

**Sandra Lapointe**

*Bolzano's Theoretical Philosophy: An Introduction.*

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This book is very welcome for a number of reasons.

First, though there is growing awareness of Bolzano's influence on contemporary philosophical sensibilities, English-language books on Bolzano have been geared more toward specialists, with authors focusing primarily on single aspects of his theoretical philosophy – such as logic (cf. Jan Berg) or philosophy of mathematics (cf. Paul Rusnock). As her subtitle promises, Lapointe's book functions instead as a genuine introduction to the whole of Bolzano's theoretical philosophy. Lapointe discusses not just his views on these two central topics (Chapters 2-6 and 9) but also Bolzano's metaphysics (Chapter 9), epistemology (Chaper 7-8), and much else besides, providing much-needed systematic context within which to better understand Bolzano's signature claims concerning logic, semantics, and philosophical analysis more generally.

Lapointe also provides valuable historical context for understanding why Bolzano develops his views, both in the broad contours and in the details, in the manner that he does in his masterwork, the *Wissenschaftslehre*. Here Lapointe shows how Bolzano takes over existing terminological distinctions, especially from the Kantian tradition (Chapter 1), in order to win through to a deeper grasp of the conceptual distinctions that such terminology hinted at, though at times only as if through a glass darkly. Lapointe also marshals her wide-ranging knowledge of writings from throughout Bolzano's development to convey a sense of the phases of Bolzano's thought – along the way compiling a very useful series of quotes from across Bolzano's oeuvre, including many never before translated.

Lapointe helpfully points readers ahead in history by concluding her book by comparing and contrasting Bolzano with two kindred spirits in the tradition now called 'semantic objectivism': Frege (Chapter 10) and Husserl (Chapter 11). With Frege, in particular, Lapointe goes beyond much existing literature by highlighting not just the frequently-noted similarities but also how Bolzano's views might be more fully equipped to deal with topics connected with semantics but only gestured at by Frege – most notably, concerning the role of intention in the communication of meaning (cf. 133-38).

Finally, Lapointe engages throughout with some of the best recent French- and German-language discussions of Bolzano (e.g., Sebestik, Laz, Benoist; Morscher, Künne, Siebel, Textor, Schnieder). This does the very welcome service of introducing such rich resources to those not yet familiar with these authors.

It's especially fortunate that Lapointe's book appeared just now, in time to prepare readers for the first complete English translation of the *Wissenschaftslehre* (by Rusnock and Paul George, forthcoming, Oxford) – along with the first English translation of 1850's *The New Anti-Kant*, the definitive record of Bolzano's section-by-section critical engagement with Kant first *Critique* (by Lapointe and Tolley, forthcoming, Palgrave). Lapointe's book charts a fruitful (if necessarily selective) path through the *Wissenschaftslehre*, to help readers find their way through its sea of thousands of pages. Lapointe also very nicely sets the stage for deeper engagements with Bolzano's

critique of Kant, in light of more thorough assessments of *The New Anti-Kant*, by Bolzano- and Kant-scholars alike.

Unsurprisingly, given the focus of her earlier research, Lapointe's strongest moments come when she's spelling out Bolzano's views on analyticity, deducibility (*Ableitbarkeit*), and the grounding-relation (*Abfolge*) which Bolzano takes to hold between truths. Lapointe draws out sharp and instructive contrasts between the then-current and quite restrictive 'concept-containment' account of analyticity associated with Kant – according to which analytic relations obtain between concepts due to their (intensional) inclusion 'within' one another, depending on whether one represents a higher or lower species than the other (19-23) – and Bolzano's 'substitutional' account, according to which analytic relations can obtain quite broadly between any propositions which share any common semantical forms (45f). Whereas the tradition focused almost exclusively on conceptual relations within the traditional categorical form of judgment ('All AB is A'), and in effect allowed only for variation within this structure, Bolzano allows for analytic relations to obtain within all sorts of shared grammatical forms, including hypothetical and disjunctive forms ('If A is B, then A is not non-B'; 'Every object is either B or not B' (cf. 61f)).

Lapointe nicely brings out how Bolzano's broader perspective on which elements in propositions can be viewed as significantly variable leads him to equally broader notions of quantification (universal validity (*Gültigkeit*)) and deducibility. She also shows how Bolzano is then able to extend both notions (validity and deducibility) to forms besides those of the then-traditional logic (e.g., involving relations; cf. 47-58).

Finally, Lapointe also ably foregrounds the philosophical significance of the distinction Bolzano draws between the deducibility-relation and the grounding-relation. Deducibility obtains within the context of *forms* of propositions (roughly: at the level of propositional schemata), and is present even in cases where the form is instantiated by false propositions – though, interestingly enough (and unlike more familiar views), as Lapointe points out, it cannot be present in contradictory instantiations, since Bolzano includes a condition that the propositions involved be at least possibly true together ('compatible'; cf. 76-77). Grounding, by contrast, obtains only between true *propositions* (cf. 89), and moreover only where there's an epistemic ordering-relation of the sort that defines axiomatic structures, an ordering that allows us to explain what makes the grounded propositions true (cf. 81f). (Strikingly, Lapointe gives evidence from Bolzano's unpublished notes that he took these grounds (where there are any) always to lie in further, more basic *truths*, and never to lie in *things* (whether simple objects, states of affairs, facts, etc.; cf. 81-82).)

As Lapointe therefore covers lots of ground in her slim volume, there will inevitably be points for which readers will be left wanting more clarification, textual evidence, and so on, before accepting Lapointe's analysis. Let me conclude by noting three such points on which Lapointe's treatment could benefit from further considerations.

The first concerns Lapointe's insinuation that Kant held a naïve view of the representation-relation involved in concepts, according to which concepts are 'pictures' or 'images' of the objects that they represent and so 'resemble' their objects as to their component parts, by containing 'in' themselves a correlative part for each of the parts 'in' the object represented (cf. 24 and 161n5). Now, Kant himself clearly and explicitly distinguishes between concepts and images in the *Critique* and elsewhere, perhaps most notably in the Schematism (cf. B180; Lapointe herself refers to this (161n5)). Moreover, Bolzano himself champions Kant's conception of the distinction between analytic and synthetic judgments as the single most crucial advance in *helping* show what

must be rejected about the aforementioned assumption behind naïve representationalism, since true synthetic judgments provide salient counterexamples: the predicate-concept applies to the objects represented by the subject-concept, and so truly represents some of the objects' properties, *despite* not having already been 'thought in' the subject-concept, and so despite the subject-concept not containing parts that represent these properties (see, e.g., *Wissenschaftslehre* §65, I.288f).

Secondly, and relatedly: Lapointe suggests (cf. 27, 37-38, 42) that Bolzano himself gives up entirely on the idea that the truth of certain propositions rests on the (intensional) meaning of the concepts involved, i.e., on the fact that the concepts involved have the 'contents' that they do, in something akin to what Kant meant by this claim. Yet, as Lapointe herself concedes (cf. 37), Bolzano himself repeatedly talks about concepts 'containing' or being 'composed of' other representations as 'constituents'. Furthermore, it is hard to see how the content of the concepts which constitute the form that remains fixed in a given proposition, once a part is viewed as variable, could in no way help determine whether the particular form is universally valid or not, or whether it stands in an analytic-deductive relation with another proposition – the latter especially, since it is precisely due to two propositions' sharing the same invariant constituents (contents) that the relation obtains. Lapointe furnishes a passage from *Wissenschaftslehre* §148 as primary evidence for her view (quoted twice to this end; 42, 60), where Bolzano claims that 'the truth or falsity of analytic propositions does not depend on the particular ideas out of which it is composed'. From this Lapointe concludes that, for Bolzano, *nothing* relevant to the truth-value of the propositions is contributed by *any* of the ideas which compose analytic propositions. Bolzano's point here, however, seems to be only that *not every* constituent idea contributes something to the truth-value, since '*some*' of the ideas can be varied at will and the truth-value of the resulting propositions remains the same (as the passage goes on to state). This more minimal point, though, is compatible with a dependence of the truth or falsity of propositions on those *other* ideas that remain invariant and so constitute the analytic proposition-form. (What is more, Lapointe herself later notes that Bolzano seems to accept that certain propositions can be known to be true 'by virtue of meaning alone' (cf. 103).)

Finally, and perhaps most surprisingly, Lapointe takes some pains to downplay the most well-known thesis attributed to Bolzano – namely, his commitment to what Lapointe calls 'semantic realism', to there being a separate mind-independent realm of 'objective' ideas, propositions, and truths (ideas, propositions, and truths '*an sich*'; cf. 132). Bolzano's account is widely thought to require that we accept that 'there are' such objects, in order to clarify (among other things) how our mental acts and linguistic expressions can share the same content or significance – even though, like Fregean *Sinne*, these objects don't exist in space or time or have causal efficacy (*Wirklichkeit*). Conceding that Bolzano does often talk this way, Lapointe guides our attention to places where he appears to argue that skeptical readers could still accept much of what's central to his position even while rejecting the notion of ideas, truths, etc. 'in themselves' (cf. 132-33). It's not clear, however, how this could be Bolzano's ultimate, considered position. The first main part of the *Wissenschaftslehre* ('The Theory of Fundamentals') begins precisely by establishing the 'existence' of truths in themselves, with 'proofs' that 'there are' not just one but infinitely many such truths in themselves (cf. §§32-33). Moreover, as Lapointe herself notes, the passages furnished for her less-committal reading come mostly from a brief work Bolzano published after the *Wissenschaftslehre* – so, after his first-hand encounters with sharp resistance to his doctrine of ideas and truths 'in themselves' – written to give a more accessible 'overview' of some of its key points and to draw in a larger public.

To be fair, a fully satisfactory discussion of these points would require more space than could be expected in a concise 'Introduction'. My request for further support here should not in any way obscure how much Lapointe already accomplishes in so little space. Indeed, Lapointe's readers will surely look forward to her future discussion of these topics and much more.

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