

Call for Abstracts

International Conference

Brentano – Comte – Mill: The Idea of Philosophy and Psychology as Science

Even from the beginning of his activity, Franz Brentano firmly believed that the philosophy of his time was on the point of entering an age of progress, which would surpass the stage of crisis provoked by the fall of German idealism, through revival of the theoretical interest and by applying a method adequate to its object of research. His fourth Habilitation thesis “The true method of philosophy is none other than that of the natural sciences” (1866) gives expression to this belief and may be interpreted either in the sense of a methodological monism, which maintains an identity of method between natural science and philosophy, or in the sense of a methodological particularism, which maintains an analogy of method between the two, namely the idea that philosophy, like natural science, gets its fundamental notions from the experience of its object of research. Given that for the young Brentano philosophy is divided into two fundamental disciplines, metaphysics and psychology, the fourth Habilitation thesis becomes as follows: “The True Method of Philosophy, hence of Metaphysics and Psychology, is the Method of Natural Science”, with the option to interpret this thesis as expressing either a methodological monism, or a methodological particularism.

Brentano’s interest in the rebirth of philosophy by appeal to the scientific method is closely related to his interest in the works of Auguste Comte and John St. Mill: Brentano discovered Comte through J. St. Mill’s book *Auguste Comte and Positivism* (1865). Also, some of his central ideas can be traced back to these two authors, either in the sense of them being taken from Comte and Mill directly, or in the sense that Comte’s and Mill’s theses represented fundamental benchmarks in Brentano’s theoretical elaborations. From this last perspective, it is relevant to point that, although he elaborated the theory of the four phases of philosophy independently of Comte’s theory of stages, Brentano was constantly preoccupied during the Würzburg years (1866–1873) to clarify the relationship between his theory and Comte’s theory of stages, and, while looking for an acceptable solution, he changed his position on the matter several times. On the other hand, his fundamental work *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* (1874) is build on ideas taken from Comte and Mill, such as Comte’s

idea of a classification of phenomena and of their corresponding sciences or J. St. Mill's idea that psychology is a phenomenal science. Generally, the views of these two authors on empirical knowledge exerted a profound influence on the young Brentano, influence which is still little researched and whose aspects are to be revealed by the conference.

The conference is focused on four themes: **(1)** the theory of stages in Comte and Brentano; **(2)** the concept of positive knowledge; **(3)** the view of philosophy and psychology as empirical disciplines, and their respective methods and **(4)** strategies for the revival of philosophical thought in Brentano, Comte and Mill.

Leading questions for addressing these themes are the following: What is the relationship between Brentano's *theory of the four phases of philosophy* and Comte's *theory of stages*? Are they based on the same conception of the *evolution of human thinking* or are they distinct ways of interpreting this evolution? Does Comte's theory admit *phases of decline* in the theoretical interest? Or in the *method*? What does the concept of *positive science* mean in Comte and J. St. Mill, what are the differences between the two authors, and what is the influence that this concept exerted on Brentano's work, especially on his *empirical and descriptive psychology*? Or on his general view of the *destiny of philosophy*, a view that he presented in numerous conferences, but in which none of the two authors is ever mentioned? How do these three authors view *psychology and internal perception*? What is the influence of *Mill's methods* on Brentano's psychology and, bearing on this perspective, how can the distinction *genetic-descriptive*, elaborated by Brentano during his Viennese years, be approached? Finally, what are the *strategies for the rebirth of philosophy* in these three authors and what role does *the philosophical tradition* play here?

Approaching Brentano is not a necessary condition for participation, but the proposed papers need to address one or some of the problems mentioned previously, with reference to Comte and J. St. Mill, or to have a clear relevance for the general theme of the conference, including here the manner in which the theme is reflected in the works of Brentano's students (Marty, Husserl and others).

Submission Instructions: Those who are interested to take part in the conference are invited to send an abstract of max. 500–700 words to **bcm.conference.2018@gmail.com** by **30th April 2018**. Abstracts must be prepared for blind review. A separate document should include a cover letter containing the following information: the title of the presentation, the name of the author and the academic affiliation. The accepted speakers will be notified no later than **31st of May 2018**. There is no participation tax. However, the organizers do not cover any travel or accommodation expenses. The language of the conference will be English. The conference is organized by the *Institute for Philosophy "Alexandru Dragomir"* in collaboration with the *Faculty of Philosophy of University of Bucharest* between **September 27-29, 2018** and is part of the research project *Brentano – Comte – Mill: The Idea of Philosophy and Psychology as Science (PN-III-P4-ID-PCE-2016-0473)*.

For further information visit the project website:

<http://brentano-comte-mill.institute.phenomenology.ro/>