



Franz Clemens Honoratus Hermann Brentano (1838 - 1917)



Franz Clemens Honoratus Hermann Brentano (January 16, 1838 Marienberg am Rhein (near Boppard) - March 17, 1917 Zürich) was an influential figure in both philosophy and psychology. His influence was felt by luminaries such as Edmund Husserl and Alexius Meinong who followed and later adapted Brentano's views.

Life

Franz Brentano studied philosophy at the universities of Munich, Würzburg, Berlin (with Trendelenburg) and Münster. He had a special interest in Aristotle and scholastic philosophy, and his dissertation (in Tübingen) was on the manifold sense of Being in Aristotle.

Subsequently he began to study theology and entered the seminary in Munich and later Würzburg, preparing to become a Roman Catholic priest (ordained August 6, 1864). In 1866 he wrote and defended his habilitation essay and thesis, and then began to lecture at the University of Würzburg. His students during this period included among others Carl Stumpf and Anton Marty.

Between 1870 and 1873 Brentano was heavily involved in the debate on papal infallibility. As a strong opponent of such a dogma, he eventually relinquished his priesthood. Following these religious struggles, Carl Stumpf who was also studying at the seminar at the time was drawn away from the church.

In 1874 Brentano published his major work "Psychology from an empirical standpoint" and from 1874 to 1895 he taught at the University of Vienna. Among his many students were the future intellectual greats such Edmund Husserl, Alexius Meinong, Christian von Ehrenfels and others (see the 'School of Brentano' for more details). While beginning his career as a full professor, he was forced to give up his Austrian citizenship and his professorship in 1880 in order to marry. However, he was permitted to return to the university but only as a Privatdozent.

After his retirement, Brentano moved to Florence in Italy and at the outbreak of the First World War he transferred to Zürich, where he died in 1917.

Work and Thought

Intentionality

Brentano is best known for his reintroduction of the concept of intentionality - a concept derived from Scholastic philosophy - to contemporary philosophy in his lectures and in his work *Psychologie vom Empirischen Standpunkte* (Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint). While often simplistically



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summarised as “aboutness” or the relationship between mental acts and the external world, Brentano defined it as the main characteristic of psychical phenomena, by which they could be distinguished from physical phenomena. Every mental phenomenon, every psychological act has a content, is directed at an object (the intentional object). Every belief, desire etc. has an object that they are about: the believed, the wanted. Brentano used the expression “intentional inexistence” to indicate the status of the objects of thought in the mind. The property of being intentional, of having an intentional object, was the key feature to distinguish psychical phenomena and physical phenomena, because physical phenomena lack intentionality altogether.

Theory of Perception

Franz Brentano is also known for claiming that *Wahrnehmung ist Falschnehmung* (literally ‘truth-grasping is false-grasping’), that is to say perception is erroneous. In fact, he maintained that external, sensory perception could not tell us anything about the de facto existence of the perceived world, which could simply be illusion. However, we can be absolutely sure of our internal perception. When I hear a tone, I cannot be completely sure that there is a tone in the real world, but I am absolutely certain that I do hear. This awareness, of the fact that I hear, is called internal perception. External perception, sensory perception, can only yield hypotheses about the perceived world, but not truth. It was for this reason that Brentano and many of his pupils (in particular, Carl Stumpf and Edmund Husserl) considered that the natural sciences could only ever yield hypotheses and not universal absolute truths as in pure logic or mathematics.

Despite this belief, however, Brentano continued to hold the firm belief that the method of philosophy should be the method of the natural sciences.

Source: Adapted from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franz_Brentano



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