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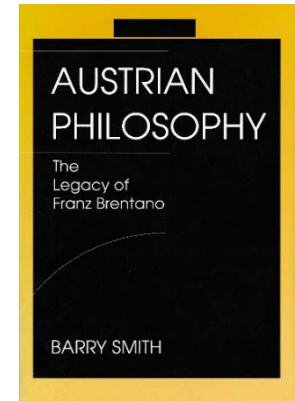
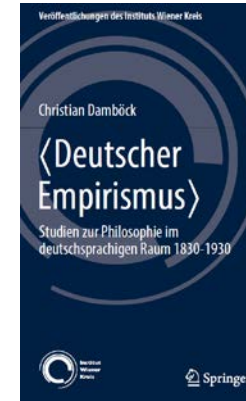
Institute Vienna Circle

Austrian and German Philosophy (1830-1930)

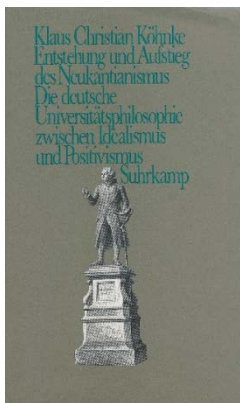
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German and Austrian philosophy 1830-1870 ... or: 1900 ... or: 1930

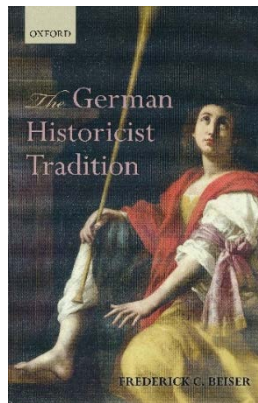
- Smith 1994, Damböck 2017
- Cf. also Klaus Christian Köhnke, *The Rise of Neokantianism ...*
- ... and various recent books by Fred Beiser



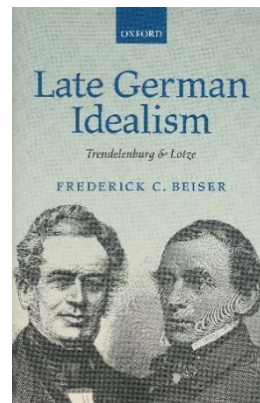
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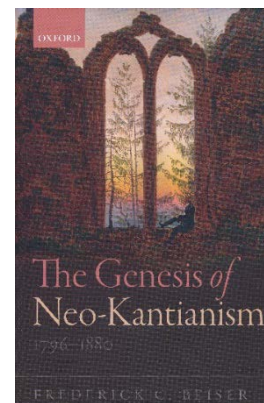
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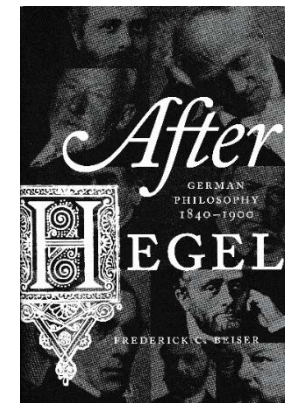
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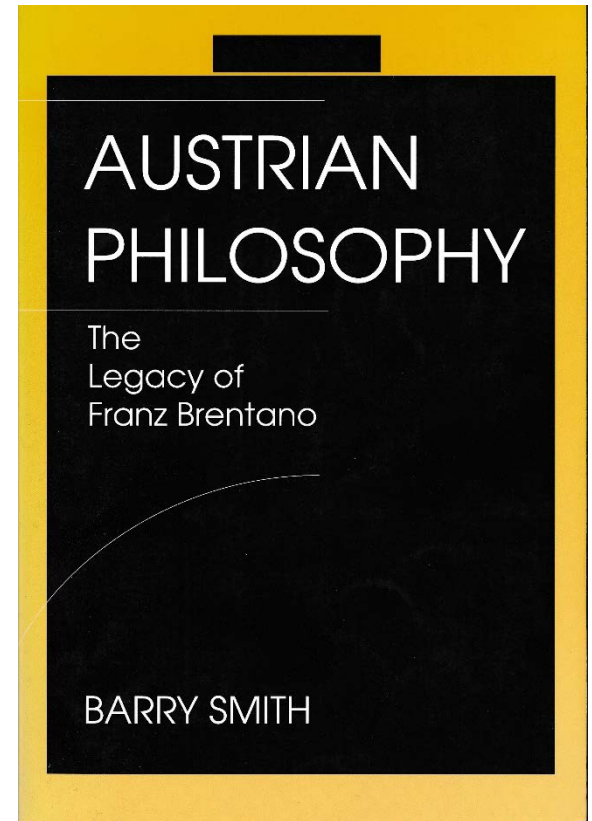
Overview

1. What is Austrian Philosophy (1830-1930)?
2. What is German Philosophy (1830-1930)?
3. Is German Philosophy (1830-1930) really NON-AUSTRIAN?

1. What is Austrian Philosophy (1830-1930)?

Smith, positive part: Two Perspectives

- Smith 1994, pp. 2-4
- The geographical approach: „philosophers of importance who were born or settled within the Habsburg Empire“
- The systematic approach: “a certain *way of doing philosophy*” 7 characteristic features



The geographical approach 1: time

- Post-Idealist philosophy
 - Hegel died in 1831
 - Bolzano published his most important writings after that time (Wissenschaftslehre 1837 etc.)
 - Brentano, Mach, Meinong were philosophers of the second half of the 19th century
- Pre WWII philosophy
 - One may be willing to include developments of the 20th century, with the inclusion of the Brentano School and the Vienna Circle
 - However, there is wide agreement that Austrofascism, National Socialism, WWII, and the emigration of reason (Stadler) had devastating consequences on Austrian Philosophy
- Thus, the period in question here starts around 1830 and ends up around 1930 (1933: Austrofascism, 1938: National Socialism)

1830

1930

The geographical approach 2: space

- The larger option:
The Habsburg empire included the following geographical regions of post WWI Europe:

- Austria
- Hungary
- Czechoslovakia
- Parts of Romania, Yugoslavia, Northern Italy, Poland and Ukraine



- The smaller option:
Austria after 1918

The geographical approach 3: people

- Austrian philosophers are „those philosophers of importance who were born or settled within the borders of the Habsburg Empire“
 - One may add: „OR Austria after 1918“
- Smith mentions the following names:
Bolzano, Mach, Brentano, Twardowski, Meinong, Ehrenfels, Husserl, Mally, Wittgenstein, Neurath, Carnap, Schlick, Waismann, Gustav Bergmann, Gödel and Popper

Problems with the notions of „birth“...

- There is a number of philosophers who were born in Austria but moved away at some stage: Husserl, Wittgenstein, Waismann, Gustav Bergmann, Gödel, Popper
 - If settlement is a crucial criterion then Husserl is a German philosopher, Wittgenstein, Popper and Waismann are British philosophers, Gustav Bergmann and Gödel are American philosophers
- What shall we do with an important and influential philosopher such as Alois Riehl, who also was born in Austria? Is he a (typical) German Neo-Kantian or an „Austrian“?

... and „settlement“

- There are also philosophers that count as Austrian philosophers, although they neither were born in Austria nor settled there for significant periods of their lives:
 - **Carnap** lived in Vienna only for three years, the *Aufbau* was a product of his early intellectual development in Germany
 - **Schlick** moved to Vienna when he was 40 years old and had already published his most important writings
 - **Brentano** moved to Vienna only when he was 36 (and he studied in Berlin)
 - The **Lvov-Warsaw School** „flourished in the years 1918-1939“ (Jan Wolenski, SEP), when Lvov and Warsaw no longer belonged to Austria

Austrian philosophy is geographically underdetermined

- In particular, the border between Austria and Germany is underdetermined:
 - Dahms: there is too much exchange between Austria and Germany to allow for any significant difference between an Austrian and German brand of philosophy
 - (This connects also with the systematic points, I will highlight below)
- But still, the picture works (if we do not overstress it)

The systematic approach 1: connection to empirical science

„Austrian philosophy is marked by [...] the attempt to do philosophy in a way that is inspired by or is closely connected to empirical science (including psychology)“

- Vienna Circle
 - Unity of Science
 - Physicalistic or phenomenalist reductionism
- Brentano: unity of method

The systematic approach 2: British Empiricism

„A sympathy towards and in many cases a rootedness in British empiricist philosophy, a concern to develop philosophy ‚from below‘, on the basis of the detailed examination of particular examples.“

- Bottom up approach
- Inductive reasoning of some kind
- Sympathy for British Empiricism

The systematic approach 3: concern with language of philosophy

„A concern with the language of philosophy. This sometimes amounts to a conception of the critique of language as a tool or method; sometimes it leads to attempts at the construction of a logical ideal of language. In many cases it manifests itself in the deliberate employment of a clear and concise language for the purposes of philosophical expression and in a sensitivity to the special properties of those uses and abuses of language which are characteristic of certain sorts of philosophy.“

The systematic approach 4: rejection of the Kantian revolution

„A rejection of the Kantian revolution and of the various sorts of relativism and historicism which came in its wake. Instead we find different forms of realism and of ‘objectivism’ (in logic, value theory, and elsewhere - illustrated in Bolzano’s concept of the proposition in itself and in Popper’s doctrine of the ‘third world’).”

The systematic approach 5-7: mereology, Gestalt theory, etc.

- We skip these features here (they cover rather ideosyncratic features of the Brentano school)
- Henceforth we focus on the first four features:
 1. Strong connection with the empirical sciences
 2. British Empiricism, bottom up, inductive
 3. Language (of philosophy) plays a decisive role
 4. The Kantian revolution *and* historicism become rejected and varieties of realism and objectivism become adopted

Not every Austrian is „Austrian“ and some non-Austrians are „Austrian“

“Unfortunately, however, it is far from being the case that all the given features are shared in common by all the thinkers mentioned. Some philosophers on the list are marked precisely by the ways in which they reacted against one or other of the features mentioned, and some (for example Wittgenstein and Husserl) changed their relationship to these features over time. Moreover, many of the purported marks of ‘Austrian philosophy’ are exemplified also by thinkers who have nothing whatsoever to do with Austria in any recognizable (geographical) sense.”

But the decisive feature is that
German philosophy is **NON-AUSTRIAN**

“What then springs to mind is the degree to which **the features mentioned have in German philosophy played almost no role at all** - a fact which is all the more remarkable given the extent to which successive generations of German philosophers have differed so widely amongst themselves.”

The approach of Smith, 1994 has three parts

- 1. The positive geographical part:** Austrian philosophy is philosophy done by those who are born or settled in Austria
- 2. The positive systematic part:** Austrian philosophy is characterized by features 1-4 that Austrian philosophers (in the sense of 1) typically share
- 3. The negative systematic part:** German philosophy is NON-AUSTRIAN

The positive parts of Smith, 1994 are essentially OK ...

- Although the geographical picture is somewhat underdetermined it is certainly not entirely wrong to call those philosophers mentioned by Smith „Austrian“ philosophers in the geographical sense
- Although not every „Austrian“ (in the g.s.) shares features 1-4 and although there are non-Austrians (in the g.s.) that share some or all of these features it is essentially OK to associate these features with Austrians (in the g.s.) ...

... with one important exception: historicism and relativism (viz. 4)

- „rejection of the Kantian revolution and of the various sorts of relativism and historicism which came in its wake” (but objectivism and realism, instead)
 - Not true for major representatives of “Austrian philosophy” (in the geographical sense) such as Mach and Neurath (and Ziesel, Carnap, Schlick, Frank, i.e., the Vienna Circle as a whole)
 - We rather may use a weaker and more restrictive label here, namely:
- 4’. „A critical attitude toward Kant and German Idealism that does not necessarily involve an ahistorical approach and/or the rejection of historicism and (moderate forms of) relativism“

Digression: Austrian philosophy is NOT JUST the Brentano School

- What makes Smith's approach so pleasant is that it tries to get both the Brentano School and Mach and the Vienna Circle and Popper and Wittgenstein under the same umbrella of one single geographically-systematic label of „Austrian philosophy“
- Therefore, we should try not to implement any feature here that might lead to a situation where significant parts of this overall group at the end turn out to be Austrian philosophers only in an improper way
- Not to include Mereology or Gestalttheory seems to be as crucial here as not to rule out historicism from the start

But: the main problem of Smith, 1994 is the negative part of this approach

- What I will argue below is that it is by no means true that German philosophers are NON-AUSTRIAN in the sense that they typically do not share features 1-4 (or 1-4')
- I will claim that German philosophers after 1830 typically share some or all of these features
- There is no significant difference at all between German and Austrian philosophy
- Rather, 1-4 (or 1-4') are **decisive features of post-idealist philosophy in both Germany and Austria (and probably even elsewhere)**

2. What is German philosophy (1830-1930)?

The geographical approach: time

- After Hegel's death a new age of philosophy began in Germany
- The respective currents became most powerful during the „New Era“ between 1848 and 1871
- They became gradually less influential after 1871, even more after 1900, and they completely vanished during the 1920s and 1930s
- Thus, even here, the relevant period is approximately 1830-1930

1830

1930



The geographical approach: space

- The „Reichsgründung“ in 1871 plays an important role (because Kant and Plato became national heroes of some kind)
- But even the difference between Prussia and Southwest-Germany is important (some „Austrian“ philosophers may turn out to be „Southwest-Germans“)
- In general, the period in question here is closely tied to the state of Germany before the „Reichsgründung“ (a multitude of small states, kingdoms and principedoms)
- However, it makes sense to consider the borders of the German Reich of 1871 as the space where „German philosophy“ developed

The geographical approach: people

- It is hardly an exaggeration to call the period in question here one of the richest periods in the history of philosophy as a whole
- See Oesterreich's two volume set: dozens of different currents and schools
- One has to idealize very strongly here
 - **Decisive role of the Berlin University** and its key figures August Boeckh and Friedrich Trendelenburg
 - Another hotspot is **Göttingen** (Herbart, Lotze)
 - Also important: Jena, Freiburg, etc.
 - Two most important philosophical schools
 - **Southwest German School**, together with Lotze
 - **Marburg School**, together with Lazarus, Steinthal, Dilthey

The systematic approach: A dark age of philosophy?

„Der Zusammenbruch der Hegelschen Schule führte gegen die Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts zu einem allgemeinen Verfall der Philosophie. Im Umkreis der gleichzeitig aufstrebenden positiven Wissenschaften (Historie und Naturwissenschaften) verlor die Philosophie vollends ihr Ansehen. Wo sie gepflegt wurde, geschah dies in der Unkenntnis und Verkehrung ihres eigenen Wesens.“ (Heidegger 1991, S. 304)

- Similar views can be found in Löwith, Oesterreich, Sluga, etc., etc.

More scientific, less public

- Actually, what happened after 1830 in Germany was that philosophy became more scientific and less public
- Cf. the enormous importance of Lotze as an academic philosopher whose writings were read worldwide
- Cf. Boeckh and Trendelenburg who were the decisive figures of the University of Berlin for about five decades (Boeckh was elected as rector five times, Trendelenburg three times: after that period until today only two further philosophers as rectors: Zeller [1878/79] and Stumpf [1907/08])

Rejection of speculative philosophy and appreciation of science

- After 1830 („breakdown of German Idealism“) the majority of German philosophers rejected the idea of speculative philosophy in the sense of Hegel
- Pure Logic became replaced with an empirical, scientific attitude
- Not pure reasoning but science provides us the material that philosophy has to logically reconstruct

Cf. Trendelenburg (Logical Investigations), Boeckh (Encyclopedia of philological science), Beneke (Philosophy in its relation to experience, speculation and life), Lotze (Microcosm)

What is the method of philosophy?

Option 1: hermeneutics

- Hermeneutics was considered an empirical alternative to speculative philosophy
- Schleiermacher and Boeckh were antipodes of Hegel in Berlin
- They developed h. as an entirely empirical method of text-exegesis as being based on the axiom that human minds work in an analogical way (cf. also Carnap, Neurath)
- Intuition becomes minimized here – the major part of the interpretative work is purely empirical
- (This is roughly the exact opposite conception of h. as we can find it in the 20th century in Gadamer etc.)

What is the method of philosophy?

Option 2: psychology

- Psychology played an overwhelming role in post-idealist philosophy in Germany
- Variety Völkerpsychologie and descriptive psychology (in the sense of Dilthey): psychology as *the* method of the human sciences, where philosophy, in turn, becomes a human science in itself
- Variety psychology as a natural science: Wundt (partially), Büchner, Vogt, Moleschott, possibly also Fries, Apelt

What is the method of philosophy?

Option 3: varieties of „logic“

- Some philosophers rejected psychology as a philosophical method, already before the end of the 19th century
- Examples: Trendelenburg, Lotze, Windelband
- Epistemology (Erkenntnistheorie) in a Kantian sense is only one option here
- Other varieties are logical conceptions either in an Aristotelian or a Platonic fashion (cf. Trendelenburg, Lotze)
- Erkenntnistheorie is certainly not the primary method of philosophy in Germany, before 1870 or so

The role of realism

- Almost all philosophers as mentioned above reject the idea that philosophy is like Smith had characterized it for German philosophy: „its attention is directed not to the world, but to our knowledge of the world“ (Smith, 1994, p. 4)
- Concepts, by contrast, are viewed to be direct results of perception
- Even higher order concepts somewhat result from inductive processes of some kind
- The epistemological motive is not a key motive at all even for a couple of important thinkers at the end of the 19th century (cf. realism in Dilthey and Riehl, etc.)

The role of empiricism

- British empiricism and French positivism became highly appreciated by German philosophers until at least 1870 or so
- This is true, in particular, for the writings of Comte, Mill, Buckle, Taine, Spencer, Whewell
- Positive reception of these philosophers in Beneke, Dilthey, Ueberweg (and many others)
- The attitude was often ambivalent (cf. Buckle) but the core ideas were usually shared

The role of history

- Historicism, in the sense being relevant here, means that we historicize abstract notions (the mind, what Kant called „transcendental“, values, etc.)
- For a historicist there is no Platonic heaven, there are no eternal and eternally fixed abstract notions, values, etc.
- In this sense most (but not all) German philosophers after 1830 are historicists ...
- ... because they claim that the system of values, concepts etc. that philosophy is able to construe necessarily depends from the respective social and geographical context in which it becomes developed
- Holds for: Steinthal, Lazarus, Dilthey, Cohen, but only in a limited way (at best) for Lotze, Windelband, Rickert

The role of language

- Hermeneutics (in the sense of Schleiermacher, Boeckh) involves sensitivity to language
- Trendelenburg demonstrated how to become sensitive to the language of philosophy in a philological way (also: Eduard Zeller, Benno Erdmann, etc.)
- Steinthal and Lazarus developed a linguistic approach to philosophy (Steinthal: philosophy is part of his „Sprachwissenschaft“; Lazarus, *Das Leben der Seele II: Geist und Sprache*)
- Also Cassirer's *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* belongs to this tradition

The role of (Anti-)Kantianism

- A thoroughly critical attitude toward the whole of German Idealism, with the inclusion of Kant, is widespread in German philosophy between 1830 and approx. 1870
- Only after the „Reichsgründung“ Kant became an almost untouchable national hero
- Trendelenburg, Beneke, Ueberweg, Dilthey, Steinthal, Lazarus, Boeckh, for example, never committed themselves to Kant – they tried to overcome Kant rather than revitalizing him in the sense of the „Neo-Kantians“
- Even the Neo-Kantianism of a philosopher such as Cohen is highly ambivalent – Cohen’s late „system“ is much more like a manifesto of historicism and (a modified version of) Völkerpsychologie than a manifesto of any form of (Neo-)Kantianism

3. Is German philosophy (1830-1930) really NON-AUSTRIAN?

No!

1. „Austrian philosophy is marked by [...] the attempt to do philosophy in a way that is inspired by or is closely connected to empirical science (including psychology)“

The same holds for German philosophy (after 1830)

No!

2. „A sympathy towards and in many cases a rootedness in British empiricist philosophy, a concern to develop philosophy ‚from below‘, on the basis of the detailed examination of particular examples.“

... is also typical for German philosophy after 1830

No!

3. „A concern with the language of philosophy“

Even that feature is widespread in German philosophy after 1830

- Hermeneutics (in the sense of Boeckh) provides a way of doing philosophy in a way that is sensitive to language
- Cf. also Trendelenburgs historical method ...
- ... and, in particular, the „Sprachwissenschaft“ of Lazarus and Steinthal

No!

4'. „A critical attitude toward Kant and German Idealism that does not necessarily involve an ahistorical approach and/or the rejection of historicism and (moderate forms of) relativism“

... is no less widespread even in Germany after 1830

Remark 1:

the geographical aspect again

- Carnap:
36 y G, 3 y A, 5 y Cz, 35 y US: 3 % A 46 % G
Studied in Jena and Freiburg (Marburg-S., Dilthey)
- Schlick:
40 y G, 13 y A: 25 % A 75 % G
Studied in Berlin (Semi-Neo-Kantianism)
- Brentano:
36 y G, 41 y A, 2 y S: 45 % G, 52 % A
Studied in Berlin (Trendelenburg, Beneke?)

Remark 2: German philosophy dramatically changed after 1871

- German and Austrian philosophy are quite similar in the time period between 1830 and 1871
- Whereas the (empiricist) features remain crucial in Austria after that period ...
- ... they constantly vanish in Germany after 1871 and even more after 1900
- Still, **the „German empiricist“ tradition stays alive**, even during those hard times of neo-idealism and Neo-Kantianism

Austrian philosophy ≡ post-idealist philosophy

- The features 1-4' are typical features of philosophers after 1830, of Austrian and German nationality (and there is no reason to believe that we do not find them even in other geographical contexts)
- Both philosophical brands (Austrian AND German philosophy after 1830) belong to the same most exciting philosophical age that is probably more important for one being interested in „scientific world conceptions“ than (a) idealist philosophy before 1830 and (b) continental philosophy after 1900 (or even 1945)

So what?

- What is it good for to realize that Austrian philosophy is not quite different from German philosophy (at least for a certain time period after 1830)?
- The point is that we might come to the conclusion that the really interesting brand of philosophy is not just „Austrian philosophy“ but something bigger, namely, the whole of post-idealist philosophy in central Europe
- The so-called dark age (1830-1870) is dark only for those who reject scientific world conceptions but a golden age for those who appreciate them