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Austrian Philosophy. The Legacy of Franz Brentano

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Abstract

This book is a survey of the most important developments in Austrian philosophy in its classical period from the 1870s to the Anschluss in 1938. Thus it is intended as a contribution to the history of philosophy. But I hope that it will be seen also as a contribution to philosophy in its own right as an attempt to philosophize in the spirit of those, above all Roderick Chisholm, Rudolf Haller, Kevin Mulligan and Peter Simons, who have done so much to demonstrate the continued fertility of the ideas and methods of the Austrian philosophers in our own day. For some time now, historians of philosophy have been gradually coming to terms with the idea that post-Kantian philosophy in the German-speaking world ought properly to be divided into two distinct traditions which we might refer to as the German and Austrian traditions, respectively. The main line of the first consists in a list of personages beginning with Kant, Fichte, Hegel and Schelling and ending with Heidegger, Adorno and Bloch. The main line of the second may be picked out similarly by means of a list beginning with Bolzano, Mach and Meinong, and ending with Wittgenstein, Neurath and Popper. As should be clear, it is the Austrian tradition that

has contributed most to the contemporary mainstream of philosophical thinking in the Anglo-Saxon world. For while there are of course German thinkers who have made crucial contributions to the development of exact or analytic philosophy, such thinkers were outsiders when seen from the perspective of native German philosophical culture, and in fact a number of them found their philosophical home precisely in Vienna. When, in contrast, we examine the influence of the Austrian line, we encounter a whole series of familiar and unfamiliar links to the characteristic concerns of more recent philosophy of the analytic sort. As Michael Dummett points out in his *Origins of Analytic Philosophy*, the newly fashionable habit of referring to analytic philosophy as "Anglo-American" is in this light a "grave historical distortion". If, he says, we take into account the historical context in which analytic philosophy developed, then such philosophy "could at least as well be called "Anglo-Austrian" (1988, p. 7). Much valuable scholarly work has been done on the thinking of Husserl and Wittgenstein, Mach and the Vienna Circle. The central axis of Austrian philosophy, however, which as I hope to show in what follows is constituted by the work of Brentano and his school, is still rather poorly understood. Work on Meinong or Twardowski by contemporary philosophers still standardly rests upon simplified and often confused renderings of a few favoured theses taken out of context. Little attention is paid to original sources, and little effort is devoted to establishing what the problems were by which the Austrian philosophers in general were exercised -- in spite of the fact that many of these same problems have once more become important as a result of the contemporary burgeoning of interest on the part of philosophers in problems in the field of cognitive science.

Keywords

[Austrian philosophy](#) [Vienna Circle](#) [Phenomenology](#) [Gestalt psychology](#)

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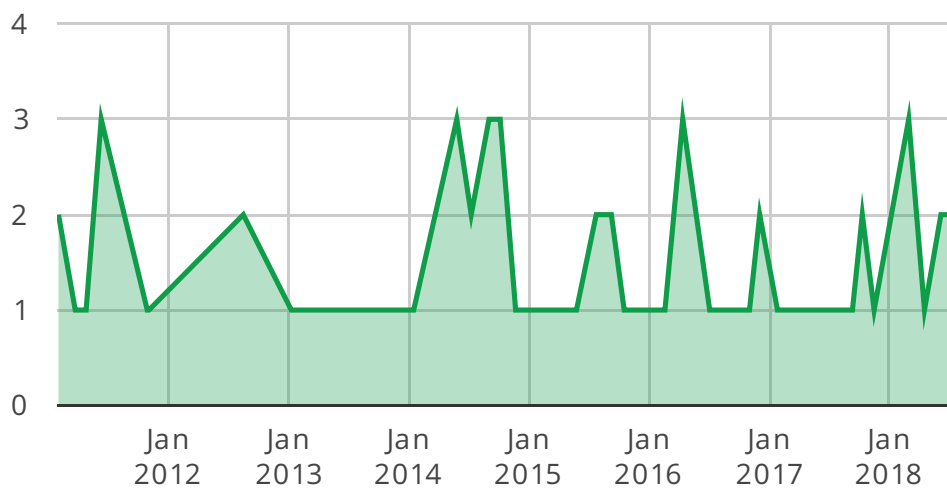
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