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# The First Breakthrough: Psychology, Theory of Knowledge, and Phenomenology of Meaning in the Logical Investigations

Pierre-Jean Renaudie

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The first breakthrough: psychology, theory of knowledge and phenomenology of meaning in the *Logical Investigations*<sup>1</sup>

Pierre-Jean Renaudie (Univ. Lyon 3 – Jean Moulin)

in H. Jacobs (ed.), *The Husserlian Mind*, London, Routledge, 2021

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When Husserl published the two volumes of the *Logical Investigations* at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (the introductory volume *Prolegomena to Pure Logic* in 1900, followed in 1901 by a second volume gathering six *Logical Investigations*), his philosophical purpose was much more ambitious than providing a series of studies on a range of topics regarding logic and theory of knowledge. The publication of the *Logical Investigations* was first and foremost an attempt to propose a new and original approach to philosophical questions based on the description of lived-experiences, which Husserl defined as “phenomenology.” It was a term he did not coin, nor was he the first to employ it in a philosophical context. He used it in a very specific sense, giving it a technical and completely renewed meaning. At this stage, however, phenomenology was less a well-defined and perfectly unified philosophical methodology (as Husserl would later on claim it to be), than a novel “research program” in a sense close to Lakatos, working on the basis of a few methodological guidelines, a number of main theses, and lots of promised developments to come.

Consequently, the content of the *Logical Investigations* needs to be understood in relation to the wider philosophical project that Husserl had expected them to give birth to, which requires an understanding of the main questions and difficulties Husserl was hoping phenomenology to resolve. Rather than presenting the variety of views defended by Husserl throughout the thousand pages that constitute his first philosophical masterpiece, this chapter will mainly focus upon these difficulties in order to account for the field of philosophical problems that phenomenology originated from and its original way of addressing them. In order to avoid projecting onto the initial version of Husserl’s work later and more sophisticated (though possibly also more consistent) conceptions of his phenomenological method, we shall primarily consider, for the sake of faithfulness and accuracy, the first edition of the *Logical*

*Investigations* and pay particular attention to the historical context within which Husserl's philosophical undertaking came to a first stage of maturation. We will reserve for the final remarks of this chapter the examination of the shortcomings and issues that he tried – rather unsuccessfully – to overcome in his attempt to revise the *Logical Investigations* for their second edition of 1913, which sheds light on the more renowned transformations that Husserl's phenomenological project was to undergo soon after the publication of his “breakthrough” work.

### 1. Husserl's anti-psychologism

Many years after the *Logical Investigations* were published, Husserl gave some indications about the main difficulties encountered by its first readers, which contributed in jeopardizing the clear understanding of the main philosophical goals of the book and led to various misinterpretations of phenomenology. As he was preparing the draft for a new preface (which he never published) to be included in the second edition of his book, Husserl stressed that the phenomenological analyses of lived-experiences provided by the six investigations of the second volume were understood as mere psychological descriptions falling under the title of descriptive psychology – a label inherited from Husserl's first mentor in philosophy, Franz Brentano (Husserl 1975, 51). It seemed unclear to most readers how the investigations of the second volume could logically follow from the extensive criticism and firm rejection of psychologism in the *Prolegomena*, which were meant to constitute an essential and unavoidable piece of Husserl's phenomenology of knowledge, as Husserl wrote in a letter to Meinong (Husserl 1994, 137<sup>2</sup>). Rather, as Husserl recalls later on in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, numerous early readers of the *Logical Investigations* understood phenomenology as a “relapse

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<sup>2</sup> Letter to Meinong, August 27, 1900.

into psychologism” and reproached their author for having given up the radicality of his own critique of psychology (Husserl 1969, 152).

Such misunderstanding and confusion about the meaning of phenomenological description and the clarification of the fundamental concepts of pure logic that Husserl expected it to achieve reveal a significant difficulty inherent to his initial undertaking. How can we understand the unity of the philosophical project that rigorously ties together the two volumes of the *Logical Investigations*?

### 1.1. Anti-psychologism and neo-Kantianism: Windelband and Natorp

Husserl was far from being the first to make arguments against psychologistic theories. Nevertheless, his *Prolegomena to Pure Logic* presents an in-depth and remarkably synthetic attempt to identify, analyze, and critically discuss the theses, presuppositions, and shortcomings that the label “psychologism” encapsulates. Husserl proposes a series of arguments that contributed a great deal to mapping the variety of positions that the new psychology gave rise to and their correlative (explicit or implicit) philosophical claims. Across the years that followed their publication, the *Prolegomena* was widely read and referred to as the official anti-psychologist manifesto (Kusch 1995).

However, the historical significance of the *Prolegomena*’s role within the psychologism dispute (*Psychologismus Streit*) contributed somewhat to concealing the subtlety of Husserl’s position in the debate. Husserl’s rejection of psychologism is certainly motivated by the harsh and pitiless critique of his *Philosophy of Arithmetic* that Frege published in a 1894 review (Frege 1972). Frege pointed out how Husserl’s analysis of the relation between numbers and the acts of collecting and colligating ultimately relies on an interpretation of logical laws that traces them to psychological processes, thereby revealing the psychologistic background of his

approach (Føllesdal 1994; Mohanty 1977). This criticism deeply impacted Husserl, whose strong interest in the conception of pure logic, developed in Bolzano's *Wissenschaftslehre* and championed by Lotze, was already in conflict with his initial Brentanian attempt to provide some psychological foundation to logical and arithmetical concepts. From this moment on, Husserl diagnoses psychologism as the main threat jeopardizing the clarification of concepts upon which a theory of knowledge must rest. Defining psychologism as the recurring attempt to ground the necessity of logical laws upon the contingency of the empirical laws of thinking, Husserl undertakes a detailed critique of the various forms of psychologism widespread in 19<sup>th</sup> century accounts of logic (such as Mill, Spencer, Sigwart, Erdmann, and Lipps) and their philosophical consequences. This critique accordingly necessitates the preliminary step of establishing the theoretical foundations of pure logic understood as a new *a priori* and purely demonstrative science of science.

Husserl insists that his position in the debate needs to be understood as a particular kind of anti-psychologism, specifically designed to address logical issues and to clear the way for setting up the tasks of pure logic. In this regard, his critique must be carefully distinguished from the more general and all-encompassing version of anti-psychologism articulated by the Neo-Kantians a few decades earlier. In a series of polemical texts aimed at reestablishing the role of critical philosophy against the rise of psychology, Windelband and Natorp, the main figures of the Neo-Kantian schools of Heidelberg and Marburg, had engaged in an uncompromising rejection of psychologism, which came to constitute a foundational aspect of neo-Kantianism and played a decisive role in its development (Windelband 1880 and 1884; Natorp 1887 and 1888; see Anderson 2005). Husserl's critical analysis, on the other hand, follows a much narrower aim that highlights the strictly logical significance of his own anti-psychologism: the only form of psychologism that phenomenology aims at overcoming is "the

psychologizing of the irreal significational formations that are the theme of logic” (Husserl 1969, 152).

It is then crucial to see that Husserl’s purpose is not only to propose a criticism of the psychologistic presuppositions undermining most conceptions of knowledge, but also – and just as importantly – to demonstrate the shortcomings of the anti-psychologistic claims articulated by the Neo-Kantians. His analysis, indeed, begins by putting aside the main arguments raised by the Neo-Kantians, which stress the “*normative* character of logic” and its irreducibility to the empirical contingency of psychological laws (Husserl 2001b, 41-44). Husserl insists that such normative objections can easily be dealt with and cleared out by the proponents of psychologism and points out the insufficiencies of the Neo-Kantian version of anti-psychologism.

This refutation of normative anti-psychologism plays a significant role in the construction of Husserl’s argument: instead of stressing the irreducible opposition between the normative procedures that theory of knowledge must account for according to neo-Kantianism and the description of the empirical facts through which knowledge is actually performed, Husserl critically examines the consequences of psychologism and formulates anti-psychologistic arguments that allow some kind of complementarity between psychology and theory of knowledge, refusing to hold them strictly contradictory to each other: psychology somehow “takes part” or “participates” (*mitbeteiligen*) in the foundation of logic, even though it does not provide logic’s “essential foundation” (Husserl 2001b, 45<sup>4</sup>). Consequently, Husserl’s anti-psychologism does not commit him to endorse the conclusions drawn by the Neo-Kantians’ critique. While the Neo-Kantian arguments were meant to clear the analysis of

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<sup>4</sup> “Die Psychologie an der Fundierung der Logik mitbeteiligt“ (I corrected Findlay’s ambiguous translation). All the quotes from the *Logical Investigations* refer to the first edition, unless specified otherwise. When available, Findlay’s English translation is mentioned, although often modified to stick as much as possible to the German.

knowledge from empirical psychology and establish Kant's critical method of transcendental deduction as the only possible way to provide the foundations of theory of knowledge, Husserl's *Prolegomena* set the grounds for an analysis of the ideal meanings (*Bedeutungen*) or "significational formations." The knowledge of logical truths can be achieved on the basis of this logical analysis; consequently, psychology does not need to be eradicated, and psychological descriptions can legitimately be considered useful to the theory of knowledge.

### 1.2. Anti-psychologism and descriptive psychology: Brentano and Stumpf

Husserl's reformulation of anti-psychologism is then perfectly compatible with a particular kind of psychology that he discovered as he started to follow Brentano's lectures in Vienna in the 1880's. Brentano's psychology proposes a treatment of mental or psychic phenomena (*psychische Phänomene*) that stresses their irreducibility to physical phenomena and emphasizes the need for a scientific method tailored to their specificity (Brentano 1995, 68). His descriptive approach to psychology is therefore explicitly opposed to genetic explanations modeled on the scientific treatment of physical phenomena: whereas genetic psychology studies the development of mental phenomena and their causal relations on the basis of inductive generalizations, descriptive psychology (later called "psychognosy") analyses the components that constitute the unity of mental phenomena and establishes the exact laws which account for the necessary relations between these phenomena (Brentano 2012, 3). Accordingly, Windelband's attack against genetic method (Windelband 1884) and his arguments in defense of Kant's critical method against the rise of psychologism fall short of invalidating the particular kind of psychology developed by Brentano.

Husserl's understanding of the philosophical stakes of psychology was strongly indebted to the works of Brentano and his followers, and his particular position within the



*Psychologismus-Streit* can be traced back to the influential analysis of that debate provided by another student of Brentano, Carl Stumpf, with whom Husserl studied in Halle and to whom the *Prolegomena* is dedicated. In an extended article published in 1891, “Psychology and Theory of Knowledge,” Stumpf engaged in a subtle and original critique of the Neo-Kantians’ anti-psychologism, acknowledging that psychological laws cannot provide the foundations of knowledge, but maintaining that psychology can nevertheless bring a substantial and essential contribution to the theory of knowledge. Stumpf agrees with the critique that necessary truths cannot be reduced to contingent facts or empirical processes; however, he stresses that this anti-psychologistic claim is compatible with a softer interpretation of psychologism, which maintains that psychology is complementary and indispensable to a theory of knowledge (Stumpf 1891, 503). However, their tasks must be distinguished: while theory of knowledge aims at identifying and classifying the most general truths that secure the immediate and self-evident foundations of knowledge, psychology describes the genesis of our concepts and traces them back to their origin.

## 2. Psychology and theory of knowledge

### 2.1. Phenomenology as descriptive theory of knowledge

In many different respects Stumpf’s analysis of the complementarity between psychology and theory of knowledge can be read as setting up the framework for Husserl’s own philosophical inquiry. When Husserl characterizes his philosophical project as a “purely descriptive phenomenology of the experiences of thinking and knowing” (Husserl 2001b, 166), his aim is to reconcile descriptive psychology with a theory of knowledge, so as to address the limitations of their conflictual claims and overcome their respective weaknesses. Phenomenology shares a

descriptive purpose with the kind of psychology developed by Brentano and taken up by his students. Both begin with an analysis of intentional acts and take conscious mental phenomena as the ultimate ground and starting point of their descriptions. However, insofar as these descriptions account for the intentional relations that tie together the objects and the specific acts of thinking or knowing directed upon them, phenomenology can legitimately claim the title of theory of knowledge, and define its task as a rigorous description of the structures of experience that brings “the logical concepts and laws” upon which thought and knowledge rest “to epistemological clarity and definiteness” (Husserl 2001b, 168).

Yet the phenomenological description of cognitive experiences resists the psychological approach to mental phenomena on a fundamental point, which should have prevented the kind of misinterpretation Husserl had to fight against later. In Brentano’s psychology, intentionality provides a criterion of differentiation between mental and physical phenomena: mental phenomena are intentional only insofar as they are directed toward an object in a specific way that cannot be described as a physical relation between two different things. Claiming that all mental phenomena are intentional and that only mental phenomena are intentional is first and foremost for Brentano a way of stressing their irreducibility to physical phenomena.

Consequently, Brentano’s descriptive psychology cannot be purely descriptive in the sense intended by Husserl, nor does it meet the requirements for phenomenology. The description of intentional acts in Brentano is ontologically committed to the distinction between two opposite kinds of phenomena, mental and physical, which characterizes psychology as an empirical project dedicated to the examination of a specific domain of reality. On the contrary, pure descriptions require a radical absence of presuppositions that Husserl introduces in 1901 as the fundamental principle of phenomenology, complementary to its metaphysical neutrality. Such descriptions do not need to rely upon any prior ontological distinction between phenomena, whether mental or physical. Disregarding psychology’s exclusive focus upon

mental phenomena, phenomenology refuses to identify as a regional science targeting a specific domain of objects or phenomena that can be *a priori* delimited: rather, phenomenology consists in the description of phenomena in general, without presupposing any ontological region to which it would be essentially bounded and committed as a specific kind of science. Accordingly, the anti-psychologistic claims developed in the *Prolegomena* remain compatible with the pure (non-empirical) descriptions of the intentional structures of cognitive experiences, allowing Husserl to present phenomenology as a brand new and original philosophical method clarifying logical concepts and providing rigorous foundations for the theory of knowledge.

In the third *Logical Investigation*, Husserl goes as far as to unearth a new kind of *a priori* law, which accounts for the relations between intuitive contents without considering their relation to consciousness or treating them as psychological contents. Against Brentanian inspired philosophers like Meinong who claim that the connections established between sensible contents must be understood as subjective “products [*Erzeugnisse*]” (Meinong 1969, 292), Husserl contests that the necessary relations that tie together dependent (*abhängig*) intuitive contents, such as spatial extension and color, or the quality and intensity of a tone, ultimately rely on psychological facts: “[t]his is no mere empirical fact, but an *a priori* necessity, grounded in pure essence” (Edmund Husserl 2001c, 8). The necessity that characterizes such relations depends upon material *a priori* essential laws, valid for any intuitive content regardless of their reference to consciousness or to their mode of presentation (Husserl 2001c, 10).

## 2.2. The phenomenological notion of experience

But how is it possible for phenomenological descriptions to not make any ontological commitment or metaphysical claim regarding the nature of mental phenomena? What do

phenomenological analyses describe if not mental phenomena? Husserl answers this question in the first sections of the introduction to the second volume of the *Logical Investigations*, in which his definition of phenomenology integrates a new concept of experience that deeply impacts the meaning of descriptive analysis. The cognitive experiences that phenomenology describes are characterized as specific kinds of so-called lived experiences (*Erlebnisse*, in particular *Denk- und Erkenntniserlebnisse*): experiences in that particular sense only bear the property of being lived through, that is, of being immediately present to consciousness in a way that does not require their *a priori* characterization as mental or extra-mental phenomena.

The word *Erlebnis* is a linguistic creation of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century; it began to spread in German literature in the last quarter of the century after Dilthey's works on poetry (Dilthey 1906)<sup>5</sup>, and became widely used in psychological studies, though in a non-technical way<sup>6</sup>. In a similar fashion to the way he used the term "phenomenology," Husserl borrowed the word *Erlebnis* from this loose and widespread psychological use and turned it into a technical concept upon which his phenomenological approach hinges. Understanding experiences as *Erlebnisse* allows Husserl both to avoid the metaphysical pitfalls of descriptive psychology and to address the limitations of the Neo-Kantian conception of the epistemic role of experience, understood as experience in the sense of *Erfahrung*. Unlike the concept of *Erfahrung*, which constituted the starting point of Kant's transcendental inquiry on the conditions of the possibility of knowledge and the core of the Neo-Kantian theories of knowledge since Hermann Cohen's seminal work on Kant's theory of experience (Cohen 1871), experiences, as *Erlebnisse*, are essentially determined by their occurrence in one's conscious life. Bringing the analysis of experience back to its originary occurrence in consciousness constitutes a strong anti-Kantian

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<sup>5</sup> See Dilthey's essay on Goethe, which dates back to 1877.

<sup>6</sup> See for instance Brentano, Mach, or Wundt, who use the term in a very broad - and mainly critical - way, pointing out its lack of scientific accuracy (Brentano 1995; Mach 1914; Wundt 1897).

gesture on Husserl's behalf, patently – if not provocatively - dismissing the criticisms that Natorp presented against the notion of *Erlebnis* (mainly against Ernst Mach's non-technical use of the term in the *Analysis of Sensations*) in an 1887 article (which Husserl knew well, as it was recommended to him by Natorp himself).<sup>7</sup>

Experiences in the phenomenological sense are first and foremost to be understood in connection to the verb *erleben* from which their meaning derives: they are what they are only insofar as they are experienced or lived through. That which consciousness experiences [*erlebt*], Husserl writes, are its experiences [*seine Erlebnisse*]: “there is no difference between the experienced or conscious content and the experience itself” (Husserl 2001c, 85).<sup>9</sup> Experiences in this sense account for the *life (Leben)* of consciousness – its very movement and temporal unfolding. This is why, while Husserl continues to occasionally use the concept of *Erfahrung* in the *LI* to describe, for instance, the reflexive relation to conscious contents that scientific psychologists draw upon, he insists that this kind of inner experience (*innere Erfahrung*) is only secondary and derived, always presupposing the domain of *Erlebnisse* as the originary form of experiencing that constitutes the ground of a purely descriptive analysis of cognitive experiences.

This intimate connection between experiences and consciousness demands that the methods of theory of knowledge be reshaped: saying that the conscious content of an experience and the experience itself are indiscernible means that experiences are by definition immediately accessible to first-person description, and so opened to a descriptive mode of investigation that no longer involves the Kantian question regarding the conditions of possibility of knowledge. Instead of requiring a transcendental deduction of the categories, understood as the most general

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<sup>7</sup> See his letter to Husserl from March 8, 1897 (Husserl 1994, 49)

<sup>9</sup> “Was [...] das Bewußtsein erlebt, eben sein Erlebnis. Zwischen dem erlebten oder bewußten Inhalt und dem Erlebnis selbst ist kein Unterschied” (Natorp 1887, 142-143).

conditions of possibility of experience, the elucidation of knowledge must consequently consist in a phenomenological analysis of cognitive experiences that describes how these concepts and categories come to be dynamically integrated in the unfolding of conscious life – i.e. in the flow of *Erlebnisse*.

### 3. Intentionality: from psychology to the theory of meaning

#### 3.1. The phenomenological reassessment of intentionality

Despite his rejection of Brentano's distinction between mental and physical phenomena, Husserl stresses that Brentano's description of the intentional relation remains nevertheless extremely valuable for phenomenological purposes: Brentano's identification of intentional acts provides a "sharply defined class of experiences," which do not merely consist in sensory contents but involve the representation or reference to objects, and which are fundamental for normative sciences, since they provide "the concrete basis for abstracting the fundamental notions that function systematically in logic" (Husserl 2001c, 95). Intentionality must consequently be rescued from an all-too narrow psychological interpretation and can be taken as the basis for a description of the structures of lived experiences, i.e. of their various and specific ways of being oriented towards their object. With that respect, intentionality consists less in an essential property of mental (as opposed to physical) states than it expresses a structural feature of lived experiences, thanks to which they can be described as consisting in various modes of relation to some object.

Husserl's reassessment of intentionality paves the way for a new kind of theory of knowledge, fit to address Stumpf's dissatisfaction with both psychologism and Neo-

Kantianism. Phenomenological analyses provide effective descriptions of the intentional structures of lived experiences thanks to which cognitive relations to objects of knowledge are achieved and they do no longer necessitate the indirect method of (transcendental) deduction that (Neo-) Kantian theories of knowledge draw on. Phenomenological description, however, does not analyze lived experiences in terms of “mental in-existence” or “immanent objectivity.” Husserl refuses to treat intentionality as a “sort of box-within-box structure”<sup>11</sup> enclosing objects, as mental contents, within consciousness. Instead, he analyzes it as a structural feature of conscious acts that accounts for their orientation towards an object, regardless of whether this object exists, is fictional, or ideal. This objective relation is precisely that which determines the specificity of every act of consciousness.

Intentionality is a relation in a quite unique and unusual sense, which cannot be interpreted as an external relation logically presupposing the independent existence of the terms of the relation. The intentionality of *experiencing*, insofar as it applies to experience understood as *Erlebnis* and not merely as *Erfahrung*, does not consist in a relation between a subject and a *Gegen-stand*, i.e. an ‘object’ characterized as *standing in front* of a subject. Instead of describing intentional experience as an encounter between consciousness and some objects, Husserl stresses that it constitutes the very essence of consciousness, which is always essentially consciousness *of* something, as he will famously claim much later:

There are [...] not two things present in experience, we do not experience the object and beside it the intentional experience directed upon it, there are not even two things present in the sense of a part and a whole which contains it: only one thing is present, the intentional experience [*das intentionale Erlebnis*], whose essential descriptive character is the intention [*Intention*] in question. (2001c, 98)

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<sup>11</sup> A detailed criticism and rejection of these phrases is presented in §11 of the fifth *Logical Investigation* (2001c, 98-100).

To describe lived-experiences is to describe them as intending objects in various ways or fashions. One might wonder, however, how we are to understand this intention if phenomenology forbids applying a psychological framework to the analysis of lived experiences. How can such intentions be described if phenomenology refuses that intentionality be primarily modelled on the description of psychological relations? Such questions bring us back to the difficulties the first readers of the *Logical Investigations* had: how the description of the intentional structures of consciousness could be compatible with the critique of psychologism formulated in the *Prolegomena*.

### 3.2. The semantic paradigm for intentionality

This difficulty is addressed by Husserl immediately after his rejection of psychologism when introducing a new model of analysis for intentionality based upon the phenomenological theory of meaning developed in the first *Logical Investigation*. This is precisely why the analysis of meaning constitutes Husserl's first investigation in this second volume: it sets a non-psychological framework for the description of the intentional relations that give their structure to lived experiences. Husserl insists that linguistic discussions are indispensable to establish "the true *objects* of logical research" and necessary to the building of pure logic, which aims at giving "firm clarity to notions and laws on which the objective meaning and theoretical unity of all knowledge is dependent" (Husserl 2001b, 165-166). The judgments upon which knowledge in general, and scientific knowledge in particular, are based, "could barely arise without verbal expression" (Husserl 2001b, 167). Objective knowledge entirely rests upon the self-evidence (*Evidenz*) experienced in concrete lived experiences of thinking or knowing (*Denkerlebnisse* or *Erkenntniserlebnisse*), which in turn depends "on the verbal meaning which come alive [*lebendig*] in the actual passing of the judgment" (Husserl 2001b, 167).



Consequently, theory of knowledge demands first and foremost that the constitution of knowledge be understood in connection with the production of meaning:

The objects which pure logic seeks to examine are, in the first instance, therefore given to it in grammatical clothing. Or, more precisely, they come before us embedded in concrete psychic lived-experiences [*konkreten psychischen Erlebnissen*] which further function either as the meaning-intention or meaning fulfilment of certain verbal expressions [...] and forming a *phenomenological unity* with such expressions. (Husserl 2001b, 167)

The analysis of the signification formations in which knowledge originates requires a phenomenological theory of meaning that describes the experiences in which meanings come alive. Such experiences provide the originary ground upon which intentionality arises and which constitutes consciousness' orientation towards its objects. Meanings, considered as *lebendige* (alive), involve the performance of an act that brings consciousness to life by making it intentional: the meaning-intention (*Bedeutungsintention*) thanks to which something is meant or aimed at. Linguistic expressions make this intentional dimension of consciousness manifest, as they are able to direct interest away from themselves towards their sense and point to the latter in an original, non-indicative, way (Husserl 2001b, 191). However, linguistic expressions are able to convey some meaning and become meaningful only insofar as they are "intimately unified" with meaning-intentions, which take up the task of conferring meaning to expressions, and must be characterized as meaning-conferring acts (*Bedeutungsverleihende Akte*): wherever something is meant, a particular object is intended or aimed at thanks to such intentions, which orient consciousness towards this object and makes it intentional (Husserl 2001b, 192).

The "aboutness" that characterizes consciousness as intentional, as always oriented in various fashions towards such or such object, can then be described through an analysis of the

meaning-intentions that confer meaning to linguistic expressions, thanks to which “the relation to [the] expressed object is constituted [*konstituiert*]” (Husserl 2001b, 194). The capacity to refer to something in a semantic fashion through signitive acts such as meaning-intentions initiates an original relation between consciousness and its objects that is not reducible to causal or physical relations and constitutes the paradigm for intentional relations, allowing Husserl to bring the analysis of intentionality back to a semantic rather than psychological ground (Husserl 2001b, 194).

However, if meaning-intentions deliver the originary format of intentionality and lay the ground for the phenomenological description of intentional relations, their analysis cannot fully exhaust the description of the concrete phenomenon of the sense-informed expression. Meaning-intentions (*Bedeutungsintentionen*) are, by themselves, nothing more than mere intentions (*bloße Meinungen*), which do not go any further than aiming at something that remains always possibly beyond their reach, something that they fall short of making present without the help of some complementary acts of intuition (*Anschauung*). Consequently, such intuitions play an essential role within the meaning-constitution process, as they are necessary to bring the expression to intuitive fulness (*anschauliche Fülle*) and realize the relation to the object by making it appear as actually present (*aktuell gegenwärtig*), or at least present to our imagination (*vergegenwärtig*) (for instance in fantasy). Such acts of intuition are complementary to meaning-intentions, which must be characterized as fundamentally empty (*leer*) and in want of the kind of completion or intuitive fulfilment (*Erfüllung*) that can only present them with the object meant or aimed at. With that respect, intuitions must be described as meaning-fulfilling acts (*bedeutungerfüllende Akte*) so as to account for their participation in the meaning-constitution process. Husserl describes the relation between meaning-conferring and meaning-fulfilling acts as a logical relation between two aspects of the constitution of

meaning that are merged together in an original way in experience, so that intuitions become phenomenally one with the meaning-intentions they come to fulfil (Husserl 2001b, 192).

With the introduction of meaning-fulfilling acts, Husserl initiates a fundamental development of his analysis of intentionality: the emptiness of meaning-intentions and the fullness of intuitive fulfillments oppose them as two irreducible forms of intentionality that cannot be reduced to a single model of the intentional relation nor derived from a common and primary type of intentionality. Their complementarity is nevertheless so fundamental in the *Logical Investigations* that Husserl presents it as crucial to the project of a phenomenological theory of knowledge (see Benoist 2001). It is essential to meaning-intentions, as meaning-conferring acts, that they can be, but do not necessarily come to be, fulfilled; likewise, it is essential to intuitions, as meaning-fulfilling acts, that they relate to meaning-intentions in such a way that they can, but do not necessarily actually fulfil them (Husserl 2001b, 199-200).

#### 4. Knowledge and Fulfillment

##### 4.1. Self-evidence and categorial intuition

Although Husserl insists that intuitive fullness is not required for the expression to have meaning (*sinnvoll*), intuitions are nevertheless necessary for the accomplishment of knowledge: only they can confer on cognitive experiences the highest degree of epistemic validation by bringing the meanings expressed in the propositions constitutive of knowledge to self-evidence. The notion of fulfillment – one of the only technical notions introduced in the *Logical Investigations* that Husserl does not borrow from his predecessors – becomes the key-concept for the phenomenology of knowledge. Indeed, knowledge comes to be experienced and performed as a kind of fulfillment in which the object is given to us in a way that fits perfectly

with the propositional format of the meaning-intention, from which self-evidence necessarily results.

Knowledge occurs when meaning and intuition are so perfectly in proportion that the unity of fulfillment experienced when they come into relation with each other constitutes the object as given. The dynamic analysis of the relationships of fulfillment points to the ideal goal that knowledge aims at, a goal in which any increase of fulfillment terminates, and where the complete and entire intention has reached its ultimate and final fulfillment. When this goal is reached, Husserl writes, “the intuitive substance of this last fulfilment is the absolute sum of possible fullness” so that the object is both meant and intuited just as it is (Husserl 2001c, 260).

According to Husserl, a phenomenological description of the dynamics of fulfillment encapsulates the ideal form of adequation and self-evidence that truth aims at. Truth is first and foremost the synthesis of fulfillment that brings meaning and intuition to adequation when one experiences “*the full agreement* of what is meant with what is *given as such*” (Husserl 2001c, 263).

Yet this phenomenological conception of truth leaves a fundamental question unanswered regarding the kind of compatibility between intuition and meaning that the synthesis of fulfillment presupposes. Understanding how such syntheses are possible seems obvious enough as long as their description sticks to basic cases such as the fulfillment of nominal meanings, which can be fulfilled through the intuitive recognition or identification of the object that such or such noun refers to. Nouns or adjectives constitute grammatical parts of linguistic expressions that do not raise any specific problem with respect to the question regarding the modalities of their fulfilment since they find some non-controversial corresponding content in intuition. The expression “white paper” expresses precisely and adequately my perception of a white sheet of paper left on the desk in front of me since the adjectival and nominal meanings coincide in the synthesis of fulfillment with the partial

percepts that relate on the one hand to the whiteness of the object and on the other hand to the object itself.

However, the paradigm of a mere coincidence (*bloße Deckung*) with the “part-percept” is fundamentally flawed and insufficient to provide a fair and satisfactory description of the cognitive experience that intuitive fulfilment entails. As the perception of the *white* sheet of paper in front of me gives rise to the knowledge *that* the paper is white, the paper comes to be known *as* white, establishing a logical connection between the whiteness and the paper that the relation between individual meanings and corresponding percepts leaves necessarily unexplained. In such cases indeed, “the intention of the adjective white only partially coincides with the colour-aspect of the apparent object” (Husserl 2001c, 273). Although perception succeeds in fulfilling the whole meaning-intention, the intention includes a surplus (*Überschuß*) of meaning that no corresponding partial percept can match up with, “a form [*Form*] which finds nothing in the appearance itself to confirm it” (Husserl 2001c, 275).

The question then bears on the phenomenological legitimacy of extending the analysis of fulfilment beyond the example of nominal meanings, which Husserl privileged so far, to more sophisticated cases, involving not only a noun but an entire statement that perception can either make true or refute. How are we to understand that perception fulfills not only the individual meanings that constitute a statement’s matter (*Materie*), but also the “aspects of meaning that that make up propositional form as such,” i.e. the categorial forms that articulate the complexity of propositions and do not find the straightforward corresponding data in perception? Husserl writes, “I can see colour but not *being*-coloured” (Husserl 2001c, 277). How in such cases is it possible to describe the relation between the sensuous contents provided by intuition and the categorial forms, such as the *being*-coloured itself, which structure propositional knowledge so as to account for the fulfilment of full-fledged propositions?

Husserl stresses that this question about the material and formal aspects of meanings that perception fulfills necessarily points to the fundamental distinction that needs to be established between two irreducible but connected kinds of perception. If “seeing” does not only apply to the aspects of perception that fulfill material parts of propositional meanings, and if perception is capable of adequately verifying propositional meanings, then it is necessary to extend our understanding of perception beyond the limits of sensuous intuition so as to account for the fact that categorially structured meanings also find fulfillment and confirm themselves in perception (Husserl 2001c, 280).

It is the function of categorial acts to enable and sustain the fulfillment of propositionally structured meaning-intentions, allowing the object to be intuited or perceived categorially, i.e. in a way that includes its categorial formation (*Formung*); in such cases, Husserl claims, the object is set before our very eyes “*in its categorial structure*” (Husserl 2001c, 280). We consequently need to acknowledge, beside sensuous perception, the phenomenological legitimacy of a super-sensuous or categorial concept of perception. Categorial acts must be characterized as founded acts, in opposition to the straightforward character of sensuous perception, which presents its objects “in one blow,” and without requiring the apparatus of founding and founded acts (Husserl 2001c, 283). In contrast, categorial perception requires the contribution of a founding act of intuition and is always built upon sensible perception (Husserl 2001c, 288).

#### 4.2. Sensibility and Understanding

In the lectures on theory of knowledge that he teaches in Göttingen immediately after the publication of the first edition of the *Logical Investigations* during the winter semester 1902-03, Husserl stresses the originality of his conception of categorial acts in opposition to Kant’s

analysis of the relations between intuitions and concepts (Husserl 2001a, in particular chapters 9 and 10). Husserl's unprecedented extension (*Erweiterung*) of perception to categorial acts allows for a phenomenological reinterpretation of Kant's distinction between sensibility and understanding, which gives its title to the second part of Husserl's sixth *Logical investigation* and aims at avoiding the "psychologism of mental faculties as sources of knowledge" that "most Kantianizing philosophers" fall into (Husserl 2001b, 316). Instead of grounding this distinction on a division between the respective domains of competence attached to two distinct faculties, Husserl's phenomenological theory of knowledge describes these competences as involving two different layers of perception, which in turn entail two irreducible kinds of acts: sensible acts providing straightforward access to the object and material aspects of the perceived on the one hand, and categorial acts that build the formal structure and complexity of the perceived on the other (Husserl 2001a, 143). However, in both cases perception, whether sensuous or categorial, occurs as an act of fulfillment that results from the collaboration between meaning-intentions and fulfilling intuitions, which can be described as a correlation between the signitive and intuitive modes of intentionality. Husserl's theory of categorial intuition concludes his inquiry in the *Logical Investigations* by justifying the legitimacy of a phenomenological theory of knowledge that can account for the variety of cognitive accomplishments through a description of our intentional lived experiences.

This original theory of knowledge is maybe less a response to Kant than to the Neo-Kantians and their uptake of Kant's epistemological project – a response which strikingly matches the requirements formulated in Stumpf's attempt to reconcile psychology and theory of knowledge (Stumpf 1891). Faithful to a version of empiricism inherited from Brentano, Stumpf undertakes to rescue the theory of knowledge from the transcendental deduction by articulating it as a description of experience on the basis of which the distinctions between matter and form or sensibility and understanding could be recast (Stumpf 1891, 481). While the

second part of the sixth *Logical Investigation* addressed this very objective more precisely than Stumpf, Husserl's phenomenological method allowed him to revisit and revise these distinctions through a strictly descriptive philosophical analysis, which Stumpf's commitment to psychology prevented him from adopting. This phenomenological theory of knowledge renews Stumpf's own attempt to delimit and follow a middle way between psychologism and neo-Kantianism. With categorial intuition, Husserl ultimately justifies a descriptive account of knowledge that avoids both the neo-Kantians' critical stance and the psychologistic reductionism.

## 5. The shortcomings of the first edition

### 5.1. A non-egological theory of consciousness

The irreducibility of phenomenological description famously led Husserl in the first edition of the *Logical Investigations* to deny that lived experiences are to be characterized as egological, i.e. presupposing an experiencing subject as a necessary structure of intentional *Erlebnisse*. This non-egological claim (Gurwitsch 1941)<sup>13</sup> logically follows from Husserl's rejection of the Neo-Kantian conception of experience: the purely descriptive approach to lived-experiences precedes its egological interpretations, refusing to bring experience back to its subjective conditions of possibility and identify the ego as the necessary "center of reference for all conscious contents" (Natorp 1888, 11). There is no necessity, as far as Husserl can see in 1901, to include the pure ego as a constitutive structure of experience in its phenomenological description as long as description sticks to the flux of experiences without projecting any philosophical conceptuality onto it. The unity of experience relies on syntheses which do not

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<sup>13</sup> See also Dan Zahavi's contribution in this volume.



require the presence of a pure identical ego-pole that all conscious experiences should involve (Husserl 2001c, 13-16, 84-86, 284; Sartre 2004, 4). Accordingly, the only ego that can be found in the description of experience is the empirical ego, along with “its empirical relations to its own experiences” (Husserl 2001c, 92-93).

This explicitly non-transcendental aspect of the phenomenology originally presented in the *Logical Investigations* was quickly at odds with the transcendental reinterpretation of the phenomenological method Husserl started to develop after 1903. The internal tensions caused by the non-egological claims initially formulated in the fifth *Logical Investigation* were so deep that Husserl eventually renounced to solve them as he was trying to rewrite these sections for the second edition of the text in order to make them compatible with the transcendental view he was now championing. This second edition eventually came out in 1913, the very same year Husserl published his handbook of transcendental phenomenology, the introductory volume of the *Ideas for a Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy*, in which he officialized the turn that brought phenomenology to integrate the pure ego into its account of the intentional structures of consciousness. How then can we understand the gap between the two editions of the text with respect to the question about the subjective dimension of conscious experience? And how can we account for the transformations that led Husserl to reinterpret experience in such a radically opposed way?

## 5.2. The phenomenological meaning of “I”

One possible way of addressing this question consists in showing that the opposition may not be as radical as it seems. Indeed, it must be noted that the phenomenology of the *Logical Investigations* does not completely disregard the question of the ego but engages in an original approach that analyzes the ego in quite different terms. It would not be right to say that the

reader of the *Logical Investigations* has to wait until the aforementioned analyses of the fifth *Investigation* to hear about the phenomenological difficulties that the notion of the ego raises. The question of the ego is not completely absent from the beginning of the *Logical Investigations*, although Husserl – maybe because of his aversion for “corrupt forms of ego-metaphysics” (Husserl 2001c, 353) – first raises it in an unusual form, making it not easy to recognize. Faithful to prioritizing the analysis of meaning-intention in his study of intentionality, Husserl suggests as early as in the First *Investigation* to treat the ego on a strictly semantic ground, as a certain type of meaning that, correlatively, requires a specific kind of fulfillment. The phenomenological problems that the ego raises need to be analyzed on the basis of a foundational question that leaves aside its metaphysical implications: if the experience of the ego derives first and foremost from the use of a particular meaning, then we only need to concern ourselves with answering the following question: “which specific kind of meaning allows the ego to become the object of an intention and of a correlative fulfilling intuition?”

Husserl addresses this question in the third chapter of his first *Investigation* when he comes to analyze the fluctuations in meaning. The first-person pronoun, thanks to which we refer to ourselves as the intending subject involved in each of our meaning-intentions, belongs to the class of the “essentially occasional expressions” along with other indexical expressions such as “here,” “now,” or the demonstrative “this” (Husserl 2001b, 218-220).

The characterization of the first-person pronoun as an essentially occasional expression bears an immediate consequence to the specific mode of fulfillment that it requires: the meaning-intention involved in the utterance of the first-person pronoun is immediately fulfilled, insofar as its sense refers to a context in which we cannot but be involved. Accordingly, the utterance of “I” gives rise to a meaning-intention that is necessarily always fulfilled, bringing the notion of fulfillment interestingly to its limit (Derrida 2011, 81-82; Renaudie 2016, 83; Husserl 2001b, 219)

However, Husserl's analysis of the specificity of such essentially occasional expressions does not go much further in the first *Investigation* since Husserl limits himself to showing that their irreducibility to objective meaning does not represent a threat for his general theory of meaning as "ideal unities," likely to bring back a semantic version of psychologism. This is the reason why Husserl ends up concluding that "ideally speaking, each subjective expression is replaceable by an objective expression" (Husserl 2001b, 223).

Husserl soon came to recognize the violence of the *tour de force* (*Gewaltstreich*) involved in his resolution of the problem raised by indexical meanings, and overtly criticized this deeply unsatisfying analysis in the preface to the second edition of the *Prolegomena* (Husserl 2001b, 7). In 1913, it is clear to Husserl that the extent of the difficulties with his analysis of essentially occasional expressions goes much further than he initially thought in 1901, and that all empirical predications must fall under this category. The objective treatment of such expressions does not do justice to their phenomenological specificity nor highlight the essential connections that tie them together, although some of Husserl's analyses point in this direction when he asks the question regarding the particular experience of fulfillment that such expressions entail. Husserl's dissatisfaction towards this aspect of his own "breakthrough work" [*Durchbruchswerk*] (Husserl, 1975, 34; Husserl 1939, 127) that had not received enough consideration as he was writing the *Logical Investigations* played a decisive, though usually unnoticed, role in the reorientation of his phenomenological research in the years following their initial publication.

This difficulty, which Husserl encountered when he was trying to set the bases for a phenomenological theory of meaning, motivated a much deeper and more complex inquiry into the various aspects of experience that the use of essentially occasional expressions encompasses. The shortcomings of his analysis of essentially occasional expressions brought Husserl to realize that the egological dimension of experience, its inseparability from the

intentional structures of experiencing, might be more decisive than he had initially thought and needed to be investigated in much greater detail. This inquiry resulted in a series of famous lectures in which Husserl explored the extremely rich experiential features attached to indexical meanings, in particular the temporal and spatial structures of experience<sup>14</sup>, which laid the ground for the in-depth analysis of egological structures later developed in the *Ideas*. These new phenomenological investigations of the experiences attached to the meaning of “now,” “here,” and “I” brought Husserl’s own attention to the weaknesses of his groundbreaking, albeit unsatisfactory work, convincing him of the necessity of a transcendental reinterpretation of his phenomenological method.

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<sup>14</sup> See the 1904-05 lecture course on the phenomenology of internal time-consciousness and the 1907 course that led to the publication of *Thing and Space* (Husserl 1964; Husserl 1997).

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