

Balázs M. Mezei and Barry Smith

THE FOUR PHASES
OF
PHILOSOPHY

With an Appendix:

The Four Phases of Philosophy and Its Current State
by Franz Brentano

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INTRODUCTION

Franz Brentano is a European philosopher who is less well-known than, for instance, Ludwig Wittgenstein or Rudolf Carnap, but who nevertheless gave rise to philosophical schools which have proved to be of the first importance in contemporary philosophy. Above all, Brentano was the teacher of Husserl, and it was Brentano's work on the concept of *being* in Aristotle which motivated Heidegger to take up a philosophical career. Brentano has thus done much to determine the shape and tenor of what is usually called Continental philosophy—the philosophy of, first of all, Germany and France in the twentieth century. Through his Polish student, Kasimir Twardowski, Brentano helped to shape contemporary Polish thought—and here we are thinking especially of Polish logic—into one of the most impressive developments in the history of philosophy. Brentano's own thought on the other hand, alongside that of his Austrian pupil Alexius Meinong, has become an important factor in contemporary Anglo-American analytic philosophy, not least through the writings of Roderick Chisholm on the concept of intentionality.

In what follows we shall introduce the English translation of what is perhaps Brentano's most important text on the history of philosophy. In our introduction, we shall analyze Brentano's conception of what he called "the four phases of philosophy"; we shall show the origin of his theory and the problems it was designed to address; and we shall demonstrate that Brentano's theory can be applied to at least one line in the history of philosophy *after* Brentano's time.

That Brentano developed his own theory of the history of philosophy is not widely known. This theory is summarized in a

short essay entitled “The Four Phases of Philosophy”, published in 1895 and translated here as an Appendix. Brentano believed that the history of philosophy displays a regularly recurring pattern and can thus be divided into successive periods, each of which can be considered as an organic whole of a precisely determined form. Such periods are for instance the period of classical Greek philosophy ending with Aristotle, the medieval period up to but not including Descartes, and the period of modern philosophy beginning with Descartes and ending with Hegel and other classical ‘German idealist’ thinkers. In each such period, Brentano argues, four phases can be distinguished: the first phase is that of intensive philosophical development, of scientific results and scientific interest; the second phase is dominated by practical interest; the third phase is that of increasing scepticism which gives way, in the end, to a last phase, in which philosophy becomes a mere branch of literature which has no scientific relevance at all.

Brentano’s theory of the history of philosophy is based on the idea that philosophy is a science, and that the method of philosophy is identical with the method of the other sciences. Philosophy is a science for two reasons. First, it has a determinate subject-matter, which is in Brentano’s eyes the structure and function of human cognition; and second, it has a determinate method, which is in no way different from the method of the other sciences, both as concerns its logical coherence and rigour, and also as concerns the requisite clarity of its formulations.

We shall therefore begin, in Part One, by investigating Brentano’s understanding of the history of philosophy and of philosophy as science. We shall then consider the emergence of Brentano’s theory of the four phases and evaluate this theory in the light of competing approaches to the problem of the history of philosophy. We shall conclude, in Part Two, by demonstrating that Brentano’s theory can be applied also to the development of philosophy in our own century.

PART ONE: BRENTANO'S THEORY

1. Brentano on Philosophy and Its History

Many currently popular thinkers see philosophy as a kind of artistic or literary activity. Richard Rorty, for instance, suggests in his *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* that philosophy should be considered as the art or method of 'making connections' between cultures, languages, conceptions, and the like, rather than as the sum of logical or epistemological efforts to ground or establish certain propositions as true. 'Making connections' for Rorty is, first of all, a kind of dialectical process, a never-ending discourse on themes and topics taken from the history of philosophy, a conversation that has a merely educational purpose. Philosophy is an activity of edification, and as such it is not subject to the criteria of truth or validity.¹ The history of philosophy, too, is not the history of true or false ideas in or about philosophy, but rather a collection of views which might be used for the mental or moral improvement of human beings.

Jacques Derrida, similarly, is convinced that the history of philosophy is nothing more than a bunch of wrong ideas concerning the nature of a spurious 'reality' (though he still for some reason treats it as material of a sort which needs to be supplied with footnotes and commentaries of the most diverse scholarly sort). Derrida's main concern is not with what people in the past might have thought—their ideas were in any case

¹ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980, p. 360.

condemned to falsehood from the start because of the effects of what he calls 'logocentrism'. Rather he is concerned with how we can interpret or misinterpret these ideas in accordance with the present interests of this or that centre of power or potential power.²

Rorty's idea of the history of philosophy is based on Hans-Georg Gadamer's conception of hermeneutics as the genuine or true form of philosophy—philosophy as a project of mutual interpretation. Derrida, on the other hand, reformulates the later Heidegger's criticism of the history of philosophy, a criticism which (through its Nietzschean admixtures) is designated to be so radical as to lead to the very elimination of philosophy and to give rise to a new type of purely rhetorical thinking. In both cases we meet an interesting paradox: both Rorty and Derrida speak of the history of philosophy in terms of a radically new conception which fulfils, and at the same time condemns, the history of philosophy as traditionally conceived. In order to reach their aim, they announce the end of the history of philosophy on the one hand (that is, for them, the end of philosophy as such). Yet on the other hand they claim to have found a new variant of philosophy itself, either in terms of 'edification' or in terms of liberatory political rhetoric. Both agree that the history of philosophy is a history of misunderstandings and misinterpretations and that the time has come to reveal this fact. At the same time both insist that they have found the means by which we can gain access to the genuine history of our subject—like Marxists exposing the 'false consciousness' by which all humanity has hitherto been plagued.

Brentano, too, believed himself to have found the right form and method of philosophy, though his understanding of the subject is much more complex and more deeply rooted in the tradition—and above all less self-serving—than those of Rorty or Derrida. For unlike Rorty and Derrida, and unlike Heidegger,

² See Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie*, Paris, 1967, Introduction.

Brentano rejects any form of ‘endism’ in the history of philosophy, denying any simple or linear teleology which would give special status to what happen to be currently fashionable views. Instead, Brentano adopts a cyclical view of the history of philosophy, a view to the effect that philosophy, however close to the truth it might be at any given stage, is condemned, in a never-ending struggle, to the subsequent revival of positions remote from, and indeed antithetical to, the truth. Brentano’s views in this regard are themselves, as we shall see, in some respects one-sided and oversimplified. They are of interest, however, as the definitive expression of what we might think of as the cyclical view of the history of philosophy—and they can be of great practical value in this light, as tools with which to criticize and evaluate rival theories in the history of philosophy.

Philosophy and Its Subject-Matter

Philosophy, like every other discipline, has its own specific subject-matter. Its main field is what Brentano termed ‘inner perception’.³ Our consciousness, in Brentano’s view, is also self-consciousness, which means that it lies in the nature of mental life to be accompanied by a reflective awareness of its own constituent mental acts and processes. To avoid the danger of an infinite regress (of reflections on reflections and so on *ad infinitum*), Brentano maintained that such inner perception occurs ‘on the side’ or *en parergo*, as he expresses it using an Aristotelian term. Inner perception is thus to be sharply contrasted with that deliberate process of focusing on the events of one’s inner life which we might call ‘introspection’ or ‘inner observation’. The latter operates on the basis of short-term memory and treats mental phenomena in separation from their context as *pale petrifacta*.

³ *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkte, Erster Band*, Leipzig, Duncker and Humblot, 1874, p. 35. English translation: *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1913, p. 35.

In inner perception, on the other hand, mental phenomena are given simultaneously and as they are in themselves; they are not artificially abstracted by the one who perceives them. Philosophy, in Brentano's eyes, is concerned with the general laws that govern mental phenomena, and the first task of philosophy is to establish the existence and nature of these laws on the basis of inner perception.

Inner perception is marked, for Brentano as for Descartes, with the quality of indubitable evidence. Because there is no gap, in the case of inner perception, between the act of knowledge and the object known, so also there is no point at which error could enter. Inner perception can thus serve as the starting point for philosophy conceived in classical foundationalist fashion. It can provide the disciple of philosophy with a basis of strictly necessary first principles, which are not derived from other principles but rather are directly given up with 'one strike', as Brentano puts it.⁴ Such principles can then be applied to various special fields in philosophy, such as ethics or metaphysics. In this sense, philosophy, besides being a special science of inner perception, is also a universal science of the first principles of knowledge.

A mental phenomenon can be just as precisely described and analysed as can the objects of the natural sciences. A description, however, cannot in every case claim the status of indubitability. The particular facts which are grasped in their psychic or—as Brentano puts it—'intentional' form, as contents of our mental life, remain particular and cannot serve as principles of a genuine science. We can point to certain isolated rules concerning the behaviour of such particular facts, but the character of these rules, inasmuch as they are established inductively, remains problematic. No problematic rule can serve, according to Brentano

⁴ *Vom Ursprung sittlicher Erkenntnis*, Leipzig: Felix Meiner, 1934, note 33. English translation: *The Origin of Our Knowledge of Right and Wrong*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969.

no, as a basis of a genuine science. There are, however, certain necessary laws which are capable of being ‘discovered’ in an intuitive way in inner perception. Examples would be that a judgement presupposes a presentation of that which is judged; that judgement but not presentation can be either positive or negative, and so on. These yield what is in the last analysis the most genuine form of knowledge, inasmuch as only this form of knowledge possesses strict necessity.⁵

Such strict necessity is, according to Brentano, a feature of the the judgements of inner perception which cannot be influenced by the subject; the subject can only accept it and apply it as a point of reference in his evaluation of other judgements concerning reality. Strict necessity is perceived ‘in the soul’; yet its necessary character is not dependent on psychophysical processes. Brentano thus sees himself as safe against the charge of ‘psychologism’ raised by Husserl and Frege against those who sought to eliminate strict necessity in favour of contingent truths of empirical psychology.⁶

Stages in the History of Sciences

The history of any science, according to Brentano, can be divided into two stages. In the first, preparatory stage, the science

⁵ *Geschichte der griechischen Philosophie* (History of Greek Philosophy), edited by Franziska Mayer-Hillebrand, Bern-Munich: Francke, 1967, Introduction, p. 5.

⁶ See *Von der Klassifikation der psychischen Phänomene* (English translation included in *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, op. cit., under the title “On the Classification of Mental Phenomena”), Leipzig: Duncker und Humblot, 1911, p. 167. See also Edmund Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen, Erster Band, Prolegomena zur reinen Logik*, Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1993 (also in *Husserliana XVIII*). See moreover Wilhelm Schuppe, “Zum Psychologismus und zum Normcharakter der Logik”, in Hermann Noack (ed.), *Husserl*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1973, and B. Mezei: “Brentano and Psychologism”, *Psychologia* (Budapest), 2, 1994.

itself is not yet clearly distinguished from other disciplines; data concerning its special field are collected haphazardly and are not readily perceived as belonging to a distinct discipline. The second stage starts with an explosion-like development of the science, in which its special territory and methods of investigation come to be clearly defined. This is what happened to physiology and to psychology in the nineteenth century, and this is what Brentano hoped would happen to philosophy itself.

For, as Brentano held, psychology and philosophy are disciplines which had been interlinked from the very beginning. Signs of this connection are Aristotle's psychological writings and the important psychological observations made by Augustine. Earlier thinkers, up to and including the rationalists and empiricists of the post-Cartesian period had, however, as Brentano sees it, been unable to achieve genuine results because they lacked the proper method of investigation—the method of inner perception. Like the German psychologist Gustav Theodor Fechner, Brentano believed that psychology was destined to help philosophy in the realization of its most central goals and to contribute thereby to both individual and collective happiness. For, as Brentano held, the rapid development of psychology in his day amounted to the birth of a new, universal science, one which would help to fulfil all the promises of philosophy in its age-long history.

Philosophy and the Decline of Cultures

Given what we have said, the history of philosophy and the history of the other sciences are similar to each other. In another sense, however, philosophy is different from the other sciences. In Brentano's view, the general historical development of the other sciences is to a large extent independent of cultural factors. Although there are stages of stagnation in the development of a given science, there are no stages of collapse or new beginning. Philosophy, however, is more directly connected to the cultural standards of a given society, to ethical, legal and even political

phenomena, and thus philosophy shows a curve of development different from the other sciences. In the history of a culture, there are stages of rapid decline and stages of flourishing, and the separate products of a given culture reflect the corresponding state of the culture as a whole. Thus also, Brentano held, the history of philosophy shows flourishing stages on the one hand, and stages of decline on the other.

Philosophy is distinguished from the other sciences also in the following sense. The genuine results attained by the latter during periods of rapid development are preserved during subsequent periods of stagnation. In the history of philosophy, in contrast, there are also declining periods in which important philosophical results are forgotten or wilfully neglected or corrupted, and even the methods found and followed earlier are replaced by sham or inferior alternatives. The result, as Brentano sees it, is that in its declining periods philosophy ceases to be a science and becomes what is generally termed literature or mysticism. Mysticism is understood by Brentano in a pejorative sense and signifies that, instead of observing and investigating the facts and laws of psychic life, philosophers make use of their fantasy and construct quite arbitrary systems of thought.

Brentano considered his age to be one of a 'philosophical renaissance'. He struggled on behalf of the conviction that philosophy would from his time on show a development similar to that of the various natural sciences: the results obtained by individual thinkers would automatically become constituent parts of a single, ever more visible and more firmly anchored whole. Brentano thus fought for the idea that the construction of idiosyncratic philosophical 'systems' would finally come to an end. Such systems, Brentano insisted, belonged to periods of decline in the history of philosophy. In a period of positive development, the philosopher's task is to carry out the analysis and the solution of particular problems in philosophy in such a way that they become integrated into that whole which is genuine philosophical science.

Brentano was however forced to admit that the history of philosophy, in the future as in the past, will likely continue to follow a cyclical pattern in a way that resembles the development of the arts rather than that of the sciences. Philosophy, in other words, will continue to display periods of flourishing alternating with periods of decline.⁷

The Four Phases of Philosophy

In Brentano's view, we can distinguish four periods of rapid and intensive progress in the history of philosophy: the age of the early Greeks up to the time of Aristotle; the age of the revival of Aristotelianism by the scholastic writers in the Middle Ages; the age of the Cartesian renewal of philosophy in the seventeenth century; and finally Brentano's own age, in which philosophy became intimately connected to scientific psychology.

As Brentano sees it, there are altogether four phases in each of these periods, among which only the first phase meets the requirements of scientific philosophy. A schematized description of the phases is as follows:

1. The first phase is that of rapid progress. Its characteristics are the expression of a *purely theoretical interest* ('childlike innocence and wonder', as Brentano puts it) on the one hand, and the application of scientific method (openness to the richness of empirical cases) on the other.

2. The second phase is that of *practical interest*: there prevails, in the philosophical investigation of nature not the search

⁷ Brentano, like many of his contemporaries, adopts in this respect the views of Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717-1768), the German art-historian and founder of the discipline of art history. Winckelmann developed a scientific understanding of the history of the arts in which the first phase—for Winckelmann: the classical period—displays a quality and style unachievable for subsequent ages. The history of the fine arts is thus a perpetually declining process.

for truth, but rather the motives of ‘relevance’, social benefit and the motives of ‘applied philosophy’.⁸

3. The third phase arises as a reaction to the phase of prevailing practicality. It is the phase of *scepticism* and comes about as follows. The practical orientation of the second phase proves highly constraining. Since the whole range of human interest cannot be satisfied by this selective focus, and since practicality questions the meaningfulness of any sphere of interest other than its own, a general scepticism concerning the human ability to gain knowledge begins to prevail.

4. The fourth phase, that of *mysticism*, arises in turn as a reaction to scepticism. Its main characteristic is the invention of new methods, the discovery of special ‘powers’ in man through which which radically new types of knowledge are deemed to become somehow accessible.

But after all this, there comes again a new phase of radical renewal, a return to the original form of philosophical activity, of ‘innocence and wonder’, and so the cycle repeats itself. The whole process is thus not one of decline, but rather that of a recurring cycle—periods of development interrupted by periods of decline. In this way, Brentano seeks an equilibrium between the view of the history of philosophy as a declining process—of the sort held by Romantic philosophers—and a view of the history of philosophy as a perpetual development of the sort favoured by thinkers of the Enlightenment.

It must be stressed that Brentano did not intend his own account as an encompassing and complete description of the history of philosophy. His intention was, rather, to offer one type of approach to the history of philosophy in cogent fashion which would be useful in the evaluation of certain philosophical and

⁸ This idea is present already in Brentano’s *Vom Dasein Gottes*, ed. A. Kastil, Leipzig: Felix Meiner, 1929, p. 86. English translation: *On the Existence of God*, Dordrecht: Nijhoff, 1987, p. 69.

historical claims. It is to provide the framework, above all, for the proper understanding of the process by which philosophical knowledge is gathered in the first phase, the phase of openness to scientific evidence.

2. The Emergence of Brentano's Theory

Brentano dealt with the problem of the history of philosophy not only in the essay on this subject matter that is translated as an appendix below, but also in other, less well-known texts in which Brentano discusses this problem, texts which show that, while some elements in the theory of the four phases remained constant in his works, others went through changes.

Brentano's very first publication, on "The History of the Ecclesiastic Sciences", appeared in 1867.⁹ There we find a periodization of the history of philosophy which is roughly the same as the one presented in "The Four Phases of Philosophy" of 1895. Similarly, in the introductory essay to his *Lectures On the History of Greek Philosophy*, Brentano sees the main characteristic of the history of philosophy as lying precisely in the fact that, after each period of development, there follows a period of decline.¹⁰ Philosophy is seen as being contrasted to the other sciences in that it has a tendency to renounce its own previously established results. This process is not, however, irreversible. Given the requisite development of culture, an insistence by some philosophers on the theoretical interest can bring philosophy back once more to its original form.¹¹

⁹ "Geschichte der kirchlichen Wissenschaften", in Johann Adam Möhler's *Kirchengeschichte* (The History of the Church), vol. 2, Regensburg, 1867.

¹⁰ See Franziska Mayer-Hillebrand (ed.), Franz Brentano: *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der griechischen Philosophie* (Lectures on the History of Greek Philosophy), Bern: Francke, 1963.

¹¹ Op. cit., p. 15.

The Influence of Comte

Brentano's idea of the four phases was undoubtedly influenced by the French philosopher and historian of science, Auguste Comte (1798-1857). Comte held views very similar to those of Brentano, and the latter's essay on Comte, published in 1869, is of crucial importance with respect to Brentano's theory. The most interesting part of this essay is a series of short statements at the end of the text in which Brentano attempts to lay down the general rules that govern the history of philosophy.¹² According to this theory, each period in the history of philosophy is composed of only three phases. The first is marked again by the burgeoning of a purely scientific interest, the second by methodological clarification and new factual discoveries, and the third is marked by decline.

Where in his later writings Brentano saw the prevailing *practical attitude* as a general reason for decline, here he borrows from Comte in seeing the decline which followed the rapid period of development in the Middle Ages as lying in the exaggerated concern with metaphysical subtleties on the part of the scholastic philosophers.¹³

In the collection of Brentano's writings published under the title *On the Existence of God* we encounter once again a threefold schema.¹⁴ The period of flourishing coincides as before with the work of Aristotle. It is followed by a period of skepticism con-

¹² As Brentano notes, this is the same theory he had already presented in his "History of the Ecclesiastic Sciences", op. cit.

¹³ See Section 3 of the translation below (pp. 85-87). Brentano holds moreover that his theory of phases can be grounded psychologically. What he means by this can be understood from a rather short statement in his *Psychology from the Empirical Standpoint*. The history of mankind, he there writes, represents what can analogically be observed in the development of each individual. See his *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt*, op. cit., p. 53. English translation p. 42.

¹⁴ *Vom Dasein Gottes*, op. cit., p. 86. English translation p. 69.

nected to the name of Pyrrho, and by a final period of what Brentano calls the 'mystical reaction' in the form of neo-Platonism. Here again the mystical phase amounts to a complete disintegration of the fruitful philosophical interest that had been manifested earlier. Its speculative, subjectively determined products are hardly distinguishable from those of literature or art. Instead of scientific rigour, the authors of such products seek 'popularity'. This schema is at first outlined by Brentano in the context of a discussion of Greek philosophy. But it is then applied in the same work to the philosophy of the Middle Ages and to nineteenth-century German philosophy.

Bear in mind that the schema of the phases is here presented in a context in which Brentano's main objective is that of demonstrating the existence of God. It is *teleology* in both animate and inanimate nature which is taken by Brentano as the most important such demonstration,¹⁵ and teleology is also one of the most important presuppositions in Brentano's theory of the history of philosophy. As he writes in his introduction to *On the Existence of God*, philosophy in its full form is the most perfect accomplishment of religion and stands in service of the same divine plan that leads mankind in general to fulfillment.¹⁶

Brentano was moreover convinced that he lived in a time in which religion would enter its higher form, that of philosophy.¹⁷ This and other features of his gradually developing

¹⁵ See his manuscript: "Zum Geleite: Aus einem Briefe F. Brentanos an einen Agnostiker" (Introduction: From a letter of Franz Brentano Addressed to an Agnostic), in *Vom Dasein Gottes*, p. LVII and especially pp. LVIII-LIX. English translation pp. 9 ff.

¹⁶ Similar ideas are put forward by Brentano in his "Über die Gründe der Entmutigung auf philosophischem Gebiete" (On the Reasons for Discouragement in Philosophy), Vienna: Braumüller, 1874, reprinted in *Über die Zukunft der Philosophie*, Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1968; see also his "Plotinus" of 1876 in *Die Vier Phasen der Philosophie*.

¹⁷ He speaks of 'universelle Revolution' in *Über die Zukunft der Philosophie*, p. 12.

theory of the history of philosophy are summarized in his lecture “On the Future of Philosophy”, a lecture delivered in 1893 (two years before the “Four Phases”), which contains all the major elements of the latter. Here again, a first flourishing phase is considered as preceding three remaining phases of decline. The latter are labeled dogmatism, critical scepticism, and a phase of ‘absolute philosophies’ illustrated by the systems of German idealism.

The reference to dogmatism here is new.¹⁸ We have seen that Brentano offers different possible explanations of what is responsible for initiating the first phase of decline: a transformation of the theoretical interest into a practical one, an exaggerated concern with metaphysical subtleties, the moment of ‘popularization’, and now: dogmatism. Although it might be possible to argue that these elements do not in fact exclude one another, or that they tell us the same thing in different ways, it seems clear that Brentano took some time to reach full clarity concerning these four aspects of his theory.

Brentano's Schema

In the “Four Phases of Philosophy” we have Brentano’s full-fledged version of the doctrine of the phases. The most important new element concerns his account of the nature of the history of philosophy when taken as a whole. He insists—as already mentioned—that the parallelism between philosophy and the natural sciences is only partial; philosophy shows one crucial similarity also to the history of the arts, namely the regular reappearance of phases of decline. The resultant final version of the theory of the four phases can be represented as follows:¹⁹

¹⁸ Brentano mentions the period of dogmatism in his “Plotinus”.

¹⁹ The original version of this chart was produced in Kasimir Twardowski’s “Franz Brentano and the History of Philosophy”, *Przetom* (Vienna), 11, August 3, 1895.

Ancient Philosophy

- a) Flourishing Phase 1: The period from Thales to Aristotle
- b) Decline Phase 2: Stoicism and Epicureanism
Phase 3: New Academy, Pyrrhonism, Eclecticism
Phase 4: Neo-Pythagoreanism, neo-Platonism

Medieval Philosophy

- a) Flourishing Phase 1: Latin Patristic and Scholastic Philosophy
(up to Thomas Aquinas)
- b) Decline Phase 2: Scotism
Phase 3: Nominalism (William of Ockham)
Phase 4: Mysticism, Lull, Nicholas of Cusa

Modern Philosophy

- a) Flourishing Phase 1: Francis Bacon, Descartes, Locke, Leibniz
- b) Decline Phase 2: French and German Rationalism
Phase 3: David Hume, Thomas Reid
Phase 4: The philosophy of the Scottish School
after Hume, including Berkeley, Kant and
German Idealism.

One constant element in each successive period is the phenomenon of *decline*. What Brentano calls mysticism or—following Hegel—‘absolute’ philosophy, is another constant element. Brentano’s account of mysticism reveals that for him it is the method used which determines the nature of a given philosophy. Mysticism is a reaction to scepticism. It tries to reestablish the authority of theoretical knowledge. But in the absence of any unprejudiced and natural empirical method for coming to grips with reality as it exists outside of and independently of the subject, mysticism dramatizes the significance of the subjective side of knowledge and yields only idiosyncratic results of no scientific value. It turns to unnatural methods, such as ‘vision’ or ‘inspiration’, which make any falsification in principle impossible. Philosophy ceases to be a science, and it comes to an end as a serious human enterprise.

3. Factors Influencing Brentano's Theory

As we have already seen, one of the most important sources of the Brentanian theory of the four phases was Auguste Comte. Comte was one of the best-known philosophical writers in Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century. He saw the history of philosophy as one part of a more general history of human thought, a history which falls into three main phases: 1. a 'theological' phase which lasted until the end of the thirteenth century, in which the most developed expressions of human thinking were realized in a theological framework; 2. a metaphysical phase, which lasted until the beginning of the nineteenth century, in which philosophy played the same role as had formerly been adopted by theology; and 3. a 'positive' or scientific phase, which was initiated through the rapid development of the modern natural sciences and in which, in Comte's eyes, the history of mankind entered the period of its final fulfilment.

The idea of the periodization of history is of course much older than Comte.²⁰ Yet we know that Comte's emphasis on the 'positive' or scientific phase in the history of mankind as far surpassing that of metaphysical or 'speculative' philosophy was especially important for the young Brentano. Brentano was influenced also by Comte's idea that the new phase in the history of mankind would coincide with a new, 'spiritual' form of religion

²⁰ Its origin lies in Christian historiography. Joachim a Fiore, to mention only one example, tried to reform the Roman Catholic Church in the thirteenth century by pointing out that the history of mankind can be divided into three phases. The first is that of the Old Testament or 'the Father'; the second is that of the New Testament, or 'Son'; and finally the third phase is that of the Holy Spirit, in which a new form of the old Christian religion was supposed to be established, by Joachim himself. These ideas remained always just under the surface in the European philosophical tradition, so much so that both Hegel's conception of history and Comte's idea of the phases can be seen as having been derived from them.

which would succeed Christianity. The 'positive religion' which Comte himself founded still exists in France. On the other hand, as Brentano notes, Comte's 'positivism' deals only with those features in the history of mankind which confirm tendencies to *positive* development or progress.

*The Periodization of the History of Philosophy:
Kant and his Followers*

Brentano's system must be seen as belonging to a period in Continental philosophy in which problems concerning the history of philosophy and its periodization played a central role in other quarters too. Important investigations were at this time being carried out by both French and German thinkers. The efforts of the former culminated in the work of Comte; as for the latter, the most influential product was the system created by Hegel in his various works on the philosophy of history.²¹ The idea that there are general or even evident laws that govern history in general as well as the history of philosophy was, to be sure, formulated by Hegel in an extremely radical fashion. But Hegel was not the first who tried to find some sort of 'reason in history'. We find similar passages already in the chapter entitled 'The History of Pure Reason' in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, where Kant distinguishes between a purely historical approach to the origin of philosophical schools and a more sophisticated understanding entailing a methodological view of the history of philosophy.²² This methodological view, Kant holds, would recognize three types of philosophy which reappear in regular fashion. The three types are, in succession, the dogmatic, the sceptic, and the critical. The main representative of the first, as Kant sees it, is Christian Wolff. The main representative of the second is Hume. Un-

²¹ See for instance Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975.

²² See B 880-884.

derstandably, Kant considers himself the main representative of the third, critical type of thinking. In another of his writings, Kant is even more explicit, asserting that 'this chronological order is grounded in the human faculty of knowledge.'²³

Note that Kant is not clear whether his stages are to be considered as *a priori* forms of the history of philosophy or as merely historical periods that can be recognized empirically. In German philosophy during the first half of the nineteenth century, when a rich variety of works were written on the 'pure forms' that govern the history of philosophy, views of the first type were dominant. Such forms are held to be capable of being grasped in their essential nature without any investigation of the actual events of philosophical history. Thus Friedrich Ast argues in his *Outline of the History of Philosophy* of 1807 that the historian of philosophy has to consider the facts of the history of philosophy as facets of a single 'idea'. We find the same view in Johann Christian August Grohmann,²⁴ in Fichte,²⁵ in Schelling,²⁶ and especially in Hegel.

²³ Immanuel Kant: "Welche sind die Fortschritte, die die Metaphysik seit Leibnizens und Wolff's Zeiten in Deutschland gemacht hat?" (What Progress Has Metaphysics Made Since the Time of Leibniz and Wolf in Germany?), Königsberg, 1804, in *Werke* (Akademie-Ausgabe), VII, p. 264. Also quoted by Lutz Geldsetzer, *Die Philosophie der Philosophiegeschichte im 19. Jahrhundert* (The Philosophy of the History of Philosophy in the Nineteenth Century), Meisenheim am Glan: Verlag Anton Hain, 1968.

²⁴ See his *Über den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie* (On the Concept of the History of Philosophy), Wittenberg, 1797.

²⁵ See the article "Übersicht des Vorzüglichsten, was für die Geschichte der Philosophie seit 1780 geleistet worden" ("Overview of the Most Important Contributions to the History of Philosophy since 1780"), published anonymously in *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft teutscher Gelehrten*, 1795, vol. 4. Geldsetzer argues that this article was written by Fichte; see his *Die Philosophie der Philosophiegeschichte im 19. Jahrhundert*, p. 27.

²⁶ F. Schelling, *Abhandlung über die Frage ob eine Philosophie der Geschichte möglich sei* (Study of the Question Whether a History of Philosophy

As a successor to Kantian philosophy, only Hegel managed to create a school of younger philosophers who enthusiastically followed his ideas during the 1830s and 40s. By the end of the 1840s however, even the followers of Hegel (and especially the so-called 'Young Hegelians') had abandoned the ideas of their master. The reasons for the defection of such radical thinkers as Ludwig Feuerbach, a relentless critic of religion in general and of Christianity in particular, as well as Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, were both political and philosophical. Politically, neo-Hegelian radicalism was suppressed along with the revolutions in European cities in the late 1840s with which it was associated. Philosophically, the rapid development of the natural sciences led to the failure of Hegelianism not least in virtue of its logical defects and of its lack of empirical foundations.

The collapse of Hegelianism in Germany meant also that the history of philosophy came to be considered in a new way. A kind of radical turn was carried out by historians of philosophy, who now understood their task in terms of scientific research and reflection rather than in terms of the permutation of speculative constructions. The first of these scholars was Christian August Brandi,²⁷ who was followed, and overshadowed, by the most famous, empirically oriented, historians of philosophy in German scholarship in the nineteenth century:²⁸ Friedrich Ueberweg

is Possible), 1798.

²⁷ *Von dem Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie. Eine Einladungsschrift zu seinen an der Universität Berlin zu haltenden Vorlesungen* (On the Concept of the History of Philosophy. Invitation to the Author's Lectures at the University of Berlin), Copenhagen, 1815.

²⁸ The protestant German philosopher and theologian Friedrich Ernst Daniel Schleiermacher (1768-1834) is another interesting representative of the new, empirically oriented, trend. Schleiermacher attempted to ground the scientific investigation of historical facts of philosophy on the investigation of the special circumstances of the age, language, and the biography of the thinkers involved. Written and spoken words and propositions are to be interpreted on two grounds, both of which are indispensable; Schleiermacher

(1826-1871)²⁹ and Eduard Zeller (1814-1908).³⁰ Each of these thinkers investigated the facts of the history of philosophy empirically and systematically. Through their work, the influence of the idealist interpretation of Kantian philosophy came to an end. As we shall see, Brentano combined the new, empirical approach to history with the original Kantian thesis to the effect that there are rules which govern the history of philosophy.

The 'Catholic Principle'

Franz Brentano was not only a fervent prophet of scientific philosophy but also a Catholic priest. From our present point of view, therefore, it is important to consider those nineteenth-century works in our field which had their theoretical basis in Catholicism, for this involved a new sort of principle for the evaluation of developments in philosophy. According to the Catholic Church, Cartesian and post-Cartesian philosophy represented a deviation from that sound tradition of the Church which amounts to the adherence to the Aristotelian-Scholastic doctrines formulated by a chain of thinkers from Thomas Aquinas to Francesco Suarez. Kantian philosophy and German idealism as a whole were seen by the representatives of this Catholic *philoso-*

called the first 'divinatory' and meant by that a kind of empathy with the author; the second is that of grammatical and historical-cultural understanding. The latter cannot lead to a proper understanding of a given text without the former. Schleiermacher called his method of understanding 'hermeneutics' and became thereby the founder of a philosophical school which still exists today.

²⁹ *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie von Thales bis auf die Gegenwart* (Outline of the History of Philosophy from Thales to our Time), 1863.

³⁰ See his "Die Geschichte der alten Philosophie in den letztverflossenen 50 Jahren" ("The History of Philosophy During the Last 50 Years"), in *Jahrbücher der Gegenwart*, 1843.

phia perennis as having staged a revolt against the traditional doctrines and conceptions of authentic philosophy.

Among the historians of philosophy in Germany who based their interpretation precisely on this Catholic conception, C. J. M. M. Windischmann in his *Critical Considerations on the Fate of Philosophy in Modern Times, and on the Beginning of a New Age in Philosophy* insisted that modern philosophy in general, and German idealism in particular, was nothing other than a collection of false beliefs.³¹ Windischmann saw the philosophy of his day as amounting not merely to a period of decline in the history of philosophy, but to the very destruction of genuine philosophical values. Modern philosophy thus coincides with secularism, in Windischmann's view, and his 'Catholic principle' remained characteristic of a group of philosophers who were more or less associated with the Catholic Church—among whom we find Brentano's teacher Friedrich Adolf Trendelenburg as well as Franz Brentano himself.

Trendelenburg was responsible not only for the renewal of interest in Aristotle's philosophy on the part of the German philosophers of his day, but also for bringing about an almost unanimous rejection of Hegelian philosophy from the late 1840s onwards. As Trendelenburg argued, the main flaw in Hegel's philosophy was his rejection of the idea of an autonomous reality as something different from the sphere of thinking. Trendelenburg's emphasis on the notion of teleology and his ardently religious convictions as well as his radical rejection of Hegel had a great impact on the young Brentano, and indeed on Trendelenburg's other students, among whom we find Wilhelm Dilthey, Søren Kierkegaard, and even Karl Marx.³² Trendelenburg's personality

³¹ *Kritische Betrachtungen über die Schicksale der Philosophie in der neueren Zeit und den Eintritt einer neuen Epoche in derselben* (Critical Investigations Concerning the Fate of Philosophy in Our Time, and the Beginning of a New Age Therein), 1825.

³² In addition to Comte, there are also other French thinkers whose ideas

and thought was of crucial importance in Brentano's spiritual development³³ (Brentano described himself, seemingly literally, as Aristotle's 'most favored son'). It was due to Trendelenburg's influence that Aristotle became so important in Brentano's philosophy.

Brentano's conception of the four phases is thus clearly a product of his age. It was influenced by the Kantian conception of the three forms of philosophy and by the efforts of those who tried to replace the Kantian theory of ideal forms with the results of scientific investigation. Brentano shares with Kant the view that dogmatism and scepticism represent an imperfect state in the history of philosophy. They agree, too, that scepticism is a reaction to dogmatism—and in both accounts it is just such a reaction which lends to philosophy its dynamic aspect. With this, howev-

show a striking similarity with those of Brentano. Thus J. M. De Gérando, in a work published in 1809, offers a periodicization of the history of philosophy into five historical stages: 1. In the first, one tries to find the principles of reality in the nature of things. 2. In the second, the nature of the human mind is studied in a philosophical way. 3. In the third, illumination and ecstatic states of mind become important, and philosophy becomes the servant of religion. This is the period of mysticism and contemplative philosophies. 4. The fourth period is dominated by logical axioms. Instead of careful investigations, we have systems of propositions that are built up in a strictly logical manner. 5. In the fifth period, the main field of research is again the human mind, but from a different point of view: its processes and laws are studied with the method of the natural sciences; all the results of the previous stages are here summarized and recapitulated. Beside De Gérando's cyclic understanding of history, one can also mention Victor Cousin and Charles Renouvier. Both attempted to work out a system of periods in the history of philosophy, with the very important difference, however, that, instead of 'phases', they spoke of 'types'.

³³ Brentano was a student of Trendelenburg in Berlin in 1858–1859. He enthusiastically followed Trendelenburg's courses on Aristotle and shared his teacher's views on the desolate situation of contemporary philosophy. For more details concerning the relationship between Brentano and Trendelenburg, see Josef M. Werle, *Franz Brentano und die Zukunft der Philosophie*, Amsterdam-Atlanta: Rodopi, 1989, pp. 64 ff.

er, their agreement comes to an end. For Kant, the imperfect states of dogmatism and scepticism are corrected and fulfilled by the critical philosophy, i.e. by Kant's own system. For Brentano, as will by now be clear, the pattern is changed in that the fruitful, flourishing state of philosophy is represented in each cycle by a new primary phase (that of Aristotle, Scholasticism, etc.); the stages of dogmatism and scepticism represent declining periods in Brentano's eyes, as indeed does the phase of Kantian critical philosophy itself.

4. Problems in the Brentanian Theory

Brentano's "Four Phases of Philosophy" caused a great deal of controversy upon its publication, not least because, like some of his other writings, it raises a highly intriguing proposal without confronting certain stunning difficulties. This somewhat perplexing trait which was characteristic of Brentano also in other spheres of his life—may have been one reason why he himself did not care to publish many of the works which were already completed during his lifetime.³⁴

³⁴ Besides his doctoral dissertation and his Habilitationsschrift on Aristotle Brentano published only two books of greater importance. The first was his *Psychologie vom Empirischen Standpunkt* (1874), and the other was his rather short work on ethics (*Vom Ursprung sittlicher Erkenntnis*, 1889). Some of his lectures were published in booklet-form, and he published articles, mainly on current problems in philosophy and in education. But he never published for example the second volume of his *Psychologie*. Instead, he published an enlarged version of one of the chapters of his *Psychologie* under the title *Von der Klassifikation der psychischen Phänomene*, Leipzig: Duncker and Humblot, 1911). In his later years, Brentano accounted for this rather small number of publications by referring to the difficulties of proofreading (caused by his increasing blindness). (Cf. Werle, op. cit., p. 46.) Brentano's other works, lectures and papers were in part collected and edited by his disciples, Alfred Kastil and Oskar Kraus, and later by Franziska Mayer-Hillebrand. Many of his works are still available only in manuscript form.

Thus in her Introduction to *The Four Phases of Philosophy*, Franziska Mayer-Hillebrand mentions that Brentano's idea of recurring historical cycles was considered by many as untenable or at least strange. We read for instance in Wilhelm Windelband's *History of Philosophy* of 1907 that Brentano's attempt, however close it stands to Comte's theory of phases, was a 'complete failure'.³⁵ Windelband does not further justify this statement, yet it is not difficult to see the sorts of problems which he, as one of the foremost experts in the history of philosophy in his day, might have had with the Brentanian thesis.

Such problems might be summarized in a thesis to the effect that Brentano's doctrine of the four phases amounts to a crass oversimplification of the history of philosophy. Thus he assigns the 'rapidly progressing phase' in Greek philosophy to an age when various competing philosophical schools already existed and when even philosophers who are considered by Brentano as belonging to a phase of decline contributed to the positive development. Aristotle could not have worked out his philosophy without Plato. Yet, Plato is not even mentioned by Brentano in most of his descriptions of the schema, since Plato's personality, philosophical doctrines and the tradition originating with him would have disturbed the consistency of Brentano's theory. One could mention, too, that what Brentano calls 'mysticism' was present already in the first phase of classical Greek philosophy in the work of the Pythagoreans. Even if one can argue that, for example, by the time of Middle Platonism mystical elements had become more conspicuous than at any previous time, still it is clear that many of the early Pythagorean or Eleatic ideas do not fit well with Brentano's picture.

Such problems are raised also by Brentano's interpreters. Hugo Bergmann's article of 1965 became notorious for its claim that 'this alleged law [of the four phases] had devastating conse-

³⁵ *Lehrbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie*, Tübingen, 1907, p. 10.

quences for Brentano's school.'³⁶ Bergmann's criticism is grounded on the undeniable fact that the Brentanian schema seems not to apply to very many particular cases. Thus Bergmann rightly refuses to accept that the whole of post-Aristotelian philosophy until the end of neo-Platonism could be considered *en bloc* as a decline. Bergmann notes in particular that in Brentano's *Lectures on the History of Greek Philosophy* the Pythagoreans are assigned a place very late in the course of historical development: after the Sophists, after Socrates, and just before Plato. Bergmann mentions other difficulties too. But his conclusion goes beyond any summary of particular problems. According to Bergmann's final judgement, the most 'devastating consequence' of the Brentanian theory was that its application to the history of philosophy from Kant onwards made impossible any authentic 'dialogue' between Brentano's school and the non-Brentanian philosophers of the nineteenth century.³⁷

Eliam Campos argues in a similar way in his *Brentano's Criticism of Kant*.³⁸ Campos, too, mentions the factual inaccuracy of many of Brentano's statements, especially those which deal with the Sophists and with philosophical works belonging to the third declining periods, as completely without value and to be condemned outright. And one could cite also critical remarks regarding this matter on the part of authors like Etienne Gilson³⁹ or Wolfgang Stegmüller.⁴⁰

³⁶ See his article "Brentano on the History of Greek Philosophy", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 26/1, 1965. Franziska Mayer-Hillebrand quotes this sentence in her Introduction to the Felix Meiner edition of the *Vier Phasen*, pp. IX-X.

³⁷ Bergmann, op. cit., p. 96.

³⁸ *Die Kantkritik Brentanos* (Brentano's Criticism of Kant), Bonn: Bouvier Verlag Herbert Grundmann, 1979.

³⁹ See his "Franz Brentano's Interpretation of Mediaeval Philosophy", *Medieval Studies*, 1, 1939.

⁴⁰ Stegmüller is among the few who presented a detailed criticism of Brentano's philosophy, allowing himself to be misled either by Brentano's enthu-

How, then, can we maintain our view of the theoretical importance of the Brentanian schema?

5. How to Read Brentano

There are some who have evaluated Brentano's theory in a more sympathetic way. In Lutz Geldsetzer's book Brentano is viewed as part of a wider discussion on the history of philosophy in nineteenth-century Germany, and in fact many of Brentano's statements cannot be understood without taking into consideration the various trends in the historiography of philosophy to which Geldsetzer refers. Thus, Geldsetzer points out that the main reason why Brentano's conception of the history of philosophy found little positive echo in his time was the then prevailing view to the effect that history as such, and the history of philosophy in particular, must be considered in terms of a perpetual positive development. This progressivist view originated in Kant's criticism of the metaphysics of his day, as well as in Hegel's idea of the predetermined character of history, but it was reinforced by the more general, and more plausible, view of the continuous progress of the natural sciences.

Geldsetzer would have us understand Brentano's theory as a part of the Romantic movement which opposed the ideal of development by substituting the notion of decadence or decline. Geldsetzer has a point, but only to the degree that Romantic views are in harmony with Catholicism in emphasizing the falsity of modern values. However, Brentano should be seen as embracing not Romanticism as such but above all the 'Catholic princi-

siastic followers, or by those critics who—like Bergmann—seem not to be able to grasp what is undeniably valuable in the Brentanian schema. See the introductory section on Brentano in Wolfgang Stegmüller's *Hauptströmungen der Gegenwartsphilosophie*, vol. I, Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1989. English translation as: *Main Currents in Contemporary German, British and American Philosophy*, Dordrecht: Reidel, 1970.

ple'. He is at the same time someone who is convinced that the theoretical sciences, including philosophy itself, are tending towards an ultimate fulfillment which will at the same time constitute a happy future for mankind. This teleological motif in Brentano's theory is incontrovertible; yet it is equally important to see that his main concern was to find an equilibrium between teleological optimism on the one hand and cultural decadence on the other. Brentano emphasized at one and the same time both the importance of the *Verfallszeiten* (the declining periods in the history of philosophy) and the thesis that the history of philosophy as a whole displays a continuous development (in the sense that each ascending phase attains a level somewhat higher than its predecessor).

Geldsetzer's approach nevertheless offers more help in gaining access to the core of the Brentanian theory than do most writings on this matter. Certainly one can acknowledge the superficiality of Brentano's treatment of particular cases, and Mayer-Hillebrand is right when she emphasizes that Brentano's primary goal was not that of detailed accuracy, but rather that of formulating a general law.⁴¹ Bergmann's talk about 'devastating consequences', does not in fact cancel the validity of the theory itself, especially if this theory is considered not as a first-order description of the historical facts but rather as a heuristic method by which one can throw new light on facts too long familiar.

Paul Weingartner mentions in his "Introduction" to the collection of Brentano's essays entitled *On the Future of Philosophy*⁴² that already the fact that Brentano had the courage to oppose most of the popular philosophies of his day is itself of merit. Hugo Bergmann's thesis—that the standpoint propounded in the "Four Phases" prevented dialogue with the proponents of other conceptions of philosophy—seems to be too weak to undermine

⁴¹ See her Introduction to Brentano's *Die vier Phasen der Philosophie*, p. XI.

⁴² *Über die Zukunft der Philosophie*, Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1968.

Brentano's theory. Bergmann writes as if dialogue were an essential factor in building up a philosophical system and as if important thinkers, such as Kant or Wittgenstein, had shown greater willingness to discuss their own special problems with representatives of rival philosophies. Moreover, Brentano was clearly not a dilettante in philosophical matters. He was a leading expert in many fields of the history of philosophy, including Aristotle and Scholasticism, as well as a primary figure in the history of such disciplines as psychology and ethics. One should not forget, either, that it is remarkable how many of the problems and positive solutions in phenomenology and analytic philosophy in our own day were raised for the first time by Brentano.⁴³ One should add, too, that some of the concerns central to modern cognitive science, above all the concept of intentionality, originate in Brentano's work.⁴⁴

6. Ideal Types: The Theory Behind the Schema

⁴³ See Klaus Hedwig's Introduction to Brentano's *Geschichte der mittelalterlichen Philosophie*, Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1980, p. IX. See also Barry Smith, *Austrian Philosophy: The Legacy of Franz Brentano*, Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1994.

⁴⁴ John Searle, *The Rediscovery of the Mind*, Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1982; see also M. Davis and G. W. Humphreys (eds.), *Consciousness*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1993.

Josef M. Werle has argued that “the Brentanian conception of the history of philosophy is an ideal type model of explanation with all the strengths and weaknesses which go together therewith.”⁴⁵ The concept of the ‘ideal type’ as a technical term was created by the sociologist Max Weber. According to Weber, the ideal type of a sociological or historical phenomenon is that structure which the given phenomenon would possess in a situation which was, counterfactually, exempt from external or alien factors and influences. In reality, of course, such a situation is never realized, yet in Weber’s eyes the understanding of such phenomena must always involve some form of ideal type on the basis of which description, analysis and classification become possible.

The ideal type, as Weber formulates it in his *Economy and Society*,⁴⁶ is a methodological and auxiliary concept. Thus, to work with ideal types in a description is to use a form of explanation which may be termed ‘ideal type explanation’. Its essential function is not to describe a group of phenomena, but rather to offer a conceptual means for understanding, for cutting through the detail. An ideal type is never realized in concrete circumstances; it is, precisely, ‘ideal’ and should be judged on this basis.

If, now, we consider Brentano’s schema as one applying the Weberian ideal type explanation, then we can resolve the puzzle as to whether the phases in the Brentanian schema are to be considered as the result of a strictly historical inquiry or as yielded by a deductive method based on some *a priori* principle. In fact, according to the ideal type explanation, the Brentanian conception is neither merely empirical nor *a priori*. It is designed to tell us something about the nature of philosophy as projected on a

⁴⁵ Werle, *Franz Brentano und die Zukunft der Philosophie*, p. 91.

⁴⁶ Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft. Grundriss der verstehenden Soziologie*, Tübingen, 1922. English translation as: *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, New York: Bedminster Press, 1968.

historical scale, but it concerns historical processes only in the form these processes would take if no external elements were to influence them. Since there is a complex mass of external influences that make it difficult to grasp the structure of the historical process in any pure form, the ideal type serves as an aid to orientation with respect to certain crucial general features of the course of historical development.

'Decline' in the History of Philosophy

According to Brentano, the history of philosophy should not be seen as a contingent manifold of idiosyncratic 'systems', but rather as a process which has its own typical regularities. The first of these regularities is based on the rather plausible assumption that the 'history of philosophy', or the history of some given branches in the history of philosophy, will be composed of phases in which a certain orientation and method, certain types of subject-matter, and a certain style in exposing philosophical ideas will be recognized as typical. Secondly, it is similarly plausible to assume that such phases in the history of philosophy will stand to each other in an interactive relationship, a relationship in which the connections between the particular phases are also coordinated by typical regularities. For the Enlightenment thinkers, the most important typical characteristic of the history of philosophy is what they saw as its irresistible development towards a happy fulfillment. For Nietzsche, on the other hand, the history of philosophy is one of irresistible decline.

Brentano, as already seen, did not lack the conception of a recurring development of philosophy. He held that periods of decline are in many cases followed by periods of renewal of the genuine philosophical interest. He considered, for instance, the collapse of Hegelianism and the rise of empirical methods in the historical sciences and in psychology as forming on such juncture of decline and renewal. At the same time, he was convinced that in the distant future a unified science will lead, under the auspices of a renewed philosophy, to the goals formulated origi-

nally by Christianity: that is, to some form of a final fulfillment of mankind.

Still, in Brentano's schema of the four phases, the main emphasis is not on the future renewal of philosophy, but rather on 'decline'. Brentano lived after all in a time when the witches' brew of visionary ideas concerning the future of science and philosophy, ideas which originated mainly in idealistic philosophy, was still influential. As we saw, Brentano opposed Kantianism in many ways. He saw it as the main enemy of the newly emerging empirical method in philosophy. It is mainly because of the widespread popularity of philosophies of Kantian origin that Brentano emphasized the fact that there are declining periods in the history of philosophy.

The second salient feature in the Brentanian theory concerns the relationship between the successive individual phases in the history of philosophy. As Brentano remarks, one prevailing understanding sees the development of philosophy as proceeding in every case through a process of *reaction to previous phases*. For Brentano, however, the game of challenge and answer is characteristic only of the periods of decline. Philosophy in its primeval form is neither based on the criticism of other philosophical theories, nor is it subject to such criticism. Certainly it would be difficult to find any philosophical theory or system that does not in some way react to earlier developments and is itself not subject to the challenges of critics. However, Brentano's point is that the criticism of other philosophies is not an essential constituent of philosophy in its original form. Rivalry begins, rather, when philosophy has already lost its original, pristine status so that it has become crucial to successive philosophical theories that they are justified and defended through the criticism of other theories.

Another general feature of Brentano's schema is the role of what he calls the 'theoretical attitude'. Already in "The Four Phases of Philosophy" we find that one of the conditions which make sound philosophy possible is 'a lively and pure theoretical interest', and in many of Brentano's other writings, too, for example in his *Lectures on the History of Greek Philosophy*, we

find similar statements.⁴⁷ ‘Theoretical interest’, for Brentano, means, first of all, an openness to nature, to natural facts and laws. It also means an attitude which makes the cognitive subject able to order and to systematize knowledge of empirical particulars with insights concerning general laws, in such a way as to establish that sort of systematic whole we call science.⁴⁸

One further general feature captured in the Brentanian schema concerns the *methods* employed by philosophers at different stages in the developmental cycle. Indeed, Brentano’s theory as a whole can be understood as a thesis on the methodology of philosophy that is formulated in the context of the history of philosophy. For what eminently characterizes philosophy in its original form, as Brentano sees it, is precisely its ‘scientific method’. The scientific method, however, is a natural outcome of the theoretical attitude. According to Brentano, if we possess the theoretical attitude, then we are in principle capable of recognizing and applying the scientific method. On the other hand, our capability of acquiring the theoretical attitude is in many ways determined by the prevalent structures of the given phase of philosophy in which we work. In the phases of decline, it is obviously more difficult to recognize and apply the pristine method of philosophy than it is in the first phase of development. The determinism expressed in the Brentanian schema is thus not absolute; according to Brentano, just as we are always free to recognize and choose the right attitude in our moral life, so are we capable of finding the right way in our philosophy as well.⁴⁹

All in all, the general structure of decline seems to be the strongest characteristic of the Brentanian schema. Still, since the fate of philosophy, in Brentano’s view, is closely connected to

⁴⁷ Op. cit., p.7.

⁴⁸ Werle too emphasizes the importance of the theoretical attitude in Brentano’s schema. See Werle, op. cit., p. 52.

⁴⁹ Franz Brentano, *Vom Ursprung sittlicher Erkenntnis*, Leipzig: Felix Meiner, 1934, Paragraph 31.

the method we apply, it is worth considering Brentano's own philosophical method in detail.

Brentano's Empiricism and the Method of Philosophy

Brentano describes his own philosophical methodology as 'empirical', and this is the expression he uses in the title of his *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*. Empiricism he sees as one of the most important features of a sound philosophical method. What he means by this is not that empirical facts, considered in themselves, are decisive in solving philosophical problems. Rather, he means that in order to reach philosophical results one must be open to the rich variety of empirical facts, and that without this attitude of openness it is impossible to remain faithful to reality. Reality, however, is not merely the totality of 'sensations' and 'ideas' as it was for the British empiricists. Indeed, Brentano rejected the starting point of traditional sensation-oriented empiricism as being too narrow.

A factor that makes Brentano's empiricism distinctive turns on his use of what Roderick Chisholm, applying an expression of W. E. Johnson, termed 'intuitive induction'. As Chisholm writes, referring to a footnote in Brentano's *On the Origin of Our Knowledge of Right and Wrong*:

In describing how we come to know, for example, that knowledge as such is worthy of love, [Brentano] says that when we apprehend ourselves as *correctly loving* a given act of knowledge, the goodness of *all* acts of knowing 'becomes obvious at a single stroke, so to speak, and without induction from a particular case'⁵⁰. ... It is 'induction' because it does proceed from a particu-

⁵⁰ Franz Brentano, *Vom Ursprung sittlicher Erkenntnis*, op. cit., footnote 33.

lar case, but ‘intuitive’ since its conclusion is not ‘problematic’, but is necessary or, as Brentano would put it, ‘apodictic’.⁵¹

Brentano gives a much more detailed account of the same phenomenon in the introduction to his *Lectures on the History of Greek Philosophy*.⁵² Here he offers a complex definition of knowledge according to which knowledge in the proper sense of the word is knowledge of necessity.⁵³ We can know the necessity of something in either of two senses. First, in the sense that we know that there necessarily *is* something—as for example in the case of a particular perception (that the perception implies as a matter of necessity that there is something which is its content). Second, in the sense that we know necessarily *the reason why* there is something—as when we reflect on the cognitive and logical conditions which explain a particular perception. Knowledge of the second sort is of a higher quality than the first; it is knowledge in the proper sense of the word. Brentano uses the expression ‘insight’ (*Einsicht*), or ‘insight into the very reason of something’, of the sort which we enjoy, for example, when we find a perspicuous geometrical proof.⁵⁴

Note however that, for Brentano, insight takes place always in a specific context of particular contents of sense-perception. Even if necessary and general laws are discovered through insight, these laws are in every case exemplified in some empirical context, and they do not belong, as in Kant for instance, to a special *a priori* realm. What makes Brentano an empiricist is not so much his understanding of how knowledge is acquired as his insistence that there is no subjective *a priori* sphere through

⁵¹ See Roderick Chisholm, “Brentano’s Descriptive Psychology”, in *Akten des XVI. internationalen Kongresses der Philosophie*, Vienna, 1968.

⁵² *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der griechischen Philosophie*, op. cit., p. 13.

⁵³ Op. cit., pp. 4-6.

⁵⁴ ‘Einsicht aus dem Grunde’, op. cit., p. 5.

which, or by virtue of the epistemological priority of which, knowledge would be gained.

Returning now to the problem of the history of philosophy, we can better understand Brentano's history of phases as being also a history of the methods applied in each phase. The genuine method of philosophy, the method of 'intuitive induction' or 'insight' is found only in the first phase, the phase of flourishing. In the subsequent phases we witness a gradual disappearance of the genuine method. 'Insight' is replaced first by mere rational argumentation, which lacks genuine insight into 'the very reason of something' and is shorn of its reference to reality. This degradation of the genuine philosophical method leads, via skepticism, to the prevalence of procedures which justify themselves by reference to 'mystical powers'.

Thus, we have a fairly full picture of Brentano's theory of the phases. The theory is dependent on many views which were predominant in Brentano's day. Yet it has a peculiar characteristic which is its emphasis on the fact of decline in the history of philosophy. Even if there are many problematic facets of Brentano's theory, still, we have also seen that it is possible to view it in a more favorable light. It is possible, in other words, to consider his theory as an ideal type explanation which serves as a methodical tool in understanding the coherence of various developments in certain branches of the history of philosophy, branches which would otherwise appear rather disconnected.

PART TWO: BRENTANO'S THEORY APPLIED

1. The Four Phases of Post-Brentanian Philosophy

We shall now try to show how, and to what measure, it is possible to apply Brentano's ideal type explanation to the history of philosophy in the period after Brentano himself.

The first problem we face in this context is the following. As is clear from what we have said of Brentano's theory, the first period (from Thales to Plotinus and his followers) lasted about 800 years. The second period (from Augustine, or from early Scholasticism, to late-Medieval mysticism) endured for more than 600 years. The third period (from Francis Bacon to German Idealism) took some 300 years to unfold itself from initial flourishing to ultimate collapse. Can we then speak of a 'period' in the history of philosophy, *after* Brentano, that is in less than one century? Is it possible to make out all *four phases* in such a short period?

As to the first question, it seems that it is not the length of a given period which is decisive in Brentano's eyes. Rather, it is the *historical structure* which constitutes a period, the structure of one flourishing phase followed by three declining phases. As we shall see, such a structure can be found in the history of philosophy after Brentano.

As to the second question, it is easy to see that in each period of the Brentanian schema, the lengths of the phases vary from some 300 hundred years (from the Milesian School up to the death of Aristotle) to phases which are present almost simultaneously (Scotism and Ockhamism in the thirteenth century; Hume and Reid were near-contemporaries of Kant). That is, the

Brentanian phase-structure can be recognized even in a relatively short period, perhaps even in a single century.

The second difficulty concerns the complex character of the history of philosophy since Brentano. For in using this phrase we may be referring either to Anglo-American analytic philosophy or to recent Continental traditions. A quick survey of the differences between Continental and Anglo-American philosophy shows however that, for all their interdependence at various points, we cannot consider these traditions as parts of any unified whole.

Anglo-American Philosophy

Moreover, given the above definition of a 'period', the history of Anglo-American analytic philosophy cannot be considered as constituting a closed period in the Brentanian sense. Even if there are some signs on the basis of which we might surmise that the Brentanian schema will soon be recognizable as a whole in Anglo-American analytic philosophy, we are not yet at the point of being able to determine exactly those developments which might constitute this schema. Bertrand Russell already saw evidence of decline in the later Wittgensteinian philosophy and Georg Henrik von Wright rightly notes that analytic philosophy has in the last two decades lost its clear form and has become eclectic.⁵⁵ Von Wright argues, moreover, that analytic philosophy must be considered as a typical product of the twentieth century, and that it has reached a point at which only an encompassing new theory of philosophy can show the way for further developments.⁵⁶ We can indeed see that recent analytic philosophy

⁵⁵ Georg Henrik von Wright, "Analytic Philosophy", in M. Georg and Ulla Wessels (eds.), *ANALYOMEN I. Perspectives in Analytical Philosophy*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 1993.

⁵⁶ The notion that a new, encompassing philosophical (or scientific) theory is needed can also be found in such authors as Thomas Nagel, Hector-Neri Castañeda, Roger Penrose and some of the representatives of analytic philos-

is marked by a number of the features pointed to by Brentano as features of decline, above all a practical orientation, exemplified in the new predominance of forms of American pragmatism and in the explosive growth of the various branches of applied philosophy. Many analytic philosophers are, moreover, adopting ideas borrowed from Continental philosophy as in the case of Donald Davidson or Richard Rorty, or they are seeking an encompassing theory of human consciousness by analyzing and evaluating the results of the cognitive sciences, as is manifest from the works of John Searle. In fact it seems that the publication of works on the problem of consciousness, and especially self-consciousness, from the late 1960s onwards by such authors as Roderick Chisholm, Hector-Neri Castañeda or Elizabeth Anscombe, has opened a new period in Anglo-American analytic philosophy in which philosophy cooperates closely with empirical science, with the cognitive sciences in particular, and in which traditional philosophical questions have been formulated in a new and scientific fashion.⁵⁷ These are not obvious symptoms of decline, and thus only future developments will show the extent to which the four phase schema can in fact be applied to the recent history of Anglo-American analytic philosophy.

Continental Philosophy

Continental philosophy, on the other hand, seems to be much closer to constituting a closed period in the Brentanian sense. A sign of this is seen in the fact that the dominant philosophies on the Continent—phenomenology, hermeneutics, ‘post-structuralism’, ‘deconstructionism’, ‘postmodernism’ and so on—seem to have lost contact with recent developments in natural sciences, and some of them have abandoned entirely any scientific concep-

ophy of religion, such as Richard Swinburne.

⁵⁷ See for instance the Introduction to M. Davies and G. W. Humphreys (eds.), *Consciousness*, op. cit.

tion of philosophy. As Manfred Frank suggests, contemporary Continental philosophy is not capable of producing new philosophical theories which might influence or determine the development of the empirical sciences.⁵⁸ Even such philosophical avenues as the theory of communicative discourse of Jürgen Habermas or Karl-Otto Apel—which have proven to be quite influential in certain circles even in English-speaking countries—have not, in the end, shown themselves capable of breaking out of the circle of a kind of new hermeneutics. Moreover, the work of Habermas *et al.* belongs rather to the field of the social sciences than to the realm of philosophy as traditionally conceived.

Yet even those writers in Continental philosophy who would advance themselves as the legitimate heirs of traditional philosophical problems—such as Emmanuel Levinas or Jacques Derrida—make use of a style and vocabulary in their writings which demonstrates that they have entirely abandoned the aspiration, characteristic of philosophy in the past, to theoretical relevance. What they offer, rather, is a kind of intellectual literature. That is, they attempt to establish a new literary genre, a development of the modern tradition of literary fiction, in which fragments of gnomic philosophy, story-telling, literary analysis, mystical poetry, gossip and entertaining talk is roughly synthesized into an eclectic whole. This form of Continental philosophy, which likes so much to declare in rousing tones that we have reached the ‘end of philosophy’, has certainly no direct relevance to scientific investigations.⁵⁹

Recent Continental philosophy exemplifies very well the Brentanian schema; that is, it manifests all the four phases of philosophy. By demonstrating this, we shall show that the appli-

⁵⁸ See his introduction to Manfred Frank (ed.), *Analytische Theorien des Selbstbewußtseins*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1994.

⁵⁹ Barry Smith, “The New European Philosophy”, in Barry Smith (ed.), *Philosophy and Political Change in Eastern Europe*, La Salle: The Hegeler Institute, 1993, 165-170 and 191-192.

cation of the Brentanian ideal type explanation to new sorts of cases is in principle possible. We shall try to analyze recent developments within Continental philosophy, bearing in mind that it was Brentano himself who stood at the beginning of these developments. We are, of course, aware of the fact that Brentano did not consider himself to be the first in a new, flourishing phase in the history of philosophy. As Kevin Mulligan shows, and as we have also indicated above, Brentano saw himself as a representative of a philosophical program originating with Trendelenburg.⁶⁰ In retrospect it is clear however that the decisive changes in Continental philosophy were due, above all, to the thought and personality of Franz Brentano.

The Period After Brentano

Recall that we are dealing in ideal types, with all the simplification that this involves. And when dealing with the ideas of major philosophers such as Brentano, Husserl, or Heidegger, we will of course find different and conflicting tendencies, some of which come to full fruition only in the work of their followers. Bearing this in mind, we shall argue that Brentano's own philosophy, together with that of his early followers, especially Stumpf, Marty, Husserl, Meinong, Ehrenfels and Twardowski, represents the first, which is to say the flourishing, phase of genuine scientific philosophy in the development of contemporary Continental philosophy.⁶¹ The later Husserl, with his often dog-

⁶⁰ See Kevin Mulligan, "Sur l'histoire de l'approche analytique de l'histoire de la philosophie: De Bolzano et Brentano à Bennett", in C. Chauviré (ed.), *Philosophie analytique et Histoire de la philosophie*, Paris: Vrin, 1995.

⁶¹ See Barry Smith, *Austrian Philosophy*, op. cit. Note that there are many connecting points between early positivism (Mach, Avenarius) on the one hand, and Brentano and the early Husserl on the other hand. Note, too, that if Carnap was a contemporary of, say, Heidegger, this would present no difficulty to those who would see Carnap as belonging to the first period and

matic and abstruse analyses, far removed from the ground-level of real-world experience, then represents the second phase, in which the theoretical interest is shorn of its reference to reality. This gives rise to a sceptical reaction and a turn to a practical orientation in the Heidegger of *Being and Time*. Finally, there comes the mystical revolution, first in Heidegger's own later philosophy, and then among his successors all the way down to Derrida and his various ilk.

2. The Phase of Ascending Development

Brentano

The authors of this essay are both admirers of Brentano's philosophy, and thus it is understandable that they would wish to see Brentano as representing the first, ascending phase in the current cycle of philosophical development. A view of Brentano's work along these lines can be defended in substantive fashion, however, in two ways. First, by pointing out the positive elements in Brentano's philosophy, and second, by pointing to the rich legacy of Brentano's thinking which has marked almost the entire course of subsequent philosophy.

As for the first, we need only mention Brentano's concept of intentionality. Although the term is of Scholastic origin, in Brentano's understanding it came to signify that special character of 'directedness' or 'aboutness' by which mental entities can be distinguished from physical ones.

It is important to see that Brentano's philosophy embodies precisely the theoretical attitude which he himself recognized as the main characteristic of the first phase of philosophy. This theoretical attitude is to be seen, above all, in the fact that Brentano emphasizes the importance of empirical investigations in psy-

Heidegger to the third. For, as we have mentioned, Kant, Reid and Hume were also contemporaries, yet still to be assigned to different phases.

chology. As we have seen, his understanding of ‘empiricism’ implies the rigorous analysis of empirical facts and of the categories they and their elements instantiate. At the same time, Brentano often shows a mistrust of the idea that experiments should be assigned a decisive role in psychology. One of his arguments against the overemphasis on psychological experiments, an argument subsequently reiterated by figures as diverse as Merleau-Ponty and J. J. Gibson, turns on the thesis that it is impossible to recognize the true character of mental phenomena if we examine them only as they exist under artificial (laboratory) circumstances. Another argument rests on the demonstration of the pointlessness of experiment in the absence of any prior (pre-experimental) categorial scheme in terms of which experimentally testable hypotheses could be coherently formulated. This indispensable categorial scheme, according to Brentano, is to be established via what he called the method of inner perception, which he considered to be the only secure way of grasping the inherent nature and intrinsic structure of psychological entities in a genuinely scientific fashion. It is this which makes Brentano’s discoveries so interesting, where the experimental observations of many of his contemporaries—such as Fechner or Herbart or even Wundt—have sunk into forgetfulness.

A further important field which was rediscovered and explored by Brentano in unparalleled manner is what can be termed analytical ontology. In contrast to Frege and other philosophers in the analytic tradition, Brentano bases his investigations in ontology not on work in the philosophy of logic and language, but in psychology.⁶² Here Brentano anticipates contemporary work on the ‘metaphysics of mind’ inspired by research in cognitive science. Ontology or metaphysics, for Brentano, is concerned with providing a full typology of beings, including, in Brentano’s early works, universals, propositions, possible and impossible objects, concepts, inexistence, past and future things,

⁶² See Smith, *Austrian Philosophy*, pp. 58 ff.

and even absolute being. Questions concerning the relationship between parts and wholes (for instance between mental entities and their elements) also belong to Brentanian general ontology.⁶³ Brentano's work in this field not only inspired Stumpf and Husserl,⁶⁴ but also continues to exert an important influence, directly or indirectly, on thinkers such as Roderick Chisholm. As Chisholm has shown, Brentano even anticipated detailed theories of contemporary cognitive metaphysics, including for example the so-called 'adverbial' account of mental phenomena.

As for the wider influence of Brentano on contemporary philosophy, we can say that without Brentano the whole phenomenological movement could not have come into being. Brentano was the teacher of Husserl, whom he influenced in a measure which cannot be overestimated. Through Husserl, Brentano became the spiritual grandfather, as it were, of Adolf Reinach, Roman Ingarden and Jan Patočka, and there are of course others, too, who bear the mark of the influence of Brentano through their indebtedness to Husserl's work, including Sartre and others in French philosophy.⁶⁵

One must add, too, the influence of Brentano on contemporary psychology.⁶⁶ As was shown for the first time by Edward

⁶³ See Wilhelm Baumgartner's article on Brentano in Hans Burkhardt and Barry Smith (eds.), *Handbook of Metaphysics and Ontology*, Munich: Philosophia, 1991.

⁶⁴ See Husserl's third Logical Investigation "On the Theory of Part and Whole". On the influence of this work, see Barry Smith (ed.), *Parts and Moments: Studies in Logic and Formal Ontology*, Munich: Philosophia, 1982.

⁶⁵ See Roman Ingarden, *Der Streit um die Existenz der Welt*, vols. 1-3, Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1964-1974 (English translation of parts of vol. 1, *Times and Modes of Being*, Springfield, Ill.: Charles Thomas, 1964); Roderick Chisholm, *Person and Object: A Metaphysical Study*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1976; and also Smith (ed.), *Parts and Moments*, op. cit. Jan Patočka, *Die natürliche Welt als philosophisches Problem*, Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1990. For the relationship between Patočka and Brentano, see Balázs M. Mezei, "Brentano, Cartesianism, and Jan Patočka", *Brentano-Studien* 7, 1995, 69-87.

⁶⁶ Concerning Brentano's decisive influence, via Stumpf and Ehrenfels, on

Bradford Titchener, the two main figures who have had a lasting influence on contemporary psychology are Brentano and Wundt.⁶⁷ Titchener describes Brentano as the principal representative and progenitor of cognitive psychology, or as he termed it, of a psychology ‘based first of all on logical argument’. He saw Wundt as someone who was committed to experiments and to the mere description of experiments. Titchener mentions, too, the merit Brentano earned by the reintroduction of the term ‘intentionality’ to designate what Titchener significantly refers to as ‘immanent objectivity’. As a result of the fact that his students obtained posts in different universities in the Habsburg Empire, Brentano exerted influence in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Slovenia and elsewhere.⁶⁸ T. G. Masaryk, the founder and first President of Czechoslovakia, was himself a student of Brentano and invested great efforts in support of work on Brentano’s phi-

the Gestalt movement in psychology, both in Berlin and in Italy, see Barry Smith (ed.), *Foundations of Gestalt Theory*, Munich: Philosophia, 1988. See also John MacNamara and Geert-Jan Boudewijnse, “Brentano’s Influence on Ehrenfels’s Theory of Perceptual Gestalts”, *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 25, 1995, 401-418.

⁶⁷ Edward Bradford Titchener, *Systematic Psychology. Prolegomena*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1929. See also E. G. Boring, *A History of Experimental Psychology*, New York: Appleton, Century, Crofts, 1950.

⁶⁸ For the influence of Brentano on Polish thought, see H. Skolimowski, *Polish Analytical Philosophy*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967; and J. Wolenski, *Logic and Philosophy in the Lvov-Warsaw School*, Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1989. For Brentanism in Italy, see Roberto Poli, “Brentano in Italy”, *Brentano-Studien* 7 (in press). For Brentanism in Slovenia, Hungary and the Czech Lands, see the same number of *Brentano-Studien*. See also Balázs M. Mezei, “The Brentano-School and Hungarian Philosophy”, *Existencia* (Budapest), 1-4, 1993-94, 647-657. And also Barry Smith, “The Neurath-Haller Thesis: Austria and the Rise of Scientific Philosophy”, in K. Lehrer and J. C. Marek (eds.), *Austrian Philosophy Past and Present. Essays in Honor of Rudolf Haller* (Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science), Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer, 1996, 1-20.

losophy in the 1930s, at a time when even Austria was no longer sympathetic to the pursuit of scientific philosophy.

Husserl

Husserl's *Logical Investigations*, and especially its first volume, the "Prolegomena to Pure Logic", is generally considered to be one of the most important contributions to twentieth-century philosophy.⁶⁹ The central topic of Husserl's 'Prolegomena' is that of psychologism, a term which was not invented by Husserl but which was first clearly defined and definitively refuted by him in this work. According to Husserl, psychologism in its simplest form consists in the claim that the origin of logical entities and logical laws is to be located in the domain studied by psychology.⁷⁰ Psychology would then have the task of discovering such laws. Psychology is however itself a science, and thus in the practice of psychology logical laws are already applied. Clearly, on pain of circularity, the laws of logic cannot be discovered through the investigations of a science in which these same laws are themselves applied. Logical laws must, rather, be prior to the specific laws investigated by the specific sciences. They are laws pertaining to the relations between logical entities such as truth and falsehood, verification and falsification, statement and statement-form, inference and theory. As Husserl conceives the matter in the "Prolegomena", these logical entities have a kind of ideal or logical existence. The science of logic is thus, in echo of Bolzano, the fundamental *science of science*, or the *science of theory itself*.⁷¹

Husserl shows step by step why psychology cannot serve as a foundation of logic and why there is a need for a theory of the

⁶⁹ Edmund Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen*, Prolegomena. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer 1993. See also *Husserliana*, vol. XVIII.

⁷⁰ Op. cit., § 17.

⁷¹ Op. cit., § 66.

possible forms, the essential characteristics, and the logical structures of scientific theories as such, a theory that would be prior to all other sciences. Husserl terms such a theory ‘pure logic’ and attributes to it three main tasks.⁷² First, pure logic determines the basic categories or forms of meanings, of objects, and of combinations thereof. Second, pure logic determines the laws governing such forms—such as the laws of syllogistic reasoning. Third, pure logic determine a typology of possible theory-forms and of possible manifold-forms—the fields or systems of objects towards which such theory-forms would be directed. All actual theories and their actual subject-matters would then be material instantiations of such theory-forms and manifold-forms.⁷³

As he puts it, any scientific theory necessarily belongs to a certain theoretical type. The characteristics of each such type can be established once and for all by formal methods analogous to those of mathematics. The knowledge thus gained—for instance concerning the logical structure through which a theory is built up—can then be applied in principle to an unlimited number of cases. The importance of the theory of theories or pure logic is thus in the first place methodological. As Husserl formulates it, pure logic is of crucial importance for any ‘sound theoretical research’.⁷⁴

Husserl is here at one with Brentano in viewing the theoretical attitude, which as we saw is one of the most important characteristics of each ascending period in philosophy, as the attitude indispensable for philosophy and for science.⁷⁵ In Husserl’s view, the theoretical attitude involves adoption of the standpoint of a neutral observer who is at least in principle capable of considering things objectively, as they are in themselves. Husserl’s concept of the theoretical attitude implies also the application of

⁷² Op. cit., § 67.

⁷³ Op. cit., §§ 68, 69.

⁷⁴ Op. cit., p. 249.

⁷⁵ Op. cit., § 71.

logical rigour and of clarity in formulating the results of theoretical reflections.

It is noteworthy, however, that Husserl fulfils only one of the two Brentanian requirements for the sort of sound philosophy that is characteristic of the first, ascending phase. The second requirement is the use of a method that is essentially appropriate to nature. For it seems that, for Husserl, this requirement must lead to a standpoint of psychologism. If philosophy is about nature, or if philosophy requires a method that is somehow true to nature, then philosophy becomes once more a science of facts. As such, however, it is not capable of fulfilling the functions of that 'pure' theoretical science which is, in Husserl's eyes, a prerequisite of all other scientific investigation.

Here we see a point in Husserl which led him to his later phenomenological views. In the "Prolegomena" Husserl stressed that one of the main tasks of pure theory is to determine what he calls the 'logical' (in a later version of the text: 'phenomenological') origin of basic concepts. This origin is made accessible to the philosopher via what Husserl later termed 'insight into essences'.⁷⁶ By exaggerating the ideal character of his theory of theories, and by overemphasizing the gap between it and the natural sciences, Husserl prepared the way for his later 'transcendental phenomenological turn', in which no feature that is appropriate to nature has a place.

3. The First Phase of Decline: The Later Husserl

Husserl's method in the *Logical Investigations* is eidetic: it allows us, for example, to grasp the meaning 'four' when we are faced with a group of four material things, via a kind of interpreting abstraction. It allows us also to grasp the essential forms of things and their various formal relations, above all the relations of part-whole and dependence. By setting forth the general laws

⁷⁶ Op. cit., § 67.

governing these relations, Husserl introduces the new discipline of ‘formal ontology’.

Husserl clearly recognized that the final message of the *Logical Investigations* remains ambiguous. On the one hand he insisted that pure logic was a universal theory of the basic logical forms, a theory reached by means of eidetic analysis. On the other hand, he still held on to the idea of philosophy as ‘descriptive psychology’—as a discipline which, in its original form, belongs to the empirical sciences. Husserl’s problem arose from the fact that a natural-scientific discipline such as descriptive psychology does not seem to be capable of offering a comprehensive theoretical description of the natural sciences as a whole. One possible solution to this problem was proposed by Paul Natorp in his 1901 article on Husserl: this consists in embracing a neo-Kantian aprioristic transcendentalism, i.e. in accepting the thesis that the theoretical science which is to ground the axioms of the natural sciences must be based on evident principles governing a ‘transcendental’ realm that is knowable *a priori*.⁷⁷ Husserl, however, adopted another solution: he endeavored to work out a special method by means of which both descriptive psychology as a natural science on the one hand, and epistemological realism in the sense of the radical refusal of Kantian and neo-Kantian apriorism on the other hand, could be embraced side-by-side by relating both to a single realm, which he called, perhaps infelicitously, the phenomenal. This new phenomenal realm, hitherto only glimpsed by philosophers and now for the first time able to be properly explored, was then to become the object of a new universal science, the science of ‘phenomenology’.

⁷⁷ See Paul Natorp, “Zur Frage der logischen Methode” (The Question of Logical Method), *Kant-Studien* 6, 1901. Reprinted in Hermann Noack (ed.), *Husserl*, Darmstadt, 1973.

Husserl's Move to Phenomenology

How is Husserl's move to phenomenology as universal science to be evaluated in the light of the Brentanian schema of the four phases? According to Brentano, the first phase of decline is characterized by the weakening or distortion of scientific interest on the one hand, and by a turn to practical motives on the other.⁷⁸

As for the latter, Husserl insisted throughout his life on the importance of the theoretical approach in philosophy, so much so that anybody who did not follow him in his understanding of this approach he considered a captive of the naturalistic fallacy, in other words of the view that logical laws can be derived from psychological facts. It must be mentioned, however that the turn to practicality means for Brentano the adoption of a strong ethical emphasis in philosophy, and Husserl's phenomenology, especially in its later phases, was indeed marked by precisely such an interest: the adoption of the theoretical attitude is, he says, the moral obligation of the philosopher, and indeed Husserl saw himself with his phenomenology as fulfilling a divine 'mission'.⁷⁹

The idea of the 'phenomenological reduction', introduced by Husserl around 1907,⁸⁰ shows clearly that Husserlian philosophy in fact contains features that are characteristic of Brentano's first declining phase. The phenomenological reduction is, as Husserl says, a matter of 'suspending' the 'natural attitude' in which we normally live—of withholding belief in the objects toward which our mental acts are directed in order to examine the functioning and the intentionality of these acts themselves. This 'suspension' is applied also to scientific acts. By universalizing the reduction,

⁷⁸ See below, p. 86.

⁷⁹ See Karl Schuhmann's Introduction to Husserl's *Briefwechsel* (Husserliana, vol. 10), Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1994, p. 7.

⁸⁰ In his "The Idea of Phenomenology", 1907 (*Die Idee der Phänomenologie. Fünf Vorlesungen*, Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1958.)

however, Husserl runs into serious contradictions, which he himself discovered later in the second book of his *Ideas*⁸¹ and in his *Crisis of European Sciences*.⁸² For it is not clear how, according to his later view, it is possible for us to be both empirical and concrete subjects on the one hand, and to carry out a universal suspension of reality on the other. It seems that, by thus universalizing the scope of his reduction,⁸³ Husserl can no longer meet one of the requirements of the ascending phase: the requirement of a method that is appropriate to nature. Through the universal reduction, the Husserlian methodology loses all contact with reality, that is, with the very world about which phenomenology was to yield true propositions. But if empirical reality is lost, then the propositions of phenomenology lose an ultimate context of reference and testability.⁸⁴

A further point concerns the weakening or distortion of the scientific interest in the first phase of decline. As we have already seen, Husserl insisted on a kind of theoretical interest in his phenomenology. He saw phenomenology as a means of transforming philosophy into a strict science, a means of providing philosophy with a rigorous methodological foundation and a clear and well-established terminology. It seems, however, that there is at least one sense in which we can say that Husserl in his

⁸¹ *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie*, Book II, Husserliana III/1. See Barry Smith, "Common Sense", in B. Smith and D. W. Smith (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Husserl*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995, 394-436.

⁸² *Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und transzendente Phänomenologie*, Husserliana VI.

⁸³ Interestingly, those disciples of Husserl who did not follow him in adopting transcendental idealism warned him of the danger of such a standpoint, a warning which Husserl however refused to accept. See for instance Max Scheler's *Vom Ewigen im Menschen* (On the Eternal in Man), Berlin: Der Neue Geist, 1933, p. 101.

⁸⁴ Karl Schuhmann, and Barry Smith, "Against Idealism: Johannes Daubert vs. Husserl's *Ideas I*", *Review of Metaphysics* 39, 1985, 763-93.

phenomenology precisely abandoned the properly scientific method. As Husserl's distinguished pupil Roman Ingarden reports,⁸⁵ the reason why he could not accept the Husserlian results and discoveries presented in the first volume of the *Ideas* was that Husserl's arguments were rather sketchy, brief, and lacking in sufficiently thorough and precise analyses of empirical facts and observations.

We can agree with Ingarden that Husserl's later writings cannot be compared in logical rigour and detailed character either to those of Brentano or to his own earlier writings. This might sound strange, since even the later Husserl is far more scientific in orientation and far more rigorous and logically coherent than some of his followers, as becomes immediately clear if we compare his writings with those of the Heideggerian school. Yet we can still say that Husserl tended more and more to rely on generalities and methodological proposals rather than on the honest toil of detailed philosophical description, argument and analysis. Husserl had earlier, following the proposal of the Austrian scientist Ernst Mach, talked of philosophy 'from below', as opposed to a Hegelian philosophy of metaphysical speculations 'from above'. In his new understanding we find in contrast a kind of general metaphysics not exempt from traces of mysticism. Husserl's new, 'phenomenological' turn to the traditional problems in philosophy was accompanied, too, by the adoption of a transcendental position of the sort similar to what was propounded by Natorp and others in the very Kantian tradition he had earlier rejected.

These tendencies of Husserl's later thought prepared the way for Heidegger. We can say that, in turning to the traditional questions of philosophy—above all to the problem of 'transcendental consciousness'—Husserl in a sense chose to embrace a historically inherited problematic in preference to his own, theoretical-

⁸⁵ See Roman Ingarden, "What is New in Husserl's Crisis?", in *Analecta Husserliana*, 2, 1972.

ly defined, problems.⁸⁶ Heidegger, too, followed a similar path: while raising the ‘question of being’—one of the central questions of Aristotelianism⁸⁷—he turned to a type of historically determined philosophy, and thereby renounced the essence of the original Husserlian phenomenology as the unprejudiced and presuppositionless investigation of reality.

4. The Second Phase of Decline: The Early Heidegger

The second phase of decline is, Brentano says, characterized by a ‘spiritual revolution’ that is intended to overcome the results of the first phase of decline. As we shall see, we find this feature in full-blown form in Heidegger’s early philosophy. Since, however, the ‘revolutionary’ character of Heidegger’s early thought is not so obvious to many of his readers, we shall need to consider this point more thoroughly.

Recall that Brentano gave two versions of the content of the first phase of decline. One version speaks of the turn to practicality; the other speaks of the theoretical interest becoming dogmatic. ‘Dogmatic’, here, means that the openness to empirical reality and to experience in general—which is characteristic of the ascending phase—is replaced by a system of imposed ideas (or ‘prejudices’ in Brentano’s terms) which serves as a determining factor when it comes to interpreting experience. Dogmatism, then, is a form of idealism or apriorism, which according to Brentano excludes the possibility of sound philosophical activity. In this sense, we can consider Husserl’s later philosophy ‘dogmatic’.

⁸⁶ See Karl Schuhmann, “Husserl’s Concept of Philosophy”, *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, 21, 1990, 274-83.

⁸⁷ One should remember that the most decisive philosophical experience of the young Heidegger was his reading of Brentano’s dissertation *Von der mannigfachen Bedeutung des Seienden nach Aristoteles*, Freiburg: Herder, 1862. English translation: *On the Several Senses of Being in Aristotle*, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1975.

Heidegger's Revolt

This feature of dogmatism in Husserl was the main target of Heidegger's early, 'revolutionary' thought. Against Husserl's view that the starting point of philosophy is consciousness, Heidegger insisted that the starting point of philosophy must be reality as a whole, or, in his own terminology, 'being'.⁸⁸ Heidegger's reasoning was as follows. Even if we accept, with the idealists, that being is in some sense contained in consciousness in general (so that things exist only as intentional objects), we can still formulate the question concerning the being of consciousness itself. If even the being of consciousness is that of a mere intentional object, then we seem to be locked in a vicious circle. The question, therefore, which must come first, is the one concerning *being*. We must ask what being is, or, in Heidegger's words, we must repeat the 'ancient question of being'.

Heidegger thus believes himself to have shown that the central point in the later Husserl's philosophy was in fact dogmatic, and Heidegger's reaction to Husserlian philosophy can be seen as a 'revolt' against the latter's dogmatism. But Heidegger's philosophy was 'revolutionary' in another sense too. Already in

⁸⁸ Heidegger's standpoint is well documented in his interpretation of the term 'phenomenology' in *Being and Time* (Chapter 2, section C). As Heidegger rightly notes, the term comes from the Greek '*legein ta phainomena*', that is 'talking about the phenomena (about the things observed)'. With a curious switch, however, Heidegger substitutes the Greek verb '*legein*' (talking about something, giving an account of something) with another verb, '*apophainesthai*' (displaying something of one's own, declaring one's opinion) as if '*legein*' and '*apophainesthai*' had the same meaning. The difference between their meanings is however this: '*legein ta phainomena*' implies that there is a subject that gives an account of certain objects; '*apophainesthai ta phainomena*' on the other hand means: to let the things appear as they are in themselves, a meaning which more or less eliminates the role of the rational subject. Heidegger's fault is not that he interprets the former expression by means of the latter, but rather that he suggests that the two meanings are the same.

Being and Time, Heidegger sought to develop a comprehensive critique of the entire history of Western thought. He considered his programme of ‘the destruction of the history of ontology’ as an important means by which to develop his own ontology of ‘being’.⁸⁹ By the ‘destruction of the history of ontology’ Heidegger meant a thorough criticism of the most characteristic tenets and presuppositions of Western philosophical thought.

Heidegger saw himself, then, as a ‘revolutionary’ thinker whose thought contained not only a devastating criticism of past philosophies but also implied a new, revolutionary approach to the problems of philosophy resting on the unique importance of the understanding of being.⁹⁰

Recall that even Heidegger does not speak about being as such as the proper thematic object of his ontology. Although he raises the famous Leibnizian question—‘Why is there something at all rather than nothing?’—he does not think that his task is to oppose a traditional or objectivist ontology to Husserl’s transcendental-idealist position. As he expresses the matter in several places and in various forms, being as such is not accessible to philosophy. We find being, rather, in the concrete being of man. Man is not vouchsafed any kind of access to a common realm of being except via the analysis of the concrete human being himself.

Heidegger’s Subjectivism

As Hans-Georg Gadamer rightly states in his book *Truth and Method*, 1960, Heidegger’s point to the effect that being as such is inaccessible to philosophy contains no essential theoretical

⁸⁹ *Being and Time*, especially § 6.

⁹⁰ Heidegger’s revolutionary attitude, however, originated in the ideal of a ‘conservative revolution’, see Hans Albert, *Kritik der reinen Hermeneutik*, Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1994, p. 33.

novelty as compared to the Husserlian position.⁹¹ Like Husserl, Heidegger too tries to ground in the subjective realm a philosophy which would claim general validity. Husserl, however, makes several attempts to understand this subjective realm in terms of general features knowable *a priori*. He holds that his 'phenomenological' method can yield knowledge of the essential forms of consciousness as such. Heidegger, on the other hand, denies that there is an essential form of consciousness distinct from its realization in the physical, social and historical existence of man. Philosophy must therefore concentrate on the concrete human being, on his emotional life, on his body as well as on his sociological situation and historical status. The problem is that it is not clear how it is possible to concentrate on the concrete human being as the object of one's philosophizing and at the same time make general propositions which might claim objective validity. How, in other words, is Heidegger to make the step from the particular to the general?

The project of *Being and Time* is the return to that basic structure in everyday reality in which conceptual thinking is originally rooted. The task of a new ontology, according to Heidegger, consists precisely in the discovery of the origin of conceptual thinking from the point of view of everyday reality. Heidegger thus introduced such key terms into his philosophy as, for instance, *Sorge* ('care') and *Sein zum Tode* ('being toward death', 'being rendered to die'), terms which had before *Being and Time* played no central role in philosophy.⁹² Such terms, Heidegger held, are much better able to express philosophical notions than terms borrowed, for instance, from the neo-Kantian or positivist philosophy of his time.

⁹¹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode* (Truth and Method), Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1960. 2, I, 3, b.

⁹² There are of course well-known exceptions such as Kierkegaard and Nietzsche and it is no accident that both of these thinkers strongly influenced Heidegger's philosophy.

The problem, however, is that this very search for the everyday origin of conceptual thinking must be carried out in an abstract language. True, Heidegger's concepts are different from those of traditional philosophy. Instead of human being, he says 'Dasein'; instead of talking of historical and cultural determining factors in human existence he speaks of 'Befindlichkeit' (roughly: 'situatedness'). Yet it would be difficult to deny that Heidegger operates with abstract concepts in *Being and Time* and that these concepts are understood and applied as such in his work. An important question, never raised in *Being and Time*, is not how he arrives at such abstract concepts, but rather how conceptual thinking is to be eliminated. For when referring to 'everydayness', that is to a common everyday experience in men, as the origin of our conceptual thinking, Heidegger already presupposes that it is possible to think and do philosophy other than through an abstract conceptual framework. This presupposition is, however, never made explicit and it is never clarified in his works. Indeed, in his early writings such supposedly non-abstract terms as *Sorge* or *Befindlichkeit* are themselves explained by means of abstract notions. Thus he explains *Sorge* ('care') as meaning 'the formal and existential unity of the ontological structures of human existence taken in its entirety'.⁹³

What we see, then, is that, while Heidegger stood opposed to Husserlian idealism, he was not able to establish any other basis, either real or mental, by which the general validity of propositions making up his new doctrine could be secured. Indeed, in understanding the task of ontology in terms of the analysis of concrete human existence, he expresses a deep-rooted scepticism towards the very idea of a common realm of general validities. Interestingly enough, it was Husserl who referred to the notion of scepticism more often and more emphatically than did Heidegger. Husserl's scepticism, however, was methodological, and served as a means to the end of gaining evident knowledge.

⁹³ See *Being and Time*, § 41.

Husserl bases his concept of methodological scepticism on the method of reduction, that is on reducing the contents of consciousness to their essential forms. Heidegger in contrast seems nowhere to recognize the importance of such a methodological clarification of philosophy. His mistrust of traditional conceptual thinking betrays however that his philosophy is indeed sceptical in character.

The New Definition of 'Phenomenon'

Heidegger's mistrust is illustrated in his proposed redefinition of the term 'phenomenon' which had originally been one of the most important expressions in Husserl's phenomenology.⁹⁴ For Husserl, a phenomenon is a sense-datum reduced to its essential core, as we might say, in such a way that it is capable of disclosing an elementary constituent of reality, a constituent which can be evidently grasped. Phenomenology in Husserl's view is a systematic description of such phenomena.

Heidegger, in contrast, distinguishes between 'phenomenon' as signifying 'something which shows itself' (in accordance with the Greek meaning of the word, in German: *Phänomen*), and 'phenomenon' as signifying a kind of token or sign of something which in itself remains in a certain way hidden. Another label for this second kind of phenomenon (in German: *Erscheinung*) is 'symptom'. A symptom provides us with the evidence of disease, that is, it indicates the presence of some kind of disorder, but it does not make clear the very nature of the problem. Normally, Heidegger argues, we do not have 'phenomena' in the first sense of the term in our everyday experience, but only *Erscheinungen*, that is, only signs or indications of hidden contents. We need to have special methods in order to explore this hidden content of *Erscheinungen*. Accordingly, in Heidegger's eyes, the task of phenomenology as the 'science of the phenomena' is not a sort

⁹⁴ See *Being and Time*, § 7a.

of description and explanation of evidently given data, but rather a kind of complex, tricky procedure, also termed 'hermeneutics', which has the task of exposing what is concealed by complex textures of *Erscheinungen* in *Being and Time*. Heidegger called this procedure *Daseinsanalytik*: it is a procedure of philosophical 'analysis' of the concrete human subject.

In his new definition of the term 'phenomenon' Heidegger expressed his deep-rooted skepticism concerning the method and the epistemological principles of Husserlian phenomenology. Heidegger thereby initiated a departure from that scientific attitude which had characterized the work of the most important Continental European thinkers since Brentano, and he thereby instituted the rift between 'Continental' and 'analytic' philosophies that has been so fateful for philosophy, even in English-speaking countries, in recent years.

Heidegger as a Philosopher of Decline

In sum, then, we can say that the main features of the second declining phase of the Brentanian schema can indeed be found in the philosophy of the early Heidegger. Heidegger's thought gives rise to a calling into question of the very possibility of theoretical philosophy itself—an attitude which was then embraced by representatives of the French existentialist school such as Jean-Paul Sartre.

It is precisely in the philosophy of the early Heidegger that the notion of a theoretical attitude, indispensable for philosophy according to both Brentano and Husserl, completely disappears. Heidegger's philosophy of existence claims to be a theory of being, that is, an ontology. At the same time, however, Heidegger fails to provide any clear account of the relevant new understanding of theory. By eliminating the notion of the Husserlian 'phenomenon' and by not replacing Husserl's phenomenological method with any other methodological instrument, the early Heidegger has succeeded in crafting a

philosophy that comes dangerously close to what Brentano called a work of philosopher's fancy.

5. The Third Phase of Decline: The Later Heidegger

As we have seen, one of the central elements of the Brentanian schema was that of *challenge*. It is this element which is the primary motor of the four phase cycle. The early philosophy of Heidegger is very often seen precisely as a reaction to Husserlian phenomenology, and as has been well documented in Theodore Kisiel's *The Genesis of Being and Time*, Heidegger, even while pretending to be a follower of Husserl, depicted him in private letters as his main enemy, as that against which he was fighting.

As is also well known, it was Heidegger himself who most strongly criticized his own earlier thinking as presented in *Being and Time*. In this early work his task had been to revise and reform Western philosophy, which had, he thought, gone astray at a very early stage. His project was based on the conviction that the whole tradition of Western philosophy needed to be rejected, or was at least in need of radical reform. *Being and Time* however remained a fragment, and its second part has never been published. As Heidegger himself reported on several occasions, the reason for this was that he became less and less convinced that his original idea of a universal reform of philosophy could in fact be carried out in the way he had intended.

The 'Ontological Difference'

Heidegger's self-criticism was grounded in the idea of what he called the 'ontological difference'.⁹⁵ Heidegger distinguished between two types of being: concrete existing being (*Seiendes*),

⁹⁵ See especially Heidegger's *Identität und Differenz*, Pfullingen: Neske, 1957.

and being as such (*Sein*), a distinction that is rooted in the Scholastic distinction between 'being in its own right' (*esse a se*, that is: God) and 'being depending on other beings' (*esse ab alio*). Heidegger however substituted for the notion of 'being in its own right' his own undefined notion of 'being as such' (*Sein*), thus seeking to eliminate any theistic connotations from the presentation of his views. This 'being as such' remains, in Kantian fashion, somehow mysterious and never accessible to the human mind, while being in the concrete sense, that is: man, is susceptible to a specifically Heideggerian sort of 'existential analysis'.

Already in *Being and Time* Heidegger held that the main task of philosophy is to provide a genuine description of being as such. Concrete beings and being as such are, he held, to be considered in radically different terms, since being as such cannot be considered a genus.⁹⁶ A genus differs from a species precisely in what it does not contain. Thus *cat* is distinct from *mammal* in virtue of dogs, whales, kangaroos and so on. Being, however, is contained in every being, even in the being or existence of genera and species themselves. Being, therefore, cannot itself be a genus. And since concepts are always of genera, being as such cannot be grasped by concepts. Being lies outside conceptual thinking.

In Heidegger's later view, the history of philosophy is a process of perpetual decline.⁹⁷ Being as such was more correctly grasped by philosophers at the beginning of this process than it was by later thinkers. During the history of philosophy being as such has been progressively forgotten. Whenever philosophers tried to speak of being as such they made the mistake of substituting for the concept of being as such the concept of some par-

⁹⁶ See Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 33, pp. 36 ff.

⁹⁷ See for instance his interview in *Der Spiegel*, September 22, 1966. The text can be found also in G. Neske and E. Kettering (eds.), *Antwort. Martin Heidegger im Gespräch*, Pfullingen: Neske, 1988.

ticular being (for example the concept of substance).⁹⁸ As Heidegger intermittently suggested, it is due to this mistake, and perhaps to other factors in human nature itself, that being as such has never been grasped in the necessary or proper way.

Interestingly, Heidegger later considered his own earlier writings as expressions of this very same progressive decline. In his writings prepared after the 'turn' in his thinking (the '*Kehre*') in the 1930s, he refused the possibility of any conceptual ontology of the traditional sort. Indeed, he considered contemporary 'technical civilization', both that of Nazi Germany and of the Soviet Union, as well as that of the United States, to be a consequence of traditional philosophical thinking.

He characterized technical progress as an expression of man's striving for mastery over nature, and thereby as an attempt to overcome man's primeval status as a being subdued by the elemental forces of nature. Primevally, Heidegger held, man had greater opportunity to realize an authentic life, a life which is not directed against the forces of nature but rather accepts the necessity of being subdued by these forces. In Heidegger's view, the contraposed type of thinking led, first, to the birth of the natural sciences, and then to 'technical civilization'. The latter, above all, is seen as having 'totalized' man's rule over nature to a degree which endangers human existence. Inasmuch as modern science failed to fulfill its original task—the task of helping mankind—by contributing to terrible wars and to what Heidegger sees as the despoiling of the planet, philosophy too has lost its legitimacy as a benefactor of mankind. Philosophy has reached its fitting end in modern technical civilization.

Yet being was not *ab ovo* closed to the philosopher; it is still possible to find access to it, yet in a way completely different from that of traditional European philosophy—including Heidegger's own early thought. Being opens itself up to us in the genuine sense primarily in the most natural and essential uses of

⁹⁸ See his *Identität und Differenz*, op. cit.

language, which occur in the best lyric poetry. Heidegger's own poetic experiments have not, though, proved unreservedly successful.⁹⁹

The Concept of 'Dasein'

As we have already seen, Heidegger attempted to ground his ontology on the concept of the concrete human being or of what he called *Dasein*. In an analysis presented in paragraph 29 of *Being and Time* he tried to define the most important characteristic trait of human existence. He proposed two possibilities in terms of 'understanding' or *Verstehen*, and 'situatedness' or *Befindlichkeit*. He investigated and rejected the thesis that the nature of human existence is determined by understanding, that is the thesis that human being is a 'rational animal'. Rather, he held, human existence is determined by *Befindlichkeit*, a term which is based on the verb '(*sich*) *finden*'.

As so often happens, Heidegger here was playing with the various meanings of the term. '*Sich finden*' has the following important meanings: 1. to be situated; 2. to be located; 3. to be in

⁹⁹ See the poems included in his collected works (*Gesamtausgabe*), vol. 13, *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens* (Pieces from Experiences of Thought), Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1983. Here is a piece of Heidegger's poetry, translated by Albert Hofstadter, from A. Hofstadter (ed.), *Martin Heidegger. Poetry, Language, Thought*, New York: Harper and Row, 1971, p. 14:

Forests spread
Brooks plunge
Rocks persist
Mist defuses
Meadows wait
Springs well
Winds dwell
Blessing muses.

some state; 4. to feel (when somebody finds himself to be in a certain mental or physical state or disposition). Human existence is now 'situated' in the sense that it is located in space and time, and is determined by physical and other circumstances. Playing with the other meanings, however, Heidegger suggested also that a certain mental or psychic attitude (a disposition, mood, spirit) is one of the most important features of human existence. Heidegger thus rejects the traditional definition of human being as *animal rationale* in favour of allusions to a basic mood or disposition as well as to physical, social and historical determining factors in a way which amounts to a radically new interpretation of the essence of man. As he himself wrote: 'Understanding is always disposed.'¹⁰⁰ This radically new interpretation still remains unexplained in Heidegger's writings however. What we have, instead, is a series of gnomic texts in which the philosophical content, wrapped up in literary formulations of fluctuating quality, is difficult to grasp.

The Destruction of Ontology

Another important element in Heidegger's thought—his notion of the 'destruction' of the tradition of ontology introduced in *Being and Time*—is further radicalized in his idea of the 'transcending of ontology' developed in the 1960s. By the 'destruction of ontology' Heidegger meant a kind of phenomenological analysis of the work of earlier philosophers of such a sort that it would enable us to grasp the experience underlying each.¹⁰¹ By the 'transcending of ontology', however, he meant a radical refusal of all the philosophical traditions of the past. As he formulated it, the main purpose of his non-ontological philosophy is to express what remains unexpressed in the works belonging to the

¹⁰⁰ 'Verstehen ist immer gestimmtes.' *Being and Time*, § 31.

¹⁰¹ Op. cit., § 6, p. 22.

tradition of ontology.¹⁰² While in his earlier writings Heidegger tended to devalue the importance of the history of philosophy—in many ways echoing Husserlian criticisms—his later attitude is based on the idea that the history of philosophy has already come to an end. If we speak about ‘philosophy’ we necessarily allude to one segment of the history of philosophy; if, however, we want to address problems that are not raised during the history of philosophy, then we are no longer ‘philosophizing’ but doing something else, something that, according to Heidegger, cannot be expressed in rational terms but only in terms related to poetry or mysticism.¹⁰³

Heidegger and Nazism

As Brentano writes, in the final phase of the decline of philosophy, people try to reach truths otherwise not capable of being grasped by means of mystical insights and other irrational powers.¹⁰⁴ If one thinks of Heidegger’s connections to Nazism and to Nazi ideology, even the term ‘pathological’ seems to be applicable to parts of his philosophy. As is well known, Heidegger associated himself with the National Socialist Party in Germany during the early 1930s and remained a member of this party until the end of the war. In his famous speech as the first Nazi rector of the University of Freiburg in April 1933, he described the main purposes of university studies in terms clearly designed to appeal to his Nazi audience. He defined, for instance, the ‘spiritual world’ of a nation as consisting in its rootedness in ‘the blood and the soil’, rather than in terms of science and reason.¹⁰⁵ He spoke, too, of the important role of ‘leading’ individu-

¹⁰² See for instance Heidegger’s *Wegmarken*, Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1967, p. 194.

¹⁰³ See Heidegger’s *Identität und Differenz*, op. cit., p. 61.

¹⁰⁴ See below, p. 86.

¹⁰⁵ See his *Die Selbstbehauptung der deutschen Universität* (The Self-

als and of their 'leading' the nation as a whole on the path to historical destiny. Perhaps even more importantly, he renounces 'academic freedom' as being not appropriate to the 'concept of freedom of German students'.¹⁰⁶

Even if Heidegger's romantic and somewhat Wagnerian-sounding rhetoric was insufficiently Nazi for the Ministry of Education at that time, and even if, in consequence, he had to give up his position as rector very soon after this famous speech, still, Heidegger's close connection over several years to such an extreme ideology throws a suspicious light on his philosophy. In his notes¹⁰⁷ to his *Rektoratsrede* of 1933 he tried retrospectively to explain his behavior as Nazi rector, which he claims proves quite clearly that his role at the university was not in itself negative or harmful; the words in his speech, however, show very well the connections between Nazism and the mysticism and irrationalism of the Heideggerian philosophy.

Heidegger's followers of course attribute an exceptional kind of philosophical method to their master, by which they hold that it was somehow possible for him to break free of such associations. Heidegger himself speaks in this connection as if the ultimate 'method' in philosophy was a kind of passivity, a passivity which would enable one to experience the 'revelation' of being as such.¹⁰⁸ It must be clearly seen that the undoubtedly interesting and inspiring religious and poetic implications of this, as of many other Heideggerian notions, cannot conceal from us the

Assertion of the German University), Breslau: Korn Verlag, 1933.

¹⁰⁶ It must be noted however that Heidegger's emphasis on 'leadership' and on the person of the leader in politics was a commonplace in political literature in his time. One finds these ideas in the works of such authors as for instance Max Weber (see Weber's *Politik als Beruf*), who otherwise did not share Heidegger's political commitments.

¹⁰⁷ *Das Rektorat. Erstveröffentlichung einer Niederschrift aus dem Jahre 1945* (The Rectorship), edited and published by Hermann Heidegger, 1983.

¹⁰⁸ See Heidegger's "Zeit und Sein", in his *Zur Sache des Denkens* (Concerning the Problems of Thinking), Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1969.

inherent philosophical difficulties in his thinking. For Heidegger seems to neglect precisely those standards of philosophical argument which alone could lead in justified fashion either to an acceptance or to a refusal of his assertions.

By not applying, or even accepting, traditional philosophical standards and methods, Heidegger's thought comes very close to what Brentano described in his fourth phase also in this respect: that it brings philosophy in proximity to what is usually termed 'literature'. Already in *Being and Time*, Heidegger's language is very often poetically ambiguous. We can agree with Stegmüller's criticism that Heidegger's philosophy is in many ways a kind of 'word-painting' (*Wortmalerei*).¹⁰⁹ In his later works, Heidegger becomes more and more determined to deprive the style and language of his writing of all traces of its earlier tone of logical rigour.¹¹⁰

Heidegger's fashion of philosophizing has in this respect influenced leading schools in contemporary Continental philosophical life. Authors as important as Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Karl Rahner, Jan Patočka and Emmanuel Levinas, as well as Jacques Derrida, have inherited central notions of the Heideggerian philosophy and applied the 'method' they found therein.

The 'End of Philosophy'

One of these Heideggerian notions, that of the 'end of philosophy', has become a fashionable term in the works of a number of contemporary writers. They may be right, in the sense that philosophy of a Heideggerian kind has in fact reached its end. This is exactly what we are trying to show in this essay. They are, on the other hand, obviously wrong insofar as they declare

¹⁰⁹ *Hauptströmungen der Gegenwartsphilosophie*, vol. I, Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1989, p. 177.

¹¹⁰ This is not true, however, of his university lectures, in which he continued to adhere to the old standards.

the end of the very possibility of scientific philosophy, of philosophy in the proper sense. This declaration is nullified by the fact that even in Continental Europe, and especially in Austrian, German, Polish, Czech and Hungarian philosophy, we can today observe a revival of the scientific orientation and also a lessening of the Heideggerian influence.¹¹¹ Those who pronounce the end of philosophy, moreover, presuppose that there is a present in which it becomes somehow possible to grasp the totality of the history of philosophy and in which it is theoretically possible to evaluate the different accounts of the history of philosophy. This point however implies what they want to deny, that is the continuity of philosophy itself.

6. After Heidegger: The Thought of Emmanuel Levinas

To illustrate the consequences of Heideggerian philosophy, we shall briefly consider one example: the thought of Emmanuel Levinas. We could have chosen other philosophers, such as Jean-Paul Sartre; or we could have chosen Derrida and his various contemporaries. Sartre, however, seems to belong rather to the second phase of decline, embodying a transitional form between politically oriented, practical philosophy and an understanding of philosophy as literature. Derrida, on the other hand, belongs decisively to the fourth phase and he seems to have given up any claim to be taken seriously at all. Instead, he tries to shock his

¹¹¹ In Germany, however, we find even now a historical approach to philosophy, described by Sidney Hook as follows: "For a philosopher, to be without historical antecedents in Germany is to be without standing, a stranger in the realm of mind. Everyone is intent on showing that his views are not only compatible with, but complete and bring to full flower, the thought of his predecessors. Consequently, the study of the history of philosophy and its reformulation is the chief activity of academic philosophers. The problems of philosophy tend to be presented in terms of their history, not in terms of their logic." Sidney Hook, "A Personal Impression of Contemporary German Philosophy", *The Journal of Philosophy* 27, 1930, 141-160.

readers by embracing ever more preposterous forms of literary and political exhibitionism.

Levinas, in contrast, is a philosopher who received his first, decisive philosophical impressions precisely from Husserl himself. Levinas' writings are meant to be taken seriously; there are arguments in them, and there is, above all, a philosophical idea, the idea of infinity, which lends Levinas' views a certain unity. Moreover, Levinas' writings, like those of Heidegger, undoubtedly possess many literary and religious merits. By analyzing his philosophy, we can indeed see how a philosophical tradition, that of Husserl, initiated in terms of a rigorous scientific endeavour, could become so intimately connected to literature and 'revelation'. This means, first of all, a change in the values which the philosopher is striving to realize.

In his very first work, published in 1930 under the title *The Theory of Intuition in the Phenomenology of Husserl*,¹¹² Levinas offers a remarkable interpretation of Husserlian philosophy. He argues that what he calls Husserl's 'immanentism' and the Heideggerian philosophy of being can be reduced to a single common denominator: Husserl's phenomenology is an ontology no less than Heidegger's philosophy is. Where, however, Heidegger considers being in its static character, Husserl's approach, especially in his analyses of time, is concentrated on a dynamic understanding of being. These claims are defended systematically and with a certain rigour.

Only later did Levinas, under the influence of the later Heidegger, begin to develop a language which was gradually removed from the attempt to fulfil these original ideals of system and rigour. In his *Totality and Infinity* of 1961¹¹³ we have a problem and a language which reflect this Heideggerian influence

¹¹² Emmanuel Levinas, *Théorie de l'intuition dans la phénoménologie de Husserl*, Paris, 1930.

¹¹³ *Totalité et infinie: Essai sur l'extériorité* (Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority), The Hague, 1961.

and which evoked rationalistic criticism even on the part of such critics as the young Jacques Derrida.¹¹⁴ True, in the change of interest and orientation on Levinas' part, particular and tragic causes—the murder of his relatives by the Nazis—played a crucial role. This circumstance, however, does not change the fact that the more he became influenced by the later Heidegger, the closer he came to a philosophy which exhibits all the basic characteristics of the Brentanian fourth phase, the phase of absolute decline.

The Notion of 'Infinity'

Levinas understands Western philosophy as an attempt to grasp in conceptual terms a realm which cannot be so grasped: the realm of infinity. The term 'infinity' (*apeiron*) had been introduced into Western philosophy by Aristotle who, in the *Physics*, refers to Anaxagoras as one who held infinity to be a property of the 'divine'.¹¹⁵ This notion was taken up by the Cappadocian fathers, who understood the term as designating a positive attribute of God. Thus, infinity was to be understood on the basis of an analogy with our perception of the attributes of concrete objects. Due to this analogy, Levinas holds, the genuine nature of God was not properly understood in Western philosophy and theology. Infinity cannot be grasped, according to Levinas, but only *accepted*. It is not the human subject which can initiate a relationship with infinity, but rather the other way around: infinity reveals itself to the concrete human being and makes the latter able to respond to the self-revelation of the former. The form of such a response, however, is not philosophy; it is rather what Levinas calls 'prophetic expression', either in literature or in a confessional framework. If one tries to

¹¹⁴ See his "Violence et métaphysique", in *La voix et la phénomène*, Paris, 1967.

¹¹⁵ *Physics*, Book III, Ch. 4.

philosophize or grasp infinity philosophically (in the traditional, Western sense of the word), one is refusing to fulfill the vocation of the human person—that is, to respond to God’s call. As a consequence, Levinas considers the entire tradition of Western philosophy as a refusal of the initiatives of infinity—as, to put it in explicitly religious terms, a denial of divine revelation. In other words, Levinas accepts the Heideggerian idea that Western philosophy failed in its endeavour to find truth; he insists, however, that even Heidegger belongs to the Western philosophical tradition and also that the reason for its failure was the erroneous conception of infinity derived from the Pre-Socratics through Christian theology.

Philosophy and theology have clearly become hopelessly confused in Levinas’ thought. But even more than that, Levinas considers the history of philosophy as the main factor in the history of Western civilization, the end of which he sees in contemporary totalitarian political systems. The systematic murder of the Jews by the National Socialists is, he holds, just one more consequence of Western civilization and of Western philosophy.

It is difficult to respond to such a body of philosophical assertions when these are put forward, as they are in Levinas, with so little argumentation or attempted justification. One point, however, must be addressed with care: Levinas’ idea is that the right form of philosophy is a kind of prophetic activity which cannot be initiated by man, but rather only by infinity or, as Levinas explicitly puts it in his later writings, by God. What Levinas is getting at here is based on his conviction that infinity, if we understand this term properly, transcends the realm of man and his capacities to a degree that makes every human activity in relation to infinity hopeless. This view seems to be problematic even from the point of view of a rational theology which seeks to establish a balanced relation between human freedom and divine omnipotence. Divine omnipotence, one could argue, cannot be realized if the human agent is eliminated or deprived of his freedom. If however freedom is in this sense a presupposition of God’s omnipotence, it also follows that the ‘natural’ human fac-

ulties—and thus the faculty of reason—must possess a greater value than is implicitly attributed to it by Levinas.

If, however, we exaggerate the conception of 'divine omnipo-
tence' in our theory, the result is either a quasi-mystical ap-
proach to the problem—which renounces any claim to theoret-
ical relevance—or sheer irrationalism. Theology is far from im-
plying irrationalism, as is evidently shown by traditional theo-
logical systems in both Western or Eastern cultures which
demonstrate a certain balance between mystical tenets such as
'divine revelation' on the one hand, and a rational approach,
embracing logical coherence, on the other.¹¹⁶ Contemporary phi-
losophers of religion, such as Richard Swinburne or Alvin Plant-
inga, are good examples of how theological beliefs and even
problems of religious mysticism can be treated in a lucidly com-
prehensible fashion.¹¹⁷ Levinas however tends to be irrational-
istic, first, in his poetical language, which he treats as philosoph-
ically relevant. He also presupposes that infinity is so different
from what is common to human beings that human beings must
be considered almost nothing in comparison to its richness and
perfection.

Levinas' thinking here is clearly rooted in Heidegger's notion
of an 'ontological difference'. We have already seen that

¹¹⁶ Consider for instance the theological system of Shankara in Hinduism
which is, like Western Scholasticism, a perfect example of how theological
rationalism is able to go together with a kind of religious mysticism.

¹¹⁷ Swinburne, for instance, writes: "It is one of the intellectual tragedies
of our age that when philosophy in English-speaking countries has developed
high standards of argument and clear thinking, the style of theological writing
has been largely influenced by the continental philosophy of Existentialism,
which, despite its considerable merits, has been distinguished by a very loose
and sloppy style of argument. If argument has a place in theology, large-scale
theology needs clear and rigorous argument. That point was very well grasped
by Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus, by Berkeley, Butler, and Paley. It is
high time for theology to return to their standards." Richard Swinburne, *The
Coherence of Theism*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1977.

Heidegger, too, overemphasizes a difference which one might otherwise have some reason to accept, the difference between being as such and particular existent things. Levinas, however, seeks to take the Heideggerian idea to its extreme in order to overcome what he considers specifically Heideggerian therein. Here again we find the Brentanian pattern of challenge and response, and the extreme character of Levinas' notion of infinity becomes even clearer. If infinity infinitely transcends our human being, then there is no concept of distance or difference which can be legitimately applied to their relationship.¹¹⁸ For in this case there is no ground of comparison or commensurability. As soon, however, as we speak about both of them together, even in terms of a negation of their commensurability, then we tacitly acknowledge that there is a kind of commensurability which they enjoy.

This relationship was designated in Scholasticism with reference to the principle of *analogia entis*, according to which being is predicated of different levels of existence in different senses. The being of God is being, as is that of man, yet with the difference that the being of God is infinite, while the being of man is finite. What makes possible the relationship between God and man is that both are beings, even if in different senses.

When Levinas overemphasizes the element of difference to the detriment of that of common ground, he commits a logical mistake that leads to irrationalism. This irrationalism expresses itself in such formulations as: God is transcendent to such a degree that he is 'absent'¹¹⁹; or: it is in principle impossible to 'represent' God in any sense of the word; or: I too am responsible if I am unjustly murdered or persecuted; or: the other person's 'oth-

¹¹⁸ This is what Philippe Nemo remarks too in his interview with Levinas; see Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethique et Infini. Dialogues avec Philippe Nemo*, Paris: Fayard, 1982, p. 104.

¹¹⁹ See Emmanuel Levinas, *Dieu, la Mort et le Temps*, Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1993, pp. 248 ff.

erness' is radically different from my 'ownness' and thus it is impossible to understand the other person's subjectivity on the basis of my own.¹²⁰ Theses of this sort have a long history in mystical literature but they are valueless in the context of rational, scientific philosophy.

An Example of Irrationalism

Levinas' irrationalism is even more extreme than that of the later Heidegger. For example, Levinas writes in one passage that

The testimony does not express itself by dialogue, but only in the form of the 'Here I am' ... It is through this witness that glory becomes glorified. This is how Infinity surpasses the finite, and it is how Infinity surpasses itself. The 'saying' without the 'what is said' of the witness signifies thus the *intrigue* of Infinity—intrigue and not not experience, intrigue which is not experience.¹²¹

Both the formulation and the content of this passage are at first sight quite difficult to understand. Levinas refers first of all to the words of Samuel, the one elected by God, who answered God's call with the words 'Here I am'.¹²² These words are then interpreted as constituting the ideal form of every bearing of witness to the highest truth, to God, and thus, as can be seen in many of Levinas' writings, they can be seen as the original form of philosophy. Third, he identifies this form of philosophy with the original form of God's self-revelation (this is what the word 'glory' refers to).¹²³

¹²⁰ *Ethique et Infini. Dialogues avec Philippe Nemo*, op. cit., p. 95.

¹²¹ 'La témoignage ne s'exprime pas dans ou par un dialogue mais dans la formule *me voici* ... C'est par se témoignage que la gloire se glorifie. Il est la façon dont l'Infini *se* passe. Le Dire sans Dit du témoignage signifie donc l'*intrigue* de l'Infini—intrigue et non pas expérience, intrigue qui n'est pas expérience.' *Dieu, la Mort et le Temps*, op. cit., p. 227.

¹²² See *I Sam.* 3, 4.

¹²³ Levinas' expression of 'intrigue' refers, first, to the the theory of 'nar-

Thus, the content of the quotation above is laden with the most diverse religious and historical connotations. Yet, as soon as the meaning is grasped, we can only wonder why its content was not expressed in a more simple and more openly confessional language without the pretense of being philosophical. For Levinas' only message is that the transcendence of 'infinity' (that is: God) must be properly understood. Moreover, he suggests too that philosophy in its original form is a bearing witness to God, so that the philosopher in his genuine form is identical with the prophet.

As soon as Levinas' ideas are clearly formulated, they lose their mystical power and attraction. They become matters of religion. Levinas *pretends* that he is doing philosophy, although in reality he is reformulating religious ideas in a philosophical or philosophically-shaded language. Our criticism of Levinas nonetheless can easily serve as the basis for further investigations of the influence of Heideggerian thought on contemporary philosophy. As Wolfgang Stegmüller notes, Heidegger introduced a philosophical language which might be very interesting and exciting in many ways (his *Wortmalerei* may be art of high quality), yet among his followers it led to a 'negative rhetoric'.¹²⁴ That is, authors like Levinas borrowed a certain style from Heidegger which is diametrically opposed to the scholarly and analytical manner of Brentano or Husserl. This style is not capable of raising and solving philosophical problems. As Hans Al-

relative identity' in which the subject's identity, and especially the consciousness of this identity, is defined in terms of his own biography. On the other hand, Levinas also refers to the biblical story of Jacob (his name means 'trickster'), in which Jacob received the blessing of his father by fraud. The etymology of the word 'intrigue' refers to the meaning of 'fraud' too. In Levinas' interpretation it is precisely through this 'heavenly fraud' that God reveals himself, by intrigue, so to say, without the interference of the human subject.

¹²⁴ *Hauptströmungen der Gegenwartsphilosophie*, Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag 1989, vol. I.

bert points out,¹²⁵ the purpose of those who use this type of style is defensive: they attempt to make their writings and thoughts immune to philosophical criticism and testing. This tactic of 'immunization' of one's philosophy is, according to Albert, the most important characteristic of the philosophers working in the 'fourth phase' of the Brentanian schema.

7. Problems in Extending the Brentanian Schema

¹²⁵ Hans Albert, *Kritik der reinen Hermeneutik*, Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1994.

The problems which have appeared during this extension of the Brentanian schema turn on the fact that Heidegger's philosophy clearly contains many original elements that cannot be described exclusively in terms of mysticism and decline. As even Stegmüller notes, it would be unjust not to notice the richness of Heidegger's many original insights and ideas.¹²⁶ Just to mention one central case: Heidegger's thinking has recently been shown to lead to new possibilities and to new sorts of questioning in the field of artificial intelligence through the radical criticism of standard theories of representation which it implies.¹²⁷ The Heideggerian philosophy is thus, in a sense, fruitful for current scientific research, something that is ruled out for a philosophy in the final phase of decline.¹²⁸ Since, however, our aim here is not to formulate an overall evaluation of Heidegger's philosophy, it is enough that we have successfully shown that the main features of this philosophy do indeed coincide with the description of the fourth Brentanian phase.

The Post-Brentanian Tradition

We have tried to follow a line in Continental philosophy which started with Brentano, was continued by Husserl and by the early Heidegger, and has become the source of various contemporary schools and trends, many of which show little sympathy to the original Brentanian project of scientific philosophy. This line in Continental philosophy is, therefore, not that of the 'Brentano school', even if disciples of Brentano play a central

¹²⁶ Op. cit., p. 194.

¹²⁷ See T. Winograd and F. Flores, *Understanding Computers and Cognition*, Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley; Karl Leidlmair, *Künstliche Intelligenz und Heidegger*, Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1991, especially p. 30.

¹²⁸ Heidegger has exerted an important influence on contemporary theology, above all through the work of Bultmann and Rahner; his influence can be detected also in psychology (if only through the work of Lacan and others); and even in the natural sciences through the work of C. F. von Weizsäcker.

role therein. For even the Brentanian ideal of scientific philosophy was not the invention of Brentano himself, but was an idea originating in standard nineteenth-century Catholic thought and in the Scholastically-inspired logical philosophy of Trendelenburg. In the view of Trendelenburg, philosophy is a science, and in Brentano's eyes, the first, flourishing phase of philosophy emerges in association with the blossoming of scientific investigation. At the bottom of the final phase of decline are those, such as Derrida in our own day, who have embraced a total identification of philosophy and literature, of truth and 'castration',¹²⁹ and who defend a view to the effect that such binary oppositions are in any case the spurious product of the hegemony of 'phallogocentric' forces.

¹²⁹ See Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979, pp. 59f.

CONCLUSION

According to Richard Rorty, the only scientifically reliable way of writing a history of philosophy is to concentrate on short periods in history, such as the one between Descartes and Kant, and to point out the development of particular ideas during such periods.¹³⁰ In our application of the Brentanian explanation to one of the most important traditions in Continental philosophy in our century, we have, in effect, followed Rorty's rule. We have picked out one particular notion in Brentano's historiography and attempted to apply it in the way Brentano would suggest. We have therefore considered those figures in Continental philosophy who have proven to be most influential. That is, we have applied the Brentanian notion in the spirit of the theory of ideal types, by interpreting philosophers on the basis of the most influential elements of their thought. Although the thinking of such philosophers as Heidegger and Levinas certainly possesses some complexity, still, they have ineluctably created a philosophical atmosphere in which the original Brentanian notion of scientific philosophy has completely disappeared. In this sense, we are justified in speaking of the decline of a philosophical tradition, a decline which has led to a one-sided, literary usurpation of philosophy.

Heidegger's understanding of the history of philosophy is, indeed, expressly decadent. Thus it was easy to show that philo-

¹³⁰ "The Historiography of Philosophy: Four Genres", in R. Rorty, J. B. Schneewind and Q. Skinner, *Philosophy of History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

sophical method shows a decline in Heidegger's thought. By this means, however, we have only shown that there is at least one strand in the history of recent philosophy to which the Brentanian explanation can be applied. We have not shown that the Brentanian schema has a general validity. The latter has not, however, been our purpose, since otherwise we would have had to deal also, among other things, with the history of analytic philosophy (from Frege, Moore and Russell on the one hand, to Richard Rorty and Hilary Putnam on the other), as well as that of the so-called 'realist' school of phenomenology initiated by Reinach and Ingarden and still alive in our day in the work of Dallas Willard and others.

What we have shown is that the Brentanian explanation can be applied as a heuristic principle in studies concerning the history of philosophy. We have shown, too, that historical conceptions which are crudely optimistic and express a belief in a perpetual development of philosophical learning must be considered in a new light. Other conceptions, on the other hand, which declare the 'end of philosophy' must be considered critically also. The point of the Brentanian conception is precisely that each phase of maximal decline has been followed by an ascending period in which philosophy served once more as the theoretical framework of new and important scientific questions and discoveries.

Brentano's own idea of the universal theoretical role of philosophy is perhaps somewhat naive. The actual state of the special sciences in our day rules out the belief in a philosophy that might serve as a single theoretical framework for all the special disciplines. This, however, is not among the features which seem to be most crucial in the Brentanian schema, and we have not committed ourselves to accepting everything which Brentano thought to be important in his understanding of philosophy. We have wanted to show, rather, how the Brentanian explanation is in keeping with historical developments inside one special philosophical tradition—namely in the Continental tradition initiated by Brentano himself—a development which does indeed begin

with a general theoretical interest so fruitful for scientific development, and which ends in a philosophy that loses this theoretical attitude and dissolves into various kinds of fashionable and popular quasi-literary genres.

The authors of the latter still reserve to themselves the same privilege to make general claims as is characteristic of the first, ascending phase. For even philosophies which have become wholly unscientific still too often insist on telling the ultimate truth in matters concerning the entire realm of philosophy. Thus we very often find that philosophers on the one hand understand philosophy as a kind of literary criticism or 'critical theory', yet on the other hand take the liberty of expounding radical views on the very philosophy which they have rejected. Or, similarly, they on the one hand exclude the possibility that truth can be attained by philosophical means, and at the same time claim that they are in the position of being able to judge the true value of philosophical systems in the past or in the present.

Thus Rorty, in his article referred to above, explains that there are four kinds of historiographical genre in philosophy. The first, which he terms 'rational reconstruction', involves that sort of approach to the data of the history of philosophy which considers questions and problems of the past as if they had been found and formulated by contemporary authors. The second, which Rorty calls 'historical reconstruction', is based on thorough historical and exegetical research and seeks to establish the original meaning of philosophical problems born and formulated in the past. The third is what Rorty terms *Geistesgeschichte*. By using this German term Rorty wants to convey the idea that there are conceptions of the history of philosophy which consider this history in terms of a perpetual development culminating in a given philosophical discovery or system. The fourth type, that of 'doxography' consists of descriptions of what philosophers in the past said or seem to have said. In Rorty's eyes, however, none of these ways can lead to the discovery or solution of genuine philosophical problems for the simple reason that *there are no such problems*.

Rorty does not seem to notice that his own approach to the history of philosophy constitutes a fifth type, which we might call the method of sneering at the past. This amounts to a specific sort of theoretical evaluation and classification of various accounts of the history of philosophy. By classifying the possible ways of writing the history of philosophy Rorty presupposes the very thesis that he at the same time pretends to deny, namely that there is a present in which it becomes somehow possible to grasp the totality of the history of philosophy and in which it is theoretically possible to evaluate the different accounts of the history of philosophy. On the other hand, he does not even try to convince his readers that he has good reasons to believe in his own system. Thus, his descriptions must, by necessity, remain vague and superficial. They do not help us to clarify what is, in fact, a supremely important question: how is it at all possible to write a history of philosophy?¹³¹

Brentano's ideal type explanation is capable of helping us in precisely this respect. By hypothetically accepting the Brentanian idea of the four phases, we are not practicing a priori historiography. As an ideal type explanation, the Brentanian schema helps us to consider concrete developments in the history of philosophy and to establish a certain system or chain of phenomena which is structured by principles which can be defined in some detail. As we have repeatedly seen, one of the main merits of the Brentanian schema is that it breaks both with an unconditionally optimistic, and with a similarly pessimistic, view of the history of philosophy. It points out, very clearly, that there are particular laws in the history of philosophy, the validity of which is, however, not universal; they are always effective, but only in a limited sphere. Our task is, on the one hand, to find out what these limits are, and, on the other hand, to define the rules which recur,

¹³¹ For a detailed criticism of Rorty's historiography, see Kevin Mulligan's article, *op. cit.*, section 8 on 'Anti-Rortyism'.

and finally to determine particular states of affairs in the history of philosophy.¹³²

¹³² Work on this volume was supported by the Brentano Foundation and by the Research Support Scheme of the Open Society Institute, Prague.

Barry Smith and Balázs M. Mezei

The Four Phases of Philosophy

including as an appendix Franz Brentano's essay:

The Four Phases of Philosophy and its Current State

forthcoming in the series Studien zur Österreichischen Philosophie
Amsterdam/Atlanta: Rodopi

Franz Brentano

The Four Phases of Philosophy and its Current State

Dedicated to the academic youth of Austria-Hungary in response to so many
signs of the warmest sympathy.

Foreword

What I offer here is the text of a lecture which I originally delivered at the Literary
Society in Vienna on the 28th of November, 1894.

I was requested to address the association with respect to a book published

by the Literary Society. Anybody who has read H. Lorm's book on *Groundless Optimism* will not be able to overlook my criticism of each of its central points. My lecture, nevertheless, will not be any the less understandable for those who have not read the book. The lecture is self-contained.

My text, as will become clear, touches upon the most important philosophical questions of our day. The novelty of the conception of the history of philosophy which it contains might surprise some of my hearers. For me, however, this conception has stood the test of time over many years. It has been presupposed by me, as by students of my academic lectures on the history of philosophy, for more than twenty years. I do not delude myself into believing that the conception will not face opposition; on the contrary, I am quite certain that the opposition against it might be so strong that it will take some time to defeat it. I hope, nevertheless, that the facts and considerations I present to you will leave an impression on the part of those who follow my lecture carefully.

I have tried to make the text as easily comprehensible as possible. The short notes are designed to make the chronological order clear for all who are less familiar with the history of philosophy.

In addition, one thing must be noted. It would be a fatal misunderstanding if anybody were to think that I deny the unusual talents of those epoch-making philosophers whom I cannot consider to have made real contributions to the advancement of philosophy. I agree with Schopenhauer in his judgment as to the scientific value of the Hegelian system; I cannot, however, consent to his contempt for the intellectual capacity of the man. One should especially not misinterpret my real opinion of Kant's philosophy in those passages in which I deal with this extraordinary thinker. Independently of what I say of his philosophical system, his achievements for the natural sciences, like those of Proclus for mathematics, remain untouched.

Franz Brentano
Vienna, 18 January 1895.

Highly esteemed assembly!

1. Hieronymus Lorm has written a book, entitled *Groundless Optimism*¹, which deals with the most important philosophical questions. The Literary Society in Vienna has published this book, and wishes now that I speak about it to you.

There is always something awkward in a single lecture on philosophy that is not addressed exclusively to specialists. One is forced to isolate aspects that are in fact connected to one another in manifold ways. What is of most lively interest is usually not what is most easily accessible to the general public. What is most easily accessible are, obviously, the elementary questions of philosophy. In the book before us, however, the views put forward are opaque and turgid. From the start it leaves us in the dark as to how we shall arrive at the most important questions, and, if I were simply to dwell on the subjects of the book I would fall into the worst mistake: I would become boring. On this occasion, moreover, it was not even left open to me to select one of those elementary questions as my topic, since I was called upon to consider Lorm's book, and thus the field from which I had to choose was in a way limited.

In spite of all this, I have accepted your invitation. The Literary Society has published a serious work on philosophy. By this, it convincingly bears witness against those who declare the general interest in philosophy extinct.² That is an act indeed that deserves recognition and gratitude.³

¹ Hieronymus Lorm, *Der grundlose Optimismus-Ein Buch der Betrachtung*, Vienna, Verlag der literarischen Gesellschaft, 1894.

² See the third paragraph of its Statute: 'The Society publishes works in literature as well as scientific works of general interest.' During the first year of its existence (1894), the Society published five books: three were literary works, one work was on science, and the one by H. Lorm concerns philosophy.

³ In my original lecture, the following passage was inserted: 'I shall perhaps never have the opportunity to speak again to my dear Viennese friends who kindly accepted me into their company twenty years ago and have shown since then so many signs of warmest benevolence. The time of my activity at the University was intolerantly shortened by Minister Taafe, and the situation became even worse when the Ministry of Education was taken over by Hohenwart—I mean of course the Ministry of Education that was reorganized by Windischgrätz under the strong influence of Hohenwart. Expressing my opinion to Herr von Madeisky I pointed out that the rights earned by all the years of my work under one Ministry cannot be revoked by such a change of office. In his answer Herr von Madeisky informed me that he could not share my view. Understandably, what I strongly wish now is a free atmosphere. My lecture here can be seen as a sort of Last Supper, which I celebrate, for the last time, together with my friends in Vienna.' My words, which were followed by a long and cold silence on the part of the audience, stirred a strong reaction in the public. Finally, I felt necessary to make some comments both on my words and on

2. Lorm's book has some outstanding characteristics. The author's openheartedness is mirrored in his work, which is full of observations in part wise and stimulating, in part vivid and astute. Lorm addresses the criticisms of others, and he evaluates in detail both current circumstances and the historical development leading to the present situation in philosophy.

His statements do not lack originality, but the strongly emphasized subjective peculiarities of his views make their general validity questionable. At the same time, Lorm proves to be more or less a man of his age. The pessimistic tendency of the time in which we live is already shown by his choice of subject. His deep respect for Kant, too, is characteristic of our day. Lorm's reverence, indeed, is differentiated in the way that is nowadays all too common: on the one hand, he celebrates Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and takes it as an established starting point of any future investigation; but on the other hand he rejects the *Critique of Practical Reason* as completely untenable and 'frail'.

As already mentioned, Lorm makes a great effort to throw light on the present situation in philosophy as well as on its prehistory. Thus I find it appropriate to do the same. This seems to be more sensible than discussing the rather strange attitude which Lorm calls 'groundless optimism'. For, as even Lorm writes at the end of his book: 'My investigations are ... for individuals only. They are not addressed to groups, nor to the collective reason of clubs and associations.'⁴ So Lorm's book is apparently not directed, either, at the collective reason of the Literary Association in Vienna, which published the book.

3. The history of philosophy is a history of scientific efforts, and it is thus similar in some respects to the history of the other sciences. On the other hand, it is different from the latter and seems rather to be analogous to the history of the fine arts. Other sciences, as long as scientists pursue them, show a constant development which may sometimes be interrupted by periods of stagnation. Philosophy, however, like the history of the fine arts, has always had periods of ascending development and, on the other hand, periods of decadence. The latter

the circumstances which provoked them in a series of articles *see the *Neue Freie Presse* of 2, 5, 8, 15, 18 December 1894). Since the problem has nothing to do with the questions addressed in my lecture, I eliminated my arguments from the published version of the main text. At the same time, I reintroduced them in a footnote in order to prevent anybody who heard my lecture from misunderstanding me, or from thinking that I believe that what I said was impertinent.

⁴ Hieronymus Lorm, *Der grundlose Optimismus*, p. 328.

are, nonetheless, often no less rich, are indeed richer in epoch-making phenomena, than are the healthy and productive periods. In the succession of these periods, a certain regularity can be found. Just as the periods of development and decline in the history of the fine arts display certain common features and analogies, so the three great periods of Western philosophy run in an essentially analogous way.

In the periods of antiquity, in the Middle Ages, and in the modern period up to the collapse of the Hegelian school, four stages can be distinguished in each case. These stages are in many ways different from one another, yet they are at the same time internally related to the extent that their similarity, once recognized, is unmistakable. Moreover, quite simple considerations in cultural psychology can make this remarkable correspondence fully comprehensible.

The first phase covers the whole ascending development. Its beginning is in each case characterized in a twofold way:

- on the one hand through a lively and pure theoretical interest. As already Plato and Aristotle rightly noted, it was through wonder that mankind was motivated to philosophical investigations.

- on the other hand it is marked by a method that is essentially appropriate to nature (even if in its early forms it is still rather primitive). It was through the aid of this method that science developed, partly through perfecting hypotheses, partly by an enlargement of the scope of investigation and partly through confronting new questions.

The second phase is in fact the first stage of decline. It is initiated in each case by the weakening or distortion of scientific interest. From this time on it is practical motives by which investigations are primarily determined. Accordingly, theoretical interest is pursued less rigorously and less conscientiously. Ideas of power and depth are lacking, and even if a certain breadth, as opposed to depth, is thereby gained, and wider circles become interested in the popularized doctrines of a philosophical sect, still, all this is no true substitute for genuine scientific activity.

Under such deteriorated circumstances, a kind of spiritual revolution breaks out, which constitutes the second stage of decline. This is the time of predominating skepticism. Science has become unscientific and has thereby made itself unworthy of trust; this trust is accordingly withdrawn. Moreover, it is now generally denied that reason is capable of any sort of secure knowledge, or it is held that such a capacity is restricted to the most miserable remnants.

Skepticism, however, is not something which can satisfy the longings of

mankind. As Aristotle states in the famous first sentence of his *Metaphysics*, ‘All men by nature desire to know.’ The natural longing after truth, when once it has been challenged by skepticism, forces its way through with violence. With pathologically intensified enthusiasm people start once more to construct philosophical dogmas. In addition to the natural means employed in the first phase, however, they now invent entirely unnatural means of gaining knowledge on the basis of ‘principles’ lacking in all insight, ingenious ‘directly intuitive’ powers, mystical intensifications of the mental life—so that very soon people suppose themselves to be in possession of the most exalted truths that are beyond all human powers.

The period of decline thereby reaches its extreme point. The contrast to the conditions which led to the first flourishing of philosophical research could not be more blatant. One claims to know everything, yet in fact knows nothing. For one no longer knows even the one truth that one had known with longing and suffering at the beginning of the first period: namely that one knows nothing.

4. Let us start with the period of antiquity in order to see whether its history in fact corresponds to our scheme.

Greek philosophy emerged with the *philosophy of nature* of the Ionian thinkers. It is quite easy to see how wonder at the riddle of the universe here gave rise to the most intense drive for knowledge. When Anaxagoras, one of the greatest of the Ionians, first neglected the care of his property and was scolded for this by his relatives, he simply renounced his entire fortune in order to live unencumbered for philosophical research. He did not even want to make use of the political privileges of his aristocratic rank, and he quite decidedly refused to take part in the government of his home city. As he said, ‘the heavens are my homeland, and my destiny is the examination of the stars.’

In addition to their lively and pure theoretical interest these earliest Hellenes possessed a kind of natural method too. This might sound surprising, since there are many today—even Comte has lent support to this prejudice—who think that mankind at first proceeded in ways entirely contrary to the things of nature, and that they discovered the appropriate means of investigation only much later. The childhood of mankind, however, was very similar to the childhood of each individual. It was Lavoisier⁵ who drew attention to the rapidity with which

⁵ A. L. Lavoisier, *Traité élémentaire de chimie*, Paris 1789. Part One, *Discours préliminaire*, Paris 1789, p. VIII.

children quickly proceed from one discovery to the next, led by nature herself in finding the right mode of investigation. Anyone who takes in his hands Theodor Gomperz's new work⁶ on the ancient Greek philosophers—a book so much admired by Billroth⁷—can easily convince himself that my acknowledgment of the merits of the ancient Ionian philosophers is not the least bit undeserved.

It was through this kind of interest and method that Greek philosophy developed. Its hypotheses were gradually deepened, its questions multiplied and became more complex, and finally wide-ranging theoretical systems were constructed. After only three hundred years,⁸ an achievement as scientifically important as the philosophy of Aristotle had become possible.

Aristotle's work was, however, also the last momentous product in the ascending stage of ancient philosophy. Immediately after him there began the first stage of decline as, quite clearly, the theoretical interest gave way to the practical one.

5. The whole of Greek culture was at that time in a state of dissolution. Belief in popular religion was at an end, and the authority of the age-old political institutions had collapsed. Philosophy was called in aid, not only in relation to theoretical needs, but also, and to a much greater extent, from a practical point of view.

The Stoa⁹ and Epicurianism¹⁰ are the two schools which, through their one-sided practical orientation, represent this first stage of decline in antiquity. Both saw their doctrine as being divided into three parts: ethics, logic, and physics. Logic and physics however enjoyed only a miserably down-trodden existence as the servants of ethics. As a consequence, ethics, too, lost in scientific value. This was only natural, because without a deeper investigation of human nature one will achieve no clarity regarding either man's task or the ways in which

⁶ Theodor Gomperz, *Griechische Denker. Eine Geschichte der antiken Philosophie*, Leipzig 1894.

⁷ In a letter to the editor in *Neue Freie Presse*, 11 February, 1894.

⁸ From Thales (born c. 640 BC) to Aristotle (died 322 BC).

⁹ The Stoa was founded by Zeno in about 308 BC and developed by Chrysippus (282-209 BC).

¹⁰ Epicurus lived between 341 and 270 BC.

this can be fulfilled.

As the school became less profound, so its breadth increased. Epicurus had incomparably more followers than did Plato or Aristotle. And even if there were among them none who could develop the Epicurean teaching in a scientific way, still, one of the disciples of Epicurus was a poetical genius¹¹ unparalleled either in the Platonic or—if we do not count the author of the *Divine Comedy*—in the Peripatetic philosophy.

6. There followed then the second stage of decline, that of skepticism. Skepticism appeared in a two-fold form in the history of antiquity. The weaker form is that of the New Academy.¹² According to its representatives, we can achieve only probability, and there is no aim in relation to which there is attainable that sort of certainty which definitively excludes the possibility of error. The strong form of skepticism is what is now called Pyrrhonism, whose founder Pyrrho flourished in the time of Alexander the Great. Initially, his activity gave rise to a greater degree of aversion than of acceptance. This situation changed, however, as soon as the dogmatism of the Stoics and the Epicureans began to go downhill. Aenesidemus¹³, Agrippa¹⁴ and Sextus Empiricus,¹⁵ the main representatives of the school, lived in this period.

Besides weak and strong skepticism we should mention also the school of Eclecticism, whose representatives allowed themselves the luxury of taking over or refusing anything they liked from the various competing schools. Thus they never arrived at any firm convictions of their own. Cicero, their most important representative,¹⁶ explicitly considered his position as closely related to the skepticism of the New Academy.

Epicureanism and Stoicism, especially in their later development, became more and more imbued by eclecticism. If we consider this fact, we can understand,

¹¹ T. Lucretius Carus, fl. 95-92 BC.

¹² Carneades, the founder of the New (or Third) Academy, lived between 214 and 129 in Athens.

¹³ Aenesidemus taught in Alexandria at about the time of Christ's birth.

¹⁴ Agrippa lived some time between Aenesiades and Sextus Empiricus.

¹⁵ Sextus Empiricus lived about 200 BC.

¹⁶ M. Tullius Cicero (106-43 BC).

too, why all the philosophical schools at that time were infected by a kind of skeptical mood, and why whole groups in society were seized by this attitude also. When Jesus declared to Pilate that he came into the world in order to bear witness to the truth, Pilate responded with a skeptical question: ‘What is truth?’

7. Skepticism, however, was not the last stage in the history of ancient philosophy. Rather it was followed by the most violent conceivable reaction. To this belong the group associated with the Jewish Platonists¹⁷ and the neo-Pythagoreans,¹⁸ whose work helped to build the third stage in the decline of ancient philosophy. By far the most important phenomenon in this class, however, was that of neo-Platonism which swoops around and preens itself in the world of ‘intelligible entities’. Ammonius Saccas,¹⁹ Plotinus,²⁰ Porphyrius,²¹ Iamblichus,²² Proclus,²³ and many others were leaders of their respective schools, who were not only celebrated but even feared as Gods. In place of the absent knowledge of the laws of the natural sciences, Proclus and others employed the artificial lawfulness of a triadic system.

This much may suffice to establish our law of the four phases in relation to the history of ancient philosophy.

8. Let us turn to the Middle Ages.

The very same drama is played out in this period. The partly Germanized peoples of the Occident showed themselves very early to have been, like the Arabs, affected by the most intense drive for knowledge. Very early on they had established who among the ancient thinkers was the true master of knowledge. Even though the ignorance of the Greek language made their task all the more

¹⁷ Philo Judaeus, fl. 39 AD in Alexandria.

¹⁸ The most important representatives of neo-Pythagorianism were Apollonius of Tyana, Moderatus of Gades (both lived under Nero), and Nicomachus of Gerasa (who lived in the time of the Antonii).

¹⁹ Ammonius Saccas (c. 175-250 AC).

²⁰ Plotinus (205-270).

²¹ Porphyrius (233-c. 304).

²² Iamblichus died under the rule of Constantine the Great.

²³ Proclus (411-485).

difficult, the Scholastic thinkers agreed in a relatively short time²⁴ on a common and surprisingly correct understanding of the works of Aristotle. Neither Alexander of Aphrodisias, nor Simplicius had understood Aristotle even to a small degree so perfectly as did Thomas Aquinas, the great teacher of the thirteenth century.²⁵ This would have been impossible without a certain congeniality of mind, something which Thomas held on to not only in other writings, but also and especially in his *De regimine principum*, a work most famous and so advanced for political philosophy. What further progress one could then have hoped for!

9. But look: immediately after Thomas the philosophy of the Middle Ages begins to decline. It is easy to see that the reason for this was the weakening and distortion of the pure scientific interest.

The most important scholars of philosophy in the Middle Ages belonged to one or other of the two large mendicant orders, the Dominican and the Franciscan. Highly esteemed authorities had been brought forward by both. The two Dominicans Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas put all the achievements of the Franciscans into the shade. This awakened not inconsiderable jealousy among the latter. And when the Franciscans, in turn, recognized a forceful and productive writer in Duns Scotus,²⁶ they raised up their banners behind him as their leader. Just as the Franciscans committed themselves to the teaching of Duns Scotus, so the Dominicans committed themselves to that of Thomas Aquinas. The love of truth and wisdom now degenerated into pure opinionatedness. All observation and conscientious consideration of contrary facts waned. Even well-founded objections were killed off dialectically by a kind of over-subtlety and by a ceaseless drawing of senseless distinctions. Thus, in addition to the two traditional kinds of distinction, real and conceptual, Duns Scotus invented a third kind, which he called the formal. This was supposed to be ‘smaller’ than the real, and ‘greater’ than the conceptual distinction, and since no clear definition was given, this third kind of distinction was all the more easily able to serve as the subject of empty verbal squabbles.²⁷

²⁴ Alexander of Hales was the first of the Scholastics who knew all the works of Aristotle (before him only the texts on logic were known). He died in 1245.

²⁵ Thomas Aquinas (1227 [sic]-1274).

²⁶ John Duns Scotus (1274 [sic]-1308).

²⁷ It is easy to understand what the expressions ‘real difference’ and ‘conceptual difference’

The obsession with disputation became ever more absurd. As a sign of this, the Scotist Franciscus Marionis introduced what was called the great *actus Sorbonnicus* at Paris,²⁸ a truly cruel torment. The poor disputee was obliged to defend his position for a full twelve hours (except for a short break for lunch) against anybody who threw down a challenge. That Scholastic thinking still today has a bad reputation as a kind of hair-splitting is due to the influence of this time, which we can call the Scotist period.

10. This, then, was the first stage of decline, which led, in consequence, to the second, the stage of skepticism. This was represented in the Middle Ages by nominalism, whose revolutionary and skeptical character has often been noted. William of Ockham²⁹ not only rejected the reality of universals; he argued, too, that all our ideas are only signs. Just as smoke, as the sign of fire, has no similarity to the fire, so too our ideas, he argued, have no similarity to their objects. With respect to the most exalted questions he stated that rational knowledge of God, as a knowing, creating and infinite being, is impossible. Similarly, we cannot know whether there is something spiritual and immortal in man. Accordingly, there is no such thing as natural morality. For God can command as he wishes. He can

mean. X is in reality different from Y inasmuch as X is always X, and X can be legitimately denied to be Y. X, however, is different conceptually from Y inasmuch as X is always X, and the concept of X can be legitimately denied to be the concept of Y. Two human beings are different in reality; a musician and a painter are also conceptually different.

It is easy to recognize that if any two things are different conceptually, they can be the same in reality. A musician can at the same time be a painter. It is equally easy to see that, if any two things are different in reality, they can be the same conceptually: for instance, Bismarck and Caprivi as statesmen both fall under the same concept. It is therefore inappropriate to say that real distinctions are 'greater' than conceptual distinctions; neither of them includes the other, they are fully disparate. It is even more absurd to introduce a 'formal distinction' as possessing some 'middle greatness' between the real and the conceptual.

Scotus applied his formal distinction to the highest mysteries of theology. The difference between the three divine persons is neither real, nor conceptual he held; rather they are formally different. And since the meaning of 'formal distinction' remained unclear, such statements could not be proved to be contrary to the orthodox teachings of the Church.

²⁸ Franciscus Marionis (with the title 'magister abstractionum') died in 1325. In 1315, he introduced the Great Sorbonnian Act, which took place every week from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. during the whole summer, and was devoted to dialectical debates.

²⁹ William of Ockham, the most important representative of nominalism in the 14th century, defended Ludwig the Bavarian against the Holy See. He died in 1343 (or 1347) in Munich.

command lies just as well as truth; the breaking up of marriage just as well as faithfulness; murder just as well as the love of our neighbor; he could even command us to hate God himself, and in this case even this would beg merit.

In the Middle Ages, the authority of the Church was still very powerful, and it was able to inhibit such skeptical tendencies. On the other hand, the nominalists tried to shirk this control. In order to achieve their aims, they declared flatteringly that what they said had nothing to do with the teachings of the Church. They argued that the teachings of the Church were theologically true; but on the other hand they considered it necessary to point out that, philosophically, the same teachings were just as decidedly false. By affirming that the same proposition can be true and false at the same time, the very essence of truth was completely destroyed.

11. There arose a new and powerful reaction to these skeptical tendencies towards the end of the Middle Ages.

As is known, numerous mystical thinkers of great prominence appeared in this period. These included Meister Eckhardt,³⁰ John Tauler,³¹ Henry Suso,³² John Ruysbroek,³³ and the author of the *Theologia Teutonica* which was edited by Luther.³⁴ Chancellor Gerson,³⁵ who presided over the Council at Constance as the most important man of his time, is rightly counted as a mystic.

And in addition to religious mysticism we find philosophical speculations which seek, via a new and unnatural method, never before heard of, to rise up in a soaring flight to the highest peaks of truth. I mention here only the followers of Lull on the one hand, and the famous German Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa on the other.

Raymundus Lullus,³⁶ a noble yet visionary man, lived as early as the

³⁰ Meister Eckhardt died in 1329.

³¹ Johannes Tauler died in 1361.

³² Henry Suso (beatified by the Church) died in 1365.

³³ John Ruysbroek died in 1381.

³⁴ The author of the *Theologia Teutonica* remains unknown.

³⁵ John Gerson (1363-1429).

³⁶ Raymundus Lullus (1235-1315). The first papal condemnation of his writings was issued in 1376.

thirteenth century in Spain. His own newly invented logical method he called the *ars magna*. He assembled a device of concentrically connected disks, on each of which he had written different words, which displayed the richest variety of combinations. It is hard to see how nature could be made to give up her secrets in this way. Lull, however, expected the utmost from this invention which he seems to have considered to have been given to him from God himself. Thus he bravely set out to demonstrate apodictically, from reason alone, the necessary character of the Divine Trinity, original sin, incarnation, and the Saviour's death. This eccentric man did not find many followers among his contemporaries. In the 14th century, however, the number of Lullists had grown so much that the University of Paris, under the leadership of Gerson, found it necessary to condemn Lull 'grand art'. The Lullists showed an immense respect for the writings of their master. As they said, the Old Testament came from the Father, the New Testament from the Son, and Lullus' teaching from the Holy Spirit. This teaching, they argued, could not be investigated reflectively, nor could it be learned. The only way to understand it would be through a sublime form of inspiration. The number of the followers of Lullus was so high even at the time of the Reformation (Giordano Bruno had the highest opinion of the wisdom of Lull) that Pope Paul IV, like Gregory XI before him, condemned and banned his writings.

The wild ambition of many in the field of speculation that is so characteristic of that age as opposed to what preceded it, is even more clearly reflected in the works of Nicholas of Cusa,³⁷ whose views helped to determine Giordano Bruno's opinion of Lullus. Nicholas of Cusa employed the name *docta ignorantia*, 'learned ignorance', for his own teaching, by which he meant a kind of ignorance that went beyond all forms of knowledge. He called this ignorance 'seeing without comprehension', or 'incomprehensible comprehension', 'speculation', 'intuition', 'mystical theology', 'third heaven', 'wisdom' and so forth. The lowest form of knowledge is sensation (*sensus*). A higher form is that of reason (*ratio*). The third and by far the most sublime form of our spiritual faculties is intellectual insight (*intellectus*). While sensation knows things by affirmation, and reason by affirmation and negation, the knowledge given in intellectual insight is gained exclusively by negation. In the field of the intellect, the law of

³⁷ Nicholas of Cusa (born in Kues at Trier, was Bishop of Brixen, lived between 1401-1464).

contradiction does not hold. On the contrary, the intellect is the principle of the coincidence of opposites.³⁸ Through this super-rational and wild manner of reasoning, the knowledge of God, of the creation, and of the unity of God and creation, are then constructed in *a priori* fashion.³⁹

In the present context, regrettably, I cannot go into more detail with respect to this last original speculative system of the Middle Ages. I believe nevertheless that the little that has been said suffices to show that this system, like the speculations of the neo-Pythagoreans and the Neoplatonists in antiquity, fits well with my general characterization of the fourth stage in the history of philosophy.

Let us turn directly to the modern age.

12. The third period emerges with Francis Bacon and Descartes.⁴⁰

The powerful yet unmingled desire for knowledge characteristic of this period is well enough known. Thus the old claim to a natural method returned in an obvious form. Experience was celebrated as the great master of knowledge. The inductive mode of investigation has ever since remained firmly connected to the name of Bacon. Similarly, Descartes, too, turned to the observation of facts. It is said that someone once asked Descartes to show him his library. Descartes opened the door of a storeroom, in which no book was to be seen. Instead, there was a slaughtered calf hanging on the wall, used by Descartes for his investigations in physiology and psychology. Descartes told his visitor: 'Here is my library, from

³⁸ Nicholas of Cusa explained his principle of '*coincidentia oppositorum*' by mathematical examples. A straight line on the one hand, and a curve, say, of a circle on the other, are contrary to one another; yet, an infinite circle is identical to an infinite straight line. A bevel is contrary to an acute angle; on the other hand, the extreme points of a bevel or an acute angle, as he held, are the same, since the two sides of the angle make a straight line.

³⁹ Despite the gap between the thought of Nicholas of Cusa and that of Hegel, a certain analogy between the two systems is unmistakable. A third element appears in both systems as the unity of the two previous ones. One should recall, too, the way in which Hegel changes the principle of contradiction into its opposite, and also the importance attributed to the principle of negation in his speculative processes.

⁴⁰ Francis Bacon (1561-1626); Descartes (1596-1650). One could mention in this context also Galileo (1564-1642), though it seems to me that he was not so influential in philosophy. The reason may have been that Italy did not play an essential role in the philosophical discussions of that time. Be this as it may, the consideration of Galileo's work would not change in the least what I have outlined with respect to the characteristic elements of the initial stages of the ascending periods in philosophy.

which I take my wisdom.’

The followers of Bacon and Descartes remained faithful to the method of experience. With the help of this method, Locke⁴¹ achieved genuine results which have been considered as valid ever since. Leibniz,⁴² too, arrived at a variety of important psychological insights. The dissipation of his efforts in many areas, however, hindered him in concentrating his extraordinary talents entirely on philosophy.

13. But just as in antiquity, so in the modern period too after a long, ascending phase new developments disturbed the scene.

The setting was in fact in many ways similar to the start of the period of decadence in Greece. Popular religion no longer had the same impact on people as it had had earlier, and in politics, too, everything traditional began to waver. Philosophy, again, was called upon to render her assistance, so that the pure theoretical interest was replaced by a practical one. This led to the same outcome as in antiquity. Philosophy became superficial, and in spite of the growing number of people interested in philosophy, its scientific significance began to ebb.

Both the French and the German Enlightenment, for all their differences, show clearly the correctness of what I have said. The former can be characterized as a kind of simplification of the philosophy of Locke,⁴³ the latter as a simplification of Leibnizian⁴⁴ thought. Hume⁴⁵ called attention to the fact that, from a certain point in time, nobody read the writings of Locke, and public opinion was shaped by superficial philosophical writers.

14. And so the first stage of the declining period began. It was directly followed by the second, that of skepticism.

⁴¹ John Locke (1632-1704) is considered even now as the most important founder of analytical psychology.

⁴² G. W. Leibniz (1646 [sic]-1716).

⁴³ Voltaire (1694-1778) was the most important among those who transplanted Lockean philosophy onto French soil.

⁴⁴ Already one can say of Christian Wolff (1679-1754) that he had watered down the Leibnizian philosophy. His school dominated the German Enlightenment. Lessing (1729-1781), by reinterpreting the doctrine of the Trinity, was known as a follower of Spinoza. In other philosophical respects, however, as is today fully clear, he allied himself with Leibniz.

⁴⁵ David Hume, *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, Section 1.

The most important representative of this stage in the third great period of the history of philosophy was David Hume.⁴⁶ This is too well known that it would be necessary to demonstrate it by talking about his views in detail. It is known, similarly, that the sting of his skepticism caused pain not only in England, but also in Germany which had in the meantime become, alongside England, the most fertile land for the cultivation of philosophical ideas. As Kant said, it was Hume who awakened him from out of his dogmatic slumbers.

15. But now look: as the most powerful response to such skepticism there follows again, a reaction which seeks to rescue and advance knowledge by unheard of and unnatural means.

In England, this reaction took place in the work of the so-called Scottish School, a group of philosophers that is much too little known in Germany today. Its founder was Thomas Reid⁴⁷ who claimed that a sum of elementary judgments could be found in the mind of each of us. We are certain that they are true, although we do not have any evidence for them. Reid called this sum of elementary judgments ‘common sense’. It is possible that we are wrong about their truth, but we have to believe them in any case; furthermore we can use them as the basis of a science. Only in this way can skepticism be overcome.

In Germany, it was Kant⁴⁸ who undertook to save knowledge from Hume’s skepticism, and his method was in essence very similar to that of Reid. Kant claimed that science demands as its foundation a number of principles which he called synthetic *a priori* judgments. On close inspection of what he means by this, however, it turns out that the term *a priori* amounts for him to propositions that stand for us as true from the beginning without their being evident.⁴⁹ The sum of *a priori* judgments have the same character as Reid’s judgments of common sense.

Now, however, Kant introduces something that is characteristic of him alone. While Reid did not try in the least to gloss over the obvious irrationality of

⁴⁶ David Hume (1711-1776). In modern times, just as in antiquity, in addition to scepticism a sort of eclecticism appeared, which was marked by a kind of sceptical uncertainty.

⁴⁷ Thomas Reid (1710-1796) was the first of the philosophers of the Scottish School. His most important followers were: Dugald Stewart (1753-1828); Thomas Brown (1778-1820), and Sir William Hamilton (1788-1856).

⁴⁸ Immanuel Kant (1724-1804).

⁴⁹ See Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 153-155 [note by O. Kraus].

his demand to build knowledge on blind prejudices, Kant endeavors to find a means by which such an apparently absurd procedure can be justified. As he concludes, grounding knowledge on blind prejudices could be permitted only on one condition: namely if we can assume that the objects adjust themselves to these prejudices.⁵⁰ This assumption must therefore be made. While, as Kant says, people had hitherto believed that our knowledge followed the things, we must now assume that the things bend themselves to our knowledge. On the basis of the earlier assumption, skepticism could not be overcome. By using synthetic *a priori* judgments, however, skepticism can be victoriously repelled.

Now all of this would be fine, were it not for the fact that, of the two assumptions, only one seems to be in accordance with nature; the second, on the other hand, is clearly an unnatural and silly claim.

Yet Kant makes every effort to make it more plausible, by alluding to the fact that the one group of objects to which our investigations are directed—namely the sum of all objects of experience—is phenomenal. Phenomena are co-determined by our subjectivity. Synthetic *a priori* knowledge is thus to refer exclusively to this group of objects; beyond phenomena, and beyond the field of possible experience, knowledge is supposed to be absolutely impossible. Accordingly, for Kant as for Hume, any investigation of the most exalted philosophical questions is ruled out. We can gain no secure knowledge of God, immortality, freedom; we simply cannot know, however much we thirst for this knowledge, whether there was a beginning of the world, whether the universe is bounded or unbounded, etc.

Kant's attempt to grab back the booty from skepticism was thus only a very partial success—if it was a success at all. For in actuality Kant's position must be plainly denied. Admittedly, objects, inasmuch as they are our phenomena, are somehow co-determined in their peculiarity by subjectivity. By saying this, however, it has not at all been shown that any old blind prejudice which we may have would prove itself in application to the course these objects take. If we assume that objects are determined by our prejudices willy nilly, then we assume something logically inadmissible, and if we want to base a science on such an assumption, then the old charge of skepticism concerning the arbitrariness of principles applies with full force.

⁵⁰ Ueberweg, too, calls the synthetic judgements '*a priori* prejudices'. Brentano's charge, however, is not that these judgements are *a priori*, but rather that, for Kant, their correctness cannot be proved [note by O. Kraus].

Kant, however, did not become conscious of this weakness in his philosophy. What caused him concern, was not doubt as to phenomena, but rather the awareness that he had to sacrifice to the skeptics the best and most exalted part of knowledge. Thus, he thinks up a new sort of substitute. While synthetic *a priori* knowledge is a matter of what we *must* blindly accept, so the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, and the freedom of the will are a matter of what we *should* believe. They are ‘postulates of pure practical reason’. We possess no sort of evidence into their truth, but this should not make our conviction of their validity any weaker. I shall hold fast to them, with no less force than to my own moral dignity. And thus Kant flattered himself that he had established certainty as to the objective reality of these exalted ideas.

Nicholas of Cusa, as we have seen, attributed a kind of ‘incomprehensible comprehension’ to his ‘*intellectus*’. Similarly, it seems to me, Kant presumed for his practical reason a sort of ‘unbelieving belief’. Everything that he brought forward in order to overcome skepticism is just as contrary to nature and as eccentric as was every previous case of reaction against the second stage of the period of decline.

In Germany, however, Kant’s philosophy was only the beginning of this reaction to skepticism. While the more sober-minded English philosophers did not go further along the road upon which Reid had set out, and indeed in the Scottish school itself Thomas Brown,⁵¹ the successor of Reid, returned to a more natural mode of consideration, Kant was followed in Germany by Fichte⁵² with his method of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. Fichte, in turn, was followed by Schelling⁵³ with his ‘intellectual insight’ that is supposed to be a type of absolute knowledge in and of itself: it cannot be taught, nor is it clear why philosophy should be obligated to pay special attention to any such monstrous power. Indeed, one is supposed to infer the mode of access to it from our common knowledge, even though no connection at all exists between them. Schelling was followed by Hegel⁵⁴ with his philosophy of the absolute, which asserts of itself that it contains

⁵¹ See note 47.

⁵² Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814).

⁵³ Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling (1775-1854).

⁵⁴ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831). Although Hegel was older than Schelling, his most important works appeared only later than those of Schelling.

the knowledge of all truth and that it reproduces the totality of the natural and the spiritual world from within itself. Hegel wants to take as his point of departure a thought completely free of content, and then make 'negation' the vehicle of dialectical progress. By means of a series of cavortings of this sort, he hoped to rise up to an eventual lofty end.

16. But come off it. Hegel's system and its pretensions have been exposed. A system that was only some decades ago still generally praised as the highest achievement of human inquiry, is today generally damned as the most extreme degeneration of human thought. This is a good sign. And we have quite generally good grounds, too, for believing that our own age is the beginning of a new period of development.

The conviction that the most recent systems have no value whatsoever, leads quite naturally to attempts to return to older thinkers, and to find a more fruitful starting point in their works, of just the sort which in the Middle Ages was found in Aristotle. Some begin this search with Kant and see in him, as it were, the 'Aristotle of the modern age'. Our historical considerations show, however, that this is undeserved. Neither what preceded him, nor what he himself taught, nor what came after him, give him anything like the sort of position in the history of philosophy which is comparable to that of the Stagirite in antiquity.

Herbart writes that Kant struck a spark that could have ignited a light, but that his legacy lay in the hands of a dissolute band. In other words, Herbart admits that directly after Kant things went worse than they had ever been before. But then why, one must ask, did this whole band become so dissolute in the wake of Kant? Would it not be something unheard of in the history of science that, immediately after the one who showed the right way, and indeed in consequence of his influence, everything was suddenly subject to errors more terrible than ever before?

Shall we allow ourselves to be misled by such arguments and by many others that have come to influence the opinion of our contemporaries? Truly not! If our time is to be praised as one that has rejuvenated itself in philosophy, then this is to proclaim the truth that it has at the same time entered into a new childhood. But then its judgment can be of no great certainty. Moreover, through its sudden shifts and changes, contemporary public opinion bears manifold testimony against itself. Yesterday, people celebrated the ethical doctrine of

compassion of a Schopenhauer. Today, they despise Schopenhauer, paying homage rather to Nietzsche's inhuman ideas regarding the *Übermensch*.⁵⁵ On the other hand, many of the best minds of our day have already emancipated themselves from the fashionable view in relation to Kant. Herbert Spencer, just to mention one of the most respected philosophers, has arrived at an opinion of Kant very much similar to my own, and he and I have arrived at this view quite independently. More than once have I heard scholars to whom I declared my estimation of Kant's philosophy exclaim: 'Exactly! How glad I am to hear that from you. My conviction is completely identical, but this is something one is not allowed to confess.' Such fear is unknown to me. On the contrary, I think it is a scientific responsibility to express openly our true opinion of such important questions.

It is also instructive to see how philosophers who attempted to reform philosophy by going back to Kant have had no sort of success. And to see how even those who choose him as their master see themselves at the same time as constrained to admit that Kant's philosophy cannot be taken all of a piece. While they praise some works, especially the *Critique of Pure Reason*, they condemn others especially the *Critique of Practical Reason*. This is Schopenhauer's opinion and this, as I have said already, Lorm's. This means that after Kant had allegedly shown the right way, not only were his followers led into errors, but even he changed to the wrong track just after he supposedly had found exactly the right way to proceed! Does this not sound strange beyond all measure?

But there is more: Whole parts of the *Critique of Pure Reason* have been set aside as untenable and worthless. Those parts which survive this thinning process are then alone awarded lasting significance, but then these, in turn, are declared to be in need of certain modifications. The views of a thus modified Kantianism are then identified with certain intuitions and opinions to which modern natural science has led, as for example with Johannes Müller's doctrine of the 'specific energies of the senses' or with the hypothesis of innate ideas and judgments of Haeckel and other Darwinists, or with Du Bois-Reymond's doctrine of the limits of our knowledge of nature. Lorm, too, proceeds in no other fashion.

A more exact investigation shows however that what is here seen as being essentially identical is in fact such as to lack any deeper affinities. Müller's

⁵⁵ See Brentano's *Die Lehre Jesu und ihre bleibende Bedeutung*, Leipzig 1921, p. 129. [note by O. Kraus].

conception of the specific energies of the senses has nothing to do with Kant's doctrine of space and time as the *a priori* forms of sensation; the idea of sensory energies is rather much more closely related to Lockean, and traditional empiricist, views on the subjective character of sensory qualities.⁵⁶ The doctrine of inborn thoughts of Haeckel and other Darwinists—a doctrine, let us add, that is contrary to experience—has nothing to do with Kant's *a priori* concepts and judgments, which are, as is known, supposed to be derived from no experience at all, not even from that of our ancestors. The doctrine of Du Bois-Reymond, finally, can in no way be connected to the Kantian teaching that the *Ding an sich* is unknowable, and that *a priori* synthetic knowledge is inapplicable to transcendent questions. The only connecting point between them might be this: that both philosophers insisted that human knowledge has certain limits. But this idea had been taught already by the old empiricist school, who also made a series of detailed discoveries about it on the basis of psychological considerations.⁵⁷ The fact is, however, that people in general do not know enough about these earlier thinkers, and thus Kant is often counted as the original source of what he in fact borrowed from others and merely made impure through various admixtures. Thus it is often held that Kant was the first who established a harmony between philosophy and the investigation of nature. The two must, however, have already been in harmony with each other to such a degree that Lavoisier, in his famous work (one still fundamental for chemistry even today), could quote a long deliberation from Condillac on the correct mode of research, in which it is pointed out that he, Lavoisier, had followed this in his own investigations and had found it to have proved itself thoroughly.⁵⁸

Let us return, then, to the genuine, more articulate sources. Let us seek to join up with the achievements of the first ascending phase of development. What we find there is real groundwork as well as that same sound, healthy method which will make it possible for us to continue successfully the work of our

⁵⁶ Thomas Young applied the hypothesis of the special sensory energies to the field of optics much earlier, and more consistently, than J. Müller. It seems, too, that we can exclude any influence on him of German philosophy.

⁵⁷ See for instance Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, chapter IV, section 3.

⁵⁸ Lavoisier, *Traité élémentaire de chimie*, Paris 1789. Part One, *Discours préliminaire*, pp. V and XXXI.

ancestors.

17. Something similar can be said of the achievements of the ascending phases of earlier periods. I have in mind, in particular, the achievements of ancient philosophy. This had, in contrast to modern times, the advantage of an ascending period of longer duration, so that it was able to reach what is in many respect a richer stock of results. Even today there are many things which can best be learned from Aristotle.⁵⁹

As for the medieval period, it must be said that, as Leibniz already recognized,⁶⁰ its results are not of the same value as those of antiquity and modernity. In fact there was never present within it an interest fully devoted to free and rational inquiry. Philosophy was treated as *ancilla theologiae* (as ‘maid of theology’). Only relatively, therefore, can it be said of the first phase of this period that it manifested a pure theoretical interest. It is certain that this served to hinder development, that it held inquiry back from important investigations in the subsequent epoch and encouraged that degeneration into senseless subtleties that is characteristic of the first stage of decline. Thus, the return to the philosophy of the Middle Ages cannot be seen as being of the same worth as the return to other periods. It would, moreover, be an absolute disaster if one were to see this period as exemplary because one wanted once more to bring philosophy into the same subservient relation to theology.⁶¹

18. It is not only in the history of philosophy, ancient and modern, that we are to seek new starting points, however, but also in the achievements of other sciences, and especially in those of mathematics and the natural sciences, which today enjoy such intensive development. Everything in science stands in

⁵⁹ At the same time Brentano declares Aristotle’s philosophy as a whole to be untenable, see his *Aristoteles und seine Weltanschauung*, p. IV [note by O. Kraus].

⁶⁰ As Leibniz said, ‘I know that the books of the Scholastics are full of nonsense, but there is gold hidden under this straw.’

⁶¹ In the original lecture, I had inserted at this point a passage addressing the Austrian Ministry of Education. According to the information of the Vienna University News, the Minister had refused in his decision concerning the Chair of Philosophy to take into consideration the proposals of the faculty. Instead, he had attempted, consciously, and clearly against his own better judgement, to secure the appointment to full professor in the University of Vienna, in a position reserved for me for some 14 years, for a scholastic philosopher, an examiner in the archbishop’s academy in Breslau. On grounds similar to the ones I mentioned in the introduction (see note 3), I removed this passage, too, from the printed version of my lecture.

interrelation to everything else, after all. That is why we find essential contributions even to philosophy in the works of eminent mathematicians and natural scientists. To mention just one of these, the development of the theory of probability was able to solve certain logical problems in such a way that Hume's skeptical concerns could be completely resolved, and in fact they have been resolved—and in such a way as to make no use at all of those unnatural means to which Reid and Kant thought it necessary to appeal.⁶²

19. The path to higher realms—the path along which Kant invited us to enter, not through the door of intellectual insight, but rather, in the strangest fashion, by breaking in by means of that unbelievable act of blind belief—is thus no longer barred, as had earlier seemed to be the case. It is true that knowledge has, and will always have, its limits. In relation to many questions, answers can be given only on the basis of probability; in relation to other questions, we can achieve not even this to any considerable degree. But even if all our knowledge is fragmentary, still, it is an imposing fragment. Man is the most wondrous among all the living creatures, wrote Sophocles; and science, as Goethe said, is 'the highest faculty of man'. This faculty has often led him further than he had ever hoped in his wildest dreams, and so may it be the case even in relation to those highest questions.

Without knowing what the essence of matter is, we have nonetheless established that matter is essentially incorruptible; without knowing what the essence of mind is, we might yet be able to show that we have a well-grounded hope that the soul enjoys everlasting existence. Without knowing the essence of the first cause of the material world, still we must work through to a rational conviction that the world is determined for the best—by this cause. By this means also we shall have gained an answer to the question of optimism in a way that truly corresponds to the needs of our nature.

Lorm rightly recognizes that the pessimistic objections of Schopenhauer and Hartmann have no scientific value. The one is based on an absurd metaphysics, the other simply on a superficial and prejudiced list of events that, considered in themselves, would have to be counted as supporting pessimistic conclusions. For Lorm, the only real basis for scientific pessimism is the sad discrepancy between the intellectual needs of man on the one hand, and his capacity to satisfy them on the other, a discrepancy that seemed to arise as a result of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Even this objection, however, appears implausible.

⁶² See Brentano's *Versuch über Erkenntnis*, Leipzig 1925, pp. 160ff. [note by O. Kraus].

20. Nevertheless, we still have other and perhaps greater objections. Thus there is the objection that points to the disteleology in the organic world and to the absence of any teleological character in the inorganic realm. But look, recent investigations in biology have reconstructed our conceptions in a way that is sharply opposed to earlier results. Huxley,⁶³ the most celebrated biologist of our day, declares on the basis of the Darwinian theory of evolution that the material world, in its original structure, seems to display a certain sort of teleology. The same view was recently propounded also by the great Ernst von Baer,⁶⁴ and by Lamarck⁶⁵ when he gave the first impulse to the evolutionary movement at the beginning of the century. And this means, then, that a teleological character comprehends equally the organic and the inorganic nature.

Other objections have been put forward, too, as for example that which relates to the necessarily finite character of creation;⁶⁶ then, the objection that refers to the small number of the dimensions of space,⁶⁷ and another that predicts

⁶³ See Thomas Huxley's *The Problems of Geology*, vol. IV, in which he argues against Haeckel. Among the German Darwinists it is especially Weismann who definitively stresses the necessity of a basic teleological structure of the universe.

⁶⁴ Karl Ernst von Baer, *Studien aus dem Gebiete der Naturwissenschaft*, 2nd edition, Braunschweig 1886, parts II, IV, and V.

⁶⁵ Jean-Baptiste Pierre Antoine De Monet De Lamarck, *Philosophie zoologique*, 1819.

⁶⁶ With respect to a possible solution of this problem, I expressed my opinion some time ago in a short poem:

The Best of All Possible Worlds

You say: 'The world must be the best of all:
The best chooses the best when he creates.'
Another: 'She is not the best, oh no!
For otherwise she would be the measure of God's power.'
But listen, the two of you who quarrel thus!
Is the world? --No! The world *becomes*
And in becoming goes beyond all measure
And, endlessly distant,
She strives from likeness to likeness
T'wards the unreachably high image of the Lord.

⁶⁷ As a response to this argument, it would be natural to refer to the fact that, beside our field of experience, there might be 'subspaces' and 'superimposed spaces' (if we are allowed to

the coming annihilation of the Earth and other possibly inhabited planets; and, finally, the objection that refers to the law of entropy and to the feared state of an ultimate winding-down of all natural processes, or at least of all higher forms of natural processes.⁶⁸ Others raise the problem which arises when, in accordance with what theodicy must demand, one regards evil in itself as something purely negative, or on the other hand as something which arises only out of the association of essentially good elements.⁶⁹ At this point, the investigation enters the most subtle problems of a theory of categories.

It is clear, then, that the question of optimism is, in its various ramifications, a most complex one. On the other hand, there is not one of the knots in the web of difficulties by which one is here confronted, which cannot be untied. Indeed, untying each knot brings with it new and advantageous discoveries, never before hoped for, so that the view of the old optimist Heraclitus⁷⁰ is confirmed: ‘The hidden harmony is stronger (*or*, ‘better’) than the visible.’

Every single one of the most important philosophers of the ascending periods were, as history teaches, optimists. Plato and Aristotle, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, and also Descartes, Locke, and Leibniz have each achieved a great deal in this respect, and this is something which deserves our gratitude. And it is simply not acceptable to compare, as Lorm dares to do, their optimistic views with the pessimistic views of our most recent philosophers. We can certainly hope, however, that whatever those philosophers left still to do, will be accomplished by us or by our successors.

introduce these expressions), each of which possesses a certain number of dimensions [different from those with which we are familiar]. Spinoza, for instance, did not find any difficulty in attributing a variety of other dimensions to his substance, in addition to zero-dimensional thinking and to three-dimensional extension. This idea, however, only leads to new difficulties. For, by accepting the thesis of multidimensionality, the danger cannot be dispelled that our universe might become decomposed, just as a bad tragedy (to use a striking expression of Aristotle, see *Metaphysics*, 1090 b 19) collapses into sheer episodes. In the present context, however, we cannot show how this objection, too, can be refuted.

⁶⁸ For this view see for instance the popular lectures by Helmholtz: ‘On the Interaction of Natural Forces’ (read in 1854), and ‘On the Origin of the Solar System’ (read in 1871).

⁶⁹ This problem was already recognized by Augustine and Thomas Aquinas.

⁷⁰ Heraclitus of Ephesus, the most talented Ionian philosopher of nature, highly respected by Socrates himself, flourished c. 500 BC.

21. Any act of knowledge implies freedom and redemption. This will hold especially of that kind of knowledge which takes into account, in a manner satisfying to our nature, what we experience as evil in the world. For pessimistic anxieties are the most tragic of the nightmares by which mankind is affected.

The religion of our people, with its doctrine of an omnipotent and omnibenevolent Father of all, is essentially optimistic. Only under the banner of optimism was it able to win for itself the world, or rather, that part of humanity which has become the bearer of world-history. Admittedly, there are signs that this victory might not be a permanent one. However, even if this greatest of all cultural phenomena should disappear, still this would not happen in such a way that its place would be left simply vacant; still less could it be replaced with a pessimistic world-view. Whatever replaces it, whatever achieves an enduring victory over it, must be explicitly optimistic, and must be in a position to give a better account of the world than that which was given by Christianity with its doctrine of original sin and of redemption by the Saviour. This revolution will be a similar one to that which gave rise to the Christian epoch, when the existing ritual law, which had hitherto been considered the essence of religion, fell. And behold: the real essence was preserved intact and emerged in a purified and clarified form. In this way, too, much may fall away again which is at the moment regarded as essential. I know, when I say this, that many noble persons will feel offended by my words, just as the benevolent adherents of circumcision were offended by Saint Paul. But the three words of faith, as Schiller called them, will only resound in the soul all the more mightily, and will all the more benevolently shape man's inner and outer life.

God grant all these things! And I trust that he will grant them.

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