
Consequences of Husserl's anti-naturalism for a theory of Meaning

Consequências do antinaturalismo de Husserl para uma teoria do significado

DOI:10.12957/ek.2023.73339

Lucas Ribeiro Vollet¹

Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina

luvollet@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6300-491X>

ABSTRACT

This article is a historical reading dedicated to rescuing aspects of Husserl's phenomenology and defending its reflexive advantages over a naturalistic and calculative view of the question of meaning. After presenting those aspects of Husserl's doctrine of intentionality that are compatible with a syntactic and computational structuralism, we present Husserl's idealized view of the structure of meaning production as a point of detachment from purely computational views. We compare this theory with the problem of the linguistic-semantic object of study, showing that it inevitably evokes skepticism about the (natural) reality of this semantic-object. We introduce transcendental reflection as an alternative to the problematization of this (non-natural) non-reality. We then show that this path opens the access to study the articulations of this (unnatural) object as institutionalized sociocultural consensuses. We assume that Husserl's attempt to draft a Theory of Science in the form of transcendental phenomenology canonised a model of critique of the technicality of European science that became a paradigm for bringing together subgroups of philosophical reflection that can tie the question of meaning back to both its gnostic past and its future as a study of circular presuppositions of interpretation - philosophical hermeneutics.

Keywords: Husserl. Phenomenology. Semantics. Anti-naturalism. Transcendental.

¹ Possui graduação em Filosofia (2008), mestrado em Filosofia (2011), e doutorado em Filosofia (2016) pela Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina.

Preliminary remarks: The theory of intentionality and the beginnings of a normative and intersubjective study of the conditions of signification

A challenge for any interpreter of Husserl is to find the least complex explanation for describing how his technical reflections on the nature of meaning determinations – already found in the distinction between sign and expression in the *Essential Distinctions* (Chapter I, Investigation I, Expression and Meaning) – are linked to a set of phenomenological assumptions that precede any theory of signs efficient use. Husserl's theory of meaning is based on the assumption that the difference between the "ideal content [of assertion] from the transient of affirming and asserting" (HUSSERL, 2001, p. 196) is controversial or confusing only when we are victims of fundamental psychological misunderstandings. For Husserl, what characterizes the ideal content of assertion is the unity discovered in them: "we recognize its identity of intention in evident acts of reflection: we do not arbitrarily attribute it to our assertions, but discover it in them" (2001, p. 196). Inherent in this conception is an avowedly strict perspective on the ideality of representations that, at first glance, is difficult to reconcile with socio-historical views of meaning. How is it to be explained that the tradition of study Husserl has fostered has developed in a way that is more connected to the socio-historical problem of the formation of structures of meaning, including the ways of life and practices that describe the communicative interplay of various successful models of meaning? If we are not mistaken about the implications of phenomenology, there must be a suitable answer. The assumption of this article is that answering this question requires understanding that the author's intellectual path never abandoned idealistic and essentialist tendencies, but that for him these tendencies occurred in combination with other areas of thought. This combination leaves open the lines of the intellectual path compatible with the trajectories of hermeneutics and other sociological and intersubjective conceptions about the origin of meaning. In Husserl's effort to find an explanation for the origin of these idealizations, the concept of intentionality, rescued from the Middle Ages by Brentano, characterizes an essential piece of this idealistic puzzle.

In Hubert L. Dreyfus' words, the systematic emphasis and development of the ramifications of Brentano's conception positions Husserl: "As the first thinker to put directedness of mental representations at the center of his philosophy, he is also

beginning to emerge as the father of current research in cognitive psychology and artificial intelligence.” (HUBERT, L., 1982, p. 2)

It is more or less possible to define a representation as direction to its object in the sense that it contains an alignment mechanism indicating its compatibility with the object, even if the expectation is disappointed or the representation fails to meet an actual object. The relation between this content and the actual object is mediated by mental structures and therefore does not obey mere causal laws. This unnatural characteristic of the mental act is, according to Brentano, following medieval thinkers, the intentional inexistence (*Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*):

Every mental phenomenon is characterized by what the Scholastics of the Middle Ages called the intentional (or mental) inexistence of an object, and what we might call, though not wholly unambiguously, reference to a content, direction toward an object (which is not to be understood here as meaning a thing), or immanent objectivity. (1874, pp. 88–89)

The concept of intentionality fulfills two requirements that we can consider essential in Husserl's campaign to find an ideal framework of inquiry into meaning. First, it captures an aspect of representational capacity that is not exhausted in the psychological act by maintaining a theorizable unity beyond the specific spatial and temporal moment of the act, i.e., a theoretical account of the consistency of representation and its object. Secondly, it gives to the study of this theory of the correlation between representation and object an object of its own, which enables us to arrive at a science of the nature of these acts with the appropriate (anti-naturalist) adjustments in our orientation of study. In Husserl's career, the *Prolegomena to Pure Logic* already represent a first anti-psychological position, proposing the appropriate adjustments, and when he comes to the *Ideas*, the author already presents a much more mature theory of the essence of intentional acts, eliminating not only psychology but also any kind of natural orientation that does not resist epoché (his version of a technical procedure of skepticism towards everything that is not purely immanent in the structure of representation). Some quotations from the two works are significant here.

In the First Investigation, chapter three, Husserl is very clear when he expresses his opinion that there is a dimension of objectivity in which meaning has a life of its own that is itself alien to an evaluation of the production of proof and the collection of evidence by certain technical mechanisms as a specific methodological technology:

Where the sciences unfolds systematic theories, when they no longer merely communicate the progress of personal research and proof, but set forth the objectively unified, ripe of fruit of known truth, there is absolutely no talk of judgments, ideas and other mental acts. (2001, p. 225)

Despite the tremendous innovations introduced in this study in Husserl's later work, especially in the eidetic analysis of the immanent in Ideas, it is sufficient for our paper to point out that the noetic-noematic structures that appear at this stage of Husserl's work are transcendental generalizations of the ideality present in our knowledge of meaning. Rather than choosing a controversial interpretive path, we prefer to show the coherence of Husserl's trajectory by emphasizing that the transcendental conception in the Ideas only perfects methods that allow us to distance ourselves from false orientations or non-ideal representations in order to approach intentional phenomena. In other words, we find in the Ideas the representation of the possibility of accessing the significant character of actions by choosing a non-natural (i.e. transcendental) orientation: "In our transcendental phenomenological attitude, we can and must raise the eidetic question: what the perceived as perceived is, which eidetic moments it includes in itself as the perception-noema." (HUSSERL, 1983, p. 216)

To read all the developments of the concept of intentionality in the 19th century would be exhaustive even for an article in which this is the main topic, but we can highlight two important developments that arise from the contribution of this concept. First, the intentionality of the mental act in Brentano provides a distinction between mental and physical phenomena and marks a fixed point of theoretical understanding that can organize the methodology of the study of psychology without subordinating itself to the physical sciences. In a further development, in Husserl, the study of intentionality is no longer even subordinate to psychology. In a remarkable passage in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, Husserl accuses Brentano of not directly accessing the dimension of essential concatenations opened by his own study of intentionality:

Brentano's discovery of intentionality never led to seeing in it a complex of performances, which are included as sedimented history in the currently constituted intentional unity and its current manners of givenness – a history that one can always uncover following a strict method. (HUSSERL, 1969, p. 245).

This leads to the understanding that the phenomenological study of meaning structures transcends not only physical but also psychological actuality, producing a highly diffuse sphere of human understanding that encompasses everything that can be scientifically produced as a *concrete* meaningful content:

An ideal is a concrete original that may exist, and that may confront one in reality, as when a young artist takes the work of a great master as the ideal that he relives and that he strives after in his own creations. (HUSSERL, 2001, p. 231)

The ideality of what is specific is, (...), the complete opposite of reality or individuality; it represents no end of a possible endeavor, its ideality lies in a unity in multiplicity. (2001, p. 231)

Husserl was already moving in a circle of thought conducive to intersubjective, normative, and social considerations, since the transcendence of intentional being, at least since *Ideas*, was already associated by him with a transcendental condition of all meaning and thus of the conditions of mutual understanding presupposed in a landscape of consciousness. What distinguishes this perspective from naive sociologism, however, is that the inquiry to which it resorts cannot be reduced to any sociocultural production of meaning (such as the political impact of a historical event), but only to a very specific kind of meaning associated with what can ultimately be expressed as consciousness – the study of which belongs to the proper object of phenomenology.

Husserl Theory of Intentionality as a structuralist-Idealist thesis

At an advanced stage of his intellectual career (*Ideas*), Husserl returns to the subject of categorial syntheses and explains their syntactic and categorial role: “every object insofar as it can be explained, related to other objects or, in short, logically determined, takes on various syntactic forms” (HUSSERL, 1983, p. 23). Those innovations must be understood within this mathematical-oriented framework. Truth in mathematics is not *positive*, i.e., it does not consist of a correspondence between a hypothesis and an actual state of nature, but rather of a *potential outcome* that can be described in a structure of mappings. The ideal character of intentionality is meant to describe the categorial character of the structural composition of the mapping between non-actual possibilities. Since the mathematical description of structures also occurs in

linguistic structuralism, we are dealing here with an interesting coincidence². Charles Parsons, in *The Structural View of Mathematical Objects*, provides a valuable introduction that contextualizes the work of theorists who have used mathematical abstractions to idealize the determination of meaning:

By structuralist view of mathematical objects I mean the view that the reference of mathematical objects is always made in the context of a background structure, and that the objects involved do not have more than can be expressed in terms of the basic relationships of the structure (PARSONS, 1990, p. 303).

Husserl is one of these authors. In this respect, it is also common to combine the advances proposed by Husserl with those of Frege, since both favor a compositional and syntactic view of the ability to learn and produce meaning: "Husserl thus characteristically claims that meanings are structured entities, whose structure depends on the syntactic properties of their formal arrangement, rather than on semantic properties intrinsic to the lexical content of words." (BIANCHIN, 2018, p. 102)

Husserl's notion of synthesis of identification or categorial intuition, considered as entertained within a horizon of ideal possibilities, resembles this mathematical characterization: "Husserl famously claimed that knowledge could evolve only from direct acquaintance, not only regarding empirical objects, but also with general, categorial structures, such as numbers, grammar, logic or general concepts" (PIETARINEN; SHAFIEI; STJERNFELT, 2019, p. 3)

General symbols involve a map of the object, and a diagram thus formed allows the general object to be reasoned about. It is possible to gain mind-experimental access to such general objects using a map, if abstract reading directions are given. As long as we have a theoretically described awareness of those paths that are purely categorial and do not need collateral structure in order to be modeled, we are entitled to a pure *a priori* vision of intentionality as a key to unlock some ideal content. Of course, not every key should do. A bad shaped key can lead to forced entry. A putatively efficient

² The least suspected technical characterization of the term "structuralism" in relation to language links this expression to the linguistic movement begun by Ferdinand de Saussure and continued in the interwar period, but does not exclude other schools, such as the American. Its basic principle was to locate the uniqueness of the object of study of linguistics in the systematic interrelations between the signs of a language and to consider the proper structural states as those in which synchronous correlations between the signifier and the signified occur. Despite the fact that the subject matter is amenable to a mathematical and non-empirical treatment, this school is also distinguished by the fact that it provides a human overview of the nature of linguistic forms that are the object of structural treatment. This characterization has some affinity with Husserl's view in that the form that language takes as an object of study is idealized or studied in eidetic structures constructed for a human purpose.

intentionality is one whose key-model is an ideal abstraction of the encoding of the path to a possible object: "Expressions, even when they function outside of knowledge, must, as symbolic intentions, point to categorially formed unities". (HUSSERL, 2001, 199)

Husserl's philosophy of categories can be seen as a rich and reflective philosophical expression of mathematical projections used to model the rationality of belief formation and computable choices between truth options. As noted by Peter Simons (*Combinators and Categorical Grammar*): "the basic principles of categorial grammar had already been enunciated without being applied by Husserl and had been applied without being enunciated by Frege" (SIMONS, 1989, p. 241).

Thus, when the author writes *Ideas*, his mature conception of *noema* can already be said to be an idealized description of the course of consciousness itself, insofar as when we look at a tree we "reduce it to its pure immanence, and what therefore may or may not hold good for the really inherit components of the pure mental process" (HUSSERL, 1983, p. 237).

This introductory chapter presents Husserl's theory as compatible with structuralism, but leaves open whether this is the core of his philosophy or merely a secondary aspect better understood in connection with more fundamental premises. According to Husserl himself, in "On the Logic of Signs" we find what Daniel Lopes has called a "computational theory of mind embedded in a language of thought" (LOPES, 2020, p. 25). Although this computational perspective is essential for characterising our cognitive activity as opposed to a purely associative view of the mechanisms present in meaning production, we believe that it nevertheless does not go beyond the purely mechanical and natural level of the meaning dimension. In the next chapter we will examine the extent to which the ideality of representations of structures is, for Husserl, an element of our conceptual-transcendental knowledge, and therefore the computable-syntactic part derived from this knowledge is only a natural-empirical residue of an internal categorial activity.

Categories, Meaning and non-naturalism in Husserl

Categorial relations, for Husserl, are ideal relations of various kinds that provide unlimited intentional mapping material or a variety of noematic layers. Since the meaning potential of a sign is not limited by a single path or categorial apperception,

our understanding of meaning cannot be described by a general formula of consistency or compatibility of intended and fulfilled. Consequently, our general understanding of meaninglessness cannot be described by a general formula of inconsistency or incompatibility of intended and fulfilled: "fulfillment is often imperfect (...), and expressions often go with remotely relevant, only partially illustrative intuition" (HUSSERL, 2001, p. 203).

Without departing from a standard approach, we will be guided by the essential distinctions that Husserl elaborated in chapter 1 of the first investigation and several subsequent sections in chapter 2, in which the author presents a rich collection of reflections and debates on the nature of meaning, its distinction from the acts of indication and intimation. In section 20, the author discusses the limits of symbolic syntax, i.e., the use of signs to convey meaningful messages: "The true meaning of the signs in question becomes clear if we take a look at the popular comparison of mathematical operations with rule-governed games, e.g., chess" (HUSSERL, 2001, p. 210).

This contrast was not meant to contain any sensational conceptual information that would elevate Husserl to a higher level of knowledge than his contemporaries; however, it already shows a peculiar orientation that is evident in the choice of emphasis and contrast. For Husserl, the arrangement of signs in arithmetic can produce mechanically meaningful iterations, but the real meaning cannot be reduced to the rules used to reproduce those iterations, just as, for example, we cannot learn the rules of chess by rules derived from physical laws about the limits of the wood from which the chessboard is built. If there is anything in this thesis that deserves attention, it is the fact that Husserl created the conditions for the theoretical basis of our knowledge of meaning. When we know the bases for generating meanings, we have to know how to deepen the distinctions that were underspecified by the surface of signs: "we mean this or that with our spoken or written signs, and (...) this meaning is a descriptive character of intelligent speech and hearing, even when these are purely symbolic" (HUSSERL, 2001, p. 212).

For Husserl, the formation of a categorial region (a supreme genus) that provides access to consistent conceptual trajectories of specification was linked to the ability to encode the structure of possibilities of fulfillment that may eventually turn into intuitive

illustrations, disambiguations, proofs and demonstrations, but which may also represent intentional contents of varying ideal complexity (not directly provable):

In a purely logical form-theory of meanings [...] we must fix the primitive forms of independent meanings, of complete propositions with their internal articulations, and the structures contained in such articulations. We must fix, too, the primitive forms of compounding and modification permitted by the essence of different categories of possible elements. (HUSSERL, 2001, Vol. 2: 69)

Husserl's distinction between complete and incomplete intentional acts is an alternative solution to the problem of unsaturatedness:

The knowledge meant (by the analysis of mere meaning of words) is one whose self-evidence calls only for pure representation of the conceptual essences, (...); all questions as to the existence of objects corresponding to such concepts, (...), is ruled out. (HUSSERL, 2001, p. 212)

For the strategy of representation to yield to meaning, it is important that the path of specification do not collapse when “the sharp difference in the direction of fulfillment shows up the cleavage of meaning-intentions” (HUSSERL, 2001, p. 212). If this is the case, it will preserve its ontological domain and program its meaningful references in schematizable or mathematizable structural directions, albeit at the expense of enrichment aids and more demanding proof requirements.

It must be remembered that the ideal structures that organize our theoretical understanding of *meaning*, delimiting a protected access area of knowledge about what can be expressed, are inseparable from the conditions of stability of the mental landscape that provides the horizon for the concatenation of that meaning as a formal system. Clearly, it is possible to identify a form of formal symbolic expression that is able to maximize the effectiveness of our sign systems and reconcile our ability to signify with our ability to prove assumptions and justify assertions. This would be a traditional study of the proposition and its organizational structure, such as ‘S is P’ or ‘Fx’. Husserl advocates the primacy of propositions over judgments:

The investigator then propounds propositions, and naturally, in so doing, he asserts or judges. But he has no wish to speak of his own or anyone else's judgments, but of his correlated states of affairs, and when his critical discussions concerns propositions, he means by the latter the ideal meanings of statements. (2001, p. 225)

But Husserl, even before *Ideas*, does not believe that the investigation of the proposition is the ultimate ground for a phenomenological theory. For if we consider the

universe of study suitable for the evaluation of propositions, we will discover a much wider and unified field: “All theoretical science consists, in its objective content, of one homogeneous stuff: it is an ideal fabric of meanings”. (2001, p. 226)

Even if we assume that a form of organization of knowledge about meaning is privileged and manifests itself as propositional knowledge, this structure of interconnected propositions is a single fabric that encompasses all of science and therefore cannot deviate from a single study, a doctrine of science that can be studied when we access the most essential thing in our conscious activity: intentionality. This discussion cannot therefore be conducted in an externally natural way, as if we were merely interrogating a mechanism of arbitrary and empty signals.

The faculty that enables the idealization of the conditions under which meaning appears as an intentional mediator of human relations is in essence a faculty that points to the non-natural aspect of the human condition. It is that side that opens introspective access to self-awareness – or the “all inclusive unity of synthetic consciousness” (HUSSERL, 1983, p. 291). This presupposition precedes technical approaches to meaning problems. Without that we would be unable to make phenomenological investigations of laws and interrelationships present in the categorial basis of our strategies of interpretation and solution to meaning ambiguities.

At a time when the history of mankind is so much marked by the theoretical and cultural achievements of Darwinism, it is at first sight a burden to claim that the human capacity to idealize its mediating structures has an unnatural aspect. This supernatural feature of the ideality of meaning structure need not be taken as a focus of mysticism in Husserl's philosophy. However, it is a source of disagreement with aspects of the *mechanicism* typically associated with the achievements of modernity. While aligning his theory of meaning with teleological explanations, it misaligned his philosophy with mechanical, inductive, and instrumental descriptions of meaning. The relations of synthesis that make up the structure of intentionality are categorial in their purest form. To use Rudolf Bernet's concise and illuminating explanation:

According to Husserl, categorial acts are mainly acts of conjoining, relating, distinguishing and so on. These are complex acts that relate diverse, pregiven, intentional objects to one another and bring them into synthetic unity under a categorial point of view, for example, that of the part-whole relationship (BERNET, 1988, p. 35).

The idealization of the laws determining the relations between types, species, structures brings the logical content of the relation between possibilities and classes of possibilities and not the mere induction of possible instances: "their justifying proof, is not a inductive one, and so they are free of that existential content that attaches to all probabilities as such, even the such as the highest and most valuable." (HUSSERL, 2001, p. 53)

Meaning conditions in non-natural Terms: the transcendental approach

According to Kant (KrV)³, "transcendental" judgements (propositions) are those that can be proven by their relation to "something entirely contingent, namely possible experience" (A705/B733). This does not exhaust the contribution of the term. The function of a method of proof of this particularity in Kant's general system is to oppose the usual empiricist and rationalist method of approaching the question of the limits of knowledge and proof. In doing so, he founds a new form of metadiscourse. What the transcendental discourse adds to the intellectual universe of epistemology and later semantics - and what we believe is the principle followed by Husserl - is a means of approaching the general problem of proof and truth by shifting the reference to the system of concepts from which this proof can be derived as a true proposition and the nature of possible experience that limits the objective parameter for this proposition. Thus, he shifts the question to the system of meanings and their interrelations, which can be viewed with the phenomenological method as a system of structural layers that sustain the relations between an intention and a possible fulfillment.

In a further development of the interpretation, we can say that Kantian transcendentalism, by condemning the limits of transcendental realism and its dialectical illusions, promoted the kind of reflection in which the nature of ideality and its possibilities of human institutionalization are brought into focus as categories that define a parameter of rationality. In Husserl, this reflection has matured to the point where it is found in the study of the meaning-relations that underlie a way of life. Now the focus shifts from the opposition to transcendental realism to the natural orientation, which, according to Husserl's phenomenology, is not able to describe the ideal conditions of construction in order to set limits to knowledge itself. It is necessary to

³ *KrV*: Critique of Pure Reason.

bracket natural orientation in order to comprehend at all - transcendently or phenomenologically - a context of linguistic mediation so complex and speculative, or so outside our conditions of understanding, that it would condemn us to such a hermetic labyrinth that life itself would be impossible.

Husserl, by tapping into the transcendental method of approaching categorial failure, also tapped into the conditions in which the absurd can appear in a culture. At some point in human history, the question of whether man was an irrational animal was not just an empirical question, but a categorial problem, i.e., a problem concerning the semantic compatibility of rules mapping a reference to a thing that would be both a man and an irrational animal. Semantic and analytic connections such as these have evolved historically and, as long as they have endured, have maintained a high degree of semantic (normative) protection inside some categorial framework, so that their denial, while not contradictory, would be deemed "absurd." All this makes the issue of "pseudo-sense" delicate, but not easily avoided. It is tricky because it reminds us of a time of philosophical dogmatism when it was natural to decide what kind of statement had "sense" (even if it was not a contradiction). But it is unavoidable, because it seems to be part of human cultural formation that certain analytic connections becomes paradigmatic. They are better entrenched in our habits of communicating and our parameters of reasoning. They testify something about our ability to avoid typical kinds of irrationality (Kant call it Dialectical of Pure Reason).

The mentioned approach doesn't take truth for granted as the mere anti-extension of untrue in a conventional system or a computer machine. It frames our canonical-paradigmatic forms of modeling truth and implication as alignments with the scientific and cultural state of the art, making "truth" historically relevant for selecting successful interactions with the social and natural environment. Since "truth" defines a state of invariance in the interpretation of a sentence, that is, the state in which this interpretation cannot be reversed, we can also say that electrons and quarks are structural constructions to amplify the state of irreversibility of our interpretations. So, the introduction of electrons and quarks is not an introduction of conventions: It is the result of an irreversible expansion of the universe of possible experiences (and their categorial relations).

The transcendental approach to the phenomenological question of the enduring and ideal rule of the sign – its intentional nature – considered the categorial relations not as simple technical-mathematical solutions, but as evidence of man's strategic ability to develop possible solutions to outline elements of meaning that are repeatable and cumulative, that can be expressed categorically, and that convey knowledge of their mapable relations (semantic knowledge). This ability indicates a capacity for reflexive revision of intentional idealizations that is not "natural" in the usual sense, i.e., that involves phenomenological reflection. The non-natural aspect of these objects of study can be described by their potential to develop alternatives to organize the system of meanings by providing new structures and textures not found in nature as physical objects. We will see in the next chapter how the recognition of this anti-naturalistic turn affects the study of language insofar as it is a human instrument with independent structures.

Structural Ideality and the mysterious nature of Language and Meaning as an Object of Study

It should be recalled that in the twentieth century, linguists based on the linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure reached similar conclusions, although they were distanced from phenomenology by oceanic stretches of methodological and epistemological divergence. The distinction between *langue* and *parole* as two different dimensions of the phenomenon of *langage* points to a distinction between the state in which the linguistic object must be in order to be an object of study. This state, in fact, has a certain degree of idealized stability. "Language should not be understood – as has frequently happened – as an actual, existing, empirical object. Rather, it is the object the linguist has to construct when he sets out to analyse language; i.e. it is a theoretical object." (WALLE; WILLEMS; WILLEMS; 2006, p. 5).

There is therefore a certain degree of circularity. To be a *studyable* object, language as such must be brought into its ideal structures by the linguist. As a result of the division between *langue* and *parole*, the linguist's recognition of language risks being limited to what he has internalized as a mechanically functioning system. Since the dawn of analytic philosophy, there has been a fundamental receptivity to the notion that without some kind of analysis, regimentation, or even idealization, we lose the

ability to examine the recursive rules internalized in a mind or culture in order to produce well-formed-formulas (assertability and inference validity were just the ultimate test for judging the efficiency of that production). There is a common denominator in this overlap of perspectives: the notion that a certain state of synchronicity must be presupposed for language to present itself as an object worthy of study.

The notion of language as an organized and systematic block of rules has a direct bearing on the view that if two people disagree on basic issues of logical consistency and analyticity, there is something about the method of communication they use that fails to unite them. In common sense terms, they do not seem to speak the same language. Of course, this is circular rhetoric. The parameter for judging whether something is an illicit, abusive, or hurtful use of language is the language itself. There are no incontrovertible facts that determine the conditions under which certain sentences are constrained by others; there are only parameters, and they are the parameters for distinguishing different strategies of inference and assertion. Relativism becomes a very live threat because there is no language-free standpoint from which to evaluate and criticize important linguistic distinctions.

One might say that an efficient language cannot produce sentences that are flexible enough to be rewarded under different conditions, i.e., both the conditions under which they are supported and the conditions under which they are not supported by another sentence *q*. But this does not change the fact that the parameter used to judge is in the language itself, and we cannot simply step outside of it to judge from the outside. It seems reasonable to maintain the suspicion that these parameters can be reified and function as historically entrenched categories or syntactic structures that cause the realm of instituted "normality": the sociological *status quo*.

Structuralism difficulties and the questions arising from it

A similar tension between naturalism and idealism was drawn in the European context of structuralist study. For the post-Saussurian tradition, a coherent study of language as a system requires distinguishing its synchronic from its diachronic state and giving priority to the former. In this prioritized state, correlations between chains of signified and signifiers can be generated by the bare knowledge of the interrelation of

the signs. In synchronic conditions there is no relationship between signs beyond the ability of the available structures to support their iterability in their grammatical roles (which means that knowing the structure amounts to knowing the iterable traces). These conditions complete the structuralist view of language as a closed and autonomous system of signs. But this view leads to a problem similar to that mentioned above about the ideality of the structural state. In the Saussurian epistemology of linguistics, language is not an innocuous object of cognition, but a set of relational forms that process the sedimentation of the human capacity to find stable "intentional" correlations. This brings back the problem of dynamic structure modifications: "changing social linguistic practices continuously transform web of relations between the signs" (PIOTR, 2016, p. 184). Consequently, "the method of this science will therefore not be external observation but participatory reflection on language as experienced, lived, and employed in daily practice. This science will remain bound to human experience" (RUIZ, 2016, p. 483).

To be a *studyable* object, language as such must be brought into its ideal structures by the linguist. As a result of the Saussurian division between *langue* and *parole*, the linguist's recognition of language risks being conditioned to what he has internalized as a mechanically functioning system. This raises some questions that haunt philosophy in many dimensions of study:

What degree of immunity to skepticism can a semantic study of language warrant when the crucial object of its investigation – meaning – is theoretically and circularly constructed by theorists who also use that language and are therefore unable to get out of it to describe it?

Is there a reasonable suspicion that the linguist's construction falsifies or compromises the results of his analysis?

Is there the danger that using language versions that represent the self-image of a cultural imaginary of a time, or whose generative machinery – its most structural part – favors dominant group practices?

How can we avoid creating an ideological view of the "normal use" of language, which we call the mystification of language patterns, in which language appears as a prominent superstructure reflecting the reification of internalized assumptions?

These considerations serve two purposes: 1. to address the inadequacy of the semantic question from the standpoint of natural science (which supports naturalistic skepticism toward entities such as "meanings"), 2. its possibility of being addressed scientifically from the standpoint of sociological and anthropological concepts. By conforming, however, to this anti-naturalistic constraint, we create a vulnerability to skepticism. We argue that semantic skepticism need not be the only option. There are no factual and observational means to decide between two systems of inference, indeed. However, the normal parameters of language use allow us to resist very gross deviations of regular conclusions and patterns of divergent assertions, giving the recursive meaning of the logical terms for a language.

The problem is then not skepticism. It is the fact that the parameters constraining conditions necessary to control meaning-paradigm shifts are sociolinguistic impositions designed for their own self-preservation, and not factual evidences of the kind a naturalist would want. The interest in remaining within the conditions of normal use and inference is not fostered by factual evidence of language use, but by the need to *mimic normal use* not to be excluded from the speech community. It is to be expected that recognition of this condition will stimulate a portion of linguists to discuss the tendency of language to standardize the parameters of use and often to create superstructures of vocabularies in order to reinforce an ideological self-image about rational or simply "normal" man.

These questions would foster a rich debate with an incredible variety of new topics, but here they serve only to emphasise the property of the object of study of linguistics and semantics as a non-reality in the proper sense of the natural sciences, and as something that, in order to acquire a theoretical reality - or to be amenable to the study of the linguist (the translator, etc.) - must correspond circularly precisely to the parameters (the categories) that the linguist is willing to use for understanding these form-structures. This will lead us to a transcendental discussion in the next chapter.

The kinds of philosophical questions and curiosities typical of a phenomenological-transcendental and anti-naturalistic approach

In this chapter, we assume that there is a philosophical sensibility that is peculiar to a partially skeptical orientation, but whose skepticism lasts only until it becomes

"transcendental." That is, this philosophical sensibility is skeptical only of the ability of natural guidance to give us answers about how to frame problems of meaning from the standpoint of the questions they deem relevant - as opposed to the mere questions of a computational theorist or a empirical linguist. Our job is to describe what they think is relevant and defend that relevance.

The continental tradition went through a long period of reflection on the conditions of the sovereignty of pure reason and the formation of meaning, thus adopting its anti-metaphysical heritage from a singular non-naturalistic (and non-positivistic) perspective. It is the non-naturalist part of continental anti-metaphysics that enables these philosophers to follow paths of thought that do not stop at the surface of the conditions for verifying propositions. Positivism and logical-positivism stops at the determination of the rule that establishes the validity of the connection between the proposition and the truth. Naturalism eliminates that part of the verification question still associated with empiricist and rationalist or dogmatic ideologies, and presents the question of determining meaning as pure and free from any ties to *a priori* projects of distinction between logical and non-logical, synthetic and analytic, etc. Modern, post-Quinean naturalism preserves only the thesis that natural science must be independent and have autonomous access to its own production of meaning and the relations of consequence. Thus, what was still "transcendental" in positivism is finally eliminated in naturalism.

Transcendental approaches, however, are not limited to positivist dogmas about *a priori* conditions of meaningfulness. There is information that teaches us how the parameters of verification are changing and what conditions of sovereignty they rely on to remain legitimate. And this subject is taboo for positivism, which is therefore sub-transcendental - if it is transcendental at all. It is a taboo for naturalism as well. Naturalists reject any kind of extra-scientific considerations about the conditions of science itself, and therefore science is considered an absolute parameter for itself. Naturalists do not conduct any meta-research on the conditions of these parameters.

But why should these parameters be immune to investigation? The institutionalization of values and rational parameters provides relevant information

about the *transcendental* support of these conditions and thus opens up “*Copernican*”⁴ avenues of reflection about the subject or the being that has theoretical access to the categories that condition the eidetic production or idealization of meanings. Continental philosophy dealt with this problem in a reflective fashion. Despite so much hyperbole, it seems that there is a difference between speaking with a reflective understanding of the categories underlying the interpretable inferences of the system and speaking without an understanding of that categorical basis. This should establish a minimal difference between sense and pseudo-sense, even if it is elastic. Moreover, cultural paradigms based on science should not be indifferent or irrelevant to the construction of certain social models of meaning, in the sense that certain analytic truths depend not only on the dictionary, but on an acquired and consolidated scientific consensus. Absurdity, nonsense, contradictions are symptoms of a categorial rupture, but also of some human crisis. We should therefore have access to the transcendental conditions that enable us to deal with these crises of meaning - and this appeals to another side of the Kantian heritage that was pursued by Husserl but not by logical-positivists.

Now, should it imply that there is some properties belonging to those who have awareness of their conditions of meaning? If so, is it a psychological, a sociological property? Is it a hermeneutical privilege? These questions seem to preoccupy continental philosophers, while they only marginally worry positivistic and naturalistic philosophers. Whether this is an advantage or a disadvantage for one side or the other depends on the interests at stake. We believe that the abolition of the transcendental approach in favor of blind technicism would be an irreplaceable loss to human reflection and to any meta-discourse on science. We believe that Husserl had similar inclinations.

Conclusion

Husserlian philosophy, however undesirably linked to the semantic and computational problematic (familiar to the analytic family of themes), remains one of the few legit available link on the academic shelves between a mathematical idealist approach and a human teleological view of meaning-making practices. The author not only discusses the conditions for building eidetic structures that give reality to human

⁴ In reference to the Copernican revolution in philosophy described by Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

solutions to integration crises, whether with their natural environment or with their social environment. The author also conducts this discussion from a transcendental point of view, questioning the essential features that legitimizes the parameters of this idealization and produces historical paradigms of rationality that describe the conditions of integration with a meaningful way of life. In conclusion, we contend that phenomenology is one of the few fields that can offer a comprehensive analysis of the problem of meaning from the perspective of human dramaturgy and its crises of integration with its way of life, regardless of whether these crises are presented as breakdowns of the rational parameters for social consensus or for intuitive synchrony with an ideal foundation of science – avoiding the isolation of science from its own categorial foundations.

As this discussion matured into a comprehensive examination of the technicality of the crisis in European science, Husserlian theory became a channel of communication between subgroups of philosophical reflection interested in preserving the pre-Enlightenment aspects of the question of meaning and links them to new areas of reflection on the question of consensus building and the circular assumptions of human understanding - philosophical hermeneutics. Among the reflections that arise from this blending of perspectives are the study of the prepropositional conditions of meaning, the Gnostic riddles about silence (which is beyond the limits of what can be said), the anthropological parameters of authenticity and inauthentic rule-following, and the mysteries about the meaninglessness or futility of life. Without this fundamental axis, then, we have very difficult access to an academic path that can provide intellectual opportunities for a whole field of reflection on the question of meaning, its possible defeats, and the human dramaturgy behind those failures of meaning, including political narratives of defeat and the consequences of the collapse of meaning for the self-identity of a personhood claim.

Since in this conclusion we cannot quote and comment - without exorbitant digressions - even a small part of the authors inspired by this approach and characterizing the above mentioned subgroups, we prefer to speak only about the kind of general curiosity that these considerations promote. This characterization of the problem is naturally apt to arouse a rich curiosity about the very human element involved in meaning production, its values, contracts and institutions, and other

instruments for building its self-understanding, the contours of its connection to life, and its strategies of rebellion when normative conditions alienate humanity from its conditions of meaningful life. It is not surprising, then, that the continental post-Husserlian tradition has tackled these latter problems more often than analytic philosophers. For static structuralism and computational conventionalism (language as calculator) are not sufficient to understand other nuances of the problem of meaning, such as the forms of obfuscation and concealment that stand in the way of our meaningful understanding of truth and implication. In the Husserlian framework, our canonical-paradigmatic forms of modeling truth and implication are not mere conventions based on a set of harmless logical vocabulary (connectives and quantifiers). We cannot simply take the extension of truth as static dogmas about the anti-extension of falsehood. As historical humanity reaches various stages of eliminating obscurations, and as there are various stages of success and failure in harmonizing intentionality with the world, the introduction of new entities (and associated ontological knowledge) is crucial to consciously grasping the structural adjustments to the invariance of truth - rather than blindly living these modifications as they occur in the "proposition" (or well-formed-sentences).

References

- ALVES, Pedro M. S. *Intersubjectividade e comunicação: uma abordagem fenomenológica*. Lisboa: Centro de Filosofia da Universidade de Lisboa. 2009.
- BIANCHIN, Matteo. Husserl on Meaning, Grammar, and the Structure of Content. *Husserl Studies*. 32. 2018. 10.1007/s10743-017-9223-2.
- BENERT, Rudolf. Perception, Categorial Intuition and Truth in Husserl's Sixth 'Logical Investigation'. *The Collegium Phaenomenologicum, The First Ten Years*. 1988. 10.1007/978-94-009-2805-3_3.
- BRENTANO, F. *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. 1874.
- HUBERT L. Dreyfus. *Husserl, Intentionality, and Cognitive Science* (Cambridge: MIT Press/Bradford Books, 1982.
- HUSSERL, Edmund. *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*. First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology. Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1983.
- HUSSERL, Edmund. *Logical Investigations*. Routledge, 2001.

- HUSSERL, Edmund. *Formal and Transcendental Logic*. Martinus Nijhoff. 1969.
- HUSSERL, Edmund. *Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*. Northwestern University Press. 1970.
- KANT, I. *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by P. Guyer and A. Wood, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- LOPES, Jesse Daniel. How Do Mental Processes Preserve Truth? Husserl's Discovery of the Computational Theory of Mind. *Husserl Studies* 36 (1), 2020, pp. 25-45.
- PARSONS, C. The Structuralist View of Mathematical Objects. *Synthese*, vol. 84, no. 3, Springer, 1990, pp. 303-46.
- PIETARINE, Ahti-Veikko & SHAFIEI, Mohammad & STJERNFELT, Frederik, *Mutual Insights on Peirce and Husserl*. 2019. 10.1007/978-3-030-25800-9_1.
- PIOTR, Litwin. Book review: Beata Stawarska, Saussure's Philosophy of Language as Phenomenology: Undoing the Doctrine of the Course in General Linguistics. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2015, 286 pp.. *Psychology of Language and Communication*. 2016. 10.1515/plc-2016-0010.
- PORTA, Mario. *Edmund Husserl - Psicologismo, psicologia e a fenomenologia*. Edições Loyola, 2013.
- RUIZ, Elena. Book review: Beata Stawarska: Saussure's Philosophy of Language as Phenomenology: Undoing the Doctrine of the Course in General Linguistics: Oxford University Press, 2015, 286 pp, *Human Studies* 39 (3), 2016. 481-486.
- SIMONS, Peter. Combinators and Categorical Grammar. *Notre Dame Journal of Formal Logic*. Volume 30, Number 2, Spring, 1989
- WALLE, Jürgen & WILLEMS, Dominique & WILLEMS, Klaas. Structuralism. *Handbook of Pragmatics*, 2006. 10.1075/hop.10.str1.
-

Recebido em: 09/02/2023 | Aprovado em: 17/07/2023

