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Franz Brentano's Philosophy After One Hundred Years

From History of Philosophy to Reism

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Franz Brentano Studies

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Venanzio Raspa

Abstract Brentano's dissertation *Von der mannigfachen Bedeutung des Seienden nach Aristoteles* (*On the Several Senses of Being in Aristotle*) (1862) is examined in the light of the nineteenth-century debate on the Aristotelian categories. After providing an exposition of the conceptions of the main representatives of this debate, Adolf Trendelenburg and Hermann Bonitz, this paper assesses Brentano's point of view on the meaning and origin of the Aristotelian categories. It shows (i) that Brentano assumes non-Aristotelian elements in his reading of the Aristotelian categories, (ii) that this depends on the fact that he shares Bonitz's thesis, and (iii) that his reading is incomplete in the light of certain Aristotelian statements about non-being.

Keywords Franz Brentano · Aristotle · Categories · Herrmann Bonitz · Adolf Trendelenburg

Several studies on Brentano's dissertation *Von der mannigfachen Bedeutung des Seienden nach Aristoteles* (*On the Several Senses of Being in Aristotle*)¹ (1862) focus on the role it played in the development of Brentano's thinking² and its influence on the young Heidegger,³ emphasize its scholastic and Thomistic background,⁴ and speak of

¹References to this work (Brentano 1862) are directly quoted in the text; the page numbers of the English translation (Brentano 1975) appear in square brackets. All other translations are mine, except for where a reference to an English edition is shown in square brackets. English translations of Aristotle's texts are taken from *The Complete Works of Aristotle—the Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. by J. Barnes.

²Cf. George and Koehn (2004).

³Cf. Volpi (1976, 1978), Krantz Gabriel (2012).

⁴Cf. Hedwig (2012), Antonelli (2017).

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the non-Aristotelian bent of the Brentanian theory of categories.⁵ Often, these studies begin with a description of the historical context: Brentano's dissertation is part of the revival of Aristotelian philosophy that took place, especially in Germany, during the nineteenth century, important stages of which included the editions, supported by the Berlin Academy of Sciences, of the *corpus aristotelicum* (under the direction of Immanuel Bekker (1831)) and of the Greek commentators (under the direction of Hermann Diels (1882 ff.)), as well as the editions of Aristotelian texts by scholars like Christian August Brandis (1823), Friedrich Adolf Trendelenburg (1833a), Theodor Waitz (1844–1846), Albert Schwegler (1847–1848), and Hermann Bonitz (1848–1849).⁶ This enormous philological work has been supplemented by a vast amount of writings on Aristotle's thought and valuable historical-philosophical works, such as those by Brandis (1835–1866), Heinrich Ritter (1829–1853), and Eduard Zeller (1844–1852, re-edited several times). The broad debate on Aristotle's theory of categories, which nearly spanned the entire century, was an integral part of the rebirth of Aristotle's philosophy in the nineteenth century. However, the studies mentioned above seldom take into serious consideration the debate on the Aristotelian categories,⁷ which is highly instructive and from which scholars can draw valuable insights today. I do not deny that Brentano's interpretation of Aristotle in his dissertation was deeply influenced by Aquinas's commentaries on Aristotle, along with Platonism and Neoplatonism. It is possible that Brentano briefly mentioned Aquinas in his dissertation out of mere academic opportunism.⁸ At the beginning of the fifth chapter of his dissertation "Being According to the Figures of the Categories," however, Brentano refers to the debate on the categories, the key participants in which were Trendelenburg (1846), Bonitz (1853), Brandis (1853, 1860), Carl Prantl (1855), and Zeller (1862²). I will therefore consider the dissertation an important contribution to the nineteenth-century debate on the Aristotelian categories, and, consequently, I will deal with it exclusively, leaving aside the developments of Brentano's categorical theory collected in the *Kategorienlehre* (*The Theory of Categories*), as this is a completely different work.⁹

1 Kant and the Nineteenth-Century Debate on Aristotle's Categories

In the background of the nineteenth-century debate on the Aristotelian categories is Kant, who provided in the *Critique of Pure Reason* a new theory of categories and advanced a harsh criticism of the Aristotelian doctrine. On the one hand, he defined

⁵Cf. Besoli (2017).

⁶On the rebirth of Aristotelian studies in the nineteenth century, see Thouard (2004a, b), Hartung (2006, 2011), Hartung et al. (2019), and Raspa (2020, 45 ff.).

⁷Only Trendelenburg's theory of categories and Brentano's discussion of it have been carefully examined; cf. Antonelli (1996, 51 ff.), Baumgartner (2006), Fugali (2012, 2017), and Villevieille (2018).

⁸Cf. Antonelli (2017, 177 ff.).

⁹For a study of the Brentanian conception of the categories from the 1862 dissertation to his later writings, see Taieb (2018).

the categories as pure concepts of the intellect, offered a justification for his categories by deducing them from the table of judgments, and arranged them in a table divided into four groups, each comprising three elements. According to Kant, 'categorizing' equates to structuring the world—giving it order. Not only are the categories the conditions of possibility of thinking, but they give shape and order to experience, delimiting its own conditions of possibility.¹⁰ On the other hand, Kant maintained that Aristotle pursued the same aim but that he had collected the categories unsystematically as he lacked a unitary principle from which to deduce them.¹¹ In Aristotelian theory, therefore, important questions remain unanswered regarding (1) how many categories there are (what the set of categories consists of), (2) their justification (the grounds for holding that they are categories), (3) and the completeness of the list (the grounds for holding that *only* these count as categories).

Kantian criticisms were perceived as a challenge by the German Aristotelians, who in the course of the nineteenth century produced interpretations that, while diverse, had the common purpose of replying to Kant.¹² Two areas of research were outlined: the origin and the meaning of the Aristotelian categories. The first line of research summarized Kant's questions: (1) How did Aristotle draw up his list of categories? (2) Is this list complete? The second line of research sought to answer the following further questions: (3) What is it that is actually divided into categories? (4) What is a category, according to Aristotle? In proposing their solutions, despite their common aim, the scholars disagreed. Brentano provides answers to all four questions, but at a price: (i) he assumes non-Aristotelian elements in his reading of the Aristotelian categories; (ii) he does so because he shared Bonitz's thesis; and (iii) his reading is incomplete in the light of certain statements by Aristotle concerning non-being.

Trendelenburg opened the debate on the Aristotelian categories in 1833 with his essay *De Aristotelis categoriis (On Aristotle's Categories)*. This text was met with positive reactions from Albert Gustav Heydemann (1835), Franz Biese (1835), and Hermann Rassow (1843), as well as objections from Heinrich Ritter (1837), Leonhard von Spengel (1845), and Eduard Zeller (1846). Many scholars took a stand on the next work by Trendelenburg, his *Aristoteles Kategorienlehre (Aristotle's Theory of Categories)* (1846), the first essay in his *Geschichte der Kategorienlehre (History of the Theory of Categories)*. These included Hermann Bonitz (1853), Christian August Brandis (1853, 1860), A. F. C. Kersten (1853), Valentin Rose (1854), Ludwig Strümpell (1854), Carl Prantl (1855), Franz Brentano (1862), and again Zeller (1862², 1879³); also taking a position in the debate were Heymann Steinthal (1863), Wilhelm Schuppe (1871), Werner Luthe (1874), Gerhard Zillgenz

¹⁰Cf. Kant (1781¹–1787², B 165 [1998, 263–264]).

¹¹Cf. Kant (1781¹–1787², A 81 = B 107 [1998, 213]; 1783: *Ak.* IV, 323 [2004, 74–75]).

¹²And to Hegel, who, in agreement with Kant, wrote the following in his *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie (Lectures on the History of Philosophy)*: "yet the work in which these categories are laid down is not to be regarded as complete. Aristotle takes ten of them; (...) Aristotle adds to these predicables five post predicaments, but he only ranges them all side by side" (1833, 1840²/1986, 233 [1894, 215]).

(1880), Richard Bauch (1884), Otto Apelt (1891), Alfred Gercke (1891), Karl Wotke (1896), Heinrich Maier (1900), and Rudolf Witten (1903), who recapitulates the terms of the debate in the first pages of his dissertation.

I will mainly focus my attention on Trendelenburg and Bonitz, and I will follow both directions mentioned above: the meaning and the origin (that is, the deduction or justification) of the Aristotelian theory of categories.¹³ Brentano is aware of this debate and provides a brief reconstruction of it in his dissertation.

At first, Brentano mentions Carl Prantl's *Geschichte der Logik im Abendlande* (*History of Western Logic*) (1855) in relation to the issue of the number of categories. Although the three categories that Aristotle introduces in *Metaph.* XIV 2, 1089b23–24 and the eight or ten that he lists in other passages are significant, Prantl argues that while they must be limited in number, that number need not necessarily be exactly 10 or 8, since there could just as easily be 17 or 18.¹⁴ On the contrary, in agreement with Brandis, Zeller, Bonitz, and Trendelenburg, Brentano believes that the Aristotelian categories could be reduced to eight and that “Aristotle maintained that this number is complete and certain” (75 [51]); cf. also 176–177 [116]). Brentano accepts some of Brandis's and Zeller's conclusions, but he explicitly states that he does not share their thesis, according to which “the categories are not real concepts, but only the framework (*Fachwerk*) in which all real concepts are to be placed” (76 [51]). His position towards Trendelenburg and Bonitz is different. On the one hand, he claims with Trendelenburg that “the categories are the most general predicates” (77 [52]); on the other hand, he suggests that they can only be so because they are, as Bonitz argues, the highest genera of being. Brentano writes that he prefers the latter opinion, even though he goes beyond Bonitz with his deduction of the categories. Let us consider in further detail the interpretations offered by Trendelenburg and Bonitz.

Following the tradition, Trendelenburg views categories as predicates (in Latin, *κατηγορίαι* were translated as *praedicamenta*). This meaning applies to the ten categories, all of which, except the first substance—but this too in certain cases (cf. *An. pr.* I 27, 43a35–36)—can be predicates. They are also called the most general “genera of predicates” (cf. *Top.* I 9, 103b20–21; 15, 107a3–4; VII 1, 152a38–39; *An. post.* I 22, 83b15–16; *Soph. el.* 22, 178a5–6), and at times simply “genera” (cf. *De an.* I 1, 402a23–25) or “figures of predication” (cf. *Metaph.* VI 2, 1026a35–b 1; IX 10, 1051a34–b 1; X 3, 1054b27–30). Such expressions, Trendelenburg argues, already point to a connection to grammar.¹⁵

In order to reply to Kant and Hegel, it is necessary to find a guideline for the deduction of the Aristotelian categories. According to Trendelenburg, Aristotle started his investigation from the whole, hence most likely from the examination of the proposition, or judgment, as a logical whole. He believes that Aristotle did not

¹³I provide a reconstruction of the entire nineteenth-century debate on the Aristotelian categories in Raspa (2020). On the controversy between Trendelenburg and Bonitz, see also Courtine (2004) and King (2019, 30 ff.).

¹⁴Cf. Prantl (1855, 205–207).

¹⁵Cf. Trendelenburg (1846, 5–8).