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The purposes of descriptive psychology

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Abstract

In this paper, I discuss the different views of the founders of descriptive psychology in the 19th century about the meaning and purpose of this discipline and sketch a new plan for connecting descriptive psychology with the language-critical tradition of analytic philosophy. I will show that the goals Hermann Lotze, Franz Brentano, and Wilhelm Dilthey set for descriptive psychology were too lofty for different reasons. The common problem they faced was how to reconcile the ideal of autonomous philosophical knowledge with the empirical relevance that descriptive psychology should have. Faced with this dilemma, I outline a new plan to conceive of descriptive psychology as a critical project aimed at overcoming the obstacles that language places in the way of our knowledge of mental phenomena.

1 | INTRODUCTION

The question of the meaning and purpose of descriptive psychology is like a historical burning mirror in which the whole problem of the separation of philosophy and psychology in the 19th century is reflected. One sees in it the intention to free psychology from an empirical burden that philosophy had traditionally placed on it. But one also recognizes the effort to strengthen the scientific reputation of philosophy by introducing the descriptive-psychological method. Both concerns led to high expectations that the founders of descriptive psychology, first and foremost Hermann Lotze, Franz Brentano, and Wilhelm Dilthey, placed in this new discipline. How these expectations are to be judged from today's point of view is the subject of this essay.[1]

The basis of my considerations is the insight that an analysis or exact description of mental phenomena cannot be an end in itself and was never seen that way by the founders of this discipline. My thesis is that quite different goals led to the high expectations, which Lotze, Brentano, and Dilthey placed in a descriptive psychology. These

expectations remained largely unfulfilled. I will argue, however, that one should not conclude from this that the project of a descriptive psychology failed as a whole. Descriptive psychology was founded at a time when the question of the relationship between philosophy and psychology was still largely unresolved. In the meantime, this question has been resolved, so that we can make a new attempt to determine the purposes of a descriptive psychology in such a way that they also appear realistic.

The essay is divided into six sections plus a brief conclusion. I begin with Lotze's plan for a division of psychology and a related clarification of the relationship between philosophy and psychology, which I will call the "Solomonic solution" (Section 2). Then I move to Brentano and his plan to separate descriptive psychology as an exact science from genetic psychology (Section 3). I will call the conflict resulting from the implementation of Brentano's plan "Brentano's Dilemma" (Section 4). A look at Dilthey will show how descriptive psychology can mutate into an anti-empiricist discipline (Section 5). In the last two sections, I will show how a new plan emerges from a combination of descriptive psychology and language critique that promises to overcome the historically conditioned rivalry between philosophy and psychology. I illustrate this plan through the language-critical reflections of the social psychologist Fritz Heider (Section 6) and through two recent examples from philosophy of mind (Section 7).

2 | THE HISTORICAL DIVISION OF PSYCHOLOGY

Descriptive psychology owes its existence to a broad interest in the classification of the sciences according to their methods and objects, which William Whewell, Auguste Comte, John Stuart Mill, and other historians of science and philosophers generated in the 19th century.[2] The fact that psychology attracted special attention in this process is partly because it first had to find its place in the edifice of science, but also because it was not a completely new science. Psychology existed as a subfield of philosophy, so the question of its scientific status was at the same time a question of the scientific status of philosophy.[3]

In this situation, it was common to propose a division of psychology as a way out. Hermann Lotze was among the influential thinkers in the German-speaking world who put forward a plan for this. In his *Outlines of Psychology* (Lotze, 1881/1886), Lotze divides psychology into three areas to which he assigns different tasks, and for which he also proposes appropriate names:

> First, Lotze says, there must be a *descriptive or empirical psychology*. Its task is to fully grasp the elements of our mental life, or, as he puts it, to describe "the life of the soul." (Lotze 1881/86, 5)
>
> Second, there needs to be an *explanatory, mechanical, or metaphysical psychology*. Since the soul is a product of the body, psychology would have to find out what the "efficient forces [are] and [the] conditions by which it is produced." (ibid.)
>
> Third, according to Lotze, there should also be an *ideal or speculative psychology*. Its task is the meaningful interpretation of the life of the soul by answering the question: "what is the rational meaning for which all this exists, or of the vocation which the life of the soul in general has to fulfil in the totality of the world." (ibid.)

Lotze does not speak here of an existing, but of a future science, whose requirements "would be perfectly satisfied" by implementing his plan (ibid.). Such far-reaching promises were made by other philosophers before Lotze, but I will not dwell on them here.[4] Instead, let us consider the question of how Lotze's plan might help to reorganize the relationship between philosophy and psychology. This is not at all clear at first, since one can certainly interpret his plan in different ways.

On the one hand, it is striking that Lotze bases his plan on a metaphysical assumption when he regards the existence of the soul as an indispensable precondition of psychology. Though he rejects speculations about the immortality of the soul and considers it a scientific hypothesis that the soul and its activities are dependent on bodily processes, he insists that without the existence of a soul there is no satisfactory explanation for the unity of consciousness. The line of evidence he offers for this is a purely philosophical one, based on the experience of an ego identity. One could, therefore, say that psychology ultimately remains a philosophical discipline for Lotze because it owes its primary object—the soul—to philosophical reflection.

Second, there is the question of why Lotze names descriptive psychology first among the fields of psychology, and why he also calls it "empirical psychology." The latter could derive from the fact that philosophical reflection starts from experience and to that extent has an empirical starting point. The experience of the unity of consciousness would be such a starting point. Is this the only reason Lotze gives for descriptive psychology's claim to be a kind of foundational discipline, or could there be other reasons as well?

Lotze's plan seems sufficiently indeterminate on this question that it may be taken to support what I want to call the "Solomonic solution" for clarifying the relationship between philosophy and psychology, because it takes equal account of the interests of both disciplines:

> *The Solomonic solution*: Let descriptive psychology be the foundations of explanatory psychology, both of which then together, in turn, form a basis for fully capturing the nature of the human soul and the meaning of its existence.

Of course, it is premature to speak of a solution here already, because we are at the beginning of a complex debate. We do not yet know what is meant by securing the foundations of explanatory psychology through a description of mental phenomena; nor is it clear how descriptive and empirical psychology is to combine to serve as a basis for addressing metaphysical and speculative questions. Thus, the question of the meaning and purpose of descriptive psychology remains obscure for the time being. To shed more light on this matter, we turn to Brentano.

3 | BRENTANO ON THE TASKS OF DESCRIPTIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Brentano began lecturing on descriptive psychology in the winter semester of 1887/88, which he also referred to as "psychognosy." Whether Brentano intended to distinguish himself from other proponents of this idea by this choice of words is unclear. It is also possible that Brentano preferred the term "psychognosy" only because it hinted at his epistemological interests (see Kamitz, 1988; Marek, 1989).

Part one of Brentano's lecture course, entitled "The Task of Psychognosy," starts likewise with a division of psychology, though Brentano is content with a dichotomy:

> Psychology is the science of people's inner life [Seelenleben], that is, the part of life which is captured in inner perception [innere Wahrnehmung]. It aims at exhaustively determining (if possible) the elements of human consciousness and the ways in which they are connected, and at describing the causal conditions which the particular phenomena are subjected to. The first is the subject matter of psychognosy, the second that of genetic psychology. (Brentano, 2002, 3)

The dichotomy seems to correspond to the first two fields in Lotze's tripartite division. Speculative psychology is thus omitted by Brentano, unless one were to declare it a subfield of genetic psychology. However, I see no plausible reason for this and equate explanatory and genetic psychology. I thus leave aside for the moment the possible tasks of speculative psychology and return to them only in Section 7.

Having divorced descriptive and genetic psychology, Brentano adds that this is a fundamental and profound difference. For, according to Brentano, descriptive psychology is a "pure psychology" and thus also an "exact science." (ibid.) Neither the one nor the other could be said of genetic psychology. This does not mean, however, that explanatory psychology is deficient for Brentano in methodological terms. For Brentano, it is a fully-fledged empirical science, even if it does not have the special position that he attributes to descriptive psychology. So, let us look more closely at what Brentano means by these attributions.

Brentano calls psychognosy "pure" because it tells us nothing about the causes that produce human consciousness:

> [Psychognosy's] aim is nothing other than to provide us with a general conception of the entire realm of human consciousness. It does this by listing fully the basic components out of which everything internally perceived by humans is composed, and by enumerating the ways in which these components can be connected. Psychognosy will therefore, even in its highest state of perfection, never mention a physico-chemical process in any of its doctrines. (Brentano, 2002, 4)

One can understand this determination in different ways. According to one reading, Brentano would thus claim that only purely phenomenal descriptions are permissible in descriptive psychology, with no implicit or explicit reference to the causes of these phenomena. This would be a rather severe restriction, since such references are ubiquitous in our everyday language. For example, how would one describe what it feels like to burn one's fingers without talking about a "burning" sensation and thus referring to the heat that causes the sensation?

It seems more plausible, therefore, to take Brentano's explanation to mean that descriptive psychology teaches us nothing new about the causes of mental phenomena. The knowledge that a certain kind of pain is caused by burning can be taken for granted. This generally available knowledge is sufficient not only to grasp all the contents of human consciousness, but also to put them in an order and to describe them systematically. Even this is still a quite demanding task.

There is a third way of understanding the attribute "pure" in this context. The purity of descriptive psychology can also refer to a certain abstractness that does not seek to describe concrete experiences, but only a totality of possible experiences. It provides only the tools for describing mental phenomena, a kind of set of rules for using psychological terms. In fact, Brentano compares descriptive psychology to Leibniz's project of developing a *characteristica universalis* (see Brentano, 1895, 84). This, too, is a formidable undertaking and would undoubtedly give descriptive psychology a special position.

Let us now turn to the second feature, which is to explain the profound difference between descriptive and genetic psychology. What is it to say that psychognosy is an "exact" science? Brentano relies here on his distinction between inner and outer perception, for which he gives an epistemological justification in the first book of his *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* (1874):

> We have no right [...] to believe that the objects of so-called external perception really exist as they appear to us. [...] What has been said about the objects of external perception does not, however, apply in the same way to objects of inner perception. [...] Of their existence we have that clear knowledge and complete certainty which is provided by immediate insight. Consequently, no one can really doubt that a mental state which he perceives in himself exists, and that it exists just as he perceives it. (Brentano 1874/1995, 10)

Here, too, we can distinguish between a stronger and a weaker interpretation. According to the stronger reading, a science is exact if its results are not only provisional but definitely indubitable. For Brentano, mathematics and logic are such sciences. Once we have recognized a proof as correct, there is no possibility of doubting the truth of the conclusion. Even the axioms that every proof presupposes are self-evident and not only cannot be doubted at

the present time, but never. They are timelessly valid truths. Could descriptive psychology also lead us to such insights? That is what Brentano seems to mean when he says, "the doctrines of psychognosy are sharp and precise" (Brentano, 2002, 5).

A weaker reading of Brentano's notion of "exact science" would allow that one can doubt any law or axiom. This is because it is never self-evident whether it is a self-evident truth. This takes much of the edge off the claim that there are self-evident truths in the first place. One can then still claim that there is a difference in principle between exact and inexact sciences because only the former allows for self-evident statements, but for practical purposes the difference would be minor. Whether a claim is merely true, or whether it is self-evident, might be difficult to decide in this case.[5]

We can draw a first conclusion at this point. Brentano not only had a plan for the division of psychology, but more importantly also a specific plan for descriptive psychology, which gives it a special epistemological position:

> *Brentano's plan*: descriptive psychology aims at descriptions of mental phenomena that enable us to formulate basic psychological laws and to know them as self-evident truths.

There is some room for interpretation here, which must be kept in mind. It is also important to emphasize that this plan in no way means that descriptive psychology ceases to be an auxiliary discipline of empirical psychology. Brentano leaves no doubt about this when he says: "The perfection of psychognosy will hence be one of the most essential steps in preparation for a genuinely scientific genetic psychology." (Brentano, 2002, 11).

Brentano's view could be summarized even more briefly in the form of an analogy. One could compare descriptive psychology to a scaffolding erected to construct a building. The scaffolding should be stable, and therefore, built of self-evident truths. The building to be erected would be genetic psychology, which can only consist of hypotheses that have no such evidence. The question, of course, is how to realize Brentano's plan. Figuratively speaking: How does one erect a scaffolding that forms a stable support for the construction of empirical psychology?

4 | BRENTANO'S DILEMMA

Descriptive psychology was not a project for Brentano to start from scratch. His plan is about a "perfection" of psychognosy, as he says in the previous quote. That is, there are already a lot of self-evident truths from which we can start. Undoubtedly, Brentano is thinking of the central theses of his *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*: the thesis of the intentional nature of mental phenomena, the thesis of inner perception as secondary consciousness, the thesis of the three basic classes of mental phenomena, his analysis of the nature of judgment, and so on. These are the theses, which are to carry the framework of descriptive psychology.

Now how does Brentano attempt to "perfect" this basic framework? The lectures contain innumerable examples by which Brentano demonstrates how formidable a task he has undertaken here. The following selected example shows the dilemma Brentano gets into. It is about the question whether every sensory perception contains a "blind assertoric acknowledgement." In Brentano's way of speaking, to acknowledge something assertorically means to make a judgment of the content "x exists," and to acknowledge something blindly means that the judging subject has no other reasons for her judgment, except perhaps "it seems to me that x exists."

Brentano now tries to show that such blind confidence in appearances can still be present even when, from the point of view of the judging subject, it is no longer justified to assert it. To make this point, he uses a comparison with opposite affective attitudes that we know are possible:

> The contrast between accepting and rejecting is not stronger than the one between loving and hating. If it is thus possible to simultaneously love and hate the same thing, then it does not seem to be excluded from the outset that one simultaneously accepts and rejects the same thing. (Brentano, 2002, 93)

This comparison raises at least two questions. It is indisputable that we can have opposing attitudes toward the same object when different aspects are involved. It may be that I find an object good in one respect and bad in another. What would such a relativization look like in the case of a judgment of the form "x exists"? Can the same object be judged as existing in one respect and non-existing in another? That is the first question.

The second question is what it means to reject the existence of a supposedly perceived object despite a sensory perception to the contrary. Brentano gives two examples of this. On the one hand, he refers to findings of modern physics, which are supposed to show that colors are not real. Second, he cites perceptual illusions, such as the impression that a straight stick in water looks curved. In this case, Brentano says, experience tells us to deny the curvature. The question now is what exactly is denied in these examples. In the case of the perceptual illusion, the answer is simpler. Here we can say that the existence of the curvature is denied, which also means that the reality of the curvature is denied. In the first case, the matter is not so clear. Is it the existence of the perceived colors or their reality that we deny, or do both amount to the same thing? Or, to put it another way, does modern physics show us, as Brentano suggests, that we succumb to a form of perceptual illusion when we perceive colored things as if their colors were real?

As one can see from this example, it is hardly possible to separate the descriptive and empirical aspects in these questions. The first question, on the one hand, is about clarifying what it means to recognize the existence of an object in this or that respect. This is a conceptual problem within the framework of Brentano's theory of judgment. On the other hand, it is also an empirical problem, namely, under which conditions one can speak of a cognitive dissonance. When does the case arise in which one simultaneously believes that something exists and does not exist?

Descriptive and empirical aspects also flow into each other in the second question. We can, of course, compare the knowledge that colors are nothing real with the knowledge that a stick does not bend in water, even if it appears crooked. But this only means that we can choose a description that supports this comparison. Whether the comparison is actually justified is also an empirical question, whose answer depends on the purposes for which our perceptual apparatus is naturally set up. Only because it is indeed set up to distinguish crooked from straight rods is it a deception to see straight rods as crooked. Whether our perceptual apparatus is likewise set up to distinguish colored from colorless objects is not a priori clear.

This brings me to the problem I call Brentano's dilemma. Brentano claims that within the framework of descriptive psychology it is possible to discover self-evident truths. However, this possibility exists only if we succeed in separating descriptive from empirical issues. Only then can descriptive psychology achieve a high degree of autonomy from empirical psychology. However, the examples Brentano discusses suggest that this autonomy does not in fact exist, and that every question he discusses also has an empirical impact. Brentano does not seem to have seen this conflict between autonomy and empirical relevance. He assumes that descriptive psychology can somehow combine the two: It can secure a high degree of autonomy from empirical science, while also making empirically valid claims. However, one necessarily comes at the expense of the other.

This dilemma arises for Brentano regardless of whether one accepts his concept of self-evident truths. So, we might well grant Brentano that the principle stated in the above example is in some sense self-evident:

> (P) There is no stronger opposition between acknowledging and rejecting than between loving and hating.

Self-evident, of course, is this principle only as long as it only says that the opposition in both cases is of the same kind. As soon as we specify in what respects the two dissonances are alike, we get into empirical waters. We can then only hypothesize what seems prima facie plausible, such as:

> (H) It is possible that affective and cognitive dissonances have the same strength.

The dilemma is that descriptive psychology cannot be required to provide both: Findings that are self-evident truths and theses that are sharp and precise. As we see from the example, the principles on which Brentano relies become sharp and precise precisely by interpreting them as empirical hypotheses. This means that we have to make a choice: We can either understand descriptive psychology as a basic philosophical science with high autonomy, or as a basic psychological science with high empirical relevance. Since the two cannot be combined, Brentano's plan is unrealizable.

In fact, Brentano was able to convince few students of his plan. Most philosophers and psychologists, unlike Brentano, chose one of the two options. As befits a dilemma, both options seem quite attractive, as I will show below. I will begin with Wilhelm Dilthey, who opts for autonomy and against the empirical relevance of descriptive psychology. His counterpart will be Fritz Heider, who defends the empirical relevance of descriptive psychology without caring about its autonomy.

5 | DILTHEY AND THE AUTONOMY OF DESCRIPTIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Besides Lotze and Brentano, Dilthey was the third important philosopher in the 19th century who took the crisis caused by the separation of psychology and philosophy as an opportunity to propagate the idea of a descriptive psychology. There were noteworthy similarities between their views (see Orth, 1984), but there was no consensus on what the sense and meaning of descriptive psychology should be. As we have seen with Brentano, this idea could also be associated with a plan that was perceived as unorthodox.[6]

The situation was different with Dilthey. His plan for a descriptive psychology quickly met with a great response in the German-speaking world:

> *Dilthey's plan*: descriptive psychology aims to describe human experience as a product of historical processes that are fundamental to all the humanities.[7]

The two points that make Dilthey's plan so attractive jump out. Unlike Lotze and Brentano, Dilthey does not ask about the elements of consciousness; rather, he speaks of human experience in a broader sense. In addition, he emphasizes the fundamental role of historical processes that shape human experience. Instead of presenting itself as the basic science of empirical psychology, descriptive psychology mutates in Dilthey's work into a discipline that has a completely different thrust: it makes the separation of the natural sciences and the humanities seem compelling. This consequence, however, follows from Dilthey's plan only if one grants descriptive psychology a high degree of autonomy vis-à-vis empirical psychology.

Without going into further detail, I would like to briefly explain the key points of this plan, which makes the autonomy of descriptive psychology a high good for Dilthey. Let us begin with the concept of experience, as we use it in everyday language. To have an experience, in ordinary parlance, is a complex process that cannot be conceived as a mere sum of individual mental acts. While it is common to speak of "elements of consciousness," it seems strange to speak of "elements of experience." If one follows this linguistically supported intuition, it is plausible that the concept of experience is holistically understood as something both mental and physical. This was also an essential point for Dilthey: every experience contains cognitive, affective, and motivational qualities, but it forms a complex whole that is more than the sum of its parts (see Owensby, 1987 and Throop, 2002).[8]

Let us now turn to historical processes, without which there may be consciousness, but certainly not experience in Dilthey's sense. Here the views of Brentano and Dilthey diverge particularly sharply. Brentano, as we have seen, defends the ideal of self-evident knowledge and, connected with it, the ideal of timeless truths on the model of mathematical laws. Dilthey fundamentally rejects both this concept of knowledge and the idea of a timeless truth as components of an outmoded conception of a-historical reason. For him, reality, as experience shows it to us, is also

the product of a historical process. There is no a-historical reality against which the truth of a proposition can be measured (see Makkreel, 1977).

It is, therefore, only consistent when Dilthey also refuses to accept inner perception as a method of cognition distinguished by self-evidence. For Dilthey, inner and outer perception cannot be clearly separated. They are interwoven processes through which we gain experience. Here, then, we come full circle to Dilthey's holistic concept of experience.

Dilthey's plan is not only attractive, but it also seems coherent. Still, it may not be a good plan for settling the relationship between philosophy and psychology. As Dilthey recognized, this separation created a gap, so to speak, within philosophy that needed to be filled. But could that gap really be filled by descriptive psychology, as Dilthey conceived it? The relationship of autonomy between two disciplines can be either one-sided or two-sided. When Dilthey tries to establish the autonomy of the humanities vis-à-vis the natural sciences, he is concerned with a reciprocal autonomy. His concern was not that psychology might still need philosophical support, but rather why philosophy would still need support from psychology. Therefore, he regarded descriptive psychology as autonomous vis-à-vis empirical psychology as much as the latter is supposed to be autonomous vis-à-vis philosophy.

Historically, one can well understand the demand for an autonomous descriptive psychology. Dilthey rightly criticizes theories such as psycho-physical parallelism, which in his view is nothing more than a futile attempt to replace Cartesian dualism with a spiritualistic monism. These metaphysical attempts remind Dilthey of the medieval effort "to unite Aristotle and the theology of Christianity" (Dilthey, 1884-94/2005, 157). Such an endeavor does not deserve the support of descriptive psychology.

However, the fact that a claim is understandable in its particular historical context does not mean that it has any validity beyond that. It is not necessary to invoke the problematic notion of a completely a-historical truth in order to avoid this conclusion. The misgivings that Dilthey had about contemporary developments such as spiritualistic monism now seem outdated. This is due in no small part to the fact that philosophy has again turned increasingly to empirical psychology. The metaphysical concerns that formed an important motive for Dilthey's plan seem, from today's perspective, rather a motive for understanding descriptive psychology not as an autonomous discipline, but as a discipline that thrives on having empirical relevance.

6 | THE LANGUAGE-CRITICAL PLAN OF DESCRIPTIVE PSYCHOLOGY

What is the alternative if the motives behind Dilthey's plan for an autonomous descriptive psychology are no longer convincing? Must we then continue to try, as Brentano did, to reconcile autonomy and empirical relevance? Rather than following this road, there is another path that seems to me more promising. One can combine descriptive psychology with the tradition of philosophical language critique, and in this way show that the description of mental phenomena need not be an end in itself and can even have empirical relevance.

The basic idea of a philosophical critique of language is that language can be a cognitive obstacle. Certain features of language can prevent us from gaining new knowledge. This can happen in several ways. Language can, first, be an inhibitor because it imposes thought templates that limit our horizons. Language can, second, also be a cognitive obstacle because it obscures knowledge that we de facto possess but that it is incapable of expressing. In this case, language would be like a veil that covers our thinking and makes it difficult for us to access our own knowledge. A third possibility would be that language seduces us into accepting simple solutions instead of going deeper into a problem. In this case, language would be like a drug that deludes us into cognitive satisfaction and prevents us from making the best possible use of our cognitive abilities.

With this, we can now formulate another plan for descriptive psychology that links it to an epistemic goal:

> *The language-critical plan*: descriptive psychology aims to remove linguistic obstacles that interfere with our ability to acquire or use psychological knowledge.

Since there are different obstacles that language can put in our way, there is no simple recipe for how to achieve this goal. Seen in this light, one could say that the language-critical plan is no less demanding than were the plans we encountered in Brentano and Dilthey. Nevertheless, I consider this new plan to be more realistic compared to the others. For, although the obstacles to be removed are manifold, they are concrete and tangible. We can, therefore, examine each individual case to see which measures seem sensible in order to eliminate this or that obstacle.

I would like to support this assessment by an example from social psychology, namely the critical reflections of Fritz Heider. They come from the appendix to his major work *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations* (Heider, 1958), his notebooks, and from his autobiography.[9] Heider's reflections concern all three types of obstacles I mentioned above.

When we think about interpersonal relations, Heider argues, we tend to take a naive view of our social lives. This naiveté stems from the fact that although everyday language provides us with a rich vocabulary to describe interpersonal relationships, it thereby captures only the surface of these relationships. In my view, this suggests that Heider is criticizing the effect of thought templates here. To overcome this, one must break down the terms of everyday language into their component parts, especially terms such as "affection" or "aversion" that we use to describe interpersonal relationships. The goal here is to reveal a network of relationships that otherwise remains hidden from us. Language analysis thus gains empirical relevance for social psychology. It becomes, as Heider predicts, "a wonderful tool for representing the subtle meanings of human conditions and what happens between people." (Heider, 2004, 155, my translation).

Another of Heider's remarks concerns the tacit knowledge we possess by virtue of our linguistic competence, but which we cannot use in our theoretical considerations as long as it is only implicit. In his notebooks, Heider recalls how, through a process of mental experimentation, he tried to bring to light his implicit understanding of the expressions "one ought to do" and "something is valuable."

> I make some mental experiments, I ask myself what consequences does it have if I think "he ought to do x," how about third persons involved, how will I react to his doing or failing to do it, etc.? And then I may come to some further formulations [...] which appear more as parts of some general framework, they carry their implications in a more visible way on the outside of their coats and not always in their pockets. (Heider, 1987, 379)

Thus, Heider concludes that familiar linguistic formulations should not prevent us from searching for new categorizations. Following the formal languages of symbolic logic, Heider considers a notational system in which new labels for relation types can be generated by simple combinatorial means. For instance, from the two basic terms

pCx p causes x
pWx p wants x

the following relation types can be generated:

pC:oCx p causes that o causes x.
pC:oWx p induces a wish for x in o

Specific examples for the first type would be: p asks o to do x, or he forces, commands, or induces him in some way to do x. Specific examples of the second type are: luring, tempting. The value of this notation does not seem to be great at first. We do not learn anything new about what it means to give someone a command or to exert pressure on someone. We also do not learn how commanding differs from exerting force or pressure. However, this is not the intention of this notation system at all. It is not about clarifying existing concepts, but about forming new concepts in order to make new connections visible. Thus, by means of the new categories, we could recognize that all relations within one type change together in a certain way, while relations of the other type remain unaffected.

Above all, however, Heider is concerned with removing linguistic obstacles. Therefore, I place his reflections in the tradition of philosophical language critique and do not see in them an attempt to plan a "psycho-logic" generating principles and theorems.[10] Such a logic would quickly run into a dilemma similar to Brentano's notion that descriptive psychology could provide self-evident truths. The point of Heider's critique of language seems to me to be precisely that descriptive psychology need not increase our knowledge at all in order to have empirical relevance. An instrument that is able to remove cognitive obstacles possesses empirical relevance by that fact alone.

That descriptive psychology can serve this goal seems to me a realistic prospect. If there is a concern that militates against this plan, it is probably the concern that this goal is too modest. Why should descriptive psychology be limited to being an instrument of language critique? In the final section, I hope to dispel this concern as well.

7 | THE INDISPENSABILITY OF DESCRIPTIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Let us recall the main points in my version of the short history of descriptive psychology. At the beginning, starting from Lotze, I sketched a plan how to regulate the relation between philosophy and psychology in a Solomonic way. This plan faltered as soon as we encountered the problem I called Brentano's Dilemma: How can descriptive psychology enjoy the benefits of self-evident knowledge if it must also have empirical relevance? Dilthey's solution to the problem was to guarantee autonomy from natural science while denying the empirical relevance of descriptive psychology. Dilthey's way thus confirmed the assumption that this is a real dilemma and Brentano's attempt to reconcile autonomy and empirical relevance seems to be an illusion.

The question now is whether the plan of a language-critical descriptive psychology offers a better way out of the dilemma. If one determines the purpose of descriptive psychology by removing cognitive obstacles, one assures it empirical relevance, as Heider's example should show. The idea that the descriptive-psychological method leads to autonomous findings is irrelevant. This irrelevance, however, could be precisely the undoing of that conception. Those who hold the autonomy of descriptive psychology to be its highest good might object that a descriptive psychology that merely removes obstacles lacks philosophical depth.

This objection, however, is not justified. It is true that the language-critical plan no longer follows those traces, which gave philosophical depth to the views of Lotze, Brentano, or Dilthey. However, this does not exclude the possibility that there are other sources from which the language-critical plan can gain philosophical relevance. Why should there not be philosophical depth without an autonomy from empirical psychology?

Another look at what I called "the Solomonic solution" may help to dispel this prejudice.[11] We can update this solution and use it to describe the current relationship between philosophy and psychology as follows: There exists an empirical psychology and there exist two disciplines, which, as it were, frame this empirical psychology. This frame is formed on the one hand by descriptive psychology and on the other hand by philosophy of mind. Philosophy of mind thus occupies today the place, which Lotze intended for speculative psychology. Descriptive psychology, on the other hand, can best be understood as an interdisciplinary project in which the original connection between philosophy and psychology lives on.

There is obviously a special connection between descriptive psychology and philosophy of mind. In the picture just drawn, this connection is given by the fact that together, both form a "frame" around empirical psychology. This idea can now be substantiated by recourse to the language-critical tradition in philosophy. Just as descriptive psychology was never an end in itself, as I have emphasized, so too is this tradition. Criticism of language was not always, but frequently, linked to a critique of metaphysics whose aim was to draw as clear a line as possible between metaphysics and science. This project of language critique, originating from the Vienna Circle, has since fallen into disuse. It can be revitalized by linking it to descriptive psychology. This is my suggestion.

How might descriptive psychology undertake this task? Broadly speaking, by playing that dual role that is typical of an interdisciplinary project. It can be the basis of empirical psychology, but it can also, together with the latter, be the basis for philosophy of mind. This was an important idea that I already mentioned in Section 2 in connection with the Solomonic solution. Descriptive psychology cannot alone, but only together with empirical psychology, form a

basis for speculative psychology, or as we can now better say, for philosophy of mind. Why this is a perfectly realistic task will be shown in conclusion by two current examples.

The first example concerns the term "mindreading," which is now used by philosophers and psychologists to refer to social skills, which are also called "theory of mind" skills. The term "mindreading" comes from a completely different tradition, in which supernatural or magical abilities are associated with this expression. How could a supernatural process suddenly become a cognitive faculty that is supposed to be completely natural? This transformation could not have taken place without an accompanying debate in which descriptive questions played a central role. While psychologists were primarily interested in how best to explain the development of mindreading abilities, philosophers were interested in how to adequately describe them. In this way, the term "mindreading" was "purified" of its speculative content and transformed into a concept that has high empirical relevance. The need for such linguistic transformations is great in philosophy of mind, as can be seen when one thinks, for example, of debates about zombies or about panpsychism.

The second example brings me back to Brentano again and concerns the seemingly endless debate about how to understand talk of intentional relations to objects. Much like the notion of "mindreading," the notion of "intentional relation" seems to denote a quasi-magical ability. The example of colors I mentioned in Section 4 illustrates the problem. For some, the ontological status of colors is unclear; for others, it is clear that colors are nothing real. Yet colors are supposed to be a primary object of our visual acts, and both sides in this dispute seem to be talking about the same thing when they talk about colors. Apparently, something can be an intentional object although its ontological status is unclear or even if its existence is in doubt. Brentano himself was so disturbed by this confusion that he felt compelled to propose a linguistic regimentation. We should make a clear distinction in our language between real things and mere objects of thought, and consider only the former as possible objects of our intentional acts. Even if Brentano's proposal did not bring the desired success, he made it clear that the ambiguous talk about intentional objects is a major obstacle for developing a theory of intentionality and that work needs to be done to overcome this obstacle.

8 | CONCLUSION

The founders of descriptive psychology had a far-sighted idea, as I hope to have shown in this essay. Descriptive psychology has proved indispensable not only for empirical psychology but also for the philosophy of mind. If, nevertheless, the impression is given that it is a failed project, it is because the goals that Lotze, Brentano, and Dilthey pursued were too lofty. The ideas of the soul that Lotze had were just as unrealistic as Brentano's goal of finding self-evident truths that have empirical relevance. Descriptive psychology has also failed as a foundation for the humanities. It is, however, suitable as a language-critical tool for identifying questionable descriptions of mental phenomena that exist in any language and transforming them into useful descriptions. Thus, it serves a good purpose, even if it loses its autonomy in the process.

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ENDNOTES

[1] I leave Edmund Husserl unmentioned here because his contribution and the influence Lotze, Brentano, and Dilthey had on Husserl's phenomenology is beyond the scope of this essay. See Frechette 2012b, Moran, 2008, Moran, 2020, and Fisette, forthcoming.

[2] Lesser-known authors in this tradition today include Jakob Friedrich Fries, Franz Xaver Biunde, Friedrich Adolf Trendelenburg, William Hamilton, Alois Riehl, and Eduard Hering. See the references in Orth, 1995/96, 22, Seron, 2017, 40, fn. 1, Frechette, 2012a, 98 f., Frechette, 2020, fn. 10, Utitz, 1921, 251, and Baumgartner, 1989.

[3] On the older prehistory of descriptive psychology, see Hedwig, 1988.

[4] A possible source for Lotze is Trendelenburg, who formulated an even more far-reaching plan: "The soul stands between nature and the spiritual world; the flower of the former is the seed of the latter. Psychology, therefore, has a double task: 1. the understanding of nature in its purpose; 2. the understanding of the spiritual world in its impulse. Psychology appears to us as the apex of natural science and as the foundation of ethics; it establishes the transition from physics to ethics." Trendelenburg 1858/59, quoted in Frechette, 2020. See also Orth, 1995/96 and Orth, 1997.

[5] For a more positive evaluation of Brentano's conception of descriptive psychology as an exact science, see Röck, 2017.

[6] Despite the strong competition between Brentano and Dilthey, there may also have been mutual influences (see Damböck, 2017, 111 f.). That Brentano considers it a characteristic of "his school" to distinguish between descriptive and genetic psychology could have been a side blow to the followers of Dilthey. See Brentano, 1895, 34.

[7] This was the original plan that Dilthey conceived in his *Introduction to the Humanities* (Dilthey, 1883/1914) and in *Ideen über eine beschreibende und zergliedernde Psychologie* (Dilthey, 1894/1924). Later, under the influence of Husserl's critique of psychologism, Dilthey changed at least his terminology and no longer considered descriptive psychology but hermeneutics as the basis of the humanities.

[8] It should be added that Dilthey does not rely so much on everyday language than on the tradition of German-language philosophy, with Schleiermacher, Herbart, Waitz, and Drobisch having a formative influence on his thinking. In contrast, Dilthey was little impressed by the writings of John Stuart Mill and other Anglo-Saxon psychologists and philosophers, who played a formative role for Brentano. See Baumgartner 1997, Lessing, 2016.

[9] Heider owes the philosophical tools he draws on here to his studies with Alexius Meinong, who in turn was a student of Brentano. See Reisenzein & Mchitarjan, 2008. I thank Kevin Mulligan for this reference.

[10] The idea of a "psycho-logic" comes from a different source. See Abelson & Rosenberg, 1958 and Jan Smedslund, 1988. For a critique see Giese, 1967 and Wilkes, 1984.

[11] The prejudice that autonomy and philosophical relevance are mutually dependent seems to be a unifying element in the various debates that have been fought out under the catchword "psychologism". My guess is that exposing this prejudice as such can largely resolve these debates.

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