ON HAVING A PROPERTY.
CORRIGENDA IN BOLZANO’S WISSENSCHAFTSLEHRE. ¹

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Summary
The hard core of Bolzano’s conception of truth can be captured by the following biconditional: a non-compound non-quantified one-place predication expresses a true proposition (Satz an sich) if, and only if, the object that is referred to in that predication (really) has the property that is predicated of it. Thus the proposition that is expressed by the sentences ‘Socrates is courageous’, ‘Socrate est courageux’, ‘Sokrates ist mutig’ and many others is true just in case Socrates has courage. In this paper I shall focus on the sense of two words that occur not only in my characterization of the hard core of Bolzano’s conception of truth but also in his own analysis (Erklärung) of this notion; namely, the sense of ‘has (hat)’ and the sense of ‘property (Beschaffenheit)’.

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Let us begin with the three-letter word. In his logic Bolzano makes extensive use of the schemata ‘A has (small-) b’ and ‘A is (capital-) B’. Whenever

¹ When I met Peter Simons for the first time (as one of three British philosophers who shared an infectious enthusiasm for what they called Austrian philosophy), he was a Lecturer at a place called the Bolton Institute of Technology, so this was at a very early stage of his academic career. After our first meeting in England, I received numerous beautiful handwritten letters on numbers and manifolds; he apparently did not mind my typewritten responses, and very soon we became friends. Already in those years Peter’s work had an impact on mine, and I have profited from his writings ever since. We met very often when he lived in his home country, in Austria, and I am very glad that we have remained in close contact even after he went into exile. I seem to remember that in the early years of our acquaintance the German Brentano was the earliest of the Austrian philosophers whose work Kevin Mulligan, Barry Smith and Peter had studied. As soon as Peter had arrived in Edgar Morscher’s Salzburg, this was bound to change, of course, and by now Peter is ready to confess: ‘It has become my unshakeable opinion that Bolzano is the finest philosopher of the nineteenth century, bar none’ (Simons 2014, 166). Hence I am certain that he will not be displeased when he finds in his amply deserved Festschrift a critical essay on some aspects of the great Bohemian’s logic and metaphysics.
its instances stand in systematic correspondence he uses them in the following way: the term in the ‘b’ position of the ‘has’ sentence is the nominalization of term in the ‘B’ position of the corresponding ‘is’ sentence. Thus the schemata turn into pairs like ‘Nathan has wisdom’ and ‘Nathan is wise’, or

(Σ) Socrates has courage
(S) Socrates is courageous.

Bolzano takes it to be a matter of course that the partners in such couples express the same proposition (1837, II, 10; 1841, 48). Ramsey agrees (1925, 60, 71), and so does Strawson who uses the same example: “The syntactical variation between “Socrates has courage” and “Socrates is courageous” is not more than that—a syntactical variation’ (1990, 318). (In spite of this prominent support I think that Bolzano’s propositional-identity claim is questionable, but I shall not question it here.3)

The proposition expressed by (S) is ‘more clearly (deutlicher) and more correctly (richtiger) expressed’ by (Σ), or so Bolzano maintains (1837, II, 11). Why does he take (Σ) to surpass (S) as regards clarity? I think his reason is similar to the reason logicians have for preferring ‘Plato is a philosopher, and Aristotle is a philosopher’ to ‘Plato and Aristotle are philosophers’. According to the pivotal Bolzanian truth-equivalence, (S) expresses a truth just in case the object referred to in (S) really has the property (S) ascribes to it. If that is the best way to specify the truth conditions of (S) then the greater clarity of (Σ) consists in the fact that it contains a term that answers the question, ‘And which property is that?’ It is not obvious that this really is the best way of specifying the truth conditions of sentences like (S), but that is a question I shall not pursue here.

What about the other compliment Bolzano makes to (Σ),—what is its greater (expressive) ‘correctness’ supposed to consist in? Bolzano believes that in sentences like (S) ‘the verb ‘to be’ is not used in its proper meaning (eigentliche Bedeutung), but only in that improper [i.e. figurative] meaning that it has as copula’.4 It has its proper meaning, he claims, in sentences like

2. Quotations from Wissenschaftslehre (=: 1837) and from Bolzano’s Lehrbuch der Religionswissenschaft (=: 1834) refer to volume number and page number of the first editions.
3. For discussion see Künne 2006, 266–72 (‘Elementary Predications and their Quasi-Platonic Counterparts’).

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