom, that room would not be a *proper* part of my house but on the contrary would constitute the *whole* house. And yet, Brentano says, there is one exception to this rule: namely, the relation between a substance and its accident. Consider Alice Munro and her accident of having won the Nobel Prize for literature. In Brentano's metaphysics, there are two concrete individuals here: Munro and Nobel-laureate-Munro. (Remember, these are distinct individuals, collocated in space but not in time: Munro has existed since 1931, whereas Nobel-laureate-Munro only came into being in 2013.) According to Brentano, there is a very special mereological relation between Munro and Nobel-laureate-Munro: Munro is a proper part of Nobel-laureate-Munro, but Nobel-laureate-Munro doesn't have any other proper part that *supplements* Munro. Why Brentano says this is a complicated matter, but he definitely says it (see Brentano 1933: 19, 47, 53, 112, 115, as well as 1966: 324, 366).

In conclusion, the core of Brentano's metaphysics is the thesis that reality is made up entirely of concrete individuals, more specifically substances and things connected to substances by certain mereological relations, such as wholes made up of a plurality of substances, parts of substances, and special wholes involving

substances as unsupplemented parts. These things make up Brentano's "alphabet of being."

Because of his view's metaphysical austerity, an important aspect of Brentano's philosophical work is concerned with what is *not* real. For in everyday life we speak of many things that don't fit into any of his accepted categories. We say, for instance, that virtue is its own reward – but "virtue" is surely not the name of a concrete individual like you and me. Likewise, we say things like "my flight was terrible" – but a flight is not a concrete object you can touch and smell like you can the Eiffel Tower. And then there are all these adjectives we have that seem to designate properties ("wise," "Greek," etc.). So something must be said about what's going on when we say such things. This is connected to a central theme in Brentano's philosophy of language, to which we now turn.

6. Philosophy of Language

The Ubiquity of Linguistic Fictions

Of secondary significance for most of the history of philosophy, the philosophy of language became the single most important branch of 20th-century philosophy in the English-speaking world. The connection between representation and reality has been a central concern of philosophy, but typically it was approach through *mental* representation, with a focus on "knowledge and reality" or "perception and reality." In 20th-century analytic philosophy, however, the same concern was explored primarily through the connection between *linguistic* representation and reality. Accordingly much foundational work was dedicated to the question of how linguistic expressions of different kinds (notably proper names and definite descriptions, but not only) manage to refer to, or pick out, specific things in the world. The theory of reference thus became the medium through which the connection between representation and reality was examined.

Why this modern preference for linguistic over mental representation? On this we can only speculate, but it's clear that the pioneers of analytic philosophy, notably George Moore and Bertrand Russell, were attracted by the fact that language is public and "objective" in a way that contrasts with the privacy and subjectivity of the mental. Given that part of these young up-and-comers' agenda was to rebel against the reign of British Idealism at the close of the 19th century, the externality and objectivity of linguistic representation must have been a strong draw.

Interestingly, it was also part of Brentano's agenda to rebel against *German Idealism*, which dominated the landscape in 19th-century German-speaking philosophy. But Brentano maintained that linguistic representation is strictly derivative from mental representation (see, e.g., Brentano 1956: 47-8), so that any insight into the former presupposes understanding of the latter. His writings on language are correspondingly somewhat dispersed. Still, the analysis of language and how it relates to reality is central to his concerns, and his work in this area is again highly original and quite influential (for recent discussions see Taieb 2020 and various essays in Dewalque, Gauvry, and Richard 2021).

a. Kinds of Linguistic Expressions

Why did Brentano think that linguistic representation derives from mental representation? The basic reason was that, like many before him, Brentano took the primary function of language to be that of facilitating communication (1956: 25-6). And to communicate with someone is, for Brentano, to indicate to them – make them know – what mental representation you're having (1930: 65). If I think that Jimmy is cool, whereupon I say to you "Jimmy is cool," and as a result you think that I'm thinking that Jimmy is cool, then I have succeeded in communicating with you. Accordingly, for Brentano what language does, at the most basic level, is *give voice* to the speaker's (or writer's) mental state. It is true that language also refers to things in the world, but it does so only by *courtesy of thought*: it is because a linguistic expression gives voice to the mental state it does, and because that mental state is intentionally directed at the worldly object it is, that the linguistic expressions refers to that object (1956: 47-8).

There is, however, a fundamental distinction for Brentano between two kinds of linguistic expressions, which he calls "autosemantic" and "synsemantic" (or – more often, actually – "categorematic" and "syncategorematic"). As the labels suggest, autosemantic expressions have meaning all by themselves, whereas synsemantic ones don't. Within Brentano's framework, what this means is that an autosemantic expression is one that gives voice to a mental state all by itself, whereas a synsemantic expression doesn't – it only assists other linguistic expressions in giving voice to complex mental states (1956: 35-8). Compare the name "Karl V" and the noun "house," on the one hand, to the article "the" and the preposition "of." "Karl V" gives voice to a thought about Karl V, "house" to a thought about a house; but there is no specific thought that "the" or "of" give voice to – they are there only to allow you to give voice to more complicated thoughts, such as (say) "Karl V of the House of Habsburg." Thus "Karl V" and "house" are autosemantic, while "the" and "of" are synsemantic. And more generally, names and nouns are paradigmatically autosemantic expressions, while articles and prepositions are paradigmatically synsemantic ones.

Autsemantic expressions differ according to the kind of mental state they give voice to. This makes sense: if what makes an expression autosemantic is that it gives voice to a mental state, then plausibly, what makes an expression the *kind* of autosemantic expression it is is the *kind* of mental state it gives voice to. It follows that the taxonomy of autosemantic linguistic expressions should mirror, and indeed derive from, the taxonomy of mental states. Since Brentano's fundamental psychological classification distinguishes presentations, judgments, and interests (see §3b above), his fundamental *linguistic* classification distinguishes three corresponding types of linguistic expressions: nouns (including proper nouns, i.e.

names), which give voice to presentations; assertions, which give voice to judgments; and imperatives ("in the widest sense of the word[, such as] 'Be it so!'" – Brentano 1930: 65), which give voice to interest states. This program for a linguistic taxonomy in the image of Brentano's psychological taxonomy is only outlined by Brentano (see notably 1965 Part 1), but is developed much more thoroughly by Brentano's prize student Anton Marty (see Marty 1908).

b. Language and Reality

By far the biggest part of Brentano's work on language is dedicated, though, to the *synsemantic* expressions. This may seem surprising, but in fact Brentano thinks that language is chock full of expressions that look for all the world like autosemantic expressions but aren't. They are what Gilbert Ryle later called "systematically misleading expressions" (see Ryle 1932, and Dewalque 2021 on the affinity to Brentano). Compare "There is a square window in the attic" and "There is empty space in the attic." As far as the surface grammar is concerned, "square window" and "empty space" function exactly the same. But "square window" refers to *something* (because it gives voice to a presentation of a concrete object), whereas "empty space" doesn't refer to any *thing* (1930: 68). Empty space is not something, it's the absence of something! Likewise, compare "The flowers lived because of the water" and "The flowers died because of the absence of water." Although "the water" and "the absence of water" function grammatically the same way in these sentences, "the water" refers to something whereas "the absence of water" refers to nothing (or more accurately put: doesn't refer to anything), since what it suggests is rather an absence of something. Accordingly, "the absence of water," like "empty space," is an expression that doesn't give voice to any presentation. These expressions have all the hallmarks of autosemantic expressions, but are in truth synsemantic. Other examples include "negative seven" and "possible car." Brentano stresses time and again that there are many examples of this phenomenon: linguistic useful fictions that can mislead us, if we take their surface grammar at face value, to think that they purport to refer to something in the world.

A particularly noteworthy example is abstract nouns, like "red" (as in "Red is a color") and "virtue" (as in "Virtue is its own reward"). These expressions seem like they give voice to presentations of abstract objects – more specifically, forms or properties – but are in reality linguistic fictions (1930: 63-4, 71). When we say "There is redness," what we're really saying is "There is something red" (1930: 69). This is important to Brentano because of his aforementioned nominalism. Since he doesn't believe in properties, if he took these statements at face value he'd have to say that "There is redness in the world" and "There is virtue in the world" are false,

which is weird. Instead, he prefers to treat these as lackadaisical constructions that serve as shorthands for statements which *are* true but have an importantly different grammar, namely, "There is something red" and "There is something virtuous."

The illusion that in addition to concrete individuals there are also properties and facts in the world is chiefly sustained, however, not by abstract nouns but by the very subject-predicate structure of assertions. When we say "Socrates is healthy," this suggests to us that there is this thing, health, that somehow inheres in Socrates (1952: 327). But according to Brentano, there is no such thing as health as such, though there *are* healthy things. What are we saying, then, when we say that Socrates is healthy? Brentano's answer is simple: we're saying that Healthy-Socrates exists. Healthy-Socrates, recall, is a special object, an "accident," which is collocated with Socrates and includes him as an unsupplemented proper part (but is also distinct from him and would go out of existence as soon as Socrates falls ill).

One thing that *very importantly* doesn't inhere in things is *existence*. Natural language offers us existence verbs (as in "Socrates exists") and existence adjectives ("Socrates is existent"), both of which suggest that existence is some kind of quality or property that things have. But for Brentano, all this is totally off. Existence doesn't inhere in objects at all, not just in the way health doesn't, but in a much deeper way. When we say "Socrates is healthy," we're asserting the existence of Healthy-Socrates, but when we say "Socrates exists," we're not asserting the existence of Existent-Socrates, but of Socrates himself (1930: 85). What is going on here? Why this difference? When we say "Socrates is healthy," health is somehow part of *what is being asserted*. But existence, for Brentano, is never part of *what* is asserted; rather, it's part of the very act of asserting. To assert *just is* to verbally attribute existence or reality to something. We can put this in terms of Gottlob Frege's distinction between "content" and "force." Frege (1919) argued that science proceeds by asking questions and then answering them, and that when we examine the very distinction between a question ("is *p* the case?") and an answer ("*p* is the case!"), we notice that they have something in common and something different. What's in common is the *content*: what we *grasp* in both cases is *p*. What's different is the *force*: in the answer, we also *judge* that *p* – we commit ourselves to *p* being *true*; none of which is the case when we merely *ask* whether *p*. This is why Frege introduced his "judgment stroke" (often written "⊢"), to signal the force with which *p* is put forward when we commit to its truth. We can understand Brentano as introducing a kind of "existence stroke" for assertion as he conceives of it (see Kriegel 2018: 133). Existence, for him, goes into a statement's force, not content. This is different from health, which does go into the content of the assertion

"Socrates is healthy," even if in a way quite different from what the surface grammar may suggest.

Given all these grammatical pitfalls of natural language, for Brentano it is one of the philosopher's main jobs to translate natural-language assertions into a regimented language that has been purified of these pitfalls. And that, for Brentano, is the first order of business of *logic*. Logic offers a kind of *reform* of natural language. Let's turn, then, to Brentano's work on logic.

7. Logic

How to Reason without Predicates

On Brentano's understanding of logic, it's a *practical discipline* concerned with how to form correct beliefs (Brentano 1956: 5). To understand what he means by "practical discipline," consider the difference between physics and engineering, or between biology and medicine. Physics and biology are purely theoretical – their aim is to tell us how things *are*. Engineering and medicine are different. Their aim is primarily practical: to tell us how to *do* something, and how to do it *right* (e.g., how to build a bridge right, or how to treat a disease right). We use our knowledge of physics in engineering and our knowledge of biology in medicine. But the kind of knowledge we seek in engineering and medicine is of a different *kind* than the knowledge physics and biology offer us. What physics and biology attempt to produce is knowledge-*that*, whereas what engineering and medicine attempt to produce is knowledge-*how*. As Brentano understands logic, it's like engineering and medicine in this respect: it, too, tries to produce knowledge-how. In particular, it tries to produce knowledge how to *reason right*, that is, how to form beliefs correctly – in other words, how to form *correct* beliefs.

This is a more expansive (and more traditional) understanding of the remit of logic than what we are used to today; but it does include the essential elements of modern logic. Modern logic is primarily understood as the attempt to produce formal logical systems. Such systems have two core components: (i) a formal language and (ii) formal inference rules (i.e., a set of rules for when you can validly deduce one statement in the formal language from another). Note well: just as Brentano's philosophy of language was developed more fully by his student Anton Marty, his logic was developed more thoroughly by his student Franz Hillebrand – see especially Hillebrand 1891.

a. How Logic Works: Formal Language and Inference Rules

What makes a language "formal"? At bottom, a formal language is a language which has been "cleaned up" of the various representational defects of "natural languages" like English or Portuguese, such as ambiguity and vagueness, and where brief and perspicuous symbols have replaced the clumsier constructions of natural language. The result is a language that would be much harder to use for everyday purposes,

but from which imprecision and unclarity have been expunged. In natural language, imprecision can be introduced in two ways: through the *lexicon* (the set of simple expressions, or individual words) or through the *grammar* (the set of rules for building up complex expressions from simple ones). A straightforward and pernicious example is proper names: the English-language expression "John Smith," for instance, is *mind-bogglingly* ambiguous – there are *so* many different things it can pick out! In a formal language, we'd replaced "John Smith" with "JS_1," "JS_2," and so on, so that each John Smith in the world gets their own unique name. A formal language also includes precise and unequivocal grammatical rules for the formation of more complex expressions, like "the house of John Smith's sister," which combines a plurality of simple expressions into one bigger one. Through precision of lexicon and grammar, we ensure that in a formal language there is a perfect one-to-one mapping of expressions to things in the world.

In addition, I mentioned, a formal language replaces the long and clumsy expressions of natural language with brief and perspicuous ones. If mathematicians didn't have their special symbols (numerals and other signs), they would find it a lot harder to make swift progress. We all learned in school the Pythagorean Theorem, which tells us how to calculate the length of a right triangle's hypotenuse given the length of its other sides. We learned that the theorem is this: $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$. If you had to say it in English, though, you'd have to say this: "The sum of the squares of the lengths of the legs of a right triangle is equal to the square of the length of that triangle's hypotenuse." That's just so much less perspicuous than "$a^2 + b^2 = c^2$"! Imagine a world where mathematicians were not allowed to write down "$a^2 + b^2 = c^2$" and were legally forced to work with the full English version. I daresay mathematics would be in a much less advanced state today, and as a result – who knows – we might not have walked on the moon just yet! So, shortness matters.

The main modern formal language is that used in "first-order predicate logic," a basic kind of formal language that allows us to express many things and can also be supplemented in various ways to express more things. In this language, there are several kinds of basic expressions, of which the main ones are:

- Individual constants: a, b, etc. to replace "John Smith," "Persephone Kropotkin," etc.
- Individual variables: x, y, etc. to talk of any arbitrary item in a given set of things
- Predicate constants: F, G, etc. to replace "is 6 foot tall," "is in love with," etc.
- Connectives: $\sim$, $\vee$, $\wedge$, and → to mean "not," "or," "and," and "if … then" respectively

- Two quantifiers: ∀, which means "all," and ∃, which means "some"

To say in this language that John Smith loves Persephone Kropotkin, we might write *aLb*, and to say "Everybody loves somebody," we'd write ∀*x*∃*y*(*xLy*) – which reads "For all *x*, there is some *y*, such that *x* loves *y*." Exercise: how do you write "If John Smith loves Persephone Kropotkin, then everybody loves somebody"? Answer: *aLb* → ∀*x*∃*y*(*xLy*).

What these ways of rendering English sentences into "Formalese" make perspicuous is the purely logical or formal structure of the sentences. They bring to a minimum any specific *content* and bring out the general *form*. This is important because which statements we're allowed to deduce from which depends entirely on the form of these statements. Content plays no role. So "formalization" allows us to generate rules of inference on the basis of the formal structure of statements in our logic. For example, intuitively from the statement "Everybody loves somebody" you can deduce "John Smith loves somebody." That means that, whatever your logic's inference rules, you must find a way to make ∃*y*(*aLy*) be a deductive consequence of ∀*x*∃*y*(*xLy*).

b. Brentano's Logic: Formal Language

Why is there a distinction in our standard logic between individual constants and predicate constants? Clearly, the reason is that a certain assumption is made, to the effect that what we can talk about in the world falls into two distinct groups: concrete individuals like John smith and Persephone Kropotkin, and properties and relations like being nice and being in love with. This assumption is not shared by Brentano, since as we've seen he rejects the existence of properties (and relations). For him the world is made up entirely of concrete individuals. This means that in Brentano's logic there can't be any predicates. In addition, he doesn't have in his logic connectives or the universal quantifier "all." But he does have two separate existential quantifiers, one positive and one negative. So, Brentano's formal language contains just two kinds of expressions:

- Nouns: *A*, *B*, etc. to replace "John Smith" and "a house"
- Two quantifiers: + for "there is" and – for "there is not"

As a result, all statements in Brentano's logic have the form A+ or A–, which we read as "There is A" and "There is not A" respectively (1956: 98). (Incidentally, the "+" is essentially Brentano's "existence stroke," since commitment to A's existence is for him an aspect of force, not content.) Brentano's challenge is to find a way to express everything we want to express but without using predicates. The goal is to

"translate" every statement that seems to predicate a property of an object into a sentence that only says "There is _____" or "There isn't _____" with nouns (including proper names) inserted.

To get clear on the challenge, let's start by making some distinctions between the kinds of statements there are. First of all, there is a distinction between *atomic* and *molecular* statements. An atomic statement is a statement no part of which is itself a statement; a molecular statement is one that's produced by putting together atomic statements. A statement like "Socrates is Greek" is atomic, because it has only three parts, none of which is a statement. But "Socrates is Greek and Plato is mortal" is a molecular statement, because two of its parts – "Socrates is Greek" and "Plato is mortal" – are themselves statements. When it comes to atomic statements, now, there is again a distinction between two kinds: singular and quantified. An example of a singular statement is "Socrates is Greek." An example of a quantified one is "All Greeks are mortal." Notice that "Socrates is Greek," "All Greeks are mortal," and "Socrates is Greek and Plato is mortal" all use predicates. In predicate logic, we'd write Gs for "Socrates is Greek," with G used as a predicate constant; $\forall x(Gx \rightarrow Mx)$ for "All Greeks are mortal," with G and M as predicate constants; and $Gs \wedge Mp$ for "Socrates is Greek and Plato is mortal," where G and M are again predicate constants. The challenge for Brentano, then, is to translate all three types of statements into a predicate-free language: (i) singular atomic statements, (ii) quantified atomic statements, and (iii) molecular statements.

When it comes to the singular statement "Socrates is Greek," we must remember that, in Brentano's metaphysics, among the many individuals Socrates is collocated with is *Greek-Socrates*. This is the concrete individual that is just like Socrates except it would go out of existence if Socrates changed nationality. So "Socrates is Greek" can be paraphrased into "Greek-Socrates exists" or "There is Greek-Socrates." Now, some metaphysicians might not want individuals like Greek-Socrates in their ontology. But if you do accept that there are such individuals, then "Socrates is Greek" and "There is Greek-Socrates" do seem to have the same truth conditions, that is, to be true in the same circumstances: if and when Socrates is no longer Greek, then Greek-Socrates no longer is, and vice versa. More generally, all predicative singulars of the form "*a* is *F*" can be paraphrased by Brentano into existentials of the form "There is F-*a*" where "F-*a*" names an accident collocated with the substance *a* (and where an accident is, as we saw, an individual, not a property).

Next take quantified atomic statements. Aristotle distinguished four types of those: "All Greeks are mortal," "All Greeks are not mortal," "Some Greeks are mortal," and "Some Greeks are not mortal." Brentano thinks he can paraphrase all

these into simple existential statements (1874: 213-4, 1956: 121). The third statement is easiest to paraphrase, namely into "There is a mortal Greek" (where "mortal Greek" is the noun) The fourth is pretty straightforward as well: "Some Greeks are not mortal" means the same as "There is a *non*-mortal Greek" (here "non-mortal Greek" is the noun). But the first and second are not that complicated either, they just have to be paraphrased into statements of *non*existence (so-called *negative existentials*): "All Greeks are mortal" means the same as "There is not a non-mortal Greek" and "All Greeks are not mortal" means the same as "There is not a mortal Greek." (This is why Brentano doesn't need a universal quantifier, by the way: he can always paraphrase universally quantified statements into negative existentially quantified ones.)

What about molecular statements? Brentano's remarks on this part of the challenge are sporadic, and somewhat unsatisfying (for discussion, see Chisholm 1976: 93-4; Kriegel 2018: 110-3). It's possible Brentano made his life unnecessarily complicated by trying to paraphrase molecular statements into *atomic* existentials; it's not entirely clear why he couldn't just have molecular statements made up of connectives and existentials.

In any case, modern logic offers various extensions of first-order predicate logic, of which the most philosophically important is perhaps *modal* logic. This is like regular predicate logic but incorporates possibility and necessity operators, so we can express not only things like "Everybody loves somebody" but also things like "Possibly, everybody loves somebody" and "Necessarily, everybody loves somebody." On this, too, Brentano had some highly intriguing but very programmatic ideas. We can't go into them here, but the basic idea is to treat modality as another aspect of force, not something that goes into content (see especially 1956: §32). In practice, it means that the existence "stroke" is split into two different strokes: one for *necessary* existence and another for *contingent* existence – with possible existence then defined in terms of these. For instance, "God is necessary" would be understood as meaning more perspicuously "There is necessarily God" and might be written "God +!"; while "Uriah is contingent" would be understood as "There is contingently Uriah" and might be written "Uriah +¡." Here I introduce the symbols "+!" and "+¡" to capture Brentano's modal forces, but of course any other symbols would do. (For Brentano's analysis of possibility statements, see 1930: 121; for his treatment of impossibility statements, see 1933: 19-20.)

c. Brentano's Logic: Formal Inference Rules

So much, then, for the formal language of Brentano's logic. Next is the question of rules of inference. Here Brentano claims no originality. He simply adopts the traditional rules (*modus ponens*, *modus tollens*, etc.) and translates them into his language. Take *modus tollens*, which runs "if *p* then *q*, not *q*, therefore not *p*." An example is:

(1) If the moon is made of cheese, then some rock is delicious.
(2) No rock is delicious.
Therefore,
(3) The moon is not made of cheese.

In Brentano's logic, this must be translated into

(1) If there is cheese-made moon, then there is a delicious rock.
(2) There is not a delicious rock.
Therefore,
(3) There is not cheese-made moon.

This inference is a substitution instance of the general rule "If A + then B +, B –, therefore A –." Accordingly, "If A + then B +, B –, therefore A –" becomes the Brentanian rendition of *modus tollens* (1956: 223, but see Hillebrand 1891: 72-85 for more systematic discussion). Similarly, other traditional inference rules will be translated into identical rules that are simply stated in Brentano's formal language. For modern discussions of this, see Terrell 1976 and especially Simons 1987 and 2004.

In summary, Brentano developed a logic that is strikingly different from anything that came before him. Although only sketchy, it's a pretty amazing feat of philosophical creativity and boldness. Observe how perfectly it's tailored to his metaphysics, with its insistence on reality being made up entirely of concrete individuals. We can frame the challenge he faced in this area as follows: If there is nothing but concrete individuals, what does it mean to reason correctly? How should we form beliefs correctly if all there is is this concrete individual here and that concrete individual there? Brentano's logic is the answer he came up with.

8. Practical Philosophy

Pluralist Consequentialism and Fitting-Attitude Analyses of Values

Logic is the practical discipline concerned with how to form beliefs correctly. If you apply it well, you should end up forming more true beliefs than if you don't. For Brentano, there are two other practical disciplines: ethics and aesthetics. Ethics gives us knowledge of how to do the right thing – it's the "engineering of correct actions," if you will. Aesthetics, meanwhile, is the engineering of better taste; it should lead you to have more correct aesthetic judgments.

Although this terminological distinction did not exist in Brentano's time, today we often distinguish two branches of ethics: *normative* ethics and *meta*-ethics. Roughly, normative ethics is supposed to tell us which actions are right or wrong, and what outcomes are good or bad; metaethics is supposed to tell us what it means to say that something is good or bad, right or wrong. Metaethics tries to capture what goodness and rightness as such consist in, while normative ethics is more interested in which things actually exhibit goodness or rightness. Brentano made original and plausible contributions on both issues – as well as in aesthetics.

a. Normative Ethics: Pluralist Consequentialism

Brentano's basic approach to normative ethics is that whenever you have several courses of actions open to you, what you should do is choose the course of action that you think will bring about the best outcome. Brentano calls this the "supreme moral precept" (Brentano 1952: 139) and today it's often called "consequentialism," because it says that the right thing to do is always whatever would lead to the best consequences. The basic idea of consequentialism is that we should judge an action by its outcome, or rather its expected outcome. This contrasts with appr4oches that judge actions by their conformity with the supposed will of God or by their consistency with the dictates of conscience or duty. All these things are bracketed in consequentialism and only the (expected) outcomes count for the purposes of ethical evaluation.

But the real question within the consequentialist framework is what makes one outcome better than another. The core of Brentano's normative ethics can be

represented as a group of *ten* principles that together constitute an answer to that question.

According to Brentano, in our world there are just four things that are good *intrinsically*, good *for their own sake*, and just three things that are *bad* intrinsically, bad *in and of themselves*. The first thing that's good for its own sake is pleasure, enjoyment, cheerfulness and any other manner of feeling good – in a word: *joy* (1889: 90). So the first principle of Brentano's normative ethics may be put thus:

[P1] The intrinsic value of joy > 0

Corresponding to it is this second principle:

[P2] The intrinsic value of suffering < 0

Suppose you have to choose between three possible worlds: one where your life has just one extra moment of joy in it (e.g., you eat a delicious cherry), one where it has one extra moment of suffering (you stub your toe), and one where neither happens and your life is just two seconds shorter (or has two more bland seconds in it). Clearly the first world is the best and the second one the worst; [P1] and [P2] explain why.

Another thing that's good for its own sake, for Brentano, is *knowledge*, or *correct belief* (1889: 22, 29) – with incorrect belief its negative counterpart. So:

[P3] The intrinsic value of correct belief > 0

[P4] The intrinsic value of incorrect belief < 0

If you have to choose between three otherwise identical worlds that differ only in that (a) in one world you know (i.e., having a correct belief about) one extra fact, say that there are three species of orangutan (as of 2021, though only 800 Tapanuli orangutans left in the wild, due to palm oil's popularity); (b) in another you're in error about this (e.g., you *incorrectly* believe there are eight species); and (c) in the third world you're ignorant of orangutan species (i.e., you have no correct belief about it, because you have no belief at all). Again, (a) seems like the best world, and (b) like the worst; [P3] and [P4] explain why.

Just as correct belief is good for its own sake, *correct emotion* is too (1952: 118). Hence:

[P5] The intrinsic value of correct emotion > 0

And:

[P6] The intrinsic value of incorrect emotion < 0

Compare worlds in which people (a) are happy about the holocaust, (b) are profoundly sad about it, (c) have no feelings one way or the other. Here (b) seems like the best world and (a) the worst, and [P5] and [P6] explain that.

In addition to the three intrinsic goods that have an intrinsic-bad counterpart, Brentano claims that there is a fourth intrinsic good to which no intrinsic bad corresponds, namely, conscious activity (thinking, feeling, planning, etc.). So we may add:

[P7] The intrinsic value of conscious activity > 0

Imagine you had to choose between two possible lives, in which the same things happen to you and about half of what happens is good and half is bad, but in one case you "live" through it in the manner of a robot or a zombie, without any conscious awareness or subjectivity. Which life would you choose? Brentano thinks it'd be crazy to choose the robot life over our normal conscious life (1959: 144, 1952: 119); [P7] explains why. Interestingly, unconsciousness is not inherently bad for Brentano – it's just "neutral." Inactivity – the sheer absence of any conscious mental life – is not some positive bad in the way suffering is; it's just the absence of something good (it's more like ignorance than like error in this respect).

So far we have seven principles. The reason we need three more principles is that sometimes different intrinsic goods (or "bads") conflict with each other and a choice of action still needs to be made. It's obvious that other things being equal, more joy is better than less, and less error is better than more. But if you have to choose between having a correct belief and an incorrect emotion or a correct emotion and an incorrect belief, which should you choose? That is, how are we to weigh two intrinsic goods against each other? If so far we've encountered 4 principles of goodness and 3 principles of badness, what we will now add are 3 "principles of betterness."

The first principle of betterness is that the value of joy and suffering is to be weighed more than the value of sheer experience:

[P8] The intrinsic value of joy/suffering > the intrinsic value of conscious activity

Consider that suffering is a form of conscious activity. The conscious-activity aspect of your suffering generates some goodness, and the unpleasant aspect of the suffering generates some badness. The fact that overall we prefer *not* to suffer suggests that the badness generated by the suffering outweighs the goodness generated by the conscious activity.

We said above that a world where people were happy about the holocaust would be a bad world. If all commemoration days for victims of the holocaust were replaced with joyful festivities, our world would be worse for that. This is explained by the following principle:

[P9] The intrinsic value of correct emotion > the intrinsic value of joy/suffering

Recall that joy itself is a good thing. So it must be that the badness generated by the incorrectness of joy about the holocaust outweighs the goodness generated by the joyfulness of it (1889: 91).

The final principle is that correct belief also weighs more than joyfulness (1952: 135). That is:

[P10] The intrinsic value of correct belief > the intrinsic value of joy/suffering

In the movie The Matrix, the protagonist at some point needs to choose between a blue pill and a red pill: the blue pill would keep him in "blissful ignorance" about being imprisoned in the Matrix, the red pill would give them knowledge of their true situation (with all the frustration, resentment, etc. that entails). The protagonist of course chooses knowledge. When he does, we approve. Why don't we *dis*approve? Why do we feel appreciation rather than indignation at this choice? [P10] explains why: because we take the goodness generated by knowledge in the red-pill scenario to outweigh the goodness generated by ignorant bliss in the blue-pill scenario.

Armed with these 10 principles, all you would need to choose between most sets of competing courses of action is empirical information about how much joy and suffering, knowledge and error, correct and incorrect emotion, and conscious activity would be involved. The purely *moral* component of the decision would be settled. Not for *all* cases, though: there is no principle here, for instance, about the relative weight of correct belief versus correct emotion. Brentano thinks we are not in a position to formulate such a principle (1952: 135). It's not totally clear what that means for *what to do* when this is the only dimension along which two

competing courses of action differ. Perhaps it means that both are equally permissible and we'd be blameless for choosing either. Whenever we can, though, we have a clear duty to choose whatever course of action we think will bring about the best outcome: "The right end of our lives, at which every action should aim," writes Brentano (1952: 139), "is to further as far as possible the good within [the sphere of our influence]."

b. Metaethics: Fitting-Attitude Analysis of Moral Value

What does it mean to say that joy is good and suffering is bad? We know what it means to say that the desk is rectangular and the coffee table is round, because we can see the desk and the coffee table and we *visually perceive* the shape quality that we ascribe to them. What it means to say that the desk is rectangular is to ascribe to the desk *this* shape that we grasp through visual perception. Likewise, we know what it means to say that the milk chocolate is sweet and the 90% dark chocolate is bitter, because we taste the two and can grasp through *gustatory perception* the flavor qualities we ascribe to them. But goodness and badness are not visible or otherwise perceptible qualities (1952: 74). You can't *smell* the goodness of joy or the badness of suffering, you can't *hear* the goodness of knowledge or the badness of error, and so on. So how do we grasp what is said when we say that *x* is good and *y* is bad? This puzzle defines the heart of Brentano's metaethics.

Brentano's response to the puzzle leverages an analogy with the concept of existence (1930: 21-22). If I ask you to visualize a turtle and then I specify that I want you to visualize a *purple* turtle, you can add something to your first visualization to accommodate my request. But when I ask you to visualize a turtle and then specify that I want you to visualize an *existing* turtle, there is nothing you can add to your visualization. This is because existence is not a visible quality in the way purple is. Some empiricists have concluded that the concept of existence is a completely empty concept (see Hume 1740 I.II.vi). But how can that be? The difference between a nonexistent turtle and an existing turtle makes all the difference in the world! Brentano's solution in this case was to claim that when we say that a turtle exists, we are not describing some quality of the turtle, but instead are asserting that the correct attitude to take toward the turtle is that of *believing in* it. His account of goodness will ultimately take the same shape.

Although you can't perceive the goodness of joy (or the badness of suffering) with your eyes, or with any other sense, here are two things you *can* perceive – through *inner* perception. First, you can inner-perceive your *positive emotion toward* joy – the fact that you *like* to feel joy, that you *appreciate* feeling joyful, that you *want* to feel it, etc. (And likewise, you can inner-perceive your negative emotions toward

suffering – the fact that you dislike and don't want it.) More importantly, now, you can also inner-perceive the *manifest correctness* or *fittingness* of these emotional reactions (1889: 22). Someone who prefers suffering over joy, or error over knowledge, would seem to us to have unfitting emotional reactions to these things. What's crucial here for Brentano is that the fit between joy and liking it (or between suffering and disliking it) is something that we *feel*. And this feeling-of-fittingness is manifest to inner perception. That, for Brentano, is the empiricist source of our grasp of good and bad.

With this in mind, Brentano offers the following analyses of the concepts of good and bad. To say that *x* is good is to say that it is fitting or correct to have a positive emotion, or more generally take a "pro" attitude, toward *x*; to say that *y* is bad is to say that it is fitting or correct to have a negative emotion, or more generally a "con" attitude, toward *y* (1889: 18). As Brentano puts it, "when we call certain objects good, and others bad, we are saying thereby nothing more than that whoever loves the former and hates the latter has taken the right stand" (Brentano 1952: 90).

Brentano does acknowledge that in many cases the fittingness of an emotional reaction is not inner perceived, and that, obviously, sometimes we don't even *have* the right emotional reaction, so perforce cannot inner-perceive its rightness. Nonetheless, there are cases of *manifest fittingness* – an analogue in the sphere of emotion of self-evidence in the sphere of belief (1889: 22) – and when we have a manifestly fitting emotional reaction to something we can inner-perceive it. It is this that perceptually anchors our grasp of moral value.

Today, one of the hottest issues in metaethics is a view called "fitting-attitude analysis of value," which is essentially Brentano's view of what we mean when we say that something is good or bad (though today it is not often motivated by the empiricist concerns that animated Brentano's thinking). It is often acknowledged that Brentano was *the* pioneer of this approach (see Danielsson and Olson 2007: 511). This is one more area of philosophy where his originality and insight anticipated important later developments.

b. Aesthetics: Fitting-Delight Analysis of Aesthetic Value

The nature of beauty, and aesthetic value more generally, is one of the oldest conundrums in philosophy. Brentano's approach here is also original to him, and mirrors his approach to existence and goodness. He claims that a thing is beautiful just if it elicits in us a correct or fitting *delight* (1959: 17). Note a subtle disanalogy here with the fitting-reaction accounts of existence and goodness: for something to

be beautiful, it is insufficient that it would be *correct* for us to be delighted with; we must actually *be* delighted with it. If something doesn't elicit delight in anybody, even though some people do pay attention to it, it cannot count as beautiful. The thing must actually delight someone; that's a necessary condition. But delighting someone – or even everyone – is not a *sufficient* condition for beauty – the delight must also be *correct*, or *fitting*.

Unfortunately, there isn't in Brentano's writings a very developed account of what makes delight fitting or correct. There *is* quite a nuanced account of what delight is: it is a two-layered experience, in which the first layer is contemplation of some object and the second layer is enjoyment of that contemplation (note well: *not* enjoyment of the object contemplated, but of the contemplating itself). Now, according to Brentano, there is no such thing as correct or incorrect contemplating, but there is such a thing as correct or incorrect enjoyment; so a fitting or correct delight consists in correct or fitting enjoyment of a contemplation of some object.

The structure of fitting delight explains, for Brentano, why it is impossible to experience aesthetic delight without any joy. If you manage to look at a sculpture completely joylessly, then you're not *delighted* by it (1959: 123). It also explains why contemplating beautiful things is good in itself. It is good, claims Brentano, because it is appropriate or fitting to take joy in the contemplating, and for something to be good *just is* for it to be appropriate or fitting to have a positive emotion toward it (1959: 136).

There are other components of Brentano's aesthetics and philosophy of art, but they weigh in on issues that don't always find a strong echo in current debates. For example, one hot issue back then concerned the nature of genius, especially artistic genius, and in particular whether the artistic genius is different from the rest of us *in kind* or merely *in degree*. That is, do geniuses like Bach and Picasso have what we all have but just have *more* of it, or do they have something completely different that's simply absent in most people? Brentano (1892) argued for the difference-in-degree view, and developed a complex argument for that, which we can't get into here (see Tănăsescu 2017).

The question of the nature of genius has more or less dropped from the agenda in contemporary aesthetics. (It's taken up more commonly in the psychology of personality, which is an entirely descriptive and empirical discipline.) But the question of the nature of aesthetic value is still central today. Interestingly, to my knowledge there is no contemporary development of a Brentanesque fitting-delight account of beauty; perhaps there *should* be.

9. History of Philosophy

The Four-Phases Theory

A scholar specializing in the history of chemistry would never get to be a professor at a *chemistry department* of a university. Their only academic hope is to be a professor at a *history department*, or perhaps a history of science program. Of course some chemists might take keen interest in the history of their discipline, but that's not going to be part their day job, so to speak. And this is true of astrophysics, neurobiology, and virtually every other discipline. But historians of philosophy are always part of the university's *philosophy department*, not its history department. This attests to the fact that philosophy has a special relationship to its history, a relationship that other disciplines don't typically have. Why that is is something nobody is totally sure about – it depends in part on what defines philosophy as a discipline, which is in itself a vexed question we're not going to get into here.

Most historians of philosophy today have an expertise in one or two, sometimes three or four main figures. For example, they might be experts on Plato, or on Plato and Socrates. More rarely, they may be experts in whole *periods* – say, philosophy in the Italian Renaissance – or in entire schools of thought (e.g., "German Idealism," which designates a line of thought that starts with Kant in the late 18th century and goes up to Hegel and his disciples in the middle of the 19th century). What almost nobody seems to do is to try to take a global look at the history of philosophy *in its entirety*, from the inception of written philosophy to the present day, and try to find general patterns or an "internal logic" to the whole thing.

There are good reasons for this. First of all, who says the history of philosophy *has* an internal logic? Secondly, if it has one, it would probably be exceedingly difficult to discern. And thirdly, life is short and to really understand deeply the thought of one or two great philosophers already takes a long time; to understand in depth *all* the great philosophers over 2,500 years of philosophical reflection – even if we restrict ourselves to Western philosophy – is essentially impossible in a single person's life, especially given that one would have to be pretty much fluent in about a dozen different languages.

Nonetheless, Brentano *did* have a theory of the history of philosophy in its entirety. Throughout his life, Brentano had been very interested in the history of

philosophy and taught courses on all major periods and thinkers. The standard academic periodization of (Western) philosophy cuts it up into three major periods: (1) Ancient Philosophy, going from [Thales](#) in the 7th century BCE to Boethius in the 6th century; (2) Medieval Philosophy, going basically from Boethius to [Descartes](#) in early 17th century; (3) Modern Philosophy, starting with Descartes and still ongoing. Brentano taught courses on all three periods. His class notes were published posthumously in three volumes (which remain as yet untranslated): one dedicated to Ancient Greek Philosophy (Brentano 1963), one to Medieval Philosophy in Christendom (Brentano 1980), and one to Modern Philosophy (Brentano 1987). In these notes Brentano goes through an astonishing number of thinkers and distills the essence of their philosophy into a few dense and illuminating paragraphs (sometimes a few pages). But in addition, Brentano gave in November 1894 a lecture to the Vienna Literary Society, later published as a self-standing essay (Brentano 1895), in which he presented a global theory of the history of philosophy *in its entirety*.

It's not part of Brentano's theory of the history of philosophy that it has a direction or a *telos*, a kind of resting place or endpoint it inexorably tends toward. It's also not part of his theory that philosophy progresses in a linear fashion in the way scientific knowledge seems. On the contrary, Brentano thinks that the history of philosophy is more like the history of art (as he sees it): it moves through cycles that start with a burst of creative energy, producing real value for a period, but followed by increasing decadence and disvalue. However, what's invariant across the history of philosophy, and gives it its overall superstructure, is that each of these cycles is structured in the same way: it comprises four phases of recurring character – one positive phase and three phases of increasing decline.

In other words, for Brentano there are four phases of philosophical development that repeat themselves in every era of philosophy. The first phase is the one that carries the torch of philosophical progress. It's marked by two distinctive characteristics: first, a totally theoretical impulse, based on pure wonder at the world, so to speak; and second, a flexible methodology that fits itself to the world rather than imposing on the world our mind's own expectations (Brentano 1895: 85-6). Both these characteristics then disappear in the following phases.

In the second phase, the main thing that happens is that instead of the spirit of theoretical wonder that sparked inquiry in the first phase, what motivates inquiry is just practical interests and needs (1895: 86). As a result, the methodology used becomes looser and more approximative: since what we're after is not getting reality exactly right, but just enough to get what we need out of it, inquiry's speed-

accuracy tradeoff starts to favor speed over accuracy. Now, this second phase is bound to lead, according to Brentano, to a complete loss of faith in the advancement of philosophical understanding, and this brings about the third phase, which is always characterized by *skepticism* (1895: 86.). Here research stops even *trying* to advance inquiry; instead it obsessively points out all the limitations of inquiry, wallowing in a kind of epistemic pessimism lacking any intellectual vitality. However, because this state of affairs is not really satisfying, and doesn't do anything to quench our inborn desire for knowledge and understanding, it's soon replaced, in a fourth phase, by a kind of mysterian or even mystical inclination, where we grasp for facile and undemanding ways of acquiring understanding (1895: 86-7). The lure of idealism and mysticism takes over principled, disciplined inquiry, and this is where we remain stuck until we sink so low that a new burst of energy ushers in a new cycle, with its own positive phase at the beginning.

To illustrate how the theory works, and also to make the case for it, Brentano flies over the history of philosophy at 30,000 feet and shows how he can fit neatly well-known philosophers in the right slots for each era of philosophy. It goes like this:

- Ancient Philosophy (Brentano 1895: 87-90):

    1) The positive phase: Anaxagoras to Aristotle
    2) The practical phase: Stoicism and Epicureanism
    3) The skeptical phase: Pyrrhonian Skepticism
    4) The mystical phase: Neoplatonism

- Medieval Philosophy (1895: 90-96):

    1) The positive phase: Thomas Aquinas and Dominican Scholasticism
    2) The practical phase: John Duns Scotus and Franciscan Scholasticism
    3) The skeptical phase: Ockham and the nominalists of the age
    4) The mystical phase: Meister Eckhart, Nicholas of Cusa, and many Renaissance Platonists

- Modern Philosophy (1895: 96-102):

    1) The positive phase: Francis Bacon and Descartes
    2) The practical phase: French and German Enlightenment (Voltaire etc.)
    3) The skeptical phase: Hume
    4) The mystical phase: Kant and German Idealism

See: once you look at the history of philosophy like this, everything makes sense. You start understanding *why* one type of philosophy follows another, and perhaps you can even start predicting what will happen next. In fact, Brentano clearly thinks that what will happen next is that *his* philosophy will usher in a new cycle in the history of philosophy, characterized by a burst of initial positive philosophical developments. He wasn't short on self-belief!

Brentano's scheme unsurprisingly places his intellectual heroes – [Aristotle](), [Aquinas](), and [Descartes]() – in the first, ascendant phase of each era. More boldly, it associates his great nemeses Kant and Hegel, whose philosophies are extremely intricate, with straight mystics like Meister Eckhart. According to Hugo Bergman, Brentano's otherwise very admirative student, this feature of Brentano's approach to the history of philosophy was actually disastrous to Brentano's legacy: in dismissing Kantian philosophy as the worst kind of intellectually worthless mysticism, it closed off any possibility of constructive dialogue through which Kantian and Brentanian philosophy could engage each other's insights and potentially cross-fertilize each other (Bergman 1965: 95).

Bergman (1965) also criticized some more specific details of Brentano's analysis of the development of Greek philosophy, while another of Brentano's students, Kazimierz Twardowski, claimed on the contrary that while Brentano's theory works well for Ancient Philosophy it becomes less plausible for Medieval and especially Modern Philosophy (Twardowski 1895: 249-50). The great medievalist Étienne Gilson criticized various details of Brentano's analysis of Medieval philosophy (Gilson 1939: 5-6), in particular the idea that Medieval philosophy somehow "starts" with Aquinas (on reflection, a very strange idea indeed, given that Aquinas was born fully three-quarters of a millennium after Boethius' death!). Brentano's analysis of Modern philosophy, meanwhile, is criticized most exhaustively by Eliam Campos, who – fairly enough – finds much to dislike in Brentano's dismissal of Kant's philosophy as worthless mysticism (Campos 1979).

To my knowledge, Brentano's theory has received only one sustained defense in recent scholarship, from Balázas Mezei and Barry Smith (1998), who argue that the phases in Brentano's theory should be understood as idealizations which concrete philosophers will always approximate only partially – and that this renders the theory's treatment of various controversial cases a lot more plausible.

Whatever we think of the specifics of Brentano's theory of the history of philosophy, however, there is something mind-blowing about the very idea of such a theory, a theory that attempts to identify an overarching superstructure in the history of philosophy. *If* accepted, a theory like Brentano's would have the great

virtue of imposing a clear organization on the history of philosophy *in toto*, thus rendering it *intelligible*. Instead of a long list of prominent thinkers, we would get a highly structured narrative of the progression of philosophical ideas. Arguably, this is precisely what distinguishes a history from a chronology. A chronology is just a list of things that happened, in the order in which they happened. A history goes beyond this in trying to identify causal and evolutionary patterns in the chronology. History thus incorporates an element of theorization or interpretation – at bottom: an attempt at *sense-making*. To achieve this sense-making, it takes an otherwise unstructured list of things that happened and imposes some structure or organization on it. In its ideal form, it attempts to identify *laws of history* (just like there are laws of physics, laws of chemistry, etc.). It's clear that this is how Brentano intends his four-phase theory – as identifying a lawful structure in the history of philosophy – and that's how it was taken by his contemporaries (e.g., Schmidkunz 1896). The sheer intellectual ambition in this commands a measure of admiration. Incredibly, Brentano tells us that he came up with his theory of the history of philosophy when he was just 22 (Gilson 1939: 2).

Conclusion

As we can see, Franz Brentano's thought spans virtually all the major areas of philosophy (and its history), from logic and language, through metaphysics and epistemology, to ethics and aesthetics, though with a special emphasis on philosophy of mind and psychology. In many of these areas, moreover, he defended highly original idea, which moreover he weaved together in a cohesive whole permeated with structural analogies. Perhaps the deepest of these is that the nature of the true, the good, and the beautiful can all be elucidated in terms of the correctness or fitting of certain corresponding reactions: the true (or real) is that which it is correct to believe (or believe *in*); the good is that which it is correct to like, approve of, or otherwise have a positive feeling about; and the beautiful is that which it is correct to delight in.

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