

## HUSSERL'S THEORY OF MEANING IN THE FIRST LOGICAL INVESTIGATION

It is by way of a reflection on the idea of *science* that Husserl is inevitably led to a theory of meaning in the *Logical Investigations*. According to Husserl, knowledge does not necessarily have to be expressed in the form of a sentence. Knowledge may very well have a place outside of any kind of explicit formulation, even though it is only in the form of sentences that truth "can become an abiding possession of science, a documented, ever available treasure for knowledge and advancing research" (Husserl 1970, 250).

One here recognizes a theme that is very similar to Frege's idea of knowledge as a "common treasure of thought which is transmitted from one generation to another". For Husserl as for Frege, what is at issue is to understand the type of objectivity of human thinking and its linguistic expression, an objectivity that is public and independent of the contingencies of any particular human subject.

For both Husserl and Frege, however, the type of objectivity here in question remains beyond discourse and the actuality of any utterances, even though this type of objectivity is manifest only in discourse. The problematic of both Husserl and Frege is thus centered on the *identity* of meaning which transcends different acts of stating and inscription, thus allowing various individuals to say "the same thing" and understand each other.

Husserl probably did not acquire his notion of the ideality of meaning directly from Frege, even though the German philosopher's anti-psychological critique which he targeted against the Austrian philosopher's first stage of thinking could have in fact provided a circumstance to arrive at this notion. The decisive source for Husserl's theory of ideal meaning in the *Logical Investigations* is undoubtedly Bernard Bolzano's *Wissenschaftslehre* (1837). An ideal entity with a certain form of identity which functions as the support for the objectivity of the sciences, Husserl's notion of meaning bears a direct relation to Bolzano's ideas of "representation in itself" and "proposition in itself".

However, this is not the only aspect of Husserl's theory of meaning which the First Logical Investigation presents in the service of a phenomenological elucidation of science as that body of knowledge which is expressed and preserved in meanings.

After 1896 (the year Husserl taught an intense course on Bolzano recently edited by Elisabeth Schuhmann), Husserl is a theoretician of the ideality of meaning expressed in sentences. But Husserl also is and remains a psychologist who issues from the school of Brentano and who thinks in terms of "intentionality" – acts by which consciousness relates to (or at least intimates) its objects. In the preface to the first edition of 1901 of the second volume of the *Logical Investigations*, phenomenology is defined as a descriptive psychology. But as a descriptive psychology, it is the result of a synthesis of Bolzano's anti-psychological objectivism (which assisted Husserl in discovering the ideality of thought) and Brentanian psychology as a philosophy of consciousness. Phenomenology is the ideality of meaning plus intentionality.

The synthetic character of Husserl's phenomenology is nowhere more clearly delineated than in the first stage of the construction of the *Logical Investigations*: the theory of meaning. In effect, Husserl's theory of meaning, as it is developed in the First Logical Investigation, is marked by a profound duality. On the one hand, the ideality of meaning takes on a prominent role and, in fact, even serves as the prototypical possibility for ideal objects in general. On the other hand, the fundamentally intentional character of meaning is brought to light by showing how meaning is inscribed in acts of consciousness, namely, meaning acts. This duality creates a number of tensions, but it should also be seen as responsible in large measure for the phenomenological character of the analysis itself. Between two styles of analysis and problems, each of a different origin, phenomenology attempts to blaze a new and third path – one on which intentionality and semantic objectivity would become compatible.

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In light of the general aim of the *Logical Investigations* (the phenomenological elucidation of the conditions for what is called "science"), the First Logical Investigation will undertake an investigation of a basic element of science: expression (*Ausdruck*).

What exactly is an expression?

Husserl begins by distinguishing expressive signs from non-expressive signs. One could not claim that all signs "express" something. For example, a simple mnemonic sign like a knot in a handkerchief does not

"express" anything. By pointing to a past experience that we are to remember, a knot in a handkerchief simply *indicates*. In itself, such a sign does not "express" anything and does not say anything about the experience in question or about anything else.

One must therefore clearly distinguish what gives rise to an indication, the stimulus by which consciousness receives an orientation towards something existing by means of another existing thing (for example, the sign that I perceive), from what properly belongs to an expression. If expressions are themselves signs (*Zeichen*), the relation which obtains between expressions and their meaning is not one of indication (*Anzeichen*). Meaning is not something belonging to an existing object, of which an expression would have the function of calling to mind a past, present, or future existence. What is, then, the status of expression?

One should note that Husserl does not present this theoretical object as if it constituted his own invention or a point of view properly his own. For Husserl, it is more a question of beginning from a distinction that is a common one, in order to delineate its significance by means of phenomenological description.

What, indeed, do we commonly discern as belonging to an expression?

On the one hand, we recognize the physical "face" of an expression (sounds, written signs) and, on the other hand, we recognize a "psychic experience" (*Erlebnis*), which is associated with signs (in the sense of a psychological association). It is this "psychic experience" which is supposed to constitute the "meaning" of the expression in question.

Husserl's problem is thus to give this distinction a rigorous status by displacing the implicit metaphysics which is contained in this distinction *in terms of description*. In effect, by following Husserl's own exposition of the 'naïve' theory of expression, as we find it inscribed in the ordinary use of language, we recognize that this is nothing other than the "*idea*" theory of meaning. According to this theory, as had been argued by Locke, meaning amounts to the idea associated with the word. By contrast, Husserl will attempt to demonstrate phenomenologically that such a theory is false. By means of a phenomenological description, the terms in which this theory is inherited ("physical face of the sign" and "meaning") will undergo a profound transformation.

To be sure, if we focus exclusively on the situation where discourse (*Rede*, which constitutes the proper level of what Husserl calls "expression") is used in its most common function, namely, in its communicative function, it is easy to understand what sustains the "naïve theory" of expression. As a basic point of fact, it would seem that discourse is essentially geared towards making something known to someone other than



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