Husserl, Logical Psychologism and the Theory of Knowledge

It is often claimed that Frege was the one to have steered the “early” Husserl away from his presumed psychologism: Frege according to a widespread opinion was the one who prompted Husserl’s criticism of psychologism in the *Logical Investigations* (cf. Bell 1994; Follesdal 2001). It is clear that there were intellectual connections between Husserl and Frege at the time Husserl was first coming to grips with the issue in the early 1890s (see for instance the Frege–Husserl correspondence, in Bernet et al. 2005, 20–31). But in light of Husserl’s 1896 lectures on logic, it is much clearer that the real impetus behind Husserl’s criticism was Bolzano’s *Theory of Science*. Husserl’s antipsychologistic position rests on a meta-epistemological reflection that has two aims. The task is to fix the respective domains of the sub-disciplines that belong to the theory of knowledge in order to explain how these sub-disciplines are connected. In this regard, Husserl considerably diverges from Frege whose treatment of metaphilosophical questions of this type is insubstantial. Directly and indirectly – “indirectly” because Twardowski played an important role in Husserl’s rediscovery of Bolzano around 1894 – Husserl is indebted to Bolzano for many of his views on the nature of logic, its relation to psychology and their respective role within the theory of knowledge. While the historical connection between Husserl and Bolzano is no longer altogether ignored, it is still nonetheless inadequately documented. In particular, most of the research focuses on the role Bolzano might have played in Husserl’s adopting a position akin to semantic realism in logic. Bolzano’s influence is to be found in Husserl’s *Logical Investigations*, especially the first book, in a much more substantial manner, and this is what I will try to argue in what follows.
Consider the following questions:

(1) What is a valid inference?
(2) What types of mental states are involved in a valid inference?
(3) What types of neurophysiological processes are involved in a valid inference?
(4) How can I avoid inferential mistakes?
(5) What types of inferences provide scientifically acceptable knowledge?
(6) What types of inferences are most likely to convince one's hearer?

These questions are all independent of one another. The question raised in (1) relates to semantics. One answers this question by providing, for instance, an objective criterion on the basis of which one is to establish systematically which inferences are such as to necessarily preserve truth from the premises to the conclusion. (2) pertains to the philosophy of mind and (3) to the cognitive sciences. One provides an answer to these questions by describing, respectively, either in mental terms (i.e., in terms of beliefs, knowledge, desire, etc.), or in neurophysiological terms, the processes that underlie the realisation of an inference by an epistemic agent. The problems brought up by (4) relate to the various heuristic procedures that support the discovery of scientific truths. (5) concerns what, in epistemology, we call justification. And, finally, (6) pertains to pragmatics and relates to the practical rules to which in a scientific presentation an agent must conform in order to insure, for instance, that his interlocutor be persuaded that the proposition she seeks to demonstrate is true.

This brief survey seeks to emphasise that the notion of inference or reasoning or, more generally, of rationality, may arise in a variety of theoretical contexts that must be discriminated. At the turn of the twentieth century however questions (1)–(6) were often not distinguished and, for the most part, the disciplines to which they pertain did not exist under separate headings. At any rate, little attention was paid to providing a clear conception of the respective tasks of or of the relations between semantics, the philosophy of mind, cognitive sciences, etc. Traditionally, the task of putting together a “doctrine of inference” or reasoning or, more generally, of rationality belonged to what philosophers called in a somewhat undifferentiated manner “logic” or “Vernunftlehre”. However, in the absence of sufficiently clear distinctions between (1), (2), etc... logic encompassed de facto a set of heterogeneous concerns that co-existed in a more or less confused manner.