

WILL AND EMOTION

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Brentano's *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt* is a work which belies its title. It would perhaps be correct if 'Empirischen' had been altered to 'Empiristischen'. – It labours on the one hand to *separate* imagination and judgment into two fundamental distinct classes of psychological phenomena, and on the other to *associate* will and emotion or even to identify an act of will as the occurrence of an emotion, though Brentano will grant that people will hardly *call* it emotion. The former enterprise is vitiated by his failure to distinguish between predication and assertion. He says of the copula that it 'nur den Ausdruck von Vorstellungen zum Ausdrucke eines aner kennenden oder verwerfenden Urteils ergänze" (Bd. 2, Kap. 7). However, this was an almost universal error; it took Frege to distinguish predication from assertion, and Brentano is surely right in combating the Humean thesis that there is no difference between mere images, and, say, propositions or their content. Brentano's second enterprise is to my mind the more interesting and powerful. He puts the act of will (in a particular case) at one end of a spectrum of emotions:¹

Betrachten wir als Beispiel die folgende Reihe: Traurigkeit – Sehnsucht nach dem vermißten Gute – Hoffnung, daß es uns zuteil werde – Verlangen, es uns zu verschaffen – Mut, den Versuch zu unternehmen – Willensentschluß zur Tat. Das eine Extrem ist ein Gefühl, das andere ein Willen; und sie scheinen weit voneinander abzustehen. Wenn man aber auf die Zwischenglieder achtet und immer nur die nächststehenden miteinander vergleicht, zeigt sich da nicht überall der innigste Anschluß und ein fast unmerklicher Übergang?

The list doesn't include fear, but might easily have done so: it could go in after longing. Now, he says, isn't the act of will which he puts in as the last member of the series, and which comes after 'Mut',

1. *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt*, Bd. 2, Kap. 8.

that is, *spirit* to make the attempt — isn't it *extremely* like that spirit, that sentiment of boldness or courage, that *nerving* of oneself, as we say? In illustration, imagine a young person standing outside the door of someone alarming, whom he is summoning up the courage to beard. He has just nerved himself to walk in, he has arrived at the state of 'Mut'. Now consider the *next* thing, before he actually pushes the door open and steps forward. If we *can* insert something psychological, something inner, in there at all — something which belongs in the *development* which is to culminate in action, won't it be *almost* the same as the 'Mut' itself, only *more committed* to the action? To see that we might do so, consider that he might summon up the 'Mut' and then realize that the action was impossible — he perceives that the swing door is locked. He physically can't push it open. Now if that's what happens, he hasn't even tried to do it. In just the same situation, in which however he doesn't notice the metal tongue of the lock in position, given that little extra, the act of will itself, he won't indeed push the door open (for he can't) but he will have tried. So there is a difference between this last term and the Mut, but how small! And aren't they obviously the same in kind? If there *is* that last term there at all, it clearly belongs to the same class as the Mut, and hence in the same class as all the rest. And so we have will assimilated to emotion. This is developed into the characterisation of emotions (and therefore will) as a set of states or events whose common theme is acceptability or unacceptability, not as true or false but in another way, of possible contents of judgment. These states or events are differentiated from one another by the peculiar colouring associated with each.

Note that we are persuaded to make the assimilation by a rather special type of example. Where no 'Mut' is needed one couldn't find a likeness, even if one assumed an intercalated act of will, when one was describing some act like picking up a glass of milk to drink it.

Brentano however is pointing to *some* conceptual relationship — in him it is an assimilation — between will and the emotions. Nor is he alone in this. Augustine makes a certain assimilation too:²

Voluntas est quippe in omnibus: immo omnes nihil aliud quam voluntates sunt. Nam quid est cupiditas et laetitia, nisi voluntas in eorum consensione, quae volumus? et quid est metus et tristitia, nisi voluntas in dissensione ab his, quae nolumus? Sed cum consentimus appetendo ea quae volumus,

cupiditas; cum autem consentimus fruendo his quae volumus, laetitia vocatur. Itemque cum dissentimus ab eo quod accidere nolumus, talis voluntas metus est; cum autem dissentimus ab eo quod nolentibus accidit, talis voluntas tristitia est.

“There is will in all of them” he says, “Nay, they are nothing but wills”. You may think this isn’t like Brentano, who is talking about a will that occurs just prior to an act: Augustine *calls* the principal passions all will and Brentano would *like* to call will *a* passion, one member of that class. But look a little more closely. The contrast isn’t so great. Augustine is concerned with just four generic emotions, fear and desire, distress and joy. “For what are desire and joy but will, saying yes [consenting to] the things we want? And what are fear and sorrow but will, saying no to [dissenting from] the things we don’t want? When we consent, seeking what we want, that’s desire, but when we consent, having the things we want, that is called joy”. (Ibid.) And likewise, he goes on, (*mutatis mutandis*) for fear and distress.

We find Augustine’s ‘yes’ and ‘no’ in Brentano too:³

Wenn etwas Inhalt eines Urteils werden kann, insofern es als wahr annehmlich oder als falsch verwerflich ist, so kann es Inhalt eines Phänomens der dritten Grundklasse werden, insofern es als gut genehm (im weitesten Sinne des Wortes) oder als schlecht ungenehm sein kann.

The comparison had already been made in respect of desire, *orexis*, in a very generic sense of the term, by Aristotle:⁴

ἐστὶ δ' ὅπερ ἐν διανοίᾳ κατὰφασις καὶ ἀπόφασις, τοῦτ' ἐν ορέξει δίωξις καὶ φυγή

(What ascription and negation are in judgment, pursuit and avoidance are in desire.).

Aristotle’s *orexis* covers sensual desire (*epithumia*) and anger (*thumos*) as well as wish, decision and choice. In the passage I quote some might claim that he doesn’t mean to refer to the passions, because the passage is leading up to the explanation of choice. But since the passions are certainly causes of pursuit and avoidance this doesn’t seem sound. So we can after all put him with Augustine and Brentano here. *All* of them speak of, or make a comparison with yes and no when they consider will and desire.

As soon as you make this comparison you are faced with the

3. Brentano, loc. cit.

4. *Eth. Nic.* 1139a, 21-2.

equivalence of “no”, in response to a negative, and “yes” in response to the corresponding positive. Does this carry through to emotion and will? Here we can ask various questions:

1) Is pleasure (‘Lust’) at the idea of something’s occurring equivalent to, or does it necessarily involve pain, distress, (‘Unlust’) at the idea of its *not* occurring? To this the answer seems to be clear, that there is no such connexion.

2) If you are willing that something should happen, must you be unwilling that it should not happen? Obviously not.

3) If you want something to happen, must you want it not to fail to happen? Here the answer is positive. Though, by the way, this doesn’t mean that wants must be consistent – nothing is said about whether you can *also* want it to fail to happen. Similarly when we say that one who believes *p* disbelieves not *p*. we haven’t said yet whether he can *also* believe not *p*.

4) If you hope that something will happen, must you fear that it will not? Here (*pace* Spinoza) the answer seems to be: Not generally. But hope and fear are tied up with *expectation* in complicated ways, and there is no doubt a host of cases where hope of something does involve fear of the contrary, at least if the thought of that is entertained. Nevertheless, one character may be fearful more than hopeful, and another the opposite.

Belief equals disbelief in the contradictory and any proposition can be given a negative form. Therefore to say that someone is characterised by believingness rather than disbelievingness is to say nothing. Unless it means that he tends – more strongly than most people – to believe what he is told rather than to disbelieve it.

But does it mean nothing to say someone’s belief attitudes are positive rather than negative? Well, it seems to mean something in the following way: someone may be little interested in what is not the case, and only interested in what is the case. But didn’t we say that *anything* can be given a negative form? It makes no sense to say that someone is interested by the fact that some man is alive and not by the fact that he is not dead. Thus we might make a classification of certain pairs of contraries as ones which exhaust the possibilities for their subjects, when they exist and are capable of having the predicates hold of them. E.g. ‘blind’, ‘sighted’.

It does make sense to say of someone “He’s interested in what colour something *is*, not in what colours it is *not*.” And it might be complained against me, if I say what ‘will’ is not, but not what it is.

Thus it does make sense to speak of a man's opinions, of his belief, as tending in the positive direction: he says what exists, what qualities things have, what they are, rather than what doesn't exist, what qualities things don't have, and what they aren't. Geach has written against the idea of there being any sense in positiveness of belief — with which he wants to contrast will — but he has, I think, not noticed this aspect. Belief is as its objects are. We may accept the idea of certain objects of belief as positive (whether or not their expression contains a negation) though we need have no general theory of *all* propositions as ultimately positive or negative in sense. Aristotle's theory of the categories is a theory of things which are positive in our present sense. (It is certainly not a theory of all predicates.)

This is the only way in which it makes sense to speak of belief as positive: 'positive' belief must mean belief in positive things. In this way belief that someone was dead could be called negative, belief that he was alive positive. And it might be a characteristic of someone always to relish believing negative things. But disbelief would not as such be negative, only disbelief in something positive.

Turning back to will and emotion, the idea of positive attitudes, as Geach says, is readily acceptable. Love, pleasure, joy, cheer, curiosity, hope, friendliness, surprise, admiration, gladness on anyone's behalf, 'nerve' — all these anyone will call positive. Whereas hatred, distress, sadness, gloom, depression lack of interest, hopelessness, dislike and spite, contempt, scorn, envy (in the sense of disliking another's gain or good), fearfulness — all these will readily be labelled 'negative'.

But perhaps this is no more than a 'taking as' which comes natural to everyone? Hatred, one may say, seems a pretty positive thing when considered in itself; but when offered the choice: How will you distribute the terms 'positive' and 'negative' between hatred and love, then one will retreat and call hatred the negative emotion. Why? Mephistopheles says in *Faust*: "Ich bin der Geist der stets verneint" — but how does that jibe with our observation that affirmation and denial of the contradictory are equivalent? If that spirit will keep a promise to say 'no' to *everything*, we can get what concessions we like out of him, like the young man in the English song "O no John no John no John, No!" Goethe's line is very evocative: is it more? — Once again, the answer is yes, if we think of that spirit as the spirit of destruction of positive things. And that is the reason for the 'nega-

tiveness' of hate. Love and hate take personal objects; hating a person, one wishes that he may be destroyed or diminished. And so the 'Geist der stets verneint' thinks that 'alles was entsteht ist wert daß es zu Grunde geht' – everything that comes into being deserves to be abolished. The roots of a real polar opposition of emotions are surely to be sought here.

So long as you stick to *propositions in general* (or other possible objects of judgment) as giving the objects of emotion and will, you may indeed say that there is yes and no in them; you may compare pursuit and avoidance to affirmation and negation; but you are going to get pursuit and avoidance as equivalent to one another in respect of the same matter, itself represented negatively or positively. You aren't going to get any real contrast of positive and negative, or pursuit and avoidance, and it is useless to look *here* for the explanation of negativeness in will and emotion.

Yet it is precisely *here* that there is a logical similarity between will and emotion. Even emotion such as love, which doesn't 'take' propositional objects, involves desires which do. And the logical similarity is in the language connected with e.g. desire on the one hand and will on the other. In this resides the sum of correctness in Brentano's assimilation of the two kinds of thing, emotion and will.

Now I am in opposition to Brentano in respect of his assimilation. I would quite radically distinguish will and emotion and I say that Brentano assimilated them because he didn't realise *how* unlike they are. I'd want to distinguish soap from washing. – At least, the need to do so would never arise; but if anyone did assimilate soap and washing I'd want to oppose it.

In spite of this, I need not deny *one* similarity at all – I mean the similarity in language. One regrets, finds bad *that* someone is ill, one wills, takes steps, to bring it about that he *not* be ill. I don't deny this similarity, rather I energetically draw attention to it. For it's a necessary and useful point for helping to distinguish between emotions and complex bodily sensations such as dizziness, nausea, thirst, itches, weariness, sleepiness, being on edge, feeling inert, feeling full. One doesn't want to call these 'emotion'. But why not? The answer is that these sensations don't involve reference to good and evil, that admixture of reasons and thoughts which is so characteristic of human emotion. Nausea, for example, is a feeling of *being liable to throw up soon*, it is not a feeling that it would be good or lovely to throw up. Nor even is thirst a feeling that it would be lovely to

drink — even though one might give expression to it by saying so and thereby become emotional about it. This point is by itself enough to shew Brentano radically wrong in his explanation of the ideas of good and evil. (If I have understood him.) If we have to use them to differentiate emotions from psycho-somatic sensations, then they cannot be explained to us by pointing to the emotions. The genetic explanation by reference to familiar objects of experience: “You know what fear and hope, love and hate are, don’t you? Well, the ideas that can be got from having all of these in your repertory are the ideas of good and evil” — this won’t work because we will already have to mention good and evil in explaining what we meant by the words for the emotions.

Brentano knows quite well that will is not a feeling: “daß er einen Willensentschluß fühle wird wohl keiner sagen.” It is a point that somewhat embarrasses him, I think, and that he forgets from time to time, as when he says that inner experience shews that there is nowhere sharp boundary between feeling and will. That suggests that he sees or wants to see an act of will as itself a content of consciousness and thinks that feeling merges into it. Indeed that was rather suggested by his spectrum. And he speaks of a “seed” of striving as already there in the feeling of yearning, of this “seed” as “sprouting” in hope, “unfolding” in wishing and in getting one’s courage up, and “ripening” in the decision of the will:⁵

Aber liegt nicht demungeachtet schon in der Sehnsucht ein Keim des Strebens? und sprießt dieser nicht auf in der Hoffnung, und entfaltet sich, bei dem Gedanken an ein etwaiges eigenes Zutun, in dem Wunsche zu handeln und in dem Mute dazu; bis endlich das Verlangen danach zugleich die Scheu vor jedem Opfer und den Wunsch jeder längeren Erwägung überwiegt und so zum Willensentschluß gereift ist?

Once again, we seem to have our attention directed to a very special sort of example. Not to such ordinary examples as the following ones: I feel inclined to shut the window and I do shut it; I have made up my mind to catch a certain train and I leave in time (or not quite in time). The idea of neighbouring members of a series which can hardly be distinguished from one another seems quite inappropriate to these cases.

That an act is voluntary doesn’t mean that it is preceded by an act

5. Brentano, loc. cit.

of will, but that it is *itself* an act of will. In proof of this, consider how, whatever inner event precedes an act, one can still ask *if it was voluntary when it occurred*. Crouching down on the edge of the swimming bath I had *just* nerved myself (Brentano's 'Mut') and positively determined to roll head first into the water – suddenly you pushed me. The physical event was almost the same. What matter that I find the *nerving myself* and the *decision* extremely alike? Neither of them was the will in the voluntary act of rolling into the water for *ex hypothesi* there wasn't any such voluntary act.

Neither of them would have been the will *in* the voluntary act if the act *had* been voluntary. The voluntariness of the voluntary act doesn't consist in anything of the sort. Brentano, who assumes it does, *finds* something introspectively almost indistinguishable from something else, something in the line of feelings (the 'Mut') which he also finds present. But the whole idea is an error, a confusion of radically different kinds of thing, of elements in a flow of feelings with the voluntariness of an act. It is in fact as odd as identifying hunger with the voluntariness of eating, or putting them in the same class.

There is another reason for the error of psychological confusion here. We all know it is difficult to find the event which shall be the act of will within a voluntary action. But it is equally difficult to find the event which is the feeling, the emotion, once we examine the situation in detail. "I'd just nerved myself" we say: but what *was* that? A certain tension of the muscles, drawing in of the breath, a thought? "I was very angry," or "very frightened". What was that? Was there a feeling of anger or fright which occurred at a particular time? Well, yes, if you mean that at some particular time it was true that I was angry (frightened). But what was the feeling of anger or fright itself? One may find certain physical sensations – but they can't *be* the anger or fright; for one can ask someone "How does (or did) anger (or fear) take you? Where did you feel it? In your chest? In your head? In your legs?" Now suppose someone says: With me then it was a constriction in the chest and a trembling in my knees. "How did you know *that* was a sensation of anger – or fear? – for I have deliberately chosen what might easily be either. At this point one wants to say: The feeling of anger (or fear) *suffuses* the physical sensations and the reactions in thought and action. That is why I say that this sensation was a sensation belonging to my being angry, whereas a tickle that suddenly perhaps attacked my nose at the same

time had nothing to do with it. And this metaphor of suffusion is a very powerful one. Brentano himself implicitly uses it: he keeps on speaking of the different *colouring* of the different emotions – leaving one to understand perhaps that the will has yet another colour. I don't think, however, that he noticed the elusiveness of the feelings themselves, which is quite like the elusiveness of the act of will. These things elude one when one approaches the matter with a certain expectation of what one will be able to find.

This point of similarity, however, would be no ground for an assimilation. The states of emotion, whether or not they are states of actual excitation, undoubtedly *cause* both voluntary and involuntary actions. Also the emotion is mentioned as a reason or 'motive' for some actions, as well as a cause of others. Examples: I upset the coffee – involuntarily – because I was so angry; I abandoned a proposed outing because I was angry – anger had taken away my inclination to make it; I wrote that letter because I was angry; i.e. anger inspired it. It would be of interest to discuss the causality – i.e. how many different types there are here. Lack of space prevents this. But at least the effect is of a quite different kind from the cause: the effect is a voluntary action taking place no doubt at a definite time; the cause, a state which lacks a central core and the assignment of which to a definite time, though sometimes possible, is by no means necessary. There need be no answer to the question when one began to fear something, or when one stopped; though it may be certain that one did fear it at a certain given date, and that it had certain consequences, some of which can be called effects.

It is difficult for Brentano not to turn out to be an emotivist. For he thinks the source of the ideas of good and bad is purely experiences of love and hate (taken very broadly). Thus he quotes with approval a remark of Kant's to the effect that only now are we at last realising that, as knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) is the source of the power of imagining what is true, so feeling is the source of the power of experiencing what is good:⁶

Man hat es in unseren Tagen allererst einzusehen angefangen, daß das Vermögen, das Wahre vorzustellen, die Erkenntnis, dasjenige aber, das Gute zu empfinden, das Gefühl sei, und daß beide ja nicht miteinander müssen verwechselt werden.

6. *Untersuchungen über die Deutlichkeit der Grundsätze der natürlichen Theologie und Moral*, quoted by Brentano, loc. cit.

So we see the drive behind his contention of the identity in kind between will and the emotions: it doesn't belong to the intelligence to frame the ideas of good and evil. But the contention fails, is void for uncertainty, because will is far *more* different in kind from the emotions than he ever even conceived as a position for his opponents to take up. To will is *either* (a) to make some decision – but no such thing as a distinct mental act is generally necessary when one acts voluntarily – *or* (b) to have a certain intention – as, e.g. I have an intention of returning to England this month, and have had it all along without thinking of it – otherwise than by booking the passage (certainly *that* is nothing of the same kind as a feeling) *or* (c) to *try* to do something (which is usually to do something *else*) *or* (d) to act voluntarily. The last is the important case for us – the others are side issues. A particular act of mine is voluntary, not because it is accompanied or preceded by an act of will, but because it is done by me either for its own sake or for the sake of something else. This new dimension of 'What for?' enters into the description of the act and belongs to the intelligence of the agent. It belongs to intelligence in two ways: one, that intelligence grasps what conduces to what and what the situation is in which it operates; and two, that it frames the conceptions of those generic ends (right or wrong) which are characteristic of human beings. I mean that e.g. other animals may be dominated by an appetite for pleasure; but it takes intelligence of the human sort to be an *akolastos* in Aristotle's sense and make pleasure in general one's goal.