

BOOK REVIEWS

The Development of Franz Brentano's Ethics, by Linda McAlister. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1982. Pp. 171. Reviewed by Helena Czosnyka, St. Louis University.

The Development of Franz Brentano's Ethics was originally the doctoral dissertation of Linda McAlister in 1968 at the Sage School of Philosophy, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY. She was later invited to contribute a book on Brentano to the series "Elementa: Schriften zur Philosophie und ihrer Problemgeschichte" of which her revised dissertation constitutes volume XXVII. She considered it pertinent since little, if anything, had been written on Brentano's ethics between 1968 and 1982.

Dr. McAlister successfully undertakes a novel study of the development of Brentano's ethics, providing an analysis of this development, as well as detailed background information and a solid critique of his position.

Brentano (1838-1917) developed two distinct epistemological positions which are generally recognized and are presented in Wahrheit und Evidenz by Oskar Kraus (1930; English trans. The True and the Evident by Roderick Chisholm, 1966), a selection of Brentano's writings arranged to illustrate the transition from one period to another. Until Dr. McAlister's work, there was no comparable presentation and study of Brentano's ethical writings, though they also enter into a discernible second phase around the turn of the century.

McAlister's first chapter treats Brentano's methodology and psychology and offers helpful and fundamental distinctions between Brentano's different understandings and uses of the term "psychology." The background work is done here to facilitate an understanding of Brentano's complex process of making moral judgments.

Chapter 2 begins the examination of Brentano's ethics, concentrating on his earlier ethical theory and following the development of his thought processes as he evaluates ethical systems of the past. Brentano's goal is to determine and establish the basic ethical principle(s). McAlister shows how Brentano himself is strongly rooted in traditional philosophy, particularly Aristotle, and how this colors his philosophy, as well as his attempts to reconcile utilitarianism and intui-

tionism (one of his original contributions). At the end of the examination of Brentano's early writings, he has not yet arrived at the formulation of a basic moral principle, other than it must be evident knowledge (it is not yet even determined whether it is a priori or synthetic a posteriori).

Chapter 3 traces Brentano's new attempt to solve this problem: his answer: 1) the basic moral principle is not feeling or sentiment--it is an instance of knowledge, 2) this knowledge is not a priori--it is perceptual, arrived at through perception of our feelings and emotions which are correct and are experienced as correct.

McAlister rightly asserts that Brentano's emphasis and interest is theoretical but, in chapter 4, examines what is to be found of normative ethics in his philosophy.

With chapter 5 we arrive at Brentano's later ethical theory. In this last chapter McAlister studies the rejections or modifications which Brentano effected within his philosophy. One example is his theory of language which gave rise to many of the other changes. Brentano arrived at the conclusion that universals do not exist and that therefore many words are devoid of meaning. The problem of the adequacy of language and the possibility of ontology now presents itself. Brentano undertakes an analysis of words and their referents known as "Sprachkritik" to distinguish between things and non-things.

Consequent upon Brentano's new belief that only things can be thought, he was no longer able to assert that "is" is univocal. Only things can really exist. This, in turn, alters a central tenet of his philosophy, that mental phenomena are relational. Thus, by 1911, he denies that mental phenomena are genuine relations, but only "relation-Like" (Relativliches). Corresponding to this decrease in the range of objects of mental acts is an increase in modes of thinking (Modi des Vorstellens).

All the above changes lead to a rejection of his earlier correspondence theories of truth and value. Since only things exist, there are no states of affairs (Sachverhalte) or states of value (Wertverhalte).

The new theory that Brentano presents claims agreement with evident and quasi-evident mental acts to be the criterion of truth and value. For a correspondence theory of truth, a coherence theory is substituted. McAlister correctly identifies the weakness of such a position: only the truth of first person, present tense, philosophical judgments could be known. The new value theory is similar, with the criterion being what is experienced as correct.

In her concluding remarks, Dr. McAlister finds that the most important change between Brentano's earlier and later ethics lies in the meaning of things as in-

trinsically good. Value judgments are now made without reference to the characteristics of their objects. "We might say roughly that on the earlier view we experience love for X as correct somehow as a result of the fact that X is good. Now 'X is good' simply means love for X is experienced as being correct, or, speaking more strictly yet, that no one who experiences an emotion toward X as being correct can possibly have anything but a positive emotion toward it." (p. 164).

In her critique McAlister is unconvinced of the fundamental aspect of Brentano's ethics, the existence of "als richtig charakterisiert emotions and feelings," as analogues to self-evident judgments (p. 165), and explains her position well.

McAlister knows of no one who has placed Brentano's later ethical theory in proper historical perspective. It is a novel and unique theory and because it did not receive the attention of his earlier writings was never very influential. McAlister asserts that if Brentano's later ethics had been known and studied to the same degree, they would have had as large an impact as his earlier views did, for example, on Meinong and Husserl. A thorough reading of McAlister's text proves this to be a fair assessment and one which provides a challenge to contemporary ethical writers.