

Mind and Metaphysics in Early Phenomenology

Instructor: Dr Sandra Lapointe

*This seminar meets once a week for 3 hours. It does not have prerequisite.

§1. Description

If most philosophers today see the nineteenth century as the cradle of the philosophical study of mind it is in great part on account of the enduring philosophical significance of Franz Brentano's groundbreaking work on intentionality. His opus magnum, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* (1874) is in this respect a classical locus for historians of philosophy. Brentano was first to place the study of mind (understood as consciousness) at the heart of the philosophical enterprise, thus carving a space for a new discipline he called "descriptive psychology".

The theories Brentano puts forward in *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* anticipated at least one crucial aspect of contemporary philosophy of mind that can be formulated in a number of more or less equivalent ways:

- mental states are psychological attitudes that have a (propositional) "content"
- mental states are "directed toward an object or proposition"
- mental states are intentional.

Interestingly, while experimental psychology also thrived at the time, and although Brentano took descriptive psychology to belong to what he calls "empirical" psychology, it was also intended to rely on a priori investigative methods. In this respect, he held it to be both distinct from and epistemologically more fundamental than its "experimental" counterpart.

Brentano's influence on late 19th and 20th century philosophy is remarkably underplayed in standard narratives. For one thing, he had a number of talented students and his theories impregnated their work remarkably thoroughly. Moreover, many of these students (e.g. Carl Stumpf, Alexius Meinong, Anton Marty, Alois Höfler, Christian von Ehrenfels, Kasimierz Twardowski, Benno Kerry, Oscar Kraus and Edmund Husserl) went on to occupy positions in prestigious university - in Prague, Berlin, Halle, Graz and Freiburg im Breisgau - and to publish work that would be seminal in the century that followed. Not only is Brentano the forebear of both Polish analytical philosophy (in Lvov and Warsaw, through Twardowski) and of what will become (so called: transcendental) Phenomenology between the wars (through the later Husserl and, after him, e.g. Heidegger), he was also one of the main influence on the "moral scientists" aka Cambridge analytic psychologists Stout and Ward in the last decades of the 19th

century. Through them, aspects of Brentano's theories shaped the thought of a number of young philosophers, including Moore and Russell.

One distinctive feature of Brentanian theories of mind is the fact that although they consider the study of mind to be key to the resolution of most philosophical questions, from logic and ontology to ethics and aesthetics, their engagement with the philosophical problems traditionally associated with the study of mind is virtually null: they have nothing to say on *the nature of the soul* and the possibility of its surviving bodily death. For most early phenomenologists, discussion of the *mind-body problem* is also a non-starter. The same holds as regards the status of materialism, panpsychism or dualism. It is noteworthy that these problems all ultimately pertain to the *metaphysics* of mind.

The purpose of the seminar is twofold: (i) to understand the theories of the most representative members of the Brentanian tradition in context, drawing on recent scholarship on the study of mind in the 19th century, in order (ii) to gain insight in what explains their refusal to engage with traditional metaphysical problems.

The discussion will focus around a selection of classics, including but not limited to Brentano's *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* (1874), Twardowski's *On the Content and Objects of Presentations* (1894) and Husserl's *Logical Investigations* (1900-01).

§2. Schedule (TBA)

Mandatory weekly readings will be made available online.

§3. Assessment:

Final paper (60%): One final paper on a topic of the student's choice (maximum 4000 words), The first draft and bibliography will be due no later than 25 October 2015. Students will be expected to respond to feedback and produce at least two (2) additional drafts before handing in the final version. The grade will be a function of the student's (i) response to feedback and (ii) improvement as well as (iii) the overall quality of the final paper.

Presentation (30%): Each student will be expected to make a 30 minutes presentation in which they will discuss the main points of the weekly reading assignment. At least one presentation will take place every week, starting 7 October.

Participation (10%): Students will be expected to attend and prepare for each weekly seminar by writing up a list of questions related to the reading. The questions will be submitted in writing at the end of each seminar. The questions will be used as a basis for discussion in class. Only the 10 best scores will be taken into account for the final grade.