

The Brentano School

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It sometimes happens that a particular place at a particular time (and for specific historical, social, and political reasons) can witness the concentrated and localized emergence of a significant new strain of thought. Such is the case with Jena at the end of the eighteenth century; indeed "Jena", for the history of philosophy, is less a geographical notation than a shorthand for the fruition of German idealism, or, for literature, the ephemeral but prophetic project of early romanticism.

There is a suspicion, however, that such determinations of a geographical and cultural context are somewhat mythopoetic; indeed, the narrative of "Jena" begins with the mystery of its own origin in the dense and suggestive text, the so-called 'Earliest System Programme of German Idealism', the authorship of which has been the subject of much speculation.¹ A further suspicion arises with respect to the literary project of the "Jena romantics" (Friedrich Schlegel, Novalis, etc.): their project has been the object of "deconstructive" appropriations which seem, implicitly, to celebrate the amenability of the "Athenaeum" to post-structuralist literary theory while effacing the paucity of their literary output.² The fact that the Jena romantics can be seen as deconstructive literary theorists *avant la lettre* arguably cannot fully disguise the extent to which their work pales in comparison with that of writers whose outlook and procedure they share or anticipate to a greater or lesser degree: Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Georg Büchner, to name but three.

¹ Written in Hegel's hand, but seemingly "authored" by Schelling; see Andrew Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity*, p.265-267.

² See, for example, Blanchot's "The Athenaeum" in *The Infinite Conversation*, p.351-359, De Man's seminal essay "The Rhetoric of Temporality" in *Blindness and Insight*, p.187-228, and the rebarbative quagmire of post-Heideggerian verbiage that is Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy's *The Literary Absolute*.

My own research into the work of Franz Kafka led me to investigate the intellectual atmosphere in Prague at the beginning of the twentieth century, and what is striking, in this context, is that while the short-lived and comparatively infertile "project" of Jena has been the object of such retrospective celebration, the "school" which perhaps realized its culmination in Prague at this time has been somewhat neglected. The philosophical (and literary) fecundity of this period is quite remarkable, as are the *dramatis personae* of figures only tangentially related to the "school" in question: Robert Musil, Roman Jakobson, Sigmund Freud, Ernst Mach, Albert Einstein.³

The central figures (some of whom are well known, while others have been victims of an often unjustified neglect) of this "school" (of which Prague was only one centre; Graz was perhaps the most significant other location) include Anton Marty, Christian von Ehrenfels, Alexius Meinong, Ewald Hering, Carl Stumpf, Oskar Kraus, Stephan Witasek, Kasimir Twardowski, and Edmund Husserl. What they shared was a preoccupation with the work of Franz Brentano, and what is especially notable is the variety of directions in which their often critical engagements with Brentano were to lead, a feature which casts an interesting light upon the distinction between "analytic" or "Anglo-American" (a characterization which seems singularly inappropriate in this context) philosophy and "continental" or "European" philosophy.

The importance of Brentano's work for this period can hardly be overstated; as Barry Smith puts it, his work by this stage had "acquired the status of a semi-official philosophy of the [Austro-Hungarian] Empire":⁴ the kernel of his thought is composed of a philosophical elaboration of the possibilities of ("descriptive") psychology as a science, his analyses suggest a plethora of lines of enquiry. His resuscitation of the concept of "intentionality" decisively informs the phenomenology of Husserl, whose thought subsequently influences much (French)

³ To put it briefly: Musil corresponded with Kafka, and studied Mach, who was himself conversant with Brentano. On the relation between the Prague School of Linguistics and Brentanian thought, see Liliana Albertazzi, "Anton Marty", in *The School of Franz Brentano*, p.84. Freud was, for a short time, a student of Brentano's (see Barry Smith, "Kafka and Brentano" in *Structure and Gestalt*, p.116); Einstein gave a paper on the special theory of relativity at the house of Berta Fanta, which was the scene of meetings which had grown out of a Brentanian discussion group; Einstein also shared a friend (Hugo Bergmann, a Brentanian-influenced philosopher) with Kafka; see Barry Smith, *Austrian Philosophy*, p.23.

⁴ "Kafka and Brentano" in Barry Smith ed., *Structure and Gestalt: Philosophy and Literature in Austria-Hungary and Her Successor States*, p. 116.

existentialism, Heidegger, and, in a more complex fashion, the work of figures such as Derrida: this trajectory encompasses much of what is envisaged as recent continental philosophy. Other responses to Brentano revolve around issues in logic (in the present context, the case of Meinong is the most significant) and anticipate the work of thinkers such as Russell, hence a prominent current of "analytic" philosophy. Brentano's impetus also animates other endeavours such as Gestalt psychology (through the work of Christian von Ehrenfels), other zones of philosophical enquiry such as ethics, aesthetics (for example, through the work of Emil Utitz) and the philosophy of language, and other disciplines such as economics and, in the work of Oskar Kraus, for instance, law. All of these "movements" were represented in Prague at the turn of the century.

Under consideration here are two "moments" in this proliferation of currents of Brentanian thought, namely the cases of Anton Marty and Alexius Meinong. An account of Brentano's thought, however, forms a necessary preface to the exposition of their thought. The crucial text for this period is Brentano's *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* (1874): Brentano's thought was to undergo significant changes, particularly with a move to "reism", and the posthumously published *Descriptive Psychology* was to shed further light upon his investigations, but suffice it to say that it is the former text that was of decisive importance for the philosophers in question.

Brentano's thesis included the famous axiom that "The true method of philosophy is none other than that of the natural sciences":⁵ thus his "descriptive psychology" was to have an *a priori* status which could bear comparison with, for example, that of physics. To this end, he discriminated between "descriptive psychology" (although this term is not prominent in *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, it increasingly became accepted as a designation of his thought) and "genetic psychology".⁶ The latter is defined as concerning the origin of mental states, and is associated with psycho-physical and physiological investigations; its claims are contingent upon empirical data and research. Brentano's "descriptive psychology" (influenced by Aristotle and British Empiricism), by contrast, seeks to identify the most fundamental elements of mental states, this process amounting to the identification of *a priori* "laws" of mental phenomena.

⁵ Quoted in *Austrian Philosophy*, p. 31 and in several other accounts.

⁶ See *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, p.29, footnote.

Brentano's method for this analysis is termed the "inner perception" of mental phenomena, which he distinguishes from "introspection" or "inner observation":

In observation, we direct our full attention to a phenomenon in order to apprehend it accurately. But with objects of inner perception this is absolutely impossible. This is especially clear with regard to certain mental phenomena such as anger. If someone is in a state in which he wants to observe his own anger raging within him, the anger must already be somewhat diminished, and so his original object of observation would have disappeared. The same impossibility is also present in all other cases.⁷

"Inner perception" focuses, not upon the objects of mental states, but rather their modes of appearing in consciousness. Brentano's project will therefore not lead to knowledge of the objects of mental states: his approach can be regarded as involving a "methodological solipsism", in that the sole zone of enquiry is that of the relationship between consciousness and objects in so far as they are manifested in, or immanent to, consciousness. Brentano's discussion of this relationship includes the celebrated resurrection of the Scholastic term "intentional", in the sense which would become familiar with the development of a fully-fledged phenomenology:

Every mental phenomenon is characterized by what the Scholastics of the Middle Ages called the intentional (or mental) inexistence of an object, and what we might call, though not wholly unambiguously, reference to a content, direction toward an object (which is not to be understood here as meaning a thing), or immanent objectivity. Every mental phenomenon includes something as an object within itself, although they do not all do so in the same way. In presentation something is presented, in judgement something is affirmed or denied, in love loved, in hate hated, in desire desired and so on. This intentional in-existence is characteristic exclusively of mental phenomena. No physical phenomenon exhibits anything like it. We can, therefore, define

⁷ *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, p.30.

mental phenomena by saying that they are those phenomena which contain an object intentionally within themselves.⁸

The insight is essentially that of an articulation of "semantic content", namely that a thought is about something in a way in which, for example, a tree cannot be "about" anything. Moreover, this is not to be conceived as an intentional attitude directed towards an object external to consciousness, for objects acquire "reality" only in so far as they are "in" mental phenomena, or are *immanent to consciousness*. The existence of a transcendent world is a question which this theory is neither willing nor able to address. The claim that "[n]o physical phenomenon exhibits anything like [intentionality]" is not to be taken as a reference to "things" external to consciousness, but only as an indication that an object of outer perception inheres only in the relation between the "real" act of perception and the "non-real" object included *within* that act itself. In an anticipation of aspects of Husserl's methodology, the objects of analysis are exclusively intentional states and attitudes with their immanent objects, and the fact that objects appear in the mode of "outer perception" does not imply reference to a transcendent world; such an issue is suspended.

As the "intentionality passage" suggests, intentional states involve three modes. Firstly, there is the presentation (*Vorstellung*)⁹ of an object inhering in the structure of an intentional state; this is consequently the "primary" component of such a state, although it is (almost?) always accompanied by a judgment (*Urteil*), which is essentially reducible to belief or disbelief, the affirmation or denial of the existence of the object, the ground of which is necessarily subjective. The third mode is dubbed "Phenomena of Love and Hate": Brentano suggests that all "complex" attitudes which emerge in the phenomena of willing, desiring, ethics and emotion are essentially reducible to the "simple" disjunction between positive (loving) and negative (hating) attitudes.

Concomitant with the suspension of the question of an externally subsistent world is Brentano's denial of a substantial basis of subjectivity: there is no additional entity (existing independently of intentional phenomena) in which the "self" could inhere. The "unity of the soul" is therefore established on the basis of the claim that, on the one hand, several distinct intentional attitudes can be directed toward a single in-

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 88-89.

⁹ The translation of *Vorstellung* as "presentation" rather than "representation" is, I assume, meant to convey Brentano's avowed aversion to post-Kantian thought.

existent object (an object can be simultaneously presented, believed in, and valued positively), and, on the other, that two objects can be presented simultaneously: a seeing and a hearing can occur at the same time, and these two objects can be associated by (and only on the basis of) a single consciousness.¹⁰ However, as Smith notes, the unity thereby established is merely "synchronic", unity at a given time. In the absence of a substantial basis for the continuity of the "self", memory can arguably testify only to a succession of collocations of intentional phenomena from which a continuity may be intuited but not demonstrated.¹¹ As Brentano suggests, in a Heraclitean turn of phrase, "The unity of the self in its past and present states, therefore, would then be no different from that of a flowing stream in which one wave follows another and imitates its movement".¹²

Brentano's thought (of which the above is inevitably only a partial sketch) was the object of critical responses which were components of a substantial number of projects. Even "uncritical" adoptions of Brentano's outlook proved perhaps surprisingly creative. This claim rests, in the present context, upon the case of Anton Marty, a lecturer at the German University in Prague during the early years of the twentieth century, in which period he was Kafka's philosophy tutor: in many respects, he was a strict (and even dogmatic) adherent to Brentano's system, reluctant to countenance any deviation from its "orthodox" formulation, even those perpetrated by Brentano himself.¹³ Marty's originality consisted, therefore, not in the theoretical apparatus he adopted but in his application of it, and, above all, in his theory of language. Given the fecundity of the intellectual climate in Prague – and, in particular, the prevalence of inter-disciplinary correspondences – it is perhaps not surprising that Marty's work on language had some influence on the Prague School of Linguistics, the most influential representative of which was Roman Jakobson.¹⁴ Certainly Marty's concern for issues such as aphasia¹⁵ and onomatopoeia¹⁶ foreshadows the agenda of structuralist

¹⁰ *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, p.158.

¹¹ *Austrian Philosophy*, p.51. Temporality (and the subjective experience of it) became an important issue for Brentano; at this stage, "time" seems to derive wholly from the duration of objects of presentation.

¹² *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, p.169.

¹³ See Liliana Albertazzi, ed., *The School of Franz Brentano*, p.95.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.84; Mathesius, the founder of the linguistics "school" was a "disciple" of Marty.

¹⁵ See, for example, "Sprache und Abstraktion", in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 2, part 2, p.104.

linguistics, and attempts have been made to depict him as a clear precursor.¹⁷

Marty dubbed his theory a "general semasiology", and divided the enterprise into genetic and descriptive semasiology. This disjunction obviously echoes Brentano's separation of genetic and descriptive psychology, but also bears comparison with Saussure's distinction between the "diachronic" and "synchronic" axes of enquiry into language. In his discussion of the "genetic" level of semasiology (that which concerns itself with the origins and development of language), Marty opposed "nativism", and in particular the work of Wilhelm Wundt.¹⁸ Wundt proposed an account of language based upon its purported emergence from physiological, instinctive gestures: "The primitive development of *articulate* language can hardly be thought of except after the analogy of this natural gesture-language".¹⁹ Language arises from onomatopoeia (there is an "originally necessary relation between sound and meaning"²⁰, although this relationship obviously becomes increasingly distant), and there remains an isomorphism of word and gesture. Marty's counter-emphasis, as Albertazzi puts it, consists in "the contrary idea that linguistic phenomena are voluntary in nature and therefore based upon intentional [...] linguistic constructs".²¹ He insists that thought can attain abstraction prior to the intervention of language,²² and implies therefore that language can be seen as originally figurative: in particular, he points to the role of proper names as signs that "denominate" individuals but which have no conceptual dimension and derive meaning only from their contexts.²³ This point could be said to amount to an admission of a certain level of "arbitrariness", the feature that dominates the work of Saussure.

Marty's account of "descriptive semasiology" takes place on three fundamental levels. The first plane to be analysed is that of "notifying",

¹⁶ See, for example, "Über Sprachreflex, Nativismus und absichtliche Sprachbildung", in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1, part 2, p. 301.

¹⁷ See, in particular, Savina Reynaud, *Anton Marty, filosofo del linguaggio: uno strutturalismo presausseriano*, which perhaps overstates the case by adding the idea that Marty's theory represents a "prototype" of Chomsky's approach; p. 204-206.

¹⁸ See in particular "Über Begriff und Methode der allgemeinen Grammatik und Sprachphilosophie": *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 2, part 2, p. 165-166.

¹⁹ *Outlines of Psychology*, p. 299.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 301.

²¹ *The School of Franz Brentano*, p. 88.

²² "The most primitive acts of abstraction are independent of all language": "Sprache und Abstraktion", *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 2, part 2, p. 105.

²³ See *The School of Franz Brentano*, p. 91.

which concerns the nature of the mental event that is to realize linguistic expression, while the second is that of "internal form", which amounts essentially to the linking of the word to the presentation or concept in the minds of the addressor and addressee. Finally, Marty investigates the realm of signification, portrayed as the capacity of a word to arouse psychic phenomena. A concentration upon the first two levels of analysis would lead to the belief that – in terms of an "orthodox" history of the philosophy of language – Marty remains close to the commitments of Locke's theory of language, in that "meaning" consists in the link between a word and a mental event, and the possibility of communication is grounded in the possibility of this connection being the same for both speaker and listener. However, Marty insists that the "notification" of mental events represents neither the original nature of language nor its central feature. What is most important for him is language's signifiatory function.

The focus of the analysis is therefore the ability of a word to engender signification, a process which can be conceived in behavioural terms: the word can arouse "psychic phenomena" in the listener; its "essence" can be understood as its affective function. A central component of Marty's approach is a conception of meaning as dynamic rather than static, a feature associated with what he terms "constructive internal (language-) form" ("*konstruktive innere Sprachform*")²⁴. This approach entails a focus upon dialogue, with its attendant strategies, imprecisions, and elements of indeterminacy,²⁵ and furthermore upon the roles of social convention and collective consciousness.²⁶ In this respect, Marty described his theories as amounting to a "practical philosophy of language", or a form of pragmatism.²⁷ Albertazzi summarizes this tendency as follows:

speakers use rhetorical and syntactic devices: they suggest and anticipate in their speech a series of imaginative contents which only make complete sense at the end of the utterance. Accordingly, we cannot speak of meaning as a logical form, but rather as a whole comprising a series of meaningful anticipations which in

²⁴ See "Über Begriff und Methode der allgemeinen Grammatik und Sprachphilosophie": *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 2, part 2, p. 143.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 141: Marty notes that features such as confusion and equivocation are rather neglected by orthodox approaches ("...in der grammatischen Literatur einen breiten Raum einnehmen...").

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 166: Marty addresses the issue of "... einer menschlichen Sprache und Sprachgemeinschaft ...".

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

dialogue evoke a sequence of expectations which are resolved only on its completion [... Marty stresses] the importance of the functional character of dialogue and of the instrumental nature of language.²⁸

Marty's irascibility with regard to transgressions of a conceived Brentanian orthodoxy has already been alluded to: the result is that a substantial proportion of his work is given over to invective. An important recipient of Marty's polemics was Alexius Meinong, whom Marty viewed as deviating needlessly from Brentano's trajectory.²⁹ In part, Meinong's work can be considered a response to a crucial ambiguity of Brentano's thought, that of the status of the "objects" of intentional states. Although Brentano characterizes every mental state as "intending" an object (immanent to the state, "intentionally inexistent"), he left somewhat unresolved the issue of what exactly could constitute an object. Objects can be "inner" or "outer"; in a letter, Brentano referred to the immanent object as a "picture", and, Johannes Brandl suggests, "[t]he picture-metaphor was taken up by Brentano's students for explaining what an 'immanent object' is. Indeed they took the metaphor as revealing an ambiguity in Brentano's use of the notion of 'object'".³⁰ There seem to be, in fact, quite a few ambiguities: what are the criteria for establishing what counts as an object? What is the ontological status of an object, given that, for Brentano's purposes, its role is exhausted by its immanence to consciousness, and the existence of "objects" independently of intentional states cannot be established? Are "objects" simple (implying some form of atomism), and what account can be given of aggregates of objects?

These issues were among the central concerns of Meinong's work, culminating in the postulation of a "theory of objects" conceived as a discipline in its own right. Whereas Brentano exercised a considerable influence over the direction of 'continental' philosophy through the work of Husserl in particular, it is through Meinong's theories that he can be seen to contribute to 'analytic' philosophy as well. Meinong's thought greatly interested Bertrand Russell and undoubtedly informed his work, even if he was ultimately to consider Meinong confused and confusing.³¹

²⁸ *The School of Franz Brentano*, p.93.

²⁹ See *Austrian Philosophy*, p.120.

³⁰ *The School of Franz Brentano*, p.276.

³¹ See, for example, Russell's paper, "Meinong's Theory of Complexes and Assumptions", in *Mind* 13.

Similarly, Meinong's contentions seem also to anticipate in certain respects some of Quine's analyses.

This sphere of influence derives in part from the fact that while Meinong's thought has as its point of departure "psychological" matters, its orientation is usually logical. His response to Brentano's alleged lack of clarity with regard to the nature of objects begins with a consideration of the relationships between parts and wholes. More specifically, he examines the issue of "complex" or "composite" objects, an analysis which leads him to postulate "objects of a higher order" which, as David Lindenfeld puts it, "include both the relations and the complexes into which they enter".³² This vision influenced Christian von Ehrenfels,³³ who felt that Meinong's move offered the basis for a more adequate analysis of complex objects: a favoured example is that of the musical melody which, Ehrenfels declares, is experienced as a whole, as an "object" in its own right rather than as a mere sum of its component notes.³⁴ In the work of Wundt, for example and by way of contrast, the feeling produced by a chord is analysed as an aggregate of the feelings aroused by each individual note struck and their possible combinations, an account which, he concedes, is "exceedingly complicated".³⁵ Ehrenfels referred to these wholes which are not strictly reducible to their parts as "Gestalt qualities",³⁶ and thereby instituted the research programme known as "Gestalt psychology".

In 1902, Meinong published *On Assumptions (Über Annahmen)*, which was substantially revised in 1910 both to accommodate his subsequent findings and to respond polemically to Marty's criticisms of the first edition. The decisive emphasis of this work is that (intentional) thought is free to assume any object as its object (the "principle of unrestricted freedom of assumption, or *unbeschränkten Annahmefreiheit*"),³⁷ even if, as in the cases of fantasy and art, the object does not, or cannot, exist. In effect, Meinong seeks to add "assumptions" to Brentano's triumvirate of presentations, judgments, and phenomena of

³² David Lindenfeld, *The Transformations of Positivism*, p.122.

³³ Apart from being an early theorist of "Gestalt psychology", Ehrenfels was also an aesthetician, playwright, thinker of value (ethical and economic), and advocate of a revolution of sexual morality on the basis of social Darwinism.

³⁴ For example, a melody can be transposed into another key while retaining its identity.

³⁵ *Outlines of Psychology*, p.160.

³⁶ See "Über 'Gestalt-qualitäten'" in *Philosophische Schriften*, vol.3 (*Psychologie, Ethik, Erkenntnistheorie*).

³⁷ *The School of Franz Brentano*, p.143.

love and hate; they are "...in a certain sense intermediate between presentation and judgment",³⁸ in that they are objects of presentation but are "prior to", or independent of, determinations of existence, which arise only at the level of judgment for Brentano.

In 1904, Meinong published what is arguably his most important text, an essay entitled "On the Theory of Objects" ("*Über Gegenstandstheorie*"; translated as "The Theory of Objects"),³⁹ which extrapolated the tendencies of *On Assumptions*. In the latter work, Meinong was already responding to what was widely acknowledged as a problem of Brentano's thought, the issue of "non-veridical" intentionality. A difficulty encountered by thinkers such as Frege and Russell who sought a logical analysis of the fabric of language was that of how a natural language could refer to "unicorns" or "the present king of France" without such sentences being obviously distinct, grammatically or logically, from those which predicate subjects whose existence is assured. A similar problem arises for Brentano in that "non-existent" objects (such as unicorns) could be presented in intentional states in the same manner as "truly existent" entities. Since reference to a transcendent world has effectively been disqualified, and the ground of judgment is essentially subjective, it seems that there is consequently no basis from which to distinguish between such "non-veridical" objects of intentionality.

Not wishing to disrupt the framework of his theory of intentional states, Brentano addresses this problem by claiming that the attempt to introduce some new basis from which to frame such a distinction would entail the introduction of two new objects of intentionality, namely "the being of x" and "the non-being of x", which would have the same degree of "reality", and which would be distinguished only by the subject's judgmental attitude toward them: "Hence we are sure that one cannot make the being or non-being of a centaur an object as one can make a centaur; one can only make the person affirming or denying the centaur an object, in which case the centaur, to be sure, becomes an object in a special *modus obliquus* at the same time".⁴⁰ To all intents and purposes, Brentano simply reiterates his position: rather than addressing the problem, he does not seem to acknowledge that there is a problem. The only foundation of the discrimination between veridical and non-veridical intentional states is subjective, and of the form "A mentally active subject

³⁸ *Austrian Philosophy*, p.120.

³⁹ In Roderick Chisholm, ed., *Realism and the Background of Phenomenology*.

⁴⁰ *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, p.294.

is denying a centaur in the *modus praesens*",⁴¹ a claim which is in part dependent upon the idea that the subjectivity of judgment does not militate against its being objective in form: what is arguably lacking is an account of how objective existence-claims are to be derived from subjective judgment.

Meinong was clearly unimpressed by Brentano's response to the issue (and Brentano was ultimately to change his position substantially in what may have been an implicit acknowledgement of critiques such as that produced by Meinong), and offers a more substantial analysis, albeit one which retains a certain opacity. He begins with an assessment of a "class" of objects which are familiar but which do not exist, taking as an example the "ideality" of the objects of mathematics: "[a]s we know, the figures with which geometry is concerned do not exist".⁴² The failure to acknowledge the extent of nonexistent objects which are objects nonetheless he terms the "prejudice in favour of the actual [*wirklich*]" or even "the prejudice in favour of existence".⁴³ What the "prejudice" conceals is the fact that many facets of human activity, from art to mathematics, involve essential reference to nonexistent objects: there is a realm of nonentities, the breadth of which is rarely theoretically admitted.

Meinong elaborates Brentano's account of a centaur as an object of an intentional state by pointing to the fact that one can describe the properties of a centaur without this process being in any way hindered by the non-existence of centaurs. This enumeration of the properties of an object he terms the object's "*Sosein*", its "being-so". If we can analyse an object's *Sosein* unimpaired by the empirical fact of its nonexistence, then, according to Meinong, this reveals the independence of an object's properties from its ontological status, "the principle of the independence of *Sosein* from *Sein*".⁴⁴ This claim leads to perhaps Meinong's most notorious remark, although its notoriety derives perhaps from its being quoted without its prefatory comment: "Those who like paradoxical modes of expression could very well say: 'There are objects of which it is true that there are no such objects'".⁴⁵

A feature of Meinong's theory to which several critics have objected is that of his refusal to discriminate between objects which do not exist and those that cannot. Unicorns, for example, do not exist as a matter of fact, but their non-existence is contingent in that the idea of a horse with a

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.292.

⁴² "The Theory of Objects" in *Realism and the Background to Phenomenology*; p.82.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.82.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.82.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.83.

horn does not seem to involve any inherent contradiction or biological impossibility. By contrast, it would seem that "round squares" not only do not exist but moreover cannot since they are inherently contradictory, impossible by definition. Meinong, however, disregards such distinctions: "Not only is the much heralded gold mountain made of gold, but the round square is as surely round as it is square".⁴⁶

Meinong seems to feel licensed to conflate the two "categories" of nonexistence because he extrapolates the principle of the independence of *Sosein* from *Sein* so that it applies not just to nonentities but *all* objects as such. Questions of being and non-being do not apply to an object as such, a situation he terms the "*Aussersein* [outside of, or beyond, being] of the pure object".⁴⁷ Meinong's exposition of this claim is often cited but is rather symptomatic of the lack of clarity caused by the absence of an adequate logical notation:

the Object as such (without considering the occasional peculiarities or the accompanying Objective-clause which is always present) stands "beyond being and non-being". This may also be expressed in the following less engaging and also less pretentious way, which is in my opinion, however, a more appropriate one: the Object is by nature indifferent to being [*ausserseiend*], although at least one of its two Objectives of being, the Object's being or non-being, subsists.⁴⁸

The passage suggests that Meinong does not simply eradicate questions of being; rather, he displaces them such that they inhere in the "Objective" (by which one can, more or less, understand "proposition") rather than in the "pure" object. The claim - rendered in a more familiar idiom, and forming an echo of aspects of Quine's contentions - seems to be that questions of being are issues of "second-order" logic, attaching to (existential) quantification ($\exists x$) rather than predication. The assertion of being and its negation arise at the level of the quantifier rather than that of the "objects" contained within the proposition; a negation sign within the proposition denies not the being of the object but one of its determinations. Crucially, Meinong's emphasis is not upon this relocation of being, but rather upon the extent to which the "theory of

⁴⁶ Ibid., p.82.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.83; whether or not this really follows from the fact of nonentities is a matter for debate.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.86.

objects" can proceed unencumbered by questions of being and non-being: "knowledge [...] finds a field of activity to which it may have access without first answering the question concerning being or non-being."⁴⁹ Meinong's theory adopts a stance of ontological neutrality: there is a vision both of a plane of nonentities and of objects hovering in a domain on which determinations of being can have no purchase, "pure" objects of which one cannot even say that they are, that they exist.

G. E. Moore declared - inevitably citing the remark that "there are objects of which it is true that there are no such objects" as if it were a definitive statement - that Meinong's theory is "dead, buried, and not going to be resurrected",⁵⁰ and indeed history has not been kind to many of the thinkers under consideration. However, if Jena is to be celebrated as witnessing, on the one hand, the crucial move from Kantian concerns to the birth of Hegelianism, and, on the other, an alleged anticipation of post-structuralist literary theory (assuming, of course, that either feature is a cause for celebration), then it seems appropriate to insist that there be a fuller acknowledgement of the contribution of the Brentano school to avenues of enquiry as diverse as phenomenology, Gestalt psychology, structuralist linguistics, and logic.

It is perhaps above all this pluralism that most merits investigation; while phenomenological texts (conventionally regarded as belonging to 'continental' philosophy) routinely discuss Brentano (alone),⁵¹ the few detailed accounts of the groups and thinkers under consideration here are identifiably 'analytic' in their outlooks and approaches,⁵² creating something of an imbalance. The division between these two philosophical approaches is today widely recognized as needlessly antagonistic and contrived, and it would surely be fertile for 'European' philosophy, as for

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.86.

⁵⁰ Quoted by Kenneth Perszyk in *Nonexistent Objects: Meinong and Contemporary Philosophy*, p.38.

⁵¹ An interesting contrast to the "rule" sketched here is offered by Deleuze, who refers, for example, to Ehrenfels and Stumpf, two members of the "Brentano school": "[Husserl refers to] the work of his contemporary Ehrenfels who, in 1890, spoke of Gestalt qualities, distinct from the qualities proper to the elements, of another order than those qualities, and above all ... the work of Stumpf ... Thus there we have what the non-numerical multiplicity is" (taken from <http://www.imaginet.fr/deleuze/TXT/ENG/bergson.html>). See also the discussion of Marty in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, p.94 (note 21).

⁵² Thus Barry Smith, for example, declares, in the course of his exposition of the "Brentano school", that the inter-disciplinary "cross-fertilisations" characteristic of it "have done much to make European philosophy so impenetrable to present-day Anglo-Saxon philosophers" ("Kafka and Brentano" in *Structure and Gestalt*; p.116).

'analytic' philosophy, to revisit the pluralist fecundity of the Brentano school, not as a historical curiosity, but rather as a model for a future philosophical nexus.

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