MODERN ERRORS CONCERNING THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE LAWS OF INERENCE*

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[10903]
§ 1 The progress of science leads to innovations of very different kinds. Frequently a new truth gets discovered, which drives out old errors. At other times a mistake goes away only to make room for a new illusion. And again it occurs that an old correct view that has been inherited is contested and discarded, while erroneous opinions are disseminated in their place.

Such cases seem to indicate an obvious step backwards. But they can also contribute indirectly to the advancement of knowledge. If the error is refuted, often other flaws, occasions of error, will be eliminated with the result that the entire domain is clarified and our insight is deepened. [10904]

* Editor’s note: The transcription of Brentano’s talk in the Philosophical Society of the University of Vienna is based on the original manuscript entitled ‘Moderne Irrtümer über die Erkenntnis der Gesetze des Schliessens’. This manuscript is located in Houghton Library, Harvard University, and it belongs to the Series Erkenntnistheorie und Logik (under the signature X.E.L. 70, #10903-10936). Part of this manuscript has been published by F. Mayer-Hillebrand in her edition of Die Lehre vom richtigen Urteil (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1956), section 48 ‘Der Vorwurf, daß die Syllogismen entweder falsch oder nutzlos seien’ (pp. 227-237). We kept the original orthography of the text, corrected the errors in the partial transcription, and completed Brentano’s references.
§ 2 In this consideration I would primarily like to turn your attention today to certain epistemological doctrines that have been established in the modern era by great men and have gained a group of followers. However mistaken they are, they might yet point the way to more complete knowledge.

§ 3 Where does the knowledge of the rules of inference come from? [10905] The old conviction, already clearly attested to by Aristotle, was that the rules of inferential procedure, in the simplest cases directly, in the more complicated ones indirectly, are evident as analytic a priori judgments.

§ 4 This was held with unrestricted universality. Therefore, when we distinguish demonstrative and empirical inferences, i.e. inferences by imperfect induction, it was held for both realms equally.

§ 5 In modern times this doctrine has been contested in part and in its entirety, more particularly from two sides:
   1) in the empirical school,
   2) in the a priori school of Kant.

§ 6 Let us first look at what certain empiricists say and then at what certain Kantians say against it.

§ 7 First, [10906] it was the domain of induction where doubt set in as to whether analytic judgments really guaranteed us the correct rules of inferential procedure.

   Hume denied it decidedly, because the conclusion contained something not included in the premises and thus there is in fact no contradiction between the acceptance of the premises and the denial of the conclusion. Since, according to Hume, there was a lack of analytic guarantee and some other kind that could replace it seemed inconceivable, he rejected [10907] all inductive inferences as logically inadmissible. They are something that people presumably have a drive to do. But the drive is nothing but a blind compulsion of habit, which leads them to behave in the case that follows as they did in the in the preceding case. This psychological law is a logical impropriety of human nature. Thus any empirical proof would be illusory, and skepticism, contrary to all empirical science, would be the only reasonable attitude. [10908]

§ 8 In such a manner this revolutionary descendant of the empirical school wanted to give all empirical evidence the merciless deathblow. The old proposition that the rules of inference must be evident in an analytic way is something he left untouched, rejecting only a part of