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**THE PLACE OF DESCRIPTION**  
**NATURAL METHOD IN THE PSYCHOLOGY OF FRANZ**  
**BRENTANO**

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## **Abstract**

This work intends to examine the way in which Brentano makes a proper philosophical concept out of description. More specifically, the idea will be defended that description is the natural method of psychology as Brentano understands it; a method relying upon natural means of knowledge, as well as specifically suited for the investigation of psychological phenomena.

In the first part, an examination will be carried out regarding the motives that led Brentano to his original conception of psychology and that, as a consequence, would determine the development of the method of descriptive psychology.

In the second part, the development itself of this method will be analysed, and the many layers of its mechanism will be singled out: from inner perception as the source of its knowledge; through its methodical procedures such as noticing and fixating in language; up to its methodical core, which will be shown to consist in a very special sort of intuitive inductive generalization towards exact, apodictic laws.

At the end, we will have a better grasp of the theoretical import of Brentano's concept of description, as well as of this unique methodological configuration that he devises, whose broader philosophical – and historico-philosophical – implications remain to be assessed in all its significance.

**Keywords:** description, descriptive psychology, natural method, intuitive induction, Franz Brentano.

## **Resumo**

Este trabalho pretende examinar a maneira como Brentano faz da descrição um conceito propriamente filosófico a partir da descrição. Mais especificamente, será defendida a ideia de que a descrição é o método natural da psicologia como Brentano a entende; um método baseado em meios naturais de conhecimento, bem como especificamente adequado para a investigação de fenômenos psíquicos.

Na primeira parte, será feito um exame sobre os motivos que levaram Brentano à sua concepção original de psicologia e que, por conseguinte, determinariam o desenvolvimento do método da psicologia descritiva.

Na segunda parte, será analisado o desenvolvimento, propriamente dito, deste método, destacando-se as diversas camadas que compõe seu mecanismo: da percepção interna como sua fonte de conhecimento; passando por seus procedimentos metódicos (notar e fixar em linguagem); até seu núcleo metódico, que consistirá em um tipo muito especial de generalização indutiva intuitiva em direção a leis apodícticas exatas.

No final, teremos uma melhor compreensão da importância teórica do conceito de descrição de Brentano, bem como desta configuração metodológica única que ele concebe, cujas implicações filosóficas – e histórico-filosóficas – mais amplas ainda precisam ser avaliadas em todo o seu significado.

**Palavras-chave:** descrição, psicologia descritiva, método natural, indução intuitiva, Franz Brentano.

# Index

INTRODUCTION.....	8
§1. A tool for all occasions.....	8
§2. Description as a method according to nature: a research plan .....	14
PART I – WHY TO EMPLOY DESCRIPTION? OR THE MOTIVES THAT LEAD TO DESCRIPTIVE PSYCHOLOGY .....	17
CHAPTER 1: Brentano’s philosophical program, from pessimism to the challenges of philosophy.....	18
§3. Where to look for it? A research hypothesis.....	18
§4. Why would Brentano need description?.....	19
§5. PES and Brentano’s broader philosophical program.....	20
§6. Four reasons for despondency .....	22
§7. Sciences age differently .....	23
§8. Turning pessimism into optimism.....	26
§9. Facing up the challenge.....	27
§10. The gap between interest and method and the specific project of PES.....	29
CHAPTER 2: The search for the right concept of psychology: the setting of <i>PES</i> , I, Chapter I.....	33
§11. Domain, concept, task, value .....	33
§12. The oldest concept of psychology.....	35
§13. Shrinking the domain of the science of the soul .....	37
§14. From domain to concept: a new conception of soul to accompany the new psychology?.....	41
§15. Psychology as science of psychical phenomena I – an inconsistent conception of phenomenon.....	46
§16. Psychology as science of psychical phenomena II – psychology without a soul .....	48
§17. The immortality of the soul as the most important question of psychology .....	52
CHAPTER 3: The Brentano Defense .....	57
§18. Brentano’s first move: the immortality of life .....	57
§19. Brentano’s second move: the simpler choice.....	61
§20. The finding of the right concept of psychology and Brentano’s goals .....	67
§21. The neutrality of Brentano’s psychology.....	68
§22. The relative worth ( <i>Wertverhältnis</i> ) of psychology.....	70
§23. An answer to the challenges .....	74
§24. The birthplace of description? .....	76
PART II – HOW TO EMPLOY DESCRIPTION? OR AN EXPLODED VIEW OF DESCRIPTIVE PSYCHOLOGY .....	82
CHAPTER 1: The lower strata.....	86
§25. Object: mental phenomena .....	86
§26. Source: inner perception.....	90
§27. Source: inner perception as a form of judgment .....	92
§28. Source: inner perception as a source of immediately evident knowledge.....	96
CHAPTER 2: The middle strata.....	102

§29. Procedures (method in a broad sense): experience, notice and fixate.....	102
§30. Procedures (method in a broad sense): experiencing.....	103
§31. Procedures (method in a broad sense): noticing.....	104
§32. Procedures (method in a broad sense): fixating .....	106
§33. Method (in a strict sense): the descriptions of descriptive psychology.....	108
§34. Method (in a strict sense): sources of belief and methodological configurations.....	110
§35. Method (in a strict sense): varieties of induction .....	115
§36. Method (in a strict sense): the problem of the passage .....	127
§37. Method (in a strict sense): exactness (ἀκρίβεια) .....	135
<b>CHAPTER 3: The higher strata.....</b>	<b>140</b>
§38. Tasks: classification and analysis.....	140
§39. Tasks: general compositional account.....	143
§40. Tasks: error, incompleteness, language .....	147
§41. Place: a pure psychology and a mongrel science .....	153
§42. Place: the priority function of descriptive psychology .....	155
§43. Place: analogies .....	160
§44. Place: the uniqueness of descriptive psychology and the difficulty of classifying it.....	166
<b>CONCLUSIONS.....</b>	<b>170</b>
§45. A descriptive oddity .....	170
§46. A method and a tool .....	173
§47. Description as the method appropriate to the domain of psychical phenomena.....	175
§48. Method according to nature: elements for a new problem.....	176
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>182</b>

## INTRODUCTION

### *§1. A tool for all occasions*

Descriptions can be used for many purposes. We can describe a platonic person, a blackbird (in thirteen different ways), or the changes brought about in a landscape by summer ended too soon. We can describe whole civilizations, whole ages as decadent or prosperous, dark or bronze; we can describe the manners of an age just as easily as the mannerisms in a work of art. In fact, like John Ruskin, we can describe the manners of an age, its moral and spiritual inclinations, within the scope of its own artistic and architectural works – Ruskin’s monumental descriptions of Venice being, in reality, an attempt to read in its stones the story of the flourishing and the corruption of Venetian civilization, an effort to make visible “the relation of the art of Venice to her moral temper” (Ruskin 2010a, 14); so much so that his description of the sculptures at the corners of the Palazzo Ducale become, in turn, the testimony of the different ages of the city: “at the first two angles,” says Ruskin, “it is the Gothic spirit which is going to speak to us; and, at the third, the Renaissance spirit” (Ruskin 2010b, 359).

We can describe real and familiar places, present or past. We can describe entire tours of foreign lands worth seeing, as in Pausanias’ earliest travel guide, the ‘Ἑλλάδος Περιήγησις’, which later came to be known simply as the “*Descriptio Graeciae*”, the “Description of Greece”. We can describe completely imaginary or *quasi-fictional* settings, Macondo or Uqbar, as well as places that exist but to which, in fact, we have never been. We can also describe the interior of a grotto in the Spanish hills during the Civil War, as Hemingway did:

Robert Jordan pushed aside the saddle blanket that hung over the mouth of the cave and, stepping out, took a deep breath of the cold night air. The mist had cleared away and the stars were out. There was no wind, and, outside now of the warm air of the cave, heavy with smoke of both tobacco and charcoal, with the odor of cooked rice and meat, saffron, pimentos, and oil, the tarry, wine-spilled smell of the big skin hung beside the door, hung by the neck and the four legs extended, wine drawn from a plug fitted in one leg, wine that spilled a little onto the earth of the floor, settling the dust smell; out now from the odors of different herbs whose names he did not know that hung in bunches from the ceiling, with long ropes of garlic, away now from the copper-penny, red wine and garlic, horse sweat and man sweat dried in the clothing (acidic and gray the man sweat, sweet and sickly the dried brushed-off lather of horse sweat), of the men at the table,



Robert Jordan breathed deeply of the clear night air of the mountains that smelled of the pines and of the dew on the grass in the meadow by the stream. (Hemingway 1940, 59)

We can, on a more daily basis, describe acquaintances, people we are particularly fond of, and people we would rather avoid. We can describe pains to our doctors – “prickly” or “dull,” we would say – and suspects to the police – “square face” or “oval face,” the man who ran down the stairs. We can even describe suspects we are particularly fond of, as Eve Polastri when she reports to an MI6 sketch artist what she remembers about the killer she was chasing after:

her hair is dark blonde, maybe honey. It was tied back. She was slim. About 25, 26. She had very delicate features. Her eyes are sort of cat-like: wide but alert. Her lips are full and she has a long neck, high cheekbones. Her skin is smooth and bright. She had a lost look in her eye that was both direct and also chilling. She is totally focused, yet almost entirely inaccessible.

Beside these many practical and literary uses, however, description can also be a theoretical-oriented endeavour; it can be writing down what we see and making others see it with the explicit purpose of increasing our knowledge of things and in the pursuit of a purely scientific goal. In that case, the looser descriptions of art and life and love, those descriptions that crossed, completely unbounded, through physical, psychological and spiritual regions, and which mixed fact with all sorts of assumptions and interferences of the fancy – those free descriptions give place to a thread firmly guided by a certain theoretical interest, upon which we focus as the theme of our descriptions.

Let us examine this contrast further. In a dazzling analysis of the writing of Carlo Emilio Gadda, for example, Italo Calvino claims that

[Gadda] cercò per tutta la sua vita di rappresentare il mondo come un garbuglio, o groviglio, o gomitolo, di rappresentarlo senza attenuarne affatto l'inestricabile complessità, o per meglio dire la presenza simultanea degli elementi più eterogenei che concorrono a determinare ogni evento (Calvino 1988, 103-4)

What Calvino finds in Gadda's world-as-*garbuglio*, however, could perfectly be said to be the exaggerated manifestation of something like a general trait or an intrinsic potentiality of all literary description: these descriptions can pass, unencumbered, from exterior to interior, from scenery to objects, from odors of things to names of things and to their place in the memory of men – exactly as we have seen in the excerpt from Hemingway. This is, in fact, how Calvino reads the Gaddean *garbuglio*. Thus, in a literary description, he says,

ogni minimo oggetto è visto come il centro d'una rete di relazioni che lo scrittore non sa trattenersi dal seguire, moltiplicando i dettagli in modo che le sue descrizioni e divagazioni diventano infinite. Da qualsiasi punto di partenza il discorso s'allarga a comprendere orizzonti sempre più vasti, e se potesse continuare a svilupparsi in ogni direzione arriverebbe ad abbracciare l'intero universo. (Calvino 1988, 105)

On the contrary, the thread of a properly scientific description is not unbounded and is not omnidirectional. In fact, scientific describers are usually conscious of the hazards involved in the proliferation of detail and in unfettered errancy, developing ways of guarding themselves against these dangers. So it is that we find, in the naturalist Louis-Jean-Marie Daubenton's entry on 'description' for the *Encyclopédie* (1751-1772), almost the copy negative of what Calvino had seen in Gadda:

Décrire les différentes productions de la nature, c'est tracer leur portrait et en faire un tableau qui les représente, tant à l'intérieur qu'à l'extérieur, sous des faces et dans des états différents. Les descriptions n'auraient point de limites, si on les étendait indistinctement à tous les êtres de la nature, à toutes les variétés de leurs formes, et à tous les détails de leur conformation et de leur organisation. Un livre qui contiendrait tant et de si longues descriptions, loin de nous donner des idées claires et distinctes des corps qui couvrent la terre et de ceux qui la composent, ne présenterait à l'esprit que des *figures informes et gigantesques dispersées sans ordre et tracées sans proportion* : les plus grands efforts de l'imagination ne suffiraient pas pour les apercevoir, et l'attention la plus profonde n'y ferait concevoir aucun arrangement. Tel serait un tas énorme et confus formé par les débris d'une multitude de machines ; on n'y reconnaîtrait que des parties détachées, sans en voir les rapports et l'assemblage. (Diderot et d'Alembert 2017, highlight mine)

Daubenton then goes on to present the precepts of a good theoretical use of description:

Les descriptions ne peuvent être utiles qu'autant qu'elles sont restreintes à de justes bornes, et assujetties à de certaines lois. Ces bornes et ces lois doivent varier *selon la nature de la chose* et l'objet de la science, dans les différents règnes de l'Histoire naturelle. Plus un corps est composé, plus il est nécessaire de décrire les détails de son organisation, pour en exposer le jeu et la mécanique. (Diderot et d'Alembert, highlight mine; see also Hamon, 1991, 43-4).

The *groviglio* – if we can still use that name here – of a theoretical description, such as that presented by Daubenton, is a very different sort of thread than that of literary and pragmatic descriptions. Not only is there a different dominant interest – what matters now is cognition, first and foremost – but, under its guidance, scientific description chases persistently after that specific object which becomes the theme of theoretical interest. The scientific description must follow the

contours of the object itself, pursuing its own internal connections while respecting its external boundaries. As Daubenton puts it, this is a description “*selon la nature de la chose*”, meaning first that it sticks to the limits of the subject matter, to which it is bounded, without passing indistinctly from one to another (it is ordered, as opposed to the “*figures informes*” above); and also that it moderates its scope according to the dimension and complexity of object (it is proportional, as against the “*figures gigantesques*” of Daubenton).

Following precepts like these, in fact, descriptions had been employed for theoretical purposes already since the earliest days of zoology and botany; we see them, for instance, in the treatises of Aristotle and Theophrastus on these subjects. They continued to be employed as natural history expanded and evolved into the great systems of Linnaeus and Cuvier, and they were crucial as well in the rapid development of modern anatomy, physiology and medicine, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century – the description and publication of experiments in the then thriving scientific journals allowing for their reproduction by any scientist, in virtually any part of the world. Describing and making see has always been an integral part of scientific development.

And yet, besides its frequent and long-lasting employment in literary and pragmatic activities, and in sciences as varied as glossology and orognosy, ornithology and behavioral psychology, something notable happens roughly at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: description starts to appear, ever and again, either as an operative or thematic *philosophical* concept. Following the then burgeoning scientific development of physics and psychology, influential thinkers as different as Mach, Kirchhoff, Wundt and Helmholtz all, in one way or another, began to talk of description – of phenomena, of natural forces, of physiological or psychological processes, or of something else – as a fundamental philosophical task. From this initial breakthrough, and as the cluttered archipelago of 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy began to take shape, ‘description’ became even more of a buzzword, on both sides of the canal: from descriptive psychology to the so-called ‘phenomenological description’, whatever one understand by it; but also from Russell’s theory of descriptions; through Wittgenstein’s descriptions of uses of language; and Anscombe’s notion of ‘under a description’; up to Strawson’s descriptive metaphysics or Rorty’s redescription, talk of description is everywhere to be found in philosophy.

Now, anyone looking for a common ground among such an assorted collection of philosophical occurrences of description will quickly realize the hardship of the task. Indeed, as employed by philosophers, what was as simple as seeing, writing down what we see and making others see it starts to turn into a convoluted and sometimes problematic activity – up to the point, even, when

it becomes itself a philosophical problem. The concept of description explodes, as it were, and one would seriously doubt whether anything remains in those usages beyond a completely equivocal word.

In order to begin to unravel the *groviglio* of philosophical description in contemporary philosophy, therefore, one would certainly do well to try and identify some of the most important threads, originating among those forerunners of philosophical description in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and trace at least some of the most significant developments that lead into the messy landscape of current philosophical methods<sup>1</sup>. It is at this point that one figure suggests itself so strongly as to almost shadow any other – the figure, of course, of Franz Brentano, whose influence in subsequent philosophy was not only profound and long-lasting, but unusually pervasive. As everybody knows by now, Brentano has been identified as the precursor of philosophy both in the islands and in the continent – and has been used to mark both filiation and dissent to these trends: he is at times the “disgusted grandfather of phenomenology” (Ryle 1976), at times the origin of the “Anglo-Austrian Analytic Axis” (Simons 1986; but see already Haller 1979).

Some even went further and tied Brentano’s widespread influence specifically to his approach based on philosophical description. Kevin Mulligan picks up Rudolf Haller’s idea of “Austrian Variations” (Haller’s 1979 studies on Austrian Philosophy are *Variationen über ein Thema*) and shows how the theme of philosophical description would have unfolded into analytic *and* phenomenological variations (Mulligan 1993). Brentano and his school would have developed a “descriptive way” of doing philosophy, which would have crossed through Wittgenstein, Oxbridge and the Vienna Circle, and would still be alive and well in the Anglo-Austrian world, but which had also thrived, for some time, in the phenomenological tradition – until, that is, the “realist, Austrian Husserl” found out he was German after all (Mulligan 1998).

No assessment of the accuracy of such narratives will be attempted here. Instead, what is going to be suggested is a goal considerably more modest: before we see in Brentano the precursor of anything, the betrayed begetter or the unacknowledged paragon, let us simply illustrate, as exactly as possible, the way in which Brentano himself makes use of description. The answer to this question will not, that is true, give us the key to our genealogy of the “descriptive way” of doing philosophy – if ever there was one; but it is surely a necessary part of that investigation. If we

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<sup>1</sup> For a quite different approach, attempting to trace the connections between two quite different vortices – namely a comparison between Elizabeth Anscombe’s concept of ‘under a description’ and a more thickly theoretical concept of description – see ‘Appendix I’.

succeed in our goal, we will have shown what the elements are which characterize Brentano's employment of description in his philosophy and will thus have at our disposal the required material for comparison, bridge-building or ancestor shaming.

So, what is it that makes Brentano's concept of description philosophically important? Not merely the fact, of course, that Brentano is a philosopher and that he employs description at some point of his philosophical activity. Description in Brentano is rather deeply philosophical – and that is because, as we shall see, it is indeed very localized. As is well-known, Brentano was the proponent of a descriptive psychology; it is precisely this location of description in Brentano's system that will make it philosophical in a quite *unique sense* – or, better, in two quite unique senses.

In a first sense, this Brentanian use of description is remarkable in that, *unlike many of those other philosophical uses*, the descriptions of descriptive psychology are understood as a wholly and properly theoretical endeavour: as a bounded and measured description, guided by a specific scientific interest, *very much like those natural scientific descriptions presented by Daubenton*. The thread of descriptive psychological *grovigli* will, therefore, have much in common with those of other, established descriptive sciences; and many of the worries that were typical of descriptive scientists such as some of the *encyclopédistes* will reappear in Brentano's employment of description. This is crucial to have in mind if we want to grasp the actual stakes of descriptive psychology as Brentano presents it, as it is a move highly characteristic of Brentano: following the tracks of modern scientific, positivistic issues all the way into problems which are both traditionally philosophical and excitingly original.

On the other hand, the Brentanian use of description in descriptive psychology is unique in a second, and stronger sense. In fact, as it should become clear at the end of our investigations, we could say that in all those multifarious uses of descriptions, in the examples above, description was employed as a *tool*: talking about what we see for purposes pragmatic, literary or theoretical. Now, in contrast to these – and this time, let us emphasize it, *unlike those other theoretical uses of description* – we will see that, in the hands of Brentano, description will become something else, or something more. It will become, beyond just a tool, also a new, original *method*, with which to tackle a special scientific domain. Or, more rigorously put, description will become a *unique methodological configuration*, on a par with the deductive and inductive methods employed in mathematics, physics or physiology (§44). As a full-blown theoretical and methodical endeavour, description, in descriptive psychology, is no longer a mere auxiliary methodical procedure that precedes a more systematic classification or investigation into causes of

phenomena; it is not the *mise en place* for truly theoretical activity; and neither is it the lightweight version of theory. What is more, the kind of theoretical achievement made possible by description is, as we will see, carried out at a level which is highly valuable and thoroughly philosophical (§42). Of course, this new sort of employment we find in Brentano also means that we will be dealing here with descriptions very unlike those we were accustomed to. It will be our task as well (§45) to understand what exactly these odd descriptions ultimately amount to.

## **§2. Description as a method according to nature: a research plan**

The idea that will hopefully be clarified in these investigations, then – and the idea that will be here defended – is that, in his theoretical endeavour of a descriptive psychology, Brentano employs description not only as a tool but also, and most importantly, as a *method*. This will imply, first of all, that this employment must adhere to a principle which Brentano always observes and which states that any truly scientific method must be “according to nature” (*naturgemäß*); a principle which, indeed, makes the descriptions of descriptive psychology resemble, in important ways, those descriptions *selon la nature* demanded by Daubenton. And yet, in Brentano, as we have suggested already, this exigency of a *method according to nature*, as it applies to description, will have its own intricacies. It is not the case, yet, of delving further into such intricacies; we will be in a much better position to clarify this principle of Brentano once we have seen it in action, operating in the development of descriptive psychology, and we will then come back to it (§48). For the moment, it suffices to say that, in Brentano, the notion of a method “according to nature” stands for at least two things: a method must rely only on the natural, actually reliable means of knowledge – which, for Brentano, are the means of experience; and a method must accord to the features of the domain it investigates. Following this double injunction, Brentano will make a method out of description – a method which, as we shall see, is reducible neither to deduction nor to induction in the forms in which the latter was then carried out in the empirical sciences.

Now, precisely because it will have to stick to strict methodological principles, the concept of description at work in Brentano’s descriptive psychology cannot but appear as a very specific one. First, it is part of a tightly interwoven conceptual network – it is systematically dependent on concepts like objectual domain (psychical phenomena); epistemic source (inner perception); evidence (a particular kind, conveyed only through inner perception); and logical form (a quite peculiar form of induction of general laws). All these concepts need to come together for

something like Brentanian descriptive psychology even to be possible. Secondly, description works within this highly specialized mechanism because it needs to guarantee the success of a very distinct project. In his general project for a scientific psychology, Brentano is trying to lay a secure ground upon which a special sort of discipline can be established, and around which an actual shared, scientific tradition can form. And, inside this project, descriptive psychology, in particular, will attain a special, privileged epistemic status, and a distinguished position in the system of sciences as Brentano conceives it.

These two different sets of determinations of Brentano's concept of psychology – internal and external determinations, we could say – correspond, broadly, to the two parts of this investigation. In the *first part*, it will be the matter of establishing what the goals are which Brentano sets for himself and in the pursuing of which description will eventually be employed. It is, one could say, a functional analysis: *what exactly is description called for to accomplish?* The analysis will try to make explicit what the stakes were that led Brentano to a position where he could finally develop descriptive psychology and work out its method. In the *second part*, it will be the matter of dissecting the actual mechanism at work in Brentano's descriptive psychology. As such, the latter is a structural analysis: *how exactly does descriptive psychology fulfil that function which we disclosed at the first part? What is it that guarantees its working as a proper scientific method?* In this second part, we will look at the conceptual network that sustains descriptive psychological descriptions (domain, source, procedures, logical form, operations, systematic place), providing an internal analysis of this structure; we will also try to confront it with other methodological configurations, in general, and with its counterpart inside Brentanian empirical psychology, namely genetic psychology, in particular.

In fact, one would have a hard time finding an examination of Brentanian descriptive psychology which did not present it as part of this twofold psychology, *in relation to* and *in contrast with* genetic psychology. The features of descriptive psychology are highlighted by means of a direct comparison with those of genetic psychology: one is static, the other dynamic; one is purely psychological, the other blends into psychophysical considerations, and so on. This correspondence, while not mistaken, is bound to be misleading; for these are two sciences which are anything but parallel. As we will try to show, descriptive psychology occupies a unique place in what Brentano understands as the edifice of sciences and philosophy; it is not more important than other sciences – and not more important than genetic psychology, in particular – but it is quite different from them, and prior to all others, in a sense that will be our job to clarify. To force descriptive and genetic psychology into a parallel is, in fact, doubly deceiving: for once, by putting

them side-by-side, one fails to stress the unique features of the particular *position* occupied by descriptive psychology; then, because one still must account somehow for the uniqueness of descriptive psychology, and account also for the fact that Brentano gives considerably more attention to descriptive rather than to genetic psychology, one not rarely ends up with the impression that descriptive psychology has more *importance* than its counterpart, that it is a preferable alternative to genetic psychology, and even maybe that it is a question of choosing one over another as a method of inquiry into psychological matters. That, however, would be a completely distorted picture of Brentano's program.

What is first necessary is to have a clear image of the particular place and of the singular structure of descriptive psychology. Only by understanding it in what it is, as well as in its context, can we then comprehend the relationship it maintains with genetic psychology and, in general, with other sciences. The major goal of this work is thus to provide, more than any external comparison, an *intrinsic account of descriptive psychology*, an account which understands it from the inside, highlighting its unique methodical configuration and, more specifically, its reliance on description as the natural method (in the technical, Brentanian sense) of psychology. This is our strategy to properly grasp a concept which, being central but very widespread in Brentano's thought – crossing paths with many other concepts on many different levels: inner perception, evidence, psychical phenomena, etc. – turns out to be a fairly elusive notion, whose essential features and internal articulations are still difficult to pinpoint.



**PART I – WHY TO EMPLOY DESCRIPTION? OR THE MOTIVES THAT LEAD TO  
DESCRIPTIVE PSYCHOLOGY**

ac prius ignotum ferro quam scindimus aequor,  
ventos et varium caeli praediscere morem  
cura sit ac patrios cultusque habitusque locorum,  
et quid quaeque ferat regio et quid quaeque recuset.

– Virgil, *Georgics*

## CHAPTER 1: Brentano's philosophical program, from pessimism to the challenges of philosophy.

### §3. *Where to look for it? A research hypothesis*

A preliminary question to be faced, if one wants to investigate Brentano's concept of descriptive psychology, is where exactly one should begin to look for it. In fact, the precise moment of the birth of Brentano's descriptive psychology is itself a debated issue. As a nominal concept, as a theme, and indeed as the subject of critical discussion, one could trace descriptive psychology back to a series of lectures Brentano conducted at the University of Vienna in the semesters of 1887-8, 1888-9 and 1890-1. As an operative concept of his philosophy, on the other hand, it figures in a much larger portion of his work. For instance, in the series of press articles *My Last Wishes for Austria*, published in 1895, Brentano criticizes the general intellectual climate of that country while at the same time presenting the outline of his own psychological theories, which he characterized precisely as descriptive psychology. And in his lecture *On the Origin of Moral Knowledge*, which was to have decisive impact on the later course of research on ethics, he once again stresses descriptive psychology as the basis upon which the achievements of his ethical theory were built (USE, 14).

However, as it will be hopefully made explicit throughout our investigations, a descriptive psychology is already deeply entrenched in Brentano's philosophical program, much before the courses and lectures of 1887-1895; it is in fact indissociable from his idea of a psychology from a purely empirical standpoint. And, if this is correct, then the roots of a descriptive psychology must be looked for already in the *Psychology From an Empirical Standpoint* of 1874. We will come back to this issue in due time (see §24). For now, what is important to retain is that even if descriptive psychology had not been singled out and identified as such in *PES*; even if the descriptive psychological tasks were mingled with the genetic ones, still most part of the psychology of *PES* – and, we could add, the critical part – can be shown to be, *in effect*, a nascent form of *descriptive psychology*.

What is really important in this issue, in fact, is that the explicit distinction of descriptive psychology and genetic psychology, through which Brentano himself presents the former in his later works, and through which most of the commentators still approach the issue, is not the only

way to account for what descriptive psychology means inside Brentano's system. The origin and cause of descriptive psychology is not to be found in some sort of opposition to genetic psychology – just like its explanation would not be complete merely by putting it in comparison to the latter. Rather, as is the whole point of the first part of this work to show, the descriptive method will be called for by the newly interpreted domain and the original concept of psychology that Brentano will carefully establish in his 1874 work. As we will see, descriptive psychology grows out of Brentano's concept of psychology as its necessary methodological framework. Ultimately, then, we want it to become clear that descriptive psychology should not be understood as merely the counterpart to genetic psychology; and that its roots are better understood when we look at it as one of the two parts – and the most peculiar one, it could be said – of the method proper to the nature of this new domain of objects that is uncovered in Brentanian empirical psychology.

Following this research hypothesis, the starting point of the investigation cannot but be the beginning of Brentano's project, right in the *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*. The first part of our investigations, directed towards clarifying the reasons for the deployment of the concept of description in the interior of Brentano's project, will thus focus on the very first, programmatic chapter of *PES*; this is the privileged *locus* from which to observe Brentano putting into work his program of a novel psychology.

#### **§4. *Why would Brentano need description?***

Chapter one of the *Psychology* is not only the introductory chapter; it is also a chapter of an essentially different character than that of the rest of the text. And not only is it different in content, but there is also a quite different feeling to it. In this dense text, it is as if Brentano were more at ease with parables and metaphors, as if he was trying his hands at telling us a rather fanciful story: the story of the many misfortunes and of the rare glimpses of progress that took place in the development of psychology. In fact, this very first chapter is where Brentano assesses all the main conceptions of psychology passed down by tradition and then, finally, presents his own conception in turn. It is a *positional* and *programmatic* chapter, where Brentano will set up a concept – the concept of a perfectly empirical psychology – whose methodological and epistemological justification will be the main task of the rest of the completed books of the *Psychology*<sup>2</sup>. And – so

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. chapters 2-4 of the first book, on the method of psychology, as well as the epistemological role of inner perception in most of the second book.

we will argue – it is precisely in the process of exploring the method of this new empirical psychology that description will first make its entrance. In this sense, as stated above, even if description is not nominally a concept of *PES*, we want to show that *it is that work already that it becomes necessary*, as the proper method (or as a part of the proper method) of empirical psychology.

Inside the scope of *PES*, it is in chapter 1 that we find Brentano's strategical move of establishing the domain and the concept of his psychology – of which his descriptive psychology will then be the crucial part. It is, therefore, by studying Brentano's move in this chapter, by restaging that movement and reconstructing his argument, that we will be able to witness the gestation of his notion of descriptive psychology, to get a view of the terrain in which only could the concept of description appear, and to answer the question as to *why Brentano had need of description as a key theoretical and methodological notion*.

Finally, it is important to remark that while the *Psychology* is still the most studied of Brentano's texts, scholarship has remained unequally distributed between its parts. In this sense, while Brentano's concept of intentionality, for instance, has been treated *ad nauseam*, and themes like the Brentanian view on self-consciousness or on the notion of phenomenon have been well charted, some passages of this key text still might profit from further examination. This very first chapter, we believe, is worthy of a new, attentive reading, so as to capture some nuances of Brentano's project and of the challenges which his psychology comes to face.

### **§5. *PES and Brentano's broader philosophical program***

At this point, we would have the option of simply jumping straight into the text of the *Psychology*. It begins in a powerful, yet abrupt tone, worth quoting in full:

Was im Anfang, wohlbekannt und offenbar, für das Verborgene die Erklärung schien, und was später, vor anderem geheimnisvoll, Staunen und Wißbegier erweckte; woran die großen Denker des Altertums am meisten mit Eifer sich abmühten, und worüber Eintracht und Klarheit noch heute am wenigsten erzielt sind: das sind die Erscheinungen, die auch ich wieder forschend betrachtete, und von deren Eigentümlichkeiten und Gesetzen ich hier, in allgemeinen Zügen, ein berichtigtes Bild zu geben suche. Kein Zweig des Wissens hat geringere Früchte für Natur und Leben getragen, und keiner ist, von welchem wesentlichere Bedürfnisse ihre Befriedigung hoffen. Kein Teil ist – die Metaphysik allein ausgenommen –, auf welchen die Mehrzahl mit größerer

Verachtung zu blicken pflegt, und keiner doch ist, welcher von Einzelnen so hoch und wert gehalten wird. Ja das gesamte Reich der Wahrheit würde manchem arm und verächtlich scheinen, wenn es nicht auch dieses Gebiet mitzuumfassen bestimmt wäre; und alles andere Wissen glaubt er vorzüglich darum ehren zu sollen, weil es zu diesem Wissen die Wege bahnt. Andere Wissenschaften sind in der Tat der Unterbau; diese gleicht dem krönenden Abschlusse. Alle bereiten sie vor; von allen hängt sie ab. Aber auf alle soll sie auch wieder ihrerseits die kräftigste Rückwirkung üben. Das ganze Leben der Menschheit soll sie erneuern; den Fortschritt beschleunigen und sichern. Und wenn sie darum einerseits wie die Zinne am turmartigen Gebäude der Wissenschaft erscheint, so hat sie anderseits die Aufgabe, Grundlage der Gesellschaft und ihrer edelsten Güter, und somit auch Grundlage aller Bestrebungen der Forscher zu werden. (PES, 5-6)

While the whole text of the first chapter is comprised of three sections, they are in fact preceded by this non-numerated, “zero” paragraph which, in what is an already remarkable chapter, stands out for a series of reasons. The sort of hefty claims it advances might be a surprise to some readers. They certainly are a challenge already to those who are used to praise in Brentano only the sober philosopher, the meticulous thinker who had eschewed the grand systematic aspirations of idealism in order to dedicate himself to philosophical clockwork. In that paragraph alone Brentano sews together a variety of implicit references and thinly veiled resonances of ancient and modern philosophers; he advances bold, major statements about the history and future of psychology; and he speaks of psychological phenomena successively as a wonder, a problem and a promise. What is more, for the magnitude of his claims and the ease with which they are stated, an unfamiliar reader could almost believe it had been written in a hurry and pasted at the beginning of the book.

One will do well to keep in mind, however, that Brentano’s *Psychology* is not a standalone incursion so much as part of a *broader program* regarding psychology and, even more, regarding philosophy itself, insofar as psychology makes for a crucial part of it. Brentano presented this program exhaustively in many texts and lectures both of his Würzburg and Vienna periods; and, in this rushing first paragraph of *PES*, what we find is actually the sketch of this very program, focusing on the role psychology should play inside this broader scheme. If that is the case, then the first thing one should do, even before one enters the text of this first chapter, would be to bring this program to light. Having a grasp of Brentano’s most general strategy will allow us to understand much better the specific move being carried out in *PES* – the move which, by its turn, will shed light on the function of descriptive psychology in Brentano’s philosophical program.

## §6. *Four reasons for despondency*

Besides the publication of *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, 1874 was the year in which Brentano took up the chair of philosophy at the University of Vienna. To mark the occasion, he presented, on April 22<sup>nd</sup>, a conference about ‘The Reasons for Despondency in the Domain of Philosophy’. “One cannot deny that philosophy is not met with great trust”, says Brentano in his lecture, as he examines the reasons of what he saw as this lack of confidence; and this was especially true of young researchers, he adds, who maintained very low “hopes of success” in the discipline (ZPh, 86). Philosophy was, at the time, systematically *undervalued*: talented young scientists were fleeing from it to other areas, and both inside and outside academia the very possibility of its realization was generally put in doubt. As he would put it again a few years later, in 1889, one could notice a sharp contrast between the glory philosophy had enjoyed at the time of the great systems of Hegel and Schelling – a glory which, to make things worse, was unwarranted – and the “deep contempt” with which it was then being met (ZPh, 104).

In his 1874 conference in Vienna, then, Brentano tries to argue against each of the reasons he identified as a cause for discouragement, and to set hopes higher for philosophical inquiry. As I will try to show, the text of this conference, written almost at the same time as that of the *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, has an important thematic resonance with the latter work, expanding some of the themes present in the background of the first chapter of *PES* and thus also providing us with a more thorough perspective from which to read his *Psychology*.

In the conference, Brentano identifies a fourfold motivation behind the despondency of philosophical inquiry as a scientific enterprise:

(Despondency-1) – *Lack of generally shared principles*: disagreement (*Uneinigkeit*) in philosophy is widespread and, most dangerously, it runs deep – “in philosophy, the dispute reaches even the first and fundamental propositions” (ZPh, 87); the philosophical world is divided into schools, no theory is generally accepted and even its very principles are a matter of controversy. Cf. with the discovery of geometrical theorems by Thales: the same Thales was at the origin of philosophical thought, but while his mathematical theorems are still today universally accepted, philosophy has developed through disagreement (ZPh, 87). Philosophy is a battlefield.

(Despondency-2) – *Historical upheavals*: the dynamics of the history of philosophy does not correspond to the dynamics of the history of sciences. A science does not begin always

anew but picks up and develops a “treasure of knowledges” (ZPh, 88) – a heritage. In philosophy, on the other hand, we have no transmission of knowledge but rather a succession of systems that consciously and intently upheave the precedent systems, abandoning them. Philosophy is a cemetery of systems.

(Despondency-3) – *Misplaced goals*: philosophers do not know how to set up for themselves the correct goals. As philosophers frequently strive to penetrate into what is supposed to be the proper essence of things (*das eigentliche Wesen der Dinge*), as they probe into “inner ‘how’ and ‘why’ of a causal connection” (ZPh, 89), they are pursuing as a task a kind of explanation that is simply beyond human understanding. When it is put like that, there is, in fact, an inaccessibility of philosophy’s goals, insofar as it mismeasures both the powers of man and the duties of the philosopher. Cf. with the naturalist who, following the “path of experience” (*Wege der Erfahrung*) (ZPh, 92), simply “observes natural phenomena (*Naturerscheinungen*) and their succession” and works “to determine the general and inalterable relationships of phenomena – the laws of their interconnections” (ZPh, 89). Philosophy is an inhuman endeavour.

(Despondency-4) – *Practical uselessness*: philosophy is useless for practical purposes. Though all sciences begin with theoretical interest and have in it their highest goals, they also sooner or later all give back fruits for our practical life and increase the competencies of men (ZPh, 91). While all the major branches of general theoretical science have translated into practical gains, the same never happened with philosophy: it has never bore any practical fruits (ZPh, 92). Cf. with the practical utility of astronomy for navigation or chemistry for medicine. Philosophy is a sterile effort<sup>3</sup>.

## §7. *Sciences age differently*

Having identified the major causes for distrust towards philosophy, Brentano takes a first step in his attempt to answer to them: he calls our attention to the issue of the historical development of sciences, and of their disproportionate, unequal evolution.

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<sup>3</sup> On this question, cf. also the introduction to Brentano’s lectures on the history of Greek Philosophy – GGPh, ‘Einleitung’, §11-12 – where he considers the reasons that could lead one to doubt of the scientific character of philosophy and presents a similar diagnosis as the one in the 1874 lecture.

Wenn wir die verschiedenen allgemeinen theoretischen Wissenschaften [...] nebeneinander stellen: so finden wir, daß sie *eine Reihe bilden, in welcher jedes frühere Glied abstrakter als das nachfolgende ist*. Der Gegenstand der später genannten Wissenschaft ist verwickelter, und zwar in der Art, daß die Phänomene, die Gegenstand der früher genannten sind, sich bei ihr durch neue Elemente und Bedingungen komplizieren. Hieraus folgt, daß *jede später genannte Wissenschaft von der früher genannten abhängig ist*, während das Gegenteil nicht oder doch nur in einem ungleich geringeren Maße der Fall ist. Und eben deshalb wird die später genannte in ihrer Entwicklung langsamer sein, und wenn man den jeweiligen Grad ihrer Vollkommenheit mit demjenigen vergleicht, welchen eine früher genannte zu derselben Zeit erreicht hat, so wird sie um ein Bedeutendes zurückgeblieben erscheinen. (ZPh, 92-3, highlights mine)

As Brentano presents it here, the series runs roughly as (ZPh, 93-4):

Mathematics – Physics – Chemistry – Physiology – Psychology<sup>4</sup>

[more abstract / less dependent / faster development] → [more complex / more dependent / slower development]

This explains, namely, the impressive development of mathematics in Antiquity; of physics in modernity; and then, at the time Brentano was writing, the major advances in physiology – making great use, indeed, of the results of chemistry and physics –, as well as the essays of an advancement in psychology.

And yet – one might ask at this point – where is philosophy in this series? Indeed, Brentano's argument is hasty here, but it is important to examine it carefully. While he does not spell it out in his 1874 lecture, it is possible to draw a more or less accurate picture of what Brentano believed to be included in philosophy from the text of his lectures on the history of philosophy from the Würzburg years. According to this picture, philosophy is composed of two main branches: metaphysics, dealing with the most generally valid laws, encompassing both physical and psychical phenomena; and psychology, dealing with those purely spiritual or psychical (*geistig* or *psychische*) phenomena.<sup>5</sup> What is important to keep in mind, therefore, even if the complete

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<sup>4</sup> Of course, one will promptly notice that many sciences are missing from this scheme. This is because this ladder of sciences, of Comtean inspiration, must itself be understood inside the broader framework of Brentano's classification of sciences. In fact, there are other divisions under which sciences fall. Among them, in particular, the division between those sciences dealing with individual facts and those sciences whose dealing with general laws; the latter are, as he says, the sciences that form the series presented here.

<sup>5</sup> Some more detailed discussions – though not without its share of difficulties – concerning the unity of philosophy, as well as its main divisions and the reasons for the privileged position of psychology in it, can be found in Brentano's general introduction to the concept and method of philosophical research with which he preceded his lectures on the history of philosophy (cf. GGPh, GMPH, GPhN). This is, nevertheless, a subject that deserves further consideration. It adds to the problem that the text of the current editions of the lectures on the history of philosophy are not always



justification of this claim lies beyond our scope here (something will be said in this respect below, §42), is that psychology is a major – and arguably the crucial – component of Brentano’s concept of philosophy. It occupies both a central place, as one of its two main branches; and a basal place, insofar as psychology – in its descriptive and its genetic branches, as Brentano would later call them – is the science on which many other philosophical disciplines are built. Not only logic, for instance, is fundamentally based upon psychology, according to a position of Brentano well known and widely criticized; but also ethics, as shown in the lectures on the *Origin of our Knowledge of Right and Wrong* and on *The Foundation and Construction of Ethics* (GAE, especially the first part); aesthetics (see his *Outlines of Aesthetics*); and even politics and the social sciences are all erected on the foundations laid bare by psychology. It is in this sense that Brentano says here that all branches of philosophy are dependent on psychology and standing in close relationship to it (ZPh, 94). From now on, then, we can assume that the development of psychology and the development of philosophy are, for all practical purposes, one and the same development.

When it comes to psychology itself, then, Brentano leaves no doubt about it: it is a late science, building upon the progress of physiology and physics before it; and, speaking about psychical phenomena, he states:

Es ist nun klar, daß, wenn es Phänomene gibt, die sich ähnlich zu den physiologischen, wie diese zu den chemischen und die chemischen zu den physischen verhalten: die Wissenschaft, welche sich mit ihnen beschäftigt, in einer noch unreiferen Phase der Entwicklung sich finden muß. Und solche Phänomene sind die psychischen Zustände. Sie begegnen uns nur in Verbindung mit Organismen und in Abhängigkeit von gewissen physiologischen Prozessen. Somit ist es offenbar, daß die Psychologie heutzutage, wo sogar die Physiologie noch relativ geringe Fortschritte gemacht hat, nicht über die ersten Anfänge ihrer Entwicklung hinausgeschritten sein kann, und daß in einer früheren Zeit, abgesehen von gewissen glücklichen Antizipationen, von einer eigentlich wissenschaftlichen Psychologie gar nicht geredet werden konnte. (ZPh, 93-4)

In the *Psychology* as well, Brentano presents this picture, and even more emphatically:

Wie die physikalischen Phänomene unter den Einflüsse der mathematischen Gesetze, die chemischen unter dem Einflüsse der physikalischen, und die der Physiologie unter dem Einflüsse von ihnen allen stehen: so sind wieder die psychologischen Phänomene von den Gesetzen der Kräfte beeinflusst, welche ihnen die Organe bilden und erneuern. (PES, 34)

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reliable, frequently mixing together different sets of manuscripts; for that reason, they must always be taken with reservation, and have been used here with this caveat in mind.

Once we read these passages having in mind Brentano's concept of philosophy and the role psychology plays in it, it becomes clear why Brentano can claim that "philosophy, even if it should not be deficient in the capacity for actual scientific progress, cannot possibly have achieved, in our times, a high degree of development" (ZPh, 94): it is the heavy conditions holding back the evolution of psychology, as its crucial part, that have kept philosophy in an incomplete state (ZPh, 94), as an *underdeveloped science*. In other words, to speak of psychology as a late science – the latest in the series, really – is to speak at the same time of the delay affecting the development of philosophical research; as long as psychology is an infant science, also philosophy cannot but linger in a state of immaturity (ZPh, 95).

### **§8. *Turning pessimism into optimism***

This incomplete state of philosophy explains, by its turn, the specific factors that had bolstered the reasons for despondency in philosophical inquiry. Having gained this historical perspective on the development of philosophy, Brentano will now be able to counter each and every one of those reasons. It is because philosophy is a late, underdeveloped science that it

*Contra* (Despondency-4): has not yet attained much practical utility; the borne of fruits coming only after maturity, as we have seen with all other sciences (ZPh, 94-5).

*Contra* (Despondency-3): does not yet know how to properly frame its questions and which tasks to pursue. Natural scientists, as well, in the infancy of their discipline, had tried to bypass the natural method of observation and intuit something like the *internal forces of nature* (ZPh, 95)

*Contra* (Despondency-2): still suffers from "more frequent and deeper periods of decline". Philosophy has the *fragile organism of a child* and, as such, it is more exposed to danger, it is subject to these bouts of depression and to constantly changing moods (ZPh, 97).

*Contra* (Despondency-1): does not yet have established principles. Being dependent on sciences which are themselves of late and quite recent development, the very ground upon which it can set roots and develop is not yet stable. Being in the process of barely making its first steps, it is not yet grounded (ZPh, 99).

It is important to understand the exact scope of Brentano's reply at this point. The argument regarding its historical underdevelopment will not by itself vindicate philosophy. Brentano's historical theory about the serial development of sciences does instead the very specific job of *rendering contingent* those pessimistic objections which argued for a necessary lack of scientific value in philosophical inquiry. In other words, Brentano is attacking the inference that leads from the somewhat legit reasons of discouragement to the supposed insurmountable shortcomings of philosophy – those reasons, says Brentano, “do not prove as much as one would be inclined to conclude” (ZPh, 92). Ultimately, the underdeveloped state of philosophy from which its detractor tries to extract his conclusions does not allow for the proof of anything “against the scientific character of philosophy” (ZPh, 94). It shows that, on the contrary, these reasons for despondency are *partially justified* – that is, they are justified inasmuch as they relate to the present historical stage of the development of philosophy. It shows that a widespread and systematic undervaluation of philosophy should be substituted for the recognition of its underdeveloped status. Showing that philosophy is a fragile organism, Brentano at the same time explains its flaws as temporary and opens up the possibility of its further development. He operates here the passage from *pessimism* to *hope*; philosophy is young, sure, but to be young is to belong to the future.

### **§9. Facing up the challenge**

Brentano's job is not done. When the reasons for despondency were shown to be historical deficiencies rather than congenial diseases, he immediately opened space for hope. But while the diagnostic might have been precise, therapeutic action was still in need. The text of *Entmutigung* does not go into great details as to what this positive intervention could be. It does, however, wrap up in the mood of optimism so typical of Brentano. At the end of the day, the conclusion supported by his analyses, says Brentano, is that “philosophy is *not yet* grounded in such a complete manner as other scientific disciplines” (ZPh, 98, highlight mine). And yet, Brentano clearly intends, at least in the uplifting mood of this lecture, that philosophy, like any other science, *can obtain* this firm status as well. When one considers its state of development, philosophy is a child – but, like any child, sooner or later it will grow out of its youthful state.

For those hopes in the development of philosophy to become actual *grounds for optimism*, however, one would have to show that each partial reason for discouragement can be confronted and overcome. In this sense, supported by Brentano's optimism, we could go back to each of the

four, now contingent, reasons and, inverting their signal, transform them into challenges – challenges which ultimately could be met, stabilizing the development of philosophy.<sup>6</sup>

(Challenge-1): we must ground philosophy on solid and generally recognized principles.

(Challenge-2): we must consolidate a stash of knowledges; we must not only organize our tradition but also open up the path to its subsequent historical development, putting it in a straighter path.

(Challenge-3): we must make sure our pursuit of knowledge relies on our actual cognitive powers and on the principles of method that we have established; we must set ourselves the right tasks which to pursue.

(Challenge-4): we must realize the immense potential for practical and human development that is latent in philosophy.

Now, this detour through Brentano's programmatical texts and his views on the dynamics of the progress of philosophy is necessary if one wants to understand the underlying motives behind his *Psychology*. Psychology, we have seen, is a central part of philosophy; and it had been held back, so far, by the underdevelopment of the other science upon which it was dependent. But now, says Brentano, these conditions have been met:

Nun aber, da selbst die Physiologie kräftiger zu sprossen beginnt, fehlt es nicht mehr an den Zeichen, welche auch für die Philosophie die Zeit des Erwachens zu fruchtbringendem Leben ankündigen. Die Vorbedingungen sind gegeben; die Methode ist vorbereitet; die Forschung ist vorgeübt. (ZPh, 99)

Now is the time for the development of philosophy and for the answering of those challenges it faced; and this development must be carried out, first and foremost, by laying the groundwork for a truly scientific psychology. Brentano's psychological agenda is, therefore, through and through philosophical: the work carried out in *PES* aims not only at the development of a scientific psychology, but of philosophy itself. This is the background we must keep in mind as we return from the broader to our more specific plan of analysis, this is the specific chain of motivations that leads into *PES*: the whole project of a psychology from an empirical standpoint, which we must

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<sup>6</sup> At this point someone could wonder whether this dominant optimism of Brentano regarding the possibility of boosting the development of philosophy does not clash with his well-known theory of the four phases. Indeed, optimism is the prevailing tone of this text; but there is nothing as well in the other texts – where Brentano presents the theory of the four phases – which contradicts the tendencies presented here. I believe it can be shown that there is nothing in the law of the four phases that precludes philosophy from achieving a firm status – or at least from achieving the point where it develops still in cycles but much steadier.

now examine, works as an answer to the challenges that were presented regarding the development of philosophy.

### **§10. *The gap between interest and method and the specific project of PES***

There would hardly be some other way to begin: psychology, says Brentano, starts in wonder. On psychological phenomena, as the object of his research, Brentano says that they are

Was im Anfang, wohlbekannt und offenbar, für das Verborgene die Erklärung schien, und was später, vor anderem geheimnisvoll, Staunen und Wißbegier erweckte; woran die großen Denker des Altertums am meisten mit Eifer sich abmühten, und worüber Eintracht und Klarheit noch heute am wenigsten erzielt sind. (PES, 6)

Wonder about psychological phenomena, or *Staunen*, the usual – and also Brentano’s – German word for translating θαυμάζειν<sup>7</sup> is not new at all. It is indeed already a noteworthy feature of the very first ascending phase of philosophy, from the Ionian thinkers to Aristotle (GGPh, 38, 65-70, 104-105, 200-204, 284-296). The astonishment they arouse, however, has always been accompanied by the recognition of the extreme hardships in any attempts of understanding them. Aristotle’s famous disclaimer, at the beginning of the *De Anima*, leaves no doubt about it: “grasping anything trustworthy about the soul is completely and in every way among the most difficult of affairs.” (*De an.*, 402a10-11)<sup>8</sup>. And though it has never ceased to amaze us, psychology is still, says Brentano, that science regarding which we have the least clarity – less than physiology, that is, or physics, or mathematics.

Now, we have already seen how, in his lecture on despondency in philosophy, psychology was depicted by Brentano as a late science. A highly complex, deeply dependent science, it had a slower rate of development and its fruits were bound to come late. In *PES*, in fact, psychology is presented in these very same terms, as we have seen in Brentano’s opening remarks (PES, 6). Yet here we also learn something new about the reasons behind this lateness of psychology: certainly, we now realize, it was not curiosity or wonder about mental phenomena that was missing – in other words, it was not for lack of effort or interest that psychology did not progress as it should have. What is it then that was missing in psychology? What were exactly the unmet conditions

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<sup>7</sup> See GGPh, 20; VP 8 below.

<sup>8</sup> Christopher Shield’s translation.

that prevented its development and that made it dependent on all those other sciences? While the answer is present just implicitly in the *Psychology*, Brentano had given us, in his lectures on Greek philosophy, a sharper picture of the indispensable parts of any theoretical, philosophical endeavour:

Die erste Phase, die ich meine, umfasst die ganze aufsteigende Entwicklung. Ihr Beginn ist immer *durch ein Doppeltes charakterisiert*: (i) Einmal durch ein lebendiges und reines Theoretisches Interesse – durch das Staunen, sagten mit Recht schon *Platon* und *Aristoteles*, sind die Menschen zuerst zu philosophischen Forschungen getrieben worden –; (ii) dann durch eine wesentlich naturgemäße, wenn auch gewiss noch mannigfacher Ausbildung bedürftiger Methode. (GGPh, 20; VP, 8; emphasis mine)

To put it even more clearly, the *two characteristics of the ascending phase* are:

- (i) Wonder – *Staunen* – θαυμάζειν; bringing about a *pure theoretical interest*<sup>9</sup>;
- (ii) A *method essentially according to nature* – (*eine wesentlich naturgemäße Methode*); to be *elaborated in manifold ways*.

Proper scientific development would then be rooted on the presence and the correct interplay between these two characteristics. It is also important to notice, regarding (ii), that while a method according to nature seems to be, in principle, available to scientists at any given time<sup>10</sup>, it still needs elaboration so as to allow for the correct progression of the science. As the method unfolds, it becomes also more effective and adequate to the phenomena to whose study it is dedicated.

This picture of what makes an ascending phase of philosophy will be of utmost importance for us. What Brentano is giving us here is nothing short of a *model* of scientific development: from the awakening of the theoretical interest, through the discovery of this field of phenomena as one experiences it, to the elaboration, always in that natural way, of the proper method and theory. If we now used this scheme to look back towards the compared development of philosophy and other sciences, we would see how the interplay between these two characteristics is not the same in all scientific disciplines and how this difference could actually account for their discrepant rates of progress. In fact, while it does seem that the wonder about the many different kinds of phenomena sprung up in our spirit very early – already with the thinkers in Antiquity, at least – and more or

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. also VP, 12: “Greek philosophy began with the natural philosophy of the Ionian thinkers. It is clear, indeed, that the wonder regarding the mysteries of the world gave rise to the liveliest desire of knowledge”.

<sup>10</sup> “The most ancient of the Greeks, just as they had a lively and pure theoretical interest, had as well a method according to nature” (VP, 12); they “had the right method as well as the right interest” (GPhN, 305). But the specific elaborations necessary for the development of this natural method in the domain of psychology were not yet fleshed out enough.

less simultaneously; and that, with this wonderment, also the theoretical interest about these different phenomena had at least been sparked; the same is not true of the second characteristic of scientific development, namely a properly natural method. The reason why sciences were dependent on each other, we now see, did not have to do with the wonder and the theoretical interest about their phenomena. They do present, however, a serial structure of dependent development when it comes to the correct methodological framing of their field and the theorizing about the characteristics and laws of their objects.

One could think, in this sense, of the relation between mathematics and the striving physics of modernity. The method of the latter, though not identical with the method of the former, somehow relies on it. And, in the same sense, at least one part of psychology is dependent on physiology, for instance. That is why the whole psychology of the ancients, there included Aristotle's, could be referred to by Brentano as the "fortunate anticipations of a properly scientific psychology" (ZPh, 94). It is the response to great wonder aroused by psychological phenomena, yet a response carried out with nothing but the rudiments of a natural method, and without the methodological preparation provided by other sciences – an anticipation, indeed.

Moreover, looking back on how different sciences in the scale of development have different interplays of interest and method, we could even speak of a *gap* between the moment of the arousing of the theoretical interest and the elaboration of the natural method, a gap that prevents sciences from fully developing, and which is narrower and easily crossed in those less complex and less dependent sciences but much harder to bridge in sciences which are complex and full of conditions like psychology. More importantly, once we read it together with the opening statements of the *Psychology*<sup>11</sup>, this scheme would show both what we have and what we still lack for the advancement of psychology. In other words, if someone ever wanted to make psychology, as one of the main branches of philosophy, a thriving scientific endeavour, this would be something like the blueprint for the enterprise.

And in fact, as Brentano was saying, in the case of psychology, wonder has never been lacking while, on the other hand, there is a startling need for an accompanying methodological development, expressed in the great disagreement and the many obscurities that still plague psychological research. In *PES*, just as he had done before in his inaugural lecture, psychology was presented as the latest in the serial development of sciences: "[t]he other sciences are, in fact,

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<sup>11</sup> And one should remind once again that psychology was included among those philosophical sciences of which Brentano was explicitly talking about when he proposed this double characterization of the ascending phase in GGPh and VP.

only the foundation; psychology is, as it were, the crowning pinnacle. All the other sciences are a preparation for psychology; it is dependent on all of them.” (PES, 5-6/2). And so we finally realize that Brentano’s job in *PES*, a job which will allow him to finally answer the challenges for the development of philosophy, is that of *filling the gap between interest and method that still in his days characterized psychology*. With the recognition that “even physiology begins to sprout”, there would be no lack of “announcing signs, also for philosophy, of the time of a blossoming to a life full of fruits” (ZPh, 99). Philosophy is ready to grow through the means of this philosophical psychology. Brentano just needs to secure the second characteristic of an ascending phase for psychology itself: *a method according to nature and the elaboration of its most fundamental principles*. Addressing the underdeveloped science of mental phenomena, he declares: “[t]hese are the phenomena (*Erscheinungen*), precisely, to whose study I as well dedicate myself, and it is of their properties and laws that I try to give a more correct picture here.” (PES, 5/2).

We have reached a crucial junction in our path: we have a clearer view now both of the challenges Brentano is facing and of the general principles that can guide him towards presenting a proper answer to those challenges – we have a view of his needs as well as his means. If Brentano wants to battle against the pessimism in philosophy, he needs to find the correct methodical elaborations that will allow for the development of psychology, as a fundamental philosophical science. And the story of descriptive psychology, we can now say, will be precisely the story of answering those challenges by *providing psychology with this method according to nature*.



## CHAPTER 2: The search for the right concept of psychology: the setting of *PES*, I, Chapter I.

### §11. *Domain, concept, task, value*

Now, how does one establish the appropriate method for a science? In order to be able to proceed correctly in any investigation, as we will see, the first step is to establish a firm understanding of the domain of phenomena being investigated. This is exactly the goal of this *Erstes Kapitel* of the *Psychology*. As the title of the chapter suggests, Brentano will try to establish the proper *concept of psychology*. This concept must be the one that, to begin with, allows the psychologist to ask the right questions and to *set up the right tasks* to be pursued in his investigation. What is more, it must be the one that *fit its domain perfectly*; this means a concept allowing us to thematize, to the extent of our natural powers, all the interrelated phenomena which compose the field of objects of that science.

As we will see, the main thread of the first chapter of Brentano's book – whose reconstruction is the subject of this second chapter of our work – is the examination of *how different concepts of modern psychology fit the domain of those phenomena which its purports to investigate* – namely psychological phenomena – and what kind of tasks appear, in result, as worthy of being pursued. And this means to follow psychology from its original wonderment; through the first, tentative theoretical elaborations as well as the presaging of a more correct delimitation of its domain; through the many, ill-fitting concepts proposed to make sense of this domain; up to the finding of the perfectly fitting concept – the one proposed by Brentano. Only when the right concept of psychology is secured will one be able to finally develop the right *method* for it, as Brentano strives to do – this being, to state it again, the question to which descriptive psychology is the answer. But one thing at a time; for now, it suffices to know that everything depends, first, on achieving this correct concept of psychology.

To put it briefly, the examination of different conceptions of psychology that Brentano carries out in this chapter will show that the correct concept of psychology must account for three things at least: the fitting concept will be the one that guarantees the alignment between the domain and the tasks of psychology, while preserving its value as a science:

DOMAIN --- [CONCEPT] --- TASK → VALUE

We have already seen Brentano's diagnosis of the discouragement regarding philosophical research in general. In psychology, more specifically, the permanent methodological confusion and the lack of development that follows from it had both led to a systematic undervaluation of the discipline. "There is no area of knowledge, with the single exception of metaphysics, which the great mass of people look upon with greater contempt" (PES, 5/2) This discouragement is, here again, not without reason. We place much of our hopes in psychology and yet it hardly corresponds to our expectations: "There is no branch of science that has borne less fruit for our knowledge of nature and life, and yet there is none which holds greater promise of satisfying our most essential needs." (PES, 5/2; cf. Despondency-4) And still, Brentano's goal is to prove that psychology has immense intrinsic and unexplored value. It is not only valuable, both theoretically and practically; it is indispensable, even. To the point that "the entire realm of truth would appear poor and contemptible to many people if it were not so defined as to include this province of knowledge." (PES, 5/2)<sup>12</sup>. As soon as the right concept of psychology is established, its field is secured and its tasks are correctly carried out, psychology will be able to grow out of its underdeveloped, childish stage. As it blossoms, psychology "is supposed to renew man's entire life and hasten and assure progress" (PES, 6/2). One is promptly reminded here of the 4<sup>th</sup> challenge set up in the *Entmutigung* lecture: the realization of the potential for human development latent in philosophical sciences. Though Brentano does not mention these concerns so often during the course of *PES*, the hopes of psychology giving actual theoretical and practical fruits is a major concern, in the long run, of Brentano's project in this book. Its value restored, psychology "is destined to become the basis of society and of its noblest possessions, and, by this very fact, to become the basis of all scientific endeavor as well." (PES, 6/2). Latest born, loveliest vision – psychology will be presented throughout the whole book as the actual science of the future.

This as well as those other challenges to the development of philosophy constitute the background against which the movement of this first chapter of the *Psychology From an Empirical Standpoint* unfolds. The establishing of the right concept of psychology, on the other hand, will be the first step towards providing it with an adequate method – once this is accomplished, and the course of the development of psychology is corrected, so will philosophy thrive with it. Domain, concept, task and value (*Gebiet, Begriff, Aufgabe, Wert*): this is how Brentano will work to put psychology

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<sup>12</sup> Fact which, however, never ceased to be recognized by a few insightful thinkers (PES,5). Cf. Aristotle: "It also seems that research into the soul contributes greatly to truth in general, and most especially to truth about nature." (*De an.*, 402a4-5).

back on track, and these are the four elements we must keep in mind as he analyses the different conceptions of psychology passed down by tradition.

### §12. *The oldest concept of psychology*

The first notion of psychology to be examined by Brentano in his quest for a fitting concept to psychology is the one presented by Aristotle in the well-known passages of *De Anima* II, 1, 412a25: “the soul is the first actuality of a natural body which has life in potentiality” (ἡ ψυχὴ ἐστὶν ἐντελέχεια ἢ πρώτη σώματος φυσικοῦ δυνάμει ζῶν ἔχοντος); and, in a different formulation, in 412b5: the soul would be “the first actuality of an organic natural body” (ἐντελέχεια ἢ πρώτη σώματος φυσικοῦ ὀργανικοῦ). Brentano further stresses this characterization, presenting almost as synonymous a number of Aristotelian terms that are said of the soul: Aristotle “mean by ‘soul’ the nature [φύσις] or, as he preferred to express it, the form [μορφή], the first activity [*erste Wirklichkeit*/πρώτη ἐνέργεια], the first actuality [*erste Vollendung*/πρώτη ἐντελέχεια] of a living being.” (PES, 6/2). Each of these terms presents specific nuances, surely, but what is important to keep in mind about these quite technical terms is that Aristotle’s way of characterizing the soul is deeply intertwined with his metaphysical doctrines and, in particular, with his hylomorphism. Namely, it is a way of characterizing the soul in terms of what kind of substance it is. As Brentano himself had clearly put it in his lectures on Greek philosophy: “*when it comes to substances, the form is usually designated with the name of ‘nature’; in the case of living beings, [...] they receive a specific name, ‘ἐντελέχεια’.*” (GGPh, 255, highlight mine). And, further on, “[...] the soul is the *substantial* entelechy of a living being” (GGPh, 285)<sup>13</sup>.

Indeed, the *De Anima* starts out by expressing the need to inquire about the genus of the soul and about “what it is” (τί ἐστὶ, 402a23-4). The categorial question, i.e., the question as to whether the soul is a substance, a quality, a quantity and so on, will be then picked up at the beginning of the second book – (τί ἐστὶ ψυχῆ, 412a5) – and will immediately be parsed in terms of what kind of substance the soul could be. As per his doctrine of hylomorphism, Aristotle presents the three

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<sup>13</sup> See also his 1867 *Die Psychologie des Aristoteles*, where Brentano refers to the question of the genus of the soul and shows how the answer to that question relies, by its turn, on knowing whether the difference between the living and the lifeless is a substantial one, “denn da wir unter dem Lebendigen und dem Beseelten und ebenso unter dem Leblosen und dem Unbeseelten ein und dasselbe verstehen, so ist klar, dass wenn das Lebendige als Lebendiges von dem Leblosen substantiell verschieden ist, das Beseelte als solches Substanz, und die Seele als Grund eines substantiellen Unterschiedes zur Kategorie der Substanz gehörig ist. [*In a footnote:*] Denn die Principien einer Substanz müssen selbst der Kategorie der Substanz angehören. Vgl. *Metaph. Λ, 4. f.*” (PA, 41-2) The answer is, naturally, in the affirmative.

different sorts of substance – matter, form and compound – (412a6-9; but cf. also *Metaph.* Λ 3, 1070a9-13) and applies this scheme to our particular subject: bodies are substances as matter; living, ensouled bodies as compound; and, answering the initial questions, souls are *substances as form* (εἶδος) or *shape* (μορφή)<sup>14</sup>. One sees, therefore, why it is that this concept of the soul as first actuality, as nature, or as form stands fully on metaphysical grounds: by assuming the soul to be a substance, and a substance of such-and-such a kind, the whole debate turns on the question of *what kind of being* the soul is. The whole field of investigation of Aristotle’s psychology, therefore, is built upon the question of what the soul is and upon the metaphysical commitments implied in such an inquiry.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> On the idea of the soul as form, cf. Aquinas, who is the main proxy through which Brentano read Aristotle, and who comments the distinction in this passage: bodies, as matter, are just being in potential; the soul, as form, is that by which they pass into act (ἐντελέχεια); the living body, as compound, is enacted. (*Sententia libri De anima*, lib. II, l.1, n.5).

In an imperfect, but often employed analogy, the soul “in-forms” the body just as a certain shape “in-forms” a piece of wax. In a better analogy, however, one could say that the soul is to the animal what sight is to the eye – this is more telling as it emphasizes that, in complex cases of hylomorphism, such as that of animals, the form is not simply its outward appearance but has to do with the account (λόγος) and the function, with that towards which something is directed. Cf., in this direction, Martha Nussbaum’s enlightening treatment of functional explanation: “[...] we must refer, not to surface configuration, but to the functional organization that the individuals share with other members of their species. This is the form; this, and not the shape, remains the same as long as the creature is the same creature. The lion may change its shape, get thin or fat, without ceasing to be the same lion; its form is not its shape, but its soul, the set of vital capacities, the function organization, in virtue of which it lives and acts. If the eye were an animal, sight, not sphericity, would be its soul, if an axe were an animal, not wedge-shape, but cutting, would be its first actuality”. (Nussbaum 1978, 71).

Finally, the distinction between first and second actuality corresponds, as Aristotle says in the passage, to the distinction between acquiring some knowledge (thus actualizing the potential one has to acquire it) and actively engaging in theorizing. The soul would be like the former, and actual waking life is the analogous of active theorizing.

<sup>15</sup> Brentano does not consider, in PES, other Greek concepts of psychology, yet he leaves it implicit that they are all equally sciences of the soul. Classical psychology, naturally enough, could not detach psychological investigations from the underlying question “τί ἐστι ψυχή,” with the latter dictating a field of investigation well beyond the domain of consciousness and intertwined with the different metaphysical doctrines that sustain it. Surely, the reason why Brentano takes Aristotle’s conception as representative of the whole Ancient views on soul and psychology is not only because of its longstanding influence on theories of the soul, but also because of Brentano’s own opinion of Aristotle as the peak of the ascending phase of Greek philosophy.

One could reasonably reply, of course, that this is a small sample of the richness of the ancient conceptions of the soul. As Cicero had put it already, in an early survey of the opinions of the Greek thinkers on the subject, “quid sit [...] ipse animus aut ubi aut unde, magna dissensio est”. He followed with a list of the characterizations of the soul since the earliest Greeks: for starters, there were the widespread conceptions of the soul as being blood around the heart; fire; breath or even a part of the brain. On top of that, there were the views of those philosophers that defended the soul to be ἀρμονία; or number; or a name without meaning; as well as the tripartite division of the soul in Plato. Finally, there was Aristotle (and Bignone has shown that Cicero is not mixing up his Greek here, as it was commonly believed, but actually making reference to the early, platonizing works of Aristotle, most likely the *De Philosophia*) characterizing the soul in terms of a fifth element, and designating it as ἐνδελεία, continuous and perpetual motion. (*Tusc.* I, 19-22; Bignone, 1973, appendix to third chapter.)

At any rate, Brentano’s point, as we will see, is merely that, unlike the modern conception of psychology, which receives its boundaries from the phenomena of consciousness, the conceptions of the soul defended by Ancient philosophers are always deeply entrenched on those philosophers’ theories of things both φύσικά and μετά τα φύσικά; their psychologies are therefore inescapably trespassed by inquiries regarding vital principles and functions, anatomy or the elements of matter.

In fact, the very tasks of Aristotelian psychology will be set up following the boundaries revealed by the substantial difference between what has life and soul and what does not have it. There will result a concept of psychology as a *science of the soul*, in the strictest sense – a psychology whose investigations are delineated and unified by the joints and limits of the metaphysical concept of the soul. This is clear, for instance, in how, after having established the most common, general account of the soul as first actuality of a living body, Aristotle proceeds to determine the specific parts or the different functions belonging to it; a division which will establish the actual research plan of the *De Anima*. “Living is said in many ways” (πλεοναχῶς δὲ τοῦ ζῆν λεγομένου, 413a22) and, because the soul is the first actuality of a *living* body it will also have, as a result, manifold parts or living functions. Thus, since his investigations must encompass all those different parts of soul he identified, Aristotle will eventually arrive at a broad concept of psychology that must include, as its subject-matter, not only the mental and vital functions of human beings and animals but also the nourishment and growth of plants, for example; indeed, it is precisely because plants are capable of self-sustainment, growth and reproduction that they are also said to be living organisms (412a14-15) and, as such, ensouled bodies as well as the concern of the psychologist. Paradoxically to us, who are so familiar with the modern boundaries of psychology, “even though [Aristotle] was far from ascribing consciousness (*Bewußtsein*) to plants, still he declared the kingdom of plants to be alive and animated.” (PES, 6).

To put it simply, then, it was not consciousness the matter of this Aristotelian psychologist. The business of the psychologist was soul, life and self-sustaining systems: growth and reproduction; motion and sensibility; thought and the higher affections of the soul. We can feel already how much things would have to change before our modern conception of psychology could take the place of this science of the soul.

### ***§13. Shrinking the domain of the science of the soul***

The first, Aristotelian conception of psychology was, however, but the beginning of the story.

Das war der Kreis der Fragen, den die Psychologie ursprünglich umschloß. Später hat sich ihr Gebiet wesentlich verengt. Von den vegetativen Tätigkeiten sprach der Psychologe nicht mehr. Das ganze Reich der Pflanzen, wenn anders hier das Bewußtsein fehlt, gehörte nicht mehr in die Grenzen seiner Forschung, und auch das Reich der animalischen Wesen, weit diese, wie Pflanze und unorganischer Körper, Gegenstand äußere Wahrnehmung sind lag ihm außerhalb seiner

Sphäre. Dies galt auch da noch, wo solche Erscheinungen in nächste Beziehung zum sensitiven Leben treten, wie dies bei dem System der Nerven und Muskeln der Fall ist. Nicht der Psychologe, der Physiologe war es, dem von nun an die Untersuchung darüber zufiel. (PES, 6-7)

In Brentano's scheme, this contraction of the domain (*Gebiet*) of psychology is the *historical process* that really marks the beginning of its properly scientific development. Yet something should probably be said at once about Brentano's choices in this brief history of the science of mental phenomena. Someone could object to the seeming arbitrariness of his story: a couple of short, almost cryptic lines dealing with the first historical concept of psychology and then, in a stroke, we now skip a couple of thousands of years and move straight to its modern transformations? On the one hand, it is important to notice that Brentano is indeed set on presenting something like an empirical, factual history. The shrinking of the domain of psychology *is a historical fact*. Brentano is not interested in rational reconstruction, in making explicit the hidden movement in the history of psychology or in creating philosophical interpretations of its development<sup>16</sup>. That said, it does not mean that Brentano will simply present an exhaustive historical picture of the development of psychology. Rather, according to his historiographical principles<sup>17</sup>, he is presenting us only the *determinant, ascending moments* of its scientific unfolding: namely, first, the awakening to wonder about mental phenomena and the rudimentary, insightful but hesitant attempts at grasping them; and, secondly, the beginning of its theoretical and methodological development, whose actual completion which will be provided by Brentano himself.

The start of this second birth of psychology, when it begins to set up its own, adequate domain, is what Brentano is calling here *modern psychology*. Now, he is not explicit about the actual agents of this important development – which we could nevertheless broadly locate in the timespan encompassing the late 17<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries – but he is quite clear as to what constitutes its peculiar traits. First of all, modern psychology is characterized by a *double exclusion*. As Brentano had put it in the passage above, the modern psychologist excludes:

- (i) Vegetative activities – the whole realm of plants;

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<sup>16</sup> As a historian, Brentano is very austere, and he is quite critical regarding the possibility of philosophical history, cf. ZPH, 121.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. his discussions of historiographical method in the introduction to GGPH and in appendix II to GPhN, 'Zur Methode der historischen Forschung auf philosophischem Gebiet'.

- (ii) Nervous and muscular system, etc. – the realm of animals *insofar* as it is the object of external perception

All that was excluded was understood to be *the domain of the natural scientist* and, in particular, *of the physiologist*. Modern psychology is, in this sense, the settling of scores between psychology and physiology. At the same time, it is important to notice the deeper meaning of this double exclusion. In fact, the exclusion of the realm of plants and the exclusion of some aspects of the realm of animals are the two different results of the enforcement of the same boundary. In the case of (i), it is easy to see how plants were excluded because they lacked consciousness altogether. But when we look at (ii), we realize that those activities do indeed have something to do with perception, while at the same time we understand more clearly what the principle was that motivated their exclusion. These processes can be studied either on the basis of external perception or *as* conscious phenomena. Perception, locomotion, desire and other conscious phenomena are split in two, as it were, on the basis of whether they are studied *as* conscious phenomena or as physiological processes, examined through external perception.

Therefore, what this exclusion shows us, by contrast, is the defining feature of this new domain of psychology – the limits of this new “circle of questions”. This is a psychology of the phenomena of consciousness (*Erscheinungen des Bewußtseins*). The fundamental difference between the psychology of old and modern psychology is the transition from a psychology that dealt with the soul to a psychology that investigated consciousness. We could schematize it as two successive, historical *delimitations of the domain of psychology*:

**(1<sup>st</sup> Delimitation – Aristotle’s ‘Περὶ Ψυχῆς’)**: *psychology aims at establishing the properties of vegetative, sensitive and intellective activities of living beings; its domain follows the contours of the concept of the soul as the form and nature of living bodies.*

**(2<sup>nd</sup> Delimitation – Modern Psychology)**: *psychology aims at establishing the laws of the phenomena of consciousness; its domain follows the field of research circumscribed by the natural affinity of these phenomena.*

About this change, Brentano says:

Die Beschränkung war keine willkürliche. Im Gegenteil, sie erscheint als eine offenbare Berichtigung, geboten durch die Natur der Sache selbst. Denn nur dann sind ja die Grenzlinien der Wissenschaften richtig gezogen, und nur dann ist ihre Einteilung dem Fortschritte der Erkenntnis dienlich, wenn das Verwandtere verbunden, das minder Verwandte getrennt wurde. Und verwandt in vorzüglichem Maße sind die Erscheinungen des Bewußtseins. Dieselbe Weise

der Wahrnehmung gibt uns von ihnen allen Kenntnis, und höhere und niedere sind durch zahlreiche Analogien einander nahe gerückt. Was aber die äußere Wahrnehmung uns von den lebenden Wesen zeigt, das sehen wir, wie von einer anderen Seite, so auch in einer ganz anderen Gestalt, und die allgemeinen Tatsachen, welche wir hier finden, sind teils dieselben, teils ähnliche Gesetze wie die, welche wir die unorganische Natur beherrschen sehen. (PES, 7)<sup>18</sup>

By looking at this passage, we can better understand how the rise of modern psychology is part of the development of a “method *according to nature*” of which Brentano spoke in his theory of the four phases. The contraction of the domain of investigation that characterizes the passage to modern psychology is, as he says it here, a “correction commanded by the nature of the matter itself”. It is a historical development, sure, but one that was not arbitrary – it was dictated by the subject-matter of the science. It was inevitable, insofar as our research cannot but bump eventually into those natural connection of what is more or less related – the very objects of research guiding our inquiry from one onto the other related investigations. It was also indispensable, insofar as there can be no truly scientific psychology without it – without the proper implementation of the correct borders of investigation, we are at risk of mixing up incompatible sorts of tasks.

What might be the most important to retain here, though, is precisely *how* the nature of the matter dictates this novel delimitation of psychology. By looking closely at the description of this new domain of modern psychology, we see that Brentano makes no reference to any sort of substantial difference, to any metaphysical delimitation that could pick out the object of this psychology like we had in the first, Aristotelian conception. In its place, the delimitation of the domain of modern psychology seems to be strongly attached to the distinction between those objects given in external perception (*äußere Wahrnehmung*) and those objects of consciousness, given in a different sort of perception.

The delimitation of the domain of investigation is then dictated by the object in the very specific sense that it follows the actual *mode of perception* (*Weise der Wahrnehmung*) proper to each kind of object and through which only they are given to us. Again, it does not presuppose that we have settled already upon any definitive understanding of what those objects of external perception – or, on the other hand, those objects of consciousness – really are. It is rather based on the simple acknowledgement that objects of consciousness and objects of external perception are “given from different sides”, as Brentano puts it. And we realize – we see, in fact, that just in one case as in the other there are affinities and analogies between phenomena of one kind as well as discrepancies

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. also GPhN, 3-4.



between them and those that are given in other modes of perception. If the first delimitation of psychology was supported by Aristotle's metaphysical views regarding the kind of substance the soul proved to be, this new delimitation is based on experiential distinctions; if the first was a metaphysical delimitation, this is an empirical one.

Now, the importance of this revelation, which marks the beginning of modern psychology, cannot be overestimated. This is what was disclosed in the experience of those researchers who were engaged in a theoretical interest directed at psychological phenomena. If we want to develop psychology through finding a method according to nature, then the very first thing we should do is to stick to those affinities and boundaries that the very subject matter reveals – this is the turning point in the history of psychology which Brentano calls modern psychology. And it is in this sense that the new delimitation of this domain will become the benchmark against which we will test the many concepts of psychology to be examined in the rest of the chapter. They will have to accord to these delimitations rendered visible in experience.

Finally, it is also important to stress: someone could say, at this point, that this whole presentation of the new delimitation of psychology is based already on technical, phenomenological concepts. But that would not be true. This is, surely, a phenomenological delimitation – but still in a very loose, non-technical sense of the term. It is a delimitation based on the different modes of perception through which phenomena (again in a broad, Comtean-inspired sense) are given to us. All of this, as we know, points forward to the major distinctions that Brentano's own psychology will work to establish. Clarifying these concepts and justifying these distinctions will be, we could say, the main task of *PES*. Nevertheless, it is important to notice that, at this point, Brentano is operating with wide, shared distinctions; distinctions that, as he says, had been incorporated and were operational in the work of modern psychologists. This is something that, according to Brentano, every single modern psychologist *sees*, though they might explain it differently. And indeed, the cleavage between what everybody sees and the particular explanations that are given of it in the work of psychologists is precisely what Brentano will have to deal with.

#### ***§14. From domain to concept: a new conception of soul to accompany the new psychology?***

The shrinking of the domain of psychology, as Brentano described it, was a very specific sort of event. It was:

- a historical fact;
- the correction of the *delimitation of a domain* of research;
- a necessity felt in the very course of scientific research on psychology;
- grounded upon the natural affinity between phenomena of consciousness as well as upon the analogies that one can establish between the laws that govern them.

It was *not*

- any individual philosophical initiative;
- the proposition of a new *concept* of psychology;
- a theoretical contention;
- a metaphysical thesis.

And yet, of course, in the concrete historical development of psychology, what Brentano is identifying as the narrowing of its field of research, as the restraining of the extension of research carried out under the banner of psychology, and as the exclusion of the domain of the physiologist as a field of investigation – all that was intimately connected, in its factual unfolding, with a transformed understanding of the discipline and of its subject matter.

It is precisely because those two things were historically connected, however, that we must keep in mind Brentano's careful effort to distinguish between them. According to him, one thing is the restriction of the domain of psychology, which we can attest by looking at what modern psychologists were actually doing in their investigations; another thing is the renewed understanding of psychology and of the soul which appeared together with this restriction of domain. It is inside this very space between *domain* and *concept*, opened up in the factual, historical development of psychology that Brentano will work throughout the rest of the first chapter of the *Psychology*. And so he says that:

Gleichzeitig aber verengte sich der *Begriff des Lebens*, oder, wenn nicht dieser – denn gerade die Männer der Wissenschaft gebrauchen das Wort noch meist in dem alten, weiten Sinne –, so doch jedenfalls der *Begriff der Seele* in ziemlich analoger Weise.

Unter Seele versteht nämlich der neuere Sprachgebrauch den substantiellen Träger von Vorstellungen und anderen Eigenschaften, welche ebenso wie die Vorstellungen nur durch innere Erfahrungen unmittelbar wahrnehmbar sind, und für welche Vorstellungen die Grundlage bilden; also den substantiellen Träger einer Empfindung z. B., einer Phantasie, eines Gedächtnisaktes, eines Aktes von Hoffnung oder Furcht, von Begierde oder Abscheu pflegt man Seele zu nennen. (PES, 8, highlight mine)

Indeed, there is a new, restricted concept of the *soul* that came together (*gleichzeitig*) with the restriction of the domain of psychology. In this philosophical combination, there came attached with this new domain of psychology a new conceptual framework, a new understanding of the soul – as the *substantial bearer of presentations*. Such a concept of the soul would even become widespread, ingrained in language: a whole usage (*Sprachgebrauche*) would develop based on the notion of the soul as substantial bearer. And yet, to stress it again, the whole point of Brentano's argument in the paragraphs that follow will be to show that, contrary to what one might think, this likely companion to the restricted domain of psychology is nevertheless not an integral part of it – in other words, that it is not *necessary* to interpret this new domain of research in terms of such a conception of the soul. Accordingly, the restriction of the concept of soul that was parallel to the restriction of the field of psychology – and which could be mistaken for an inseparable component of the new psychology – will appear as merely *one way among others of making sense of the field of modern psychology*.

It is important to notice that this does not mean Brentano needs to reject the modern notion of soul altogether: it is with the next step in the reasoning that he is going to take an issue, namely, with the move that makes the concept of soul the immediately valid, inseparable companion of the concept of psychology, inescapably tying one and the other together. Brentano will insist, to the contrary, that this is just *one possible way among others* of understanding modern psychology. In doing so, it is the link between soul as substantial bearer of presentations and a psychology as the science of such a soul that is being called into question.

Let us then take a moment here to reflect upon the deliberate, calculated way in which Brentano is telling his story. The historical fact he wanted to highlight, and which was the historical anchor in his picture, was the shrinking of the domain of psychological research – this is what properly characterized all *modern psychology*. Accordingly, Brentano's brief history of psychology is comprised, when it comes to it, of two crucial moments: the first, pre-modern, broad range of investigations to which Aristotelian psychology devoted itself; and the modern, restricted field. Once this has been established, what he will proceed to consider are all the simultaneous, possible and competing ways of interpreting this domain, all of which are equally part of what he calls modern psychology.

Modern psychology is, we could say, *an uninterpreted domain*. And therefore, what Brentano will do, from now on, is to present the *many possibilities of defining or conceptualizing modern psychology* or, what is the same, the *many possibilities of arrangement between concept and*

*domain* of psychology. Needless to say, each of these abstract possibilities will also have a handful of real philosophers among its partisans. In fact, the reader of the *Psychology* might have been startled by the generality of Brentano's assertions in this section of the text. It might strike that reader as surprising that there is no specific reference to any philosopher holding such a conception of the soul as substantial bearer of presentations, aside from the remark on its becoming something like a current usage at his time. Yet, on a closer examination, this plays on behalf of Brentano's argument, precisely because what he is trying to do here is not a doxographical review of the different historical concepts of psychology. Rather, at this point, once he moves from the historical landmark of the shrinking of the domain of research in psychology to the multiple possible concepts of it; it is no longer a chronological examination that is being carried out, but the geography of the then current possible conceptualizations of this domain of modern psychology – or, more precisely, the military cartography of the competing factions of modern psychologists. In this regard, it makes sense that Brentano does not single out actual, individual authors but rather different possible theoretical positions. In fact, one reason why the text of this first chapter is so compelling is the way in which Brentano handles a heavy-laden topic of the history of philosophy through concise, elegant formulations of the theoretical positions implicated in it. The engagement with a particular philosopher is never more important for Brentano than the critical evaluation of the general standpoints under consideration<sup>19</sup>.

Following this plan, Brentano will show how the concept of the soul as substantial bearer of presentations – arising at the same time as modern psychology – provides a quite likely, and indeed the *first possibility* of interpreting the domain of modern psychology.

[...] es scheint darum nichts im Wege zu stehen, wenn wir, trotz der veränderten Fassung, den Begriff der Psychologie auch heute noch mit den gleichen Worten wie einst Aristoteles

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<sup>19</sup> This, of course, does not mean that it would not be possible for someone to trace each identified “faction” of modern psychologists back to its most important representatives. We will not do this, since our goal here is to reconstruct what is taken to be the main thread of the argument of Brentano in this chapter – namely, how the development of psychology requires the right concept to fit its domain. To show all that is happening on the background of the text of this chapter – both Brentano's interlocutors and the critiques he is trying to counter – would be a completely different project.

Of course, however, in looking at this first conceptualization of modern psychology, that binds together the study of the domain of consciousness with the science of the soul, one cannot but be remembered of Descartes's “sum igitur praecise tantum res cogitans, id est, mens, sive animus, sive intellectus, sive ratio”. The geographical renegotiation, moreover, proceeds in two opposite directions: the restriction of the boundaries of the soul to the boundaries of the mind (to the exclusion of physiological processes); and the expansion of the mind from mere intellection to include also sensations or imagination.

This initial identification will then develop, as is known, into more explicit conceptualizations of psychology like the famous establishing by Wolff of rational and empirical psychologies which, through Kant's critique of it, would play a crucial role in this untold story of the background of this chapter of Brentano's *Psychology*.

bestimmen, indem wir sagen, sie sei die Wissenschaft von der Seele. Ähnlich wie die Naturwissenschaft, welche die Eigentümlichkeiten und Gesetze der Körper, auf die unsere äußere Erfahrung sich bezieht, zu erforschen hat, erscheint dann sie als die Wissenschaft, welche die Eigentümlichkeiten und Gesetze der Seele kennen lehrt, die wir in uns selbst unmittelbar durch innere Erfahrung finden und durch Analogie auch in andern erschließen. PES, 8, highlight mine)

*If* psychology, under the restriction of its domain, deals with those conscious phenomena; and *if* there is such a thing as a soul which is the substantial bearer of these presentations of consciousness; *then we could*, almost naturally, define psychology as the science of such a soul. As Brentano puts it, stressing the hypothetical character of the definition he is presenting, “it seems” like we could make a science out of this new conception of the soul.

Hence, our first *possible* definition or conceptual determination (*Begriffsbestimmung*, cf., for instance, PES, 12):

**(1<sup>st</sup> concept of modern psychology):** *psychology as the science of the soul – the latter understood in the sense of substantial bearer of presentations.*

As Brentano notices, under this definition, psychology is still the science of the soul, its subject matter is still defined in terms of substance, as in the olden days of Aristotle – only now the concept of soul has a different meaning than that of the Aristotelian πρώτη ἐντελέχεια: it is soul *sive Träger von Vorstellungen*. This is now a clear, strong *interpretation of the domain* of modern psychology. It implies more than a simple restriction or delimitation of that domain; it implies a *theoretical position* as well and a *metaphysical standpoint*. Brentano also remarks that, most importantly, this definition of psychology puts it in a neat opposition to the natural sciences, which also get defined, in substantial terms, as bodies. Thus, the two fields of phenomena that Brentano had identified, the fields of the phenomena of external perception and of the phenomena of consciousness, *both get an interpretation*: as a science of bodies – i.e., bodily substance; and as a science of the soul – i.e., substantial bearer of presentations. Now, in spite of the seeming neatness of this double interpretation, the careful reader might have already picked up the detail in Brentano’s text quoted above: “*es scheint nichts im Wege zu stehen*”, he had said, when we define psychology in this way – and indeed, problems will surface that make this concept of psychology untenable or, at least, unpreferable.

### ***§15. Psychology as science of psychical phenomena I – an inconsistent conception of phenomenon***

In the beginning of section 2 of this first chapter, Brentano tells us that the aforementioned concept of psychology – science of the soul as substantial bearer of presentations –, despite its seeming like a reasonable concept, is far from being unanimous. Some psychologists would rather make sense of psychology as the “science of psychical phenomena (*Phänomenen*)” (PES, 13). This interpretation of the domain, however, quickly proves trickier than the previous one. For if the definition of psychology as the science of the soul was based on what Brentano had presented as a relatively straightforward and even widespread conception of the soul, the same would not be true with regard to the concept of ‘phenomenon’.

Again we must put historical considerations aside – it is not the case here of coming back to the rich and troubled chronicle of the concept of phenomenon, both pre- and post-Brentano. What is important to retain in this reconstruction of ours is that Brentano will proceed to settle his score with two different conceptions of phenomenon that, by the time he was writing, played a role in the philosophical debates on the status of psychology and natural sciences, in general. As we will see, these two different meanings of phenomenon will give us the two next conceptions of psychology that will be examined in Brentano’s search for the right concept of modern psychology.

Brentano considers first the notion of phenomena as “mere phenomena” (*bloße Phänomene*) – i.e., phenomena as opposed to “true, actual being” (PES, 13). This conception of phenomenon is more familiar to us from discussions of natural philosophy. In fact, the sciences of nature can also be given a definition in this kind of terms, as sciences of physical phenomena. And the way the opposition plays out there between phenomenon and true being is very well-known: there would be a distinction between those objects that are presented by our senses, and which do not really exist outside of our sensations – such as colour, sound, temperature or taste – and true, actual objects, to which the former allude.

Brentano picks up here some common arguments about how deceiving physical phenomena can be. There is often, as he points out, general disagreement and confusion when it comes to determining such qualities as colour or taste. And, referring to Locke and his experiment with water basins, he reminds us that different states like warmth and cold can be aroused in us by the

very same object, and that they do not exist in the object itself.<sup>20</sup> Yet Brentano also adds, referring to a discussion to which he regularly comes back, that we are frequently mistaken as well in our establishing of size, place and motion of the objects of perception.

And not only do these conflicting experiences show us that we cannot rely on the veracity of physical phenomena. Ultimately, it is also the case that physical phenomena appear to be supported by what is *an assumption* of those actually, externally existing objects that they seem to allude to – the physical phenomena alone provide us with no guarantee of these truly existing objects (PES, 14). One could always, in this situation, systematically put into doubt any assertion about the existence or the being such-and-such of a real world as the cause of these phenomena. The true being behind physical phenomena, it seems, eludes us in manifold ways.

In parallel to that conception of physical phenomena, then, the partisans of our second conception of psychology might want to define it as the science of psychical phenomena, under this specific sense of phenomenon – as *mere* psychical phenomena. And this would give us our second possible conceptualization of modern psychology:

**(2<sup>nd</sup> concept of modern psychology):** *psychology as the science of psychical phenomena; phenomena in the sense of mere phenomena, opposed to true being.*

Brentano is quick to point out, however, that there are major differences between these parallel attempts to give both physics and psychology a definition in terms of phenomena. And that is because those very characteristics that distinguished phenomena from true being, in the sense discussed above for the natural sciences and physical phenomena, cannot be attributed as well to psychical phenomena. In the case the latter, which are given in inner rather than external perception,

wir haben sogar von ihrem Bestande jene klarste Erkenntnis und jene vollste Gewißheit, welche von der unmittelbaren Einsicht gegeben werden. Und deshalb kann eigentlich niemand zweifeln, ob der psychische Zustand, den er in sich wahrnehme, sei, und ob er so sei, wie er ihn wahrnehme.  
(PES, 14)

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<sup>20</sup> Locke's famous experiment is referenced in a passage of his *Essay*, where it has the goal of demonstrating the distinction between primary qualities, "utterly inseparable from the body", and secondary qualities, "which in truth are nothing in the objects themselves but power to produce various sensations in us by their primary qualities". By immersing our right hand in a basin with warm water, the left in cold water, if we come to put both hands in a basin with lukewarm water, we will have a different sensation of temperature in each hand (cf. Book II, Chapter VIII, §§9-10, 21). It is worth pointing that Brentano's position is not the same as Locke's, as he will go further and claim that even those qualities such as space and motion, as they are presented to us, have the status of mere phenomena.

Psychical phenomena are not misleading in the same way that physical phenomena are. Here we do not find that same gap that had set itself between the physical phenomena as they were presented in perception and the true objects they suggested: I can surely be mistaken about the relative size of two objects which, at different distances, appear to have the same extension, but I cannot be mistaken about there being a perceiving of these objects, nor about these perceiving being of these objects as having the same size; I can deny the existence of physical phenomena such as the warmth I feel in my hand when I dive it into a basin of hot water, yet I cannot doubt that feeling itself nor its being a feeling of warmth instead of a cold feeling. To hold such phenomena as doubtful, says Brentano, would be to give in to an absurd sort of skepticism (PES, 14).

It is the recognition of the distinct kind of certainty with which psychical phenomena present themselves to us, as well as of the impossibility of the exercising of doubt over them that constitutes the core of Brentano's argument against this conception of psychology, which – different from the first – will be deemed untenable, and immediately dismissed by Brentano:

Nicht also, um in dieser Hinsicht Natur- und psychische Wissenschaft einander gleich zu stellen, kann man vernünftiger Weise verlangen, daß man die Psychologie als die Wissenschaft von den psychischen Phänomenen bestimme. (PES, 14-5)

The transposition of the notion of *mere phenomena* to the domain of psychical phenomena proved to be simply impossible, says Brentano. Because that, any attempt to make sense of psychology in terms similar to those of physics could not but end up as the defence of an inconsistent concept<sup>21</sup>.

### ***§16. Psychology as science of psychical phenomena II – psychology without a soul***

Brentano's argument against the understanding of psychical phenomena in the sense of mere phenomena was a crucial step in the establishment of another conception of phenomenon – closer to his own – and towards the correct concept of psychology. The realization that psychical phenomena are given with complete certainty in inner perception is of great theoretical value to psychology and will be explored thoroughly in all the subsequent chapters of *PES*. For now,

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<sup>21</sup> Another chapter of our unwritten background story to the text of *PES* would have to show how this passage engages, implicitly, with Kant's conception and critique of the possibility of psychology – as well as with his conception of phenomenon. Such conception had already been duly challenged by other philosophers before Brentano, namely by Überweg, whose critique Brentano had in mind.



though, what is important to remark is that Brentano is highlighting a new aspect of this field of phenomena that makes up the domain of psychology: what is given in inner perception, and that we call psychological phenomena, is not only a field of interrelated phenomena of consciousness but also a domain of indubitable, completely attested and really existing psychological states. Our conceptualization of psychology, therefore, must be in accordance with this feature.

And now, drawing the consequences of this clarification, Brentano reminds us that not every modern psychologist who holds psychology to be the science of psychological phenomena is in agreement with the inconsistent concept of psychology presented in the last section. Brentano will then present what is a *third* current conception of Modern Psychology: one that, just like the previous one, understands psychology in terms of psychological phenomena; but one that, unlike the former, avoids the mistaken application of the notion of mere phenomena to its domain.

**(3<sup>rd</sup> concept of Modern Psychology):** *psychology as the science of psychological phenomena; phenomena in the sense of events.*

We have then a concept that shares the literal definition with the previous conception while understanding it in a different sense. Psychology is still the science of psychological phenomena but this time we have a novel, stronger notion of psychological phenomena, which are to be understood very broadly as mental “states, processes or events” (*Zustände, Vorgänge, Ereignisse*) (PES, 15). Thoughts, perceptions, acts of will are all truly existing psychological states. Phenomena, in this conception, are appearances, in the most straightforward way – that which appears in experience; nothing more, but nothing less<sup>22</sup>.

This adjustment does seem to correct the mistake of the previous, second notion of psychology and to yield something like a just, plausible concept of it. And yet, as Brentano will show, there are still some misunderstandings that come attached, as it were, to this third conception; while getting closer to doing justice to the domain of psychological phenomena, there is still clarificatory work to be done upon the concept of psychology – this is then where Brentano will have to intervene and finally propose his own, corrected understanding of psychological science.

It turns out that this third concept of psychology often arises, as Brentano explains, out of a different critique of the conception of psychology as the science of the soul. If they do not deny, like the partisans of the second conception, that thinking, perceiving or willing are truly existing

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<sup>22</sup> Indeed, one of the first misunderstandings one needs to get out of the way when reading Brentano is the conflating between his positivistic, empiricistic notion phenomenon and the Kantian one. If we are to look for a source of this ‘phenomenon’, it would be Comte or Mill, but certainly not Kant.

states, they do not allow, on the basis of that alone, for any talk of a soul underlying these mental states.

Now, this critique does point to what Brentano considered a grave mistake, and a mistake that lead philosophers out of the path of experience and straight to the path of mysticism: the mistake, that is, of misunderstanding the limits of knowledge (*die Grenzen der Erkenntnis verkannt werden*). Assuming that psychology was the science of the soul was to *suppose*, from the outset – so the critique goes –, that psychical phenomena were properties of the soul as a persistent, substantial bearer<sup>23</sup>. This could not be more than an assumption because the soul, say these psychologists, does not appear to us together with psychical phenomena:

was berechtigt zur Annahme solcher Substanzen? – Ein Gegenstand der Erfahrung, sagt man, sind sie nicht. Weder die Empfindung zeigt uns eine Substanz, noch die innere Wahrnehmung. Wie uns dort die Phänomene von Wärme, Farbe und Schall begegnen, so bieten sich hier die Erscheinungen des Denkens, Fühlens, Wollens dar. Ein Wesen, dem sie als Eigenschaften anhafteten, bemerken wir nicht.

And they go further:

Es ist eine Fiktion, der keinerlei Wirklichkeit entspricht, oder für die, wenn ihr sogar ein Bestehen zukäme, es auf jeden Fall nicht nachweisbar sein würde. So ist sie offenbar kein Gegenstand der Wissenschaft. (PES, 15-6)<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Brentano's conception of substance is, not unexpectedly, informed by what he calls the "valuable, old Aristotelian concept" (VDG, English translation 84), which he employs throughout in his metaphysical discussions. Indeed, while the discussion of the theory of substance and accident gains an even more central, and transformed, role in his late period – where its original Aristotelian motives will be thoroughly reworked, in ostensibly mereological terms and inside the framework of his reist convictions, as seen, for instance, in the texts of his *Kategorienlehre* – it was already an early occupation of Brentano.

Already in 1862, in his study of Aristotelian metaphysics, he presented a thorough analysis of being according to the figures of the categories and an examination of the relation between substance and its accidents (cf. especially MBS, ch. V, §5).

The substance, as the bearer of its accidents, persists through the gaining or losing of this or that accident, while the contrary is not true. To defend the idea of a substantial soul is then to say that our thinking, perceiving and willing, as accidents, cannot exist but in a soul; while the soul can still exist before they arise or after they come to be. Cf. also (VDG, Eng 327) "we must think what the criterion is for whether a determination is to be looked upon as substantial or accidental. Among substantial determinations is everyone without which a thing absolutely could not exist. [...] Likewise, our thinking and willing appear to be accidental, just as surely as the soul, can survive without them."

<sup>24</sup> Hume is the forerunner of this conception. Already in his lectures on modern philosophy, Brentano referred to Hume's doctrine that the "*Substanzbegriff* ist eine leere Fiktion; so auch das *Ich* als substantieller Träger der Vorstellungen." (GPhN, 46). And, later in this chapter of *PES*, he quotes the well-known passage from Hume's *Treatise* as a paradigmatic defence of the view that psychical phenomena do not reveal a substantial bearer: "For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception. When my perceptions are removed for any time, as by sound sleep; so long am I insensible of *myself*, and may truly be said not to exist." What men find themselves to be is

The critique is only partially accurate, as we will see further down Brentano's argument. But it calls our attention, correctly, to the need of attaining to that domain of phenomena which is given in experience when setting up our definition of psychology. The problem with the first concept was that it *assumed something more than what was given to us* in the domain to be studied; what is strictly given in inner perception are psychical phenomena, and not the soul – this is where we find justification for the definition of psychology as the science of psychical phenomena.

The situation can be summarized in the formula Brentano borrows from Albert Lange. “There is no such thing as the soul,” says Brentano, “at least *not for us* [*nicht für uns*], but psychology can and should exist nonetheless, although, to use Albert Lange's paradoxical expression, it will be a psychology without a soul” (PES, 16/8, translation modified, highlight mine). And yet, it might seem like we have reached a disconcerting conclusion. Is there really a point, after all, in saving psychology while relinquishing its original, traditional object?

The reason, says Brentano, why one would still want to have such a psychology is because it leaves open a “wide field of investigation” (PES, 16). Even if this understanding of psychology radically alters the interpretation of that domain of phenomena of consciousness that we discover in inner perception, the fact is that this conception of psychology completely retains its field of research. The reference here is still to Albert Lange, as he puts it in a passage quoted by Brentano: “Calmly assume, then, a psychology without a soul! And yet the name will still be useful so long as we have something to study that is not completely covered by any other science.” (PES, 16/8). The title of psychology is useful insofar as it makes sure the psychologist keeps his *to-do list*: it circumscribes a series of problems to be investigated and “a wide realm of significant *tasks*” (PES, 17, highlight mine) to be pursued exclusively by the scientist of psychical phenomena; the same that were pursued, under a different conception, by the scientist of the soul. All the facts that one could investigate, all the laws that one could establish under a substantialist interpretation of psychology can and should be the subject matter of this psychology without a soul (PES, 17)

Brentano supports his point with a brief presentation of John Stuart Mill's psychology. Mill's psychological investigations were carried out in a Humean spirit, and inside a phenomenistic conception of psychology such as discussed above. He sought to determine the laws of succession of psychical states, both those more general, as the laws that rule over the association of psychical phenomena, and those more specific, presiding over this or that class of mental occurrences. Now,

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“nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement.” (*Treatise*, Book I, Part IV, sect VI, in PES, 24).

what is important here for Brentano is not the particular content of those laws established Mill's psychology; there is much to be learned from the content of Mill's analyses, surely, but Brentano's point is a different one. What really matters here is the fact that the kind of task delineated by Mill can be pursued, as it is plain to see, whether or not one assumes a substantial soul underlying these regularities of psychical phenomena.

Dies etwa ist der Überblick über die psychologischen Probleme, welchen uns einer der bedeutendsten Vertreter der ausschließlichen phänomenalen Wissenschaft von seinem Standpunkte gibt. Und wirklich geschieht durch die veränderte Fassung und nach der Ansicht, die zu ihr führt, in allen diesen Beziehungen der Psychologie kein Eintrag.

Assuming a phenomenal point of view (*Standpunkt*) does not change at all the actual investigative work of the psychologist or the proper object of his study; the whole realm of tasks of psychology is preserved under this conception, while admitting as its domain nothing but what is given in experience. It thus seems like we have finally reached an adequate conception under which modern psychological endeavour could be carried out. And still, as we are about to see, even if Brentano does agree with the viability and the general correctness of this conception, it is still afflicted with crucial obscurities that need to be examined before we have a perfectly fitting concept of psychology.

### ***§17. The immortality of the soul as the most important question of psychology***

While our third, phenomenalist definition of psychology did seem to encompass all the tasks that bear upon the psychologist, there is in fact one task, says Brentano, that seems to be excluded by this conception. It is an undertaking, moreover, considered by him to be of the greatest relevance; it was the "main task" of ancient psychology, as well as the one "which gave the first impetus to psychological research" (PES, 21/11). He means none other than the question of life after death. And it is not just the importance of that question Brentano is stressing upon; he is insisting on its place at the very origin of psychological research, as the task that gave the "first impulse for the development" (*den Anstoß zur Entwicklung*) of psychology (PES, 22).

The question of the persistence of the soul after death is the one that first led Plato to psychology, says Brentano. It was "the desire to ascertain the truth about this problem which led him to the field of psychology [*in dieses Gebiet hineinführte*]." (PES, 21/11). In his lectures on Greek philosophy, already, Brentano had said something along the same lines:

Die Untersuchung nach ihrem Wesen [der Seele] und ihrer Unsterblichkeit ist von Platon sorgfältiger als irgendwo vor ihm geführt worden. Wenn auch die Ergebnisse noch vielfach mangelhaft sind, so wurde doch die richtige Methode der Untersuchung für die Zustände der Seele eingeschlagen. (GGPh, 204)

By aiming at clarity about the immortality of the soul, what Plato found instead was the *right method* with which to tackle psychology; this collateral gain determined the whole subsequent history of psychology, even if the actual question of immortality had ultimately remained unresolved for him, as it is still for us. In this sense, the whole endeavour of psychological research – in both its elements: a theoretical interest in the domain and the rudiments of a correct method (cf. §8) –, could be seen as the outcome of this original quest for settling the matter of the immortality of the soul.

What is more, all through Ancient psychology, this task maintains its place as the guiding motive of psychological inquiry. Referencing the *De Anima*, for instance, Brentano says it appears to Aristotle as “the most important object of Psychology” (PES, 22);<sup>25</sup> establishing something about the immortality of the soul thus remained, for at least a long part of the history of the discipline, the *desideratum* of psychology, the goal that gave its efforts their direction.

These are the reasons behind a critical objection faced by this new conception of a psychology without a soul. On the one hand, for a modern psychologist to give up on the task of the immortality of the soul would be for him to let down the very impulse that kickstarted psychology; it would be to stray psychology from its original path. And yet, as the objection goes, this is precisely what that phenomenalist psychologist was compelled to do – since, if there is no such a thing as a soul according to his psychology of the phenomena of consciousness, then there could not be any question regarding its immortality.

The reasoning seems to have daunting consequences; its conclusion, to be inescapable. And yet if some of those modern psychologists would bite the bullet, renounce the longstanding motivating task of psychology and try to downplay the consequences of their doing so, Brentano’s way out, more ingenious, will follow in a different direction. He will take arms against the constraining

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<sup>25</sup> It is certainly an important question for Brentano’s reading of Aristotle. From his early *Psychology of Aristotle*, that focuses precisely on the doctrine of the νοῦς ποιητικός, through his lectures on Greek philosophy and his long debate with Zeller, to his later works on Aristotle, the question of the immortality of the soul – and of the origin of such an immortal soul, to be specific – always gets central attention.

force of the reasoning itself according to which there can be no question of the immortality of the soul under such a conception of psychology.

Brentano begins by examining the first way out of the conundrum. Should we deny the objection to have any real importance and gladly relinquish the question of the immortality of the soul? According to those who follow this path, psychology would simply be going through “a similar spectacle as that in the domain of natural science” (PES, 22) ‘Is not philosophy just like alchemy?’, they would say. ‘Did not the search for turning lead into gold lead the alchemists to the science of chemistry just like, as yourself indeed admitted, the search for establishing the immortality of the soul had led Plato to the right track of psychological research?’. As the natural sciences matured, the example of alchemy shows, they realized they had been pursuing an absurd goal, but they realized as well that it had given them something else in return; something much more valuable, which was the right path of investigation into chemical sciences, with all sorts of useful applications. The sign of maturity for psychology would accordingly be the abandonment of that futile inquiry into lunar matters and the settling for a correct path of investigation into earthly business instead. Methodological development would be the surrogate for its early fanciful aspirations, and psychologists would be trading an impossible pursuit for a properly scientific conception of their discipline.

This is a view Brentano cannot accept. As he puts it:

Für die Hoffnungen eines Platon und Aristoteles, über das Fortleben unseres bessern Teiles nach der Auflösung des Leibes Sicherheit zu gewinnen, würden dagegen die Gesetze der Assoziation von Vorstellungen, der Entwicklung von Überzeugungen und Meinungen und des Keimens und Treibens von Lust und Liebe alles andere, nur nicht eine wahre Entschädigung sein. Der Verlust erschiene darum hier bei weitem beklagenswerter. (PES, 23)

The *value* of psychology as a science would be diminished by such a trade. While it might have resulted in a functional, even correct discipline, it would be a discipline by no means be as valuable as the psychology of Plato and Aristotle.

We must never forget that, for Brentano, what is ultimately at stake is restoring the faith in the value of psychology – thus, in the value of philosophy. And here we see clearly – as it was said before (§11) – that the value of psychology is a function not only of having a concept that is loyal to what is given as its domain, but also one that allows us to pursue a certain number of tasks in this domain.

Now, we, as “the heirs of previous researchers” (PES, 23), not only have inherited the impulse towards the investigation into the domain of the phenomena of consciousness and the rudiments of the method of psychology. There are also certain tasks that have been handed down to us. To let these tasks down, says Brentano, would mean to diminish the scope and the worth of our psychology. So, one could ask again: is this really a good deal? Brentano’s answer, as we know, will be in the negative. In fact, as he will try to show, there is an even better way out: even under a concept of psychology as the science of mental phenomena one is not compelled to really abandoning the task of the inquiry into the immortality of the soul.

Let us pause and look back for a moment, for we have reached a crucial step. So far, Brentano was doing nothing but to examine some different conceptions of psychology, testing these concepts against the domain of the phenomena of consciousness – a domain conveyed by experience alone, and whose investigation was, first and foremost, the job of the psychologist. It is only now, at this point, that he is going to suggest a correction to the latter of these conceptions. It will be a subtle correction, surely, but one that will allow the psychologist to finally encompass all the tasks which must fall upon his domain of research – including that most important task handed down to us by the tradition of Ancient psychology –, while at the same time allowing nothing extraneous into the definition of his discipline as the science of mental phenomena.

It will be our job now to follow closely this move of Brentano; and, by doing so, we will see that this move – the Brentano Defense, we might as well call it – is not, as it is too commonly thought, *the simple exclusion of the soul from the domain of psychological research*. In fact, the idea of a psychology liberated from the traditional inquiry into the soul was already current among philosophers of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as Lange’s clever catchphrase had shown us. Brentano’s move is rather, in a way that we will have to make clear, the *protection of the question of the soul* from a misunderstanding that accompanied the modern conception of psychology and that supposedly followed from it; a protection that will, at the same time, yield a correct concept for a fitting and valuable psychological science. In this sense, the Brentano Defense will be the clarification and the refinement of this third – more correct but not yet perfectly fitting – concept of modern psychology; and, in achieving that, its result will be the securing of a fitting concept for psychology.

As it regards the inherited motives of psychology, then, it will become clear that, much unlike alchemy, the right method in psychology is not the leftover for the psychologist’s abandoning of the higher aspirations of the handed down tasks. It is, on the contrary, the only way one can

correctly pursue these investigations. Indeed, Brentano's quarrel was never against the kind of ambitious, even far-fetched questions towards which philosophers of the past strived when they were engaged in psychological investigations; it is rather against the wrong way one to engaging in these investigations, relying on speculative reasoning or the supposition of hidden entities, forces, capacities and so on. And at the same time, on the other hand, only a psychology that is correct not merely in the means with which it pursues its tasks but also in the very tasks it poses itself as a goal can hope to become something like that mature, scientific psychology worth engaging in.

The right method should not therefore compensate for the loss of its highest tasks but indicate the correct path towards them. Developing the rudiments of the method that was handed down by Plato and Aristotle is the way to reclaim those questions – the questions handed down by the same Plato and Aristotle – from, on the one hand, those who deny the value or feasibility of these tasks – such as materialists, phenomenologists, etc. –; and, on the other, those who want to take shortcuts in their path towards this goal – speculative philosophers of all sorts. This is Brentano's most personal contribution in the search for a fitting concept of psychology, at the end of which he will find, at last, that thoroughly empirical standpoint for psychological research. This is what, according to him, will allow for the truly becoming scientific of psychology; the finding, that is, of its own sort of scientificity, quite different, of course, from that of the natural sciences.

Behind this move is a spirit of non-renunciation; a resolute intellectual ambition – an intellectual optimism, even – of having a method not merely correct but completely adequate to its object and allowing for an exhaustive exploration of its whole domain, which can be trusted completely both at the level of the most down-to-earth discoveries of the then thriving experimental psychology, and at the level of the farthest and most ambitious pursuits of Ancient psychology.



## CHAPTER 3: The Brentano Defense

### *§18. Brentano's first move: the immortality of life*

Brentano's move towards establishing the correct concept of psychology is actually twofold – and it is important to make clear what exactly those two corrections are that he makes to the conception of psychology as the science of mental phenomena. First, he will show that the question of the immortality of the soul does not lose *all* meaning under this conception; it can still be meaningfully asked, but in an *improper sense*. Then, he will show that, contrary to what one might think – and regardless of what some of those who propose a psychology without a soul may believe – the question of the immortality of the soul *in the proper sense* is in no way affected by assuming such a position regarding the domain of psychology.

The first part of Brentano's defense, then, is to counter the objection according to which the range of tasks of a psychology as science of mental phenomena would be smaller than the traditional conception of a psychology as the science of the soul insofar as the former would exclude the question of the immortality of the soul. Against that, Brentano will try to show that “whatever appearance of necessity there is for restricting the range of inquiry in this connection, it may still be no more than an appearance” (PES, 23/12). As evidence of this, Brentano will first bring out attention to Hume himself who, in spite of his staunch denial of a substantial conception of the soul, would have declared that “in a conception such as his, all the proofs of immortality retain absolutely the same strength as in the traditional conception to which it is opposed.” (PES, 24/12).

Brentano immediately notes that Lange interprets this as mockery, but that “[w]hat Hume says, however, is not so obviously ridiculous as Lange and perhaps Hume himself might think.” (PES, 24-5/12). The passage of Lange to which Brentano refers reads:

Die feine Ironie, welche sich hier gegen die Metaphysiker wendet, trifft anderswo die Theologen. Dass bei Humes Ansichten von der Unsterblichkeit der Seele im kirchlichen Sinne nicht mehr die Rede sein kann, versteht sich von selbst. Dessenungeachtet gefällt er sich gelegentlich in der boshaften Bemerkung, dass die sämtlichen Argumente für die Uunsterblichkeit der Seele bei seinen Ansichten noch ganz dieselbe Beweiskraft hätten, wie bei der gewöhnlichen Annahme von der Einfachheit und Identität derselben. (Lange 1887, 362-3)

Now, neither Brentano nor Lange specify the exact passage of Hume under consideration. It is reasonable to suppose, though, that Lange has in mind the *Treatise*, 1.4.5, just a couple of

paragraphs before the quote of Hume he is commenting on. Here, even though Hume says that “the question concerning the substance of the soul is absolutely unintelligible” and that there can be no conclusion of the matter, he also says that

[i]n both cases the metaphysical arguments for the immortality of the soul are equally inconclusive; and in both cases the moral arguments and those deriv'd from the analogy of nature are equally strong and convincing. If my philosophy, therefore, makes no addition to the arguments for religion, I have at least the satisfaction to think it takes nothing from them, but that every thing remains precisely as before. (Hume 2007, 164)

If this is indeed a malicious comment, as Lange defends, Brentano is right in that it does reveal an important insight regarding the different levels on which one can discuss the immortality of the soul; an insight the seriousness of which Hume seems to be aware.

Indeed, the irony of this comment is not there in the fact that Hume does not really believe that those proofs from moral arguments and from analogy of nature remain untouched by metaphysical considerations; but rather in the fact that, while these proofs may indeed retain their full strength regardless of what we concede concerning the substantiality of the soul, Hume believes these proofs themselves to be flawed.

We see this clearly in Hume’s compelling essay *On the Immortality of the Soul*, where he actually discusses the distinction between proofs of immortality that are metaphysical, those that are moral and those that proceed from analogy of nature. Unlike in the *Treatise*, Hume is candid here about his intents to show that by “the mere light of reason it seems difficult to prove the Immortality of the Soul” (Hume 2008, 324) and that each of these three kinds of arguments ultimately falls short of providing good reasons for believing in the immortality of the soul; such a belief finds its origin and nurture only in faith and in the scriptures. Still, precisely as Brentano suggests, Hume actually holds these three levels of reasoning to run separately from each other, so that, even after the rebuttal of metaphysical arguments for the immortality, there are still open to consideration both those proofs from moral considerations and from analogy of nature.

It is in this sense that, after claiming first that “just metaphysics teach us, that the notion of substance is wholly confused and imperfect; and that we have no other idea of any substance, than as an aggregate of particular qualities inhering in an unknown something” (Hume 2008, 324) so that both matter and spirit are equally unknown; Hume moves forward to scrutinizing other, independent ways of considering the question of immortality.

He examines, for instance, those moral arguments that derive their strength from a supposed divine interest in the “punishment of the vicious and reward of the virtuous” (Hume 2008, 325). If God’s justice is to be made effective, the argument goes, then one must suppose some sort of life after death – there would have to be at least some kind of “futuraity” of those vicious and virtuous individuals so as to allow for such an accountability. Needless to say, Hume judges these concerns regarding futurity as “unaccountable terrors [...] artificially fostered by precept and education” (Hume 2008, 326), and will present a number of arguments in the contrary.

He further considers that level of reasoning that he calls “physical”, dealing with arguments that proceed from analogy of nature. At this level, he says, the reasons are “strong for the mortality of the soul” (Hume 2008, 328).

Where any two objects are so closely connected that all alterations which we have ever seen in the one are attended with proportionable alterations in the other; we ought to conclude, by all rules of analogy, that, when there are still greater alterations produced in the former, and it is totally dissolved, there follows a total dissolution of the latter. (Hume 2008. 329)

It is thus that, looking at the analogies that hold between bodily and spiritual phenomena, one can only infer, from all those vices, weaknesses and confusions of body, which affect the soul as well, that a greater alteration of the body would bring about a proportionate alteration in the soul.

At the end, as Hume had declared, all the three lines of reasoning turn out to be dead ends. Yet, as Brentano had suggested, each of those three levels had to be dealt with separately, as Hume fought each of the arguments on their own grounds. Taking a cue from Hume’s irony, Brentano as well will diffract the issue of the immortality of the soul, singling out two senses of the question:

Denn wenn auch der, welcher die Seelensubstanz leugnet, von einer Unsterblichkeit der Seele im eigentlichen Sinne selbstverständlich nicht reden kann, so ist es doch durchaus nicht richtig, daß die Unsterblichkeitsfrage durch die Leugnung eines substantiellen Trägers der psychischen Erscheinungen allen Sinn verliert. (PES, 25)

In this passage, Brentano distinguishes between a question of the immortality of the soul in the proper sense (*im eigentlichen Sinne*), which would indeed be off-limits to those who deny the substantiality of the soul, and a question understood in a different, non-proper sense – one we could say to be, using Brentano’s common conceptual pair<sup>26</sup>, a question of the immortality of the soul in the improper sense (*im uneigentlichen Sinne*). Most importantly, Brentano says that this

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<sup>26</sup> On the usage, by Brentano – and later by Husserl – of the improper/proper pair, see Majolino 2008.

latter question *does not lose all meaning* under the new conception of psychology. From irony to impropriety, Brentano will find a path through which the question of the immortality of the soul can be put forward in a new, yet still meaningful way.

[M]it oder ohne Seelensubstanz, ein gewisser Fortbestand unseres psychischen Lebens hier auf Erden jedenfalls nicht geleugnet werden kann. Verwirft einer die Substanz, so bleibt ihm nur die Annahme übrig, daß es zu einem Fortbestande wie diesem eines substantiellen Trägers nicht bedürfe. (PES, 25).

It is then in terms of this persistence (*Fortbestand*) of psychical life that Brentano will redeploy, in an improper, relative sense, the question of the immortality of the soul. If, as he says, those who oppose the idea of a substantial bearer of the mental phenomena must admit at least that there is such a thing as a persistence or continuity of our mental life *here on Earth*; and that this continuity does not require a substantial bearer; then the question of the persistence of mental life *after death* is preserved regardless of what is held regarding a substantial bearer.

The extrapolation of this simple duration of life to after the destruction of the body – or, if we want, “after the destruction of our bodily phenomena” (*leiblichen Erscheinung*) (PES, 25) – is, in principle, perfectly conceivable, and makes for a question that is perfectly meaningful, with reference to mental phenomena alone. It is a question, indeed, very similar to the one that Hume discussed under what he called the ‘physical arguments’ for immortality. The question of immortality in the improper sense, to which Brentano will also refer as the *immortality of life*, can therefore be posed and pursued without ever stepping outside the newly established domain of a psychology as science of the phenomena of consciousness. It can be asked and answered, that is, at the level of those laws that regulate the combination and of succession of mental phenomena, just like all the other tasks that fall upon this sort of psychologist. In fact, beyond Hume, Brentano considers to have had important and positive forerunners both in John Stuart Mill and Gustav Fechner, who would have already recognized the possibility of asking this kind of question in this sort of terms – Mill having said that “it is precisely as easy to conceive that a succession of feelings, a thread of consciousness, may be prolonged to eternity, as that a spiritual substance forever continues to exist; and any evidence which proves the one, will prove the other” (quoted in PES, 25). Ultimately, as noted by Mill, if the improper question were settled by this kind of psychologists in favour of the persistence of mental life after death, then this would imply, for those phenomenalist psychologists who, in turn, assumed the substantiality of the soul, that the proper question would be settled as well; insofar as they, assuming that our mental life has a

substantial substrate as its bearer, would have proof of the persistence of this bearer as well with the persistence of mental life after the destruction of the body.

This is, therefore, the first part of Brentano's move: to show that, contrary to what some of the proponents of a psychology without soul would want to believe, the question of the immortality of the soul can still be pursued, in this specific sense, under that phenomenalist conception of psychology; and, finally countering the objection against that conception, to show that, if we accept it, "the field of psychology would not thereby be narrowed in any way, and, above all, it would not suffer any essential loss" (PES, 26/13), allowing the psychologist to live up to the tasks handed down by tradition. Brentano's move is a correction, as it were, to the phenomenalist conception of psychology as it was usually presented. And it is the warding off of an "inconsequence", one in which those proponents of the third concept of psychology frequently incurred, and which consisted of wrongly inferring from the conception of a psychology without a soul to the complete exclusion of the question of immortality from their psychology (PES, 25).

### ***§19. Brentano's second move: the simpler choice***

And yet there is a second mistake to be corrected in that conception of psychology, as presented by Mill and company. We have seen how Brentano had divided in two the question of the immortality of the soul. He has shown, already, that the question of the immortality *in the improper sense* – reinterpreted as the question of the immortality or persistence, after death, of mental life – falls squarely within the domain of psychology as the science of mental phenomena. Accordingly, he is now going to try to establish that assuming a conception of psychology as science of mental phenomena does not imply the denial of the question of the immortality of the soul *in the proper sense* – or, better, that it does not imply any position whatsoever regarding this question.

As we will see, this further clarification involves shedding light on what the actual metaphysical charge is of assuming such a conception of psychology as the one proposed by our third group of modern psychologists. More specifically, even if many of those who proposed the idea of psychology as a science of mental phenomena were traditionally motivated by a critical stance regarding the metaphysical position according to which there would be something like a substantial substrate of our mental states, Brentano will try to show that this connection is by no means justified.

As Brentano says, settling the question of whether there is or not something like a substantial substrate to our mental states is not at all an easy task. A quick look back at tradition will show the most eminent thinkers to be strongly divided on this matter. “Just as there are eminent men who have questioned and denied that phenomena have a substantial bearer there also have been and still are other very famous scientists who firmly believe that they do.” (PES, 26/13) It is a question ridden with difficulties and, if our choosing this or that conception of psychology depended on whether we give a positive or negative answer to this question, then we would certainly be on rough grounds.

To the contrary, however, Brentano shows that this is not the case.

Doch ohne eingehende metaphysische Untersuchung diese Ansicht annehmen scheint ebenso unstatthaft als sie ungeprüft verwerfen. [...]

Wenn also die neue Begriffsbestimmung der Psychologie ebenso untrennbar mit der neuen, wie die ältere mit der älteren metaphysischen Lehre zusammenhinge, so würden wir entweder nach einer dritten zu forschen oder in die gefürchteten Abgründe der Metaphysik hinabzusteigen uns genötigt sehen.

Zum Glück ist das Gegenteil der Fall. Die neue Erklärung des Namens Psychologie enthält nichts, was nicht auch von Anhängern der älteren Schule angenommen werden müßte. Denn mag es eine Seele geben oder nicht, die psychischen Erscheinungen sind ja jedenfalls vorhanden. Und der Anhänger der Seelensubstanz wird nicht leugnen, daß alles, was er in bezug auf die Seele feststellen könne, auch eine Beziehung zu den psychischen Erscheinungen habe. (PES, 26-7)

Surely, those that deny a substantial substrate of the soul accept at least that there are mental states, whose study is the proper job of the psychologist. But what Brentano is calling our attention to is the fact that those psychologists who do accept a substantial substrate of the soul also accept – no less than their opponents – there to be such mental states; further, the latter also accept that these mental states are correlated to the substantial substrate which they hold to exist. This means, in fact, that, in one case or the other, independently of any metaphysical position, the definition of psychology as science of mental phenomena is a valid one. As Brentano will explain, to define psychology in these terms has the advantage of freeing us from the commitment to this or that answer regarding the metaphysical puzzles of the soul. By carrying out psychology in this fashion we remain unencumbered by such questions.

Es steht also nichts im Wege, wenn wir, statt der Begriffsbestimmung der Psychologie als Wissenschaft von der Seele, die jüngere uns eigen machen. Vielleicht sind beide richtig. Aber der

Unterschied bleibt dann bestehen, daß die eine metaphysische Voraussetzungen enthält von welchen die andere frei ist, daß diese von entgegengesetzten Schulen anerkannt wird, während die erste schon die besondere Farbe einer Schule an sich trägt, daß also die eine uns allgemeiner Voruntersuchungen enthebt, zu welchen die andere uns verpflichten würde. (PES, 27)

In this passage, we see more clearly that there are three important marks which distinguish the newer definition – the corrected conception of psychology as the science of mental phenomena – from the old conception – the first concept proposed for modern psychology, according to which psychology would be the science of the soul:

(i) The first difference is that, unlike the concept of psychology as the science of the soul, which implied the explicit metaphysical assumption of that very soul, this new conceptual definition of psychology carries with it no metaphysical presupposition (*Voraussetzung*). We could thus say – but only in a specific sense, the meaning of which will be made clearer in the following sections – that this is a concept of psychology that is *metaphysically neutral*, unencumbered by any metaphysical content.

This also entails, in particular, that such a conception of psychology implies nothing like a negative answer to the question of whether there is a substantial bearer of mental life – the kind of negative answer which would, in turn, imply the meaninglessness of the question of the immortality of the soul in the proper sense. Not only can Brentano conclude, then, that the field of psychological research suffers no restraining under this conception of psychology – because, as he had shown already, we can still pursue the question of the immortality of the soul *in the improper sense* –; but also that, under this conception, the question of the immortality *in the proper sense* is actually preserved, so to speak, insofar as it excluded from psychology but not rendered meaningless, still being part of a set of viable metaphysical questions. We say preserved, indeed, in the double sense of the term: the question of the immortality of the soul in the proper sense is retained – that is, not excluded – as well as postponed until those more complex, more dependent inquiries of metaphysics have been carried out. Under this metaphysically neutral conception of psychology, the question of the immortality of the soul remains therefore an open question<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> Now, Brentano's goal at this time, when he is advancing his concept of empirical psychology, is to liberate psychology from any metaphysical commitment rather than to present an argument that could help the partisans of the immortality of the soul defend their position against the attacks of phenomenologists and materialists. But his move of course does not preclude a later position taking on the subject. It actually serves to demonstrate the question of immortality to remain both pressing and viable. What Brentano says about chess moves is applicable here as well: "Wir sehen einen Zug als gut an, wenn er alle Drohungen parirt. Ist dieser Zug überdies der *Entwicklung der Streitkräfte* förderlich und geeignet, einen *gesunden* Angriff einzuleiten, so werden wir den Zug für *vortrefflich*

If we looked back at the objection that was advanced against this conception – the objection which held that, since there is no such a thing as a soul according to this conception of psychology, then there can be no question of immortality –, we would see that, on the one hand, the first of Brentano’s defensive moves had taken arms against the conclusion of the argument. “Well”, he had said, “even if it turns out that there is no such a thing as a substantial bearer of the soul, one can still meaningfully and legitimately pose the question, under this conception, of the persistence of our mental life.” This second defensive move, on the other hand, works by rejecting the very premise of the objection: “And further”, Brentano seems to be saying, “one is not really forced to accept that there is no such a thing as a substantial bearer of the soul even though one is determined to carry out his psychological researches under the banner of a psychology without soul”.

(ii) Secondly, and precisely because it carries with it no metaphysical presupposition, it also *favours no specific theoretical position* – in the strong sense of having a definitive interpretation of what psychology is ultimately about. In other words, this new definition of psychology can be shared by all psychologists and accepted by members of any school. It accounts for the actual work of psychological research without entering the meanders of the assumptions of this or that psychologist as to the final interpretation of their discipline. We could as well say, then, that this concept of psychology as science of mental phenomena is marked by a *strategical neutrality*, adding strength to Brentano’s enterprise; in fact, if he is correct, psychologists from any school will be compelled to accept his proposed definition.

(iii) Finally, this new definition places the whole endeavour of psychological investigations in a *position of priority* with regard to any metaphysical investigations. It liberates the researcher, as Brentano says, from a series of preliminary investigations.

These three differences delimitate what will become three crucial characteristics of psychology as conceived and practiced by Brentano; as such, they will be extremely important in the development of a method appropriate to it – namely, in the development of descriptive psychology. We shall have to come back to these points later. For now, though, what Brentano is calling attention to is the comparison between one and another ways of delimitating the concept

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erklären dürfen.“ (NVSP, 103). Brentano’s excellent move at the same time parries the attacks against psychology and leaves him in a more favourable position for a later attack of his own.

Thus, the tactical move of *PES* is perfectly in accordance with Brentano’s own position – expressed in many of his writings, e.g. *DP*, *VDG*, *PES III*, *VE*, etc., which is naturally that of the acceptance of a substantial bearer of mental states and, most importantly, of the immortality – and individual creation by God – of the soul. It is important to always keep this in mind: Brentano’s psychology does not end but begins with descriptive psychology.

On the way these underlying layers of a deeply metaphysical psychology make themselves felt in – and in fact pre-delimitate the empirical field of the psychology of – *PES*, see Mariani 2020.



of psychology, as well as to the theoretical advantages of one of these concepts. The two concepts, indeed – which, to recall our path so far, correspond to what we have seen as the *first concept of modern psychology* (cf. §14) and the *third concept of modern psychology* (cf. §16) –, are *not at the same level*, theoretically speaking: one concept is broader and more simple than the other. Perhaps, as Brentano says, *both* will turn out to be correct. Perhaps, once proper metaphysical investigations are carried out, what is today a science of mental phenomena will also become the science of that sort of substance we call the soul. This is possible precisely because the correct way to understand these two concepts is not as if they stood one against the other but rather as coming one before the other. In other words, whether it turns out or not that psychology become a full-fledged science of the soul, the fact is that we can carry out any and all of its tasks under that simpler conception that sees it as the science of mental phenomena.

With that in mind, Brentano points to two theoretical advantages of this new conception of psychology: it is simpler and, as such, facilitates the work of the psychologist; and, because it is simple, it also depends on less assumptions and is thus more robust: “any exclusion of an unrelated question not only simplifies, but also reinforces the work. It shows that the results of our investigation are dependent on fewer presuppositions, and thus lends greater certainty to our convictions.” (PES, 27/14)

Having shown that, in reality, there is no metaphysical charge implied in this new conception of modern psychology, Brentano not only succeeds in presenting this as a viable conception of psychology but also in presenting it as the one that, for reasons of methodological parsimony, is to be preferred. This is the accomplishment of Brentano’s intervention in the debate regarding the correct conception of psychology – in this sense, what Brentano is doing is also to give a different shape to the debate; he is calling our attention to a methodological problem having to do with the very relation between, on the one hand, taking a stance regarding the definition of psychology and, on the other hand, having a certain metaphysical belief. More specifically, what he is trying to do is to invert the way philosophers have commonly argued for a definition of psychology. Most definitions of psychology, in fact, follow some kind of metaphysical belief; Brentano is trying instead to press for a definition that contain only the essential, necessary elements for the psychologist to carry out investigation in his domain. With this simpler, but perfectly encompassing, concept, one can establish the establish the correct field of psychology and accomplish the associated tasks, all *before* deciding on the question of the substantiality of the soul or, indeed, *before* beginning to do any metaphysics. “Let us take this as a definition of

psychology – a working definition, if we want,” Brentano seems to be saying “this is how to proceed; this is where we should start from.” Concept first, metaphysics later<sup>28</sup>.

Now, since Brentano has shown that this concept of psychology is not charged with metaphysical assumptions, as some would have made us believe; and that, on the contrary, it is preferable for purely theoretical reasons; then this implies, of course, that there are completely different reasons why we should ultimately settle for this conception of psychology. One does not need to buy the whole package of those philosophers who eventually proposed a psychology as science of mental phenomena because they denied the existence of a substantial substrate of the soul. Instead of assuming such a conception of psychology *because of some metaphysical standpoint*, we should do it instead *out of methodological precaution*.

This *correction* to the concept of psychology as a science of mental phenomena – the third concept proposed for modern psychology – is the result of Brentano’s arguments. That concept is thus liberated from the two mistaken beliefs that were supposed to accompany it: the belief that it would exclude the question of the immortality of the soul altogether; and the belief that it implies the denial of a substantial soul. After that, Brentano can finally proclaim that we can “adopt the modern definition [*die jüngere [Begriffsbestimmung] uns eigen machen*]” (PES, 27/13). And he finishes the second section of this chapter by concluding:

*Wir erklären also in dem oben angegebenen Sinne die Psychologie für die Wissenschaft von den psychischen Erscheinungen. Die vorausgegangenen Erörterungen scheinen geeignet, eine solche Begriffsbestimmung der Hauptsache nach deutlich zu machen. (PES, 27, highlights mine)*

After a proper *correction and clarification of its sense*, Brentano adopts therefore, with modifications, the third concept of modern psychology.

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<sup>28</sup> N.B.: this “methodical empiricism”, – the idea that the establishing of a working concept out of the actual experience of the researchers should be the first thing in the order of our investigations – was already behind Lange’s own proposal of the expression “psychology without a soul”. And Lange himself refers, on this point, to Mill, who developed his psychology of association while postponing the metaphysical question of its material reducibility (Lange 1887, 701).

It is not the case, then, as the incautious reader of Brentano might think, that Lange was led by metaphysical views towards denying a psychology of the substantial soul, as if he held an actual materialist position; quite on the contrary, his work was highly critical of such a position. Lange, much like Brentano, was proposing a consensual, strictly experiential determination of the concept of psychology, under whose “provisional right” (*provisorisches Recht*) (Lange 1887, 702) psychologists should carry out their research. This conceptual determination was achieved by paying attention to the phenomena only, leaving its ultimate metaphysical interpretation for a second moment.

Brentano’s innovation, therefore, is not in the move, which was already Lange’s, of *strategically proposing* a definition of psychology without soul – as it is sometimes suggested – but in the correction of the borders of the concept of psychology, and in the actual clarification of what such a definition could be, as we will see in what follows.

**(3<sup>rd</sup> concept of Modern Psychology)\*:** *psychology as the science of psychological phenomena; phenomena in the sense of events.*

The definition, while literally the same, now stands, however, upon a significantly changed conception of psychology: one that carries no prejudice or over-interpretation of its domain but rather follows faithfully, in its conceptualization, the *Grenzlinien* suggested in experience (see quote in §13); one that can now, finally, be justly called a *psychology from an empirical standpoint*. It is purely or perfectly empirical, in the sense that it is completely defined by what is given in experience as its domain of this science, while assuming nothing extraneous to it. This is a psychology that encompasses the whole of those mental phenomena, naturally linked together through the same mode of perception, while allowing no intrusion in it; a psychology that deals with all questions that can be meaningfully asked regarding these phenomena, while precluding itself from any unnecessary investigations. We could say that Brentano has operated, as promised, a “clarification of the general sense” (PES, 27) of that third definition.

#### ***§20. The finding of the right concept of psychology and Brentano’s goals***

At the end of his argument, Brentano has therefore come upon a perfectly empirical standpoint for psychology, a concept under which it can be properly understood and developed. But this is not, of course, the end of the story: Brentano must now get started with the work of actually developing psychology. Still, it is convenient for us to take a moment here to look back upon what has just been established and upon its significance for Brentano’s programmatic goals, as they had been delineated in (§§3-9). As it was shown, Brentano’s moves towards a new concept for psychology were motivated and guided by proximate and distant goals: at the most general level, we have seen how Brentano was determined to stand up to four different challenges faced by philosophy in its historical development (§§6-9), and we have seen also that psychology, being a fundamentally philosophical science, would have a most prominent role in any attempt at confronting those challenges; at a more specific level, we have seen how the *Psychology* of 1874 was an attempt to aid in this development of psychology by bridging the gap, in the domain of psychological research, between the long-lasting interest about psychological phenomena and the lack of an appropriate method with which to tackle its investigation (§10); finally, we have seen how the first chapter of *PES* aimed at accomplishing what could be counted as the very first step towards the development of this appropriate method, which was to find a proper concept for psychology – the

concept, that is, that fits its domain, allows the psychologist to carry out all the tasks of his field and, in doing so, preserves the value of his discipline (§11).

The last of these goals, also the humblest, has now been achieved; the close treatment of the first chapter of *PES* should have made clear that Brentano accomplished what we had called the *alignment* of domain, concept and task required for putting psychology on firm grounds. The concept he has established – that of psychology as a science of mental phenomena, understood together with all the caveats he has carefully added to the proposal of Mill and the other partisans of this conception – was enough to circumscribe everything that was given in experience as the domain of mental phenomena and nothing that was not given as such; as well as to enforce the boundaries of the field of questions open to the psychology.

What remains for us now is to examine the relation between this local accomplishment of Brentano and those broader goals to which he still aspires. As it will be argued, on the one hand, at the more general level, the finding of a proper conception of psychology does seem to point the way for an answer to those historical challenges faced by philosophy; on the other hand, at the level of the advancement of psychology, it shows even more clearly the necessity of working out a method which corresponds to this new concept of psychology. The former will be the subject of the following sections of this part; the latter, of the second part of this work, where we will be able to examine how description is deployed precisely in the development of this corresponding method.

### ***§21. The neutrality of Brentano's psychology***

The first important result of Brentano's establishing of the proper concept of psychology has to do with the two sorts of neutralities characterizing the newfound conception of his discipline. As we have seen (§19), Brentano's proposed notion of a science of mental phenomena could be said to be both metaphysically neutral – in that there was no specific metaphysical position attached to it – and, in close connection with that, also strategically neutral – in that it favoured no particular theoretical position but could actually be accepted by members of different schools. Both claims ask for further clarification.

The first thing to make clear is the sense of Brentano's insistence upon the absence of metaphysical prejudices in this conception of psychology. It is important to have in mind that Brentano is not rejecting the importance of metaphysical discussion *per se*. His objection is rather against the

inclusion of any metaphysical presupposition in those concepts with which we carry out psychological research. While this is not unclear in the text of the *Psychology*, it is a point worth stressing, if only to mark the difference between Brentano and a certain tendency that aims to completely ward off any metaphysical question as meaningless. Brentano never wanted to exclude metaphysics or even to separate it completely from psychology or other empirical sciences – as if this empirical psychology were the safe, sound way of doing philosophy, uncontaminated by metaphysical muddles. It is rather, for Brentano, a matter of priority: it is about settling the relative position of psychology and metaphysics. Namely, what is important is that psychology, being a less dependent science than metaphysics, contain no presuppositions that belong to the latter. Any metaphysical position implied in our concept of psychology would imply a change in this relative position, putting metaphysical research as preliminary to psychological investigation, as Brentano had said.

Most importantly, this objection does not preclude psychology, in turn, from achieving results that could be significant for metaphysics: there is nothing wrong with psychology ultimately telling us something about metaphysical matters – in fact, the very possibility that facts regarding psychical phenomena take part in inferences leading to more general facts that have to do with every kind of object whatsoever is an important feature of Brentano's conception of metaphysics. The guiding theoretical intention of Brentano's psychology, one could say, is not anti-, but pre-metaphysical, and even pro-metaphysical. Metaphysics is not neutralized, it is protracted.

From that empirical standpoint proposed by Brentano, psychology is also neutral in a second sense; we had called it *strategical neutrality*. In fact, when he stepped in to establish the proper concept of psychology, Brentano was intervening in a field marked by an all-out war. Psychology faced, at the time, both external and internal pressures. First off, the blooming advances of physiology and psycho-physics appeared to some as if they would render psychology, as a standalone science, ultimately irrelevant, insofar as they held the dream of mapping every specific psychical function to their specific physiological support.<sup>29</sup> Brentano's frequent discussions of the problem of the borders between psychophysics and psychology, as well as his critiques of the eminent physiological psychologists of his day – like Fechner, Wundt or Maudsley –, scattered throughout the text of the *Psychology*, show that he was well aware of the threat of psychophysical reductionism. His own thoughts on the matter, though, could not be more assertive: as we have

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<sup>29</sup> While the dream might seem more complicated nowadays, it is not difficult to imagine the excitement when both Charles Bell and François Magendie, for instance, independently discovered the physiological separation of the sensory and motor functions in the spinal nerves, at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

seen, psychology, considered as a whole, relies heavily upon the results of physiology, surely; nevertheless, it represents a completely different step in the scale of sciences, with its own domain, its own interest and its own method.

Already facing the threat at its external borders, the general dispute and the deeply entrenched disagreement between psychologists complicated the situation even further for psychology. From a strategical point of view, therefore, Brentano's move in this chapter of *PES* can be seen as the regimentation, against the enemies of psychology, of all those modern psychologists who, in one way or another, and in spite of their specific metaphysical views, actually agreed on the worth of carrying out their work of psychological research.<sup>30</sup>

The strength of Brentano's proposed conception was that it defined psychology purely by what was given experientially as its domain of research. Thus, by adhering closely to the experience of the psychologist in the carrying out his tasks, this concept could actually function as a common ground that all different sorts of psychologists could recognize, and upon which they all could count in the realization of their work. All that was necessary to be part of Brentano's regiment was that one recognized the domain of those closely connected phenomena of consciousness and judged it important to carry out specific research inside of this domain, investigating the laws that regulate their elements. It did not matter, at that point, what any of these modern psychologists believed these phenomena to stand for. As it was defined by Brentano, this concept of psychology effectively established a neutral turf – and, at the same time, a common territory on which psychologist can stand their ground against the menace of materialistic reductionism.

## **§22. *The relative worth (Wertverhältnis) of psychology.***

Another important result following from Brentano's accomplishments so far is the restoration of the proper value of psychology as a discipline. As anticipated, (§11) the value of psychology was to be a function of the alignment of its concept, its domain and its field of tasks. Since those concepts of psychology criticized by Brentano systematically distorted the boundaries of the discipline with ill-founded presuppositions and excluded crucial tasks from the consideration of

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<sup>30</sup> There is another sense, completely different sense in which Brentano's *Psychology* has been noted by more than one commentator as being strategic. This is of course the idea that this work would play an important role in mitigating Brentano's fame as a scholastic philosopher and an ultramontanist (see e.g., Haller 1988, 21; Chudzimsky 2004, 1). But the accuracy of this claim and the actual extent of Brentano's scholasticism would be the subject of another chapter of that background history of PES, which we will not pursue here.

the psychologist, its proper value could not but be negatively affected. But now that a concept has been found that perfectly fits its domain and encompasses all the tasks that fall upon the psychologist – as the case of the reintroduction of the question of the immortality of the soul has shown quite well – the value of the discipline can also be readjusted.

It is precisely at this point, right at the end of the first chapter of the *Psychology*, that Brentano introduces the problem of how to determine the relative worth (*Wertverhältnis*) of a science – the value, that is, of a certain scientific discipline relative to other disciplines. The enthusiasm a certain discipline arouses, he says, echoing some of the concerns of the opening paragraph of the chapter, is not a reliable yardstick with which to measure its value; or, at least, it is not enough of a measurement. Instead of that, taking into consideration their theoretical ambitions, Brentano indicates three parameters with which the relative worth of a science can be measured, and which will allow for a proper comparison between psychology and the natural sciences:

1) The first has to do with the sort of knowledge a science can aspire to. The researcher who dedicates himself to the study of physical phenomena, for instance, can arrive at best at establishing some sort of relative truth (*relative Wahrheit*); this is because, as Brentano had argued before, since those phenomena he studies – physical phenomena such as sound, color, etc. – do not truly and effectively exist (*wahrhaft und wirklich bestehen*) but are instead mere “signs of something effectively real” (*Zeichen von etwas Wirklichem*), they can present no more than a faulty picture of reality. Knowledge of them, therefore, can only be knowledge “in a very incomplete sense” (PES, 28). The phenomena given in inner perception, quite on the contrary, are “true in themselves” – the evidence with which we perceive them guarantees that they are such as they appear (PES, 28). This “intrinsic truth” (PES, 37) of psychical phenomena, as against the relative truth of the objects of the natural sciences, makes for their superior value.

2) Not only in how something is known is there value for a science, but also in that which is known. One learns something about extension, movement or space and he has gained knowledge of valuable things, surely. But one learns about the intricacies of sensations, judgments or the acts of the will and he has learned about things which are “incomparably superior in beauty and sublimity”. As proof of this Brentano points to how great these phenomena appear in the most intricate realizations of the major scientists and artists, as well as in the righteousness of the virtuous man (PES, 29).

3) Finally, all that is proper (*Eigen*) to the one who investigates has more value than what is foreign (*Fremde*) to him. So it is, says Brentano, that each of us is more interested in the research of our

culture than in that of foreign people. Now, the phenomena of consciousness are what there is of most proper to everyone. It demarcates what is *ours* from what is not (PES, 29).

These parameters of evaluation – whose presentation here is frankly haphazard – have a broad Aristotelian flavour to it, a trend that Brentano recognizes, pointing to Aristotle’s discussion of the ἀκρίβεια and the nobility of psychology in the opening of *De Anima*. Further, and more importantly, they are all alike in that they establish the *theoretical value* of a science. And yet this is not, Brentano will say, the only way to fare one science against another. Besides those four axes of theoretical value, one can also regard the *practical value* of a science. And in this respect, too, psychology will show to be immensely valuable; even if, as Brentano had suggested at the very beginning of his inquiry into the concept of psychology, it is value in the form of an unfulfilled potential.

4) Brentano goes further, then, in measuring the worth of psychology, by adding that “[e]ven in [the practical] respect there is hardly another branch of science which can be placed on the same level with psychology unless perhaps it is one which merits the same consideration on the grounds that it is an indispensable preparatory step toward the attainment of psychological knowledge.” (PES, 30/15). Psychology, in fact, forms the root of many disciplines whose value to human life is immediately and universally recognized: it is to shed light over the eyes of the artist and nurture the logician in his investigations, so important to all science. Most of all, it is to establish the soil upon which ethics and politics – it provides the basis for “a theory of education [*Erziehungslehre*], both of the individual and of society [*des Einzelnen wie der Gesellschaft*]” (PES, 30/16) – can be built. How great an advancement came from the applying of physiological expertise to the art of medicine? The same progress, and more, would result from accepting the guidance of psychology in those matters relative to social and political organisms (PES, 31). And just as natural beings are subject to laws of their development, that we can grasp through the means of the natural sciences, so can psychology predict the – more intricate, surely, but still lawful – development of spirits (PES, 32).

5) One last factor must be considered which contributes to the value of psychology: “the specific and incomparable interest which psychology possesses insofar as it instructs us about immortality [...]. The question concerning the hope of a hereafter and our participation in a more perfect state of the world falls to psychology.” (PES, 37/19, translation modified) Insofar as psychology might be able to establish anything in this regard, it results in an unparalleled increase in its worth, both in a theoretical sense, as it would ascertain something even more perennial than any law of physics,



and in a practical one, as the belief in immortality – so many moral philosophers have argued – would radically change the path of our earthly actions.

Now, someone who stood before such an optimistic depiction of a thriving and fruitful psychology while at the same time having in mind its current state of development (current in 1874, that is, though arguably in 2020 as well) would probably not be able to shake off the feeling that something was missing. And indeed, as Brentano will say, replying to those very concerns with which he had begun his inquiry – that “no branch of science that has borne less fruit for our knowledge of nature and life” (PES, 5/2) – it is reasonable enough to wonder whether psychology can live up to this ideal. Psychology has indeed accomplished little of its potential.

At this point, Brentano resumes, almost in their exact formulation, the argument he had put forward in his lecture on despondency. The doubt regarding the development of psychology will receive the very answer: “the reply to this objection is not far to seek,” says Brentano, “[it] is revealed by a simple consideration of the position which psychology occupies in the series of sciences” (PES, 32-3/17, translation modified). And again, after presenting an almost identical overview of the compared history of sciences, showing them to be distributed in a scale; forming a chain from the lowest to the highest degree of dependence; including mathematics, physics, chemistry, physiology and psychology; with psychology as the latest link of the chain (PES, 33-4); Brentano concludes that only now, once all the underlying conditions have been met, can we expect a corresponding development for psychology. Again, the underdevelopment of psychology appears as the necessary result of this dependence and, thus – as Brentano had already insisted in *Entmutigung* –, as a historical fact. (PES, 35).

But now, with the developing of chemistry and physiology, we have all the resources we need in order to understand psychical phenomena in all their complexity. This is the moment to dedicate ourselves to “the most important task of our time [*die wesentlichste Aufgabe unserer Zeit*]”, namely the “investigation of psychological laws” and the “methodological inquiries” of psychology; so that we “may, therefore, confidently hope [*mit aller Zuversicht hoffen*] that psychology will not always lack both inner development and useful applications”. (PES, 35/18). Here is the project of the *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*.

The conclusion, therefore, of Brentano’s establishment of the proper concept of psychology is the reiteration of the promise and the value of psychological research. Psychology appears once more, just like in *Entmutigung*, as a late bloomer – and as a science of the future. Finally, at this point, we finish what we had begun with our analysis of Brentano’s inaugural lecture, we come full

circle, and we realize how the whole endeavour of the *Psychology* effectively comes as an answer to those concerns explicitly formulated by Brentano during his discussion of despondency in the domain of philosophy.

### **§23. An answer to the challenges**

A closer look at Brentano's standpoint at the end of his search for the proper concept of psychology will show that he has in fact established all the elements that allow for an answer to those challenges sketched in *Entmutigung* (§9). Let us never forget that, in Brentano's philosophical project, psychology was the central and fundamental branch of philosophy, so that the development of these two disciplines went hand in hand (§7). The possibility of the advancement of psychology, which we can now "confidently hope for", also changes dramatically the image of the future of philosophy itself.

*Ad* (Challenge-4): As we have just seen, Brentano wraps us this first chapter of the *Psychology* by renewing the stakes of the bet regarding the value of psychology. Psychology had been historically delayed but not only is it the case that all the conditions are ready for its development but also the work of laying down the method that is now being carried out shall clear the way for its renewing impact on human development; it is just a beginning, but one which is an "indisputable sign of the possibility of a fuller development which will some day bear abundant fruit" (PES, 3/xxvi).

*Ad* (Challenge-3): Brentano has systematically corrected those mistaken concepts of psychology that either included as part of it tasks that could not be carried out by means of experience or that, on the contrary, left out important and feasible investigations.

*Ad* (Challenge-2): Brentano has gathered psychologists around a shared concept of their discipline. Not only has he settled the question of modern psychology as regards the tradition of psychology, down to its beginnings in Ancient Greece. More importantly, he has overcome conflict and philosophical strife and has substituted to it, as he proposed right on at the preface, "a common subordination to truth," (PES, 3/xxvi) "a single unified science of psychology in place of the many psychologies we now have" (PES, 2/xxv)

*Ad* (Challenge-1): Brentano has tied his concept of psychology perfectly to that which was given in experience as the domain of mental phenomena – a common, solid ground that every

researcher can recognize and rely upon to establish basic, fundamental truths. He has found that “core of generally accepted truths”, finally achieving in psychology that “unity of conviction” (PES, 2/xxv) that had been found already in physics, chemistry or mathematics.

The hopeful picture of this nascent philosophy is the exact opposite of the one Brentano examined in his lecture on despondency (§6). Philosophy is no longer a battlefield but a “Temple of Friendship” (*Tempel der Freundschaft*) (GPhN, 83); it is not a graveyard but a laboratory; not an inhuman endeavour but one which, on the contrary, employs only human powers and all of the human powers; philosophy is not sterile but ready to blossom with both theoretical and practical fruits.

And still, it would be really naïve to believe Brentano’s job to be done. In fact, what he has achieved at this point is nothing more than an indication of the direction in which the answer to those challenges can be properly worked out. The hard work itself lies ahead of him: the actual development of the method corresponding to this new empirical psychology; the method with the help of which its theoretical basis can be laid down and from which the practical fruits will eventually grow.

In this sense, one could say that what was presented in this first chapter of *PES* was a *program*, whose goal is to counter despondency, to block the menaces imposing themselves upon psychology and to provide an answer to the challenges faced by philosophy. And yet, it remains precisely that – a programmatic chapter. It presents a thoughtful solution but, so far, it is not much more than a promise. We had said, at the beginning of our analyses (§11), that the *first step* towards the development, in psychology, of a method according to nature was finding the right concept with which to properly understand that domain. This much Brentano has accomplished and now, as he himself will promptly recognize, begins the development of the method itself.

This is, in fact, exactly what is going to happen in the following chapters of the *Psychology*, which deal with the kind of experience constituting the foundations of psychological knowledge, the limitations of psychological perception, the artificial means with which to overcome these limitations and, in general, the procedures involved in establishing the fundamental laws of empirical psychology. This internal architecture of *PES* is not gratuitous. It is rather a near perfect illustration of that methodological principle of Brentano, and of Aristotle before him: first of all, get to know your subject-matter; then, work the method with which to tackle it.

But this second move, if it begins immediately after the end of the first chapter of the 1874 *Psychology* – in the next pages of the book, indeed –, will not be completed until almost the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, this is the same move, so widely discussed by disciples and commentators of Brentano, that leads from the first, unified presentation of a psychology from an empirical standpoint to the later, more complicated presentation, according to which it is necessary to distinguish two major branches of psychology – *descriptive* and *genetic* psychology. We can see now that we are getting closer to our explicit purpose of investigating *description* as it is employed by Brentano. Indeed, we now must part ways with our guiding thread so far, Brentano's 1874 *Durchbruchswerk*. That is because we must finally focus our investigations *not upon the whole of the methodological solutions* that are going to be developed to tackle this new concept of empirical psychology, but *to a specific, special part of it*: the method of what Brentano will call, of course, *descriptive* psychology.

#### **§24. *The birthplace of description?***

There is a question lurking in the background, of course, since we first identified Brentano's move of establishing a psychology from an empirical standpoint with the beginning of his employment of description: is it really the case that descriptive psychology is already there in the *Psychology* of 1874? and is it already distinguished there from its famous counterpart, genetic psychology? The long debates on how much and what exactly changed in Brentano's project of psychology after 1874; on whether descriptive psychology and genetic psychology should be understood as different sciences or as parts of the same science; on what makes up for this problematic unity; and on whether there is a change in the relative position of psychology inside Brentano's system of sciences – they all raise relevant questions, the answers to which it would be impossible to present here. Most pressingly, one could ask whether, in Brentano's Würzburg and early Vienna period, he already had clarity about the relative independence and the particularity of descriptive psychology – thus discouraging the talk of a significant break between the *Psychology* of 1874 and the later writings – or whether this independence came later – together, indeed, with the relativization of the famous thesis according to which the method of psychology is the same as that of the natural sciences.

This last debate finds a careful reconstruction in (Fréchette 2012), where we see how it is usually taken for granted – starting already from Kraus's suggestions in 1919, through Bergmann's

influential account in 1966, and up to Mauro Antonelli's more recent contribution in 2008 – that only in his Vienna period did Brentano come to a “clear realization of the importance of this separation” and that “in the *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* Brentano had not carried out this distinction” (Kraus 1919, 21, apud Fréchette 2012, 2)<sup>31</sup>.

Fréchette himself holds the contrary thesis and convincingly claims that “Brentano already had, as a young Professor in Würzburg, the distinction between the descriptive and genetic directions of research in psychology”; that “in Brentano's philosophy the approach of psychological description remains constant” (Fréchette 2012, 1); and – even more emphatically – that “already during his Würzburg years, Brentano had the concept of descriptive psychology” (Fréchette 2012, 15).

Still, even if one were to reject Fréchette's revision of the traditional view on the matter, the fact is that even the proponents of a later and more radical separation between descriptive and genetic psychology cannot deny an important *continuity* between the ground-breaking psychology of 1874 and Brentano's more mature presentations of the subject. On the one hand, it is clear that Brentano did eventually prefer to present psychology in two separate branches – something he had not done in *PES* – thus pointing to the strategical importance of a certain separation of tasks; on the other hand, however, it is undeniable that he did carry out significant descriptive psychological investigations already in *PES*. What is more, it is probable that he was aware of the specificity of these preliminary, clarifying, descriptive tasks when contrasted with the establishing of the complex laws of succession of mental phenomena, the latter ultimately dependent upon physiological structures.

Evidence for this view could be found, for instance, when Brentano in 1890-1, reflects upon the unfortunate confusion of descriptive and genetic tasks: “instead of dividing psychognostic questions from questions pertaining to genetic psychology, psychologists, up to the present day, usually mix up these questions in manifold ways.” (DP, 6/8). The way Brentano speaks, it is suggested that he himself is not one to fall prey to this specific mistake. Sure, this is not definite proof, but, if Brentano believed this was a mistake in which he had incurred before, it would be awkward for him to raise this critique without mentioning his previous positions (either to openly

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<sup>31</sup> Spiegelberg even speaks of a reversal in the relative position of genetic and descriptive psychology in the passage from *PES* to the later works: “This is the beginning of a reversal in the relative position of these sciences, under which a “pure” psychology, i.e., a psychology free from non-psychological admixtures, will try to supply its own basis and indirectly one of the bases for sciences like psychophysics and physiological psychology, which thus far seemed to take precedence. Psychology no longer takes its cue from the other natural sciences; it establishes itself as an autonomous enterprise, if not as a separate one.” (Spiegelberg 1994, 35)

correct himself or to suggest that this was not exactly what he had in mind). Had he incurred in such a mistake in the 1874 *Psychology*, it is much likely that he would bring up the subject and insist on the correction of his former view. Rather, what it seems to suggest is that in the *Psychology* he had not *mixed up* these kinds of tasks, but simply presented them together as part of one and the same development of psychology.

And this seems to be confirmed by a careful reading of *PES*, where Brentano shows clear signs of having in mind the separation and the order of the tasks to be carried out by the empirical psychologist. To give but one example, in Chapter III of the first book, where he spells out the need to derive the laws of succession of phenomena, he begins by saying that “[o]ne task to which psychologists must first devote themselves is the determination of those characteristics which are common to all mental phenomena” (*PES*, 62/33), and that

Aus der Betrachtung der allgemeinen Eigentümlichkeiten wird sich das Einteilungsprinzip der psychischen Phänomene ergeben, und daran sofort die Bestimmung ihrer Grundklassen knüpfen, wie die natürliche Verwandtschaft sie fordert. Denn ehe dies geschehen, wird es unmöglich sein, in der Erforschung der psychischen Gesetze, die ja größtenteils nur für die eine oder andere Gattung von Phänomenen gelten, weitere Fortschritte zu machen. (*PES*, 62-3)

Ultimately, even Kraus himself, in spite of being a partisan of the late emancipation thesis, is the one to suggest that, if the actual separation between descriptive and genetic psychology was there in *PES*, Brentano had already worked out a *separation of tasks*. That had been pointed by Kraus in many of his comments to the second edition of *PES*<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> As it is well known, Kraus – who Husserl once called “eine Art Torquemada” of Brentanism (*Hua Dok III/4*, 82) – carried out this editorial work with a heavy hand, adding to his edition of the *Psychology* a long introduction and editor’s notes whose clear intent was to reinforce – or, when that could not be achieved, simply to force – the unity in Brentano’s thought by integrating the earlier efforts of 1874 with the developments present in his later writings. Kraus’s whole editorial effort is better seen as lending a hand to ensure the systematicity and homogeneity of Brentano’s corpus and, as such, is far away from the high, impartial editorial standards of contemporary academia. Not so easy to tell is whether Kraus’s interventions would be at odds with Brentano’s own beliefs regarding the job of historians of philosophy. What is certain is that Brentano thought of the history of philosophy as a job for philosophers, more than professional historians or philologists. For him, “the thought-structure of a great thinker is like the organism of a living being, where each part depends on the other in its constitution” (*AW*, 15). As he tries to put back together a lost organism from the remaining part, the philosopher, just like the palaeontologist, must use whatever pieces he can find but also fill in the gaps to recreate the unified structure that is ultimately lost. Kraus’s bad philology is not reckless, but purposeful. He approaches Brentano like Brentano approached Aristotle – and, as we also known, he had for that the blessing of his former teacher himself. Now, it is inevitable to go beyond Kraus’s editions. They have done no great service to the critical fortune of Brentano’s works and have likely, in the long run, deprived us from a better understanding of his thought. Still, when it comes to philological degeneration, it is to wonder whether Kraus’s textually unfaithful but loyal approach to Brentano is really that far worse than a certain modern scholarship, faithful to the text but quick to sell Brentano’s philosophy short to the latest analytic trend.

And such a view is corroborated, needless to say, by Fréchette, who says that “the stages of descriptive psychology that Brentano discusses in his 1887 lectures partially agree with the method of the empirical sciences, and they also come to the fore in the 1874 *Psychology*, though in a somewhat different form.” (Fréchette 2012, 8) To support his claim, Fréchette brings to our attention an 1875 manuscript – only one year after the *Psychology*, that is – in which Brentano very explicitly distinguished between two sorts of tasks to be carried out in the analysis of presentations: the task of describing them; and the task of establishing the laws of their origin and succession (Fréchette 2012, 9). It seems to support very clearly the idea that description immediately begins to grow out of the original move of empirical psychology in 1874.

All of this comes to show that, regardless of the more specific debate on when or why the separation between descriptive and genetic psychology took hold of Brentano’s treatments of the subject, regardless of what exactly changed in the process or of what sparked such a change, *our general claim remains valid*: there is a continuous move that leads from the establishing of the concept of an empirical psychology to the working out of descriptive and genetic psychology as the relatively independent, theoretically distinct approaches to carrying out the investigation of the domain of mental phenomena.

It might as well be a crooked development – one that would eventually include the reevaluation of important methodological commitments –, but the fact is that the same impulse runs through the establishment of a psychology as science of mental phenomena in 1874 and the specific theoretical and methodological developments of the later years. As we have said before, those later developments come to answer a question that had originated already in the second chapter of *PES*: how does the psychologist explore this new domain that has been secured? What is the proper method with which to tackle investigation into this subject-matter?

Thus, regardless of how one feels about the “emancipation problem” – to use Fréchette’s expression –, regardless of whether Brentano became aware only later of the particularity of descriptive psychological tasks or whether this implied a break with anything like a *Einheitswissenschaft* project, the fact is that, emancipated or not, descriptive psychology, in the sense of employing description to carry out research into mental phenomena, had been born well before its explicit separation in the late 1880’s. This is precisely what should become clear with the *second part* of this work. We want it to be shown exactly *how* descriptive psychology develops as the necessary theoretical configuration with which to investigate the domain of that psychology from an empirical standpoint of 1874. Descriptive psychology is the way forward into that territory whose discovery we can trace back to the first chapter of the *Psychology*. In this sense, at least,

we can say with confidence that the 1874 is the birthplace of descriptive psychology, if not the moment of its emancipation. This is also why, in order to understand description as a method in Brentano's psychology, it was important to analyse carefully the inaugural moment of empirical psychology in that text.

At this point, then, we begin to see more clearly what was accomplished in the *first part*. Let us look back at the question that brought us this far. We said we would search, there in the 1874 *Psychology*, for *the reasons that led Brentano to employ description*. Now, it is true that we have reached the end of the first part of the investigation and this hypothesis, set up in §3 has not been really justified. What has been accomplished instead is that we have shown the motives behind Brentano's *establishing of a new concept of psychology*. It is left to show how it is that *description itself springs out of this new concept, as the method appropriate to it*. Our hypothesis – whose correctness nevertheless becomes more tangible now – is thus based on the idea that this new concept of psychology that Brentano uncovered effectively *calls* for description as the method with which to explore this newly conceptualized domain of objects.

Once this second step of our investigation is accomplished, in the next part of this work, once it is shown that the methodological structure of description is deeply rooted in the concept of empirical psychology uncovered in *PES*, that it responds to the intrinsic features of its subject-matter, and that it is the inevitable methodical correspondent to such a concept of psychology, then indeed we can show that the motives we found determining the establishing of that new conception of psychology *also* determine the goal and motivation for the deploying of description – they will then appear as the ultimate answer to *why it is that Brentano needed to employ description*, the guiding question of the first part of the work.

Description, as it will later consolidate in descriptive psychology, can therefore be seen as the result of a *methodological unfolding* of that concept of psychology first uncovered by Brentano in 1874. In this sense, the specific question that the second part of our work has to investigate is *how* description is employed in the exploration of that new territory of psychology. Only there will be a caveat, the reason for which was discussed above: the methodological unfolding of the concept of empirical psychology actually follows in a twofold direction. Both genetic and descriptive psychology are methods appropriate to this domain of research, delimitating two different directions of investigation: on the one hand, pure psychology; on the other, an interrelational, mixed science, which considers mental phenomena together with their physical support.



In this sense, the opening lines of 1890-1 on *psychognosy* or *descriptive psychology* are extremely telling:

Psychology is the science of people's inner life, that is, the part of life which is captured in inner perception. It aims at exhaustively determining (if possible) the elements of human consciousness and the ways in which they are connected, and at describing the causal conditions which the particular phenomena are subjected to. The first is the subject matter of psychognosy, the second that of genetic psychology. (DP, 1/3)

From one and the same domain of investigation, Brentano detaches neatly the two tasks that will correspond to the two disciplines he is now distinguishing. This distinction will become clearer later on but, for the moment, what is important to keep in mind is that both are psychologies from an empirical standpoint. Both are carried out under that concept secured in *PES*, and both were already operational in that work, if not explicitly distinguished. Finally, they are both indispensable for the reconstruction of psychology and for the renewing function this discipline is to play in the very development of mankind. There is no such thing here as one being more important than the other – indeed, could there ever be such a naïve comparison between sciences? –, even if one remains more fundamental, having priority over the other, a point which will also be discussed in due time.

And still, if they are both crucial parts of Brentano's psychology, and equally important, we will nevertheless add to the chorus of commentators who tend to consider descriptive psychology almost to the oblivion of its less philosophical counterpart. The cut in our case is inevitable, since our goal in this work is, of course, to understand the more specific role of *description* as a method in philosophy; but the road not taken of Brentanian psychology is certainly worth of more attention and some dedicated scholarship.

## **PART II – HOW TO EMPLOY DESCRIPTION? OR AN EXPLODED VIEW OF DESCRIPTIVE PSYCHOLOGY**

nonne vides, croceos ut Tmolus odores,  
India mittit ebur, molles sua tura Sabaei,  
at Chalybes nudi ferrum, viroshaque Pontus  
castorea, Eliadum palmas Epiros equarum?  
continuo has leges aeternaque foedera certis  
imposuit natura locis

– Virgil, *Georgics*

### *Intermezzo*

We have seen already how the Brentano Defense – that move in *PES* whose objective was the clarification and the refinement of the conception of a psychology of mental phenomena – had secured a perfectly fitting, purely empirical concept for psychology. But in order to properly live up to those challenges faced by philosophy, and in order to really put psychology in the right course of its ascending phase, it is not enough to have settled the question of the proper concept of psychology (this was in fact only the first step, §11); it is also necessary to show how it is that one can devise, under this conception of psychology, the proper method of psychological research – it is necessary to show *how one can effectively explore this domain*, how one can work the land and plough the field. That is the subject of the second part of our investigation. The employment of description, as we shall see, is in the realization of this endeavour.

More specifically, it will hopefully be clear that the very specific conceptualization of the domain of psychology whose comprehension was the result of the first part makes it both possible and necessary the implementation of something like a *descriptive* psychology. It is in this sense that we have spoken of a *methodological unfolding* of description, as the development of method the appropriate, required method with which to tackle that recently conceptualized domain of investigation.

On the one hand, then, without that first step, without the correct identification and interpretation of the domain, the method could not but develop in the wrong direction. On the other hand, the method itself must follow the theoretical commitments that we have already found in the securing of the domain of psychology: the reliance on the experience of mental phenomena; the taking notice of the special kind of phenomena given in inner perception and the special sort of guarantee it provides; the independence of this field of phenomena from metaphysical considerations, etc. What will be built under the banner of descriptive psychology, and what we will examine in detail, *will spring from the essential features discovered as characterizing the domain of that psychology as science of mental phenomena.*

The unity of the two parts of this investigation, therefore, correspond broadly to this unity between the objectual domain of psychology and the descriptive method as the method appropriate to it. Because of that, the second part, unlike the first, will no longer follow a specific line of reasoning – as, in the first part, we followed Brentano's analysis of the motives leading to the delimitation and conceptualization of an empirical psychology. It will rather present, in a synoptic view, the

unfolding of the *multi-layered structure* that constitutes the descriptive method in Brentano's psychology.

Differently put, we could say that, in the first part, we have followed Brentano as closely as possible in his critical analysis and his rejection of old concepts of psychology; we have followed him as well as he reached the grounds of a new conceptualization of the discipline, as a psychology from an empirical standpoint. What we will do, now, is the vertical analysis of the methodological edifice that is built upon that ground under the name of descriptive psychology. If the first part was diachronic, the second part is synchronic – it all plays out in a single logical moment.

That is also the reason why (and this is important to keep in mind) we did not attempt any critical assessment of Brentano's moves in the first part; namely, we did not bring up any question regarding many of the bold and controversial claims he advances in that chapter of *PES*, from the historical dynamics of the serial development of sciences, through the distinction between psychological and physical phenomena, and up to the *vexata quaestio* of the immortality of the soul. Let us not forget the target of our inquiries: *not* the Brentanian psychology itself, but *description* as its *natural method*. In other words, what we want to assess is the adequateness of Brentano's method *with regards to* his conception of psychology. It was necessary, therefore, to follow him as faithfully as possible in the latter, so we could now properly evaluate the former.

As we shall see, then, the concept of description in Brentano will appear as this stratified structure, where each of the parts is necessary, and where those that are on top follow the intrinsic features of the lower ones, according to the idea that a method must develop according to the object it is directed to. The lowest strata will be formed precisely by this new domain of objects that has been just established, together with the way it is experienced – in inner perception, with immediate evidence; from these basic layers, it will be shown how Brentano devises a mechanism to extract the truth out of this terrain and to explore this domain; finally, the upper layers represent the tasks and results of the method.

Here again, whenever possible, we will be brief about problems and discussions which are not directly relevant to the functioning of this structure, regardless of how important they are to the understanding of the whole of Brentano's thought or to his posteriority. Since this structure of description crosses many of the central concepts of Brentano's philosophy, trying to analyse and critically measure each one would imply a complete overview of his philosophy. Our goal will remain specific: to emphasize the role of each layer in the assembly of the general structure. Because of that, especially in the first sections, we will be more interested *in how each of these*

*concepts connect to each other*. It will be as if we attempted to present an exploded view of Brentanian descriptive psychology, i.e., a depiction that singles out each component of the general structure in order to better show how each of these concepts fit together and how they can be assembled to function as methodical description (examples of exploded view drawings include some of Da Vinci's manuscripts, patent applications of all kinds of machines or, simply, assembly instructions for any IKEA furniture). At the end, we will finally be in a position to present a critical evaluation, but an evaluation of this *structure* as a whole.

The different nature of this second moment of our inquiry also means that the text of this part will be much more analytic. It could, in principle, be read in any order, not unlike one uses an anatomic atlas; and this regardless of the fact, which should be clear by now, that there is something like a priority of the object (lower strata), from which the methodical steps follows (higher strata). As far as possible, whenever the analysis of one level pointed to a specific discussion in another level, there is an explicit reference in the text.

Since we believe – as it is important to remind – that this methodological unfolding of description begins right at the second chapter of the first book of the 1874 *Psychology*, and continues at least up to Brentano's lectures on descriptive psychology in 1887-189, our *corpus* will also be significantly expanded for this second part. Unlike our procedure in the first part, here it will not be the case of reconstructing the argument of any single text of Brentano. On the contrary, all those works of what we could call the “middle period” – roughly from 1874 to the 1904 reistic turn – will be considered; and we will not pay any attention to the differences, minor but certainly present, between the positions advanced in each of them. In very specific passages of the argument, we will recur to texts from later periods, but only where we believe they do not express points on which Brentano's opinions have changed considerably, and thus can be used not to contradict but to support and clarify what has been established in the main *corpus*.

## CHAPTER 1: The lower strata

### §25. *Object: mental phenomena*

The first level of the multi-layered structure of descriptive psychology is of course that of the very domain of objects (*Gegenstandsgebiet*) of this newly understood psychology. We have said much about it already: the core of Brentano's move in the initial chapter of the *Psychology*, analyzed in the first part of these investigations, was precisely the correct conceptualization of the domain of psychology, but it is nevertheless important to establish more explicitly what it is to speak of *the domain of objects* of descriptive psychology.

What is, in general, the object of a science? A usual way of putting it, that Brentano seems to approve, is that "the object of a science is characterized as that object whose laws such a science determines directly and explicitly" (PES, 139/76). And what could the object of psychology be? The answer is, at least at first sight, quite straightforward: the "proper object [*eigentlich Gegenstand*] of psychology," says Brentano, are "mental phenomena in the sense of real states" (PES, 140/77) – i.e., mental phenomena insofar as they present themselves as truly existing, in inner perception, as the secondary objects of consciousness. This is the answer Brentano has given in 1874 and the answer he has never ceased to give when it came to the question of the object of psychology. And yet this answer, though straightforward, calls for important clarifications.

#### *i) The object of psychology and the object of descriptive psychology*

The first thing one could note is that, in *PES*, Brentano was concerned with the object of psychology in general, not with descriptive psychology, in particular. What happens, then, when one considers the internal division between descriptive and genetic psychology? We have said already that both descriptive and genetic psychology should be understood as parts of this broader science of mental phenomena (§24). In fact, what happens is that they carry out different tasks of investigation relating to that very same domain of mental phenomena; it is not in what they relate to, but in how they relate to mental phenomena that we will find the difference between them (see also §41). We can, therefore, take Brentano's answer as valid for descriptive psychology. In fact, in the actual lectures on descriptive psychology in 1890-1, he will take as his starting point the very same characterization of its subject matter: descriptive psychology will deal with "the part of life which is captured in inner perception" (DP, 1/3).

*ii) The definition of psychology as the doctrine of the soul in the 1887-91 lectures*

And still, it is true that this is not the only characterization of the object of descriptive psychology in his lectures on the subject. What he actually says there, in the very same passage quoted above, is that “psychology is the life of the soul [*Seelenleben*] of men, that is, the part of life which is captured in inner perception” (DP, 1/3, trans. modified). Now, is Brentano here going against all the hard work he has been through in *PES* in order to prove the independence of the domain of psychology – understood as the science of mental phenomena – from metaphysical assumptions?

If we consider carefully what Brentano was trying to establish in his 1874 work, that is certainly not the case. As Brentano himself insisted, the minimal concept of psychology put forth in *PES* – the concept of a psychology as science of mental phenomena – could be picked up by any psychologist, including, that is, a psychologist like Brentano himself, who ultimately holds that psychology *is, in fact*, the doctrine of the soul. What we have here is not a contradiction of that minimal concept but rather an added level of interpretation of the psychologist’s domain of research. That the soul is actually perceived in inner perception as a substantial substrate always has been Brentano’s belief (see note to §19). It is just that the justification of this lies beyond the minimal content that needs to be accepted as the neutral domain of an empirical psychology and as something that could be shared by all modern psychologists in their common investigation.

Still, this does not mean that a psychologist must always carry out his investigation under this minimal concept alone. In Brentano’s lectures on descriptive psychology, he is not presenting a shared program for psychologists to follow, but the results of his own investigations – building, as they should, also upon his own, broader philosophical beliefs. This is a further *Begriffsbestimmung* of psychology, one that does not contradict the minimalistic one of *PES*; but one that does not stop, either, at the point of strategical neutrality that was crucial to Brentano’s goals in that work. None of this changes the fact – and this is the essential point – that, insofar as psychology is the science of that which can be captured in inner perception, all those laws of descriptive psychology that Brentano investigates in the lectures could still be carried out under the metaphysically neutral concept of *PES*.

*iii) Proper and improper objects of descriptive psychology*

Brentano said, in the formulation quoted above, that the *proper* object of psychology were mental phenomena in the sense of real states. What does this mean? In fact, mental phenomena as really existing states, presented in inner perception, are the primary objects of descriptive psychology – that to which it relates in the first place. Beyond that, however, other sorts of objects enter into the consideration of the psychologist insofar as they are *relative to* the first, proper objects that are mental phenomena. In this sense we can speak of an extended domain of improper (*uneigentlich*) objects of psychology, which includes both physical and psychical phenomena as intentional objects<sup>33</sup>. This means that the descriptive psychologist must investigate both the seeing and what is seen; the presenting and what is presented; the love as well as what is loved, and so on.

This broadens a lot the scope of the investigations of the descriptive psychologist. It allows him to carry out detailed research, as Brentano actually did, into physical phenomena as objects of perception, into the objects of evaluations and into the objects of judgments. It is what allows for the role of descriptive psychology in forming the basis of disciplines as diverse as ethics, logics and aesthetics (§42). And if one is concerned, instead, that this might endanger the unity of the domain of descriptive psychology or of its research, Brentano promptly reassures us that, in spite of it being possible to distinguish between the real part of the mental phenomena and its object as the non-real correlate, the investigation must always be carried out *integrally*, into one and the other as correlates.

Indeed, Brentano is very clear in the notes to his 1888-9 lectures on descriptive psychology: “[i]t would be a mistake to believe that, because our phenomena are partly real, partly non-real, it is possible to divide [the subject matter] such as to talk first of the ones and then of the others. The knowledge of the correlatives is one.” (DP, 130/138) And a few paragraphs later, Brentano insists: “[i]f we want to describe a psychical activity, we will have to describe its particular object and the manner in which the activity refers to it” (DP, 131-2/140). In fact, as we will see, this somewhat complicated unity of the act and its intentional correlate is what makes mental phenomena unique, and what determines, by its turn, the internal unity of the domain of descriptive psychology.

#### *iv) Further determinations regarding mental phenomena*

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<sup>33</sup> On Brentano’s ontology and the difference between the so-called *realia* and *irrealia*, (Chrudzimski, 2004) is the classic reference. See also, more recently, (Taieb, forthcoming), for a comparison between Brentano’s ontology and that of his successors.



In the first chapter of the 1874 *Psychology*, whose argument was reconstructed in the first part, we have seen how Brentano painstakingly establishes the domain of psychology to be that of the phenomena of consciousness. But if the delimitation of psychology as the science of mental phenomena had indeed been established very early, the fact is that this actual domain of the phenomena of consciousness, which appear as being connected by numerous analogies and affinities, has not been given a technical, secure confirmation of its unity. Following its experiential recognition by modern psychologists of all sorts, and after the proper conceptualization that was achieved in the first chapter, it is now necessary to provide this domain with a solid foundation with which to justify its unity.

As soon as Brentano sets out to develop the method of his new psychology, therefore, one of the first tasks to which he dedicates himself is that of clarifying and securing the very notion of mental phenomenon, according to which the domain of empirical psychology – and, as we have seen, of descriptive psychology – is to be understood. To this end, the discussion of mental phenomena that has served as a basis for Brentano’s argument in the first chapter was not enough. It was necessary to “establish more firmly and more exactly [*fester und genauer bestimmen*] what was only mentioned in passing [*flüchtig angedeutet*] before” (PES, 109/59). Indeed, if Brentano could gather universal agreement around the recognition of the domain of psychical phenomena as the subject-matter of psychology, the fact is that there could still be much confusion and lack of clarity as to its correct border and its exact signification (PES, 109/59). If psychology was to be the science of mental phenomena, it was important to understand *precisely* what a mental phenomenon is and so a more exact conceptual determination becomes necessary (on ‘*Begriffsbestimmung*’, see §39)

This is, of course, the problematic that, in *PES*, leads to the question of the distinguishing features of mental phenomena and the arch-famous passage on intentionality, from whose reading we shall be spared. The many difficulties relating to the precise understanding of the intentional relation must not bother us here; what is important is that the recognition of the intentional object always present in mental phenomena provides Brentano with an exclusive and general characteristic with which to demarcate the domain of psychology.

As Brentano will put it later, in the lectures: “the peculiarity which, above all, is generally characteristic of consciousness, is that it shows always and everywhere, i.e. in each of its separable parts, a certain kind of relation relating a subject to an object. This relation is also referred to as ‘intentional relation’.” (DP, 21/23) And again, in a different set of notes: “[t]he realities which fall

into our perception are psychical, i.e. they display an intentional relation, a relation to an immanent object.” (DP, 131/139). These passages make it clear, as we have seen already (§16), that Brentano’s notion of mental *phenomenon* has nothing of an opposition to what is real. Quite on the contrary, mental phenomena are realities, existing in themselves, with non-real correlates as the objects towards which they are intentionally related; they are the *facts* of the domain of consciousness which the descriptive psychology must investigate.

Now, what is most important for us about this peculiarity of mental phenomena is that, since this feature “is something (a) generally and (b) exclusively characteristic of consciousness” (DP, 21), it can be used to set the boundaries straight and cleanly between mental and physical phenomena, thus securing the unity of the domain of descriptive psychological research.

What is more, the separation between psychical and physical phenomena immediately leads us to the next element of our multi-level structure: inner perception. We had said, indeed, that the proper objects of psychology are mental phenomena *as they present themselves as truly existing, in inner perception, as the secondary objects of consciousness*. These further determinations, regarding the way in which mental phenomena are given in experience, will belong to the next level of our vertical structure.

### **§26. Source: inner perception**

The same observation is valid here that was put forth in the previous section: there are many important and well-known discussions on Brentano’s concept of inner perception and his notion of evidence. Firmly following the goal of our investigations, what is important for us is not to discuss the intricacies – and difficulties – of these concepts by themselves, but to understand exactly how they assemble into the structure of descriptive psychology. In this sense, we could say our investigation will dwell upon the concept of inner perception *as the source of empirical psychology and of descriptive psychology in particular* (PES, 40).

Indeed, besides their being directed at an object or having an intentional correlate, there is another characteristic, intimately connected with this first, that sets apart mental phenomena – the objects of descriptive psychology – from physical phenomena. It is the fact that mental phenomena are given in that special sort of experience (*Erfahrung*) Brentano calls *inner perception* (*innere*

*Wahrnehmung*). Not only what is grasped as the object of descriptive psychology but also *how* it is grasped is an important part of its theoretical structure.

Now, the first mistake one should avoid is that of thinking of inner perception as a sort of reflective *observation*. Indeed, Brentano goes off his path to distinguish inner perception from inner observation, as that was a prominent method proposed by psychologists at the time<sup>34</sup>. Inner perception then has nothing to do with a special sort of attention one would need to direct towards one's mental acts. While attention will play an important role in descriptive psychology, it is not that of being the source of knowledge about psychical phenomena. In fact, as Brentano says, it is not only unnecessary to direct attention towards mental acts in order to "perceive internally"; it is also impossible to do so – "it is a universally valid psychological law," he says, "that we can never focus our *attention* upon the object of inner perception" (PES, 41/22)

Quite to the contrary, moreover, what is needed to perceive our mental phenomena is to direct our attention elsewhere:

Nur während man mit seiner Aufmerksamkeit einem anderen Gegenstande zugewandt ist, geschieht es, daß auch die auf ihn bezüglichen psychischen Vorgänge nebenbei zur Wahrnehmung gelangen. So kann die Beobachtung der psychischen Phänomene in der äußern Wahrnehmung, indem sie für die Erkenntnis der Natur uns Anhaltspunkte gibt, zugleich ein Mittel psychischer Erkenntnis werden. (PES, 41)

Inner perception is no self-observation. It is rather the result of the very particular structure of consciousness itself. This is, indeed, another feature which is peculiar to consciousness, and is intrinsically connected to the intentional relation (DP, 22/25; PES, 128/70). In consciousness, Brentano says, there is an

untrennbaren Verbindung einer primären und concomitierenden psychischen Beziehung. Jedes Bewußtsein, primär auf was immer für ein Objekt gerichtet, geht nebenher auf sich selbst. Im Vorstellen der Farbe also zugleich ein Vorstellen dieses Vorstellens. (DP, 22/25)

On other occasions, Brentano would refer to this incidental, concomitant, accompanying or collateral – *nebenbei* – psychical relation in Aristotelian terms, as perception *ἐν παρέργῳ* (e.g., PES, 185/102; DP 133/141). In the same mental phenomena – for instance, in seeing something – not only does this mental act have the object that is seen as its primary object, but, in a collateral

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<sup>34</sup> Lange's *History of Materialism*, – which is quoted by Brentano on this regard and which, in later editions, in turn, quotes Brentano's *Psychology* precisely on the same subject – provides a general overview of how self-observation was both employed and criticized at the time, see Lange 1887, 685ff.

relation, it also has itself as its *secondary object* (see also PES, 179-80/98). It is in this sense that it was said above that psychological phenomena constitute the objectual domain of psychology.

From this twofold structure of mental phenomena, from this “characteristic fusion [*eigentümliche Verschmelzung*] of the accompanying presentation with its object” (PES, 183/100) will the third particular feature of mental phenomena: “its immediate, infallible evidence [*unmittelbare, untrüglich Evidenz*]” (PES 128/70).

But in order to understand exactly how this immediate evidence follows from the structure of inner perception it will be necessary to understand something more about those notions implied in this idea an immediate evidence, which is infallible. It is necessary to dig deeper here, since we are opening up problems that will be central to our undertaking, namely to understand how it is that the psychologist can *explore* this domain of mental phenomena, *harvesting* from this domain the fundamental laws of descriptive psychology.

### ***§27. Source: inner perception as a form of judgment***

According to Brentano, “when we say that mental phenomena are those which are apprehended by means of inner perception, we say that their perception is immediately evident” (PES, 128/70). Now, the first thing one should keep in mind when Brentano speaks of immediate evidence as a mark of this domain of objects of mental phenomena, and as the mark of inner perception as the source of descriptive psychology, is that evidence is a concept that belongs already to the level of logic or, to say the same, it belongs together with those concepts such as judgments, knowledge and truth.

Inner perception, we thus realize, cannot be simply a kind of accompanying presentation; it is always accompanied as well by a sort of knowledge – a further stratum in that specific sort of fusion (*Verschmelzung*) that is characteristic of consciousness with its object (PES, 196): “[w]henever a mental act is the object of an accompanying inner cognition,” says Brentano, “it contains itself in its entirety as presented and known, in addition to its reference to a primary object. (PES, 196/107).<sup>35</sup> Not only is there an intimate connection between a psychological act and the

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<sup>35</sup> In fact, a mental act can also be the further object of an act of emotion: “every mental act, even the simplest has four different aspects under which it may be considered. It may be considered as a presentation of its primary object, as when the act in which we perceive a sound is considered as an act of hearing; however, it may also be considered as a presentation of itself, as a cognition of itself, and as a feeling toward itself.” (PES, 218-9/119). This is the basis

accompanying presentation of it in inner perception, then; there is also, grounded on the former, a knowledge of it. When we internally perceive some object, we do not merely have an image of them, we *perceive them as existing* – we *affirm them*, as Brentano will say. To see a colour or to hear a sound is not merely to have a presentation (*Vorstellung*) of the primary object and a presentation of the mental act itself as the secondary object; it is already to know that the latter exists. What a careful consideration of inner perception reveals, then, is that it is already an “affirmation [*Anerkennung*] of the mental phenomenon which is present in inner consciousness” (PES, 201/110).

Now, this could be a perplexing idea, and it is worth to consider it carefully. What Brentano is saying is that inner perception, as it is present throughout the whole of mental life, would already consist in some sort of *judgment* that we continuously carry out as we perceive. This idea seems not only to go against what is traditionally thought of as a judgment, but also against common sense itself. As Brentano himself points out, it is certain that even new-borns have inner perception. Should we believe them to be engaged in acts of judgment? The difficulty in seeing the correctness of this doctrine, says Brentano, lies in the fact that we still rely upon a firmly established but ultimately mistaken theory of judgment. The idea of inner perception as a form of judgment is, therefore, at the heart for the so-called Brentanian “reform” of logic, whose main traits it is necessary now to present, insofar as they will touch upon that immediately evident knowledge of inner perception that is the source of descriptive psychology.

Traditional, scholastic logic had always seen judgments as essentially the matter of attributing a predicate to a subject. According to this theory “every judgement connects a plurality of concepts” (PES, 200/110). But this, says Brentano, is not actually the case: “compounding of subject and predicate *is not at all essential to the nature of judgement*. The distinction between these two elements has to do, rather, with a commonly used form of linguistic expression.” (PES, 200-1/110, highlight mine). Nowhere would this be more explicit than in the existential judgment. According to the traditional theory, this kind of judgment would have to consist in the attributing of the predicate ‘existence’ to a certain object A or, in the case of denial, in the rejection of this predicate to that object. But Brentano casts serious doubts on what could the predicate ‘existence’ be in these cases; and, in the second book of the *Psychology*, where the matter is properly dealt with, he advances further arguments that show that this connecting of the predicate ‘existence’ with an object A presupposes already some kind of acknowledgment of A – an acknowledgement which,

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of the tripartite division of consciousness of Brentano, and of the unitary, but complex character of consciousness (§39).

by its turn, is virtually indistinguishable from the adding of the predicate ‘existence’ to the object A and which must thus be explained in a different way.<sup>36</sup>

Following the argument in a different direction, Brentano also points out that not only is it the case that one does not have to combine presentations in order to form a judgment, but also that one can indeed combine them without judging anything:

offenbar kommt es vor, daß em Denkakt, welcher nichts als ein bloßes Vorstellen ist, eine vollkommen ähnliche, ja eine völlig gleiche Zusammensetzung mehrerer Merkmale zum Inhalte hat, wie diejenige, welche in einem anderen Falle den Gegenstand eines Urteils bildet. Wenn ich sage: irgend ein Baum ist grün, so bildet das Grün als Eigentümlichkeit mit einem Baume verbunden den Inhalt meines Urteils. Es könnte mich aber einer fragen: ist irgend ein Baum rot? und ich, in der Pflanzenwelt nicht genugsam erfahren und uneingedenk der herbstlichen Farbe der Blätter, könnte mich jedes Urteils über die Frage enthalten. Aber dennoch würde ich die Frage verstehen und mir infolgedessen einen roten Baum vorstellen. Das Rot, ganz ähnlich wie zuvor das Grün, als Eigentümlichkeit mit einem Baume verbunden, würde dann den Inhalt einer Vorstellung bilden, mit welcher kein Urteil gegeben wäre. (PES II, 44-5/159)

In other words, and considering both directions of the argument, Brentano is saying that the distinction between a presentation and a judgment is independent from that between a single and a complex presentation. But, in this case, what then is necessary for us to pass from a presentation to a judgment – what is the element that *is* essential to the nature of the judgment?

According to Brentano, this distinctive character is the affirming or denying of simple or complex presentations *in a further, distinctive kind of intentional relation that we call a ‘judgment’*. It is a further element present in the *intimate fusion* of the psychical act; on top, so to speak, of the reference towards the primary object and also of the presentation of the mental act as the secondary object. As Brentano had said before, it is grounded on the previous levels, but adds a further complication to the mental act: it is a “completely new kind of relationship [*eine völlig neue Art*

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<sup>36</sup> “Wäre dieses Urteil [„A ist“] die Anerkennung der Verbindung eines Merkmals „Existenz“ mit „A“, so würde darin einschließlich die Anerkennung jedes einzelnen Elementes der Verbindung, also auch die Anerkennung von A liegen. Wir kämen also an der Annahme einer einschließlichen einfachen Anerkennung von A nicht vorbei. Aber wodurch würde sich diese einfache Anerkennmig von A von der Anerkennung der Verbindung von A mit dem Merkmale „Existenz“, welche in dem Satze „A ist“ ausgesprochen sein soll, unterscheiden? Offenbar in gar keiner Weise.” (PES II, 45-6/161).

The matter is, of course, not as settled as Brentano would want it. It would be pointless to remember all the different students and opponents of Brentano who went against his analyses. Again, what is important for us here is rather how this theory of judgment is connected to Brentano’s analysis of inner perception and how it operates inside the general structure of descriptive psychology. For Brentano’s detailed arguments, see the rest of the discussion quoted here in PES II, Chapter VII, §§5ff.; many of the texts of *Wahrheit und Evidenz*, notably ‘Critique of Sigwart’s Theory of the Existential and the Negative Judgment’; and *Die Lehre vom richtigen Urteil*

*von Beziehung*] with the object” (PES II, 38); and it is precisely this new intentional relation, irreducible to presentations, that constitutes, by itself and regardless of any combination, the acceptance or denial of the object. The “distinctive feature [*Eigentümlichkeit*] of judgement” is “a particular kind of relation to the immanent object” (PES II, 65/172; see also USE, 17-8/15-16, where this second fundamental class of intentional relation is presented as the Cartesian class of *judicia*).

In light of this, Brentano explains the positive existential judgment as the affirmation, in that superposed intentional relation, not of the object A together with the predicate “existence” but simply of the object A of which one has a presentation; the denial, as the simple rejection of that object. These are the basic forms of judgment, but a way to build more complex judgments out of these basic forms will also be developed.

In fact, in the background of Brentano’s theory of judgment lies the belief that one must not confuse the logical form of a judgment with its verbal expression. It was precisely this mistake, as we saw him saying in the quote above, that led people to the mistaken belief that judgments were a matter of combination of a subject and a predicate. In reality, though, “it can be shown with utmost clarity that every categorical proposition can be translated without any change of meaning into an existential proposition, and in that event the “is” or “is not” of the existential proposition takes the place of the copula” (PES II, 56/165). When one judges, for instance, that “some S is P”, the copula can be redeployed to make explicit the underlying form of a judgment of acceptance “there is an SP” – or, to put it even more specifically, of one’s acknowledging the presentation of an SP<sup>37</sup>.

It is because the verbal expression of a judgment in a categorial form is usually more elegant, indeed, that we were led to ignore the fact that, below the surface form, these are existential judgments. (PES II, 60). Still, when it comes to philosophical discussions, Brentano is prompt to urge philosophers to “stop confusing linguistic differences with differences in thought” (PES II, 63/171).

Finally, then, once we understand his new take on the theory of judgment, we can also see how Brentano can account for inner perception as being already an act of judgment. Indeed, as Brentano

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<sup>37</sup> It is also important to notice that, in spite of the strong emphasis of these passages, Brentano admits, on other occasions, that not all judgments can be reduced to existential form. In response to that, he will eventually develop his theory of double or compound judgments. On this point, see especially his response to Windelband in WE, English translation. 58. Still, as Linda McAlister notes, “[t]he important thing is that [Brentano] has tried to loosen the grip that the subject/predicate theory of judgment has had on philosophers” (McAlister 2004, 162). Finally, for a technical reconstruction – and conjectural extension – of Brentano’s system, see (Simons, 1992).

himself admits, it would be impossible to explain inner perception as this sort of judging activity if we assumed the theory of judgment that was handed down by tradition (PES, 200/110). But if "this judgement of inner perception does not consist in the connection of a mental act as subject with existence as predicate, but consists rather in the simple affirmation of the mental phenomenon which is present in inner consciousness" (PES, 200-1/110); and if this affirmation has been properly understood as a fundamental, irreducible form of intentional relation, then there is nothing strange in assuming that this judging of inner perception is an integral part of all mental life.

### **§28. Source: inner perception as a source of immediately evident knowledge**

We have understood how it is that inner perception can be a source of judgments – judgments which, ultimately, will be the basis upon which descriptive psychology is to be built. Yet it is still necessary to understand more precisely that kind of immediately evident judgments that are characteristic of inner perception.

Brentano does indeed present a number of systematic distinctions between judgments – which, to make things even more complicated, do not seem to be completely constant throughout his many incursions on the subject: there are evident and blind; assertoric and apodictic; immediate and mediate judgments, among others. Let us begin with what might be the most important distinction in Brentano's theory of judgments, namely, that between a blind and an evident judgment. Now, the first thing to get out of the way is the generally non-philosophical meaning of evidence as something from which something else is to be inferred – as in, say, evidence of a murder, of a crime, and so on. Evidence – *Evidenz* – is to be understood as the being evident of something, in this case of a judgment. In this sense, the German term is also frequently translated as "self-evidence".

But what is, then, an *evident* judgment? Against a certain traditional answer, Brentano says that an evident judgment is *not* a judgment accompanied by some sort of feeling of conviction. If evidence were a feeling, as Brentano notes, an activity like basic arithmetics, given the immediate, compelling evidence of its propositions, would have a most disturbing effect upon our nervous system (USE, English translation, 57). And in fact, he says, if it does happen that we often have something like an urge to believe in certain judgments, a "natural instinctive tendency" (USE, 20/19) it is actually quite unreliable, and frequently leads us into mistake – as in the case of false



but deeply entrenched memories, for instance or even in the tendency to believe in the existence of physical phenomena. This kind of “blind tendency” can only lead us to prejudice; it is distinct from that certitude (*Sicherheit*) which is characteristic of evidence (PES III, 2-3).<sup>38</sup>

And while Brentano did believe at the beginning that there was something like a degree of conviction that characterized evident judgments, a measurable force that allowed us to distinguish between the feeble conviction of mere beliefs and the absolute conviction of evident judgments (for instance, in PES, 202/110-11); he later abandons this belief and subjects it to a harsh critique – the essential distinction between evident and blind judgments, he says in 1889, “does not pertain to degree of conviction” (USE, 21/20). As he puts it later: “[c]onsider two persons who are distinguished by the fact that one judges something affirmatively and has no doubts about it whatsoever, while the other believes it to be merely probable. The latter does not make the same judgement as the former but with a lesser degree of intensity.” (PES II, 151/223). They are rather, Brentano will say, different judgments. Evidence, he eventually concludes, “does not have degrees” (DP, 35/38; see also USE, 72/83).

But if evidence is not a feeling, and not even, properly speaking, a degree of conviction, then what could it be? Brentano’s answer here might seem evasive at first: he says one cannot explain what an evident judgment really is but must show it instead.

Worin diese bestehe, läßt sich nur durch Vorführung von Beispielen, worin sie gegeben ist, und durch Vergleich derselben mit anderen, worin sie fehlt, klarmachen. Ist dies doch der einzige Weg, den wir auch anderwärts betreten müssen, um uns einfache Merkmale zur Klarheit zu bringen. (PES III, 3)

As a simple feature, this character of evidence can only be shown through examples. And still, Brentano does not shy away from presenting them in the clearest of manners.

[Der] Unterschied von blinden und evidenten Urteilen [...] läßt sich, weil elementar, nur an Beispielen klar machen.

Blind ist das Urteil: Farbiges ist. Evident: ich sehe. Ich denke. Blind: Unräumliches ist unmöglich. Evident: es kann nicht etwas zugleich sein und nicht sein. 2 ist größer als 1 etc. (VE, 150)

Blind judgments “involve nothing that manifests correctness [*ist durch nichts als richtig charakterisiert*]” and thus “they may be contrasted with certain other judgments which are ‘insightful’ or ‘evident’.” (USE, 21/19). Brentano even devises a “method of comparison”,

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<sup>38</sup> Brentano criticizes Sigwart for essentially the same mistake. See his USE, 66ff./78ff.

spelling out how to better juxtapose blind and evident judgments in order to facilitate the grasping of this differentiating mark (DP, 52-54/54-57).

Finally, in an important passage, that might be the clearest characterization of evident judgments, Brentano also shows how they play a very distinct role in the context of giving reasons:

Wirft man die Frage auf: warum glaubst du denn das eigentlich?, so wird ein vernünftiger Grund vermißt Würde man dieselbe Frage bei einem unmittelbar evidenten Urteil aufwerfen, so wäre wohl auch hier keine Begründung zu geben; aber die Frage würde angesichts der Klarheit des Urteils gar nicht mehr am Platze, ja geradezu lächerlich erscheinen. Jeder erfährt den Unterschied zwischen der einen und anderen Urteilsweise in sich; in dem Hinweis auf diese Erfahrung muß, wie bei jedem Begriff, die letzte Verdeutlichung bestehen. (USE, 21/20)

Now, let us insist that Brentano is not avoiding the question. It just happens that *the question has no point*; the distinction itself is evident between an evident and a blind judgment. In this sense, evidence plays here the role of an *elementary* concept. And this is not an imperfection in Brentano's theory, but an advantage: if one had to explain evidence in terms of another concept, then one could always ask, regarding this second concept, what its and so on. Instead, when Brentano points to the fact that evidence shows itself as a manifest mark of the correctness of judgments, and that this is a fundamental distinction, itself immediately apprehensible in experience, he intends to pinpoint exactly what the starting point is of the explanation of any further concepts like truth, existence, and so on.

The immediate evidence – and that of inner perception, in particular – is put in the position of the *pierre de touche* of Brentano's descriptive psychology – and arguably of his entire philosophy. And Brentano criticizes those authors that have fallen into the temptation of trying to prove or test the correctness of an evident judgment – both by trying to “compare” the content and the object of an inner perception or by some sort of correct integration of the act of inner perception into a continuous, harmonious whole (PES, 196-8/108-9).

Diese Versuche, die Untrüglichkeit der inneren Wahrnehmung zu begründen, sind demnach vollständig mißlungen, und dasselbe gilt von jedem anderen, den man etwa an die Stelle setzen möchte. Die Richtigkeit der inneren Wahrnehmung ist in keiner Art erweisbar, aber sie ist mehr als dies, sie ist unmittelbar evident; und wer skeptisch diese letzte Grundlage der Erkenntnis antasten wollte, der würde keine andere mehr finden, um ein Gebäude des Wissens darauf zu errichten. Einer Rechtfertigung unseres Vertrauens auf die innere Wahrnehmung bedarf es also

nicht; wohl aber bedarf es einer Theorie über das Verhältnis dieser Wahrnehmung zu ihrem Objekte, welche mit ihrer unmittelbaren Evidenz vereinbar ist. (PES, 198-9/109)<sup>39</sup>

Inner perception, as the source of immediate evidence, is the last ground on which knowledge can be based and defended. Of course, one could, in principle, doubt even this most fundamental mark of correctness of these basic, evident judgments. Yet this only leads to the self-defeating path of radical skepticism and is not considered by Brentano to be a viable alternative.

Inner perception is that point into which one cannot dig, but from which one must build. Our theories must be *conciliated with* the evidence of inner perception and, most of all, this evidence must be employed as a resource for theoretical development: considering one does not assume radical skepticism and denies the correctness itself that is manifested as the evidence of inner perception, what one acquires is a whole domain of truths which, properly speaking, are certain, infallible and indubitable:

Was einer einsieht, ist allerdings wie für ihn so für jeden anderen, der es in derselben Weise einsieht, sicher. Auch kommt dem Urteile, dessen Wahrheit einer einsieht, immer Allgemeingültigkeit zu; d. h. es kann von dem, was er einsieht, nicht ein anderer das Gegenteil einsehen, und jedermann irrt, der das Gegenteil davon glaubt. Auch mag, da was ich hier sage zum Wesen der Wahrheit gehört, wer etwas als wahr einsieht, erkennen, daß er es als eine Wahrheit für alle zu betrachten berechtigt ist. (USE, 67/80)

That the characteristic evidence of the judgments of inner perception allows us to achieve this certain ground of truth will be of course immensely valuable for the development of each and every science, and we will have to come back to this point in order to understand exactly how the laws of descriptive psychology are established.

For now, though, let us remark that out of these immediately evident truths one can also arrive at more complex, derivative truths, through what Brentano will call *mediately evident judgments*. Evidence, as it turns out, is conveyable through some sorts of inferences. In this case, we say the

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<sup>39</sup> And this is precisely what Brentano will provide, as he derives, from the evidence of inner perception, the fundamental unity of the primary and secondary intentional relation. “This alone makes possible the infallibility and immediate evidence of inner perception. If the cognition which accompanies a mental act were an act in its own right, a second act added on to the first one, if its relation to its object were simply that of an effect to its cause, similar to that which holds between a sensation and the physical stimulus which produces it, how could it be certain in and of itself? Indeed, how could we ever be sure of its infallibility at all?” (PES, 196/ 107) The theory according to which the primary and secondary relations would be formed by two different mental acts is thus incompatible with the evidence of inner perception, and thus to be discarded. Brentano’s arguments here are distinctly Cartesian. If inner perception did not stand in a *real unity* with its object – that kind of unity between knower and object known –, he says, but rather connected to it as cause and effect are connected to each other, nothing would prevent, for instance, an all-powerful being of producing the same effect as the supposed object. (PES, 199/109)

judgment is mediately evident insofar as its evidence refers to the evidence of the judgments from which it follows: “one must still distinguish between immediately and mediately evident judgments, that is, those which become clear by themselves and for themselves, and those which become clear *on the basis of proofs*” (VE, 150, highlight mine).<sup>40</sup> If we were to repeat here the same question that Brentano proposed as a test to the evidence of immediate judgments – namely, “why do you really believe that?” – here, unlike both the case of the blind and the immediately evident judgment, one can *give reasons (Gründe)* for the belief, pointing to those other beliefs from which it follows.

Finally, going a step further in our divisions, one last difference must be made explicit – which will also be crucial later for understanding the functioning of descriptive psychology –: the distinction between *assertoric* and *apodictic* immediately evident judgments. Immediate evidence, as it happens, is not an exclusive characteristic of the judgments of inner perception.

die unmittelbare Evidenz sich in zwei Klassen von Urteilen gegeben findet. Die einen sind innere Wahrnehmungen, unmittelbar evidente Apperzeptionen. Sie offenbaren uns etwas als sichere, nicht aber als notwendige Tatsache. Das evidente Urteil ist hier, um einen seit Kant üblichen Ausdruck zu gebrauchen, assertorisch. Die anderen sind allgemeine negative Urteile, die den Gegenstand gewisser zusammengesetzter Begriffe als unmöglich verwerfen. Sie sind nach der Kantschen Ausdrucksweise apodiktische Urteile. Die letzte Klasse ist es, die Hume im Auge hatte, als er neben die Erkenntnis von "Tatsachen" die Erkenntnis von "Verhältnissen" stellte, mit dem ersten Namen den assertorischen Charakter andeutend, mit dem letzten aber darauf hinweisend, daß es sich bei den unmittelbar evidenten apodiktischen Urteilen immer um den Gegenstand eines aus mehreren Begriffen zusammengesetzten Begriffes handelt. (VE, 46)

This division, it is worth noticing, was already fully operational at the time of the DP lectures: it had been presented – instrumentally but practically unchanged – in Brentano’s lecture on ethics (USE, 21/19); and also in his critique of Sigwart – in the notes to that same work –, where it is characterized in more explicitly modal terms. There is a

modale Besonderheit mancher Urteile, wie z. B. des Satzes des Widerspruchs, gegenüber anderen, wie z. B. dem Selbstbewußtsein, daß ich bin, übersähe; beim ersten handelt es sich um "notwendig wahr oder falsch", beim anderen nur um "tatsächlich wahr oder falsch", obwohl beide

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<sup>40</sup> And already in the lectures on the history of philosophy: „Wissens in weiteren Sinn: jede klare Erkenntnis einer intelligiblen Wahrheit oder, mit anderen Worten, jede übersinnliche Erkenntnis, möge sie nun auf ein Grundgesetz oder auf eine untergeordnete Tatsache sich beziehen und durch unmittelbare Einsicht oder durch Schluss aus unmittelbar oder mittelbar, durch Deduktion oder durch irgenwelche andere Art des Schliessens Einsicht in sie gewonnen haben), so dass nur die Glaubenwahrheiten und Meinungen ausgeschlossen wird.“ (GPhN, 2)

im gleichen Sinn des Wortes evident sind und sich in Ansehung ihrer Sicherheit nicht unterscheiden. Nur aus Urteilen wie die ersteren, nicht aber aus solchen wie die letzteren schöpfen wir die Begriffe der Unmöglichkeit und Notwendigkeit. (USE, 70-1/82)

External perception – the perception of physical phenomena – is manifestly excluded on the grounds of its fallibility, whose proof Brentano had presented already from the first chapter of the *Psychology* (PES, 13-4; see also VE, 163ff. for detailed arguments against the evidence of external perception). Only the perception of our own mental life is evident.

Our own psychical phenomena – these are the objects of the immediately evident assertoric judgments we call inner perception. This is why we can speak of psychical phenomena as given in *true judgments*, as *true beings*; while physical phenomena, to the contrary, “cannot be proved true and real even by means of indirect demonstration” (PES, 128-9/70). Inner perception alone, Brentano goes as far as to say, is perception in the proper sense of the word (PES, 128-9/70) – as per the German *Wahr-nehmungen*, taking-as-true.<sup>41</sup> And in this sense we also clarify what was said initially about the objects of descriptive psychology being mental phenomena *insofar as they present themselves as truly existing*, in inner perception, as the secondary objects of consciousness.<sup>42</sup>

We have given a detailed picture of inner perception as the source of descriptive psychology. It is a source, we have established, of assertoric immediate evident judgments – through these judgments those psychical phenomena present themselves to the descriptive psychologist as truly existing. And yet, of course it is not enough to have a multitude of truths at one’s disposal, flowing from inner perception, as it were. It is necessary to be able to harvest these truths and build them into a full-bodied science. Object and source are clearly delimited; now the effort of the descriptive psychologist begins.

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<sup>41</sup> Indeed, as was already mentioned above, the concept of truth is to be understood on the basis of the notion of an evident judgment – and not the other way around. Truth is a concept derived from this mark of correctness of the evident judgment: “[w]e call a thing true when the affirmation relating to it is correct” (USE, 19/18). And the same goes for the concept of ‘existence’: “[t]he concepts of existence and non-existence, respectively, are correlates of the concepts of the truth of the (unitary) affirmative judgment and the truth of the (unitary) negative judgment. [...] the correctness of the affirmative judgment is correlated with the existence of what is judged.” (USE, 60/74). On evidence as the elementary concept of Brentano’s theory of truth, as well as a discussion of the difficulties that may arise from it, see also Parsons 2004, 189ff.

<sup>42</sup> It is also worth noticing that this characterization explicitly excludes mental phenomena *as the primary objects of some acts*, such as when we imagine or remember this or that mental act. In this case, they are not *proper*, but *improper* objects of descriptive psychology, according to the distinction presented before.

## CHAPTER 2: The middle strata

### §29. Procedures (method in a broad sense): experience, notice and fixate

Now that we have achieved clarity regarding the object of descriptive psychology and also regarding the source from which its truths are to be gathered, we must finally face the properly *methodological* question of *how to harvest this source* and *how to explore this domain*. But here again our question will let itself divide. For, as we shall see, it will be useful to single out the question of the method of descriptive psychology *in a broad and in a strict sense*. In a broad sense, it is the question of identifying all those procedures (*Verfahren*) with which the descriptive psychologist tackles his objectual domain – and this includes all the tools, all the auxiliary and preliminary tasks he has to accomplish: the gathering, collecting, preparing, and so on; in a strict sense, this question refers to the way in which he effectively grasps the truths out of which his science is constituted.

The distinction itself will become clear as we advance. To begin with, though, we should ask: what are the steps the descriptive psychologist must go through in the exploring of his domain? How does he even begin to explore those truths that are given to him through the rich source of inner perception? Brentano asks himself this question in very clear terms and gives it an answer that is equally straightforward.

Damit der Psychognost seine Absicht erreiche, hat er ein Mehrfaches zu leisten.

a) Er muß erleben,

b) er muß bemerken,

c) er muß, was er bemerkt, fixieren um es zu sammeln,

d) er muß induzierend verallgemeinern; (DP, 28/31)

The first three of these steps belong to the procedures of the descriptive psychologist – i.e., to what we could call the method in the broader sense. The last one, as we will see, is the crucial step in the establishing of descriptive psychological laws, the methodological step in the strict sense, as well as the one which presents the most complicated difficulties.

### **§30. Procedures (method in a broad sense): experiencing**

“Above all,” says Brentano, “the psychognost must experience, i.e., his inner perception must register [*erfassen*] [...] a wealth of facts of human consciousness if he is not to lack the material necessary for his investigation” (DP, 29/32). Now, inner perception gives us, with immediate evidence, a great wealth of mental occurrences – it furnishes the descriptive psychologist with a *raw material* of sorts: as my mental life unfolds, I experience a complex succession of sights and sounds, recollections, tactile sensations, different acts of emotions, more or less abstract thoughts and so on. But a science is of course not such a mere recording, in real time, as it were, of each and every moment of one’s conscious life; and the descriptive psychologist cannot limit his investigation to the current unfolding of his inner perception. He must be able to gather, for analysis, a variety of different experiences and to eventually bring them together so as to discover those common elements and those regularities of his own mental life but also – as he expects – the mental life of others. As we will see in more detail later, the job of the descriptive psychologist – like that of any scientist in the strict sense of the word, Brentano would say – will be to present a *general (allgemeine)* account of mental life (§39). In this sense, while inner perception is the *source* of descriptive psychology, and *experiencing* is the first methodical procedure in the exploring of its domain, a series of auxiliary devices and further methodical procedures will immediately appear as indispensable if the psychologist wants to overcome this initial limitation of his experiencing to the here and now of the unfolding of his own mental life.

In principle, as Brentano will say, the descriptive psychologist should not be afraid that he does not live through each and every possible mental event, of course. Insofar as his job will be to present an account of the common and recurrent elements of mental life in general, there is no great fear that he will miss out on important classes of mental phenomena; and neither that his results will be valid only for his own, particular mental life. In fact, as Brentano puts it, “I need not have made every simple judgment, [or] to have cherished every wish, in order to understand the person who expresses them to me” (DP, 29/32). Given that the fundamental elements of this class of mental phenomena are present in my experience, I can survey them and present something like a general account of it. And while there are certainly difficulties involved with the linguistic expression of our mental life and with the communication of the psychologist (§40), there is, in principle, a common ground of the general traits of mental life that allows for the sharedness of the results of descriptive psychology, and also for the indirect complementing of the investigations of the individual psychologist by the testimony of others. All of that, however, will require a

careful application of a series of methodical procedures, which we now must examine in further detail.

### **§31. Procedures (method in a broad sense): noticing**

As we have realized already, the mere recording of some raw material in inner perception is not even close to being sufficient for the development of a science like descriptive psychology. The very first step after the experiencing of phenomena, says Brentano, is the noticing of what was collected in inner perception. Noticing is about making explicit what is otherwise implicitly perceived (DP 33/36) – as Brentano will always insist, to experience something is not the same as *noticing in its many parts what was experienced*:

Man kann [...] recht wohl etwas erleben, ohne es doch zu bemerken, indem es in der Mannigfaltigkeit dessen, was gleichzeitig in unsere innere Wahrnehmung fällt, zwar enthalten und wahrhaft mit wahrgenommen ist, aber uns in gar keiner Weise auffällt. Und so ist es denn für die Zwecke, die der Psychognost verfolgt, schier so gut wie nicht vorhanden. (DP, 31/34)

The descriptive psychologist's job, then – his second fundamental procedure, we could say – is to “notice sufficiently the particular experiences and their essential parts” (DP, 31/34).

This gap between the implicitly contained and the explicitly noticed parts is due to the very nature of inner perception, on which the descriptive psychologist relies; for inner perception, as we have seen (§27), is an *acceptance*, a judgment in which something is affirmed. Now, as Brentano will say, “if the accepted thing is a whole with parts, then the parts are all, in a certain manner, concomitantly accepted. The denial of any of them would contradict the acceptance of the whole. Yet the individual part is, for this reason, by no means accepted [...] specifically (by itself) and in particular” (DP, 34/36).

To use an ordinary example (which, though not belonging to inner perception, will help us in the clarification of the operation of noticing): if I perceive a cat in my room – and, by perceiving, accept it as existing in front of me – I perceive it together with all its multiple parts, namely actual bodily parts, like a tail, four paws, etc; and as logical parts, such as being a feline, a mammal or a living being. Suppose someone walked into the room and said that we were the only two mammals in there. This claim would obviously contradict my perception of the cat, through the denial of the part ‘mammal’ in it, and I would immediately object to it. But this does not mean, of course, that



I explicitly perceive, from the start, all of the parts of the cat. I might not have noticed, for instance, the stripped pattern of the cat's tail. Maybe I would never notice it at all. Still, if someone were to deny that specific part of the cat – by claiming, e.g. that the cat has a completely black tail – I would quickly be led to noticing it, thus specifically accepting that part and recognizing the claim to be contradictory to my perception.

The same happens with those objects of inner perception. When inner perception registers the seeing of a patch of colour, for instance, there are parts of this seeing – together with the parts of its intentional correlate – which remain implicit. I might, for instance, not notice the evidence with which this mental phenomenon is perceived, at least before reading Brentano's discussion made me aware of it. I might not notice the specific hue of the patch of colour – say, a patch which is blue but which has as well just a hint of red tinge; or I might fail to notice that there is a slight difference in the darkness of the colour patch in its left zone. All of these implicitly perceived parts can – and must, if the descriptive psychologist cares for the completeness of his science – be noticed, becoming explicitly perceived parts.

In the lectures, Brentano discusses several factors that facilitate the noticing of the parts of a phenomenon. From the physiological conditions of paying attention; through the skills one acquires through practicing notice; up to the actual ways one can set up a comparison between phenomena, making their different parts explicit, Brentano presents painstakingly detailed, specific indications of how the descriptive psychologist must proceed here. What is important for our investigation, though, is not so much to understand exactly what makes for efficient noticing as to recognize noticing as one of the fundamental procedures of the descriptive psychologist.

We could say that this step, after the gathering of the raw material of inner perception, is a first processing, a first sorting out of that material, in order to distinguish exactly what was collected. As we will see, the precise recognition of the parts of what is given in inner perception will play a crucial role when it come to the the critical step in the descriptive psychologist's method, namely the inductive generalization (§35).

### **§32. Procedures (method in a broad sense): fixating**

But the mere sorting out of this material, as it were, is still not enough. The next methodical procedure considered by Brentano is that of fixating. In this step, the descriptive psychologist achieves a first collection and a first organization of his material.

As Brentano puts it,

Das Einzelne, was wir bemerken, hat für sich allein wenig Bedeutung. Um das Bemerkte nutzbar zu machen, müssen wir diese Erkenntnis mit andern in Verbindung bringen. Und zwar

- a) mit andern eigenen Erkenntnissen der Zukunft wie der Vergangenheit;
- b) mit fremden, zu deren und zu eigenem Gewinn. (DP, 65/67)

This “putting our knowledge in relation” proceeds then in a double direction. On the one hand, the descriptive psychologist must go beyond the here and now of the unfolding of his mental life; and this means not only recording the knowledge presented at each flowing moment of inner perception, but also fixating, in memory, the knowledge that will allow for the establishing of the regular and recurrent elements of consciousness. On the other hand, it is also necessary for the descriptive psychologist to put the knowledge collected in his own mental life in a stable relationship with the phenomena of other people’s mental lives.

Following in the first direction, we will find memory as an auxiliary device allowing the descriptive psychologist to access what has passed through and was formerly registered in inner perception. To begin with, memory works as a sort of auxiliary device for experiencing itself, as it gives access to phenomena that would hardly be accessible otherwise. In the paradigmatic example, Brentano notes what would happen for instance if, struck by anger, I tried at that very same moment to direct my attention to it, in order to analyse and study this emotional act. As it is clear, this would already imply an interference with – and ultimately the disappearing – of my anger. But psychology, we have already seen, does not rely upon inner observation; rather, in a case like that, the descriptive psychologist must employ memory in order to access what was registered before in inner perception.

Wenn der Versuch, den Zorn, der uns bewegt, beobachtend zu verfolgen, durch Aufhebung des Phänomens unmöglich wird, so kann dagegen ein Zustand früherer Aufregung offenbar keine Störung mehr erleiden. Auch gelingt es wirklich, dem vergangenen psychischen Phänomene so

wie einem gegenwärtigen physischen mit Aufmerksamkeit sich zuzuwenden, und es in dieser Weise so zu sagen zu beobachten. (PES, 49/26)

Moreover, memory allows for the collection of those phenomena which impress themselves repeatedly in mental life, making possible their further revival. In this way, the descriptive psychologist can already gather and collect at his will an immense variety of mental facts and ultimately bring them together in order to identify the regularities of mental life.

But fixation, as Brentano emphasizes in this passage of his lectures, does not always involve a proper revival of those past presentations: “taking note of something is not always achieved by impressing that thing itself on our memory, but often by impressing on the memory something equivalent, something which *stands in for* [*seine Stelle vertritt*] [the thing we wish to take note of]” (DP, 66/68, highlight mine).

This sort of substitution [*Stellvertretung*] is both possible and necessary. It is necessary in order to facilitate the job of the descriptive psychologist, who can employ these substitute presentations instead of having to revive, again and again, the same presentation acts; and it is possible because, as Brentano says,

gewisse Vorstellungen in einem eigentümlichen Verhältnis zu andern stehen. Sie sind von ihnen verschieden, weisen aber doch auf sie hin.

Sie sind, ich möchte sagen, mit ihnen konvertibel; was unter die eine fällt, gehört auch unter die andere. Und sie stimmen vielfach in den sehr wesentlichen Leistungen, wenn nicht vollkommen, doch in beträchtlicher Annäherung mit ihnen überein. (DP, 67/68)

Of course, “words and written language are substitute presentations of particular importance. Recording is the most secure means of mediation for the future” (DP, 69/71). Language is the paradigmatic form of this sort of collecting. And, furthermore, language is also what allows for the second direction of fixating we had distinguished above: where the descriptive psychology fixates his own experience in order to put it in relation with that of others. By employing language as a substitute for his presentations, the psychologist can engage in communication, sharing his results and integrating the testimony of others. In communicating, it becomes necessary, as Brentano says, “to indicate [the noticed phenomenon] to others by couching it in some language or other.” (DP, 65/67) And the possibility of substituting intuitive presentations for linguistic ones is what allows for that.

Now, it is true that, if inner perception – as we have seen before – is infallible, methodical procedures such as memory and communication are not. They are, as Brentano admits, possible sources of error and incompleteness in the work of the descriptive psychologist. Language, in particular, is identified by Brentano as the source of much incompleteness in the tasks of the descriptive psychologist. We will have the opportunity to examine this in further detail (in §40). For now, it is enough to remark that the need for these auxiliary devices does not represent an unsurmountable obstacle to descriptive psychology, but rather they make explicit the necessity of careful methodical procedures.

The psychologist must pass through all these methodical steps: the recording of the material of inner perception; its sorting out in meticulous noticing; and the collecting and organizing of that material through fixating. These are all essential procedures, without which there could be no such a thing as a descriptive psychology. And still, so far, he has not properly established any descriptive psychological truth. But one crucial step is still lacking: as we have seen, the descriptive psychologist must “generalize inductively” (DP, 28/31, §29); and, as we will see, it is with this next step of the psychologist’s proceeding that the actual establishing of descriptive psychological truths and the actual theoretical development of that discipline will take place.

### ***§33. Method (in a strict sense): the descriptions of descriptive psychology***

As we move on to this crucial step of the method of descriptive psychology, it is necessary however to have a clearer image of the kind of description that is at stake here. For, in fact, what is it that the descriptive psychologist describes? As we have seen, it cannot be something like the mere recording and broadcasting of all the experiences registered in his inner perception; descriptive psychology is not a livestream of the psychologist’s own conscious life, even if this conscious life is the source of a multitude of assertoric, immediately evident judgments. And neither is it the matter here simply of exploring and collecting a myriad of different experiences, discovering new specimens, as it were, of psychical phenomena – maybe cataloguing them under this or that classification. As it was discussed already, Brentano clearly rejects the claim that the descriptive psychologist must experience every single possible mental phenomena in order to establish something about them – to have made every simple judgment, have been affected by every emotion, and so on (DP, 29/32). An infinite collection of mental phenomena would be rigorously pointless to the descriptive psychologist, and would only force him into “the useless,

long-winded and indeed neverending task of trying to characterize the classes to which each of them belong” (DP, 29/32).

Indeed, as it was established in the previous sections, the descriptive psychologist must, in a series of methodical steps, sort out and organize the raw material of inner perception so as to be able to establish something about the recurrent elements of mental life. But even this first level of generalization achieved through these methodical procedures is not enough for the kind of science that Brentano is trying to set up. A science describing the regularities of an individual’s mental life, a psychological biography of sorts; or even the psychological description of a specific group – this kind of ideographical science is surely possible, and Brentano would certainly not deny the value of these undertakings. But they would in fact pertain to genetic psychology, at most. Descriptive psychology, by its turn, though it will be built as a descriptive science, is nothing like a natural history of consciousness – rather, as it will be our main job to examine, it will be established as a very unique sort of descriptive science, employing a unique sort of descriptive method.

It is not so much like a naturalist that the descriptive psychologist must explore his terrain. Experiencing mental phenomena *qua* descriptive psychologist means recording, sorting out and fixating these phenomena, sure – but only in order to “experience all their *elements*” (DP, 29/32) and ultimately in order to establish *general truths about how these elements combine in any mental life whatsoever*. This task of providing a general account of the parts of consciousness, whose details we will examine in a dedicated section, calls for a further methodical step, one which in fact makes the descriptions of descriptive psychology much more than simply record, sort out, collect, fixate or catalogue. Descriptive psychology stands at a level of generalization which is essentially different from that to which we can arrive through these methodical procedures: the laws or truths of descriptive psychology are not mere regularities; they have *claims to universal validity*.

And so it is that, from the mere recording through the sorting out and collecting, organizing of the material given to the descriptive psychologist through the immediate evidence of inner perception – through this whole methodical *mise en place*, we could say – it is now necessary to understand how Brentano actually proceeds in this critical step of generalizing inductively, through which the properly general truths of which descriptive psychology will spring.

**§34. Method (in a strict sense): sources of belief and methodological configurations.**

Still another clarification is required, however, before we engage with what we have called the method in the strict sense of descriptive psychology, namely the clarification regarding the very concept of method. While Brentano frequently engages in discussions of methodological nature – the whole of the lectures on descriptive psychology can be said to be such an effort – it is not always easy to grasp what his views are on method as such; the endless discussions on the actual meaning of his fourth *Habilitationsthese* being there to prove it. Precisely because it is not easy to have a clear, systematic comprehension of the different kinds of method according to Brentano, those few texts that directly tackle the problem of the different ways of gaining scientific insight have a special significance. Many of these texts are manuscripts of Brentano's Würzburg years, written for his lectures on the history of philosophy; lectures which, as we know, always began with a broader discussion on philosophy itself, as well on its method.

In some of these texts, as it will hopefully become clear, we can distinguish discussions of Brentano on what we have called the question of method in a strict sense; that is, not merely the specific procedures employed by many different sciences, but what seem like the more essential routes or channels through which this or that science arrives at its own form of interconnected truths – because, indeed, a science is not any mass of knowledge haphazardly put together, “not every arbitrarily collected complex of truths, not every multiplicity of knowledges connected into a unity and [provided with] a name” (GPhN, 3). Rather, “there must be a reason [*es muss ein Grund da sein*]: they must belong together [*zusammengehören*], form a class of truths” (GPhN, 4). A science is a body of knowledge connected for a reason; but also built together into a theoretical structure standing upon a determinate foundation.

Two of these manuscripts will be of particular interest for our investigation. Dating from around 1870 (GPhN, 374), they are catalogued as H 45, nrs. 25290 and 25294, being part of the introduction to the lectures on the history of philosophy; and they have been fortunately (but only partially) reproduced in Klaus Hedwig's careful edition of Brentano's lectures on modern philosophy. In the first of these texts, Brentano offers a very general analysis of the *ways through which someone comes to hold a belief*:

Sechs Arten, in denen wir eine Ansicht gewinnen: 1) Intuition; 2) Deduktion; 3) Induktion; 4) Rhetorische Argumentation: a) Autorität; b) Analogie und Beispiele; c)

Wahrscheinlichkeitsbeweis; 5) Poetisches Gewinnen. Pulchritudo requirit tria: integritatem, proportionem et claritatem; 6) Zeugnis des Glaubens (GPhN, x).

Again, this is a very broad survey into the most basic *sources of beliefs*. It clearly ranges not only over theoretical and properly scientific means but also over other sources of *doxa* or *Ansichten*. Indeed, much could be said about these six sources – one could comment on the placing of analogy, together with argument from authority, under ‘rhetorical argumentation’; or gloss over the reference to Aquinas<sup>43</sup> – but where it gets really interesting for us is when we read this together with a second manuscript of the same period, following a connection indicated by Hedwig himself.

In this other manuscript, Brentano is trying to establish the more specific question of what the right *method* is for philosophy, in particular, and he relies, to begin with, on the same division of the different ways through which one comes to a belief; this time, though, these sources of belief are explicitly evaluated for their methodical potential. “There can be no method,” he says, “with which *to build* a philosophy, besides those which find their reason and power of persuasion in one or another of those mentioned ways” (GPhN, 302). As we will see, all those purported methods with which to carry out philosophy rely on one or more of those basic sources of belief; they are the basic sources from which any method must be built. Of course, to say that the method of philosophy must rely on some of these sources does not mean, however, that all of them are appropriate sources for a theoretical enterprise like that of philosophy. It is in this sense that Brentano will list and analyse the main candidates of philosophical methods: what are the possible ways in which those sources of belief can be combined to allow for philosophical knowledge? And which of these combinations are appropriate to that endeavour? Let us follow Brentano’s analyses of them.

- i) The first professed method of philosophy is the one Brentano calls “intuitive method”. It relies upon a sort of intellectual intuition that would give us access to the hidden determinations of nature; an intuition that would be accessible only to geniuses and that could not be taught or demonstrated. This is the purported method of philosophers like Schelling or Hegel. It is also closely related to the mystical elucubrations of a Plotinus or a Böhme. Intuition, well-understood, is here “nur bloss angeblich Intuition,

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<sup>43</sup> Cf., for instance, *ST*, I, q.39, 8: “Nam ad pulchritudinem tria requiruntur. Primo quidem, integritas sive perfectio, quae enim diminuta sunt, hoc ipso turpia sunt. Et debita proportio sive consonantia. Et iterum claritas, unde quae habent colorem nitidum, pulchra esse dicuntur.” “For beauty requires three things. First, integrity or perfection: those things which are impaired are also ugly because of that; then, due proportion or harmony; finally, clarity: of those things which have a bright color, we say that they are beautiful.”

in der Tat subjektive Phantasieren". All in all, this is "eine schlechthin absolute Erkenntnisart" (GPhN, 302-3).

- ii) The second is the "mathematical method", relying on intuition and, most characteristically, deduction. Spinoza is the paradigmatic case, who begins with axioms and postulates and obtains from them a series of propositions and corollaries. Herbart and Wolff are also examples (GPhN, 303).
- iii) The "natural-scientific method" (*naturwissenschaftliche Methode*). Built of *intuition, induction and deduction*. This is the method governing over the ascending phases of philosophy and followed by: Plato, Aristotle, Albertus Magnus, Aquinas, Bacon, Hobbes, Descartes, Locke and (in part) Leibniz. (GPhN, 303).
- iv) The manifold methods of rhetorical argumentation. Included here are arguments from authority – of an individual or a tradition – such as, for instance, the role that Plato's dialogues assume in Proclus; as well as popular method of appeal to common sense and probable reasonings (GPhN, 303-4).
- v) The poetical method – understood here in a broad sense, as striving for beauty in the presentation of thought; in the terms of Aquinas, this method relies on the integrity, proportion and clarity of presentation to support belief. Here as well Brentano identifies many sub-divisions and presents many examples. Remarkable among them are the importance given by some Platonics to the literary form of the dialogue; or Cicero's eclectic approach. Here as well analogies play a role, as does the discovery of rhythmic patterns in philosophy, of which Fichte's Thesis-Antithesis-Synthesis would be an example (GPhN, 304).
- vi) The final method considered is that of the "testimony of faith" (*Zeugnis des Glaubens*). But here Brentano – following Aquinas again – immediately insists on the triple distinction between knowledge (*Wissen*), faith (*Glaube*) and opinion (*Meinung*); with knowledge, faith shares certainty (*Gewißheit*); but like opinion, and unlike knowledge, faith can provide no evidence or compelling reasons in its support (GPhN, 304).

Indeed, once we pass from the simple synopsis of those very broad sources of *doxa* to the specific question of their potential as a *method*, we immediately realize that not all of them are equally strong candidates. Those methods, for instance, that want to support themselves on the basis of faith or poetical and rhetorical force are immediately dismissed by Brentano. Faith, beauty or persuasion are not *per se* illegitimate sources of beliefs, but Brentano considers it obvious that they must be separated from those sources that intend to provide actual insight (*Einsicht*) and



knowledge (*Wissen*) (GPhN, 304) – belief and even certainty can be achieved through them, but not evidence<sup>44</sup>. The admissible sources of belief, then, are those that either provide immediate evidence or that somehow allow us to convey them through mediation.

As for the first method, the one he called “intuitive”, it is pointless to remind how Schelling, Hegel and Plotinus were the targets of Brentano’s most virulent critiques. One should not be misled by the name of this supposed method: it is not the matter here simply of relying on experience – something which Brentano considers to be fundamental to any science – but of the *abuse of intuition*, as if it could tell us something else beyond what is immediately accessible to anyone. On the other hand, what Brentano calls intuition, as a source of belief, is perfectly acceptable and, correctly understood, is what guided philosophers such as Bacon or Locke. Brentano’s intuition, therefore, suggests no special rationalistic powers, but rather the common scientific appeal to experience.

Finally, the “mathematical method,” would fall prey to the mistake of relying too much on those highest, general propositions from which everything else would have deduced. But these propositions themselves are not sufficiently grounded in evidence. This method, therefore, only has the appearance of being exact. “One would be dead wrong,” says Brentano, “if one took Spinoza for an exact philosopher, out of our preconceptions regarding the mathematical method” (GPhN, 305). We could say it is the case here of an *abuse of deduction*.

By elimination, then, Brentano reaches the conclusion that, if one is looking for a method with which to tackle philosophical research, the natural-scientific the go-to method. Now, for a series of reasons, this is an important claim – the light it sheds on the debate around the fourth *Habilitation* thesis being just one of them, and arguably not the most relevant<sup>45</sup> – but what we should emphasize right now is that, considering the natural-scientific method as a form of

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<sup>44</sup> Cf., for instance, Brentano’s open letter on the absence of presuppositions in scientific research, where he lays out his – Aquinean – position according to which religious belief is not counter to truthfulness [*Wahrhaftigkeit*], but neither is a scientific procedure; and according to which the whole domain of knowledge is exhaustively divided in immediate or mediate knowledge, neither of which corresponds to religious faith: “Wie immer man mit Hochachtung von dem positiven religiösen Glauben denken mag, es steht fest, daß er der Evidenz ermangelt. Er ist weder unmittelbare Einsicht, noch Wissen im Sinne einer aus unmittelbarer Einsicht bündig gefolgerten Erkenntniß. Auch sage ich damit nichts, was die katholische Kirche selbst etwa bestritte. Selbst Thomas von Aquin, der vor Allen hochgepriesene Kirchenlehrer, will es schon in den Worten des Apostels: „Fides est substantia sperandarum rerum, argumentum non apparentium“ scharf formuliert finden (Summa theol. 2a 2ae qu. 4 art. 1). Und an anderer Stelle sagt er, daß der Verstand auf doppelte Weise zustimme; einmal, weil er durch die Sache selbst zur Zustimmung gebracht werde, sei es unmittelbar oder mittels Schlußfolgerungen; dies sei das Gebiet des Wissens.“ (VP, 139)

<sup>45</sup> We will have the chance to come back to this point. In any case, the debate itself is sterile as long as one does not understand what a method in general must be, what a natural-scientific method is, and what a non-natural-scientific method could be.

combination of those sources of belief, what we see is that *intuition, induction and deduction* are those sources with which we are left to work, and which must be combined – correctly, that is, without abuse – in order to build our philosophical method<sup>46</sup>.

Now, Brentano's inquiry here was directed towards a method for philosophy – of which, it is important not to forget, descriptive psychology is a part – but the same sort of investigation could have been carried out for any other science, where we would ask what combination of sources of belief could yield a proper method for it. In any of those cases, one would have to rule out those sources of belief which are not properly sources of knowledge, like faith, poetical harmony and persuasion; and in any of those cases, one would have to rely on different combinations of intuition, induction and deduction, while carefully avoiding the abuses of any of them.

This is in fact what Brentano himself emphasizes, as he notices that one should not understand, by his claim that the method of philosophy is the natural-scientific, that “all philosophy rests upon natural-scientific bases; only one must carry out research *proportionally* to the philosophical domain, just like different branches of the natural sciences research proportionally” (GPhN, 305). Intuition, induction and deduction recur, but these sources can, and must, be *arranged differently* – *proportionally*, so to speak, to the subject-matter – so as to create different *methodological configurations*.

Let us further remark that, in examining how these sources combine to form a method proper to a science, Brentano is clearly not worried about the countless procedures employed by scientists: observation, measurement, collecting, abstraction, memorization, fixation, cataloguing, etc. – all that we have called the method in a broad sense. What he is presenting is, rather, an examination of what we could call methods *in the strong sense of the word*, namely of the different paths through which sciences draw their insights, their evidence, from the fundamental sources of beliefs, an operation which those procedures serve to prepare, and from which they derive their significance. This second sense of method can be seen to be operational, for instance, when Brentano carries out some of his attempts at a systematic classification of sciences; a classification based on many criteria, for sure, but in which method is not the least important of them. On these occasions, Brentano would often advance a division according to method (*nach der Methode*)

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<sup>46</sup> See also VDG, 70 (English translation): “the natural ways of knowing by perception, deduction and induction”. This partition by itself is, of course, not highly original. One would find similar divisions in the works of Brentano's contemporaries, as well as roots running deep into the history of philosophy.

between inductive and deductive (or, we should maybe say, inductively and deductively-oriented) sciences (see, for instance, GPhN, xiv and 10).

Now that we have gained a better understanding of this strong notion of method, we can finally direct our gaze back towards descriptive psychology, and try to observe there whether and how it combines intuition, induction and deduction into a particular methodological configuration. At first sight, indeed, what we find there squares nicely with what we have established in general about these configurations. We had already seen, for instance, how descriptive psychology relied on inner perception as its fundamental *intuitive source* (§28); and now, as we move on to that further methodical procedure (fourth on our list of §29), namely, the *inductive* generalization through which the descriptive psychologist – after the *mise en place* of collecting, sorting out and fixating – will actually establish the general truths proper to his discipline, it looks like we have identified the crucial methodical step that most properly characterizes this methodological formation, the actual way in which descriptive psychology gains its insights; finally, as will also see (§42), also deduction will play a limited part in descriptive psychology as an auxiliary method. That being said, once we engage in the detailed examination of how induction operates in descriptive psychology, however, we will discover that this inductive generalization, which characterizes the methodological configuration of descriptive psychology, is also a highly specific – and fairly controversial – form of induction.

### **§35. Method (in a strict sense): varieties of induction**

We have seen how the descriptive psychologist had to register the phenomena given to him in inner perception (§30); to note the parts of these phenomena so as to distinguish their implicitly perceived parts (§31); and to fixate his findings in precise and secure scientific terminology (§32). But we have also seen that this incipient level of organization and generalization was not enough to account for the actual claim to universality which is characteristic of descriptive psychology (§33). In order to reach this next, decisive level, the descriptive psychologist, as Brentano explicitly puts it, “must generalize inductively” (*induzierend verallgemeinern*) (DP, 71/73).

But how does this generalization work in the specific domain of descriptive psychology? How are the laws of descriptive psychology actually established? Brentano’s presentation, in his lectures, of this central methodical step is disconcertingly concise and at times outright confusing – all the more so because the kind of induction that will be the trademark of descriptive psychology is very

different from the well-known inductive procedures in the natural sciences, for instance. This has led commentators and critics to considerable difficulty and some puzzling conclusions, as we will have the chance to examine. Before we tackle the specific question of the inductive generalization of the descriptive psychologist, then, it is imperative that we arm ourselves with a better understanding of Brentano's doctrine of method, in general, and of induction, in particular. Fortunately, we have pretty good sources from which we can learn about Brentano's insightful and sophisticated theory of induction; the most significant of which is arguably his 1903 manuscript 'Down With Prejudices!' [ '*Nieder mit den Vorurteilen!*' ], edited and published by Alfred Kastil, where Brentano sets out to answer the skeptical challenges of Hume as well as the follies of Kant, and to lay the basis of a properly natural, scientific method of research in philosophy (and, with that, in the sciences); a method, that is, built strictly upon immediately accepted truths or upon the proofs carried out from those truths (VE, 4).

### *i) Complete and incomplete induction*

In the third chapter of that work, after having clarified the theoretical status of mathematics, Brentano turns to the possibility of inductive knowledge – a key step in the parrying of skepticism. As it turns out, the problem of induction, or the problem of the passage to the universal, has a long pre-modern history, in which Brentano intelligently looks for support. Brentano begins by noting a discrepancy between the modern concept of induction and traditional, Aristotelian induction or *ἐπαγωγή* (VE, 68)<sup>47</sup>. Namely, modern logicians extend the name of induction to a certain kind of

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<sup>47</sup> This is already debatable. While it is generally true that syllogism and induction are opposed to each other, and while this is in accordance with *APr.* 68b13 and especially *APo.* 71a5-11, the opposition is not absolute. Aristotle does refer to syllogisms as inductive (*APo.*, 71a21, 24; see also Ross 1957, 47, 49; Mignucci 1965, 314.); and he himself calls *ἐπαγωγή* cases of complete inductions, in the sense Brentano will distinguish here; see *APr.* 68b20-1; *Met.* 1055a5-10.

In fact, Brentano's three senses of induction - as he will distinguish them here and as we will see in detail - correspond quite neatly to the threefold distinction of the senses of induction in Aristotle as advanced by Ross, which became the standard view among contemporary interpreters: "Aristotle uses 'induction' in three ways. He most often means by it a mode of argument from particulars which merely tends to produce belief in a general principle, without proving it. Sometimes he means by it the flash of insight by which we pass from knowledge of a particular fact to direct knowledge of the corresponding general principle. In one passage he means by it a valid argument by which we pass from seeing that certain species of a genus have a certain attribute, and that these are all the species of the genus, to seeing that the whole genus has it."

Needless to say, however, Aristotle's treatment of induction is one of the most puzzling - and most polemical - points of his logic; so much so that both Brentano's attempts to sort them out and any attempts to map them out with Brentano's own distinguished senses of induction must be taken very carefully. Ross's account, for instance, while having been arguably the most influential in contemporary commentaries, has been subject to critiques from many sides. See, for instance, Hintikka 1980 for an important critique; and Mignucci 1965 for still another division of the senses of induction, different from that of Hintikka and Ross. These are just some landmark studies, but literature on the topic is vast and growing, and would require dedicated attention.

inference which is, properly speaking, nothing more than a syllogism. Brentano's first move, therefore, is to clarify the differences between what modern logicians call *complete* and *incomplete inductions*.

A *complete induction* is "the passage [*Übergang*] to a general statement on the grounds of a provedly complete enumeration of the particular cases" (VE, 68). In an example presented by Brentano: if I know that the sum of the angles of any right triangle is equal to two right angles; that the sum of the angles in any obtuse triangle is equal to two right angles; that the sum of the angles in any acute triangle is equal to two right angles; and that these are all the kinds of triangles; then I can assert that the sum of the angles in all triangles is equal to two right angles. In another example, similar to a further example by Brentano (though maybe a bit more profane than his): if John Lennon was from Liverpool; Paul McCartney was from Liverpool; George Harrison was from Liverpool; and Ringo Starr was from Liverpool; then, from the completeness of the enumeration, I can assert that the Beatles were from Liverpool.

As Brentano shows, this form of induction can actually be put in the form of a syllogism.

Considering the first example, we would have:

Alle Dreiecke, welche entweder rechtwinklig oder stumpfwinklig  
oder spitzwinklig sind, haben zur Winkelsumme 2R.

Alle Dreiecke sind Dreiecke, die entweder rechtwinklig oder stumpfwinklig  
oder spitzwinklig sind.

Also haben alle Dreiecke zur Winkelsumme 2R. (VE, 69)

Brentano then goes on to consider a second, closely related form of reasoning, which he presents as the "proofs by recursion" of mathematics (VE, 69); and which, in English, came to be known as 'mathematical' or 'successive induction' (De Morgan 1838), but which in German were more frequently called '*vollständige Induktion*,' indistinctly from the former case of induction presented by Brentano (see, for instance, Dedekind 1939).<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> *Was sind und was sollen die Zahlen* was published in 1888, and we read, §60: "Der vorstehende Satz bildet, wie sich später zeigen wird, die wissenschaftliche Grundlage für die unter dem Namen der vollständigen Induktion (des Schlusses von  $n$  auf  $n + 1$ ) bekannte Beweisart." Dedekind 1939, 12.

The mathematical reasoning designated by this sense of *vollständige Induktion* or complete, successive, or mathematical induction is commonly retraced to Francesco Maurolico and, as an explicit, conscious procedure, to Pascal, who nevertheless did not employ the term; though some forms of it can be traced even further (Cajori 1918); and arguably even to Plato! (*Parmenides* 149a7-c3; see Acerbi 2000).

Cajori shows that the talk of 'mathematical induction' for this kind of inference is not unmotivated. In fact, the proof from  $n$  to  $n + 1$ , he shows, arises out of an attempt to provide a more solid demonstration of problems which had originally been solve precisely with *incomplete induction* (naturally understood to be an unworthy, merely presumptive method to be used mathematics). Namely, he shows how Jakob Bernoulli provides an  $n$  to  $n + 1$  proof

Here, though there is no actually exhaustive enumeration, the completeness is gained from our knowing that the cases not mentioned are, as a rule, similar to the ones mentioned. As Brentano puts it, something "is said, which makes the individual cases not mentioned appear to be necessarily dependent on the individual cases that were mentioned" (VE, 71). For instance,

Wenn ein gewisses Gesetz für eine gewisse ganze Zahl erwiesen ist und es andererseits außer Zweifel steht, daß es, wenn für irgendeine ganze Zahl, notwendig auch für die nächstfolgende oder unmittelbar vorausgehende Gültigkeit hat, so schließen sie daraus auf seine Gültigkeit für alle folgenden, beziehungsweise für alle vorausgegangenen und eventuell für alle ganzen Zahlen.  
(VE, 69)

This procedure is thus composed of a base (e.g., we prove that the law holds for 0 or 1) and an inductive step (e.g., we prove that, for every  $n$ , if the law holds for  $n$  then it holds for  $n + 1$ ).

And yet, as we said, these types of complete induction are, as Brentano remarks, nothing more than syllogisms – there is nothing in the conclusion which had not been contained in the premises (VE, 70); and, because there is no real transformation between the knowledge we had and the knowledge we gain, neither can we say, according to Brentano, that there is here anything like that “passage [*Übergang*] from purely assertoric statements [*rein assertorischen Behauptungen*] to an apodictic one” which characterizes all induction (VE, 71).

Let us pause on this result for a moment. As he distinguishes true from mere apparent inductions, Brentano is effectively presenting us with a well-defined concept of induction. Similarly, in subsequent passages, he will speak, besides

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of a problem which John Wallis, some years before, had tackled "*per modum inductionis*", meaning here the approximative inference, usual in the natural sciences, from an incomplete enumeration of cases: "Bernoulli takes one of Wallis's problems and proceeds to show how the procedure can be improved by introducing the argument from  $n$  to  $n + 1$ . Thus, in Bernoulli's mind, incomplete induction, because of its incompleteness, gave birth to mathematical induction" (Cajori 1918, 199). Both senses of induction - the incomplete and the mathematical one - were loosely used by mathematicians from Wallis onward until De Morgan, in 1838, fixated the terminology of 'successive' or 'mathematical induction', which came to be known in Germany as *vollständige Induktion*, generating ambiguity with the traditionally Aristotelian case of complete enumeration as Brentano had distinguished it - and promptly generating calls for clarification similar to the one Brentano makes here: "The usual German expressions is 'vollständige Induktion.' In criticism of this term Federigo Enriques [*Problemi della scienza*, 1906] says: 'We should not confound *mathematical induction*, namely the argument from  $n$  to  $n + 1$ ... with the *complete induction* of Aristotle.' In this Aristotelian sense the term 'vollständige Induktion' is used in 1840 in the article 'Induction' in Ersch and Gruber's *Encyklopädie*, where we find the example: If two sides are found to be greater than the third side in plane triangles with a right angle, and with an obtuse angle, and also with only acute angles, and this inequality is shown to be true likewise of spherical triangles, then the inequality can be asserted to be true of *all* triangles. Here a 'vollständige Induktion' is quite different from the argument from  $n$  to  $n + 1$ ." (Cajori 1918, 201). From these passages quoted by Cajori, we see that this was a current discussion at Brentano's time; cf. also the similarity of the example of Ersch and Gruber with the one given by Brentano.

- (i) a passage from purely assertoric to apodictic statements, also of
- (ii) an “ascension [*Aufsteigen*] from individual assertoric judgments [*assertorische Einzelurteilen*] to general laws [*allgemeinen Gesetzen*]” (VE, 73); and of
- (iii) an “establishment [*Feststellung*] of a general law on the grounds of individual experience [*auf Grund von Erfahrungen im einzelnen*]” (VE, 72).

These three characterizations of induction, while not identical, make clear enough that Brentano had in mind a strong cognitive achievement where novel, general knowledge is secured on the basis of previous, individual judgments of experience. A few more things must be brought to attention here. On the one hand, Brentano follows, almost *verbatim*, Aristotle’s presentations of induction: cf. characterization (i) of Brentano and *Top.* 105a13-4: “induction is the *passage* from particulars to universals” (ἐπαγωγή δὲ ἡ ἀπὸ τῶν καθ’ ἕκαστα ἐπὶ τὸ καθόλου ἔφοδος); and (iii) with *APo.* 71a8-9: inductive arguments “*proving* something general by means of the particular being clear” (οἱ δὲ δεικνύντες τὸ καθόλου διὰ τοῦ δήλον εἶναι τὸ καθ’ ἕκαστον). On the other hand, Brentano’s characterizations are explicitly worded in terms of *statements, judgments* and *laws*. This is not trivial and, as we shall see, not without consequences<sup>49</sup>.

Given Brentano’s understanding of induction, then, we see better why those procedures called by modern logicians ‘*vollständige Induktion*,’ in which there is no proper ascension, but rather a necessary following from the set of the premises to a new level of knowledge in the conclusion, happen to fall out of the scope of the concept. We see as well why Brentano insists on distinguishing them neatly from genuine, *incomplete induction*. In the latter, what we have is an *incomplete enumeration* of the particular cases and, here, nothing is said that makes the unknown cases necessarily dependent on the ones that are known. This is the traditional form of induction as it appears frequently in the natural sciences, for instance, and the example given by Brentano is precisely that of the passage from the assertion of the mortality of a multitude of organisms – an assertoric assertion, obtained through manifold experiences – to the general law according to which all organisms must be mortal. “Here, from the factual death of many [organisms], the necessary death of all is inferred as a law of nature. One *started from* [*ging aus*] simple assertoric

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<sup>49</sup> In fact, a perplexing question in Aristotle’s treatment of induction is exactly that of knowing whether what is being discussed is the passage from particular to universal concepts or propositions (or both). Barnes presents it as one of the three puzzles that traditionally plague the interpretation of *APo.* II 19 (1993, 259); and Mignucci suggests the ambiguity might be functional in Aristotle’s treatment of the subject: “La conclusione del passo [100a15-b5] è ancora ambigua, perché non è chiaro se i primi (τὰ πρῶτα: 100b4), di cui si dice che sono conosciuti per induzione (ossia per una sorta di ascesa dal meno generale al più generale), siano i primi principi, gli assiomi delle scienze, oppure i generi sommi. Ma ciò fa parte della forse voluta ambiguità del discorso di Aristotele in cui non è mai chiaramente distinta la questione della formazione dei concetti da quella della formazione delle proposizioni singolari, particolari e universali.” (Mignucci 2007, 303-4)

knowledge and ended with an apodictic statement.” (VE, 71, highlight mine). In actual induction, moreover, not only do we acquire the insight of a novel apodictic statement, but also the particular cases, from which we began, receive a “*new light*”: we now understand them as instances of a general law and, therefore, we grasp them as necessary (in our example, we grasp the particular organisms as necessarily mortal). In the general laws, as Brentano puts it, we grasp the “*reason of the necessity*” (*des Grundes der Notwendigkeit*) (VE, 72) of the individual facts of experience.

*ii) Induction in a strict and in a broad sense*

Now, after this careful distinction between complete and incomplete induction, and after the exclusion of the former of the scope of actual induction, Brentano claims that this latter, proper sense of induction actually admits of a further clarification. That is because incomplete induction, as he just presented, is merely *the strictest form of induction* – i.e., induction, as the passage from assertoric to apodictic statements, is not restricted to those inferences from incomplete enumeration which are common in the natural sciences.

The way Brentano argues for that claim is again with reference to Aristotle, and the lead of the problem is the question of how to grasp the “*highest principles of knowledge*” (*höchsten Prinzipien des Wissens* (VE, 72; αἱ πρόται αρχαί, *APo.* 99b21). According to the *Posterior Analytics*, II 19, *all* the highest principles of science are established “through induction, from the perception of individuals” (VE, 72; *APo.* 100a16-b5). This, however, as Brentano remarks, is in explicit contradiction with other claims of Aristotle: first, those in which the law of contradiction (itself a principle, namely a common axiom for all sciences) would be established “as a self-evident [*selbstevidentes*] law” (VE, 72; *Met.* Γ 3-4?); and, further, those in which many ways of arriving at the principles of knowledge are distinguished – “some by induction, some by perception, some through a certain practice, and some by other means” (VE, 72; *EN*, 1098b3-4). The way Brentano will solve the textual contradiction is precisely by saying that Aristotle himself employed induction in a *double sense*, i.e., sometimes more *strictly* and sometimes more *generally*.

In addition, this disambiguation would help us to solve another apparent contradiction, namely that arising when we consider the highest principles of mathematics. As it is clear, these propositions could never be established through incomplete induction, or induction in a strict sense. They are not secured through an enumeration of particular cases; one does not need to prove Thales’s theorem for many different circles before one is convinced of its truth.



And, indeed, Brentano says this is in accordance with the results of the previous chapters of his investigation, where he sought to clarify the possibility of mathematical knowledge. There, he had found that mathematics, contrary to what was so frequently asserted in modern philosophy, was in fact dependent on experience, at least in a certain sense (VE, 48ff.)

*Ihre Begriffe, sagten wir, seien allen ihren Elementen nach aus Anschauungen, und zwar aus Anschauungen, welche die Wahrnehmung uns gibt, entnommen. Wir sagten, damit es zu einem apodiktischen analytischen Urteil komme, müßten Perzeption und Apperzeption, welche bloß assertorische Urteile sind, vorausgegangen sein. Und dasselbe gilt von dem höchsten analytischen Gesetz, dem allgemeinen Kontradiktionsgesetz selbst. So kann denn wirklich ganz allgemein gesagt werden, man gewinne die allgemeinsten Gesetze immer nur so, daß Einzelwahrnehmungen uns den Weg zu ihnen bahnen. (VE, 72-3)*

We see, therefore, that these principles are indeed acquired through some sort of ascent from the particular to the universal, as Brentano had characterized induction – but through a kind of ascent quite different from the one involved in the cases of strict, incomplete induction we have just examined. A broader sense of induction is indeed necessary to account for the way these principles are grasped.

In this procedure, that Brentano calls *induction in a broad sense*, what we have is that the laws “become clear with immediate absolute certainty [*unmittelbarer absoluter Sicherheit einleuchtet*] on the grounds of the simple clear apperception” (VE, 73); there is an “analysis of the concept”, which shows us “elements that we can immediately recognize as positively conflicting [*positive widerstreitende*] or as contradictory [*kontradiktorischen*]” and that we must therefore “reject as impossible” (*als unmöglich zu verwerfen*) (VE, 73). Let us break down Brentano’s explanation, beginning with the first part of his claim. What provides us with insight into the law is a *distinct apperception (deutlichen Apperzeption)*. Let us not focus on the notion of ‘apperception’ which, though being an important concept of Brentano, would lead us astride; what is indispensable here is the idea that we have a *distinct grasp of a psychological phenomenon in inner perception*, that is, the idea that there is already a perceiving of the phenomenon together with a *distinguishing* of its elements (as we saw was crucial in the method of the descriptive psychologist, §31). Then, through what Brentano calls a *conceptual analysis* of this material of perception, in which certain combinations of these elements are shown to be either conflicting – e.g., “something blue is not possibly red” – or outright contradictory – e.g., “something red is not possibly not red” (VE, 47) – and are thus to be rejected as impossible, yielding the apodictic assertion (in the sense presented in §28).

Once the parts of phenomena are sufficiently distinguished, this procedure can also yield laws regarding parts which are necessarily included in some concepts.

Sage ich zum Beispiel „Was rot ist, ist farbig“ oder, was dasselbe sagt, „Es gibt unmöglich ein nichtfarbiges Rotes“, so muss ich vor allem etwas Rotes gesehen haben, den Begriff des Roten und in ihm den Begriff des Farbigen apperzipiert haben, um daraufhin mit apodiktischer Evidenz das Urteil zu fällen: „Es gibt kein Rotes, das nicht farbig ist“. (VE, 49)

An ordinary example, frequently advanced by Brentano (DP 42/45): if one has a distinct grasp of the concept of violet, then one can see that the concept of a violet without blue or red as parts is an impossible one; and thus that red and blue are always necessarily present as elements of it. Finally, Brentano also gives the example of the laws regarding composition of the sounds of vowels. According to these laws, discovered by Hermann Helmholtz, "every vowel contains certain overtones which give it its peculiar character"; these overtones being a necessary part of the phenomenon of each specific vowel (VE, 74)<sup>50</sup>.

It is easy to see, from the examples and Brentano's explanation, that we are dealing here with a novel and broader notion than that of incomplete induction; it is an induction where the securing of the apodictic laws is gained *immediately* out of perception – in Ross's characterizations of this sort of induction in Aristotle, he says, stressing its unique character:

[the] induction here is not proof of the principle, but the psychological preparation upon which the knowledge of the principle supervenes. The knowledge of the principle is not produced by reasoning but achieved by direct insight - νοῦς ἂν εἴη τῶν ἀρχῶν (A*Po.* 100b12). This is in fact what modern logicians call intuitive induction<sup>51</sup>. (Ross 1957, 49)

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<sup>50</sup> Cf. *Die Lehre von den Tonempfindungen*, Part 1, Section 5: "Um die *Zusammensetzung der Vokalklänge* zu begreifen, muß man zunächst berücksichtigen, daß der Ursprung ihres Schalles in den Stimmbändern liegt. Diese wirken bei laut tönender Stimme als membranöse Zungen und bringen wie alle Zungen zunächst eine Reihe entschieden diskontinuierlicher und scharf getrennter Luftstöße hervor, die, wenn sie als eine Summe einfacher Schwingungen dargestellt werden sollen, einer sehr großen Anzahl von solchen Schwingungen entsprechen und deshalb im Ohre als ein aus einer ziemlich langen Reihe von Obertönen zusammengesetzter Klang erscheinen. Mit Hilfe der Resonanzröhren kann man in tiefen, kräftig gesungenen Baßnoten bei den helleren Vokalen sehr hohe Obertöne, selbst bis zum sechszehnten hin, erkennen, und bei etwas angestrengtem Forte der höheren Noten jeder menschlichen Stimme erscheinen deutlicher als bei allen anderen Tonwerkzeugen hohe Obertöne aus der Mitte der viergestrichenen Oktave (der obersten Oktave der neuen Klaviere)" (Helmholtz 1896, 168-9, highlight mine) Helmholtz then proceeds to show how the overtones of the different vowels can be measured and differentiated: "[e]s lassen sich diese Unterschiede in den Obertönen der verschiedenen Vokallaute mittels der Resonatoren sehr leicht und deutlich erkennen." (Helmholtz 1896, 178, highlight mine).

<sup>51</sup> This modern usage of the term 'intuitive induction' used by Ross to characterize Aristotle's induction can be traced to William Johnson's *Logic* (Broad 1927-1928, 1). Already in 1968 Chisholm had shown the connection, on the other hand, between the 'intuitive induction' of Johnson and Brentano's induction in a broad sense (Chisholm 1976, 97).

Here there is no collecting of individual perceptions and no enumeration of instances – no building up from experience, as it were; and no process of inference. In this sort of induction, as Brentano had also put it, experience *paves the way* for what is ultimately an immediate grasp through  $\nu\omicron\delta\varsigma$  (a word of difficult translation, that could be rendered as 'intuition', 'intellection', 'comprehension', 'insight'... 'evidence?'). As Brentano puts it in his lecture on ethics (also a discipline built upon apodictic statements gained through intuitive induction): the truth of the general law “becomes obvious at a single stroke, [*mit einem Schlag*] so to speak, and without any induction from particular cases” (USE, 82/15). And yet, while not relying on the enumeration of particular cases, this is still some kind of induction insofar as it fulfils the main condition: not only is there the *perception of the particular* and the *establishing of a general assertion* but also – unlike complete induction – there is a proper *passage from an assertoric to an apodictic truth*.

Let us stress what is conveyed by the talk of strict and broad sense. Brentano understands strict induction *as a special case* of induction in a broad sense. This means that in both cases – strict and broad induction –, we are talking about the same core procedure: one begins with perception and ends in apodictic laws; it is only that, in the special case of incomplete induction, the passage from the individual assertions to the general law does not take place “immediately out of the presentations given through perception” (VE, 73), but rather requires the supplementary aid of *some sort of inference*<sup>52</sup>. As Brentano puts it:

Eine *Induktion im weiteren Sinn* üben wir, sooft wir die Erkenntnis eines allgemeinen Gesetzes aus einer Erfahrungstatsache schöpfen, auch wenn dies ohne irgendwelches Schlußverfahren geschieht, da vielmehr der Grund der Tatsache uns aus dem deutlich apperzipierten Begriff unmittelbar einleuchtet. Eine *Induktion im engeren Sinn* dagegen üben wir nur dann, wenn wir aus einer oder mehreren Erfahrungstatsachen ein allgemeines Gesetz erschließen. (VE, 74)

Finally, a fundamental point must be stressed about the different forms of induction: the exactness, or lack thereof, of the laws achieved through each of them. That is because not only is strict induction a type of inference – a “proper inference” [*eigentlichen Schluß*] (VE, 73), Brentano says

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Other important studies in sorting out the different senses of Brentano's inductions and pointing to the unique character of induction in a broad sense are Bergman 1976 and Marek 1989.

<sup>52</sup> Besides the value of this conceptual scheme for the understanding of Brentano's own doctrine of method, it might also hold some value as an interpretative thesis of Aristotle. Namely, while many commentators have proposed different ways of dividing the senses of Aristotle's induction, it seems like Brentano is the only one to have proposed that there is just one sense of induction in Aristotle, that lets itself divide between strict and narrow (while complete induction is excluded and only improperly called induction). But, here again, this is a claim that would require further investigation.

– but it is actually an inference leading from something certainly experienced in perception to a general laws which always includes some degree – even if negligible – of presumption.

Hier [broad induction] haben wir auf Grund einer einzigen deutlichen Beobachtung absolute Sicherheit für die allgemeine Gültigkeit des Gesetzes, und sie kann als absolute gar nicht weiter vermehrt werden; dort [strict induction] haben wir keine absolute Sicherheit, glauben aber doch, der Annahme des Gesetzes vor seiner Verwerfung den Vorzug geben zu sollen, und dieser Glaube verstärkt sich durch Wiederholung der gleichen Beobachtung in anderen und anderen Fällen. (VE, 73-4)

The certainty of strictly inductive laws is therefore approximative – they deal in likelihood (*Wahrscheinlichkeit*): in the less certain cases, they are established as probable; in the most certain, however, they can attain something like an infinite probability. In these latter cases, whoever affirms the law “exceeds [*hinausgeht*] only an infinitesimally small amount beyond what, in a strict sense, the premisses contain” (VE, 86). Error, in these cases, is for all practical purposes excluded, and the law is asserted with a “practical equivalent” of absolute certainty (VE, 80)<sup>53</sup>. This point will be of extreme importance to the proper characterization of descriptive psychological laws and to the understanding of the specificity of the method employed in descriptive psychology (§37).

### *iii) Induction in descriptive psychology*

Now that we have thoroughly examined Brentano’s theory of induction as he presents it in 1903, in “Away with Prejudices!”, we should ask: does this picture square with the sparse notes Brentano had left, in his lectures, on the employment of inductive generalization in descriptive psychology? In fact, it does. Again, the text of *Descriptive Psychology* is very sketchy at this point and the terminology of induction is, as we have seen, far from being straightforward; still, it is not difficult to ascertain that, under the general title “Inductive Generalization” given by Brentano to this step in the method of the descriptive psychologist (§29), the three forms of inductive generalization presented in *Versuch über die Erkenntnis* – improper, complete enumerative induction; incomplete

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<sup>53</sup> Brentano also speaks of this “practical equivalent” as “physical certainty”. See the discussion in VDG, 102 (of the English translation): “in many cases we infer the reality of a matter of fact from its infinite probability. Let us illustrate this with an example: I claim that a bowling pin thrown up into the air will not come to rest on its head when it falls. In contrast to the other cases we examined, the possibility of error is not absolutely ruled out here, but it is as good as ruled out. One speaks in this case of “physical” certainty as opposed to absolute or “mathematical” certainty.”

enumerative induction or induction in a strict sense; and induction in a broad sense or intuitive induction – all play a part in the discussion.

To begin with, Brentano says, justifying the conciseness of his remarks that, “[it] is not necessary for us to dwell on this point [inductive generalization] in the present context. Whatever is true in the other inductive sciences also applies here.” (DP, 71/73) It is indeed difficult to grasp the exact sense of Brentano’s remarks here. It is obvious that inductive generalization in descriptive psychology is often quite particular – and, as we shall see, that, for the most part, it is not like inductive sciences at all (if we understand by this those sciences that rely mostly upon incomplete induction), and more like the mathematical disciplines Brentano analyzed in “Away with Prejudices!”. One should probably conclude that Brentano is referring, in this specific passage, *exclusively to induction in a strict sense* as it is used in descriptive psychology, i.e., he is saying that, *insofar* as the descriptive psychologist employs *incomplete induction*, everything works just like in any other inductive science. But that, of course, is not the end of the story. In fact, considering the very special sort of object it deals with, and the high standard of exactness that its laws aspire to (see below, §37), one cannot but conclude that incomplete induction is not the most appropriate method for descriptive psychology. It is just the same here as with John Wallis’s mathematical proofs by incomplete induction (see note above) – while they could maybe be useful in some situations, any mathematician would quickly see that they are below the standards of rigor one should pursue in the domain.

And, in fact, as it should be obvious by now, it is not incomplete induction but induction in a broad sense – the intuitive sort of induction, immediately rendering evident apodictic laws from the analysis of experience – that constitutes the heart and the core of the method of descriptive psychology. The general laws which the descriptive psychologist must establish are nothing less than the *laws of necessary or impossible combinations of parts of psychological phenomena*, which he grasps immediately from the analysis of the concepts themselves. To take as an example one of Brentano’s most famous claims, one of these general laws would state that the concept of a judgment must always have an underlying presentation as one of its elements. Another famous descriptive psychological law would be that, for instance, claiming that every emotion would have – analogously to judgments – either an acceptance or a rejection as one of its parts. Proceeding in this way the descriptive psychologist would be able to explore this territory of mental phenomena – not merely by noticing and fixating this or that specific phenomena, this or that regularity of a certain mental life, but by establishing the most general, necessary connections, or else the impossible connections, of the elements of psychical phenomena, as they appear necessarily in

each and every mental life. And if there were any doubt left that these laws are to be reached by induction in a broad sense, one would need only to look at the absolute certainty with which they are established (more on this below, §37).

Finally, also the third sense of induction discussed in *Versuch über die Erkenntnis* – complete induction – makes an appearance here. It appears as a sort of methodological injunction, which states that the descriptive psychologist must make sure that the laws he established through intuitive induction really stand at the *highest possible degree of generality*.

Bei den Eigentümlichkeiten, welche bei gewissen Elementen des Seelenlebens bemerkt werden, muß man möglichst zu verallgemeinern suchen, damit die Induktion ihre Aufgabe erschöpfend löse, d.h. wir müssen konstatieren, welcher der höchste allgemeine Begriff ist, an welchen sie sich als Art- oder Gattungseigentümlichkeit knüpft. [...]

Also z.B. wenn ein wirklich trennbares Element des Seelenlebens der Empfindung oder an einem gewissen phänomenalen Punkt lokalisierten Rot und in ihr sich Qualität und örtliche Bestimmtheit als einander durchwohnende Teile des Inhalts erkennen lassen; und wenn man Ähnliches bei der Empfindung eines Blau usw., kurz allgemein auf dem Gebiet des Gesichtssinnes findet, so ist dieser Charakterzug mit dem wirklich trennbaren Farbelement überhaupt in Verbindung zu bringen. (DP, 72/74)

Brentano then shows what would happen if one failed to find the highest general concept when establishing an apodictic law – and the example he gives is exactly the same he gave in the *Versuch*, when discussing complete induction:

Sonst wäre es, wie wenn ein Mathematiker statt des Satzes von der Winkelsumme der Dreiecke drei Sätze, je einen für die Rechtecke, Spitzzecke und Stumpfecke aufzuführen wollte. (DP, 72/74)

Just like there would be no sense in establishing separate theorems for each species of triangles, there would be no sense in establishing individually for all the basic colors (whose complete enumeration Brentano presents a couple of lines before: red, yellow, blue, white, black and, roughly, green) that their quality and their spatial determinations are inseparable parts. The laws of the descriptive psychologist must be such that no complete induction is left to be carried out from its species to its genus<sup>54</sup>.

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<sup>54</sup> My reading of this passage is different from the recent analysis of Taieb 2021. He takes the whole passage to be a (mistaken) attempt at providing an example of *incomplete induction* (Taieb 2021, 100). As he himself notes, however, this could not but fail. Taking induction in the strict sense of the word, Taieb concludes: “To be sure, Brentano’s example of [strict] inductive generalization in descriptive psychology is quite unfortunate: does one merely know

### §36. Method (in a strict sense): the problem of the passage

We have mapped the forms of induction in Brentano; we have identified the way they are part of the procedures of the descriptive psychologist; we have seen that induction in a broad sense or intuitive induction is the core of his method. We have thus finally clarified what we have called the question of the method in the strict sense of descriptive psychology, namely the question of how the descriptive psychologist actually attains his insights, establishing the truths that constitute his discipline.

But if, on the one hand, Brentano's appeal to intuitive induction reveals a powerful and original means of attaining apodictic, exact knowledge, on the other hand, one cannot but feel that several obscurities still plague the precise functioning of this crucial step of through which, according to Brentano, we attain immediate insight of *a priori* laws. Further clarification seems desperately necessary, but difficult to find in Brentano's texts.

#### *i) Empirical standpoint, ideal intuition*

Not surprisingly, the issue has caught the attention of interpreters and critics; most notably, it was one of the main discussions between the contributors to a debate which is no longer recent, but still very instructing to anyone trying to make sense of Brentano's theory of knowledge. In a volume organized by Linda McAlister (McAlister 1976), we have such varied authors as Lucie

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through [incomplete] induction that in colour perception, quality and localisation overlap? Isn't it rather a kind of *a priori* knowledge? Would it make sense to say the following: 'it is highly likely that for colours, quality and localisation overlap, but there may be cases where it does not happen'? Thus, Brentano seemingly fails to give a good example of inductive generalization [in the strict sense] in descriptive psychology. Yet he clearly thinks that there is [strict] inductive knowledge in descriptive psychology."

The explanation here is that Brentano's concern in this passage is not with induction in the strict sense, and that his example was *not* an example of incomplete induction. As Taieb notes, it would be absurd to suppose it *highly likely* that quality and spatiality are inseparable for every colour: I do not need to go through all the colours to establish this with some certainty; I do not gain conviction from an increased enumeration of cases; I do not leave room for some counter-example ("maybe there exists a very special sort of antique fuchsia that just happens to appear without spatiality?"). Brentano's example was rather intended to show how the descriptive psychologist must make sure that his inductions are *as general as possible*.

Gilson, Roderick Chisholm and Theodorus De Boer noticing the peculiar, if not outright questionable, character of Brentano's intuitive induction.

Chisholm, for his part, says that the question immediately presents itself of knowing "how can one arrive at 'apodictic' universal laws by *describing* mental phenomena?" and of how exactly "intuitive apprehension" could help us in this task (Chisholm 1976, 93, 96). And he notes, pointing to Brentano's intuitive induction, that it would place him, in spite of his own talk of "empirical standpoint", well beyond empiricism and right with Husserl or Frege in the anti-psychologistic faction, the disagreements between them being, to a great extent, "merely terminological" (Chisholm 1976, 97-8).

De Boer disagrees with Chisholm: the misunderstanding between Brentano and Husserl is not purely terminological, but "substantial" (De Boer 1976, 103). According to him, Brentano's appeal to intuitive induction is not a step in the direction of Husserlian eidetic intuition but an impasse, a flat contradiction in the interior of his theory of knowledge: "the question arises *how we can justify this generalisation from an empirical standpoint?* [...] In my opinion, Brentano's thought here leads to a dead end, and Husserl's doctrine of the intuition of essences (*Wesensschau*) is to be understood as an answer to these difficulties." (De Boer 1976, 104). Let us examine this better: the inconsistency here would be between the way Brentano accounts for the acquisition of apodictic laws, on the one hand, and the professed "empirical standpoint" of his psychology, on the other.

There are only two possibilities here: one must either be a consistent empiricist and, as such, reject all *a priori* knowledge, or retain this knowledge (which Husserl wanted to do just as much as Brentano did), and thus renounce the narrow empiricism that recognises only individual experience as the authoritative source of knowledge. (De Boer 1976, 104)

To admit anything like *a priori* knowledge, as Brentano did, would inevitably push him towards some "kind of Platonism", which he nevertheless rejects (De Boer 1976, 105). Now, it seems undeniable that Chisholm and De Boer are onto something; they are right to call attention to what looks like a complicated balance between the absolute, apodictic powers of intuitive induction and Brentano's widely announced empiricism. Still, I would like to suggest two corrections to the way Chisholm and De Boer set up the problem here – and which has been often repeated by later commentators:

(i) first, *contra* Chisholm, we should not try to begin to make sense of the uniqueness of Brentano's intuitive induction and of his account of exact sciences by confronting it with his successors but,



as it should be obvious by now, with his predecessors – namely, because, as we have seen (§35), Brentano’s induction in a broad sense is explicitly modelled upon Aristotle’s account of induction in *APo.*, II 19;

(ii) second, *contra* De Boer, we should not try to characterize the tension in Brentano’s theory of knowledge as a dilemma consisting of, on the one hand, the Platonic commitment to Ideas and, on the other, the adherence to empiricism – at the very least, one should not take for granted his restrictive concept of empiricism (either you are an empiricist, and you accept only individual experience as a source of knowledge or you accept some sort of *a priori* knowledge and then you are no longer an empiricist). There is clearly some room between De Boer’s alternatives. It is precisely the space which Brentano is consciously trying to explore with his own sort of empiricism, as he declares it in the very first lines of the *Psychology*: “my standpoint in psychology is the empirical: I accept experience alone as my teacher; but I share with others the conviction that a certain ideal intuition [*ideale Anschauung*] is not at all incompatible with such a standpoint.” (PES, 1). To accept De Boer’s formulation of the impasse is, therefore, to abandon Brentano before he even begins to make his case. This space between empiricism and ideal intuition is one, moreover, which Brentano shares with at least a significant part of the Aristotelian tradition, whose particular kind of empiricism has frustrated many classificatory attempts. The correct way to characterize the tension introduced in Brentano’s thought by intuitive induction, then, is not by resorting to extrinsic, stiff discussions of empiricism and *apriorism*<sup>55</sup>; but by trying to understand it, as far as possible, in the terms of Brentano’s own theory of knowledge. If we follow down this latter path, we will see that what is really important here is not the tension between intuitive induction and this or that sort of empiricism, but the tension between the former and *inner perception, as the source of knowledge* which Brentano frequently claims to be at the basis of descriptive psychology. In other words, what one must bring to light is the fact that Brentano is not always clear about the relationship between the sources of knowledge employed in sciences like mathematics and descriptive psychology.

Thus, while De Boer may be right in pointing to “an obvious gap in the way Brentano establishes the foundation for ‘pure’ universal concepts” (De Boer 1973, 105), what we must understand is

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<sup>55</sup> Brentano himself is very clear about what he means by “empirical sciences” and “*a priori* knowledge”: he explicitly distinguishes the sense in which sciences like mathematics and descriptive psychology are *a priori* (their laws do not depend on the existence of any matter of fact) and the sense in which they are empirical (the source of their concepts is in experience) (VE, 48ff)

what this gap is a gap of, exactly: my suggestion is that we should understand it as a gap between those two kinds of evidences which Brentano admits in his scientific, presuppositionless philosophy, namely between the assertoric evidence of matters of fact provided by inner experience and the apodictic evidence of general laws provided by intuitive induction.

*ii) A gap between two evidences*

To begin with, what seems to play a role in this confusion is that inner perception is, itself, an ambiguous notion. As we have seen (§27), inner perception is a special sort of intentional fusion, consisting *both in a source of presentations and a source of evident assertoric judgments*. This bivalence of inner perception, which was thoroughly explored by Brentano, becomes ambiguous when he claims that inner perception is the source of knowledge of the descriptive psychologist. Is inner perception the source of the presentations out of which his concepts are built? Or is it a source of evident judgments, upon which precisely the descriptive psychologist relies – an actual source of legitimacy or validity for him?

From the character of the laws of descriptive psychology, and from the analysis of mathematical knowledge and the account of intuitive induction in *Versuch über die Erkenntnis*, one would be inclined to believe the latter. And this would also be perfectly in accordance with the standard interpretation of Aristotle's intuitive induction: the general law is not a consequence of the consideration of the particular instances, the relationship between them is not like that of the premises and conclusions of an inference; the individual experience is rather a psychological preparation, it paves the way for the immediate insight in intuition.

There are passages, however, especially of the *Psychology*, which suggest that inner perception has a stronger role to play, being a full-blown source of judgments for the psychologist; passages where Brentano refers to inner perception *proving* this or that (PES, 179/98); to its *showing us* that this or that is the case (PES, 203-4/111-2); to its being the sole *judge* for descriptive psychological matters (PES II, 36), and so on.

Thus, what is troubling, if we want to accept Brentano's account of apodictic laws, more than the disavowal of this or that kind of empiricism, is that we must abdicate precisely from this decisive role of inner perception, upon which Brentano insisted so much. And then all the talk of inner perception as providing us insight into truly existing phenomena, into veritable being, into absolutely certain facts, and so on – all this seems to lose a lot in importance: these infallible

judgments help the descriptive psychologist in precisely nothing; and, on the other hand, there is nothing in the actual laws of descriptive psychology that refers back to these judgments.

Let us stress this point. If we accept that it is not the *evidence* of inner perception that plays the crucial role in the grounding of the apodictic laws of descriptive psychology, then this means that it is not because a certain presentation is *accepted in inner perception* that I would be able to recognize that its denial would result in something like a contradictory combination of elements, etc.. And in fact, even for a radical skeptic, someone who would deny evidence itself, such a thing as a presentation of an act of hearing without the presentation of a sound would be a contradictory idea; and even the skeptic would be able to distinguish these absurd combinations from those fictional or real – it does not really matter for him – possible combinations of parts of psychological phenomena. Even if the presentations which constitute the experiential source of an exact science like descriptive psychology were to be acquired from some other source – in a dream, for example – they would still be suitable material for the conceptual analysis out of which intuitive induction comes about. All of this without the involvement of inner perception *qua* source of evidence. If this is the case, then one is forced to admit that it is not really from the evidence with which some facts are given in inner perception that one derives the evidence of those general, apodictic truths.

But that this is the case indeed seems to be supported by yet another problem in Brentano's account of apodictic laws: the fact, that is, that one cannot ground the *evidence of impossibility* that characterizes the latter upon the *evidence of indubitability* that is characteristic of the assertoric judgments about matters of fact provided by inner perception. The modal constraints, if we want – the consciousness that a certain combination of elements of phenomena *could not be otherwise* –, the force of law of apodictic statements, is not obtained directly from inner perception, no matter how certain that might be – it is rather obtained in the process that Brentano characterizes very roughly as that “conceptual analysis”. And this holds even if one is to object that perception is capable of rendering us general concepts and judging about them, as Brentano will eventually claim; there still remains a gap between the generality of these concepts and the *apodictic universality* of the laws of descriptive psychology: we are speaking here not merely of the passage from statements such as “I see this red spot,” “I judge that this is the case,” “I am feeling this anger here” to “I am feeling anger (in general)” or “I feel an emotion (of which anger is a species)”; but of the passage from these judgments, already involving general concepts, to judgments such as “it is impossible that I feel an emotion without an underlying acceptance in perception”.

Now, what I have tried to do was merely to set up the problems of his theory of knowledge in terms more endogenous to Brentano's thinking. Further research would be necessary in order to even begin to address these issues or to examine whether Brentano does in fact have a good answer to them – one must not, after all, “be hasty in taking apparently incompatible propositions” of a philosopher to be truly contradictory (AW, 14/10). This clarificatory work would be way beyond the scope of this work, whose target is not the specific clarification of Brentano's most basic epistemological tenets, but rather the way in which they are built into the broader methodological structure of descriptive psychology. A whole effort of reconstruction would be necessary for that goal and, in particular, we would have to learn more about the process that Brentano calls “conceptual analysis”; about his account of concept acquisition and abstraction; and about his notion of apperception – an issue we have deliberately avoided before.

One thing is certain, though, regarding these investigations: given the sparsity of Brentano's writings on the topic (especially of his early and middle phase, before the reistic turn), it would indeed be almost inevitable to look for extra help if one wanted, from the scattered pieces of his thoughts on the subject, to reconstruct the whole of Brentano's doctrine – as Cuvier did reconstruct his pre-historic animals from their remains (AW, 15/10). In looking for help, though, one would do well to search for it in those systems of thought organically related to the one of Brentano, instead of trying to import extrinsic interpretative categories, old or modern. This would be perfectly warranted by the extensive overlap between Brentano's doctrines and those of the Aristotelian tradition: not only is Brentano's account of induction developed with constant reference to Aristotle, but his whole psychology, metaphysics and doctrine of method are, it is well-known, openly supported by his interpretation of the Aristotelian system, together with a non-negligible hand from Thomas Aquinas<sup>56</sup>. All these problems Brentano faces in trying to accommodate intuitive induction in a system based upon the experience of individuals are problems which any Aristotelian account of induction might also face and, at the centre of his difficulties, lies nothing less than the issue of the grasp of universals without the commitment to Platonic entities – a problem which, of course, has shaped the whole development of the Aristotelian tradition. Because of that, if there is any way out of this impasse for Brentano, and if he does not say much explicitly that could help us in seeing this way out, a natural direction of inquiry would be to examine how the Aristotelian tradition has dealt with the issue before Brentano.

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<sup>56</sup> The sheer extent of, for instance, Brentano's reliance upon the *Posterior Analytics* for his doctrine of method – which has not yet been properly cartographed – makes one wonder whether it is not reckless to affirm, for instance, that Brentano works in a mostly Cartesian “epistemic framework”, as defended in Volpi 1989.

iii) *A flight of fancy*

Before we move on, however, something could be perhaps suggested regarding the way Brentano actually accounts for the apodictic character of the general laws of descriptive psychology – even if by advancing such a suggestion we might be incurring in that very same recklessness we were just cautioning against.

The suggestion is that, if we look at what Brentano *effectively does* rather than at what he *says*, we would maybe see that his procedures, more than leading to a dead end, as De Boer claimed, somehow smuggle something more into his method – something that was not explicitly claimed, and which is more than the mere evidence of matters of fact conveyed by inner perception. To put it differently, it seems like the grounding of those apodictic laws which are the basis of descriptive psychology, and which are deemed to be derived merely from inner perception, actually follows a more deviant path.

This appears already when we consider how Brentano effectively presents some of those basic truths of descriptive psychology. When, in the *Psychology*, Brentano is arguing for that fundamental descriptive psychological law, namely that every mental act is directed towards a primary object but also towards itself as a secondary object, he refers to inner experience as providing proof of it:

*scheint die innere Erfahrung unzweifelhaft zu zeigen, daß die Vorstellung des Tones mit der Vorstellung von der Vorstellung des Tones in so eigentümlich inniger Weise verbunden ist, daß sie, indem sie besteht, zugleich innerlich zum Sein der anderen beiträgt. (PES, 179/98, highlight mine).*

We are standing here before a privileged example of a descriptive psychological proposition; and the way in which Brentano argues for its truth, by pointing to the *undeniable proof* of inner perception, presents it more than as a simple source of presentations, and seems at first to be advancing the thesis according to which the evidence of inner perception grounds general laws about the elements of mental phenomena.

But as he advances in his argument, he puts forth a quite different sort of reason for accepting his claim:

Wir können *den Ton* das primäre, das Hören selbst *das sekundäre Objekt* des Hörens nennen. Denn zeitlich treten sie zwar beide zugleich auf, aber der Natur der Sache nach ist der Ton das

frühere. Eine Vorstellung des Tones ohne Vorstellung des Hörens wäre, von vornherein wenigstens, nicht undenkbar; eine Vorstellung des Hörens ohne Vorstellung des Tones dagegen ein offener Widerspruch. Dem Tone erscheint das Hören im eigentlichsten Sinne zugewandt, und indem es dieses ist, scheint es sich selbst nebenbei und als Zugabe mit zu erfassen. (PES, 180/98)

What Brentano is doing here is that, in order to substantiate the descriptive psychological law relating the presentation of the sound and the presentation of the presentation of the sound as, respectively, primary and secondary objects he is actively engaging in an *exercise of imagination*. And it is the analysis of this fictional combination that yields a contradiction, which is then what can actually ground the truth of an apodictic law such as “every presentation of an act of sensation must include a presentation of the sensible object”. The evidence of impossibility is not gained through a mere appeal to the *indubitability* of what is accepted in inner perception, but through an exercise of imagination, in which the *inconceivability* of a presentation of the act of hearing without a presentation of the sound is attested.

The same thing happens in the second book of the *Psychology*: when it is the matter of establishing the basic classes of mental phenomena, Brentano claims inner perception as the only legitimate source of his method.

Wie aber soll uns eine solche Rechtfertigung gelingen? Werden wir etwas anderes tun können, als auf die innere Erfahrung verweisen, welche lehre, daß die Beziehung des Bewußtseins zum Objekte in den einen Fällen eine durchaus gleiche oder eine ähnliche, in den anderen dagegen eine grundverschiedene sei? — Es scheint, als ob kein anderes Mittel uns zu Gebote stehe. Die innere Erfahrung ist offenbar die Schiedsrichterin, die in dem Streite über Gleichheit oder Verschiedenheit der intentionalen Beziehung allein zum Urteile berechtigt ist. (PES II, 36)

But when it comes to settling the more complicated, disputed matter of the natural order – logically speaking, always – of these classes, Brentano’s fatal blow is his recurring to the inconceivability of a certain hypothesis in order to reject it as impossible. It is thus that, regarding the precedence of presentations as the most basic class of psychical phenomena, upon which judgment and emotion must build, Brentano says that

wir haben dennoch zugleich einen gewissen Unterschied der Allgemeinheit bemerkt, insofern das primäre Objekt notwendig und allgemein nur in der dem Vorstellen eigenen Weise der intentionalen Einwohnung im Bewußtsein gegenwärtig ist. Auch könnte man sich ohne Widerspruch ein Wesen denken, welches, ohne Vermögen für Urteil und Liebe, allein mit dem Vermögen der Vorstellung ausgestattet wäre, nicht aber umgekehrt; und die Gesetze des

Vorstellungslaufes bei einer solchen psychischen Fiktion könnten einige von den Gesetzen sein, die auch jetzt in unserem psychischen Leben ihren Einfluß offenbaren. (PES II, 127-8)

And yet again, in proving the precedence of judgments over emotions, Brentano recurs to “psychical fictions”: “The thought of a being which would combine the capacity to judge with the capacity to represent but which would have no impulse of love or hatred contains no contradiction” (PES II, 128), while, on the other hand – it is suggested – the fiction of a being that had the capacity for presentation and love but not the capacity for judgment would be an inconceivable, absurd, impossible fiction.

Could not these examples point us to something structural in Brentano’s method? Could it not be that his appeals to the evidence of inner perception are not really the whole story, and that the crucial step in the intended conversion from assertoric claims to apodictic laws is actually the inconceivability of certain combinations of parts of phenomena, through which these combinations are recognized as contradictory rejected as impossible? Indeed, maybe this kind of fictional exercise is precisely what Brentano had in mind when he spoke of a *conceptual analysis* as a procedure involved in induction in a broad sense.

### **§37. Method (in a strict sense): exactness (*ἀκρίβεια*)**

Though the proper mechanism through which Brentano secures his apodictic insights might still be somewhat obscure, something is certain about its results: the laws of descriptive psychology, obtained through what Brentano has called induction in a broad sense, have a distinguishing character; they are not only general, not only apodictic, but also, as Brentano frequently puts it in the lectures of *Descriptive Psychology*, exact (*exakte*) (see in particular DP, 1-5/3-7).

Now, the question of the exactitude of science and philosophy has always been a concern of Brentano: the very first of his Habilitation theses is a protest “against the division of sciences in speculative and exact [*exakte*]”, a protest upon which the very existence of philosophy would depend (ZPh, 137). But exactness, inasmuch as it is a widespread notion in Brentano’s thought, is also hardly a univocal concept. It is important, then, to pinpoint the sense in which Brentano claims the laws of descriptive psychology to be exact.

Already in the 1874 *Psychology*, for instance, in a passage to which we have already alluded (see §22), Brentano endorses Aristotle’s claim that psychology is a science more valuable than any

other both i) because of the dignity of its object and ii) *because of its exactness* [*Schärfe*, Brentano's German here for Aristotle's ἀκρίβεια] (PES, 37/20)<sup>57</sup>. And he explains that the reason why Aristotle considered psychology an exact science is because

Ihm hängt die Schärfe der Erkenntnis mit der Unvergänglichkeit des Gegenstandes zusammen. Das stetig und allseitig Wechselnde entzieht sich nach ihm der wissenschaftlichen Forschung; das, was am meisten bleibt, hat am meisten bleibende Wahrheit. (PES, 38/20)

And, indeed, Brentano himself had just put forth, in the previous paragraph, a similar argument to that of Aristotle: he had compared the validity of the laws of natural science, limited to earthly, mortal life; and the validity of the laws of psychology – or at least some part of them, of course – which would extend both through mortal and immortal life, making the latter science more valuable than the former.

Now, Brentano's interpretation of this passage of *De Anima* is far from obvious. Commentators have not failed to point out that ἀκρίβεια in general, and even its occurrence in this specific passage, has many possible senses beyond the one pointed by Brentano (see the moderns Shields, 2016, 82; and Polansky, 2007, 36; but also Aquinas's commentary, for whom the ἀκρίβεια of psychology stems from the acquaintance each of us have with our own soul (Lectio I, §6); and Trendelenburg, 1877, 155-6, with which Brentano was acquainted in its previous editions). Ἀκρίβεια, as it turns out, has variegated meanings, fluctuating through the Aristotelian *corpus*, and it is not always easy to identify precisely which one is being employed.

And yet, just as Aristotle's concept is more equivocal, on the one hand, so does Brentano's talk of exactness – *Schärfe* or *Exaktheit* – extend far beyond the sense in which it was employed in that passage of the *Psychology* we just examined; and, as we will see, the way in which he refers to psychology as an exact science in the first chapter of *PES* is *not* the same way in which he will characterize the exactness of descriptive psychological laws in *DP* – that sense of exactness, that is, with which we are particularly concerned. Now, this being the case – considering we have a double problem of equivocity – maybe we can profit from Brentano's reference to Aristotle's ἀκρίβεια and follow both equivocities side-by-side, as it were, using Aristotle's concept – more thoroughly cartographed – as a guide to Brentano's manifold senses of *Exaktheit*. If we are right,

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<sup>57</sup> The passage to which he refers is none other than the opening lines of *De Anima*, 402a1-4: “Τῶν καλῶν καὶ τιμίων τὴν εἶδησιν ὑπολαμβάνοντες, μᾶλλον δ' ἐτέραν ἐτέρας ἢ κατ' ἀκρίβειαν ἢ τῶ βελτιόνων τε καὶ θαυμασιωτέρων εἶναι, δι' ἀμφοτέρα ταῦτα τὴν περὶ τῆς ψυχῆς ἱστορίαν εὐλόγως ἂν ἐν πρώτοις τιθεῖμεν” (emphasis mine); which Brentano translates as “Wenn wir zu dem, was edel und ehrwürdig ist, das Wissen rechnen; mehr aber das eine als das andere, sei es, weil seine *Schärfe* größer, sei es, weil sein Gegenstand erhabener und wunderbarer ist: so möchten wir wohl aus beiden Gründen die Erkenntnis der Seele mit Fug zu den vorzüglichsten Gütern zählen“ (PES, 37, emphasis mine).



not only this first, explicitly Aristotelian sense of exactness might become clearer, but we might also get important clues for understanding other senses of exactness in Brentano.

*Apo.* I, 27, 87a31-8, is probably the passage where ἀκρίβεια receives its most systematic treatment by Aristotle. He distinguishes there three senses of exactness: a science is more exact than another if i) it is concerned with both the facts and the reason why (τε τοῦ ὅτι καὶ διότι) of its subject matter; ii) it is not said of an underlying subject (μὴ καθ' ὑποκειμένου) while the other is said of an underlying subject; iii) it depends on fewer things (ἐξ ἐλαττόνων) while the other depends on additional posits (ἐκ προσθέσεως).

So, could we identify which of these senses, if any, Brentano had in mind when he agreed, in *PES*, with Aristotle's claim on the exactness of psychology? To help us with that, it might be useful to remark that this exact same passage is paraphrased in Brentano's own lectures on Aristotle, as he discusses the issue of the exactness of sciences. As Brentano reads it,

Exakter sind die Wissenschaften, [i] welche das 'Daß' und 'Warum' zugleich betrachten, als jene, die nicht beides enthalten. Jedoch darf das 'Warum' nicht von dem 'Daß' getrennt sein. Und [ii] die abstrakten sind exakter als die konkreten, z. B. die Arithmetik gegenüber der Harmonielehre. Auch [iii] ist die Wissenschaft, welche aus wenigen obersten Grundsätzen abgeleitet ist, genauer und früher als die, welche sich noch auf sinnliche Zusätze stützt, wie z.B. die Arithmetik gegenüber der Geometrie. (GGPh, 234)

The way Brentano reads the second criterion is revealing: more exact are those sciences which are further abstracted – and one could complete: abstracted from matter, understood by Aristotle as something which resists order and regularity (*GA*, *A*, 10, 778a4-9; see also Barnes, 1993, 190); sciences like arithmetics, having no material subject, versus sciences like harmonics, being a specific science of the arrangement of sounds. We can see better, now, that the notion of exactness of the first chapter of *PES*, according to which Brentano interpreted Aristotle's claim in the opening lines of *De Anima*, is very close to this second Aristotelian sense presented *Apo.* I, 27.

As if that were not enough, it is possible to single out at least two more senses of ἀκρίβεια, scattered through other works of Aristotle (see Barnes 1993, 190): iv) “a science is less exact if its theorems hold only 'for the most part'” (ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ) (*EN*, *A*, 3, 1094b11-27; *Γ*, 5, 1112b1-9); and v) “one demonstration is said to be more exact than another if its premisses are closer to the principles of the science” (*Apo.*, I 24, 86a16-7; *EN*, *Z*, 7, 1141a16-8). And thus we will find, among these manifold meanings of ἀκρίβεια, not only that explicitly Aristotelian sense of *Exaktheit* that Brentano uses in *PES* (namely sense (ii)), but also *the more specific sense in which*

*Brentano will claim the laws of descriptive psychology to be exact in DP.* For indeed, when Brentano claims, in the *DP* lectures, that descriptive psychological laws are exact, it is precisely that fourth Aristotelian sense of ἀκρίβεια that he will employ, the sense according to which iv) the laws of an exact science hold not only “for the most part”, but *without exceptions*.

Descriptive psychology, Brentano says, “belongs to the exact sciences [*exakten Wissenschaften*]” (DP, 1/3, translation modified). And how should that be understood? First of all, Brentano dismisses what he takes as a false track: “[t]here has sometimes been talk of exact science as opposed to a so-called speculative science. [...] I would be gravely misunderstood if, in our case, one were to think of this distinction.” (DP, 3/5). This passage is important, in the first place, because it explains the exact meaning of that first *Habilitation* thesis, put forth so many years before. It is not that philosophy must take the side of exact sciences against the speculative ones. It is rather that the whole opposition between exact and speculative is misleading. On the one hand, the very idea of a *speculative science* is an oxymoron. Speculation is “bare and void of all scientific character” (DP, 3/5). On the other hand, one must keep in mind that there are, indeed, *exact and inexact sciences*<sup>58</sup>.

This is how Brentano presents this latter distinction:

Es gibt Wissenschaften, welche ihre Lehrsätze ganz scharf und präzis formulieren können. Andere, welche genötigt sind, sich mit etwas unbestimmten, verschwommenen Formeln zu begnügen. Ein Mathematiker sagt nicht: die Winkelsumme eines Dreieckes hat häufig oder gewöhnlich, sondern es hat immer und ausnahmslos zur Winkelsumme 2 R. (DP, 3/5)

An inexact science such as, say, meteorology,

wenn sie uns selbst von sehr einfachen Dingen wie von der relativen Temperatur eines Sommer- oder Wintermonates berichtet. "Oft", "meist", "durchschnittlich" sind Wörtchen, durch welche sie die Schärfe ihrer Behauptungen abschwächen muß, um nicht ihrer Wahrheit etwas zu vergeben. Sie ist eben nicht imstande, die Bedingungen, welche auf die meteorologischen Vorkommnisse einen Einfluß üben, sämtlich zu ermitteln und in Rechnung zu bringen und so kommt sie denn auch zu einem oft innerhalb weiter Grenzen schwankenden Resultate. (DP, 3/5)

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<sup>58</sup> Cf. also GPhN, 6, where Brentano identifies as one of the reasons for the discouragement in philosophy the fact that “[d]ie Philosophen selbst [behaupten, die Philosophie sei] keine exakte Wissenschaft. [Doch bleibt offen,] in welchem Sinn von exakten und inexakten Wissenschaften zu sprechen [ist]; dies [ist] nicht der Gegensatz zu spekulativ.“ Which seems to indicate already that philosophy, as a whole, might be neither an exact science nor mere speculation, but precisely an inexact one.

But while meteorology is an extreme case, of extreme inexactness, we could say – we all know how easy it is to be caught in the rain unprepared during what was announced as a sunny afternoon – inexactness afflicts all those sciences which cannot provide a full determination of the factors influencing the phenomena they study.

Most importantly, inexactness afflicts genetic psychology, as that part of psychology, opposed to the descriptive one, that studies the laws of coming to be and passing away of psychical phenomena. These laws, by their turn, depend on a series of complicated factors, physiological to a great degree, and of which we have no fully determining knowledge (cf. §41). Because of that, says Brentano, they do not have a “strictly general validity”, but “are subject to a more or less frequent occurrence of exceptions” (DP, 4/6, translation modified).

On the contrary, an exact science, such as descriptive psychology, has this fundamental mark: the *exceptionlessness of their laws or theorems (Lehrsätze)*. To descriptive psychological assertions such as that according to which every judgment has an underlying presentation, or that which states that every emotional act is either positive or negative, no exception can be found, no disconfirming instance. This is not to say that there can be no mistake in the establishing of these laws (on that, see §40). But no one will ever, on a given day, casually run into an instance of judgment which somehow disconfirms that law of descriptive psychology; as one could perfectly well, on a given day, leave without an umbrella just to find some meteorological prevision disconfirmed; or, arguably, like one can always run into specimens representing anomalies in the laws of zoology, physiology and so on.

Interestingly enough, Brentano speaks of descriptive psychology having *doctrines* which are sharp and precise, but he also speaks of their *allowing for a precise formulation* (DP, 4/5-6). Laws of exact sciences “are formulated in a sharp and exact manner” (DP, 3/5), and descriptive psychology is no exception. Brentano does not distinguish, therefore, as others would eventually do, between, on the one hand, descriptive psychology as a science dealing with somewhat vague or imprecise or morphological concepts and, on the other, logic or mathematics as dealing with concepts that have clear-cut definition. This is not the sense of exactness in question here, and it is not clear whether Brentano even had the problem in mind. When Brentano speaks of exact *formulation* of a law, instead, we should understand this sharpness of formulation as the sharpness of its legal force: the fact, as Brentano emphasizes repeatedly in this section, that, in a law of an exact science, ‘always’ means literally ‘always’, and not ‘most often,’ ‘practically all the time’; ‘all’ means literally ‘all’ and not ‘the great majority,’ ‘most of,’ and so on.

## CHAPTER 3: The higher strata

### §38. *Tasks: classification and analysis*

Through our investigations into its method, we have reached a more thorough understanding of descriptive psychology and of its mechanisms. The glaring question now – the question that naturally follows – is, of course, that of the actual function this mechanism is supposed to accomplish. What does the descriptive psychologist strive for? What is the use of these apodictic, exact laws of necessary combinations of psychical phenomena that he establishes through his procedures and his method?

Descriptive sciences have frequently been portrayed as *classificatory* sciences. This is how William Whewell, for instance, in his *Philosophy of the Inductive Sciences*, speaks of those sciences such as mineralogy, botanics, and zoology (see Whewell 1847, vol 2, book VIII). These natural-historical sciences – that Brentano himself sometimes calls descriptive<sup>59</sup> – are also those that are traditionally called descriptive sciences; and in this group we would have to include as well a science like geognosy or descriptive geology, to which Brentano explicitly compares descriptive psychology (more on this later, see §43). These are sciences whose most basic task is that of comparing phenomena, finding resemblances between them and, through this identification of likeness, distributing them into classes (Whewell, 1847, 470) which are eventually built up into a systematic classification.

Classification is, of course, also an important task of descriptive psychology. Already in *PES*, distinction of the three basic classes of mental phenomena, as well as their divisions and subdivisions (see in particular *PES* II, 3/137), was a major concern of Brentano. Moreover, proceeding in a way that looks much like the procedure of the natural historical sciences Whewell analyses, Brentano insists that these classifications cannot be arbitrary (*PES* II, 3/137), but rather “must be natural, that is to say, [they] must unite into a single class objects closely related by nature, and [they] must separate into different classes objects which are relatively distant by nature” (*PES* II, 28/150). As for the principle providing guidance to our connecting what is connected and separating what is separated, it is, of course, none other than inner perception (*PES* II, 36/154): this is the “natural way [*naturgemäß Weg*]” to build a classification, namely by basing oneself upon knowledge of the object itself (*PES* II, 28-9/150); and not by importing one’s criteria

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<sup>59</sup> Cf. the manuscript from the Würzburg lectures of 1868/9 quoted in Fréchette 2012, 8; the same distinction appears in *GPhN*, though there these sciences are named ‘concrete’.

from other disciplines (PES II, 29/150) – for instance, by trying to classify psychological phenomena according to their physiological basis or their ethical import. Inner perception, here as always, is the sole source of legitimacy: the classifications of descriptive psychology must accord with what is shown in inner perception; and the separations or the groupings proposed in it must be achieved through that same induction in a broad sense that is characteristic of the discipline; so that the classification is established with the same certainty and exactitude of any descriptive psychological law.

It is in this sense that Brentano, already in 1874, establishes the main classifications of mental phenomena, and then follows, in later texts, to provide further classifications of presentations, judgments and emotional acts. Great part of the *Descriptive Psychology* lectures is devoted to presenting detailed – and not always agreeing – classifications of psychological phenomena. For instance, Brentano begins one of these attempts at classification by distinguishing two main tasks: “we wish to identify, above all, (a) what [psychical acts] have in common, [and] (b) the main classes they fall into” (DP, 83/89). The first question is that of the common character of all psychological phenomena, the question upon which the unity of the domain of psychology is based – and which we have already examined (see §25). And the second is the one from which Brentano establishes, first, the already well-known tripartite classification into presentations, judgments and emotional acts; and, further, the divisions of presentations (e.g., in sensations and proteraeestheses (DP, 85/91)), of judgments (e.g., in affirmation and negation, immediate or mediate, or apodictic and assertoric, etc. (DP, 149/158)), or of emotional acts (e.g. in simple loving or hating or preferring and relegating (DP, 150/159)).

It is not our goal here to compare these different sketches of classification or trying to systematize them into a definitive classification, but rather to show in which way they constitute an important task of the descriptive psychologist. Brentano speaks, on at least some occasions, of distinguishing the *logical parts* of mental phenomena; so that, for instance, a classification of a certain judgment could be taken as the distinguishing of the parts: being an affirmation → being a judgment → being a relation of consciousness (DP, 20/23). In this sort of distinction,

handelt es sich um zwei Bestimmtheiten, von welchen die eine über die andere untergeordnet das Ding s.z.s. von derselben Seite (nur die eine minder, die andere mehr) bestimmen, mit andern Worten um das, was man im strengen Sinn eine logische Gattungsbestimmtheit und eine logische spezifische Differenz nennt. (DP, 18/21).

These parts are characterized by one-sided distinctional separability: Brentano's way of saying that not every judgment is an affirmation but every affirmation is a judgment; or, in his other example, that every red is a red is a color but not every color is a red.

But not every part is like that. Picking up the example of sensations, for instance, Brentano says that,

wo wir Qualität und örtliche Besonderheit unterscheiden, handelt es sich um zwei spezifische Bestimmtheiten verschiedener Gattung, welche, sich eigentümlich einander durchdringend, gegenseitig zu ihrer Individualisierung beitragen. (DP, 18/20-1)

These are what Brentano calls “mutually pervading parts [*sich durchwohnende Teile*]” (DP, 20/22) and, to continue speaking as Brentano, we could say that they determine the objects, as it were, from different sides – these are the different, horizontal parts that form the psychical act as a concretum. In our example of sensation, we have as a first pervading part the spatial (or space-like) determination and, as the second part, what Brentano calls the quality, which “occupies the place (or the analogue of the place), [i.e.] fills the space (or the analogue)” (DP, 89/95). In another example, we could have a certain judgment that has as its mutually pervading parts, say, its being affirmative (as opposed to a rejection); its being evident (as opposed to blind); its being related to a physical phenomenon (as opposed to a psychical one); its being assertoric (as opposed to apodictic).

Now, should we say that the task of investigating the relation between quality and spatial particularity, and then showing their necessary connection in an apodictic law; or the task of establishing the connection between being a judgment of inner perception and being an evident judgment, are tasks of classification? The distinction of the manifold mutually pervading parts of all sorts of mental phenomena; the clarification of the fundamental intentional relation that is common to all psychical acts and the establishing of their inseparability; the spelling out of the distinction between primary and secondary intentional objects – are these classificatory tasks?

When we look at all the various tasks the psychologist has to carry out, it seems really difficult to sustain the characterization of descriptive psychology as a simply classificatory science. It seems inadequate when descriptive psychology is sometimes presented, by critics or enthusiasts, as merely a science striving towards the classification of mental phenomena; for the same reason, even when an always judicious commentator such as Fréchette says that classification is the *main task*, “*die Hauptaufgabe der deskriptive Psychologie*” (Fréchette, 2012, 13), it still looks like an understating characterization of the job of the descriptive psychologist. Not the same mode of

connection holds between all different parts of psychical act; and they are certainly not all relations of genera and species – or, differently put, of classes and members of classes. In fact, it had been suggested already in 1874 that the task of psychology was not only “to classify mental phenomena” but “to determine satisfactorily the characteristics and laws for each class” as well (PES, 42/23) – and this should not be taken as referring to genetic psychology only, but already to the ground-laying work of descriptive psychology itself.

Similar considerations are valid for yet another important task that befalls the descriptive psychology, a task intimately connected with that of classification. If classificatory sciences – so it was usually proposed – were all about establishing *resemblances* and distributing phenomena together into classes, they would nevertheless also comprise the corresponding task of *analysis* – the task, that is, of *noticing dissimilarities*, and developing an exact descriptive terminology that not only fixates the similarities, but also distinguishes the objects from each other. As Whewell puts it:

[b]y the continued progress of that knowledge of minerals, plants, and other natural objects, [...] the most important and essential features of similarity and dissimilarity in such objects have been selected, arranged, and fitted with names; and we have thus in such departments, systems of Terminology which fix our attention upon the resemblances which it is proper to consider, and enable us to convey them in words. (Whewell, 1847, 485)

Here as well we have a task which Brentano has not failed to point out as being part of the job of the descriptive psychologist: he surely speaks of descriptive psychology as an “analysing description [*analysierende Beschreibung*] of our phenomena” (DP, 129/137); and that methodical procedure of noticing, as we have seen already (§31), was designed to bring out “part agreements, part differences” (DP, 51ff./53ff.). But here again, for the reasons just spelled out above, it becomes clear that descriptive psychology is not *simply about analysis*; that its job is not so simple as *making distinctions*. It is rather concerned with a wider assortment of various kinds of relationships between parts of phenomena.

### **§39. Tasks: general compositional account**

If classification and analysis are significant tasks of the descriptive psychologist, but not its main task, then what could its *Hauptaufgabe* be? Brentano’s answer is actually very direct, and given right at the start of one of his presentations of descriptive psychology in the *DP* lectures: the aim

of descriptive psychology is that of “exhaustively determining (if possible) [(*nach Möglichkeit*) *erschöpfend zu bestimmen*] the elements [*Elemente*] of human consciousness and the ways in which they are connected [*ihre Verbindungsweise*]” (DP, 1/3).

There is a lot packed in these opening lines that requires specific clarification. First of all, let us not concern ourselves with the fact that Brentano speaks here of *human* consciousness (on the fact that this does not contradict the general determination of the object of descriptive psychology as the domain of psychical phenomena, see the discussion in §25). Let us further leave aside, for now, the qualification according to which one should carry out an exhaustive determination of the elements of consciousness *as far as possible*; this will be the subject of the next section. Let us rather focus, first, on the task that is presented here to the descriptive psychologist – a twofold task, really, insofar as the psychologist must determine *both the elements of consciousness and the modes of connection (Verbindungsweise)* of these elements.

Consciousness, Brentano says, “consists of a multitude of parts” (DP, 10/13) and, as we advanced above, not all of them are connected in the same way. Among the manifold parts of consciousness, some can be actually separated – much like parts of a spatial continuum – when one ceases to exist while the other continues to exist. Brentano gives as examples a seeing and a hearing, for instance (DP, 12/15). They might come together to form my present consciousness, but they are separable nevertheless. These separable parts can be further divided into one-sidedly or mutually separable<sup>60</sup>. There are, moreover, parts which are not really separable, but only distinguishable: Brentano calls these distinctional parts (DP, 13/16) – and here again there are many subdivisions, such as those mutually pervading parts of acts that were discussed above; the logical parts of acts; the parts of the intentional correlation and the double relation of primary and secondary object (DP, 20-2/25-7). Finally, there are distinctional parts in the modified sense, that is, improper parts gained through modifying distinctions, such as, most importantly, the objects of acts (DP, 25-7/28-30).

Corresponding to these manifold parts, then, there are also the manifold *Verbindungsweise* of consciousness, through which all the parts are linked together into the *whole* of conscious life. The idea of consciousness being a whole is, in fact, crucial to descriptive psychology. Going against the Humean critiques, according to which conscious life would be nothing more than a bundle of

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<sup>60</sup> Properly speaking, Brentano says that the *elements* of consciousness are the last really separable parts (DP, 13/16). It is clear, however, that the task of the descriptive psychology extends further into the examination of the distinctional and modifying parts.



perceptions, without anything to actually bind them together (see above, §18), Brentano insists, already from the time of the *Psychology*, upon the unity of consciousness. Thus, he asks

ob es auch bei einem solchen größeren Reichtume psychischer Erscheinungen immer noch eine reale Einheit sei, die alle umfasse, ob auch sie alle als Teilphänomene zu einem reell einheitlichen Ganzen gehören, oder ob wir es hier mit einer Vielheit von Dingen zu tun haben, so daß die Gesamtheit des Seelenzustandes als ein Kollektiv, als eine Gruppe von Phänomenen zu betrachten sei, deren jedes ein Ding für sich ist oder einem besonderen Dinge zugehört. (PES II, 221-2/120)

And the answer is of course the former. But – and this is crucial – to say that consciousness is a unity is not to say it is a simple thing.

Einheit und Einfachheit - das hat wiederum schon Aristoteles mit Nachdruck geltend gemacht – sind Begriffe, die nicht miteinander verwechselt werden dürfen. Wenn ein wirkliches Ding nicht eine Mehrheit von wirklichen Dingen, so kann es doch eine Mehrheit von Teilen enthalten. (PES II, 223/121; see also DP, 79/83)

Clearly, it is under this perspective that Brentano carried out the analyses of parts in the *DP* lectures. Consciousness is not “strictly uniform and completely simple” (DP, 10/13) precisely because “it shows itself as being composed of many parts” (DP, 12/15). This Aristotelian distinction, however, cuts in two directions. For a unity is to be distinguished from a simplicity, on the one hand; but it is to be distinguished from a heap – or, as we could also say, a bundle – on the other. Consciousness, Brentano is saying, is not like a heap but, to stick with Aristotelian examples, like a syllable: it is composed out of something in a way that the whole is one (τὸ ἕκτινος σύνθετον οὕτως ὥστε ἓν εἶναι τὸ πᾶν, in *Met.*, Z, 17, 1041b11); so that this composition manifestly involves two things: not only the elements themselves (στοιχεῖα) but also a certain arrangement of these elements. As Aristotle puts it in a different passage, it involves both *matter* and *form*:

For the letters are the causes of syllables, and the material is the cause of manufactured things, and fire and earth and all such things are the causes of bodies, and the parts are causes of the whole, and the hypotheses are causes of the conclusion, in the sense that they are that out of which these respectively are made [ὡς τὸ ἐξ ὧν αἰτία ἐστίν]; but of these some are cause as *substratum* (e.g. the parts), others as *essence* (the whole, the synthesis, and the form). (*Met.*, Δ, 2, 1013b17-23; Jowett)

Parts and wholes are understood in this passage, and in many others, as, respectively, the material and the formal cause of things – as matter and form, in a broad understanding of the terms. It is a distinction that applies, of course, not only to material things, strictly speaking, but to syllables (having letters as their elements, arranged in a certain way); syllogisms (having premises as their elements, arranged in a certain way); and, as a particular case, to bodies. This is what distinguishes all of these things, as *wholes* (in quite technical sense), from mere heaps.

In the case of this whole that is consciousness, then, we also have the parts – the στοιχεῖα, the matter – as well as the *Verbindungsweise* – the arrangement of the parts, the form. The investigation and determination of this *whole*, this *composition* of consciousness is the ultimate objective of descriptive psychology. In other words, the object of descriptive psychology (if we wanted maybe to go even further than the characterization presented in §25) is not simply the domain of psychical phenomena, but the *laws of composition of the domain of consciousness*, in this technical sense. Sure, we can still speak of descriptive psychology as an *analysing description*, but now we know that this analysis must be understood in the sense of a *compositional account*, an account, that is, which brings to light the manner in which the manifold psychical phenomena are composed.

And yet this is not all. For the task of the descriptive psychologist is not to provide a compositional account of this or that psychical phenomenon but “to provide, *in general*, a description of the domain of our psychological activity” (*im allgemeinen* eine Beschreibung des Gebiets unserer psychischen Tätigkeit [zu] geben) (DP, 132/140). We had seen already the painstaking methodical procedures through which the descriptive psychologist secured the establishing of apodictic laws; and now we understand how this is part of his task. Thus we can finally say of the *Hauptaufgabe* of descriptive psychology that it is to provide a general compositional account of the entire domain of consciousness, spelling out the apodictic, exact laws of the necessary, possible and impossible *Verbindungsweise* between the various and manifold parts of psychical phenomena. In so doing, descriptive psychology *traces* this domain in its fundamental features; it creates a *model*, as it were, of these necessary, possible and impossible combinations.

As Brentano also puts it, highlighting the particularity of the duty of descriptive psychology: “[i]ts aim is nothing other than to provide us with a general concept [*allgemeinen Begriff*] of the entire realm of human consciousness” (DP, 2/4). This is both a simple and an intricate task. On the one hand, it is a task bounded, from the start, by very strict limits: the limits of the territory of the realm consciousness. On the other hand, it must be understood as the task of rendering a general

concept whose *definition* – in the sense of the intricateness of its internal determinations – *increases as the tracing of the domain advances*, as one notices and distinguishes more and more of its fundamental parts and establishes the rules of their interconnection. Merely having some hazy general concept of consciousness is, by itself, not enough; to have a concept does not mean to have all its features clearly laid out. Thus, the job of the descriptive psychologist is not *simply* to provide a general concept of the whole of consciousness, but to work out, as much as possible, the determinations of this concept – just like the efforts of cartographers naturally did not end when the rough shapes of the continents were laid down in early world maps like Ortelius’s *Typus Orbis Terrarum*, but were directed towards producing more accurate and detailed charts.

And this finally brings us, of course, to an understanding of that qualification mentioned and left aside at the beginning of the section: that the descriptive psychologist must *exhaustively determine* the elements of consciousness and its modes of connection. In other words, his task is not merely to provide a concept of the whole of consciousness, but to engage himself, as far as his powers allow, in a progressive *Begriffsbestimmung*, an ever richer conceptual determination of this field.

#### **§40. Tasks: error, incompleteness, language**

The image presented so far of Brentano’s descriptive method could lead, however, to a serious mistake: the mistake, that is, of thinking that descriptive psychology is completely immune to error. For indeed, if the evidence of inner perception is indubitable; if the apodictic laws established by induction in a broad sense are absolutely certain, then what could possibly go wrong? Descriptive psychology, however, is definitely not infallible; and Brentano himself never fails to point out the many and diverse occasions for error to creep into the procedures of the descriptive psychologist. A completely different investigation would be needed to even begin to chart all the “cliffs and sandbanks” on which the adventurous psychologist could get stranded (DP, 28/31) but, this not being possible, at least a few pointers must be given about where and how exactly error enters the scene of descriptive psychology.

One thing has been established and cannot be revoked: inner perception, insofar as it is a source of evidence, is indubitable and, yes, infallible, meaning there is no room for error here (DP, 29/32). We also saw, however, that experiencing was but the first step of a long series of methodological procedures, broad and strict, through which the descriptive psychologist must pass in order to establish the truths of his discipline. And, in fact, already in noticing – i.e., the second important

methodical procedure we identified – one finds significant challenges for the psychologist. Noticing itself is, for sure, just as infallible as the experiencing in inner perception upon which it is based; there is no false noticing (DP, 31/35; 65/66). To notice, after all, is nothing but to make explicit what was implicitly accepted in a certain experience, from which it quickly becomes clear that there cannot be any mistaken noticing. Yet we do find in noticing a critical source not of error, but of *imperfection* or *incompleteness* (*Unvollkommenheit*).

One can have a certain experience, be conscious of it, and still fail to notice its most crucial aspects: one can feel pain and fail to distinguish between the pain itself and the underlying sensuous presentation; one can perform a judgment and fail to distinguish between the object judged and the act of judgment itself; one can see a certain blue and fail to notice that there is some amount of red mixed in it; and so on. And this means that even some of the most important elements of our mental life are frequently overlooked in psychological analyses – as, for instance, Brentano could argue, the very intentional relation that is characteristic of all mental acts. This failure to notice and the incompleteness it entails are not only a contingent danger for the descriptive psychologist but a foe against which the descriptive psychologist must continuously battle. In fact, Brentano's goal of a *Begriffsbestimmung* of consciousness remains, until the end, precisely that: a goal. Any descriptive psychological account is always plagued by some degree of obscurity, of indistinctness (*Undeutlichkeit*), of lack of noticing – and, together with that, by the failure in establishing some of the laws of the connection of elements of mental phenomena. This dark side of the mental landscape was fully admitted by Brentano, and the fact that some parts of consciousness will always remain outside the account of the psychologist was brought up and discussed many times in his lectures (see, in particular, DP, 60ff./63ff.). That being said, if incompleteness lingers as a shadow over the job of the descriptive psychologist, it still does not explain how it is that error creeps into his results. It is rather during the next methodical procedure – the step, namely, of fixating in language – that error is to be found.

Language, as we have seen (§32), works by providing unintuitive substitute presentations, through which phenomena are collected and put into relation with each other. These substitutions simplify and facilitate the operations of the descriptive psychologist – in fact, of every scientist and layman – but they are not perfect; they rather provide approximations to that object to which they correspond. As if that were not enough, we create such approximations not only to simple, individual things, but also to general and sometimes fairly complex objects. It then happens that we end up with presentations about whose contents we are not completely clear, and which can lead to mistaken identifications. Through language, all sorts of confused determinations can mix

into our concepts, making us affirm things which were not really there, and which were not really secured by the evidence of inner perception.

Together, the lack of noticing and the use of confused concepts make descriptive psychology susceptible to “multifarious dangers” (DP, 69/71). On the one hand, the failure to notice the distinctive features of our experiences facilitates the using of mixed-up concepts to speak about phenomena; on the other hand, the lack of terminology also leads to a lack of noticing, insofar as calling attention to distinctions and directing the gaze towards more comprehensive noticing most often involves the use of linguistic substitutes.

Thus, to give an example discussed by Brentano, philosophers have been able to neglect, for centuries, the crucial distinction between presentations and judgments (PES II, 70-1), and one of the reasons for this mistake lies ingrained in our very language – the language, that is, as we ordinarily employ it, “the language of the people” (*Sprache des Volkes*), as Brentano puts it: it is the fact that we commonly refer to both presentations and judgments indistinctly as *thoughts* (*Denken*), while we clearly set these apart, in daily talk, from emotions or acts of will (PES II, 73).

But this is just one single example of what is in truth, for Brentano, a recurrent malaise. The inherited language, in which the descriptive psychologist himself or herself was raised and educated, brings with it a series of inherited mistakes and imprecisions. And not only our ordinary language, but also our scientific and philosophical vocabularies suffer with the plague of equivocity. Brentano mentions how Whewell’s *History of the Inductive Sciences* shows scientists being frequently misled by homonyms in their classifications and how philosophers have been led by language to bring together things that had no resemblance to each other as well as to separate things that were similar (PES II, 74)

And yet if language is a hindrance in the path of the descriptive psychologist, just like in that of the scientist and the philosopher, it is by no means an insurmountable obstacle, a barrier that would effectively cut off any attempt to describe our psychological phenomena. Quite on the contrary, as Brentano puts it when discussing the task of establishing the fundamental classes of psychological phenomena: “ordinary language [*gewöhnliche Sprache*] [prepares] the way for psychological investigations by means of the general names it assigns to mental phenomena” (PES, 63/33). Language presents a problem of imprecision, sure, but it also provides a general, common ground of communicability upon which the psychological investigations – and the language of psychology – can build. Through language, even if it is a vague *Sprache des Volkes*, we can refer to the broad classes of mental phenomena, distinguish their most important elements and so on; and through it

we acquire the rough concepts which we can, as our science develops, sharpen through careful, artificial, methodical development of our terminology – i.e., through noticing, comparison, fixating and all the others procedures which we have already examined – so that these concepts can be made more distinct (*deutlich*).

All that is needed is that one does not take for granted what is received in language: “ordinary language is not entirely reliable, and it would mislead those who depended upon it too much, just as it would facilitate the discovery of truth for those who utilize its definitions with caution.” (PES, 63/33) It provides both a provisional support and a rough sketch of the distinctions to be traced, but neither a sufficient guarantee nor a definitive outline; and the distinctions and terminology of the descriptive psychology must be always secured by reporting them to the legitimating force of inner perception.

As far as Brentano is concerned, then – and always considering that descriptive psychology is a fundamentally philosophical discipline –, there is nothing like the problem of a uniquely philosophical language, a language requiring an essential break with the ordinary one; or, differently put, the problem of a philosophical language is, for Brentano, essentially the same as that of any language at all, namely the problem of equivocity, only heightened to the level of precision and rigour that is asked for in science or philosophy.

This also means that, for Brentano, the issue of the language with which we are to carry out our descriptions of psychical phenomena is not, by itself, a critical one. There is no trace in Brentano, for instance, of that apprehension – a more contemporary apprehension, arguably – that would see in the conceptualization of what is given in internal perception an irresistible distortion of the original, raw material of experience; or the sign of the inevitable prejudices that, loaded up in language, prevent a pure description of our mental life.

Now, Brentano even quotes from Mill when the latter says that

in the simplest description of an observation, there is, and must always be, much more asserted than is contained in the perception itself. We cannot describe a fact, without implying more than the fact. The perception is only of one individual thing; but to describe it is to affirm a connexion between it and every other thing which is either denoted or connoted by any of the terms used. (Mill 1974, IV, i, §3, 644)

Or, in Brentano's paraphrasing of the passage: description always involves more than perception, "it involves comparison and interpretation [*Vergleich und Deutung*]" (Ps 53 manuscript, c. 1876, for the third book of the *Psychology*; quoted in Hedwig, 1988, 33; see also Fréchette 2012, 10)

Brentano is then perfectly aware that a description is never *merely* the description *of a fact* but involves already comparison, generalization and the employing of a certain conceptual repertoire. And yet this does not lead him to concerns about the impairment of description by the interference of theoretical commitments and prejudices that, smuggled in language, would somehow contaminate the observation at the basis of description. That is because, as we have thoroughly discussed (§33), the goal of a Brentanian descriptive psychologist has never been the description of the raw material of experience – to pick up Brentano's metaphor –; it has never been the communication of the particular facts of the psychologist's private mental life. It has to do, rather, with the establishing of general laws governing the connection of parts of all mental lives. And, in this sense, the descriptive psychologist cannot but engage in multiple levels of generalization: not only the fixating in language – that is, the "affirming a connection between the singular fact and the other things denoted and connoted by the terms used" that Mill talks about – but all those strictly regulated methodical procedures through which the general laws are established which compose the descriptive model, valid for every factual occurrence, of the parts and modes of connections of consciousness.

The raw material of experience, then, must pass through several levels of processing before it yields the descriptive propositions which compose our model of consciousness: to describe is more than to observe, surely; and in the case of a descriptive psychological description, it is to experience, notice, fixate, analyse conceptually, generalize inductively and so on. At the end of this whole process – artificial, laborious and methodical – the descriptive psychologist will establish a set of certain, apodictic laws; laws regarding the inconceivability, for each and every factual conscious life, of the combination of some elements of mental phenomena. And it is not a problem for Brentano if description always involves some degree of comparison or if it employs ready-made concepts, because the procedures through which the descriptive psychologist builds his descriptive models of consciousness are designed precisely as a conscientious, diligent form of methodical generalization, in which the general laws that he wants to establish must be carefully tested against the immediate evidence of inner perception. In other words: the descriptions of the descriptive psychologist have their ground in perception not because they are the observation of absolutely particular, raw experiences but because its long-winded methodical procedures

guarantee the immediate grounding of those general truths themselves which constitute descriptive psychology. And it is precisely because these laws are grounded with immediate evidence – ultimately retraceable to the evidence of inner perception alone – that descriptive psychology remains *presuppositionless* (more on that in §42), even if it is always affected, in its language, by some degree of obscurity.

Coming back, however, to our general survey of the errors of the descriptive psychologist, a word is still necessary, finally, on how the incompleteness of noticing and the mistakes of fixating can affect the crucial methodical step of descriptive psychology, that is, the inductive generalization itself. And indeed, the failure to distinguish all the parts – logical parts, in particular – of a certain mental phenomenon can lead to the descriptive psychologist to an insufficient induction, of the kind that we saw before (§35) when, instead of establishing some law for the highest general concept, the psychologist establishes a subordinate law, of a lesser degree of generality (DP, 72/74). Generalizing from a concept with poorly distinguished parts one can arrive at laws of inadequate scope, as it were.

On the other hand, one could also fall prey to the opposite mistake, arguably more severe, of exaggerating the scope of one's inductions. If someone, for instance, failing to consider the particularity of emotional acts – which are analogous, but not identical to judgments –, were to say that evidence is a character applying equally to judgments and acts of love and hate.

Now, it is important to say, nevertheless, that the possibility of this kind of error does not testify against Brentano's claim that the propositions of descriptive psychology are exact – i.e., that what they state is *always* the case. For there can be no *counter-example* to it, no disconfirming instance, no case disproving a certain descriptive psychological law, as there could be an instance that disproves a certain incomplete inductive conclusion: one can always run into a black swan and it could even be that the sun does not rise tomorrow, but no one will ever judge something without having an object that is judged. We could, therefore, find out that we have made a mistake in what we established as a supposed descriptive psychological truth, but not that we have a descriptive psychological truth which is not certain.



#### ***§41. Place: a pure psychology and a mongrel science***

Having acquired a fuller picture of the source, object, procedures, method and tasks of descriptive psychology, we are finally in a position from which we can evaluate its place in the general scheme of scientific disciplines and in Brentano's own philosophical system; and from which we can properly tackle that notorious – the overly prominent, even – question of the distinction between a descriptive and a genetic psychology.

Right at the outset of his lectures, Brentano says that “[p]sychognosy [...] is pure psychology [*reine Psychologie*], whereas it would not be inappropriate to refer to genetic psychology as physiological psychology.” (DP, 1/3). It is important to understand the exact meaning of this claim, which seems to have been interpreted too literally by some commentators: it does not mean that the laws of genetic psychology are simply the laws of psychophysics nor that the proper content of genetic psychology are merely the interactions between physical or physiological conditions and psychical phenomena. What is characteristic of *genetic* psychology, first of all, is not that it is physiological psychology, but that it is the investigation of the laws of succession of mental phenomena, the laws *of their coming to be and passing away*; and this investigation can be carried out, to a great extent, by looking at these processes, so to speak, from its psychical side – by looking at psychical phenomena themselves. In fact, as Brentano presents it, genetic psychology would comprise multifarious tasks, only some of which could maybe said to conflate with those tasks of physiological psychology or psycho-physics. Not only does the genetic psychologist try to establish the most general laws of the succession of mental phenomena, but he can also seek, for instance, to determine the processes of generation and transformation of the mental lives of specific individuals, of certain populations, or even of entire societies or cultures; and not only is he concerned with the more general laws that regulate the normal succession of certain phenomena, but also with the special laws that governs particular, abnormal cases.

In this regard, he could work to reconstruct the “pre-history” of the conscious life of a mature individual by examining the development of children and try to ascertain the conditions for the arising of this or that psychical capacity; and, in an investigation of this kind, he could establish, for instance, a relation between the desire to notice and the strength of impressions that are strikingly novel, breaking with habitual perceptions and instilling such a desire to notice new distinctions (DP, 55/57). He could instead focus on the connections of certain mental phenomena in pathological individuals (PES, 90/47). He could develop a theory exclusively about the

dispositions that a certain psychical phenomenon leaves behind and the most common interactions about psychical phenomena (PES, 87ff./45ff.). He can inquire into the cultural and artistic expressions of a certain civilization through its ascent and decline and he can work towards discovering the general laws that govern the ascendent and descendent phases of art or science or philosophy. All of these are genetic psychological investigations into the coming to be and passing away of psychical phenomena.

However – and this is Brentano’s point – one cannot fully comprehend processes of generation, succession and decay unless one comprehends *their causes* as well. Genetic psychology is not concerned only with “the fact that a specific phenomenon does occur now, or does not occur now or disappears” (DP, 2/4) but also with the causes for their occurrence. Genetic psychology is certainly not just a science of the “*Daß*”, of the “*ὅτι*”, but also of the “*Warum*”, of the “*διότι*”. And here, once we turn our attention to the causes of these complex processes, we will find out that the *conditions upon which they depend are not entirely traceable to psychical phenomena*, but rather must be sought for in human physiology and ultimately in physical processes. As Brentano explains, since human consciousness is “tied to certain physiological events [...] then it is evident that genetic psychology will never be able to achieve its task fully and properly without mentioning physico-chemical process and without reference to anatomical structures” (DP, 1-2/3-4). It is this *reference to something else* – which, distant as it sometimes may be, is always necessarily there – that makes it impossible to speak of genetic psychology as pure psychology. The laws of genetic psychology, therefore, cannot be considered as a complete, self-sufficient system of laws; they can only find their *completion* with this investigation into *the physiological and physical laws that constitute their underlying conditions*. Therefore, the complete determination (*Bestimmung*) of these laws of genetic psychology necessarily implies stepping out of the limits of the domain of mental phenomena. And, all this considered, we see that, indeed, it is not inappropriate to call it physiological psychology – but neither is it completely accurate.

Descriptive psychology, on the contrary – as it must be sufficiently clear at this point – establishes propositions about the combinations of parts of mental phenomena, with reference to nothing but mental phenomena, and relying exclusively upon the evidence of inner perception in which mental phenomena are given. Its main task is to present an account of the whole domain of consciousness; its job is to explore this domain and this domain alone, and it is completely bound to it. Thus, if both descriptive and genetic psychology deal primarily with psychical phenomena, the difference between them is that the former keeps to limits of that domain, while the latter, by putting

psychical phenomena *in relation with* other phenomena, is a discipline between domains; if the former is endogenous, pure psychology, the latter is an exogenous, mongrel science.

#### **§42. Place: the priority function of descriptive psychology**

But descriptive psychology is not only pure in the sense of being *purely psychological* – in the sense, that is, in which all it cares about are psychical phenomena. By maybe forcing Brentano's point just a little, we could say that descriptive psychology is *pure* also in the sense that it is dependent on nothing except what is immediately apprehended in inner perception. As it was already mentioned before (see §40) the reason why one could say that descriptive psychology is *presuppositionless* or that it *purely describes* is precisely the fact that its certain, apodictic, general laws are established immediately out of the concepts provided by inner perception. Let us stress this point: descriptive psychology *purely describes* not because it avoids generalizing, making comparisons and so on; not because it deals in some kind of naïve conceptuality; and certainly not because it refrains from advancing theoretical claims; but because all of its laws refer to nothing else, in their justification, but to the experience of inner perception, being all directly founded upon that ground, without the mediation of inferences and without the support of hypotheses (as Brentano had already insisted when setting up the concept of psychology from an empirical standpoint, §19).

This, in turn, does not mean, of course, that the descriptive psychologist cannot make use of hypothetical thinking, deductions or analogies. Quite on the contrary, “making deductive use [*Deduktive Verwertung*]” of the insight he has attained is one of the explicit steps that Brentano identifies as belonging to the descriptive psychologist's procedures (DP, 74/76), and we could as well have included it in our survey of the last chapter. In this way, he can pave the way for new discoveries and provisionally map portions of his domain which are still covered in obscurity. But, unlike in other sciences, whose laws essentially and inevitably must be attained through some sort of inference or involve some degree of hypothetical claims, descriptive psychology – because of the certainty that is proper to its domain – must strive for immediate grounding of certain laws: this is the achieved methodical form of its propositions.

Once we grasp more clearly this idea that descriptive psychology depends on nothing but the experience of inner perception, we can also better understand Brentano's claim, in his investigations on induction in *Versuch über die Erkenntnis*, that induction in a broad sense has the

function, already delineated by Aristotle, of establishing the *principles of knowledge* (VE, 72; already mentioned in §35). As Brentano explains in more detail in his lectures on Aristotle, there is a puzzle regarding the very starting point from which our knowledge can begin. More specifically, he asks, what is the starting point of those deductions and demonstrations which account for a great part of our insights, including the knowledge of most theoretical sciences?

It is clear that a deduction always begins from some previous knowledge, from which it infers its conclusion. But, under the threat of an infinite regress, it is also clear that not all knowledge can have been the result of an inference<sup>61</sup>. There must be, then, some propositions which, themselves, were not attained through inferential processes, and which can serve as the basis for these deductions.

Daher sagt Aristoteles: ‘Das schlechtin Erste müssen unbeweisbare Begriffsbestimmungen sein’ (τὰ πρῶτα ὀρισμοὶ ἔσσονται ἀναπόδεικτοι).

Man kann ja nicht ins Unendliche beweisen. Es muss also oberste Prinzipien geben, die eines Beweises nicht bedürfen. (GGPh, 232)

Now, on the other hand, if these principial propositions – or, in Brentano’s somewhat emphatic translation of the Greek, the “*schlechthin Erste*” – must provide the basis for the demonstrations of sciences like logic and mathematics, which are absolutely certain, they cannot, in turn, be less certain than the propositions of those sciences. From this it follows that induction in a strict sense, which proceeds from the collection of single instances known in perception to the establishing of general, but *only approximately certain* laws, is not up for the job (GGPh, 232).

The answer to the puzzle thus brings us to intuitive induction, which begins from the assertoric propositions of inner perception (and §28, already, had showed that inner perception was the “ultimate foundation of knowledge”) but is then somehow able to rise from them towards general, apodictic truths which are absolutely certain – just like those truths of descriptive psychology. Those “non-demonstrable conceptual determinations”<sup>62</sup> – which, as we have seen, are the task of

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<sup>61</sup> And, of course, solving the infinite regress by circular argumentation is a cure worse than the disease. Cf. with Brentano’s discussion of the problem of the principles in the introduction to *The Foundation and Construction of Ethics*, where he explicitly rejects this as an absurd solution: “[w]e cannot avoid this infinite regress by arguing in a circle, for then we simply explain the term in question by means of the same term, but in a disguised form. (However, some proofs of this kind are utterly undisguised. Molière parodies them in *The Imaginary Invalid*: ‘Mihi a docto doctore domandatur causam et rationem, quare opium facit dormire. A quoi respondeo: Quia est in eo virtus dormitiva, cujus est natura sensus stupifire’.)” (GAE, 16/10).

<sup>62</sup> ‘Conceptual determination’ is the purposefully literal translation of Brentano’s *Begriffsbestimmung* which, as we have seen, was precisely the name of the kind of task that descriptive psychology carries out. In a standard translation, such as that of Barnes, the Aristotelian line goes: “the primitives will be indemonstrable definitions” (APo. 90b27).

descriptive psychology to establish (see §39) – can then function as the “highest principles” for all sorts of demonstrations; and can for the bedrock from which can rise a philosophy free from prejudices, admitting only the immediately evident, “in the spirit of Bacon and Descartes” (VE, 3).

This explains why descriptive psychology occupies a place that could be said to be a position of *priority* in relation to other sciences; and priority, in fact, both in the sense that no science comes before it and in the sense that it fulfils this function of setting up the bases for other sciences. Indeed, as Brentano will explain, descriptive psychology plays this *fostering* role of supporting and promoting the development not only of genetic psychology, with which it holds an obvious relation, but also – and maybe less intuitively – with sciences such as logics, ethics and aesthetics.

In the case of genetic psychology, it is easy to see why descriptive psychology constitutes a necessary foundation on which the former can develop. The relationship between these two branches of psychology is very well-known, and has been thoroughly explored, reason for which we need not detain ourselves too long on the matter; what is important to stress, though, is what Brentano calls the “natural order [*natürliche Ordnung*]” (DP, 6/7) of these disciplines. Insofar as it befalls descriptive psychology the exploration and characterization of the entire domain of consciousness, the *Begriffsbestimmung* of the different psychological phenomena and the distinction of their basic classes, it is also the discipline which provides the fundamental characterizations and clarifications from which genetic psychology can then work to establish the laws of succession of these psychological phenomena. To put it simply, the genetic psychologist cannot explain the coming to be and the passing away of any phenomena before he knows exactly what these phenomena are – what are their “principal characteristic peculiarities [*hauptsächlichsten charakteristischen Eigentümlichkeiten*]” (DP, 9/10). Or, as one could also say, the genetic psychologist cannot explain anything – or, in particular, explain the causes of the succession of phenomena – before he knows what the *explanandum* is; and this is precisely a descriptive psychological task. Thus, says Brentano, the “perfection of psychognosy will [...] be one of the most essential steps in preparation for a genuinely scientific genetic psychology” (DP, 9-10/11).

All of this allows us to speak of genetic psychology as *dependent* on descriptive psychology (DP, 10/13); as well as of descriptive psychology as the “prior part [*frühere Teil*]” and genetic psychology as the “second part of psychology” (DP, 129/137). Even if, certainly, as Brentano will

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The intriguing question, however, of the exact relationship between conceptual determinations, *Begriffsbestimmungen* and proper ὀρίσμοι, *definitions*, is not one we can follow here.

not fail to point out, genetic psychology can also aid descriptive psychology in its investigations – just as, in fact, any science can be actually helpful to any other science to some degree, in the setting up of experiments, formulation of hypotheses, exhibitions of analogies and in many other auxiliary functions. To give just one, but significant example, when Brentano examines the different skills and dispositions that actually facilitate noticing – which is, itself, a crucial procedure of descriptive psychology –, he relies a lot on genetic psychology (DP, 37ff./39ff). Still, this is not the same kind of fundamental, necessary precedence that holds between descriptive and genetic psychology.

It is also significant that this separation between descriptive and genetic psychology – a separation regarding both purity and priority –, as it is worked out by Brentano in his lectures, is the consolidation of a duality which, in the 1874 *Psychology*, was still present as an ambiguity, we could say, or a tension. That ambiguity, that is, which afflicted psychology as being, at the same time, the *latest science* – the most complex, most dependent, of latest development – and *the science of the principles*, a science grounded upon the absolutely certain evidence of inner perception – more certain, that is, than those sciences based on physical phenomena could ever be. That ambiguity will then be resolved into the distinction between genetic psychology, studying psychical phenomena as relative, conditioned phenomena, and descriptive psychology, studying psychical phenomena purely in themselves; each of them occupying different places in the system of dependency of sciences.

And yet, as it was said, descriptive psychology is valuable not only insofar as it fosters genetic psychology but also insofar as it assumes a crucial supporting function for those main philosophical sciences of logics, ethics, aesthetics and metaphysics. Brentano speaks of its value “for the whole of theoretical and practical philosophy” and claims that it could lay the bases for that *characteristica universalis* chased by Descartes and Leibniz (DP, 158/167). While Brentano does not spell out this idea, it is not difficult to imagine that he had in mind the fact that descriptive psychology has the task of providing fundamental clarification of those concepts with which we understand the components of human consciousness. In so doing, in making distinct – and, ideally, perfectly distinct – the parts and connections of all mental phenomena, it could furnish an assortment of perfectly clear and distinct concepts, which could then be employed as the basic conceptual repertoire of philosophical sciences.

In fact, we know that, by clarifying concepts such as those of ‘judgment’, ‘inference’, ‘truth’, ‘correctness’ and so on, descriptive psychology is responsible for laying out the basis of logic, for

example – understood by Brentano as the practical discipline of correct judgment. Analogous relationships would hold between the descriptive psychological clarification of acts of will and the development of ethics; and between presentations and aesthetics. Accordingly, in his lectures on the *Origin of our Knowledge of Right and Wrong*, Brentano says that, in order to understand what we mean by ‘best’ or ‘good’, “we must inquire into the origin of our concept of the good. This concept, like all our others, has its origin in certain intuitive presentation.” (USE, 16/8) And he proceeds, in the notes, to say that concepts such as ‘willing’, ‘inferring’, ‘purpose’, and ‘cause’ all “have their origin in certain concrete intuitions that have a psychological content [*stammen aus Anschauungen psychischen Inhalts*]” (USE, 53/8).

All philosophical disciplines, then, eventually rely upon the *Begriffsbestimmungen* of the descriptive psychologist to form their basic vocabulary, from which they then develop their own theories and laws; this is the only way the logician, the moralist, the aesthician or the metaphysician, not to mention, after them, the political scientist, the sociologist, and others, who also ultimately borrow from the source of descriptive psychology, can thrive in their enterprises<sup>63</sup>. Brentano is clear about that not only in his lectures on *Descriptive Psychology*:

Wert der Wissenschaft von der Seele. [...] Von hier aus [erreicht man die] Sicherung der Außenwelt. Die Logik, Ästhetik, Ethik, Pädagogik, Politik und praktische Dependenz [gehen von hier aus]. Die Unsterblichkeitsfrage, [das Erfassen] Gott[es] in Analogie zur Seele, die Begriffe Ursache, Wirkung (Zweck, Mittel) [erlangen] hier ihre Klärung. (DP, 154/163)

But also in the more systematic presentations of his philosophy, such as his *My Last Wishes for Austria*, where the Cartesian idea of securing strict foundations, free from prejudice, appears again – though here, of course, the roots of the Cartesian tree is psychology, metaphysics being one of its branches:

die systematischen Disziplinen der Philosophie zeigen sich, wenn man die Sache gründlich erwägt, in Bezug auf das Prinzip natürlicher Arbeitsteilung noch inniger verbunden. Auf Grund neuer psychologischer Ergebnisse schmeichle ich mir, die elementare Logik reformiert und in die Prinzipien ethischer Erkenntnis einen tieferen Einblick gewährt zu haben. Und ähnlich ließe sich für die Ästhetik und jede andere Disziplin der Philosophie aufs leichteste nachweisen, daß sie,

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<sup>63</sup> All these sciences – including logic, as the practical discipline of the correct judgments – also borrow, of course, from genetic psychology (DP, 76/78); this also makes descriptive psychology doubly valuable, as it is itself the basis of genetic psychology. For a more detailed view of the architecture of Brentano’s philosophical program and the place of philosophy among scientific disciplines, see also Fisette (forthcoming).

losgetrennt von der Psychologie, wie ein vom Stamme losgetrennter Zweig verdorren müßte.  
(LWÖ, 39)

At this point, we also see more clearly why we could say at the beginning that description would be employed, in Brentano, as a full-blown philosophical method (§1); and that psychology had to be considered as a central and basal branch of philosophy (§7).

### **§43. Place: analogies**

It is during his attempts to clarify this particular place occupied by descriptive psychology that Brentano will present an important analogy; an analogy that would be many times repeated by Brentano himself and that would become illustrious among commentators.

When explaining, for instance, the natural order, as we have seen above, between descriptive and genetic psychology Brentano says that

Ähnlich wie auf mineralogischem Gebiet die Orognosie und Geognosie der Geologie vorangehen und auf dem näherliegenden Gebiet des menschlichen Organismus die Anatomie überhaupt der Physiologie vorangeht, ähnlich wird der Psychognosie nach dem Begriffe, den wir früher bestimmten, vor der genetischen Psychologie ihre Stelle anzuweisen sein. (DP, 6/8; see also 129/138)

Descriptive psychology has the same sort of priority over genetic psychology, Brentano is saying here, as geognosy over geology or anatomy over physiology.

Reflecting upon this relation, in 1895, Brentano would say that descriptive and genetic psychology are “in distant analogy to geognosy and geology” (LWÖ, 34) But here the analogy will be employed to highlight not so much – or not only – the relation of priority between one and the other, but the different sort of tasks they carry out: descriptive psychology – like geognosy – showing “all the final psychical constituents from the combination of which arises the totality of psychical phenomena”; genetic psychology – like geology, it is implied – teaching us “about the laws according to which phenomena come and disappear” (LWÖ, 34). It is a distinction with which we are already familiar as well (see §§39, 41): the static, compositional task, on the one hand; the dynamic, genetic task, on the other.

Now, this analogy, as it was said already, is a lead that commentators often point to. And yet, it is never – or rarely – really taken seriously, functioning rather as a way to quickly settle the otherwise



challenging question of the relation between descriptive and genetic psychology. To begin with, it is crucial not to forget that we are dealing with an *analogy*; it implies some *similarity* of relation between two or more pairs of elements, but it is not a claim of *identity*:

was heißt Analogie? Aristoteles selbst sagt es: Gleichheit von Verhältnissen, welche in der einen wie anderen Gattung bestehen. [...] Sage ich, ein Bejahendes verhalte sich zu einem Verneinenden wie ein Liebendes zu einem Hassenden, so nenne ich das Liebende als zum Hassenden sich verhaltend gleich dem Bejahenden als zum Verneinenden sich verhaltend, also das eine in etwa gleich dem andern und umgekehrt. (DP, 163/172)

An analogy, then, marks one relation as *roughly the same* as the other; because of that, if we follow the similarities long enough, we will also end up finding differences between the elements, and the analogy will eventually break down. And yet, if we follow our analogy long enough for it to break down, it will also help us understand what exactly is original and peculiar of a descriptive science like Brentano's descriptive psychology.

So, in order to understand exactly how far these analogies go – in order to have a better understanding of the resoluteness of this comparison – it is useful to have a more accurate rendering of the initial picture with which Brentano compares descriptive and genetic psychology. We could ask, then: what did Brentano had in mind when he spoke of these disciplines? What exactly did he understand by geognosy and geology, anatomy and physiology? And, finally, what kind of relationship did hold between them which would be similar to that between descriptive and genetic psychology?

While the talk of anatomy and physiology seems relatively straightforward, what is certainly striking, for a modern reader, is Brentano's reference to *geognosy* (*Geognosie*) as a science parallel to geology. In fact, this term had been usual among German-speaking naturalists of his time, as it is well noted by commentators. It could be traced back to foundational works of Abraham Gottlob Werner and to the writings of Werner-inspired naturalists such as Christian Keferstein; it was also present in introductory scientific books, such as Friedrich Schoedler's *Das Buch der Natur*, which we know Brentano studied (see Hedwig 1988, 42).

But, as these authors struggled to establish new boundaries for their investigations, or to systematically organize their disciplines, the exact delimitation of these sciences and the exact meaning of the distinction between geognosy and geology varied – just as, among those who investigated the human body, also the delimitation between anatomy and physiology was unstable

and varying from author to author<sup>64</sup>. In many of these cases, the relationship between geognosy/geology and anatomy/physiology is nothing like what Brentano identifies between descriptive and genetic psychology.

How then, does Brentano understand these distinctions, after all? In fact, among these manifold attempts at classification, we do happen find at least one systematic presentation which explicitly distinguishes sciences like descriptive geology (another label that could interlap with ‘geognosy’), botanics and anatomy, on the one hand, and sciences like geological dynamics and physiology, on the other; and a presentation which, at the same time, reflects upon the methodological significance of separating these two groups. This systematic presentation is found, precisely, in the work of William Whewell, who was a major source for Brentano in the history and philosophy of sciences, and whose discussions Brentano knew quite well and took into consideration.<sup>65</sup> Whewell distinguished, namely, between *phenomenological sciences*, on the one hand, and *palaetiological* and *aetiological sciences*, on the other.

By *palaetiological sciences* – a category coined by Whewell himself, encompassing sciences such as geology, glossology or comparative archaeology (Whewell 1847, 95) – one designates that class of sciences “in which the object is, to ascend from the present state of things to a more ancient condition, from which the present is derived by intelligible causes” (Whewell 1837, 481; 1847, 95). Differently put,

In each of the Sciences of this class we consider some particular order of phenomena now existing: from our knowledge of the causes of change among such phenomena, we endeavour to infer the causes which have made this order of things what it is: we ascend in this manner to some previous stage of such phenomena; and from that, by a similar course of inference, to a still earlier stage, and to *its* causes. (Whewell 1847, 100)

Now, in order to ascend to the past state of phenomena, the palaetilogist must rely, first of all, upon “the aid of the evidence of the present” (Whewell 1837, 482); and yet, of course, he must also have some knowledge of the general laws that regulate the transformation of phenomena in his domain, so as to be able to actually infer from the present to the past state. As Whewell puts it, “our knowledge respecting the causes which actually *have* produced any order of phenomena

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<sup>64</sup> On the frequently conflicting and rapidly changing designations of these sciences, see what Klemun 2015 called its “*Bezeichnungsmanie*”.

<sup>65</sup> There are scattered references to Whewell in Brentano’s works, and he had copies of Whewell’s *Philosophy of the Inductive Sciences* and *History of the Inductive Sciences* in his personal library. On this, see Fréchet, 2012, esp. 9; Hedwig, 1988, 34; and Dewaulque (forthcoming).

must be arrived at by ascertaining what the causes of change in such matters *can* do.” (Whewell 1847, 101)

This means that one should further distinguish palaeiological sciences from *aetiological* ones, which investigate precisely the laws that govern the transformation, in general, of one state into another – present, past, or hypothetical states, it does not matter here<sup>66</sup>. Aetiological sciences occupy themselves, for instance, with the laws regulating the transformation of mineral formations, linguistic patterns or bodily states.

One could say that aetiological sciences are intermediate sciences, mediating the pure description of phenomena and the theories that infer to their previous states (Whewell 1847, 111). Or, as Whewell also puts it, aetiology provides an investigation into the *possible* past, from which one can then infer to the *actual* past, as palaeiological sciences do. It is also in this sense that he calls the latter aetiological *histories* (Whewell 1847, 95). Palaeiological sciences, says Whewell, are a combination of two ideas: of the investigation into the causes of transformation of phenomena, aided by aetiological inquiries (αἰτία); and that ascending to a past configuration of phenomena (πάλαι) (Whewell 1837, 481).

Both aetiological and palaeiological sciences are also sciences that Whewell calls *theoretical*. As he employs the term, it means that they contain some degree of inference or conjecture.

Geology examines *the existing appearances* of the materials which form the earth, *infers* from them previous conditions, and *speculates* concerning the forces by which one condition has been made to succeed another. [Comparative philology] [...], compares the languages of different countries and nations, and by an examination of their materials and structure, endeavours to determine their descent from one another. (Whewell 1847, 96, highlight mine)

Of course, what Whewell has in mind with speculation is not that kind of unnatural, mystic procedure worthy of the worst moments of the history of philosophy. It simply means that one must infer from known to unknown particular states; one must infer to those past configurations of phenomena to which we do not have access, and of which we do not have direct evidence.

Now, what is important to retain of all this, more than the division itself between palaeiological and aetiological sciences, is that both of these are sciences which investigate – either in general or

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<sup>66</sup> In fact, Whewell also distinguishes palaeiological sciences, as the sciences investigating the causes that shaped the past and present states of certain phenomena – and that he also calls *philosophical* history – from what he calls the “common forms of History” which strive merely to ascertain “what the series of events has been” (Whewell 1837, 95), without investigating into their causes.

in particular – into the causes of phenomena. They are sciences of the αἰτία, in the words of Whewell, sciences about the ‘why?’ or the ‘*warum?*’. As such, both aetiological and palaeiological sciences are essentially different, by their turn, from those sciences which Whewell calls *descriptive* or *merely phenomenal*

The investigation of causes has been termed *Aetiology* by philosophical writers, and this term we may use in contradistinction to the mere *Phenomenology* of each such department of knowledge. And thus we should have Phenomenal Geology and Aetiological Geology, for the two divisions of the science which we have termed Descriptive and Theoretical Geology. (Whewell 1847, 101)

The phenomenal or descriptive sciences are also, naturally, the first step of the investigation in each domain of phenomena; they form the basis from which the aetiological investigation into the causes of aetiology or the palaeiological ascending to past states can take place. For any domain, as Whewell puts it,

we find the necessity of constructing in the first place a science of classification and exact description, by means of which the phenomena may be correctly represented and compared; and of obtaining by this step a solid basis for an inquiry into the causes which have produced them. (Whewell 1847, 104-5)

Under the form of a distinction between the sciences dealing with the “knowledge of the phenomena” and those seeking “knowledge of their causes” (Whewell 1847, 101), Whewell’s categories square with Brentano’s own distinction, developed in his Würzburg years, between *erklärende* and *beschreibende* sciences (GGPh, 8; see also Fréchette, 2012, 8-9). They would give us, moreover, a solid framework within which to understand the analogy between descriptive geology and theoretical geology, on the one hand; and descriptive psychology and genetic psychology, on the other. As we have seen already, genetic psychology, the science occupied with investigating the succession of mental phenomena, encompasses multiple tasks, which could be characterized precisely as a mix of aetiological and palaeiological investigations: first, establishing the various laws that govern the coming to be and passing away of phenomena; but also reconstructing the past configurations of individual mental lives or collective, cultural formations (see §43). Also, like Whewell’s palaeiological sciences, genetic psychology relies on some degree of conjecture for its reconstructions and, like those his sciences of αἰτία, it *depends* on a previous, purely descriptive science of mental phenomena – in this case, descriptive psychology itself, which could then be said to occupy the place of the phenomenological science for this domain. Indeed, it is reasonable to suppose that Whewell’s distinctions influenced Brentano in his own attempt at classifying the different parts of psychology, and it even resonates

with Brentano's terminology: another name for descriptive psychology (*deskriptive Psychologie*) is "descriptive phenomenology (*beschreibende Phänomenologie*)" (DP, 129/137).

But if this is so, then in what sense exactly is descriptive psychology a science like those phenomenal sciences identified by Whewell? Could we say that it really belongs to the same class as, say, botany or descriptive geology? In order to pursue this question, it might be useful to follow another of Brentano's leads. In fact, beyond the more general analogy that he claimed to hold between descriptive and genetic psychology and the sciences of phenomena and sciences of causes, Brentano also goes as far as actually saying that descriptive psychology is, "so to speak [*sozusagen*], the 'anatomy of the soul'" (DP, 129/135).

Having examined the task to which descriptive psychology is mainly dedicated – namely, to provide an account of the whole of consciousness in its parts and their connections (see §39) – it is not difficult to see the sense of Brentano's remark.

A quick survey into the *Traité d'anatomie* of Bichat – Xavier Bichat, that is, who Brentano himself considered to have been responsible for the constitution of physiology as a science, playing a similar role for this discipline as Linnaeus for natural history and Lavoisier for chemistry (ZPh, 128) – shows that he understands the task of anatomy in a way that is strikingly similar to the task of Brentanian descriptive psychology. In the introduction to that work, where Bichat discusses the methodical foundations of his discipline, he tells us that "there are, in the general organisation of animals, a certain number of simple tissues, which are everywhere the same." These tissues, he says "being *the actual organized elements* of living economy, are combined four to four, five to five, six to six, and so on, to form the *composite* organs that nature destines to the fulfilling of each function." (Bichat 1801, ix, highlight mine)

While the study of the functions is the task of physiology – in a division not far from the one we have been examining – anatomy is in charge of presenting what we could perfectly call a compositional account of animal organization, spelling out its elements (the task of 'general anatomy') and their *Verbindungsweise* or, as Bichat puts it, their diverse combination (the task of 'descriptive anatomy'). We see now that both anatomy and descriptive psychology – the Brentanian "anatomy of the soul" – are engaged in creating models of the components and modes of connections, be it of human consciousness or of animal organization.

Pushing our comparison so far has revealed indeed points of similarity between, first, the relationship of descriptive and genetic psychology and that of other pairs of phenomenal and aetiological sciences; and, secondly, between descriptive psychology and a descriptive science

such as anatomy. However, it also makes it evident – as was suggested before – that these similarities only go so far; that we are dealing here with an analogy, and not with a proper, uniform classification that would put descriptive psychology side by side with descriptive geology or descriptive anatomy and that would equate them in their method and tasks. It is our job, now, to examine this breaking down, the failure of the analogy, in which we will be able to better identify the singularities of descriptive psychology.

#### ***§44. Place: the uniqueness of descriptive psychology and the difficulty of classifying it***

From the analogies examined in the last chapter, at least one difference must have stood out to the eyes of the attentive reader: if, in fact, both the descriptive anatomy of Bichat and the descriptive psychology of Brentano strive to provide something like models of their domain of study, the very ties, however, that hold these models together are very distinct in one and the other case.

As Bichat puts it, “descriptive anatomy examines the organs [that is, composites of tissues] as nature presents them” (Bichat 1801, xii). Its job is to create models of normal, healthy animal organization; but these models – like the laws of those inexact sciences – admit of all sorts of exceptions and abnormalities (and, in fact, even these abnormalities can be studied on their own as special cases, in a science like teratology, for instance).

Descriptive psychology, to the contrary, gives us a model of the necessary and impossible relations between psychological phenomena. It is not just a model of mental phenomena *as nature presents them*, but a model of mental phenomena as they *could* and *could not* be presented. It maps the parts and the modes of connections not only of this or that mental life, and not even of most mental lives, but of *each and every* mental life – no exceptions. The laws of descriptive psychology are such that its contradiction is not merely improbable, far-fetched or physically impossible – as, for instance, the idea of a man with seven hearts and no lungs is far-fetched and empirically impossible – but actually absurd and unthinkable. These are the laws, as we have seen, of a science that is exact – in a sense of that word no one would employ to characterize botanics, geology or anatomy.

This also highlights an important difference between the relation of descriptive and genetic psychology and that of other pairs of descriptive and aetiological sciences, in Whewell’s sense. For there is a cleavage, not only of purity (as we have seen, §41) but also of *exactness* (§37),

separating descriptive and genetic psychology, a cleavage we do not find between descriptive and palaeontological geology or between anatomy and physiology.

There is yet another point, revealed in our previous analysis, that indicates a limit to Brentano's proposed analogies and that highlights an important, unique feature of descriptive psychology. Whewell distinguished between sciences that he called 'descriptive' and sciences he called 'theoretical,' the latter being those that involve some degree of inference or speculation. Now, Brentano would surely agree that descriptive psychology involves no hypothesis or speculation. But he never went as far as attributing it the status of non-, *quasi*-, or pre-theoretical. Descriptive psychology has a *fostering* function (see §42), but it is not merely a preparation for theory; it has *priority as a science*, but it is not *prior to science*.

Rather, descriptive psychology was always referred to by Brentano as a full-fledged science, with a specific domain, a method of its own, and the job of establishing of general, necessary laws. And while the actual requirements which, according to Brentano, had to be fulfilled for a discipline to be called a science were somewhat fickle and unstable (compare, for instance, the discussions on "knowledge in strict" and "broad sense" in the manuscripts of the introductions to his lectures on the history of philosophy, GGPH, 5; GPhN, 2), descriptive psychology seems to check all or almost all of the requirements. See, for instance, Brentano's claim in a letter to Husserl, where the subject was the scientificity of logic:

Anything that is known may well be of *some* theoretical interest. Knowledge, even of the most insignificant kind, is a good. But much of it, from the theoretical standpoint, is relatively worthless. [...] What is it, then, that determines the value of certain truths and indicates that they are more worthy than others to be considered for their own sake and to be combined into a purely theoretical discipline?

What Aristotle required above all was this: if we are to be concerned with the necessary properties of some general concept, then there must *be* certain objects which fall under that concept. (WE, 95 (English translation)).

The point of dispute there was different, but the conditions are clear: to be worthy of being considered by their own sake and as standalone theoretical discipline, certain truths must refer to the necessary properties of some general concept (see "allgemeine Begriff" of consciousness, §39) under which there are certain objects which actually are. Descriptive psychology fulfils all of these requirements, as it establishes general, necessary properties of that actual domain of psychical phenomena.

Thus, if Brentano could certainly follow Whewell in opposing descriptive psychology to those sciences which employ inferences and must ultimately resort to some sort of speculation, descriptive psychology was a bad fit in that category of the descriptive, *non-theoretical* sciences identified by Whewell.

Things get worse, however. For the truth is that descriptive psychology was also a bad fit in Brentano's own attempted classifications of sciences. We had seen already that the Whewellian distinction between descriptive and theoretical science was parallel to what Brentano had once distinguished, in one of his youthful manuscripts, as being the "*beschreibende*", descriptive, and the "*erklärende*", explanatory sciences.

And yet this was a time when Brentano was experimenting with different systematic classifications of sciences, sometimes following in the steps of Aristotle and Aquinas, sometimes stepping away from them (Hedwig 1987, xii). In other occasions, then, this distinction between descriptive and explanatory is also presented as being the distinction between *concrete* (*konkrete*) and abstract (*abstrakte*) sciences. In this sense, in the manuscripts published as the introduction to his lecture on Greek philosophy, Brentano says

Man spricht von konkreten und abstrakten Wissenschaften.

Die ersteren handeln vornehmlich von Einzeltatsachen (historischen Wissenschaften) die letzteren suchen die Tatsachen zu erklären. Sie fragen nach dem ‚Warum‘, während die konkreten Wissenschaften nur das ‚Daß‘ der Erscheinungen konstatieren. Daher nennt man die abstrakten Wissenschaften auch erklärende oder Gesetzeswissenschaften (z.B. die Mathematik). (GGPh, 8)

Nevertheless, in yet another manuscript, dated by Hedwig as being from before 1870, we have a similar classification, with a different *rationale*: here Brentano distinguishes abstract and concrete sciences on the basis of "what is being proved in the subject of the science; either it is universal or individual. The individual science include, for instance, astronomy, geography, history, jurisprudence (positive law) and the like." (GPhN, xiii). In this third manuscript, then, Brentano presents the same distinction between abstract and concrete but without, this time, anchoring them in the difference between the investigation of 'that' and 'why'.

What should we conclude from this entanglement of classifications? There are certainly many inconsistencies between these different attempts and many issues that could be pointed out (not the least of them being the fact that these are all manuscripts, and not polished, systematic texts). But what we see, throughout these manifold endeavours, is that descriptive psychology would be a hard fit in *any* of those attempts at classification. One could say it is a *beschreibende, descriptive*



science, sure; but it is not pre-theoretical, and is certainly not *concrete* in the sense of occupying itself with *Einzeltatsachen*. Quite on the contrary, we have seen repeatedly how it deals in a very high degree of generality and *abstraction* – it establishes, through induction, universally valid laws, creates a universal model of the whole of consciousness, provides a general account of its concept, and so on. In the terms of the *Geschichte der Philosophie der Neuzeit* manuscript, it would be a science dealing not with individuals but with universals. Thus, at least by the criteria of that manuscript, we could place descriptive psychology together with the *abstract* sciences. However, if we look to the other manuscript, which says that the abstract sciences are also those which are concerned with investigating the *causes*, then we come back to our initial problem, and descriptive psychology *cannot be said* to be abstract because it is not *explanatory*.

Now, the fact that descriptive psychology does not fit well into these classifications is not, by itself, exactly surprising. As we said, these were tentative classifications by Brentano, and mostly worked out in his youthful years. But it does indicate that the development of the method of descriptive psychology, in his Vienna years, would eventually *force* any of Brentano's old attempts at a systematic classification of science. And, most importantly, it points to the *singularity* of descriptive psychology in its methodological configuration: while genetic psychology might be an almost perfect example of aetiological, explanatory, abstract science, Brentanian descriptive psychology is a very particular sort of *beschreibende* science indeed. And regardless of the similarities that might hold and do hold between the two sorts of psychology and other pairs of sciences, all analogies ultimately break down when we take into account the uniqueness of descriptive psychology as a theoretical discipline. We have seen (§§34-5), for instance, how the descriptive psychologist combines the different sources of belief (intuition, induction and deduction) in a very particular way, giving rise to a methodological configuration completely different from that of traditional inductive sciences. And we have also seen (§42) how it was able to tackle the problem of the principles in a way that neither strict inductive nor deductive procedures could. It is not, therefore, an exaggeration to speak of descriptive psychology as *a unique theoretical discipline*, and of its descriptive psychological descriptions as *a unique method*.

## CONCLUSIONS

### *§45. A descriptive oddity*

In a parallel review of Brentano's *Psychologie* and Wundt's *Grundzüge der physiologischen Psychologie*, two foundational works of psychology published in the same year of 1874, Edward B. Titchener, who was trained as a psychologist more than as a philosopher, provides some very illuminating remarks about Brentano's descriptive psychology. Titchener's insights are all the more revealing because of their philosophical candour – bordering, one could say, on naïveté. His verdict might sound striking to someone who, like us, just spent dozens of pages talking about description in Brentano:

[h]e appeals but rarely, and then only in general terms, to facts of observation. His rule is to find out what other psychologists have said, to submit their statements to a close logical scrutiny, and so by a process of sifting to prepare the reader's mind for a positive determination. When the ground has thus been cleared Brentano's doctrine, novel though it may be, has the appearance (so to say) of a necessary truth; we feel that we have duly considered the possibilities in the case and have come to the one rational decision. (Titchener, 1921, 83)

Titchener's remarks are interesting for a series of reasons. For starters, one must have in mind that he was working primarily with the 1874 *Psychology*, plus a few of Brentano's later, published texts; and still, he identifies quite well both the general and the apodictic character which is proper to descriptive psychological propositions. But even more interesting is what he concludes out of it: for Titchener, it is not Brentano who advances a *descriptive* psychology – it is Wundt! “We may say,” he claims, “as a first approximation, that Brentano's psychology is essentially a matter of argument, and that Wundt's is essentially a matter of description.” (Titchener, 1921, 83). Of Wundt, he adds that his “primary aim in all cases is to describe the phenomena of mind as the physiologist describes the phenomena of the living body, *to write down what is there, going on observably before him*” (Titchener 1921, 88, emphasis mine).

The important question, therefore, that is raised here, is whether we should conclude with Titchener that Brentano's appeal to facts only “in general terms” and that his establishing of “necessary truths” instead of factual claims makes it so that we should not properly speak of his psychology as descriptive. After all that was examined, of course, it should be clear that the answer to that question must be in the negative.

And yet, Titchener's review shows that we are dealing, in Brentano's descriptive psychology, with a very unusual sense of description. Titchener's claims hint to the fact that the exact sense in which Brentano's psychology can be said to be *descriptive* is far from obvious. Fortunately, our previous investigations put us in the perfect position to tackle that issue. Let us then, reflect upon our results, try to make explicit the peculiar sense in which Brentano's descriptive psychology is, indeed, descriptive.

Descriptive psychology is descriptive, first, (i) in the sense that its task was precisely that of tracing the domain of psychical phenomena, plotting the field of consciousness in its elements and their intricate connections. There is, as we have seen, an entire domain of consciousness, and its boundaries are the boundaries of descriptive psychology (§39). Descriptive psychology thus describes – or, we could say, profiting from the established translation of Pausanias' travel book, it circumscribes, in a proper περιήγησις – the outlines of this territory, providing something very much like an *exactissima descriptio* of it: a general concept of consciousness, with the highest possible definition (*Begriffsbestimmung*).

Sure, the question remains: what, after all, is a Brentanian description the description of? Titchener was not wrong when he said that Brentano, unlike Wundt, did not *write down what was there, going on observably before him*. On the one hand, there could hardly be a better way to put in English words what we ordinarily have in mind when we talk about description, and yet, on the other, this is clearly not what a Brentanian descriptive psychologist does, as we have extensively argued for (in particular in §§33, 40).

A descriptive psychological description is an odd description indeed: it does not describe *what is there*, actually going on in the unity of this or that conscious life, but rather the impossible and the necessary configurations of whatever it is that inhabits this region (§39). It does not describe *what is going on before me*, but rather all that can never go on and all that must always go on together – in front of me and in front of anyone; a fisherman, tomorrow, by the Tagus, or Caesar on a March 15<sup>th</sup>. In fact, it is not concerned with things that are, but neither is it concerned with things that it is possible may be: its subject-matter is not merely the affair of possibilities, but that of necessities and impossibilities.

These descriptions make up for a strange sort of *a priori* science – in Brentano's sense, that is, of a science whose laws are universally valid; whose validity, therefore, does not depend upon any matter of fact. It is strange because these laws, insofar as they are the laws of the necessary and impossible combinations of parts of mental phenomena, are, nevertheless, laws *about facts*. These

laws describe generalities which are not idealities, but necessary and impossible ways in which facts come together. It is the problematic empiricism of Brentano that, we have seen, has not gone unnoticed by commentators (§36). But where De Boer saw a contradiction, surpassed by the doctrine of intuition of essences, some see an actual enlargement of what we can expect of experience: Spiegelberg, for instance, in his classic history of the phenomenological movement, saw in Brentano already a “new type of empiricism,” “foreshadowing a new and widened epistemology” (Spiegelberg, 1994, 33). And yet, what does this troublesome empiricism mean for the way the descriptive psychologist carries out his *descriptions*? For if the describer of essences can legitimately say that there is something in front of him which he is describing, this path is definitely closed off to the Brentanian descriptive psychologist. Can one describe an absurdity? Can one describe a necessity? The problem of Brentano’s descriptive psychology is not so much its having the *appearance* of a necessary truth, as Titchener had put it; it is the fact that it purports precisely to describe the *apparition* of necessary truths. This is what Brentano claimed to have achieved with his – problematic – mechanism of the passage from the assertoric evidence of the facts of inner perception to the immediate evidence we gain of general, apodictic laws. Brentano’s mechanism is designed to ground the whole model of the necessary and impossible combinations of mental phenomena upon nothing else but that sort of experience that we have in inner perception. In this sense, if the Brentanian descriptive psychologist indeed does not write down *what is there, going on* before him, he does write down what presents itself *observably* – or, in his terms, *perceptually* – before him.

Descriptive psychology is then descriptive in this further sense, (ii) that, relying as it does on intuitive induction, it is a methodological configuration whose laws – unlike the laws of those sciences built around deduction and induction in a strict sense – does not leap over or takes distance from the immediate evidential ground of experience (§42). We have seen, for instance, how someone who induces in a strict sense – someone, that is, who passes from a collection of observed facts to the establishing of a general laws – always goes a bit further, even if an *infinitely little* bit further, than what is given in experience. And the mathematician who engages in deductive proofs grounds the truth of some propositions upon the truth of others. Let us remind ourselves of Brentano’s exercise (USE, 21/20, §27): if someone asks the mathematician why he believes the conclusion of a certain demonstration, he cannot but point, as leading to his belief, to the truth of those propositions upon which the former is secured. The descriptive psychologist, on the contrary, would always answer the question of the truth of any of his general, apodictic laws, by pointing directly to the evidence provided by inner perception. The whole complex of

knowledge, the whole body of insights which make up descriptive psychology is an *immediate* one, if we want – retraceable, at every step, to the ground of inner perception.

Of course, the cost of the immensely difficult task descriptive psychology aims to accomplish is that not only is it *bounded* to the domain of psychical phenomena, as we have just seen, limited by the boundaries of the whole of consciousness; it is also *bound* to this domain. In other words, if description is about immediately grounding this body of knowledge upon experience alone, then of course it requires, besides an intricate, specialized methodological configuration also a special, intrinsically truthful domain from which it can effectively draw the certainty it imprints on its laws.

Finally, then, descriptive psychology is descriptive in the sense (iii) that, in spite of the generalization it carries out, its truths are *intuitive* all the way through, unlike those sciences which rely on mathematical abstraction. Unlike that “mathematical Sun” of Brentano’s quote of Ampère, which wilts the landscapes and dries out things down to their roots (DP, 76/78), the general laws of descriptive psychology are about psychical phenomena exactly as they are grasped: they do not trade intuitiveness for certainty. Quite on the contrary, it is intuition that really gives us the full measure and the full certainty of its objects, a certainty whose harvesting is the job of the unique methodological configuration of descriptive psychology.

#### **§46. A method and a tool**

On the one hand, then, Titchener had given us a fairly accurate account of an ordinary, common concept of description: to write down what is there, going on before us. As such, description can be and is frequently employed towards many different ends: to describe imaginary settings or works of art, to describe suspects to the police, as well as to describe plant species, muscle-tendon interactions *and mental phenomena*. We can surely use description, as a way of writing down what is going on before us, in the pursuit theoretical, scientific goals.

And still, this is not what Brentano has in mind when he talks about descriptive psychology. Even though Brentano rarely uses the exact expression of the descriptive psychologist “describing” his objects, “describing” mental phenomena and so on, we could try and fixate the describing of the Brentanian descriptive psychology. In this sense, to describe is, at least: to experience (§30) psychical phenomena (§25) in inner perception (§26) – i.e., to judge with evidence (§28) –, to

notice their elements (§31), and then generalize inductively (in the broad sense) (§35) towards absolutely exact (§37), immediately grounded (§36), laws of the modes of connection of parts of phenomena (§39), which are then fixated in language as clearly as possible (§32). Far more than just experiencing or simply noticing, and certainly more than merely writing down what is there, though all of these play some part in the process.

It also becomes clear that description, in the sense of descriptive psychology, is intrinsically connected with many other key concepts of Brentano's psychology, logic and metaphysics – it is, in short, a notion deeply entrenched in Brentano's philosophy itself, right at the center of his conceptual network. Now, it would be a mistake to treat every philosophical architecture like that *σύστημα* of the Stoics, of which Cicero once said that “if a single letter were to be moved, the whole would come tumbling down” (*Fin.*, III, 74), but we could safely say that, in every construction of philosophical concepts, some of them occupy a central place, standing in a greater number of connections, and sustaining more weight in the edifice, and thus being more difficult to move or to substitute; while others, having a lower rate of systematicity, lie at the edges of the construction, more easily displaced. And, if this is so, we could say, then, that Brentano's concept of description is one occupying a very singular place, with a high rate of systematicity; being difficult to remove, but also to transpose into a different building. It is a concept whose picking up by another philosopher or transposition to a different project, while not impossible, would certainly prove challenging, and would most likely imply significant distortions.

If that first, ordinary concept of description gave us a *tool* that – as any tool – could be used for plentiful activities, scientific endeavours included; that other, highly specific sense of description involved in Brentanian descriptive psychology designates nothing less than a full-fledged *method*: bound and bounded to that domain to which it was specially designed to harvest; consisting of that whole, multi-layered conceptual mechanism we have analysed in its different strata; and resulting in a special sort of theoretical *and philosophical discipline*, a pure psychology which plays a fundamental role in the development of science and philosophy. As a tool, description can be of vegetable formations, animal organizations or mental processes; it can be description of the movements of nature, as in Kirchhoff; of sensations, as in Mach; of physiological and psychological phenomena indistinctly, as in Wundt. As a method of empirical psychology, however, description has a specific place where it belongs and where it can be employed, as well as a specific function that it fulfils, resulting in that highly special and valuable theoretical discipline.

#### **§47. Description as the method appropriate to the domain of psychical phenomena**

Description, in this methodological sense, and encompassing the entire conceptual network analysed in the second part of this investigation, is not only bound and bounded to that domain of psychical phenomena – it is, more than that, the *method appropriate to this domain*. It is a method which, as we have seen, was specifically designed to harvest the absolute certainty provided by inner perception into the exact, apodictic laws of descriptive psychology.

This is why any account of descriptive psychology had to start – *as per* our research hypothesis (§2) – with an investigation into the securing of the concept of psychology. Without the correct delimitation of the internal affinity of that unitary domain (§13) and without its correct conceptualization (§20), revealing the special characteristics of psychical phenomena (§15) and setting up the possible field of action for the psychologist (§18).

From the precise circumscription of the domain, through the discovery of the right concept of psychology, to the building of a method whose purpose is to appropriately explore this domain, we have given an account of both why and how Brentano employs descriptive psychology. The goal was to provide a positive account of the actual and logical development of descriptive psychology – an inner account, as it were, of the functioning of descriptive psychology – instead of the usual, artificial parallel with genetic psychology, which tends to overlook the very different positions these sciences occupy (frequently, and paradoxically, while also overlooking the great importance Brentano attributes to genetic psychology).

We are also in a position, now, to understand how Brentano was finally able to face the task of providing psychology with the necessary methodological elaboration that it lacked and of bridging that gap, open since Plato's and Aristotle's first rudimentary developments, between the great interest and importance of psychology, on the one hand, and its poorly developed method, on the other (§10). Descriptive psychology is, of course, only part of the job, the other part being precisely that immensely broader and equally important genetic psychology. But it is also the first part (§42) and thus represents the crucial moment when psychology is finally put back on track and set to move in the correct, ascending direction (§11).

Finally, and keeping in mind that psychology both a central and basal position in Brentano's conception of philosophy (§7), this methodological completion, by its turn, will allow the

philosopher to face those four perennial challenges (§§9, 23), counter despondency (§6) and, more, change pessimism into optimism (§8), restoring trust in philosophy.

It is always important to keep in mind the stakes behind Brentano's project of descriptive psychology and the fact that there is genuine philosophical tension behind even his most specialized discussions of temporal boundaries, conversions of syllogisms or the purity and mixture of colors. To face such a daunting challenge, then, as the one he presented in *Entmutigung* Brentano had need of a bold plan: a new grounding and a new method for that fundamental philosophical discipline of psychology. Descriptive psychology, with that intricate methodological configuration, at last appears as precisely a discipline whose goal is to explore the domain of consciousness with the guide and the resources of experience and experience alone (Challenge-3); whose truths, because of their anchor in evidence, are solidly grounded and universally secured (Challenge-1), as well as resistant to upheaval (Challenge-2); and which carries a strong capacity of fostering scientific and philosophical development, leading to theoretical and practical gains (Challenge-4).

#### **§48. *Method according to nature: elements for a new problem***

Our path so far has given us a clear picture of Brentano's "making methodical" of description: it has shown us how the very development of the descriptive method as the method specifically designed to that domain of psychical phenomena, first conceptualized in the *Psychology* of 1874. And yet our claim, right from the beginning (§2), was not simply that description should be understood as a method appropriate to psychology but that it was, more particularly, what we called its "natural method", or a "*method according to nature*". In fact, these are the precise terms in which Brentano had spoken of the fundamental characteristic, together with a pure theoretical interest, of the ascending phase of a theoretical discipline (§10). The idea of a method according to nature, as a methodological principle, guides Brentano's very effort of developing descriptive psychology, as we have examined it here. In fact, as it was claimed at the beginning, our whole investigations could be seen as an illustration of this idea.

And yet, once we turn our attention explicitly towards this idea, it turns from being a guiding principle to being the field of a new problem. We would like to conclude, then, by pointing to this *problem* of natural method – in no way trying to settle the question, but rather providing some notes for the opening up of this further path of investigation. On the one hand, we will try to show



that there are at least two senses in which Brentano refers to scientific methods and procedures as being according to nature; and that, in both of these senses, descriptive psychology is exemplary. On the other hand, we must account for the fact that Brentano never really thematizes the idea itself of “natural” or “according to nature” – “*naturgemäße*,” as he says, “*selon la nature*,” in the words of Daubenton in the *Encyclopédie*, or, as we could also put it, freely borrowing from Aristotle, “φύσει” or “κατὰ φύσιν”.<sup>67</sup>

As it had already been suggested (§2), the talk of a method according to nature seems to suggest at least two different ideas. With a first, more prevalent sense of the expression, Brentano expresses the idea, widespread in his work, according to which a method *should accord to the features of the object of the investigation, i.e., to the way those specific things really are*. It is a principle to which Brentano sticks not only in the development of the descriptive method, as we have sufficiently examined, but also when setting up the methods with which he inspects natural scientific, genetic psychological and even theological questions.

In observance of this principle, one learns, for instance, not to demand from one’s results a precision which cannot be achieved in that domain. We have seen, in our discussion of exactness, how Brentano explicitly picked up this precept from Aristotle. The latter teaches that just as one should not be content with probable arguments from a mathematician, so should one not expect demonstrations from a rhetorician (*EN*, 1094b25-7), and Brentano learns to require from descriptive psychology that sort of absolute exactness allowed for by the evidence of inner perception, while admitting of the genetic psychologist reasonable, highly probable inductions. As he puts it in his lecture on the future of philosophy:

Die Naturwissenschaft verlangt also keineswegs [...], daß wir überall gleichmäßig und so, wie in den einfachsten Fällen der Mechanik, vorgehen sollen. Im Gegenteil, sie unterweist uns und übt uns darauf ein, der besonderen Natur der Gegenstände entsprechend unser Verfahren zu ändern und unsere Ansprüche bald zu steigern, bald herabzustimmen, um dort den volleren Erfolg zu erzielen, hier, auf das Unmögliche verzichtend, das wissenschaftlich Mögliche glücklich zu erreichen. (ZPh, 35)

A method must be proportional to its subject-matter; it must accord to its degree of exactness and precision (§37). Moreover, by observing this principle of proceeding in accord to the features of

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<sup>67</sup> Rudolf Haller identifies already – as it has since become common – a mixture of Aristotelianism and modern positivistic motifs in Brentano’s empiricism; and points to the Aristotelian resonances of Brentano’s *naturgemäße Methode*. According to him, under the influence of Comte, „wagte der junge Philosoph den Sprung von Aristoteles in die aufkommende neuesie Phase, indem er die Idee der naturgemäßen Methode (das ist die Aristotelische Fassung) mit der naturwissenschaftlichen Methode vereinte.“ Haller 1988, 22.

the object, one also learns that it is upon direct knowledge of the subject-matter that our classifications and categories must be built, instead of being applied to it from the outside, as it were. In this sense, it was the inner affinity holding between the phenomena of consciousness that led to the recognition of the domain of psychology as the science of psychical phenomena, a delimitation “required by the nature of the very matter [*durch die Natur der Sache selbst*]” (PES, 7; §13).

And thus Brentano says that

[e]ine wissenschaftliche Klassifikation soll von der Art sein, daß sie in einer der Forschung dienlichen Weise die Gegenstände ordnet. Zu diesem Zwecke muß sie natürlich sein; d. h. sie muß das zu einer Klasse vereinigen, was seiner Natur nach enger zusammengehört, und sie muß das in verschiedene Klassen trennen, was seiner Natur nach sich relativ fern steht. (PES II, 28/150)

This was, according to Brentano, the “natural way [*naturgemäß Weg*]” to build a classification (PES II, 29/150, §38), following, that is, the “intrinsic differences” (PES II, 40/157) between the objects of the domain. In a similar sense, Brentano had spoken of a “natural order” (*natürliche Ordnung*) of disciplines (DP, 6/7), according to which some, by their subject-matter itself, would be dependent upon others, thus also determining a “natural division of work” (LWÖ, 39; §42) inside philosophical and non-philosophical disciplines.

It should be plain to see, from all that was said so far, that the method of descriptive psychology is a method according to nature – in this first sense through which we refer to the declination of method in accordance with its objectual domain. But there is still another way in which Brentano uses the expression, which seems at principle irreducible to the first. This second sense is at work, for instance, in Brentano’s discussion of the phase-dynamics of philosophy. It was in this sense he spoke of the ascending phases of philosophy always being characterized by both a theoretical interest and a method according to nature (VP, 8); and of the Ionian natural philosophers having not only “a live and pure theoretical interest” but also “a method according to nature” (*eine naturgemäße Methode*) (VP, 10; §10).

This sense of natural method is not employed so much to indicate the required variations of our procedure according to the different features of the domain, like in the first sense; it is rather employed to mark a staunch opposition to those *unnatural ways of proceeding* – typical of the last and most decadent phase of decline of philosophy – that Brentano rejects as being unscientific. Brentano’s mission, as we have seen, was to lead philosophy away from the “unnatural means”

(*unnatürliche Mitteln*) employed even by thinkers like Reid and Kant, and back into a track of “research according to nature” (*naturgemässe Forschung*) (VE, 3). “ ‘All men,’ says Aristotle in the famous opening words of his *Metaphysics* ‘naturally strive for knowledge.’” But in those decadent phases of philosophy,

Das natürliche Verlangen nach Wahrheit, von der Skepsis in seinem Laufe gehemmt, bricht sich gewaltsam Bahn. Mit krankhaft gesteigertem Eifer kehrt man zum Aufbau philosophischer Dogmen zurück. Zu den natürlichen Mitteln, mit welchen die erste Phase gearbeitet, erdichtet man sich *ganz unnatürliche Erkenntnisweise*, Prinzipien, die *ohne alle Einsicht sind*, geniale unmittelbar intuitive Kräfte, mystische Steigerungen des intellektuellen Lebens, und bald schwelgt man in dem vermeinten Besitz der erhabensten, alles menschliche Vermögen weit übersteigenden wahrheiten. (VP, 9, highlight mine)

We see, now, in this second sense, a method according to nature is one that resists the urge to satisfy our natural desire for knowledge with promising, but deceitful, unnatural means. And just as Aristotle taught us that all men tend by nature to desire knowledge, so did he show us that we *do have* natural means at our disposition – universally available – with which to fulfil this desire. Let us not forget what follows those opening lines of the *Metaphysics* which Brentano had evoked:

All men *by nature* [τοῦ εἰδέναι ὀρέγονται φύσει] *desire to know*. An indication of this is the delight we take in our senses; for even apart from their usefulness they are loved for themselves; and above all others the sense of sight. For not only with a view to action, but even when we are not going to do anything, we prefer seeing (one might say) to everything else. The reason is that this, most of all the senses, makes us know and brings to light many differences between things. *By nature animals are born with the faculty of sensation* [φύσει μὲν οὖν αἰσθησιν ἔχοντα γίγνεται τὰ ζῷα] and from sensation memory is produced in some of them, though not in others. And therefore the former are more intelligent and apt at learning than those which cannot remember (980a21-b22)

By nature men are born with both desire and the correct means to fulfil it. *Contra* Comte, Brentano claims that humans do not proceed by default in an anti-natural way and against the order of things, but that, in the infancy of individuals as in the infancy of the species, “children make progress from discovery to discovery, guided by nature itself in the correct path of research [*von der Natur selbst den richtigen Weg der Forschung geführt*].” (VP, 10)

What are these natural means, then? Not surprisingly, those which based upon the “way of experience [*Wege der Erfahrung*]” (ZPh, 92): “research on the grounds of facts is the most natural one to men [*ist ja die dem Menschen natürlichste*]” (ZPh, 128). More specifically, as Brentano

puts it in the passage above, natural are those which rest upon insight (*Einsicht*). We have already examined them: intuition and induction and deduction are all “natural ways of knowing” (VDG, 70, English translation; see also VP, 126); valid sources of belief, capable of providing and preserving evidence (§34). The scientist or philosopher who follows it will not engage in an inhuman endeavour but follow the paths available to human knowledge. They are completely distinct from those unnatural procedures: speculative, immediate but not evident, disconnected from the guidance of experience.

What we have here, therefore, is a second and universal sense of method according to nature. Universal because, in this sense, all natural methods are equally natural; whereas, in the first sense, each natural method was natural in its peculiar way, as it follows the particularities of its subject-matter. Needless to say, descriptive psychology is also natural in this second sense. Completely secured in experience and following its guidance in all its procedures, it is, moreover, immediately grounded in experience, something not all sciences can boast about.

The relation between these two senses of natural method, from universal to particular method also gives us two points in relation to which one could settle the question of the fourth *Habilitation* thesis, regarding the relationship between the method of philosophy and the *method of the natural sciences*: the idea of a *method according to nature* contains already both a universal commandment, a characteristic that must be by any correct method; and a specific commandment, of following the features of each particular objectual domain. From there, we are close to explaining the need for a proportional reading of the thesis, as was suggested already by many commentators.

And yet many questions lie at the background of Brentano’s doctrine of natural method: what does it mean that Brentano accepts these ideas of “natural means”, of methods which are “more natural to us”, of “human faculties [*menschliche Vermögen*]”? What is it that supports this theory of human development according to nature? It is certainly not any sort of anthropologism, to which Brentano was always opposed; it is no naturalistic relativism, either. It is certainly not a compromise with Kantianism, Brentano’s lifelong opponent. What, then, could the sources be from which Brentano draws this idea? How much does he really borrow from Aristotle? And how much from scholasticism? Finally, what is the exact relationship between the universal and the specific senses of “method according to nature” that we have just distinguished?

To answer these questions would require us to dig deeper into this “phenomenological naturalism” that we find at the core of Brentano’s constant appeal to experience as the guide of natural method;

it would require us to go further into the examination of that primitive notion of his system, namely the notion of evidence – and into the way it functions as a *natural mark of correctness*, as a *natural sanction*, as it were, on our judgments and, from there, on our methods and theories (see, for instance, USE, §16). There is a certain *naturalness* with which evidence is accepted as the basic, unquestionable concept of Brentano's philosophical system, as we have seen (§28): evidence was something like the flat appearance and the flat ground upon which we must built our theories, but which cannot, itself, be put into question. If there is something like a problematic empiricism put forth by Brentano, and widely acknowledged, there is also, less often identified, the reliance upon an evidence that is *way too unproblematic*, *all too natural*, and which stands right at the base of that empiricism. Such an investigation into the ultimate causes of natural evidence would also require that we finally step outside of Brentano's descriptive psychology, and into the unequivocally metaphysical psychology that had always been in the horizon for him; a psychology which does not spare the talk of "soul" or "faculties," for instance.

As we know, in fact, Brentano's idea of a natural method would not withstand the test of time that well. Even the heirs of those two families of which Brentano is claimed to be the ancestor would subject this idea to manifold critiques. Eventually, the whole idea of natural means of experience, of natural ways of proceeding and, in particular, of a natural sanction of evidence upon which the whole edifice of knowledge can be erected – all of that would be put at risk precisely at the moment when evidence would become, as they say, the name of a problem. And also at that moment, when the tranquil naturalness of evidence would be shaken, another, rather *unnatural* descriptive philosophical science would have come to light.

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