

Edmund Husserl on the Conditions of the Possibility of Theoretical Knowledge: A Philosophical Exegesis

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The goal of the article is to unfold a critical inspection of Edmund Husserl philosophical views on the conditions of the possibility of theory and science in general which the thinker develops in the part of his *Logical Investigations* called “Prolegomena to Pure Logic.” Special heed is paid to the refutation of psychologism, the arguments for the ideality of theoretical concepts and laws, the constituents of the realm of ideality, the characterization of ideal entities, and the relation between the ideal and the real. A number of critical points are raised on the analytic inadequacy (i.e., ambiguity, incompleteness) of some core concepts such as ‘proposition,’ ‘truth’ and its ‘timelessness’ versus ‘immutability.’ The article concludes by explicating the asymmetrical and one-directional character of the relation between the ideal and the real: the manner in which the ideal through its necessary criteria of truth and meaning, both pure and prescriptive, influences and governs the real, is not held by the real toward the ideal. The factual world possesses no relationship to the realm of ideal entities that would exert a founding power with regard to the latter’s essential constitution.

Keywords: science, theory, truth, ideality, reality, fact, philosophy, epistemology, methodology, phenomenology, Edmund Husserl.

The persistence of intellectual probing and the novelty of philosophical interpretation brought by Edmund Husserl to the acute issues of epistemology, in general, and of logic, in particular, stand as perhaps the least debated achievements of the immense time and effort that he invested in the writing of the *Logical Investigations*. The philosopher, muses Husserl, “wants to clarify the essence of a thing, an event, a cause, an effect, of space, of time etc., as well as that wonderful affinity which this essence has with the essence of thought, which enables it to be

thought, with the essence of knowledge, which makes it knowable, with meanings which make it capable of being meant etc.”¹

In the case of the *Logical Investigations*, its goals and procedures, such an attitude of philosophical diligence is accorded by Husserl to the proper objects of logic. The purpose of the *Investigations* is nothing less than to do “justice to the idea of a science of the conditions of the possibility of theory in general.”² The latter statement sets forth

1 See Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, p. 159.

2 Ibid., p. 155. Husserl’s formulation of the ‘conditions

before Husserl two tacit challenges which he, if the reflection is not to become sterile, has to meet: first, he has to show that such a science is indeed *needed* to resolve certain logical problems; secondly, he has to demonstrate that such a science is possible, consequently laying out its essential components, that is to say, explaining what it is.

Such is the endeavor of the entire *Logical Investigations*. In the upcoming explorations, however, we shall confine ourselves just to the part of the *Investigations* entitled the *Prolegomena to Pure Logic*. We shall focus our interest thus mainly on the first challenge, i.e. the reasons given by Husserl to ground the need for a science which would study the conditions of the possibility of theory in general. The justification of such a science ultimately rests on the plausibility or implausibility of the datum termed by Husserl the ‘ideal character of all truth and meaning.’ The latter notion, one ought to keep in mind, has undergone a complex development throughout the whole of the *Logical Investigations*. As a result, by limiting the scope of our research only to the *Prolegomena to Pure Logic* we are inevitably destined to miss some of Husserl’s more extended and richer understanding of the concept of ideality as it is furthered and unfolded in the sections of the *Investigations* beyond the *Prolegomena*.

of the possibility of theory in general’ hearkens back to Immanuel Kant’s (*a priori*) ‘conditions of the possibility of’ (objects in general, all things as appearances, all cognition of objects, how objects can be given to us, all experience, the objects of experience, etc.) in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, pp. 222, 225, 255, 279, 459 et al.

The Type of Psychology Exposed and Refuted

Husserl’s insight into the nature of logic, its theoretical domain, method, and scientific concepts, in the frame of the *Prolegomena* is expounded in a conscious contrast to the proper domain, method, and scientific concepts of psychology. Husserl treats the latter science in a very narrow sense. It is, according to him, the “empirical science of mental fact.”³ Since it is an empirical science, it is also a natural science concerned with the “*natural conditions* of our experience” such as “concentration of interest, a certain mental freshness, practice etc.”⁴ Psychology is thus seen as merely the “empirical science of the mental attributes and states of animal realities.”⁵ In describing the objects and procedures of psychology Husserl was undoubtedly affected by the recent trends among the practitioners of that science who had too easily dispensed with the “mystery box of the mind” and launched forth the new psychology without a soul.⁶ And this, moreover, was declared to be the cardinal foundation of the science of logic. Yet how could a science whose methods are deductive, objects immutable, premises self-evident, conclusions necessary, and knowledge apodeictic be rooted, nay, validated in a science whose methods are inductive, objects mutable, premises but

3 Ibid., p. 109.

4 Ibid., p. 119.

5 Ibid., p. 169.

6 Cf. Franz Brentano, *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt*, 1874; Friedrich Albert Lange, *Geschichte des Materialismus und Kritik seiner Bedeutung in der Gegenwart*, 1866; Ernst Mach, *Erkenntnis und Irrtum: Skizzen zur Psychologie der Forschung*, 1905.

likely, conclusions non-necessary, and knowledge probable? To the claim of founding logic in psychology Husserl pronounces an unmitigated 'no.' The principle reason is that the nature of logic and the nature of psychology permit and even necessitate the grounding of the latter in the former but not vice versa. The two disciplines are commensurate in the respect in which any valid statement of psychology implies logic as the principle governing such a validation; in the respect, however, in which logic *per se* implies nothing psychological, the two disciplines are incommensurate.

THE ARGUMENTS FOR THE IDEALITY OF THEORETICAL CONCEPTS AND LAWS

1. The argument from the Absence of Reference to Anything Mental

Husserl quotes the logician Christoph Sigwart who in his treatise entitled *Logik* states that it is a "fiction [...] that a judgment could be true if we abstract from the fact that some intelligence thinks such a judgment."⁷ "A philosopher who speaks in this manner," rejoins Husserl, "has accepted a psychologistic reinterpretation of truth."⁸ Sigwart's assertion is simply incongruous with the results obtained from a genuine analysis of the character of truth as well as of the science which purports to systematically deal with truth as such, i.e. logic. For, the "laws of pure logic," according Husserl, "totally lose their basic sense, if one tries to interpret them as psychological."⁹

7 Christoph Sigwart, *Logik*, Bd. 1, S. 205.

8 Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, p. 85.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 111.

It is stated that from the point of view of logic both its truths and laws "presuppose nothing mental, no facts of psychic life, whether in their establishment or their content."¹⁰ Let us ask, then, Husserl concerning the precise ways in which, while faced with a logical truth or law, one finds it completely devoid of mental reference or any other psychic feature. To illustrate Husserl's position, let us examine the proposition 'A is true.' Considered in its purely objective sense the latter speaks of no act of judging, thus of no mental act whatever, to wit, it is not equivalent to the statement 'It is judged that A is true.' Further, since the proposition contains no reference to any act of judging, it can contain no reference to the (actual or possible) subject of that judging, either, e.g. 'It is judged by someone that A is true.' Finally, the proposition 'A is true' holds no reference to any psychic fact or content, that is to say, it carries no information about associating, imagining, presenting, calculating, remembering and other similar acts which make up one's mental life. Consequently, at least a threefold absence of reference to anything mental is detected in the phenomenological analysis of a purely logical proposition, i.e. that of mental act, subject, and content.

In addition to the preceding observations Husserl appends one more argument indicating that no mental element is a part of a purely logical proposition. Psychology being the science of mental facts, its "possibility is accordingly a case of real possibility." It is conceivable, therefore, notes Husserl, that "what is psychologi-

10 *Ibid.*, p. 51.

cally impossible may very well be ideally possible.”¹¹ Husserl gives no example, still what he most likely means is the fact that we are in a position to posit an arithmetical entity such as a supremely gross number or a geometrical figure whose complexity and intricacy defy the contingent powers of our understanding, such incapacity on our part, still, in no way affecting the propositions that hold true about those complex entities. It is this very inability to be thought that shows these propositions to be free from any reference to thought.

The above argumentation of Husserl, nonetheless, should not be accepted without a closer scrutiny. They are not, it seems, thoroughly exempt from being questioned, perhaps even seriously doubted, though the earnestness with which we will attempt to criticize them ought to be taken as a compliment of respect and not a sign of unmotivated negligence. Let us first inspect the earlier proposition ‘*A is true*’ and all the theoretical consequences that Husserl concludes from its purely logical content. First of all, in its present form it can be called a proposition only in a derivative sense, since *A* as such is nonsensical, that is strictly in and of itself it possesses no meaning, conceptual or objective. Under such a stipulation, the statement ‘*A is true*’ is neither true nor false, because no truth-value may be predicated of something nonsensical. Furthermore, in being meaningless *A* cannot even be the subject of this or any other proposition, for a subject must by definition constitute a meaning-unit, and, since the “proposition” ‘*A is true*’ is

thus shown not to have a subject proper of which the truth-value would be predicated, it is no proposition at all.

Yet, such a reading of the signification of *A* in the context of the proposition ‘*A is true*’ would be the grossest of misunderstandings, perhaps even an ominous signal that one should immediately give up the work he believes he is called to do, i.e. to interpret philosophical thought. *A*, on the contrary, should be understood as a symbol employed by logic for technical purposes to ease certain logical activities, yet as symbol it always stands for something other than itself, something that has meaning. Only by being a symbol, thus deriving its signification from some concept or thing other than itself, can *A* truly function in the proposition ‘*A is true*.’

Nevertheless, even our conceiving of *A* as a symbol proper is not satisfactory to render the proposition ‘*A is true*’ in logically unequivocal terms, since for the predication of a truth-value of *A* to be authentic *A* must be not only a meaning-unit, but a meaning unit of a certain kind. Suppose *A* stands for a house, or a river, or a wind, all of which undeniably possess meaning; still, in each of these cases the predication of a truth-value in the proposition is but a misapplication of the concept of truth (or falsity). Matters make no progress, even when one tries to replace *A* with certain theoretical concepts which, although meaningful, still make up quite an independent class of meaning-units from that of houses, rivers, winds, and so on. We say no progress, because the concepts of argument, premise, entailment, relation, nay, even truth itself *qua* mere concepts cannot be either true or

11 Ibid., p. 118.

false in much the same manner in which trees, rivers, and winds cannot. Hence, we must in addition specify the group of meaning-units which alone can stand as logically appropriate subjects designated by the symbol *A* in the proposition ‘*A is true*.’ Such a group of meaning-units must be that of propositions, that is a group of those *compound* meaning-units in which some predicate is related to some subject whereby such a relation is posited to obtain or not to obtain.

These distinctions we have just introduced might have been assumed by Husserl, or they might not have been assumed. At any rate, his presentation has not escaped the kind of ambiguity which on account of its obscurity is enough to infect his logically pure concepts with “impurity,” to with, unclarity. Still, even now the cloud of doubt is not thoroughly cast away. The reason is, to return to the issue, that given that *A* in ‘*A is true*’ stands for some proposition, one, nonetheless, is able to conjure up many statements which in fact do contain references both to certain processes of thought, thinking subjects, as well as to diverse contents *as* contents of thought. For instance, the sense ‘I find myself bewildered, Socrates!’ manifests each of these references all at once. ‘I’ refers to the thinking subject, ‘finding’ construed as inward search, self-observation, or introspection marks an act of thinking – which is understood here, of course, in the broadest sense – and the state of bewilderment designates among other things a certain disposition of how something mental is experienced. Now, by attributing a truth-value to the above proposition we thereby

originate a new, quite distinct proposition, i.e. ‘[that] I find myself bewildered, Socrates, is true’; even so, does this change empty the latter proposition in its totality from *all* mental references whatsoever? One must say ‘no,’ lest one fall prey to grave equivocations all over. For the transition from the first proposition to the second one was accompanied not by a removal of each and every mental reference, but by an alteration in its character.

Thus in saying that ‘*A is true*’ comprises no reference to anything mental we must single out yet another qualification, namely, that *A* is the sort of proposition that *de facto* does not speak of psychic phenomena. And because neither the truth-predicate nor the subject-proposition in and of themselves speak about facts of mental life, their being related together in a complex proposition, so the argument runs, must also be free from talk about the mental. All this, though possibly true, seems nevertheless to run the risk of compromising with clarity. Is not the saying that a proposition ‘does not refer to’ or ‘does not speak of’ something mental, one might ask, harbor a further ambiguity? For it would be quite fallacious to infer from the fact that a proposition in its (positive) content makes no mention of mental phenomena that *its nature* therefore is not mental. One has to understand that the *nature* of a proposition as such and its *positive content* are so distinct and autonomous items in one’s epistemic experience that the attributes of the one cannot be directly applied to the other. In other words, even if the nature of a proposition were mental, in its content it could still speak of things that are not mental; and vice versa, even if

the nature of a proposition were not mental, in its content it could still speak of things that are mental. A more in-depth inspection of these and other matters, however, would stretch well beyond the scope of our immediate concern. Let us, then, move on.

2. The Argument from the Absence of Reference to Anything Factual

Psychic facts, for Husserl, constitute but a part of the overall factual world. To put it in another way, there exist items of experience which are *facts*, though they are not mental. In this section, subsequently, we shall deal with the latter sort exclusively.

Husserl opines that a genuine inquiry into what the concepts and propositions of pure logic are must lead one to observe that the latter “breathe no word regarding reality.”¹² Such concepts and propositions, dubbed by Husserl “ideal meaning-units,” are “elevated above all possible change, since all change affects what is individual, and, makes no sense in regard to”¹³ the proper objects of logic. With respect to purely logical laws he states that they are called pure because “they exclude all factual content.”¹⁴ “They can accordingly not be affected by any actual or imagined change in the world of ‘matter of fact.’”¹⁵

A brief consideration of what Husserl intends by the notions of ‘fact’ and ‘factual law’ will add to our interpretation of this argument both ease and exactitude. Husserl treats facts as “something determined as to

time.”¹⁶ Facts are always individual¹⁷. They are also “contingent’: they might very well not have been the case, they might have been different.”¹⁸ In some passages Husserl refers to facts as “blind,”¹⁹ although such a metaphor scarcely does service to one’s better understanding of the nature of facts (for they might as well wear glasses, one could snappily retort). With regard to factual laws Husserl notes that “each law for facts arises *from* experience, which means that it can only be inductively based on individual experience.”²⁰ As a result, the *factual* implies temporality, individuality, contingency, induction and thus probability.

The concepts, propositions, and laws of pure logic seem to stand in stark contrast to matters of fact construed in the above sense. According to Husserl, a modus tollens, for instance, is true without any regard to or determination in time. It is not contingent, that is to say, it might not have been otherwise, nor is its truth gleaned from individual sense experiences thus affording at best a case of probable knowledge. No, a modus tollens, if it is really known, it is known apodeictically. The objects of pure logic are infinitely removed from the ephemeral ever-changing manifestations of the factual world, they are “purely theoretical truths, ideal in character, rooted in their own semantic content and not straying beyond it.”²¹

12 Ibid., p. 94.

13 Ibid., p. 98.

14 Ibid., p. 52.

15 Ibid., p. 97.

16 Ibid., p. 55.

17 See *ibid.*, p. 80.

18 Ibid., p. 82.

19 Ibid., p. 131.

20 Ibid., p. 54.

21 Ibid., p. 97.

3. The Argument from Atemporality and Immutability

Let us now consider a somewhat longer passage on the ideality of truth from the *Prolegomena*:

Experiences are real particulars, temporally determinate, which come into being and pass away. Truth, however, is 'eternal', or, better put, it is an Idea, and so beyond time. It makes no sense to give truth a date in time, nor a duration which extends throughout time. Naturally one says of truth that on occasion it 'comes to mind', and is accordingly 'apprehended' or 'experienced' by us. But such 'apprehension', 'experiencing' and 'coming to consciousness', are spoken of in quite a different sense in relation to ideal being, from what they have in relation to empirical, individualized being. We do not 'apprehend' truth as we apprehend some empirical content which comes up, and again vanishes, in the stream of mental experiences: truth is not a phenomenon among phenomena, but is an experience in that totally different sense in which a universal, an Idea, is an experience.²²

The key concepts occupying the center of Husserl's multi-faceted insight are those of 'eternal' or 'being beyond time' versus 'temporal determination,' 'coming into being' and 'vanishing' or 'passing away from being.' It takes but a second to realize that

no simple road of solution is in store for us. It is said that truth is beyond time. Yet, truth understood as what: a concept, an essence, a species, a real obtaining relation of correspondence between a particular proposition and a particular state of affairs, or perhaps all at once?

One may speak of truth as such, or of this or that truth, or again of truths about facts, of truths about other truths. Is each and every type of truth equally beyond time, or rather some are and some are not? Even so, suppose we have finally pinned down the exact sense of what we mean by 'truth' and of this we say it is 'beyond time.' How afar do we still find ourselves from possessing a more or less definite answer! For truth to be beyond time does not mean that something must always be true, – though as long as there exists a temporal world it must indeed be always true, – because 'always' is a time category and pertains to the same class of categories as, for example, the category 'sometimes.' Rather, for truth to be beyond time means that any characterization of it in terms of a "duration which extends throughout time"²³ is entirely extraneous to its nature. The fact, however, that a certain phenomenon is not included in the essential description of another phenomenon does not automatically entail the fact that the latter bears no relationship to the former, even a necessary one, as in the case of a necessary condition. People may spend hours conversing about stars, scrupulously considering their weight, size, heat, gravitation, mineral and gas makeup etc., yet making no mention

22 Ibid., p. 85.

23 Ibid.

whatsoever about space, which, nevertheless, constitutes a necessary condition for the existence of those stars. In an analogous way, the fact that temporality does not enter into the essential meaning of truth in and of itself cannot determine whether temporality is not presupposed in some other way, e.g. metaphysically.

Closely related to the timelessness of truth is its immutability. In our discussion of the factual world and its contingency we have noted that, according to Husserl, such contingency can in no way be predicated of truth or any other strictly logical entity. The reason is that facts

might very well not have been the case, they might have been different. If the facts then differ, logical principles also will differ; they will also be contingent, with a being relative to the facts on which they are founded.²⁴

To paraphrase, facts constantly change. They do so because they are what they are without necessity and as such they cannot serve as ground for something which is necessary and devoid of change. Now, every change, be it motion or alteration, can take place and be observed only in the context of time. A change in form, thus a substantial change, or a change in aspect, thus an accidental change, presupposes at least two states of affairs one of which must precede the other which in turn may occur in time alone. Yet, this essential connection between change and time should not therefore merge the two data into an essential identity. Indeed, given that an object is timeless it

must also be changeless. But is the reverse true? Does it necessarily follow that since an object is changeless, it must also be timeless, to wit, does immutability always entail atemporality? This is far from being obvious.

One might wonder, if something is without change, any evidence of its being in time is thereby forfeited. To this we should reply in a twofold manner. The presence of absence of evidence for a thing being or not being in time is a question of epistemology and as such is quite separate from the fact that the thing is or is not in time. Timelessness does truly determine that something is untouched by mutation, yet not vice versa. Moreover, two modes are possible in which a thing may be said to have its locus in the world of change. Change can be intrinsic to it so that the thing *itself* is described as existing in process and in time, or the thing can itself be entirely free from change and still stand in real relation to other things undergoing change, thus existing immutably and yet determined in time, though not intrinsically but through that real relation to other things undergoing change. The latter case is outstandingly peculiar availing us of very few analogies. One could, nevertheless, imagine an object which would be totally motionless and yet completely engulfed by other objects set perpetually in motion. It seems, then, that the concept of an immutable thing which is temporal is not contradictory. It is, therefore, the concept of a possible thing, a thing which, let us be a bit more suggestive, may be of the nature shared by the objects of pure logic as Husserl understands it.

It is not clear what is precisely meant by the 'coming into and passing away from

²⁴ Ibid., p. 82.

being' of the contingent things, a phenomenon which, in contrast, plays no part in the essential constitution of truth. Such 'coming and passing' may refer to a thing's ever changing character, i.e. to the alteration of the thing as an individual, or the expression may be taken literally as addressing the beginning and end of some concrete existence. To attribute the first sense to the essence of truth or any other properly logical entity would be false, since the phenomenological analysis of truth, as Husserl well indicates, shows the latter to be immutable. The second sense, however, whether its predication of truth would make the latter mutable or not permits of much subtlety. Here is the puzzle: when Husserl speaks of the immutability of truth, is not his primary phenomenological concern to state that the essence of truth possesses an *a priori* necessary form the alteration of which is impossible? The necessity here in question is essential and not existential, so must be the immutability safeguarded by that essential necessity. Still, what is necessary as to its essence could still be unnecessary as to its existence. And does the latter undo the former? Acts of coming into existence and again vanishes into non-existence represent some kind of change, but the possibility of such a change does not in itself validate the possibility of change in the essence of certain things once these exist. That is to say, not that the essence could be otherwise, but that there could be none.

The train of our reasoning is by no means purged from all hesitation, the sense of groping is the unfortunate part of our general attitude. Even so, the thesis suggesting itself throughout is this: Husserl's

rigorous claim is that truth is timeless and immutable. We, on the other hand, are inclined to believe that the same phenomenological observations of the essence of truth are open to a somewhat different evaluation. Firstly, it is not incompatible that truth possesses a nature that is immutable, while at the same time temporal; secondly, it is not incompatible that truth possesses a nature which is necessary and immutable in regard to its essence, but unnecessary and mutable in regard to its existence (real or ideal!).

4. The Argument from the Correctness or Incorrectness of Judgment

Concepts and laws belonging to the theoretical terrain of logic maintain our capacity to issue an appropriate evaluation of certain mental acts. Notions like inference or syllogism etc., on the one hand, and calculation or multiplication etc., on the other, are often used in a twofold sense. Sometimes they may refer to the pure relations obtaining among ideal meaning-units, at other times they may refer to the psychic acts which the mind performs when it actually thinks a logical argument or a mathematical problem-solving. These two realms, the logical and the psychical, are essentially different, both of them standing in a mutual relationship of theoretical priority of foundation. Thus Husserl warns:

How often has it been observed and objected that the identification of logical with psychological law would also destroy every difference between correct and incorrect thinking, since the incorrect modes of judgment are

no less governed by psychological laws than the correct ones?²⁵

A judgment is considered to be correct when “what it judges, i.e. its content, is true, and incorrect when this content is false.”²⁶ Or, as Husserl expresses himself in another passage, a correct judgment is one which proceeds “in accordance with truth,”²⁷ an incorrect judgment, conversely, is one which does not proceed in accordance with truth.

In the first quotation we discover two items that are especially of interest to us: a) Husserl’s remark that the “incorrect modes of judgment are no less governed by psychological laws than the correct ones” and b) that if all logical laws are identified with those of psychology, then “every difference between correct and incorrect thinking” would thereby be abolished. Inasmuch as some judgment is a mental phenomenon, inasmuch as it is accessible to empirical observation, experimentation, and assessment, its being correct or incorrect can signify its merely psychological description, e.g. judgments possessing properties A, B, and C are called “correct” and other not possessing those properties are called “incorrect.” So far as the concern of the psychologist extends, as a result, the words ‘correct’ and ‘incorrect’ designate a *factual* difference.

Yet, such usage is quite strange to the traditional meaning of these two terms, and in particular as they are used by the logician. For the latter ‘correct’ and ‘incorrect’ are first and foremost evaluative categories and only as such can they serve

25 Ibid., p. 71.

26 Ibid., p. 94.

27 Ibid., p. 80.

as a foundation for certain prescriptive statements as well as for one’s preference regarding certain types of thought which are normatively regulated by those statements. Such correctness or incorrectness of a judgment, as can be easily garnered from the texts quoted above, is defined and determined by judgments’ compliance or non-compliance with the ideal laws of logic and the notion of truth. According to Husserl, one and the same truth extends over a vast multiplicity of actual as well as merely possible acts of judgments, and insofar as these find themselves in harmony with the one self-same true content given in each of them, they are said to be ‘correct.’

Each truth stands as an ideal unit over against an endless, unbounded possibility of correct statements which have its form and its matter in common. Each actual judgment, which belongs to this ideal manifold, will fulfill, either in its mere form or in its matter, the ideal conditions for its own possible inward evidence.²⁸

Thus the correctness of judgments as an evaluative category cannot have its source in laws of psychology; on the contrary, it presupposes the ideal concepts and laws of pure logic, since by these alone it is rendered rational.

5. The Argument from the Need of a Theoretical Discipline to Ground All Normative Disciplines

Another set of considerations which leads Husserl to accord to certain concepts and

28 Ibid., p. 119.

laws an ideal status has to do with his argument that “each normative, and [...] each practical discipline, presupposes one or more theoretical disciplines as its foundation.”²⁹ And again, “every normative discipline demands that we know certain non-normative truths.”³⁰

In like fashion, one can legitimately speak of the type of logic called normative which is concerned with how human beings *ought* to think. In his renown confutation of psychologism, Husserl puts forth a number of serious reasons for why no (empirical) psychology can ever constitute the basis of the normative science of logic. If such a basis, however, is not to be sought in psychology, it must then be found in some other discipline. Such, according to Husserl, is the rigorously theoretical discipline of *pure logic*.

It is time now to acquaint ourselves with the proper objects of this new science as it is propounded in the pages of the *Prolegomena*.

THE CONSTITUENTS OF THE REALM OF IDEALITY

The science of pure logic, as Husserl envisages it, deals with three distinct classes of ideal entities, which, nevertheless, form a close-knit objective unity over-arc'd by the concept of truth. The first class of ideal entities consists of certain purely formal concepts. These, furthermore, are sub-divided into two groups: namely, conceptual categories which include such notions as ‘truth,’

‘subject,’ ‘predicate,’ ‘concept,’ ‘relation,’ ‘relatum,’ etc. and objective categories which include such notions as ‘object,’ ‘property,’ ‘state of affairs,’ ‘unity,’ ‘plurality,’ ‘number,’ ‘connection,’ etc.³¹ Another name given by Husserl to pure concepts is ‘meaning-units.’ The latter can be simple or complex. When two or more meaning-units enter into a relationship of truth they are said to form a “timeless ideal unity” which is nothing other than an ideal proposition.

Next comes the class of ideal laws. Herein are included all logical rules of inference, syllogism, argument, and proof. When ideal propositions composed of pure concepts are ordered by way of inferential rules into a consistent series of arguments and proofs leading from less complex truths to more complex ones the last class of ideal entities is reached, that is the class of pure theory or science. The latter, as Husserl defines it, is a “certain objective or ideal interconnection which gives these acts [of thought] a unitary objective relevance, and, in such unitary relevance, an ideal validity.”³² What Husserl means by such an ‘interconnection’ is in part the aim of the next section.

THE CHARACTERIZATION OF IDEAL ENTITIES

We shall attempt now to enumerate the essential qualities or characteristics which all pure concepts, propositions, laws, and ‘theory in general’ possess by virtue of pertaining to the realm of ideality. Our task

29 Ibid., p. 38.

30 Ibid., p. 39.

31 See *ibid.*, pp. 104, 153.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 144.

will partly lie in the mere recapitulation of the previous sections concerning Husserl's arguments for the ideality of theoretical concepts and laws, since it is there that he, in a healthy phenomenological tension triggered by the fateful proposals of psychologism, first enunciated the properties essentially belonging to the nature of ideal unities, properties so injudiciously overlooked by and left out from the psychologistic account of logic.

First of all, each and every ideal entity is timeless, "there can be nothing in [its] essential content which concerns the temporal, and which therefore concerns the factual."³³ Note, that an ideal unit's being non-temporal, in Husserl's opinion, necessarily entails its being non-factual, that is its independence from all that is connected with "circumstances, [...] individuals and species."³⁴ Of course, the realm of ideality is totally devoid of any mental reference, but this is already included in the general absence of reference to anything factual.

Only by constituting an objective realm of their own are these ideal entities rendered knowable to us. And that they are, in effect, as such, i.e. as ideal, known by us is assumed by Husserl as an obvious fact.

[I]t is [...] inwardly evident that truths are what they are, and that, in particular, laws, grounds, principles are what they are, whether we have insight into them or not. Since they do not hold in so far as we have insight into them, but we can only have insight into them in so far as

they hold, they must be regarded as objective or ideal conditions of the possibility of our knowledge of them.³⁵

Another designation applied by Husserl to describe a certain characteristic present in all ideal entities is that of 'categoriality'. This notion is unfortunately not developed in the *Prolegomena*. Thus for its better understanding we need to make an exception and turn for assistance to the second logical investigation. There by calling an ideal unit 'categorial' Husserl means that the latter "pertains to the pure form of possible objects of consciousness as such."³⁶ Doubtless, it is a difficult passage. One finds it more or less intelligible to speak of form with respect to inferences and arguments, yet what would exactly a form of an object be, and this versus a *pure* form of an object, and this versus a *pure* form of a *possible* object. Still, it is enough here to grasp that each ideal entity considered as categorial is "purified" from any hint to the concrete, the individual, the factual, it is, as Husserl puts it in many passages, a "mere concept."

It will be helpful to observe how the notion of ideality is used by Husserl in interpreting pure concepts, laws, and theory, each separately. Husserl defines truth (and falsity) in a threefold manner: Firstly, it is predicated of "*meanings* as such, purely on the basis of their categorial formal structure"; secondly, truth is predicated of the "*objective correlates*" of "*meanings* as such," that is in regard to the "being and not being of objects as such"; thirdly, truth is predi-

33 Ibid., p. 68.

34 Ibid., p. 93.

35 Ibid., p. 150.

36 Ibid., p. 240.

cated of “states of affairs as such, again on the basis of their pure, categorial form.”³⁷ No matter in which predicative sense truth is used, “talk of temporal determination” can only make sense “in regard to a fact posited by a truth (provided, that is, that it is a truth about facts); it makes no sense in regard to the truth itself.”³⁸ Truth itself, that is to say, is timeless, though as such it may hold of temporal states of affairs. Truth, furthermore, is entirely transcendent to any and all acts of thinking as well as agents capable of thought. “[T]ruths,” says Husserl, “*hold* in themselves unknown to anyone, e.g. such truths as transcend men’s capacity for knowledge.”³⁹ The point here, of course, is not that there exist some truths that transcend us, namely those that are beyond our ability to know them, as opposed to truths that are not transcendent. The point is that each and every truth is transcendent, but in the case of truths which, due to the intricacy of their contents, are simply unreachable to our contingent minds such a transcendence is emphatically brought into relief. In the final analysis, Husserl looks at the “ideality” of truth as the single route assuring “its objectivity.”⁴⁰

Just as in the case of ideal concepts, the laws of pure logic are essentially purged of any allusion to the domain of the mental. These laws are “so abstract that they contain no reference to knowledge as an act of a knowing subject.”⁴¹ The opposite of an ideal law is a “*law of nature*, as an empirically

based rule regarding what in fact is and occurs.”⁴² In contrast, an ideal law is one “based purely on concepts, ideas, purely conceived essences, and so not empirical.”⁴³ The notion of ideality, as a result, is inseparable from the notion of ‘being pure,’ i.e. having no relation of ground or foundation to the world of sensible facts. Moreover, every scientific deduction, understood as a connection of entailment between the premises and the conclusion, is valid (or invalid) *necessarily* and therefore without exception only if such a validity ultimately stems from the ideal rules set forth by the laws of pure logic⁴⁴. Hence, ideal laws are the cardinal source of logical necessity, and as such they must be *a priori* laws. Even so, the significance of ideal laws is not yet exhausted, since it is they as well, according to Husserl, that “express the conditions for knowledge in general, or for deductive theoretical knowledge in general, conditions which have their ‘pure’ foundation in the ‘content’ of knowledge.”⁴⁵

The last constituent of the realm of ideal entities is pure science or theory. The latter is defined by Husserl as a “certain objective or ideal interconnection which gives [the] acts [of thought] a unitary objective relevance, and, in such unitary relevance, an ideal validity.”⁴⁶ This objective interconnection operates on two distinct planes as is clearly stated by Husserl in the following text:

[I]t can be understood as an *inter-connection of the things* to which

37 Ibid., p. 154.

38 Ibid., p. 80.

39 Ibid., p. 85.

40 Ibid., p. 121.

41 Ibid., p. 151.

42 Ibid., p. 106.

43 Ibid.

44 See *ibid.*, p. 146.

45 Ibid., p. 150.

46 Ibid., p. 144.

our thought-experiences (actual or possible) are intentionally directed, or, on the other hand, as an *interconnection of truths*, in which this unity of things comes to count objectively as being what it is. These two things are given together *a priori*, and are mutually inseparable. Nothing can be without being thus or thus determined, and that it is, and that it is thus and thus determined, is the self-subsistent truth which is the necessary correlate of the self-subsistent being. What holds of single truths, or single states of affairs, plainly also holds of interconnections of truths or of states of affairs. This self-evident inseparability is not, however, identity. In these truths or interconnections of truths the actual existence of things and interconnections of things finds expression. But the interconnections of truths differ from the interconnections of things, which are 'truly' in the former; this at once appears in the fact that truths which hold of truths do not coincide with truths that hold of the things posited in such truths.⁴⁷

The first characteristic of theory taken in its ideal sense is its functioning as an 'interconnection.' In other words, it forms a complex unity relating, by means of pure logical laws, the simpler ideal units such as concepts and propositions into the most general theoretical whole of the 'science of the idea of science.' Although Husserl

speaks of the 'interconnections of things' and the 'interconnections of truths' as being ever essentially concomitant, this is true only of some *particular* science. In pursuit of ideal theory we must direct our interest exclusively to the 'interconnections of truths' and their essential features. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to note that, according to Husserl, every state of affairs must have a correlative truth concerning it so much so that considered purely in and of itself no state of affairs is objective, since it "comes to count objectively as being what it is" only (even if not exclusively) through a truth correlative to it. The latter statement, however, for Husserl might simply be another way of asserting that ideal unities constitute the ultimate conditions for valid knowledge, thus knowledge of the objective as objective, be it a knowledge of a mere fact or a pure truth. Besides these two distinguishing facts about theory, namely, that it is a complexity consisting of pure concepts and laws as well as it is essentially *one*, since in its pure generality it constitutes the consummate whole of each and every theoretical possibility; besides these two facts, all that applies to the ideal characterization of idea concepts, propositions, and laws, also applies to pure science or theory.

THE RELATION BETWEEN THE IDEAL AND THE REAL

Reading through the pages of the *Prolegomena*, staying on the alert for every passage treating the notion of ideality, one cannot help but be lured into the question of rapport, if any, between the ideal and the real.

47 Ibid., p. 144–5.

Time and again Husserl indicts the psychologistic logician of ignoring the “fundamental, essential, never-to-be-bridged gulf between ideal and real laws, between normative and causal regulation, between logical and real necessity, between logical and real grounds.”⁴⁸ The bare strength of the assertion, the uncompromising tone of its pronouncement, seem to leave no ground for mediation, since such appears simply unattainable between two sides breached one from another by a chasm of the “fundamental, essential, never-to-be-bridged gulf.” Let us, then, inquire whether this is Husserl’s actual position.

The relationship between the ideal and the real is, in fact, a multiple one, involving variation in kind, degree, and complexity. We shall thus begin with what Husserl terms the ‘act of ideation or ideational abstraction.’ Assuming the rigorous division between the two realms, the ideal and the real, one comes to realize that the essential difference lying between them requires correspondingly two different acts of cognition, for “as universal objects differ from singular ones, so, too, do our acts of apprehending them.”⁴⁹ Every event of experience in which one is brought into an actual and significant contact with the datum experienced may serve as an occasion for the ideal species to emerge intentionally in one’s mind, the experienced datum being but a real individual instance of that ideally single species. For, in Husserl’s words,

just as, while regarding some concrete case, we refer, not to it, but to its universal, its Ideal, so, while regarding several acts of such ideation, we rise to the inwardly evident recognition of the identity of these ideal unities which are meant in our single acts. These unities have identity in the authentic, strictest sense: they are *identical* Species [...].⁵⁰

Acts of ideation, consequently, designate a relationship between the ideal and the real interpreted as a certain actual occasion on which the contemplation of the real becomes the point of departure for the contemplation of the ideal.

Another respect in which the ideal and the real are closely connected is that of epistemic foundation. Passages abound in which Husserl, almost to a pedantic degree, tries to inculcate into his reader the truth that no objective and valid knowledge would be possible if there were no such ideal entities as pure concepts, propositions, laws, and science. “Plainly we are here concerned with *a priori* conditions of knowledge.”⁵¹ These are the ideal conditions which reach into the sphere of possible or actual thought, and, so-to-speak, oversee and govern its direction as to truth. “Obviously these [*a priori*] laws,” continues Husserl, “may undergo self-evident transformations through which they acquire an express relation to knowledge and the knowing subject, and now themselves pronounce assertions regarding ideal possibilities that arise through the transferred

48 Ibid., p. 50.

49 Ibid., p. 86.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid., p. 150.

application of ideal relationships (expressed in purely general propositions) to empirical instances.”⁵² By being what they are the ideal concepts, propositions, and laws make up the principles of all noetic validation, they stand therefore in a relation of a necessary logical condition to each and every *possible* instance of objective knowledge. It is here also that the correctness or incorrectness of judgments is ideally ascertained. Husserl, accordingly, points out that,

Each truth stands as an ideal unit over against an endless, unbounded possibility of correct statements which has its form and its matter in common. Each actual judgment, which belongs to this ideal manifold, will fulfill, either in its mere form or in its matter, the ideal condition for its own possible inward evidence.⁵³

Even when talk is of *real* or *actual* instances of knowledge, the latter’s relatedness to the ideal unities is by no means amiss. For, as stated by Husserl, “truth is certainly apprehended in knowledge, and the ideal thereby becomes a determination of a real experience.”⁵⁴ Though, the “propositions,” he cautions us, “which treat of this determination in its conceptual purity are not laws of real psychical happenings [...]”⁵⁵ The ideal laws are conceived of as certain *basic* necessary regulations which in a mode pertaining to them are able to penetrate the real acts of one’s knowledge and determine them in their attainment

of truth, such a penetration in no wise imperiling the essential autonomy of these regulations from the acts of knowledge determined by them.

Only when ideal unities in their strictly determinate form appear to one’s consciousness, only when they, so-to-speak, indwell the thoughts of one’s mind, can one speak of internally evident truths and meanings. The reason is that for Husserl

Inner evidence is rather nothing but the ‘experience’ of truth. Truth is of course only experienced in the sense in which something ideal can be an experience in a real act. Otherwise put: *Truth is an Idea, whose particular case is an actual experience in the inwardly evident judgement.*⁵⁶

Those moments of extraordinarily clear understanding, moments of abrupt, inspired intellectual seizing upon some essence in its full translucence of meaningfulness, moments, when our minds are imbued with a sense of inner evidence that something is true regardless of time and circumstances, these are the moments sustained by an immediate awareness of concepts, propositions, and laws in their immutability and timelessness, to wit, in their ideality.

It is important to note that in all the cases in which some relation is observed between the ideal and the real is always an *asymmetrical* relation, that is to say, it is always one-directional. The manner in which the ideal through its necessary criteria of truth and meaning, both pure and

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid., p. 119.

54 Ibid., p. 106.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid., p. 121.

prescriptive, influences and governs the real, is not held by the real toward the ideal. We have seen the diverse modes in which the ideal affects the real by concurring with the latter in acts of ideation, by constituting the necessary conditions of the possibility of knowledge, by determining instances of actual knowledge, at last by founding all noetic acts informed with inner evidence. In each of these a relationship is extended from the ideal to the real, yet not vice versa. To return to the question of logic, Husserl finds it feasible that “psychology *helps* in the foundation of logic.”⁵⁷ His single con-

tention – one might add, quite an adamant one – is that the sphere of the psychological, thus the sphere of real acts of knowing does not “provide logic’s *essential foundation*.”⁵⁸ As a result, the “fundamental, essential, never-to-be-bridged gulf” between the ideal and the real should be taken to mean that the factual world possesses no relationship to the realm of ideal entities that would exert a founding power with regard to the latter’s essential constitution.

57 Ibid., p. 45.

58 Ibid.

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