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Carl Stumpf and the Philosophical- psychological Debate at the turn of 19th and 20th Centuries

Carl Stumpf – From Philosophical Reflection to Interdisciplinary Scientific Investigation, edited by Silvia Bonacchi & Geert-Jan Boudewijnse, Krammer, Wien 2011.

Carl Stumpf – Von der philosophischen Reflexion zur interdisziplinären wissenschaftlichen Forschung, herausgegeben von Silvia Bonacchi & Geert-Jan Boudewijnse, Krammer, Wien 2011.

The book *Carl Stumpf – From philosophical Reflection to Interdisciplinary Scientific Investigation*, edited by Silvia Bonacchi and Geert-Jan Boudewijnse is a collection of critical contributions on different aspects of Stumpf's philosophy and is intended to demonstrate the pivotal role that Stumpf has played in the definition of psychology in terms of a new science. Most of the chapters in the volume are by scholars who have already focused their studies on the philosophical-psychological debate in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Thematically speaking there are effectively three reasons that must be taken into account in justifying the actual importance of Stumpf's philosophy that clearly emerges from this book: a) his historical-philosophical position; b) his propensity toward an empirical research-method and c) his role as a true watershed between the various strands of thought of the twentieth century. Indeed, as we are reminded by the editors in the *Editorial*, "Stumpf was the key player who succeeded in the push that brought psychology out of its place as a branch of philosophical or merely theoretical learning and into its new place as an empirical science". Hence we can rightly say that Stumpf was responsible for developing an independent line of research in respect of

his “Brentanian” formation by taking a critical and detached position toward many of the issues in which much of the thinking on the philosophy of time was mired.

From the structural point of view the book is divided into three sections: in the first section Bonacchi and Boudewijnse contextualize Stumpf’s position within the philosophical-psychological tradition of the XIX and XX centuries. The aim of the second section – which includes the contributions of Fisette, Martinelli, Centi, Ewen and Moro – is to demonstrate why Stumpf should be considered “a classical philosopher who thoroughly analyzed some great minds of the past and developed his own insights”. Finally in the third section Kaiser-el-Saifi, Fisette and Toccafondi point out the essential role that Stumpf has played in the founding of a new scientific canon.

As far as a detailed examination of the book’s contents is concerned, in the first contribution Bonacchi recalls the most significant aspects of Stumpf’s path in philosophy and psychology starting in 1865 at Würzburg University. During this period Stumpf attended Brentano’s lectures in History of Philosophy, Metaphysics and Logic. Bonacchi highlights the importance of Brentano’s theory of consciousness – based on the distinction between physical and psychical phenomena and the relative intentional character of the second – as well as his reflections concerning feelings and values. Bonacchi highlights the fundamental role played by Lotze in the development of Stumpf’s thought, as it was under his supervision that Stumpf qualified as a teacher in 1870 with a work entitled “Über die Grundsätze der Mathematik”.

The other important biographical aspects presented by Bonacchi, through the identification of the multiple academic positions held by Stumpf (Würzburg, Prague, Halle, Munich, Berlin), are particularly useful in reference to the Berlin period because they allow us to get a detailed understanding of Stumpf’s many research interests. Those interests range from empirical testing of *Gestaltqualitäten*’ existence, to the *critical position* regarding empirical and associationist psychology, to discussion of evolutionistic theory and the role of Kant’s transcendental philosophy as well as his researches concerning the psychology of sound.

The contribution of Geert-Jan Boudewijnse “Carl Stumpf – Experimental studies on Abstraction” completes the introductory section, presenting the most noteworthy theoretical aspects of Stumpf’s thought. Boudewijnse recalls how the space-perception theory formulated by Stumpf in his 1873 work – *On the Psychological Origin of Space Perception* – represents the indispensable theoretical foundation which one cannot ignore if what one seeks is a comprehensive outline of Stumpf’s thought.

According to Stumpf there is a structural relationship between space and colour: colour is the result of the capacity of our soul to translate certain physical stimuli into experience whereas space-perception is perception of a quality. Directly connected with the theory of space perception is the distinction between detachable and un-detachable contents. Within this problematic horizon a key role is played by “abstraction”, considered as the ability to isolate certain aspects. Boudewijnse rightly states that “abstraction is only possible when there is something to be abstracted, when there is thus a presentation in consciousness and on one or more dimensions on which the presentation can project values and which values can be noted”. The abstraction is a much debated issue in the theories of knowledge of the late nineteenth century: one recalls that Brentano in his *Deskriptive Psychologie* distinguishes between “merken”, “auffallen” and “aufmerken”; Husserl in his *Philosophy of arithmetic* states that it is only “through abstraction” that we can obtain the “general concepts” – number, states of affair, relationship – or, adopting the phenomenologically more refined definitions of *Logical Investigations*, it is only through *ideirender oder generalisierender Abstraktion*.

In addition to focusing on the key role played by abstraction, Boudewijnse shows how the experimental works, devoted to musical and speech sound, are of crucial importance not only from the methodological point of view but also in order to trace the theoretical foundation of the “gestalt” concept. Just as the concept of “fusion” represents the idea of an act which can simultaneously connect different sensations, the result of which is not a simple sum but something different. Indeed in the second book of his *Tonpsychologie* Stumpf has stated that “wir nannten *Verschmelzung* dasjenige Verhältnis zweier Inhalte, speciell Empfindungsinhalte, wonach sie nicht eine bloße Summe sondern ein Ganzes bilden“. If the “experience of gestalt stems from a complex”, the concept of “*Verschmelzung*” is the process that produces this complex. Nevertheless the fact that the fusion is a “process” is not so obvious because it could indicate also something that already exists and that we only now notice.

With regard to the concept of fusion it is particularly interesting to remember that thinkers like Stumpf, Meinong, Husserl, Mach and von Ehrenfels have come to characterize this process, although using different terminology; this is symptomatic of the theoretical convergence of purpose shared by these different thinkers. Then, describing the relationship between “wholes” and “gestalten”, Boudewijnse rightly states that at the end of his life Stumpf explained the perception of gestalten according to a perspective

“much closer to the one offered by Lotze and in opposition to his own students’ explanation of gestalt phenomena”.

This interpretive hypothesis finds its legitimacy in the contribution of Beatrice Centi entitled “Stumpf and Lotze on Space, Reality, Relation”. In order to bring out similarities and differences between the meaning of space developed by Stumpf and that proposed by Lotze, Centi observes that if on the one hand “like Lotze, Stumpf also rejects the idea that the soul already possesses a complete intuition of entire space”, on the other hand he rejects Lotze’s own idea that space has a positive content which differs from qualities by virtue of the lack of extension. However one of the most significant similarities must be located in the concept of “localization” that in both Stumpf and Lotze cannot involve a conscious psychic process. Developing his theory of space perception, according to Centi, Stumpf stresses the “explicative precedence of quality” with regard to space because he would share with Lotze the idea that space is a form of sensitivity in a narrower sense when compared to that proposed by Kant.

The third theoretical aspect addressed by Centi is the meaning of “relation” used by Stumpf that is important in order to determine what kind of quality is implied. The concept of relation alone is one of the most debated issues in the philosophy of the late nineteenth century. The fundamental distinction between primary and secondary relations that Brentano derives from J. S. Mill, has been determined according to different philosophical-psychological perspectives but almost always in connection with the problem of presentation in time and space. From the theoretical point of view there is a constitutive and constituent link between relation, representation and quality which must first be explained and clarified. Focusing on the concept of “Raumvorstellung”, the extension is defined by Stumpf not as a pure form of subjectivity but as a partial content, a psychological part, and as highlighted by Centi “the extension and size already imply a consideration of relation between the various parts of the place”. The third aspect that Centi points out is the constitutive role played within Stumpf’s philosophy by the term “Sachverhalt” that should not be limited to simply outlining the content of a judgment but which should also convey “an intrinsic and totally subject-independent relationality of reality”.

Denis Fisette is the author of two different contributions to this volume. The first one, entitled “Love and Hate: Brentano and Stumpf on Emotions and Sense Feelings”, studies the controversy between Brentano and Stumpf regarding emotions and sense-feelings. Although Fisette, in the introductory section of his contribution, does not miss the opportunity to emphasize the influence that Lotze has had on Stumpf - according

to the author this influence is to be found, from a methodological point of view, in Lotze's propensity toward a scientific approach in philosophy - the aim of this paper is to determine "whether the pleasure provided by an object such as a work of art is intentional, as in Brentano's theory, or merely phenomenal, as Stumpf would have it". Precisely the definition of emotional status is a central topic within the psychological-philosophical debate of that era because it both allows us to deepen the study of the structure of consciousness and to investigate the possible conditions for a scientifically grounded ethical theory. Methodologically speaking according to Fisetto the Stumpf distinction has to be read as a) descriptive psychology understood as the "science of mental function", b) phenomenology as a "science of sensory phenomena", and c) the "theory of knowledge" that deals with the origin and justification of knowledge.

In his second contribution Fisetto reconstructs the key points in which Husserl and Stumpf compare each others' thinking on the relationship between phenomenology and descriptive psychology. Whether, on the one hand the key role that Stumpf has played in developing the Husserlian phenomenological method is without question - in this regard it is important to remember that the *Logische Untersuchungen* are not dedicated to Brentano but to Stumpf - or if on the other hand many interpretive hypotheses are formulated in order to determine whether Stumpf must be included within the phenomenological movement or not. Fisetto's contribution "Stumpf and Husserl on Phenomenology and Descriptive Psychology" thus has the merit of bringing out similarities and differences between these two authors not only in reference to the first phase of their philosophical reflection but also by examining the meaning and value of Stumpf's criticism of Husserl's phenomenology in *Ideen I*.

In his contribution "Intentionality and God's Mind: Stumpf on Spinoza", Riccardo Martinelli aims to show the originality of Stumpf's interpretation of Spinoza, dealing with two primary aspects of Spinoza's philosophy: parallelism and infinity of attributes. Hence this interpretative hypothesis is not only directed at highlighting the theoretical legitimacy of Stumpf's reflection on Spinoza's philosophy but rather to explain his own position concerning the crucial phenomenological question of intentionality. Martinelli defines Stumpf's position as "a phenomenological or intentional dualism" the purpose of which is to forsake the intentional model proposed by Brentano and Husserl.

In the chapter "Über die Grundsätze der Mathematik" von Carl Stumpf", Wolfgang Ewen focuses on the *Habilitationsschrift* (1870) precisely dedicated to the study of the principles of Mathematics. What is

noteworthy is the fact that during this period many philosophers – Stumpf, von Ehrenfels, Husserl among others – dealt with the problem of the scientific foundation of Mathematics. In this historical period there was also a widespread conviction that a “mathematical methodology” can be extended also to other fields of knowledge. In a way Mathematics is synonymous with a scientifically grounded methodology and for this reason it is essential to exactly define its own assumptions. Therefore Stumpf’s interest in the grounds of Mathematics is important for two reasons: the first one is that this *Habilitationsschrift* anticipates in certain aspects the thesis developed in the book of *Über den psychologischen Ursprung der Raumvorstellung*; the second one is that, using the concept of “deduction from notions” [*Deduktion aus Begriffen*], according to Ewen, Stumpf anticipates Frege’s and Husserl’s positions.

In her contribution “Tonpsychologische Gestalten. Pieces of a Theory of Tonal Fusion by J. F. Herbart and C. Stumpf”, Nadia Moro aims to show how the conception, according to which the theories of Herbart and Stumpf on the psychological theory of fusion must be considered as opposite, can be reversed because “elementalistic components are to be found in Stumpf’s chord analysis, where Herbart seems to carry out a more coherent whole survey”. Moro’s essay is divided into three sections: in the first, devoted to the Stumpf’s theory of fusion – recalling the idea that tonal fusion must be just traced in his work concerning the origins of spatial presentation and developed in his *Tonpsychologie* – she rightly states that “fusion can be seen as a special kind of graduated gestalt” and that gestalt must be defined “as a perceptual or sensuous whole provided with psychological import but not aesthetic value”. The second and the third sections deal with Herbart’s *tonpsychologie* and with his alleged atomism. The aim of these two sections is to demonstrate that Herbart’s philosophy is much more than an abstract monadology because it hints at a gestalt approach.

The contribution of Kaiser-el Safti “Der Witz (in) der Tonpsychologie Carl Stumpfs” is intended to highlight the philosophical influence of Stumpf’s *Tonpsychologie*. Kaiser-el-Safti rightly points out how the importance of this work is not limited only to a mere psychological study of music but also to that of its cognitive and theoretical implications. As far as the epistemic value of the *Tonpsychologie* is concerned, Kaiser-el-Safti states that through the concept of “Verschmelzung” Stumpf does not limit himself to defining an operation able to determine the possible condition of a unitary apprehension of an object which extends over time, but that he also tries to show how the unitary of the consciousness is possible. Indeed it is not accidental that the fundamental concern of the psychological and philosophical studies

of the late nineteenth century is to preserve the unitary character of consciousness. If on the one hand consciousness is a stream – inside which the multiple constitutive levels have to be considered not as independent from each other but as structurally related – on the other hand the *Verschmelzung* could be interpreted as the existing relationship, a synthesis – that allows the preservation of the unitary character of consciousness. In this sense the concept of “fusion” is very similar to the Husserlian concept of passive synthesis because it does not suggest an active process but instead something already given that we can thematize only through reflection.

In her contribution “Stumpf and Gestalt Psychology: Relations and Differences” Fiorenza Toccafondi takes up, contextualizing and comprehensively arguing, the thread of Kaiser-el-Safti’s contribution. She outlines similarities and differences between the “cognitive model” developed by Stumpf and that proposed by the Berlin School of Gestalt theory. The starting point of the essay is the “not associative nature” of the relation connecting “extension” and “colour” formulated by Stumpf in his *Raumvorstellung*. According to Toccafondi such an assumption must be interpreted in opposition to the Kantian separation between form and content of intuition and connected to a key aspect of the Aristotelian perspective “the one of the relation between sensitive and intellectual soul, the idea that the concepts of the latter become rooted in the former and that the intellectual soul cannot disregard the sensitive soul”. In sections 3-5 of her contribution Toccafondi identifies some theoretical aspects of primary importance in order to establish which meaning of “phenomenology” is more congenial to Stumpf’s formulation. In addition to the reminder of the Aristotelian principle of the *immanence* of form in concrete reality it is worth noting – also because it represents a further development of the Boudewijnse’s stress on *abstraction* – that Toccafondi’s emphasis on the fact that “for Stumpf perceiving means to notice or note an appearance meant as absolute content but also notice some parts in a whole as well as the relations between these parts”. The basic idea of this contribution is to show that Stumpf has played a key role in the development of Gestalt theory but at the same time his thought cannot be entirely limited to this theory since it preserves a constitutive and prolific originality.

This collection of contributions concludes with a useful bibliographical section in which Denis Fisette reports in detail the entire scientific production of Stumpf – books, editions, articles, reviews, correspondence, transcripts of lectures, reports of meetings of the Royal Academy of the Sciences of Berlin and translations into other languages.

The overall impression one gets from the reading of *Carl Stumpf – From Philosophical Reflection to Interdisciplinary Scientific Investigation* is that this is a very useful tool both for those who are not very familiar with Stumpf's thought and for those who wish to investigate further the philosophical-psychological approach developed by this author. Nevertheless the title of the collection does not show so much a "path" as a "tension" within Stumpf's thought between these two different instances. In this regard, it is worth noting that the diversity of research interests of the authors represents an "added value" in itself because it allows to the reader to deal with the multiple issues according to different research-perspectives. Through reading this book one realizes that here is a multifaceted personality that, by virtue of his versatility, cannot be simply labelled as philosopher, psychologist or scientist. For this reason what emerges is the necessity for a thorough study of his thought and this volume represents a key step in this direction. ∞

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