

Cutting Diamonds. The Modal Shift in Husserl's Correlationism



Gregor Bös

Thu 15th Sept, 2022

GAP 11

Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Truth and Evidence
- 3 Notions of Possibility
- 4 Lessons for Phenomenological Metaphysics

Outline

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Correlationism

- Husserl's notion of truth "artfully combines" (Simons 2006, 128) the correspondence theory of Bolzano with the epistemic notion of truth in Brentano¹

1. For the slides of this presentation, see <https://gregorboes.com/dl/2022-09-15-Berlin.pdf>

Correlationism

- Husserl's notion of truth "artfully combines" (Simons 2006, 128) the correspondence theory of Bolzano with the epistemic notion of truth in Brentano¹
- The resulting notion of truth tightly relates truth and possible evidence

[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*“. (Hua18, §50)

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

- In what follows, evident judgement is understood as a factive mental state. Evidently judging that *p* entails *p*.

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Shifting Correlationism

- Husserl's earlier metaphysics (from the period of the *Logical Investigations*) is standardly distinguished from that of the middle (*Ideas I*) and late period (*Crisis*)
- I argue that Husserl's changing notion of *possibility* is a key to this difference and the disagreement between existing interpretations

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die Möglichkeit der Erfahrungserkennt[n]is, [...] die gefordert ist durch den Sinn der "Existenz eines Dinges", kann nur gefasst werden als reale Möglichkeit, und das sagt wieder Möglichkeit für ein aktuelles, reale Möglichkeiten motivierendes Bewusstsein. (Hua20-1, 270)

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the possibility of cognitive experience, [...] which is demanded by the meaning of "existence of a thing", can only be comprehended as real possibility, and that in turn means possibility for an actual consciousness that motivates real possibilities. (tr. GB)

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- Hardy (2013, 100): Evidence has to be *ideally* possible (and truth is correspondence)
- Zahavi (2017): Evidence has to be a *motivated* possibility (and truth is epistemically restricted)

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Formally speaking: Correlationism and possibility

For the following, let us describe Husserl's correlationist thesis as a biconditional:

$$\text{True}(p) \leftrightarrow \Diamond EJ(p) (:=\text{CORR})$$

where $EJ(p)$ is an act of evident judgement, that p .

- How should we interpret the possibility operator \Diamond ?

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Different kinds of possibility in Husserl

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Different kinds of possibility in Husserl

- logical possibility
- ideal possibility
- *real possibility*
- motivated possibility
- empty possibility

Real possibility: Kant

Real Possibilities are also introduced by Kant (CPR, Bxxvi)

[D]enken kann ich, was ich will, wenn ich mir nur nicht selbst widerspreche [...]. Um einem solchen Begriffe aber objektive Gültigkeit (reale Möglichkeit, denn die erstere war bloß die logische) beizulegen, dazu wird etwas mehr erfordert. Dieses Mehrere aber braucht eben nicht in theoretischen Erkenntnisquellen gesucht zu werden, es kann auch in praktischen liegen.

[...] I can think whatever I like, as long as I do not contradict myself, [...] But in order to ascribe objective validity to such a concept (real possibility, for the first sort of possibility was merely logical) something more is required. This “more,” however, need not be sought in theoretical sources of cognition; it may also lie in practical ones.

Real possibility: James

And in James' *Will to Believe* (1896, sec. I):

A live hypothesis is one which appeals as a real possibility to him to whom it is proposed. If I ask you to believe in the Mahdi, the notion [...] refuses to scintillate with any credibility at all. [...] To an Arab, however (even if he be not one of the Mahdi's followers), the hypothesis is among the mind's possibilities: it is alive. This shows that deadness and liveness in an hypothesis are not intrinsic properties, but relations to the individual thinker.

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- I take *real possibility* here to be the desired notion of possibility that allows a defensible formulation of CORR. But which notion of possibility is this?

CORR with ideal possibility

- Ideal possibility is too permissive: it does not exclude non-actual possibilities.

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- Ideal possibility is too permissive: it does not exclude non-actual possibilities.
- Husserl saw this himself:

die gegensätzliche Rede von “realer” Möglichkeit gegenüber unserer idealen (freien) Möglichkeit hat das Bedenken, dass es auf Realität im eigentlichen, 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)

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. demand thetic intuition, *ideal possibility is content with mere phantasy.*

Correlationism with factually motivated possibility

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- In the Ideas I it becomes clear that this restriction is how we should understand CORR:

Das Ding ist Ding der *Umwelt*, auch das nicht gesehene, auch das real mögliche, nicht erfahrene, sondern erfahrbare, bzw. vielleicht erfahrbare. *Die Erfahrbarkeit besagt nie eine leere logische Möglichkeit*, sondern eine im Erfahrungszusammenhange *motivierete*.(Hua3-1, §47)

The thing is the thing of the environment; so, too, is the thing not seen, also the really possible thing, the thing not experienced but capable, or perchance capable, of being experienced. *The possibility of being experienced never designates an empty logical possibility*, but instead one *motivated* in an experiential connection.

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- Real possibilities need to be *motivated*, which I here read as a form of epistemic justification. (see also Wiltsche 2017)

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- But for CORR, this faces two immediate objections.
 - Error: factually motivated possibility is not sufficient for truth. Having a false belief or misleading justification motivates possibilities of evidence that are not correlated to truths.
 - Ignorance: factually motivated possibility is not necessary for truth. Having no justification for some ideal possibilities does not rule out their truth. Truths about aliens in outer space, or undiscovered fish in the Mariana trench.

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- We might try to define real possibility (\diamond_R) in terms of possible justification.
- Let \diamond_{MF} range over possibilities that are in fact motivated
- Possible justification again is understood in terms of possible evident judgement: (\diamond)

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- Instead of $True(p) \leftrightarrow \Diamond_{MF} EJ(p)$ we now have $True(p) \leftrightarrow \Diamond_* \Diamond_{MF} EJ(p)$
- But the same problems reappear:
 - if $\Diamond_* = \Diamond_I$, the distinction between actual and possible evidence collapses
 - if $\Diamond_* = \Diamond_{MF}$, error and ignorance counterexamples return
- This leaves the option to recursively define real possibility: $\Diamond_R = \Diamond_R \Diamond_{MF}$

Keeping the world fixed

- Husserl himself describes “existence” as a selection that *the object* imposes on the possible streams of consciousness

Die Existenz besagt eine *Auszeichnung im Heer der Möglichkeiten*, und *korrelativ* zu dieser Auszeichnung steht die Regel der real möglichen Erfahrungen gegenüber den “durch” die Existenz des betreffenden Dinges *ausgeschlossenen* ideal möglichen. [...] Die Wirklichkeit des Dinges wählt aus den Mannigfaltigkeiten möglicher Bewusstseinsströme aus. (Hua 20-1, §61, 269)

Existence predicates a *distinction in the host of possibilities*. *Correlated* with this distinction is the rule of really possible experiences, in contrast with the ideal possibilities that are *excluded* “through” the existence of the relevant thing. [...] The reality of the thing selects from the manifold of possible streams of consciousness. (tr. GB)

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- Despite the struggles to define them, it seems clear which possibilities are intended as *real* possibilities: those in which (a portion of) the world stays fixed
- Real possibilities are those that respect the selection of possible experience imposed by the real world
- But this selection is independent of our actual knowledge

What went wrong?

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- Alethic possibilities can differ in scope (like practical vs. physical vs. metaphysical possibility) but do not depend on states of knowledge
- Epistemic possibility depends on a state of information. Something is possible “for all we know”, e.g. when it has not yet been ruled out yet that the butler is the murderer
- Restricting ideal to motivated possibilities shifts from an alethic to epistemic possibility

Real possibility as a sui generis form of alethic possibility

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- Real possibility — as an *alethic* notion of possibility — requires that a part of the world under consideration remains fixed
- This requires to think of the world as "being some way" independently of our knowledge about it. Specifying real possibility relies on a prior understanding of truth.
- If CORR relies on a notion of *real possibility*, CORR does not allow to understand *truth* as *possible evidence*


Conclusion

- Real possibility relies on a prior understanding of truth.

2. The challenge presented here is distinct from the knowability paradox, due to Alonzo Church and Frederic Fitch, which derives with minimal assumptions $p \rightarrow \Diamond Kp \models p \rightarrow Kp$

Conclusion

- Real possibility relies on a prior understanding of truth.
- CORR does not allow to understand truth in terms of possible evidence²

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