Meaning and Dummett's Austrians

Peter Simons

Trinity College Dublin

Published in: Bernhard Weiss, ed., *Dummett on Analytical Philosophy*.

Basingstoke: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2015, 195–210.

1 Origins of Analytic and Continental Philosophy

Michael Dummett's 1987 Bologna lectures, published in German translation as *Ursprünge der analytischen Philosophie*¹ and in an enlarged English version in 1993 as *Origins of Analytical Philosophy*,² constitute a very minor part of his *oeuvre*. None of the essays in the 2007 *Library of Living Philosophers* volume³ mentions them, which is fair enough, since the vast bulk of Dummett's considerable achievements lie elsewhere. However they are notable for two reasons. Firstly, they illustrate Dummett's interest in the roots of the movement of which he was such a prominent representative, roots extending beyond his perpetual subject Frege. Secondly, and this is why they interest me, they show his willingness to engage with representatives of what one might call the Austrian analytic tradition. Dummett goes so far as to propose the epithet 'Anglo-Austrian' to capture the origins, quite rightly repudiating the anachronistic 'Anglo-American' (1 f.). Even this term, flattering as it is to an Anglo-Austrian like myself, is a trifle oversimplified, since of the major Austrians Dummett mentions, Bolzano was Bohemian, Brentano was German and only later Austrian, Husserl was Moravian, but studied, worked and took citizenship in Germany, although his doctorate and philosophical study were in Vienna. Wittgenstein was of course Austrian but studied mainly in England, had university positions only there, and later took British citizenship. Other early analytic philosophers, not just Frege but also Schlick, Carnap and Reichenbach and others, were German, and all of them wrote in German. Even the father of Polish analytic philosophy Twardowski studied in Vienna and wrote his doctoral and *Habilitation* dissertations in German. In many

1 Dummett 1987.

2 Dummett 1993. References to this work are given in the text in parentheses and cite the page number only.

3 Auxier and Hahn, eds., 2007.

ways it then would be better to call the origins of analytic philosophy ‘Anglo-Austro-German’, or even ‘Austro-German’, since even though this last leaves out the Moore–Russell Cambridge element, they too interacted with the German-language work in various ways. (Russell could be writing to Frege and Meinong in the same week.)⁴

This is in the end a minor labeling problem. The thrust of Dummett’s effort in *Origins* is more substantial: it is to attempt to explain how it was that the chief originary figures of analytic philosophy (Frege) and continental philosophy (Husserl) could be doctrinally so close to one another in 1900 and yet be the fountainheads of traditions which diverged to the point of mutual incomprehension as well as deep mutual hostility. That is indeed a fascinating and puzzling fact, since Dummett is correct about both the early proximity, and the later divergence and hostility, much of which is still with us. So, and especially since Dummett admits his book “does not purport to be a history” (viii), even of all of analytic philosophy, a better and more honest if less snappy title for the book might have been *Some of the Philosophical Origins of the Division between Analytical and Continental Philosophy, and their Implications for What a Correct Theory of Meaning Should Be Like*.

For those of us who had long advocated an affinity between Austrian (and some German) philosophy and good early analytic philosophy it was gratifying to discover Dummett taking an interest. That he did so was due in no small measure to his interaction with others sharing that view, notably David Bell and Herman Philipse, (x) who got him reading Brentano and Husserl, neither of whom had been on the *Speisekarte* of Oxford philosophers since Ryle had taken an interest in the 1920s and 30s. Dummett even describes his work as a “painful and still incomplete retracing of the steps taken by the young Ryle”. (ix)

Dummett’s principal focus in his account of the origins of the movements and the division is the account of thinking, the contents of thoughts, and meaning. That is certainly a point of serious convergence, it is philosophically as fundamental as it gets, and it is central to the divergence. As might be reasonably expected, there are many factors that Dummett does not mention or does not highlight, that can be brought to bear in affording an account of the divergence. Many are non-philosophical: the differences between Austrian, German and English university systems, the randomly winnowing effects of the First World War,⁵ the different

⁴ For a recent balanced view on the origins, see chapter 3 of Glock 2008.

⁵ Cf. Simons 2001.

antecedent backgrounds in the various affected countries, the accidental facts about individuals, appointments, and the variably efficacious attempts of politics from the Imperial-Royal Austrian court to the Third Reich to interfere in academic affairs.⁶ All of this would demand a level of historical, biographical and philosophical detail, interest and competence which few if any persons would be interested to pursue and deploy. So of course Dummett's account is partial and insufficient, as he readily acknowledges. But it remains the case that the principal occasion of the divergence, in his opinion, namely how analyticals and continentals account for the notion of meaning, is a very important, perhaps the most important, doctrinal ground of the divergence.

Given that when Michael Dummett thought about anything to do with meaning, what he said was bound to be deep, penetrating, troubling, consequential, and possibly right, it behooves the commentator on this matter to get his or her opinion straight about both the matter and Dummett's take on it, so I think it interesting and locally important to investigate whether Dummett's account of the differences concerning meaning among the philosophers in question holds water, or if not, why not, and what needs adjusting. So that is my excuse for the rest of this paper

2 The Dilemma about Meaning and Content

The fourth chapter of *Origins* is provocatively entitled 'The Extrusion of Thoughts from the Mind'. Anyone who failed to flinch on first reading this title is low in sensibility: philosophical, linguistic and stylistic. How can thoughts be extruded (squeezed out of) the mind, since that is where they are, belong and originate? One does not run across thoughts making their way across the campus or taking up a corner on the commuter train, not even kept in expensive suspension in some university laboratory. But what Dummett means by 'thoughts' is what others would tend to call 'contents of thought'. Of course Frege used the term *Gedanke* for such things, but that is no excuse: Frege's choice of terminology was here execrable, and more than merits lack of perpetuation. I prefer to eschew Frege's and Dummett's 'thoughts' and speak instead of 'contents', it being understood we are talking about contents of thinking (judging, assuming, wondering, expecting, doubting, etc.), and

⁶ For an account of the incessant political interference in Austria from Bolzano to Stegmüller, see Simons 2000.

more broadly, contents of mental acts (seeing, hearing, liking, wanting, anticipating, etc.)

Terminology aside, there was a serious dilemma facing any philosopher thinking about thinking at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. It was this. Take Sally's thinking that her car needs repairing. (Maybe she heard a funny noise last time she took it out.) Is her thinking this a psychological matter, internal to and somehow part of her conscious mental life? Or is it a matter of her being somehow hooked up to an external item that we can call the content of her thinking? It might seem as though the first view is bound to prevail: after all, Sally's thinking is *Sally's* thinking, and any thinking is something mental. So Sally's thinking is a mental act on the part of Sally, and a person's mental acts are parts of their mental life.

On the other hand, suppose Sally says to Wolfgang, 'My car needs repairing.' Then she is communicating with him and getting across the same thing she was previously thinking. And he understands her and thinks it too, at least, he understands what she means, whether or not he's in agreement. So it seems that what they both understand, the content of her thought and the meaning of her utterance, is something interpersonal and common to both, not something privately locked up in their respective consciousnesses. But this objective something in common is also not to be found in the spatio-temporal-causal world of everyday life: it is somehow abstract. But if so, what kind of existence does it have, and if it is outwith the spatio-temporal-causal cosmos, how can we be in contact with it or access it? The standard modes of cognitive commerce with things are in some way or other causal, but causality fails here because the item to be accessed is not within the causal order. What can be going on?

The dilemma is of course commonplace and well known. The point is not that communication is impossible or does not take place frequently and successfully. It is that each of these two tempting metaphysical assays of what transpires when communication takes place makes it appear impossible, or miraculous, or inexplicable, or two or more of all three.

3 In the Mind: Brentano

It is standardly held, and not wrongly, that the origins of continental philosophy as developed in the 20th century lie in Brentano's reintroduction into philosophy of the

Aristotelian–Scholastic concept of intentionality. This move, presaged in his *Habilitationsschrift* of 1867, *Die Psychologie des Aristoteles*,⁷ but blazoned out as the criterial characteristic of the mental in the *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* of 1874, is the mental or intentional in-existence of an object/content in any mental phenomenon. It is extremely tempting to understand Brentano's view as follows. Sally sees her car. Her seeing is intentional, so it is a seeing-of, and her car (English, yellow, two-seater sports, 1296 cc 4-cylinder engine) is that something which Sally sees. This is the commonsense view, and it is the one Dummett takes about Brentano in *Origins*. But it is definitely not what Brentano thought in 1874, whatever he might have thought later.⁸ In 1874 the object of Sally's seeing is in-existent, that is to say, existent-in, her seeing. (We could say it is in-existent in her mind or soul, but Brentano was being cautious about such metaphysical pronouncements in 1874.) Brentano was at that time a Cartesian sceptic about the external world, and thought it doubtful or even unlikely that there is an external physical item somehow dubiously connected to the car-as-seen-by-Sally, which is an internal feature, or better, part, of her mental act or phenomenon of seeing. To see this is how Brentano takes the matter to be, it suffices only to read the famous passage in the *Psychology* and its attendant footnotes. The term 'content' (*Inhalt*) is then to be taken literally: the car-as-seen, which is the object of the seeing, is contained in (*enthalten in*) the whole seeing.

This is why the notion of a physical phenomenon, contrasted by Brentano with mental phenomena, is still a concept of a type of phenomenon, or appearing, and so basically mental. The car Sally sees is a physical phenomenon: it has no content, it is not a car-of anything, it is just a car. But a car-as-seen is no physical car, even if it lacks the content of anything mental. It is a physical phenomenon, and so something mental, since phenomena are of themselves mental. But her seeing it, judging it needs repair, worrying about it and so on are all mental phenomena, in which the car is in one way or another contained. The mind does not literally contain anything physical, massive, bulky, energetic, or yellow.

This is so alien a conception to us that we find it hard to credit that a philosopher of Brentano's standing could have seriously believed it. But believe it he did. He took the basic idea from Aristotle's conception of perception, in which, when Sally sees the car, the form of car is literally present in her seeing and in her mind.

⁷ See George 2004.

⁸ This point is made in the review Smith 1989.

What makes a car a real car as distinct from the perception of one is the matter. That's why the car in Sally's seeing has no weight, and why you cannot sit in it or drive it away.

There are straws in the wind, even in 1874, that Brentano might move towards a more commonsense and realistic conception. And so he did, later. But he did so crabwise. At some points he believed we might have a non-existing car or state of affairs of the car needing repair as our object, and later still he considered that in the case of mistaken or illusory acts we have no actual object at all, it is just that we talk about it as if we do. Such are the gyrations through which Brentano's conception of intentionality makes its way as he tortuously revises his views. The ideas of 1874 and thereafter variously influence his students, notably Husserl, who (initially) takes a much more sane and commonsensical view, as we shall see.

Brentano was never very interested in language and meaning as such, so we should not expect much from him in the way of an account. (His student Anton Marty did, but that is a different and long story.) But to the extent that we can readily graft an account of linguistic meaning onto his early philosophy, it would tend to be of the private sort that Dummett rightly finds wanting. When Sally tells Wolfgang the car needs repairing, the meaning of her utterance, what she is talking about, is the complex of phenomena she has in mind when she judges that her car needs repairing. When Wolfgang understands her aright, it is because his thoughts have suitably matched hers. Here of course is the nub of the problem. It is not just that no-one can be sure his or her thoughts match Sally's in the right way, so that the success or otherwise of the communication remains uncertain: it is that it is unclear how Sally herself can mean what she does by the words she utters and be certain that the words correctly convey the content of her thought. This is, or is at least closely related to, Wittgenstein's problem of a private language.

Incidentally, though this is not our primary concern, Brentano's late reistic philosophy is much more akin to later analytic philosophy than his earlier work. It is ontologically lean, and is accompanied by a thorough *Sprachkritik* which purports to show that the apparent form and ontological commitments of various expressions are not what they seem. Whether it is credible or not is another matter, but it could just as easily have been written in the 1930s and 1940s as decades earlier. It would have been interesting to have had Michael Dummett's views on the late Brentano.

4 Out of this World: Bolzano and Frege

The obvious opposite of this problematic subjective view of meaning is to make meaning something objective and equally accessible to all. Since this will not be something mental, and equally not something physical, it will have a third status: it will be abstract or ideal. That is the view of Dummett's hero Frege, who throughout the *Origins* functions both as the arch-representative of analytic philosophy and as the constant foil to other conceptions. Dummett's favoured criterion for when someone is an analytic philosopher is whether s/he has taken the linguistic turn, as exemplified in Frege's *Grundlagen der Arithmetik*. In Frege, at least in the *Grundlagen*, this consisted, according to Dummett, in the context principle, that words have meaning only in the context of a sentence. Throughout Dummett's work on Frege, this principle has loomed very large. My own view is that it looms too large, and that the principle is of relatively local significance, in the *Grundlagen*, because this was written in German and not in formulas. Indeed the context principle is used but not highlighted as such in a much earlier work, namely in Book V of Euclid's *Elements*, where it serves to define ratios between quantities in such a way as to accommodate irrationals. Its use there is more complex and subtle than in Frege: whereas Frege was simply trying to give a retro-fitted foundation for uncontroversial simple arithmetic, Euclid (following Eudoxus) was breaking new ground and overcoming the problem of incommensurables.⁹

Frege's account of meaning eventually settled down from 1890 into the theory of sense and reference with which every philosophy student is now familiar. The remarkable geniality and systematic working-out of this theory is why Frege is revered as a philosopher of language, although the distinction plays hardly any role in his logical systems. The theory as held by Frege is platonistic. The senses of expressions, including notably the senses of complete sentential clauses, which are his *Gedanken*, or as I shall say, *propositions*, are denizens of a "third realm" (Frege's retrospectively unfortunate term was *ein drittes Reich*) and therefore neither part of the subjective but temporal order of the mental nor part of the objective spatio-temporal-causal order of the physical world. We have access to these senses in virtue of a thoroughly mysterious relation Frege calls "grasping" (*erfassen*). When Sally says "My car needs repairing" and Wolfgang understands her, they do so by each

⁹ Simons 2011.

grasping the same thought, or thoughts which are close enough to have the same import for everyday speech. But how they do so is at least as mysterious as how their subjective thought contents might be relevantly alike according to the Brentanian account. There is apparently nothing to stop Sally and/or Wolfgang grasping the wrong proposition, say that Sally's roses need watering, and either understanding one another perfectly because they both grasp the very same wrong proposition, or misunderstand one another by grasping different propositions, but this somehow failing to make any difference to their worldly communion. Dummett recognises this difficulty, and it is why he repeatedly castigates what he calls Frege's "myth of the third realm". The platonism as such may or may not be an issue – one could mayhap be a platonist about other things such as properties or mathematical objects – it is the consequence that the realm-crossing relation of grasping is impotent to explain how real-life successful communication takes place that makes the theory useless in accounting for meaning.

Frege was not the first to hold such a view: as Dummett rightly notes, it was held quite explicitly three generations earlier by Bolzano, whose theories in his *Wissenschaftslehre* of 1837 so uncannily resemble Frege's in many ways. Dummett doubts whether Frege ever read Bolzano, and he may be right, but others such as Kerry and Korselt expressly drew Frege's attention to the similarities: Frege clearly did not care to take up the challenge of comparison. Bolzano's theory, by virtue of its similarity to Frege's, is equally opposed to the subjectivist account of meaning, which would lead to psychologism, the view that logic is to be investigated as part of psychology, an evil which Bolzano criticises just as did Frege after him. But his theory likewise fails to solve the problem of communication in just the same way, and indeed Bolzano's name for the relationship individual humans bear to his platonic ideas and propositions is the same as Frege's: *erfassen* (sometimes also: *auffassen*). That both concur on the term simply means they have the same name for the same problem.

5 Unstable Compromise: Husserl

If neither Brentano's way of understanding meanings, namely as inherently mental, nor Bolzano's and Frege's way, namely as transcendent abstracta, is satisfactory, is there a third way which avoids their respective problems? The one philosopher who

had read and taken in both what Brentano, and what Frege (and Bolzano) said was Edmund Husserl, and it is Husserl against whom Dummett chiefly opposes Frege in the *Origins*. Husserl represented in many ways the ideal vehicle for a fruitful merger of the ideas of his teacher Brentano, from whom he took the importance of the concept of intentionality, now partly liberated from its Cartesian matrix, and Bolzano–Frege, with their emphasis on the objectivity of meaning. Husserl, like Twardowski and other younger Brentano-students, was impressed and influenced by Bolzano, and indeed helped to publicise the latter’s achievements more widely. He was also one of the very first people to read Frege and take him seriously: he has good criticisms of Frege’s *Grundlagen* theory of number, he had sensible alternatives to Frege’s conception of concept, and he prompted Frege into retaliation against the criticism. Here is not the place to go into the vexed question whether and to what extent Husserl was “converted” from a supposedly psychologistic position to a platonistic position on logic by reading Frege’s savage review of his 1891 *Philosophie der Arithmetik*. Suffice it to say that, whether self-motivated, pushed, or a combination, by the appearance of the *Logical Investigations* of 1900–01, Husserl’s point of view was that meanings are abstract, or as he says *ideal*.

Unlike Bolzano’s and Frege’s senses however, Husserl’s ideal meanings stand in an internal relation to the mental, since they are the kinds or *species* of aspects of our mental acts. When Sally tells Wolfgang that her car needs repairing, she not only makes the relevant noises with suitable speaker’s intentions to communicate (Husserl’s account anticipates Grice by some decades), but the difference between her doing so and a computer doing so consists in her having a mental act of judging or assuming the car needs repairing, which her speaking to Wolfgang discloses or intimates to him, but which embodies features, so-called meaning-intentions, whose kinds *are* the meanings in question. So meaning, while not subjective, since Wolfgang’s understanding her will (assuming success) embody instances of the same kinds, is yet internally connected to the mental activity in which we engage when speaking, listening, understanding etc. There is no need for the mysterious grasping relation.

Dummett is not happy with Husserl’s compromise view however, because he considers it succumbs to what he calls the Humpty-Dumpty problem, namely that it is inexplicable how the right meaning is what is instantiated in each speaker or hearer when utterances are made and understood (44 ff.) Whether that is so or not, I have not

been able to decide, and Dummett is not completely categorical in his accusation. However, I do think Dummett has a good point. If ideal meanings are kinds, stand to meaning-acts as types to tokens, then from a phenomenological and ontological point of view the tokens or meaning-acts are prior to the meanings or types, and it is they that have to do the hard work. It is because Sally's meaning-intentions are as they are that she means the ideal proposition that her car needs repairing. But this takes us back to the private Lockean–Brentanian assignment problem. Of course she and her community may be getting along perfectly in understanding one another. But the internal selection or occurrence of “just the right” tokens for the type cannot contribute to this, because the assignment is literally as well as metaphorically in the dark and out of sight. Conversely, if it is because Sally has her mind set on the ideal proposition that she gets to exemplify “just the right” tokens, then we have the grasping problem again. Either way, Husserl's theory falls down, and the compromise is unstable.

Having endorsed Dummett's main point, I must add that in my view his negative take on Husserl's theory of meaning is very one-dimensional. The first Logical Investigation, ‘Meaning and Language’, is an amazing piece of philosophy of language for its time: it covers many things, including speaker's meaning and indexical expressions, which took others decades to catch up on, and it at least tries to find a way to justify the platonism that Frege simply stated and stamped his foot about.¹⁰ That Dummett has a better alternative in view is due in no way whatsoever to Frege. Husserl also goes on to outline a conception of universal grammar of meanings which closely anticipates work done variously by the Poles and Chomsky, much, much later. While never as crisp in statement or refutation as Dummett's hero Frege, Husserl in his often ponderous way gets round to covering much more ground, and we should not forget that it was he, and not Frege, who convinced people that logical psychologism was wrong.

6 Noemata and Idealism

Dummett treats Husserl as though he had just one theory of meaning, and this is completely wrong. In fact the crucial step in Husserl's transition from being a logical platonist in 1901 to a transcendental idealist in 1913 comes in his lectures

¹⁰ See Simons 1995.

Vorlesungen über Bedeutungstheorie of 1908, which appeared as volume XXVI of *Husserliana* in 1987, and which Dummett clearly did not find time to take into account before the English version of *Origins* appeared in 1993.

In this transition,¹¹ Husserl maintains his earlier view of meanings as species, calling them now *phenological* or *phansic* meaning. I shall use the less ugly term *species* meaning. But he now adds another kind of meaning, which he calls *phenomenological* or *ontic* meanings, which term is both ugly and misleading: in the light of his later terminology I call them *noematic* meanings. Husserl's reasons may perhaps include that he is beginning to see just the problem that Dummett has discerned, namely how it is that the species meaning can be sure to be the right one to connect with what we intend.

Noematic meaning comes out of Husserl's ever-complicating revisions of the concept of intentionality. In the *Investigations* he was happy to say that someone who is talking about the god Jupiter is not talking about anything: unlike Twardowski and Meinong he is not prepared to countenance non-existent objects for such talk to be about. On the other hand someone who seriously believes there is such a god may talk about them with just as much conviction and inner life and detail as Sally talking about her car. So from a phenomenological or first-person experiential point of view, Husserl does want to say that there is something the talk of the god Jupiter is about, that it is as objective as a car, but that it is not an externally existing god. This is the noematic meaning, or as he would call it, the *noema*: the object as meant. Noemata are not species, but they do stand in an internal relation of correlation to the acts of meaning, the noeses, whose kinds are the species meanings. Since noemata cannot exist without noeses, they are dependent entities, so not platonic in Plato's sense, but as intersubjective, they are abstract. By the time Husserl spells this idea out in the *Ideas* of 1913, he has not only fixed a less barbaric terminology, he has also decided that in view of the generality of intentionality, extending beyond the use of language that he had been considering in 1908, not only linguistic acts but all object-presenting mental acts have a noematic side. So Husserl is prepared to say that noemata are an extension of the idea of meaning or *Sinn* from language to all objectifying acts.

Dummett makes much of this, because to him it is the crucial point at which Husserl's views clearly diverge from those of Frege, for whom *Sinn* is always and only the *Sinn* of an actual or potential expression. If Frege is, while Husserl is not,

¹¹ Described in Simons 1995, § 7 f.

tying *Sinn* to language alone, this marks the criterial break between Frege's linguistic approach and Husserl's phenomenological (at any rate, not exclusively linguistic) approach to meaning, reference, thought and reality. This is how subsequent analytic philosophy from Wittgenstein onwards could complete the linguistic turn, while continental philosophy could go its several ways, whether phenomenological (Husserl) or existential (Heidegger). Furthermore, Dummett endorses the view of Herman Philipse and Barry Smith that the introduction of noemata "was a step along the long and thorny road to transcendental idealism". (83)

I do not think that either of these points is correct. Firstly, Dummett himself points out that Frege increasingly came to emphasize the independence of propositions and other senses from any actual expression in language. Senses are indeed apt to be linguistic meanings, or something closely related to them, but Husserl said the same about noemata. Although the vast majority of noemata occur in connection with perception and other content-rich aspects of consciousness, there is nothing in principle to prevent any noema from being nailed down by a word as that word's meaning. Whether that will involve another Humpty-Dumpty move or not is irrelevant: the point is that Husserl, unlike Frege, has his eye on connecting meaning in language with meaningfulness in consciousness more widely, and is looking for continuities. Dummett is concerned, like many language-oriented philosophers such as Davidson, to emphasize the discontinuities, and so to deny that "brutes think".¹² Perhaps time and animal cognition research will tell us who is right, but the trend of discovery has been monotonically in the direction of narrowing the gap between animal cognition and human language-assisted cognition, so if I had to place a bet, it would be on Husserl, not on Frege.

As to the question whether introducing noemata was *conducive* to idealism the answer must surely be "no". If noemata are sufficiently like Fregean senses, Frege should have been pushed in a similar direction, which he was not. In any case, it is perfectly possible to combine a realistic account of experience, knowledge and the rest with a phenomenology and semantics employing noemata: the work of David Woodruff Smith and other realist phenomenologists offer illustrations of this combination, and it is not, or at least not obviously, incoherent.

¹² In chapter 12, 'Proto-Thoughts', of *Origins*, Dummett is prepared to concede that non-linguistic beings have some experiences and capacities which help to prepare the way for thought, but he continues to stress the gulf and the differences.

Of course it is true that Husserl did slide into idealism, and that noemata came to perform a very handy role as phenomenologically kosher substitutes for external objects once the shutters of the phenomenological reductions came rattling down. But Husserl had already prepared the way for his transcendental idealism much earlier in the *Investigations*, long before he adopted noemata. Meaning is not tied essentially to objects: ‘Jupiter’ is meaningful despite there being no such Roman god. Nor, incidentally, is meaning essentially tied to communication, according to Husserl: in § 8 of the first Investigation, stressing that language can play a considerable role in our uncommunicative inner life, he notes that “when we live in the understanding of a word, it expresses something and the same thing, whether we address it to anyone or not.”¹³

These facts too should not of themselves push towards idealism: what does is Husserl’s conception of essence. If some kind is such that not all of its instances have a certain property, that property is not essential to the kind. Some meanings lack referents. Therefore it is not essential to meaning that it be referential. Some acts of meaning are not communicative. Therefore it is not essential to meaning that it be communicative. Some acts of consciousness lack external objects. Therefore it is inessential to consciousness that it be objectual. Therefore meaning could be non-communicative, confined to one consciousness, and lack external reference. Idealism, even solipsism result.

Husserl’s mistake here is to overlook the necessarily distributed nature of the ontological basis for meaning, and even for consciousness. To use two old analogies, it is not essential to a banknote that it be genuine, or to a promise that it be given in good faith. To conclude from this that in principle all banknotes could be counterfeit or all promises insincere is a fallacy. Likewise, that some acts of meaning are internal and uncommunicative does not mean all could be; that some conscious acts may lack referents or be illusory does not imply that all could. In all of these cases, the exceptions require there to be a background of normal cases. To make this abundantly clear was the service of Dummett’s last Austrian.

13 Husserl 1970, 279.

7 The Social Third Way: Wittgenstein

None of the philosophers considered so far – Bolzano, Brentano, Frege, Husserl – gave sufficient attention to the social nature of language. Nobody made as much of this as the later Wittgenstein, and the point has largely gone home in the philosophical community. It is through the extant and changing patterns of use of language in linguistic communities that meaning exists as something objective. The point has been stressed sufficiently often and with sufficient conviction to need no further argument. It is from this Wittgensteinian perspective that Dummett is happy to repudiate both psychological and platonistic accounts, both Brentano and Frege. It is also on this basis that a light-touch account of meanings as abstractions can be developed. Dummett envisages a basis of concrete uses of language by particular speakers at particular times making particular noises, gestures and other signs to particular audiences and in particular circumstances. Across this basis, into which we are born and inducted and to which we conform, we are able by discerning similarities that can be taken as equivalence relations (or something close enough to them for our purposes) thence to talk about abstract words, sentences, their meanings, and all the other items that linguists investigate. There is surely nothing wrong with this, and as an ontological nominalist I cannot envisage any other basis with which I could rest content.

All the same, once the salutary negative lessons have been extracted from Wittgenstein, and the richness of his range of examples digested, there remains a deeply unsatisfying lack of system to Wittgenstein's own work, indeed a deliberate eschewal of system, which is why linguists and philosophers of language – those who have not simply aped the master – have gone beyond and tried to build theories. Dummett is just such a person. While I have neither the space, the inclination or indeed the competence to enter into any detail about Dummett's quest for a theory of meaning and what it should or should not involve, I will register two points on which I think Dummett failed, because of the influence of the Wittgensteinian perspective, to do sufficient justice to one of the Austrians he named, namely Husserl, and two he did not, namely Marty and Bühler.

In Wittgenstein's philosophy of language, the mental component so stressed by Husserl drops out completely. It has no role, because it is impotent to make meaning objective as Wittgenstein (and everyone else, except perhaps Brouwer and

other solipsists) rightly desires. But Brentano, Husserl and others were perfectly right to maintain that there is an essential mental component to language in use. Without mental acts of perception, judgement and so on, noises would be meaningless. Husserl was right on that. Where he was wrong, and Wittgenstein was right, was to think that the mental side is what gives expressions meaning, makes them meaningful. Wrong: it is their use in societal communication that does that. But such communication can only obtain because we language users are beings with a rich panoply of mental capacities. Otherwise it might as well be zombies or robots “talking” to each other. We don’t think that when internet servers link up and pass information back and forth that this is language with meaning: if something meaningful is being passed along, this meaning got there in the first place through human end-users. Whatever roles the mental plays – and that is a long, disputed and incomplete story – it cannot be ignored, which is one good reason why cognitive science flourishes. Wittgenstein and – for different reasons – Frege would no doubt have disapproved, and they would both have been wrong to do so.

Anton Marty (1847–1914) was another semi-Austrian: Swiss by birth, student of Brentano in Würzburg, professor in Prague, then still part of the Hapsburg Empire (he died in 1914). Marty was Brentano’s “Minister for Language”: he specialised in the philosophy of language when this wasn’t a specialism, and wrote copiously from a not-quite-orthodox Brentanian standpoint, including on such topics as language and abstraction, sentences and words, and theories of meaning, all of which would have interested Dummett. His massive (and yet uncompleted: only volume 1 appeared) *Untersuchungen zur Grundlegung der allgemeinen Grammatik und Sprachphilosophie* of 1908 covers a plethora of subjects, interweaving linguistics, psychology and ontology, and like Husserl, and later Chomsky, Marty advocated a universal grammar. Its main fault is that it is predominantly polemical rather than constructive. Strident criticisms of now justifiedly forgotten third-rate authors get in the way of a clear account of his own. Nevertheless, he was important, and he influenced our final character.

The final semi-Austrian I must mention is more important still: Karl Bühler (1879–1963) was born and trained in Germany, and was Professor of Psychology in Vienna from 1922 until 1940, when he and his wife escaped to the United States. He was Karl Popper’s doctoral supervisor, but much more importantly, he integrated developmental, Gestalt and cognitive psychology, social science, and language into a

comprehensive and impressive *system*, something never achieved (or aspired to) by Wittgenstein. His *Sprachtheorie* (1934), like Wittgenstein, emphasizes the social aspect of language, while not neglecting its psychological side. There are many points of convergence. While well known among psychologists, Bühler is hardly known at all among philosophers, yet he deserved and deserves to be better known. Sadly for his following, Bühler lacks the attractive oracularity of Wittgenstein: he tends to write clearly so it is easy to understand what he means. With Bühler in hand, one would be better able to appreciate the extent to which Wittgenstein does or does not stand out from the run of Austrian thinkers, and therefore to what extent analytical philosophy remained closer to its Austro-German roots than might appear as seen from Oxford.¹⁴

8 *Schlusswort*

It would be churlish to criticise Dummett for not writing a history in the standard sense. He did not set out to do so. In fact *Origins* is in many ways less a history than an historically tinged vehicle for defending his own views on meaning against others.¹⁵ For *that* purpose, Bühler or Marty or Twardowski or Reinach is not necessarily relevant, nor does it matter whether Wittgenstein is systematic, or whether he was careful about his sources. But in *Origins*, Dummett does express the hope that some day someone will write a proper history of the actual influences of the figures, works and institutions around the origins of analytic philosophy and its divergence from continental philosophy. Since he wrote, quite a bit of work has been done by a number of people, though it does not yet quite add up to the kind of comprehensive account he had in mind. Whether he would have been satisfied with what has appeared I don't know: I suspect he would in some ways and not in others. But the impulse to find out more and get things into better perspective would no doubt have pleased him.

¹⁴ For a modern attempt to do just that, see Mulligan 2012.

¹⁵ See Philipse 1994.

References

- Auxier, R. E. and Hahn, L. E., eds. 2007. *The Philosophy of Michael Dummett*. Chicago: Open Court.
- Dummett, M. A. E. 1987. *Ursprünge der analytischen Philosophie*. Translated by J. Schulte. Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp.
- 1993. *Origins of Analytical Philosophy*. London: Duckworth.
- George, R. 1995. Brentano's Relation to Aristotle. In Jacquette, D., ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Brentano*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 20–44.
- Glock, H.-J. 2008. *What is Analytic Philosophy?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Husserl, E. 1970. *Logical Investigations*. Translated by J. N. Findlay. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Mulligan, K. 2012. *Wittgenstein et la philosophie austro-allemande*. Paris: Vrin.
- Philipse, H. 1994. Husserl and the Origins of Analytic Philosophy. *European Journal of Philosophy* **2**, 165–184.
- Simons, P. M. 1995. Meaning and Language. In Smith, B. and Smith, D. W., eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Husserl*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 106–137.
- 2000. The Four Phases of Philosophy: Brentano's Theory and Austria's History. *The Monist* **83** (2000), 68–88.
- 2001. Whose Fault? The Origins and Evitability of the Analytic–Continental Rift. *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* **9** (2001), 295–312.
- 2011. Euclid's Context Principle. *Hermathena* **191**, 5–24.
- Smith, B. 1989. On the Origins of Analytic Philosophy. *Grazer Philosophische Studien* **35**, 153–173.