

The Germ of Transcendentalism in the Logical Investigations: the Knowability of States of Affairs



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- 1 Introduction
- 2 The origin of correlationism
- 3 Husserl's correlationism
- 4 Possibilities of evidence
- 5 A whole different story ?

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The Origin of Transcendental Idealism

- It is well known that Husserl takes a transcendental turn, some time around 1908
- The default story centres around the phenomenological reduction
- I want to focus here on Husserl's notion of truth and its correlation with possible evidence and existence
- I begin with a historical overview and then try to offer some systematic considerations about correlationism
- For the slides of this presentation, see <https://gregorboes.com/dl/2022-01-15-Paris.pdf>

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Truth and Evidence

*And what all this comes to, strictly speaking, is the following:
Truth pertains to the judgement of the person who judges correctly – [...] it pertains to the judgement of one who asserts what the person whose judgements are evident would also assert.*

Es läuft [...] auf nichts anderes hinaus [...] als darauf, daß die Wahrheit dem Urteile des richtig Urteilenden zukommt, d.h. dem Urteile dessen, der urteilt, wie derjenige darüber urteilen würde, der mit Evidenz sein Urteil fällt.

(Brentano [1930] 1974, 139)

- Husserl "artfully combines" (Simons2006, 128) Brentano's and Bolzano's theory of truth (cf. Benoist2002)

The Heritage from Brentano

- acts of evidence form the epistemological foundation
- Truth for Brentano is a question of correctness: one judges truly if one judges correctly, i.e. in the way that a competent agent would judge
- But Husserl disagrees in the theory of judgement and logic:
- Brentano tries to explain truth without objective states of affairs
- Brentano tried to explain negation in terms of two polar kinds of judgement

The Heritage from Bolzano

- the realist elements in Husserl's theory of truth are often attributed to Bolzano's influence

I shall mean by a truth in itself any proposition which states something as it is, where I leave it undetermined whether or not this proposition has in fact been thought or spoken by anybody. [...] [T]he number of blossoms that were on a certain tree last spring is a statable, if unknown, figure. Thus, the proposition which states this figure I call an objective truth, even if nobody knows it. (Bolzano [1837] 2014, § 25)

Husserl on Bolzano

a work which, with respect to the logical “doctrine of elements”, leaves far behind any systematic conception of logic that the world literature has to offer. [...] Logic as a science must be based on Bolzano’s work [...].

ein Werk, das in Sachen der logischen Elementarlehre“ alles weit zurückläßt, was die Weltliteratur an systematischen Entwürfen der Logik darbietet. [...] [A]uf Bolzanos Werk muß sich die Logik als Wissenschaft aufbauen [...]. (PPL / Hua18, 227)

- but Husserl was dissatisfied with Bolzano’s epistemology:

So sehr Bolzanos Leistung aus einem Gusse ist, so wenig kann sie [...] als endgültig abschließende angenommen werden. [...] so sind besonders empfindlich die Mängel in erkenntnistheoretischer Richtung. (PPL/Hua18, 228)

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Prolegomena

Evidently, there is [besteht] a general equivalence between the sentences “A is true” and “it is possible, that someone judges with evidence that A”

[E]videntermaßen [besteht] die allgemeine Äquivalenz zwischen den Sätzen “A ist wahr” und “es ist möglich, daß irgend jemand mit Evidenz urteilt, es sei A” (PPL/Hua18, §50)

Prolegomena ctd.

- here we also find the claim to the effect that only the "ideal possibility" of such evidence is required

What is psychologically impossible may very well be ideally possible. The solution to the generalized '3-body problem' [...] may exceed [übersteigen] any human cognitive capacity, but the problem has a solution, and the inner evidence which relates to it is therefore possible.

Was psychologisch unmöglich ist, kann ideal gesprochen sehr wohl sein. Die Auflösung des verallgemeinerten 'Problems der 3 Körper' [...] mag jede menschliche Erkenntnisfähigkeit überschreiten. Aber das Problem hat eine Auflösung, so ist eine darauf bezügliche Evidenz möglich.
(PPL/Hua18, §50)

6th Investigation

- §39 is right between the discussion of fulfilment and categorial intuition. It spells out *four* different notions of truth. Truth is:
 - 1 The *identity of the objects* that an act token emptily intends and another act token presents intuitively.
 - 2 The *identity of the content* of emptily representing and intuitively presenting act *types*.
 - 3 The *object* that fulfils the empty intention, insofar as it can be called “the true” when it is experienced as “true-making” (*wahrmachend*).
 - 4 The *correctness* of an empty representation: a sentence or an act of judgement.

6th investigation ctd.

- the possibility of fulfilment in intuitive presentation is the underlying idea *[the proposition] says, it is so, and it is in reality so. Thereby is pronounced the ideal, that is general, possibility, that such a proposition [...] could come to fulfilment.*
[der Satz] sagt, so ist es, und es ist wirklich so. Darin ist aber die ideale, also generelle Möglichkeit ausgesprochen, daß sich überhaupt ein Satz solcher Materie [...] erfüllen läßt. (LI VI, §39, 655; tr. GB)

Later forms of correlationism

- possible givenness to a multiplicity of subjects, not a single subject
- emphasis from first to third notion of truth in §39 of 6th LI
- shift from synthetic to monothetic notion of evidence
- but there is still a role for synthetic evidence in the Formal and Transcendental Logic; overall his theory of truth seems quite stable
- what changes is how he understands the notion of possibility that correlates truth and possible evidence
- can this change in correlationism tell us more about Husserl's trajectory to transcendental philosophy?

Is this notion of truth epistemic?

- note that "evidently judging that " is a form of "knowing that "
- the thesis that all truths can be known in some sense is a typical thesis of some philosophers who have defended "epistemic" notions of truth: Dummett's semantic anti-realism, Putnam's internal realism, Peirce's pragmatism, Logical empiricist verificationism
- Some interpreters place Husserl's understanding of truth in the vicinity of that tradition (e.g. Zahavi 2017)
- This raises the question: should we understand Husserl's notion of truth as "epistemic"?

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Scope

- Different notions of possibility can be said to have "different scope":
 - Everything that is legally possible is physically possible
 - Whatever is physically impossible is not legally possible (no legislation for alternative nature)

- epistemic possibility describes a state of information: something is possible "for all we know", e.g. when it hasn't been ruled out yet that the butler is the murderer
- alethic possibility describes an *objective* possibility: these can differ in scope (like practical vs. physical vs. metaphysical possibility) but they do not obviously depend on states of knowledge

A hierarchy of possibilities

- 1 Logical possibility (\diamond_L)
- 2 Ideal possibility (\diamond_I)
- 3 Real possibility (\diamond_R)
- 4 Ideally Motivated possibility (\diamond_{MI})
- 5 Factually motivated possibility (\diamond_{MF})

Ideal Possibility is not Logical Possibility

- Logical and ideal possibility are sometimes identified
- But I take logical possibility to be only constrained by formal essences, and ideal possibility to be constrained by formal and material essences

Ideal Possibility: the problem of non-actual possibilities

- we have already seen that Husserl sometimes speaks of a correlation between truth and ideal possibility of evidence

The opposing talk of "real" possibility in contrast with our ideal (free) possibility has the concern, that reality in the proper, substantial-causal sense becomes irrelevant [...]. While realities, probabilities, real possibilities etc. demandthetic intuition, ideal possibility is content with mere phantasy.

die gegensätzliche Rede von "realer" Möglichkeit gegenüber unserer idealen (freien) Möglichkeit hat das Bedenken, dass es auf Realität im eigentliche, substanzial-kausalen Sinn bei der ersteren gar nicht ankommt. [...] Während Wirklichkeiten, Wahrscheinlichkeiten, reale Möglichkeiten u. dgl. setzende Anschauungen fordern, die gar nicht ohne weiteres in unserer Freiheit stehen, genügt für die ideale Möglichkeit überall die bloße Phantasie. (Hua20-1, §48, 178ff.; tr. GB)

- Call this as **the problem of non-actuality**

Motivated Possibility

- One way in which Husserl tries to restrict the relevant possibilities of evidence is by demanding that there is some positive justification for a possibility to obtain

The possibility of being experienced never designates an empty logical possibility, but instead one motivated in an experiential connection. (Ideas I, §47)

Factually Motivated Possibility

- here we need to disambiguate again. *Factually* motivated possibilities are those for which some *actual* evidence could speak (\diamond_{MF})
- I think this is the understanding of motivated possibility that Husserl actual relies on. This is especially visible in his attempted proof of transcendental idealism (Hua 36)
- On this notion of possibility, truth and the state of the world directly depends on our *actual* knowledge about it. It is clearly an idealist thesis.

Factually Motivated possibility: the possibility of error

- But this understanding of correlationism has problems. Take the possibility of error: if I believe that the Queen is in Windsor Castle, seeing her in the flesh in Windsor Castle is a motivated possibility. But if the Queen is in Buckingham palace, what happens with the correlation between a true proposition and a motivated possibility?
 - Another diagnosis of what goes wrong can be made in terms of scope and flavour of possibility.
 - We were looking for a possibility with narrower scope. But \diamond_{MF} describes epistemic possibility, not alethic possibility
 - The problem from error shows that formulating correlationism requires at least *some* degree of idealization.

Ideally Motivated Possibility

- one could think of an ameliorated notion: ideally motivated possibility of evidence
- true propositions are correlated with possibilities of evidence that *could* be motivated: if I were not in error about the Queen's whereabouts, the possibility to see her in Buckingham palace *would* be motivated
- This avoids the "problem of error".

Ideally Motivated Possibility: The Treadmill

- But idealizing motivated possibility seems to reintroduce the problem of non-actuality: how do we distinguish between the real possibility of evidence for a possibility and the ideal possibility of evidence for a possibility?
- More formally put: we move from $\diamond_{MF}EJ(p)$ to $\diamond_R\diamond_{MF}EJ(p)$.
- How do we distinguish the counterfactual motivation that for a possibility to see the Queen in Windsor Castle from the counterfactual motivation to see the Queen in Buckingham palace?
- We are back where we started: trying to find a goldilocks interpretation for real possibilities \diamond_R . They need to have narrower scope than ideal possibility, but retain alethic flavour (unlike actually motivated possibility)

Truth is primary

- It might appear "frustratingly easy" to know which kinds of possibilities we are trying to specify: those in which "the world stays fixed"
- But this world-fixing is what we have to understand in terms of truth. It cannot be recovered in terms of possible evidence.
- But this means that "possible evidence" cannot replace truth. If Husserl's later notion of truth in fact becomes epistemic, it is a mistake.

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Nominal and Propositional Truth

- not all acts are categorially formed
- the notion of truth introduced in the 6th Logical Investigation can be applied to the fulfilment of "nominal" as well as "categorial" empty intentions
- nominal intentions are fulfilled by (the intuitive presentation of) objects, categorial intentions are fulfilled by (the intuitive presentation of) states of affairs

Conclusion

- Spelling out the modal notion in correlationism is tricky
- despite appearances to the contrary, the correlation between truth and possible evidence does not allow to define truth in evidential terms
- Husserl's proof of transcendental idealism slips from an alethic to an epistemic notion of possibility

- thank you for your time. I am grateful for any comments:
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