



# Franz Brentano and His Competing World Views. A Philosopher's Choice between Science and Religion<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

There are two types of philosophy of mind in Brentano: (A) Aristotelian, and (B) genuinely Brentanian. The former (A) is to be found in the Aristotelica series; and by (B) I understand the content of *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*. The manuscripts for its unwritten parts and Brentano's lectures on God and immortality of the soul surprisingly fall into **A**. These lines of thought are so different that it can be astonishing that they were authored by one person. In my paper I will try to show the roots of this dichotomy as well as to check whether there is a conflict between these theories, and, if so, whether they can be reconciled. These are not only two different philosophical theories, but at least one of them is a manifestation of a world view, and a key to it can be found in Brentano's biography.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Brentano, filozofia umysłu, religia, światopogląd, Arystoteles, św. Tomasz, substancja, umysł, Bóg

**Keywords:** Brentano, philosophy of mind, religion, world view, Aristotle, Aquinas, substance, mind, God

## Franz Brentano – a profile

Franz Brentano (1838–1917) was a German philosopher who worked in numerous fields: metaphysics, ontology, psychology, logic, theology, ethics and history of philosophy. He is known mainly for reintroducing the scholastic notion of intentionality into contemporary philosophy (*Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* (*PES*),

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1874).<sup>2</sup> In fact, as one can see in the lines cited below, also known as “the intentionality quote,” Brentano did not use the exact word “intentionality.” He spoke of “intentional/mental inexistence” of an object in our mind. Upon this notion he was able to build his very modern philosophy of mind (i.e. division of mental phenomena into three classes of presentations, judgments and phenomena of love and hate, self-consciousness, synchronic unity of consciousness), but on the other hand – so to speak – to create a link between medieval logic and psychology as well as contemporary philosophy.

Every mental phenomenon is characterized by what the Scholastics of the Middle Ages called the intentional (or mental) inexistence of an object, and what we might call, though not wholly unambiguously, relation to a content, direction toward an object (which is not to be understood here as a reality), or immanent objectivity. Every mental phenomenon includes something as object within itself, although they do not all do so in the same way. In presentation something is presented, in judgment something is affirmed or denied, in love loved, in hate hated, in desire desired and so on.<sup>3</sup>

Brentano is also famous as a teacher of many significant philosophers (and not only philosophers); among whom we can count Edmund Husserl, Anton Marty, Christian von Ehrenfels, Alexius Meinong, Carl Stumpf, Hugo Bergmann, Alfred Kastil, Tomáš Masaryk, Sigmund Freud, and Kazimierz Twardowski (to mention just a few).<sup>4</sup> The last of these students of Brentano, Kazimierz Twardowski, was the founder of the Lvov-Warsaw School, which makes Brentano something of a godfather, so to speak, of Polish analytic philosophy. Interestingly, there was no proper school of Brentano in Vienna. On the one hand among his students one can find all the distinguished names mentioned above, and some would even like to see Franz Kafka among them (he was friends with Hugo Bergmann), although he lived and worked in Prague. On the other hand, as we learn from Husserl’s memoirs<sup>5</sup> (Husserl was Brentano’s student in Vienna in winter 1884/1885 and 1885/1886), Brentano did not believe himself to have created a school. Brentano is remembered as somebody who gave momentum to phenomenology, revolutionised epistemology and psychology, influenced the Lvov-Warsaw School, inspired British analytic philosophy and raised a couple of generations of influential philosophers, but he died in the belief that there was no proper heir or continuator to his work. One can sometimes have

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<sup>2</sup> See also W. Huemer, *Franz Brentano* [in:] *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2014 Edition), E.N. Zalta (ed.), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2014/entries/brentano/> [accessed: 30.10.2014].

<sup>3</sup> F. Brentano, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, trans. A.C. Rancurello, D.B. Terrell, L.L. McAlister, London, New York 1995. p. 68.

<sup>4</sup> Even Martin Heidegger, although they never met in person. In *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, Heidegger said that it was Brentano’s book *Von der mannigfachen Bedeutung des Seienden nach Aristoteles* that awoke his interest for philosophy.

<sup>5</sup> E. Husserl, *Wspomnienia o Franzu Brentano* [in:] F. Brentano, *Aristoteles i jego światopogląd*, trans. S. Kamińska, Kraków 2012, p. 23–34. The memoirs of Edmund Husserl are taken from Oskar Kraus’s book *Franz Brentano. Zur Kenntnis seines Lebens und seiner Lehre. Mit Beiträgen von Carl Stumpf und Edmund Husserl* (Munich 1919). I incorporated them into my translation of: *Franz Brentano, Aristoteles und seine Weltanschauung (Aristotle and His World View)*.

the feeling that Brentano's indirect influence on philosophy, i.e. via his students, was greater than the direct one. And his conviction of dying "childless" was rooted in his peculiar view on the master-student relationship, which had a lot to do with his "affinity" with Aristotle (about which more below). However, in his book *Austrian Philosophy, The Legacy of Franz Brentano* (p. 20), Barry Smith gives a much more trivial explanation of the lack of a school of Brentano. According to him, the school was not established because the authorities of the University in Vienna did not return to him his professorship (given in 1874 and lost in 1880 – more on this below), and this is why Brentano was forced to teach as *Privatdozent* for the rest of his life. As a result, the place that could have been taken by Brentano and his pupils (who instead dispersed all over Europe) was taken by Moritz Schlick and his agnostic group of followers, who fought phenomenology as a manifestation of old metaphysics. Thus, Anton Marty and Christian von Ehrenfels settled in Prague, Carl Stumpf in Berlin, Alexius Meinong in Graz, Kazimierz Twardowski in Lvov, etc. Although this was a hardship for Brentano, it had a huge (and positive) impact on European philosophy in the broad sense. Had the school been established in Vienna, the scholars would not have taken all the positions at various universities, and thus the fruitful diffusion would not have taken place.

Surprisingly, it still remains unknown that there was a completely different side to Brentano, another current of his philosophical work, in which he was incessantly engaged from 1862 till 1911.<sup>6</sup> And the thing he was so fiercely devoted to was his Aristotelian studies. In this very long period of almost 50 years, Brentano wrote the following books on Aristotle, which are now known under the common name of *Aristotelica: Von der mannigfachen Bedeutung des Seienden nach Aristoteles* (*On the Several Senses of Being in Aristotle*, 1862), *Die Psychologie des Aristoteles, insbesondere seine Lehre vom nous poietikos* (*The Psychology of Aristotle*, 1867), *Über den Creatianismus des Aristoteles* (*On Aristotle's Creationism*, 1882), *Aristoteles' Lehre vom Ursprung des menschlichen Geistes* (*Aristotle's Theory of the Origin of Human Soul/Intellect*, 1911), *Aristoteles und seine Weltanschauung* (*Aristotle and His World View*, 1911). There is also the rather considerable Nachlass: *Über Aristoteles* (*On Aristotle*, 1986), plus numerous manuscripts.

To order the facts, it will be useful to introduce a division into two currents of Brentano's philosophy of mind. I call these currents **A** and **B**, because one stands for Aristotle and the other for Brentano. I will start with the latter one, as it is better known. Representative of **B** is the content of *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*. In this book, Franz Brentano exchanges the traditional conception of substantial soul for a chain/bundle<sup>7</sup> of mental phenomena/acts with no underlying substra-

<sup>6</sup> S. Kamińska, *Aristoteles według Franza Brentano. Dyskusyjna interpretacja / Komentarz do przekładu fragmentu dzieła F. Brentany Aristoteles und seine Weltanschauung*, "Kwartalnik Filozoficzny" 2010, vol. XXXVIII, no. 1; S. Kamińska, *What Can Grow from the Divine Seed? The Divinity of Human Beings According to Aristotle*, "Studia Religioznica" 2012, vol. 45 (3).

<sup>7</sup> Bundle theory, originated by David Hume, very broadly speaking states that objects consist of bundles of properties and that there is no substance/substratum in which they inhere. Substance theory says that a substance is a property-bearer that is distinct from its properties. Substance theory is to be distinguished from bundle theory, but also from the theory of the bare particular (i.e. substance with no

tum. In doing so he is influenced by David Hume (the famous critic of the notions of substance and causation), Gustav Theodor Fechner (an experimental psychologist who tried to develop an entire world view without resorting to the hypothesis that there exist any mysterious substances besides phenomena perceived by our senses or inner observation), Wilhelm Wundt (who founded the first laboratory of experimental psychology), et al. The theory of mental life described in *PES* has been very influential ever since. Brentano's ideas included in this work are still alive among contemporary philosophers, and the literature on the subject is vast.

The **A** current, on the other hand, has not been so "successful", and for several reasons has not found its way into the philosophical mainstream. In the *Aristotelica* series (as well as in unpublished<sup>8</sup> parts of *PES*), Brentano is – as the name suggests – a thorough-going Aristotelian. What the name does not suggest is that this Aristotelianism has a very strong Thomistic admixture: a theistic account of a personal God, immortal soul as a substratum for mental phenomena, creationism, "creation" of the world and creation of particular souls in time.<sup>9</sup> It is a full-blown Christian Aristotelianism to be honest (which shall mean that **A** not only stands for Aristotle, but also for Aquinas), and this fact finds a plausible explanation in Brentano's biography, which for a philosopher was very eventful.

## The story of his life

The book that opens *Aristotelica*, Franz Brentano's doctorate entitled *Von der mannigfachen Bedeutung des Seienden nach Aristoteles*, is one of the milestones of his biography.<sup>10</sup> This work is dedicated to Friedrich Adolph Trendelenburg, the only per-

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properties). Brentano in *PES* rejects the idea of the soul conceived as the bearer of its mental phenomena, as something different from them (he rejects the substance theory). He speaks of a chain of mental phenomena with no underlying substratum, which is why I decided to call it chain/bundle theory. Unfortunately, he does not develop this issue, and we cannot say how the mental phenomena are interconnected. He has an account of the synchronic unity of consciousness, i.e. inner perception informs us of the coexistence of mental phenomena in a particular moment of time, but there is no diachronic unity of consciousness, i.e. we do not know how they coexist over time, which – in the long run – amounts to the problem of identity/personhood, and this may be the cause of Brentano's decision to stick to substance theory in his other writings.

<sup>8</sup> At first, Brentano planned to publish six books of *PES*. However, he only managed to publish two of them, and the rest remained in manuscript.

<sup>9</sup> When I speak of the creation of the world I put the word "creation" in quotation marks, because Brentano was strongly inspired by Aquinas' concept of *creatio continua*, which aims to reconcile the act of creation with the eternity of the world. For Aquinas the world was "created" by God, but on the other hand it is not possible to indicate the concrete point in time. The human notion of time does not apply to God, who is beyond time. And thus we say that God lends its existence to the world. It is a fusion of Aristotelianism (eternal world) and Christianity (creation). *Creatio continua* is to be understood as if God were creating the world all the time and at the same time the world were eternal. Brentano subscribes to this point of view. When it comes to the soul, Brentano also follows Aquinas and says that the soul is created by God and incarnated at a special moment of the foetus's development, called *perfecta dispositio corporis*.

<sup>10</sup> It was also a milestone in Heidegger's biography, as I stated above.

son – according to Brentano, of course – who understood Aristotle. Trendelenburg (1802–1872), Brentano’s Berliner teacher, was a philosopher and a philologist. He was one of the godfathers of the 19th-century Aristotelian revival. In 1833 he published a critical edition of Aristotle’s *De Anima*, which was seminal for Brentano’s development as he grounds his theory of intellectual soul and the deity-humans relationship mostly in this work. What could also have been important for the young Brentano was Trendelenburg’s conviction that the right explanation for the world can only be given in terms of the final cause (teleology!). Both Trendelenburg and Brentano also believed that there are more similarities than differences between Plato and Aristotle, and both shared an aversion to German idealism – so much for philosophical taste.

Another important figure in the formation of Brentano’s **A** world view was Franz Jakob Clemens (1815–1862). Brentano met him in Münster, where he spent two semesters, and quickly became intellectually and emotionally attached to him. He later called him “the professor of his heart”, and it was Clemens, not Trendelenburg, who was the supervisor of Brentano’s doctoral thesis. Clemens was a Catholic philosopher and a Jesuit. He acquainted Brentano with scholastics, and it is often said that he was responsible for the Catholic trait in Brentano’s writings and could even have influenced Brentano’s decision to become a Catholic priest. Unfortunately, Clemens died in 1862, in the year of Brentano’s doctoral defence.

To sum up this stage of Brentano’s biography, one should say that Trendelenburg inspired him with Aristotle, and Clemens with Thomas Aquinas, and these are by far the two strongest influences in **A**.<sup>11</sup> There is also the Leibnizian thread, which would be worth elaborating on but, unfortunately, to do so would surpass the scope of this paper.

The years 1864–1873 were the period of Brentano’s priesthood. This was put to an end (although the formal resignation fell in 1879) because Brentano contradicted the dogma of papal infallibility (Vatican Council I, 1869–1870): “(...) when the declaration of papal infallibility caused Roman Catholic lines in Germany to be sharply drawn, Brentano found he could no longer in good conscience remain a Catholic...”<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, in his heart, he remained a believer. In March 1873 Brentano had to resign from his professorship in Würzburg as it was formally attached to his priesthood. In 1874 he was awarded a professorship in Vienna, which he happily accepted, but which he also left six years later due to his marriage (in Austria it was forbidden for a former priest to get married, and thus Brentano accepted Saxon citizenship). The above sentence contains two crucial facts in Brentano’s biography. Not only does it explain why he remained a *Privatdozent* for the rest of his career (which – as Husserl<sup>13</sup> relates – made him rather unhappy), but it also gets to the bone of the genesis of the **B** current in Brentano’s philosophy of mind (this is, of course, one of

<sup>11</sup> See also S. Kamińska, *Nieznanne oblicze Franza Brentano* [in:] F. Brentano, *Arystoteles i jego światopogląd*...

<sup>12</sup> A.J. Burgess, *Brentano as a Philosopher of Religion*, “International Journal for Philosophy of Religion” 1974, no. 2, p. 83.

<sup>13</sup> E. Husserl, *op.cit.*

the possible explanations). Namely, after leaving Würzburg Brentano was in need of a position. This, however, required that he shake off the well-deserved scholastic label he had earned in the preceding years. Some specialists on Brentano (including Peter Simons<sup>14</sup>) believe that he wrote *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* in order to appear a much more modern philosopher than he really was. Nowadays, we might use the meaningful expression “fake it to make it” to describe this. In his introduction to *PES* from 1995, Simons calls it Brentano’s “passport out of Würzburg”. This justification would also explain why only two of six intended books of *PES* were published, and the rest remains in manuscript until today (and contains A-theses). Moreover, Simons claims that Brentano was not a genuine producer of books. Nevertheless, he was a distinguished teacher and he was always fiercely engaged in matters close to his heart.<sup>15</sup> This would in turn explain his devotion to Aristotelian writings, in the case of which – it has to be admitted – he was quite an effective producer of books (five books finished and published!). Brentano believed (and said so explicitly in the opening lines of his last book *Aristoteles und seine Weltanschauung*) that he was Aristotle’s youngest son.<sup>16</sup> He had two elder brothers, namely Eudemos and Theophrastus, with whom he engaged in a highly interesting discussion in his work *Aristotle’s Psychology*, 1867. This “family tree” was supposed to authorise him not only to comment on Aristotle and interpret Aristotle, but also to emend and supplement Aristotle where he saw a need for it. He exercised this right using the Thomistic tools, and this more or less boils down to the outline of the A current.

## Are A and B at all compatible? Do they have anything in common?

In the very first pages of *PES*, Brentano formulates a question about the possibility of the continuation of the existence of our mental acts after the bodily death, which is basically a question about the immortal soul, only ... without the soul. The question looks rather confusing against the background of the published books of *PES*, as there is nothing more on immortality on its pages. To cut a long story short: Brentano – not only in his *Aristotelica*, but also in the manuscripts for the unpublished books of *PES* – goes back (I use this expression to illustrate the fact that he chooses a theory rooted in the 13th century) to A as he sees himself defeated in his pursuit for diachronic unity of consciousness which would be the key to immortality. He formulates an account of the synchronic unity of consciousness, meaning being aware of oneself and one’s mental acts at the specific moment in time. Unfortunately, the diachronic one is a problem, as there is no “glue” to hold the phenomena together over time, besides the boundaries of mortal body, and therefore they drift apart and we can no longer think of an immortal self. And thus the thing that guarantees A’s superiority

<sup>14</sup> See F. Brentano, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, trans. A.C. Rancurello, D.B. Terrell, L.L. McAlister, London, New York 1995. With an Introduction by P. Simons.

<sup>15</sup> See also S. Kamińska, *Nieznane oblicze Franza Brentano...*

<sup>16</sup> See also *ibidem* and S. Kamińska, *The Alleged Activity of Active Intellect – a Wild Goose Chase or a Puzzle to Be Solved?* [in:] “Zagadnienia Filozoficzne w Nauce” 2014, vol. LIV, pp. 79–126.

over **B** is the possibility of a plausible account of immortality, which Brentano, as a former Catholic priest and a consistent believer, simply could not let go. Brentano was a very religious person and he had, so to speak, an official and a private world view. In the end the strong belief of there being an immortal soul defeated the “official philosophical programme”.

As I discuss this issue in detail from the psychological and ontological standpoint elsewhere, here I will concentrate on another aspect of the matter, i.e. the relationship between science and religion.

How can a man who in his *Habilitationsthesis* claims that that the true method of philosophy should be no different from the method of natural science engage his personal views into philosophical constructs? Of course, Aquinas was a very logical, rational philosopher, but Brentano did not adopt his views because of these features, but rather because of his theism (see: the opening pages of *Aristoteles Lehre vom Ursprung des menschlichen Geistes*, where he unsuccessfully tries to defend himself from being called a Thomist). Rather than by the method of science, Brentano was driven by a personal motivation, a strong belief and an emotional need while formulating the theses in **A**. Let me quote an interesting passage from A.J. Burgess’s paper *Brentano as Philosopher of Religion*: “Brentano owes and acknowledges a heavy debt to Aristotle and to the Thomistic tradition. This debt can hardly be overemphasized, but it can be misunderstood. Only in the widest sense could he be termed a Thomist. No doubt he himself would have rejected the title, and rightly so. Yet in essentials it is the Thomistic interpretation of Aristotle which he follows, for example on the immortality of the individual soul and on the temporal<sup>17</sup> creation of the world.”<sup>18</sup> As I said above, Brentano indeed tried to reject the title, but he did it only in the face of accusation of not only being a Thomist, but of using Aristotle as the background against which Thomistic philosophy could be better exposed without a true regard for Aristotle. Nevertheless, in the same disclaimer-passage (p. 1 of *Erster Teil* of *Aristoteles Lehre vom Ursprung des menschlichen Geistes*) he expresses his true belief that Aquinas was a much better-suited and considerably more thorough-going Aristotelian scholar with a deeper insight than those who came after him. This is why I believe this passage to be at least ambiguous.<sup>19</sup>

## A Bigger Picture

In his deliberations on the immortality of the soul,<sup>20</sup> where he fiercely defends the substantial account of an intellectual soul, Kazimierz Twardowski lists the philosophers who were against it, i.e. in favour of bundle theory. Surprisingly, Brentano is not

<sup>17</sup> For an explanation of the word “temporal” see the footnote on *creatio continua* above.

<sup>18</sup> A.J. Burgess, *op.cit.*, p. 85.

<sup>19</sup> It is worth noting that Burgess did not refer to the fragment I am dealing with here.

<sup>20</sup> K. Twardowski, *Filozofia współczesna o nieśmiertelności duszy* [in:] “Przełom” 1895, vol. 1, no. 14, pp. 427–438 oraz *Metafizyka duszy* [in:] “Przełom” 1985, vol. 1, no. 15, pp. 467–480 [in Polish]. These are two papers that form a unity, so to speak, and therefore should be read together.

among them, although Twardowski was not only familiar with *PES*, but also engaged in developing its ideas,<sup>21</sup> which can serve as further proof (besides Simons's opinion on *PES* and the motivation behind it) that the Aristotelian part was much more important for Brentano, and Twardowski – as his faithful follower – knew it. My personal belief is the same; however, it would be unfair and devoid of deeper sense and justification simply to dismiss Brentano's best-known achievement as a whim, sudden change of mind, etc. Surely, even if there was a hidden agenda behind it, it must have been difficult for him to maintain two such different world views.

## Religion vs. science impartiality

Kazimierz Twardowski, who unlike his teacher was very much into meta-philosophy, proposed a solution to such problems, namely the rule of science vs. world-view impartiality. This can be expressed as follows: advocating this or that metaphysics is a matter of faith, not knowledge. Religion/world view and philosophy must be strictly divided. The premise behind this was the following: philosophy exercised in the metaphysical way is unable to justify its claims and theses. This lack of justification contradicts the spirit of science.<sup>22</sup>

This was supposed to be an axiom in Twardowski's school, and in most cases it worked. It should not be confused with the science/not-science distinction introduced by the Vienna Circle at that time (the Lvov-Warsaw School and the Vienna Circle are often compared, for which there are some good reasons, but not this one). For the members of the Vienna Circle science was a tool for defeating all metaphysics or – in the best-case scenario – identifying it with poetry. For the Lvov-Warsaw School it was about acknowledging what is scientific and thus can be a part of the “official programme” of the School, and what is private (and bound to stay this way) but with no qualitative justification.

One must see the difference between defeating religion and including this religion-fight into one's programme and simply not including religion in the scope of deliberation for metaphilosophical reasons.

However good and useful this impartiality rule may sound, even Twardowski himself did not manage to obey it all the time. Nevertheless he tried. It seems that Brentano, on the other hand, was not preoccupied with this issue. Or rather one should say that he did not care, because according to him there was no conflict. In his paper *Brentano as a Religious Thinker*, to which I referred above, A.J. Burgess quotes Brentano's quite famous words, which I decided to use as a punchline here:

In a letter to a young agnostic Brentano once cited approvingly the famous saying of Francis Bacon: “It is true, that a little philosophy inclineth man's mind to atheism; but depth in phi-

<sup>21</sup> In 1894 Twardowski developed, clarified and supplemented Brentano's ideas from *PES* in his famous work and his *Habilitationsschrift* at the same time: *On the Content and Object of Presentations – A Psychological Investigation* (1894). He enriched Brentano's *act-object* distinction with an *object-content* distinction.

<sup>22</sup> See also J. Woleński, *Logic and Philosophy in the Lvov-Warsaw School*, Dordrecht/London 1989.



osophy bringeth men's mind about to religion." Brentano himself might have put the point this way: bad philosophy, and particularly bad idealistic philosophy, inclines a man to atheism, but a rigorous and scientific philosophy will bring him back.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> A.J. Burgess, *op.cit.*, p. 87.

