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IS BRENTANO'S METHOD A UNIFYING ELEMENT
OF THE BRENTANO SCHOOL?

Among historians of philosophy it is often taken for granted that the «Brentano school» was one of the influential philosophical movements at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century – but Brentano's own contributions are often eclipsed by that of his direct students. This invites to reflect on the nature of and the unity within the school. Since Brentano's conception of a rigorous, scientific philosophy had a strong impact on his students, it has been argued that this conception constitutes a unifying element in an otherwise heterogeneous group. The scope of this article is to shed light on this thesis and to show its limits. I argue for a differentiated view: the Brentano school is best seen not as a compact movement, but as a heterogeneous group of scholars who approached, in a given historical and geographical period, similar topics in very similar ways.

Keywords: Franz Brentano, Brentano-school, Philosophy as Rigorous Science, Edmund Husserl, Alexius Meinong, Descriptive Psychology

Brentano had a somewhat peculiar position in the history of philosophy. At the time when he started to publish, the traditions of German idealism and system philosophy had come to an end and made way for a new, more scientifically orientated conception of philosophy. While Brentano saw himself as an innovator who actively participated in the attempt to shape a new paradigm of research in philosophy and psychology, he is nowadays often only *mentioned* for having introduced the notion of intentionality and for the long and impressive list of students who he has taught – but his own contributions to philosophy are hardly *discussed*; his students seem to have had a much stronger impact on the development of philosophy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. This raises questions concerning the nature and impact of Brentano's school. In particular, we might ask whether there is a unity among the direct students of Brentano that would allow us to speak of a school or a movement in a narrow sense, i.e. a homogeneous group of scholars who jointly elaborate a shared philosophical perspective. This question seems relevant, as the «Brentano school» has gained increasing attention over the last decades.

Since it was proposed recently that Brentano's conception of a rigorous, scientific philosophy and his metaphilosophical views are unifying elements of the Brentano school, I will pay particular attention to the role Brentano's views on the true method of philosophy have had for his impact on students and for the formation of the school.

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In the first part of the present article, I will reconstruct the role Brentano's methodological maxim has had for his philosophical self-understanding. Then I will reconstruct the impact of this maxim on his direct students. In the final part I will focus on the very idea of a «Brentano school». In particular, I will discuss the philosophical unity of the school and mention some contingent historical circumstances that have shaped its development.

1. Brentano's views concerning philosophical method and their role within a larger picture

Throughout his lifetime, Brentano continued to develop and refine his views. As he approached philosophy in a very systematic manner and always kept the bigger picture in mind, minor changes in single parts of his philosophical views often brought about modifications or adjustments in his overall position¹. There are, however, several themes in Brentano's thought that show remarkable continuity, such as his views concerning the correct method of philosophy. He formulated the maxim that philosophy should adopt the strict and rigorous method of the natural sciences already early in his career, at his *Habilitations*-defense in 1866², and found various occasions to reaffirm and elaborate his conception in publications and lectures later in his life.

Brentano's views on the subject remain substantially unaltered, though we can notice a slight change regarding their dialectical function. In the early formulations of the thesis, its negative impact seems to be dominant. At his *Habilitations*-defense, for example, Brentano merely states the thesis, but does not spell out in detail how a rigorous and scientific method could be applied in philosophy. It seems, thus, that he was mainly interested in stating how philosophy should *not* be done: Brentano's maxim arguably served to demarcate his own position from the dominant traditions of German idealism and system philosophy. In particular, his fourth *Habilitations*-thesis was part of a strategy to take distance from Schellingianism³, which at the time had a secure standing at the University of Würzburg, where the *Habilitation* took place⁴. Brentano, thus, did

¹ This does not imply that Brentano intended to present a system, as was suggested in the recent literature (cf. U. KRIEDEL, *Brentano's Philosophical Program*, in Id. [ed.] *The Routledge Handbook of Franz Brentano and the Brentano School*, Routledge, London and New York 2017, pp. 21-32), an assessment that brings Brentano dangerously close to German system philosophy, which definitely does not do justice to the his own understanding of his work. For a more detailed discussion, cf. W. HUEMER, *Was Brentano a Systematic Philosopher?* in M. ANTONELLI - T. BINDER (eds.) *The Philosophy of Franz Brentano*, Brill, Leiden (forthcoming).

² At the occasion of his *Habilitations*-defense, which took place on July 14, 1866, Brentano posted 25 theses in Latin, the fourth of which reads: «Vera philosophiae methodus nulla alia nisi scientiae naturalis est [The true method of philosophy is none other than that of the natural sciences]». The theses are reprinted in F. BRENTANO, *Über die Zukunft der Philosophie*, Meiner, Hamburg 1968, pp. 136 ff.

³ This becomes particularly evident when studied in connection with the second thesis, in which Brentano attacks the idea that revelation (*Offenbarung*) could be a source of knowledge in philosophy – a claim that can be read as a direct attack on Schelling.

⁴ Schelling was professor at the University of Würzburg from 1803-1806. Moreover, Brentano recalls that at the time of his *Habilitation*, the two professors of philosophy at Würzburg, Franz Hoffmann and a certain Maier [sic!], were both direct students of Schelling (cf. *ibi*. p. 106). Hoffmann was a direct student both of Schelling and Baader. When Brentano mentions «Maier, der Vater des Nationalökonommen» (*ibidem*) he probably refers to Alois Mayr, father of the economist Georg Mayr, who is the only Mayr (by this or any similar spelling) listed at the *Verzeichniss der Vorlesungen* of the University of Würzburg, faculty of

not shy away from attacking a philosophical approach that had been adopted by several members of the exam committee. This move was not without risk⁵, but allowed him to depict the mainstream position as outdated and at the same time to present his own position – or better: the position he intended to develop in full detail in the years after the *Habilitation* – as an innovative and original alternative.

philosophy, at the time. Mayr was primarily a mathematician, but also taught courses on philosophy.

⁵ With his direct and polemic way of defending his philosophical views, Brentano risked offending the professors at Würzburg who not only had to judge about his *Habilitation*, but also were called to decide on his academic future only four years later. In fact, when Brentano formally asked to be promoted from *Privatdozent* to *außerordentlicher Professor* in 1870, his application was welcomed by the faculty in a meeting in July, but a definite decision was delayed to a later moment. In early December 1870, however, Brentano's application was voted down. There seems to have been a heated discussion, for several professors felt the need to express their diverging opinions, and, thus, to support Brentano's application, in so-called *Separatvoten*, i.e. in statements that were added to the minutes of a faculty meeting and in which individual members of the meeting could voice their disagreement with the majority decision. These *Separatvoten* are reprinted in T. FREUDENBERGER, *Die Universität Würzburg und das erste vatikanische Konzil: ein Beitrag zur Kirchen- und Geistesgeschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Degener, Neustadt a.d. Aisch 1969, pp. 457-464. These *Separatvoten* were successful as they were received by the senate of the University of Würzburg, who decided in February 1871 to submit Brentano's application to the ministry and, thus, made possible that Brentano was promoted to *außerordentlicher Professor* on May 13, 1872. Interestingly enough, Franz Hoffmann made the unusual move to draft a *Separatvotum*, even though he agreed with the majority decision of the faculty meeting. The way in which he presents his reasons for the view that Brentano should not be promoted to *außerordentlicher Professor* show that the relation between Brentano and Hoffmann were not without friction. Apart from criticizing Brentano for the short list of publications (a fact that is mentioned, but not considered decisive also by those who drafted a *Separatvotum* in favor of Brentano) Hoffmann calls Brentano «a minor important beginner, who, after having been friendly supported by me, treated me ignobly» [*noch wenig bedeutenden Anfänger, der von mir auf das freundlichste gefördert worden war und sich ignobel gegen mich betragen hatte*]» (*ibi*, p. 460, my translation). Hoffmann calls Brentano «ungrateful and inconsiderate [*undankbar und rücksichtslos*]» (*ibi*, p. 462). At one point he describes him as a «talented young scholar, whose development of life and orientation of mind should have guided him towards theology. As a professor of Dogmatics or the History of Dogmas or of Patristics at a theological faculty he probably could have achieved in short time excellent, maybe even outstanding results. As a philosopher one can expect hardly more from him than a scant repristination of medieval scholastics that shows mainly Aristotelian influences, brought into a modern shape and adorned with some modern ingredients [*Dr. Brentano ist ein begabter jüngerer Gelehrter, dessen Lebensentwicklung und Geistesrichtung ihn auf die Theologie hätte hinweisen sollen. Als Professor der Dogmatik, der Dogmengeschichte, der Patristik an einer theologischen Fakultät würde er wahrscheinlich nach einiger Zeit Vorzügliches, vielleicht Ausgezeichnetes leisten. Als Philosoph steht kaum etwas Anderes von ihm zu erwarten als eine unzulängliche Repristination der vorwiegend unter aristotelischen Einflüssen erwachsenen mittelalterlichen Scholastik, in moderne Formen gegossen und mit einigen modernen Zutaten ausgeschmückt*]» (*ibi*, p. 461, my translation). In a good part of the *Separatvotum*, Hoffmann spells out how harmful it could be if only a single Catholic priest would become philosophy professor at Würzburg. He expresses his fears that illiberal tendencies in the Catholic church – tendencies that have become, in Hoffmann's view, manifest in the dogma of papal infallibility, which had been promulgated in the same year – would threaten academic freedom in Würzburg's philosophical faculty. Ironically, Hoffmann seems to project his aversion against the first Vatican council on Brentano. He obviously had not taken notice of the fact that Brentano himself struggled with the results of the council and especially with the dogma of papal infallibility, which caused him, as is well known, to eventually withdraw from priesthood – and from the position that Hoffmann wanted to deny him. Incidentally, also the second direct student of Schelling at the faculty, Alois Mayr, has drafted a *Separatvotum*. Mayr seemed to have had a much more positive opinion of Brentano, though. Not only did he welcome Brentano's promotion to *außerordentlicher Professor*, he even suggested he should have been promoted to full professor, if there was the possibility to do so: cf. *ibi*, pp. 458 ff.

When Brentano came back to discuss the method of philosophy later in his life, on the other hand, he seemed to have more constructive intentions. His main goal was no longer to demarcate his own position from the ones that had dominated the philosophical landscape of Germany until the mid-nineteenth century. Rather, the way he talked about the correct method of philosophy is directed towards the future development of the discipline. This became particularly manifest in two respects. First, in several occasions he spells out, in more detail compared to his early statement, *how* a scientific and rigorous method can be applied in philosophy. Brentano, thus, made an effort to determine in a clear and explicit manner how research in the young discipline of psychology ought to be conducted⁶. Second, if we consider Brentano's cyclic model of the history of philosophy, we see that his maxim on method also allowed him to mark his own position in the discipline. According to this model, which he had developed from 1860 on⁷ but has presented in print only in 1895⁸, the three periods in the history of philosophy – ancient, medieval and modern philosophy – can be subdivided into four phases: the first is a phase of ascending development that is marked by a «lively and pure theoretical interest»⁹. The other three are phases of decline: In the second phase, the pure theoretical interest and profundity diminish; it is a phase of divulgation, the achievements of the first phase are explored and scholars are mainly interested in the practical application of the results of the first phase. In this process, the new paradigm starts to show its limits, people lose their trust in science. A general skeptical attitude gains ground and comes to dominate the third phase, which is the second phase of decline. But this leaves unsatisfied, as people have a natural inclination to strive for knowledge. With «pathologically intensified enthusiasm people start once more to construct philosophical dogmas»¹⁰, but they do so relying on unnatural sources of knowledge, on «ingenious “directly intuitive” powers, mystical intensifications of the mental life»¹¹: in the fourth phase, skepticism turns into mysticism. With this, the development comes to an end and a new cycle can begin – and it will do so with a phase of ascending development, which will be made possible by a new shift

⁶ Brentano described his method already in his *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt I*, Meiner, Leipzig 1924; Engl. transl. by A.C. Rancurello, D. B. Terrell, and L.L. McAlister, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, Routledge, London and New York 1995, but his description of the method remained still quite general and contained aspects that have never been fully developed neither in *Psychology*, nor in later texts and can, thus, be considered 'dead ends' (take, for example, Brentano's remark on the importance of «the study of autobiographies for the psychologist» [*ibi*, p. 29], which, as far as I know, has never been taken up by him or any of his students). Brentano did continue to refine and elaborate his method. He presented his views mainly in lectures, though, which could be taken to show that he intended to teach the method to a younger generation. Some of these lecture notes have been made available in his *Descriptive Psychology*, Engl. transl. by B. Müller, Routledge, London and New York 1995.

⁷ «The first time Brentano was struck by this idea, as he later told me, was during his convalescence from a serious illness (Easter 1860)» (C. STUMPF, *Reminiscences of Franz Brentano*, Engl. transl. by L.L. McAlister and M. Schättle, in L.L. McALISTER [ed.], *The Philosophy of Brentano*, Duckworth, London 1976, pp. 10-46, here p. 11).

⁸ F. BRENTANO, *Die vier Phasen der Philosophie und ihr augenblicklicher Stand*, Felix Meiner Verlag, Leipzig 1926; Engl. transl. by B.M. Mezei and B. Smith, *The Four Phases of Philosophy and Its Current State*, in B.M. MEZEI - B. SMITH (eds.), *The Four Phases of Philosophy*, Rodopi, Amsterdam - Atlanta (GA) 1998, pp. 81-111.

⁹ *Ibi*, p. 10; Engl. transl., pp. 85 ff.

¹⁰ *Ibi*, p. 9; Engl. transl., p. 86.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

in paradigm that brings into view phenomena that have been overlooked so far and requires a new methodological framework «that is essentially appropriate to nature»¹².

In the light of this model, it seems plausible to suggest that Brentano's later statements concerning the right method of philosophy do not aim primarily at distinguishing himself from other philosophical traditions, but rather at presenting his own philosophical position as a contribution to the inauguration of a phase of ascending development that could mark the beginning of a new, fourth period in the history of philosophy¹³ – an achievement which, as he states in his 1894 lecture on the *Four Phases of Philosophy*, will be «accomplished by us or by our successors»¹⁴.

In addition, the development of a new method for philosophy can have a collateral effect, of which Brentano was definitely aware: A philosopher who succeeds in introducing a new methodological framework is not only in a position to substantiate the idea that he was able to conduct research in new directions and pay due attention to phenomena that others might have overlooked – and, thus, to show that his own contribution goes essentially beyond the 'state of the art'. He can also nourish the hope that a new generation of scholars, who see the relevance of this new framework and develop an interest in the new fields of study, will be willing to adopt it and, thus, elaborate and refine the research project that the philosopher who introduced it in the first place might have only sketched in its general traits. The new method might, thus, launch a new tradition or school that elevates his contribution from the level of individual achievement to that of a collective enterprise.

In both respects, the negative impulse of demarcation and the positive goal of establishing a new methodological framework for philosophical research, Brentano's attempts have proven successful, albeit – especially with regard to the second point – on a more modest scale than he might have hoped. He definitely managed to mark the differences between his own position and the tradition of German Idealism which, in the eyes of many, had already come to a dead end at the time. It is less obvious, however, that Brentano has actually achieved what he had hoped for with respect to setting up a tradition, a school, or a movement of scholars who would have continued to conduct research in the theoretical framework he had introduced¹⁵. This might

¹² *Ibi*, p. 8; Engl. transl., p. 85.

¹³ Brentano has expressed his conviction that there is a strong tie between the development of a new method and the beginning of a new phase in philosophy already in 1866. In his *Habilitations*-lecture on Schelling, he states that «[t]he great turning points in the developments of a science indisputably come along with a change of method» (BRENTANO, *Über die Zukunft der Philosophie*, p. 108).

¹⁴ BRENTANO, *Die vier Phasen der Philosophie und ihr augenblicklicher Stand*, p. 31; Engl. transl., p. 110. The way in which Brentano sets up his model definitely invites for this thought. Balázs Mezei and Barry Smith make this inference explicitly and state in a text that accompanies the English translation of the lecture, which they have edited, that Brentano was «as representing the first, ascending phase in the current cycle of philosophical development» (MEZEI - SMITH, *The Four Phases of Philosophy*, p. 42).

¹⁵ If we take into consideration the opinions voiced by some of Brentano's direct students, it is not clear, however, whether and to what extent it was Brentano's intention to found a new school that bears his name in the first place. Carl Stumpf, for example, suggests that Brentano was opposed to this very idea. In his *Reminiscences*, he states that «he [i.e., Brentano] was, on principle and with every right, against the development of a "school" that swears by his every word» (STUMPF, *Reminiscences of Franz Brentano*, p. 44). I think that we should take this statement with caution, though. Brentano always upheld the ideal of educating his students to become independent thinkers rather than blind followers. It is noteworthy, however, that both Husserl (cf. E. HUSSERL, *Reminiscences of Franz Brentano*, Engl. transl. by L.L. McAlister

sound controversial, as Brentano nowadays is often introduced with reference to the long and impressive list of students that have studied with him. Moreover, the term «Brentano school» is often used to refer to a group of clearly defined philosophers who worked on a related set of topics¹⁶. There are, of course, good reasons for grouping philosophers like Carl Stumpf, Anton Marty, Edmund Husserl, Alexius Meinong, Christian von Ehrenfels, Kasimir Twardowski, and others under one heading: all of them build on central notions of Brentano's philosophy, most notably on the notion of intentionality, and all of them dedicated a good part of their energy to the development of a philosophical psychology or, more generally, the study of consciousness. Still, I would like to propose a more differentiated view that acknowledges the common points of departure, but also pays due attention to the heterogeneity that is to be found in this group. I will illustrate this point by sketching the way in which Brentano's conception of philosophy as a rigorous science was received.

2. *The fascination of Brentano's maxim concerning method*

The idea that the early Brentano tried to distinguish himself from the current mainstream by insisting on the conception of a rigorous, scientific philosophy was definitely perceived by the philosophy professors of the University of Würzburg who were members of the exam committee. We know from Brentano's own testimony, but also from that of Carl Stumpf, that already during the *Habilitations*-defense, Brentano's fourth thesis was harshly attacked by members of the committee, in particular by Schelling's student Franz Hoffmann and by the philologist Carl Ludwig Ulrichs¹⁷. When Brentano gave a lecture on Schelling in December 1889¹⁸, he read in large parts from the manuscript that he had prepared for the lecture at the occasion of his *Habilitation* more than 23 years earlier. In the introductory remarks,

and M. Schättle, in McALISTER, *The Philosophy of Brentano*, pp. 47-55, here p. 51) and Meinong (cf. A. MEINONG, *Selbstdarstellung*, in R. SCHMIDT [ed.], *Die Philosophie der Gegenwart in Selbstdarstellungen*, Meiner, Leipzig 1923, pp. 100-160, here p. 104) mention that Brentano was typically not reacting well when one of his students turned against his own position or departed in ways that he could not approve. This way of reacting can be read as an expression of Brentano's hope that his students would accept his general, overall framework and to work within its parameters. Contrary to Stumpf's statement there is, thus, evidence, that Brentano did like the idea that there might be a Brentano school in which his approach is further elaborated. Husserl expressed this assessment explicitly in his *Reminiscences*, where he stated that Brentano's «inner certainty that he was moving in the right direction and was founding a purely scientific philosophy never wavered» and then continues with the following words: «This explains, first, why being a deeply penetrating and effective teacher, indeed, why having a school (in the good sense) was so important to him: not only for the dissemination of the insights achieved, but also for the continued work on his thoughts» (HUSSERL, *Reminiscences of Franz Brentano*, p. 51).

¹⁶ For an illustration of this point, a reference to the following two volumes might suffice: L. ALBERTAZZI - M. LIBARDI - R. POLI (eds.), *The School of Franz Brentano*, Kluwer, Dordrecht 1996; KRIEGEL, *The Routledge Handbook of Franz Brentano and the Brentano School*.

¹⁷ Cf. STUMPF, *Reminiscences of Franz Brentano*, p. 11. Incidentally, at the occasion of the debate concerning Brentano's promotion to *außerordentlicher Professor* in December 1870 (cf. above, footnote 5), also Ulrichs drafted a *Separatvotum*, where he expressed himself in favor of Brentano's promotion.

¹⁸ *Über Schellings Philosophie*, lecture given at the *Philosophische Gesellschaft* on December 17, 1889. Brentano acknowledges that the lecture is in great parts identical to his inaugural lecture he had given at the occasion of his *Habilitations*-defense on July 14, 1866 (with the title *Über Schellings Philosophie in ihren verschiedenen Phasen, Darstellung und Kritik*). According to Carl Stumpf, it was not Brentano who chose to speak on this topic; probably it was set by Hoffmann, cf. STUMPF, *Reminiscences of Franz Brentano*, p. 11.

he shares his recollections of the *Habilitations*-defense and says, with reference to Alois Mayr and Franz Hoffmann:

Schelling's students, thus, were my judges. And I had to be doubly careful. For my judges were at the same time the adverse party; and they knew me as opponent since I stepped into the field with an open visor. For among the 25 theses, which I had posted for public defense, one, which they chose to become primary target of attack, was: *Vera philosophiae methodus nulla alia nisi scientiae naturalis est*¹⁹.

It is noteworthy that Brentano uses the metaphor of a medieval tournament to describe his *Habilitations*-defense, which is actually an exam. Moreover, Carl Stumpf uses the same metaphor when he describes the event in his *Reminiscences*²⁰. This choice of wording echoes that Brentano and his closer circle recalled this event not as a cordial and harmonious discussion, nor as an exam in which the student tries to show that he has absorbed the view of his academic teachers, but rather as an intense exchange and confrontation in which a young and rising contestant dared to challenge the traditional understanding of philosophy and its method – and that he did so in a quite vehement or even polemic manner.

Brentano, thus, stood up for his views and it seems that he has done so in an impressive manner – at least in the eyes of (parts of) the audience. We can assume that it were in particular the young students who cheered. Carl Stumpf, who was one of them at the time, writes: «The way in which Brentano defended and explained his theses revealed him to be so superior to his attackers that I decided then and there to attend his lectures in the autumn»²¹. Stumpf adds that it was in particular Brentano's views on the method of philosophy that caught his attention:

We were especially happy that the method he claimed for philosophy was none other than that of the natural sciences, and that he based his hopes for a rebirth of philosophy on this method. It was a new, incomparably deeper and more serious way of understanding philosophy²².

Stumpf's testimony clearly underlines the importance of Brentano's conception of philosophy as a strict and rigorous science for the formation of the first group of students. It is remarkable, however, that this holds not only for the first – and probably most faithful – generation of students in Würzburg; we have testimonies also of students who attended Brentano's lectures in Vienna, who mention Brentano's conception of philosophy as a rigorous science as the element that had primarily

¹⁹ «Schellings Schüler waren also meine Richter. Und ich mußte doppelt achtsam sein. Denn meine Richter waren zugleich die mir feindliche Partei; und sie kannten mich als Gegner, da ich mit offenem Visier in die Schranken trat. Denn unter den 25 Thesen, die ich damals zur öffentlichen Verteidigung anschlug, lautete eine, die sie sofort zum Ziel des Angriffs wählten: *Vera philosophiae methodus nulla alia nisi scientiae naturalis est*» (BRENTANO, *Über die Zukunft der Philosophie*, pp. 106 ff., my translation).

²⁰ Cf. C. STUMPF, *Erinnerungen an Franz Brentano*, in O. KRAUS (ed.), *Franz Brentano: Zur Kenntnis seines Lebens und seiner Werke*, Beck, München 1919, pp. 85-149, here p. 88. In the English translation, the German term «Turnier» is translated with «battle of wits» (ID., *Reminiscences of Franz Brentano*, p. 11), which does not conserve the metaphor and, thus, risks at not doing full justice to the spirit of the formulation.

²¹ *Ibidem*. In this term, Brentano lectured on *History of Philosophy*. The course is not listed in the official *Verzeichniss der Vorlesungen* of the University of Würzburg. Brentano, however, makes reference to it in his application to become *außerordentlicher Professor*, which is reprinted in Freudenberg.

²² *Ibidem*.

caught their attention or deserved their admiration. Alois Höfler, for example, who attended Brentano's lectures in Vienna from 1877 on, expresses in his otherwise quite bitter obituary his «honest and until today not diminished thankfulness for the fact that I have found in Brentano really the very first teacher, who taught me to apply in philosophical matters the same rigorous standards, as I have learnt to do it in mathematics and physics»²³.

When Edmund Husserl attended Brentano's lectures at the University of Vienna in 1884-1886, he did not see a provocative young scholar, but an arrived and charismatic philosopher who had many followers. Like Stumpf²⁴, also Husserl noted that the encounter with Brentano had convinced him to pursue a career in philosophy²⁵ – and also he mentioned Brentano's conception of a rigorous, scientific philosophy as decisive element. In his *Reminiscences*, he suggests that he owes to Brentano the «conviction that philosophy, too, is a field of serious endeavour, and that it too can – and, in fact, must – be dealt with in a rigorously scientific manner»²⁶.

These testimonies are significant, for they show two things: first, Brentano insisted on questions concerning the right method in philosophy in all phases of his career as academic teacher, both by *applying* a rigorous and scientific style of reasoning and by explicitly *reflecting* on questions concerning method in his lectures²⁷. Second, Brentano's style of reasoning and his new methodological outlook fascinated students, awakened or reinforced their interest for philosophy and philosophical psychology, and significantly shaped their views. In fact, most of his students who continued to work in philosophy adopted central notions of Brentano's philosophy – most importantly, the notion of intentionality – as integral, central elements of their own philosophical positions and remained (by and large) faithful to Brentano's conception of scientific philosophy, understood in a broad sense, even though many of them have found it necessary to further develop or emend it. This shows that Brentano's views on method were a central element – in combination with his didactic talents – for Brentano's success among students. From a historical or sociological perspective, it definitely seems plausible to individuate in Brentano's conception concerning the method of philosophy a unifying element that allowed Brentano to form a group of students who were willing to conduct their own research within this larger framework.

3. Seeing the differences

The discussion of the preceding sections illustrates primarily the «power that Brentano exercised over susceptible students»²⁸: he offered a new and original outlook

²³ «Die aufrichtige und bis heute nicht geschwundene Dankbarkeit dafür, daß ich ja in Brentano wirklich den allerersten Lehrer gefunden hatte, der mich in philosophischen Dingen ebenso strenge Maßstäbe anlegen lehrte, wie ich es in Mathematik und Physik gelernt hatte» (A. HÖFLER, *Franz Brentano in Wien*, «Süddeutsche Monatshefte», München, May 1917, pp. 319-325, here p. 321, my translation).

²⁴ Cf. STUMPF, *Reminiscences of Franz Brentano*, p. 12.

²⁵ HUSSERL, *Reminiscences of Franz Brentano*, p. 48.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

²⁷ Some of the later Vienna lectures on method have been published in BRENTANO, *Descriptive Psychology*.

²⁸ STUMPF, *Reminiscences of Franz Brentano*, p. 12.

that promised to leave behind the 'old' traditions of German idealism and system philosophy. Moreover, he drew the attention of his most talented students to questions related to the study of mind and consciousness and to the emerging discipline of psychology: new fields in which students felt they could conduct cutting-edge research and contribute in the exploration of «dark continents»²⁹ that had not been explored beforehand.

For showing that Brentano's method could be considered a unifying element for the Brentano school, however, one would also have to show that it was applied, by the members of a school, in a (more or less) uniform way. I fear that in this respect we will find far less homogeneity as one could expect. In what follows I will focus on two reasons why the group of Brentano's students did not form a homogeneous group that could be perceived as such by their contemporaries: First, many of Brentano's students wanted to be perceived not as members of a bigger movement that had been founded by someone else, but as independent philosophers who were in a position to start a movement or a school in their own right. Second, while many of Brentano's direct students constitute at best a heterogeneous group of philosophers, who developed in very different directions, the second generation of students (Brentano's so-called *Enkelschüler*) appropriated Brentano's philosophy and established a new orthodoxy that made it even more difficult for less devoted students to officially adhere to the 'true doctrine'.

3.1. Brentano's independent students

It is often reported that Brentano tried to teach his students to become independent thinkers on their own and, in fact, it seems that he was more successful in this point than he wanted to be. In fact, many of his students have proven to have an open eye for the theoretical problems in the discipline and the capacity to develop the theoretical framework to address these problems.

Many of Brentano's students built on his seminal distinction between descriptive and genetic psychology; some of them, in particular Carl Stumpf and Alexius Meinong, tried to develop both strands and put a strong emphasis on laboratory research. Meinong, as is well known, inaugurated the first psychological laboratory in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Carl Stumpf established a psychological laboratory at the University of Berlin. These achievements were essential in the development of the emergence of a scientific psychology. In this scientific context, however, where experimental results are typically more important than individual thinkers or schools of

²⁹ I borrow this metaphor from Husserl who reflects, in September 1905 on the analogies and differences between his own position and that of Meinong and describes them as «two travelers on one and the same dark continent. Of course we often see the same and describe it, but [...] often in different ways [*zwei Reisende in einem und demselben dunklen Weltteil. Natürlich sehen wir oft dasselbe und beschreiben es, aber [...] vielfach verschieden*]» (E. HUSSERL, *Einleitung in die Logik und Erkenntnistheorie. Vorlesungen 1906/07*, Husserliana XXIV, hrsg. von U. Melle, Nijhoff, Dordrecht 1984, p. 444, my translation). It is remarkable that we find similar metaphors regularly among Brentano's students, which shows that the idea of discovering and exploring new areas of knowledge was widespread among them. In his biography of Brentano, Kastil, for example, describes Brentano as a philosopher who was interested in «penetrating hitherto unexplored districts of truth [*das Vordringen in noch uneroberte Bezirke der Wahrheit*]» (A. KASTIL, *Die Philosophie Franz Brentanos. Eine Einführung in seine Lehre*, Francke, Bern 1951, p. 7, my translation).

thought, they were more likely to be perceived as empirically working scholars, and not as philosophers who were part of the Brentano school. Thus, the foundation of psychological laboratories, that was so much demanded by Brentano, overshadowed the particularly *Brentanian* heritage of Stumpf's and Meinong's achievements in the context of scientific psychology.

Things might have gone in a different manner if Brentano would have succeeded in opening and guiding his own research laboratory; in this case, a Brentanian school of scientific psychology might have become a leading movement that could have considerably shaped the emergence of the discipline. As Brentano lost his academic influence after his resignation from the position as full professor at the University of Vienna³⁰, however, he no longer had the academic power to realize such a project.

Also within the narrower field of philosophy, where Brentano's contributions were undisputed, many of his students stood up for their independence from their teacher, though. Both Meinong and Husserl, for example, developed philosophical positions that clearly show Brentanian roots, but go in essential respects beyond – and both did so with the recognizable intention to form a movement or school in their own right, the theory of objects and phenomenology, respectively.

There were definitely several reasons why Meinong and Husserl have broken with Brentano; some of them had a more personal nature³¹, others were related to the psychologistic tendencies in Brentano's philosophy, others again to the latter's restrictive views in metaphysics: After Twardowski's critique of Brentano's early conception of intentionality³² both Meinong and Husserl opened up their metaphysical horizons, while Brentano reacted with a radicalization of his metaphysical views in his turn towards reism³³. One additional motive for deviating from Brentano's position, which is more central to the discussion of this paper, is related to methodological questions.

³⁰ Brentano, as is well known, resigned from his position in 1880 when he decided to get married with Ida von Lieben. As the Austrian laws did not permit a wedding for former priests, Brentano had to resign from his Austrian citizenship – and his position as a full professor – to become Saxonian citizen and get married in Leipzig. Brentano thought that it would only be a short-term resignation and that he could come back into his position after his wedding. The Austrian ministry, however, did not play along and Brentano could continue teaching at the University of Vienna only as *Privatdozent*. This loss of academic power might have prevented the formation of a strong Brentano school at Vienna. Moreover, the events described might also have reinforced Brentano's notorious reluctance to publish, which might have been a further element to undermine the formation of a school. For a more detailed discussion of this aspect, cf. J.M. WERLE, *Franz Brentano und die Zukunft der Philosophie: Studien zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte und Wissenschaftssystematik im 19. Jahrhundert*, Rodopi, Amsterdam - Atlanta (GA) 1989.

³¹ As I have mentioned above (cf. footnote 15), both Meinong and Husserl expressed their disappointment about Brentano's harsh reactions when his former students developed view he could not share.

³² Cf. K. TWARDOWSKI, *On the Content and Object of Presentations: A Psychological Investigation*, Engl. transl. by R. Grossmann, Nijhoff, The Hague 1977.

³³ In a letter to Marvin Farber, Husserl comments: «In his beginnings he seemed to strive beyond neo-scholastics; but unfortunately he got stuck in scholastics. And it is even worse in his late writings. This is distilled scholastics [In seinen Anfängen schien er über die Neu-Scholastik hinauszustreben; aber er ist leider in Scholastik stecken geblieben. Und am Schlimmsten steht es mit seinen Altersschriften. Das ist destillierte Scholastik]» (E. HUSSERL, *Briefwechsel*, Bd. IV, *Die Freiburger Schüler*, hrsg. von E. Schuhmann and K. Schuhmann, Kluwer, Dordrecht 1994, p. 82).

This becomes particularly manifest in the case of Husserl. Like Brentano, Husserl often insists that philosophy should be considered a rigorous science³⁴, but his conception of scientific philosophy deviates considerably from Brentano's. While the latter argues for a continuity of method between philosophy and the natural sciences, Husserl advocates a hierarchical understanding, where philosophy prepares the ground for the natural sciences. Moreover, while Brentano argues that philosophy is based on inner perception, Husserl suggests that the relevant data for philosophy can be gathered only by a special procedure, the intuition of essences, which requires a special form of attention. In short, Husserl might have been fascinated by Brentano's conception of method in his early days as a student, but he radically broke with it when he came to elaborate his own philosophical position. Even in his late works, Husserl came back to praise Brentano's methodological approach, but when he does so he typically also points at its limitations. In *Crisis*, for example, he writes:

Only when Brentano made the demand for psychology as a science of intentional experience was an impulse given that could lead further, although Brentano himself had not yet overcome objectivism and psychological naturalism³⁵.

Husserl, thus, continues to express admiration for Brentano's methodological conception and to praise it for its innovative power, but uses all occasions to criticize the naturalistic and sensualistic roots in Brentano's conception which he thinks to have overcome with his phenomenological method.

This shows that Brentano's conception of the method of philosophy had the potential to attract young and talented students, but it did not prevent them from deviating from Brentano's position once they had individuated the aspects in which they took the approach to be insufficient. In the light of this discussion it might be surprising that in a recent contribution, which I think is very interesting, Arnaud Dewalque has individuated Brentano's method and his metaphysical views as the unifying element of the Brentano school in the sense that they are shared by *all and only* the members of the Brentano school³⁶. Dewalque lists a set of nine propositions that he takes to be distinctive of Brentanianism; they are, in other words, necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for membership of the Brentano school. It seems to me that the sufficiency claim can be criticized for being overstated, for it does not take the historical and geographical unity of the school into consideration. The claim concerning necessity, on the other hand, is too strong, for it considerably restricts the Brentano school. It seems to me, for example, that neither Husserl nor Meinong would have accepted the second set of propositions that concern the relation between philosophy and psychology and consists in the following claims:

³⁴ Cf., for example, ID., *Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft*, «Logos», 1.3 (1911), pp. 289-341.

³⁵ ID., *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, Engl. transl. by D. Carr, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 1970, p. 298. For similar remarks, cf. *ibi*, pp. 222 ff., 233 ff., but also the letter to Landgrebe from February 5, 1922, reprinted in ID., *Briefwechsel*, Bd. IV: *Die Freiburger Schüler*, pp. 304 ff.

³⁶ Cf. A. DEWALQUE, *The Unity of the Brentano School*, in KRIEGER, *The Routledge Handbook of Franz Brentano and the Brentano School*, pp. 236-248.

C4 Philosophical sciences cannot achieve their goal without relying upon investigations into mental phenomena.

C5 [The reason it is so is that] philosophy uses empirical concepts, which have their source in inner perception.

C6 [Therefore] philosophy must rely upon psychology³⁷.

These propositions, and in particular C5 and C6, are at odds with Husserl's critique of psychologism, his critique of inner perception, and his views on eidetic intuition. For this reason, I would like to suggest that the nine propositions that are listed by Dewalque should not be read as necessary and jointly sufficient conditions, but rather as prototypical theses that allow us to detect a family resemblance among members of the school. This would allow us to continue to speak of the Brentano school in a looser sense that refers to a group of philosophers who worked in a given historical and geographic context on similar problems, applying or developing similar methods. It would require us to give up the idea that there is a clearly circumscribed school or that we could determine whether someone was a member of the school on the basis of necessary and jointly sufficient conditions, though. The nine propositions listed by Dewalque could still function as a useful *touchstone* that can help to individuate deviations of individual students who took distance of the school, but continued to acknowledge the influence that Brentano had exerted on them.

3.2. *The role of orthodox Brentanianism*

It is, I think, a merit of Dewalque's proposal that it tries to give a sort of *rational reconstruction* of what it might have meant to be a member of the Brentano school. In a project of this kind, which deals with a sort of *idealization*, it is possible, if not desired, to leave out historical or geographical details that are not pertinent for these narrow purposes. If we aim to get an understanding of the historical reality of a Brentano school, on the other hand, we cannot leave out aspects that were less *rational*, but might nonetheless have been decisive for the course of the events. In this perspective, one would have to take aspects like rivalry, personal antagonisms, or inappropriate appropriations into account. The short, but little friendly letter exchange between Alexius Meinong and Edmund Husserl, for example, might give an idea why the two did not make a joint attempt to reform and further develop Brentano's methodological approach³⁸. A thorough examination of all relevant factors of this kind, which span over a finely woven web of personal relations of a large number of persons, goes, of course, far beyond the scope of this paper. For this reason, I would like to focus only on one contingent factor, which, I think, ironically was a great obstacle for the formation of a Brentano school in a larger sense: the attempts of Brentano's second generation students (*Enkelschüler*) in Prague, Oskar Kraus and Alfred Kastil, to promote a Brentano school (in a more restricted sense). The two have gotten to know Brentano only in his late years, when he did not hold any university position any longer and was

³⁷ *Ibi*, p. 246.

³⁸ For a more detailed discussion, cf. W. HUEMER, *Husserl's Critique of Psychologism and his Relation to the Brentano School*, in A. CHRUDZIMSKI - W. HUEMER (eds.), *Phenomenology and Analysis: Essays on Central-European Philosophy*, Ontos Verlag, Frankfurt a.M. 2004, pp. 199-215.

weakened by his blindness and took, in consequence Brentano's late position, especially his reism, as the most authentic of his views.

I have mentioned above that according to Stumpf, Brentano never had the intention to form a school, while Husserl stated that it would have been important for Brentano to have a school «in the good sense»³⁹. Husserl's remark shows that the term «school» was not always used with positive connotations at the time, for they can easily become dogmatic and, thus, unscientific. It seems to me that the efforts of the «Brentanoten» (as they were called in Prague) Kraus and Kastil were often perceived in this way by some of Brentano's direct students, as they seemed to have had very clear ideas about the 'true doctrine' and were quick to criticize others for deviating from original Brentano's position. This attitude might have awakened the urge in many «Brentanians» (in a large sense) to distance themselves from the «Brentano school». In fact, also Arnauld Dewalque acknowledges that the term «Brentano school» was used among Brentano's students also to «distance themselves from what they take to be sheer Brentanian orthodoxy»⁴⁰.

When asked by Marvin Farber for his relation to Oskar Kraus, for example, Husserl not only expresses his bewilderment about the conduct of the «Brentano school», he also takes the occasion to distance himself from Brentano.

Kraus [...] is basically a good guy, but as Brentanist he is a real fanatic, a kind of Torquemada. He would not hesitate, if he had the power, to burn Brentano's enemies at the stake. Including me and my friends, for I began in my youth as an enthusiastic admirer of Brentano and took myself for too long a time, in a self-delusion, which now is difficult to understand, to be a collaborator of his philosophy and in particular his psychology⁴¹.

For sure, Husserl had taken distances from Brentano already beforehand, but I find it telling that in this letter he finds strong words of regret for his former enthusiasm for Brentano when answering a question concerning Oskar Kraus.

Similarly, also Meinong insists in a letter to Twardowski in his independence from Brentano and complains that this independence was not seen from philosophers of outside the school, but that he was criticized for it from within. Meinong writes: «the less informed interpret my relation to Brentano very much to the disadvantage of my independence, while it is my very independence that is so often criticized by the "orthodox"»⁴².

³⁹ Cf. above, note 15.

⁴⁰ A. DEWALQUE, *The Rise of the Brentano School*, in KRIEGEL, *The Routledge Handbook of Franz Brentano and the Brentano School*, pp. 225-235, here p. 225.

⁴¹ «Kraus [...] ist eigentlich ein „guter Kerl“, aber als Brentanist ein arger Fanatiker, eine Art Torquemada. Er würde die Gegner Brentano's ohne eine Miene zu verziehen, wenn er die Macht hätte, auf Scheiterhaufen verbrennen. Darunter mich u. meine Freunde, denn ich fieng zwar in der Jugend als begeisterter Verehrer Br<entano>s an u. hielt mich, allzulange, in einer jetzt schwer verständlichen Selbsttäuschung, für einen Mitarbeiter an seiner Philosophie, u. insbesondere seiner Psychologie» (HUSSERL, *Briefwechsel*, Bd. IV, *Die Freiburger Schüler*, p. 82, my translation).

⁴² «Minder Orientierte mein Verhältnis zu Brentano sehr zum Schaden meiner Selbständigkeit zurecht legen, indes es doch gerade diese Selbständigkeit ist, die mir die „Rechtgläubigen“ so sehr zum Vorwurfe machen» (Meinong's letter from July 2, 1897, reprinted in A. MEINONG - K. TWARDOWSKI, *Der Briefwechsel*, ed. by V. Raspa, De Gruyter, Boston 2016, p. 82, my translation). Meinong refers to a passage in *Friedrich Ueberwegs Grundriß der Geschichte der Philosophie*, where he is characterized as an admirer of Brentano.

This statement illustrates very well the tension in which the more independent students of Brentano have found themselves: From the outside they were often perceived as students of Brentano, while orthodox Brentanists treated them as traitors of the true doctrine. It is obvious that they must have felt uncomfortable in both roles, for both Husserl and Meinong saw themselves as independent philosophers, or even as founders of philosophical schools in their own right, who have had a great debt to Brentano, but always strived for developing a position of their own.

4. Conclusion

The discussion so far illustrates well, I think, that the term «Brentano school» is most useful when it is used not in a narrow or restrictive, but in a loose way that includes all those philosophers who have had direct or indirect contact with Brentano and have been influenced by his position – even if they later might have felt it necessary to emend or modify parts of the doctrine. Brentano was often described as a charismatic teacher; he impressed a large number of students with his views about the nature of philosophy, its method, and its content, in particular the emerging discipline of psychology. Moreover, he invited his students to become independent thinkers in their own right and to conduct their own research in ways that are appropriate to the phenomena. The fact that Brentano (or, for that reasons, the orthodox Brentanists) could not approve of many of the individual achievements of his former students, should not make us overlook that Brentano exerted an impact on the development of philosophy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century mainly through his former students, especially the more independent ones. This fact that could easily be overlooked if we apply a too narrow conception of the «Brentano school» or make adherence to the school dependent on criteria that are overly restrictive.

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