

Husserlian Aspects of Wittgenstein's Middle Period

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It is not immediately obvious that there was anything connecting Husserl or phenomenology with Wittgenstein's work, but with an examination of the evidence, this attitude can be changed. I will establish the modest probability that Wittgenstein had contact with the ideas of Husserl, and that the ideas of Husserl were either directly or indirectly influential in Wittgenstein's work. Wittgenstein's concern with phenomenology is most explicitly expressed in his *Philosophical Remarks* (hereafter *Remarks*), however there is tacit concern throughout most of his writing.

The first section of the *Remarks* begins with a discussion of phenomenology. It serves to introduce the idea that Wittgenstein believed himself to be working on phenomenological problems. The issue is with what he calls a "phenomenological language." A phenomenological language is an attempt to construct an ideal, pure, language of thought, that stresses the grammar over the content, form over the particular facts expressed by that form. He says:

I do not now have phenomenological language, or 'primary language' as I used to call it, in mind as my goal. I no longer hold it to be necessary. All that is possible and necessary is to separate what is essential from what is inessential in our language.

That is, if we so to speak describe the class of languages which serve their purpose, then in so doing we have shown what is essential to them and given an immediate representation of immediate experience...

A recognition of what is essential and what inessential in our language if it is to represent, a recognition of which parts of our language are wheels turning idly, amounts to the construction of a phenomenological language (Wittgenstein 1975).

Before this point, Wittgenstein had a phenomenological, "primary" language as a goal. Where? The *Tractatus*, with its pictorial presentations, draws a limit to the expression of thoughts, and clarifies the logic of our language by elucidating the possibility inherent in any statement that has sense (*Sinn*). This pure grammar, or essentialist definition of language, was sought there. Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* tries to say what can be said about the form of thought and language, and to attempt to show what cannot be said about the formal structures of our thought.

The early Wittgenstein had said, "Language disguises thought. So much so, that from the outward form of the clothing it is impossible to infer the form of the thought beneath it..." (Wittgenstein 1961). Thus, clarity about the form of a proposition, its "pictorial form," or *grammar*, would clearly display the *possibilities* of language. In defining any possible language as a *language* only in terms of what is required for representation to occur (through establishing the elements essential to any picture), the *Tractatus* presents a purely formal language. Husserl did *not* develop a special language to convey the universal structures, though their description was a primary concern of his. How much, perhaps, did Husserl's management of language influence Wittgenstein's later philosophy in its analysis of ordinary language?

After 1929 Wittgenstein's stated goal was to examine the form of *ordinary* language. It was not to construct a logical, meta-language, like Frege's "language of thought," but to clarify the ordinary one by uncovering the necessary requisites for representation. This is one basic difference between Wittgenstein's early and later periods: the shift from *pure* to *ordinary* language analysis. In place of a language that disguised thought, the picture-language of the *Tractatus* was to have a clinical cleanliness. Wittgenstein's attitude in the *Philosophical Investigations* is different: instead of a "primary" language of thought, which would communicate nothing in the end, a more rough hewn language grips the world better (see Wittgenstein 1968). The hope for a transparent medium through which to transmit our thoughts is now seen to be itself a prejudice. We can see this shift in terms of his stance on phenomenology, on the cusp of his change from the *Tractatus* to the *Philosophical Investigations*.

Wittgenstein's goal is comparable with Husserl's, as Husserl states it in the introduction to Volume II of the *Logical Investigations*. Husserl begins with a discussion of linguistic *expression*, of our attempts to communicate meaningfully. He says:

Linguistic discussions are certainly among the philosophically indispensable preparations for the building of pure logic: only by their aid can the true *objects* of logical research, ...be refined to a clarity that excludes all misunderstanding. We are not concerned with grammatical discussions, *empirically conceived and related to some historically given language*: we are concerned with discussions of a most general sort which cover the wider sphere of an objective *theory of knowledge* and, closely linked with this last, the *pure phenomenology of the experiences of thinking and knowing*... This phenomenology must bring to pure expression, must *describe* in terms of their essential concepts and their governing formulae of essence, the essences which directly make themselves known in intuition...(Husserl 1976)

Husserl did not promote a radical revision of language, but he cannot be said to have "left language alone," as he proceeded to stipulate the "phenomenological" meaning of a glossary of terms. This is precisely what Wittgenstein accuses Husserl of, in his conversations with Schlick (Waismann 1979). Nevertheless, Husserl claims, "Rough reflection on our thoughts and their verbal expression, conducted by us without special schooling, ... suffice to indicate a certain parallelism between thinking and speaking." (Husserl 1976) The goal for Husserl's phenomenology was to express, within ordinary language, the essential grammar of thought, a descriptive, *eidetic* (not empirical), science. For Husserl, it was the case from the beginning that the structures of thought could be expressed directly through an ordinary (though modified) language.

We can define Husserlian phenomenology as fundamentally characterized by the following aspects:

1. Concern with the faithful *description* of the structure of immediate experience; that all knowledge begins in experience. *Phenomenology provides the grammar of experience.*

2. Phenomenological truths are intuited from immediate experience, insofar as the syntax of immediate experience can be repeatedly confirmed by any conscious entity through reflection that is free from prejudice, thus allowing a *pure* description. This constitutes phenomenological objectivity.

3. Empirical sciences, such as psychology and physics, are *founded* on the grammar of immediate experience and the rules of logical justification. Consequently, phenomenology cannot be generated by the sciences, but serves as the *grounds* for the sciences.

4. Husserl's phenomenological *method* is based on the epoché, the suspension of the "natural attitude." The "natural attitude" is the underlying *prejudice* of an objective world existing independently of experience. The epoché is why phenomenology is unencumbered by the metaphysical mind-body question, allowing for a pure description of experience. This allows phenomenology to uncover essential characteristics of an impersonal abstract Ego via a kind of *Wesensschau*.

5. Like Franz Brentano, Husserl identifies the *intentionality* of consciousness as paramount among these structures. This is the relationship between consciousness and the world.

In examining how many of the above phenomenological aspects are presented in Wittgenstein, we first find a united stance against psychologism. Though this anti-psychologism is shared with Frege, Frege was unconcerned with the given, immediate experience, which he believed to be inherently subjective *Vorstellungen*, and in principle not objective. Attending the phenomena is not enough. It is the recognition that phenomenology is a "first philosophy" which demands the establishment a descriptive grammar of immediate experience, a language of thought. Once one rejects the sciences as the source of this grammar, as a field that already presumes logic, there is nowhere else to turn but to a type of phenomenology.

It is clear that Wittgenstein, like Husserl, also rejected the notion that philosophy could ever become one field amongst others in the sciences, physical or psychological. In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein claims, "The totality of true propositions is the whole of natural science..." "Philosophy is not one of the natural sciences," and "Psychology is no more closely related to philosophy than any other natural science." (Wittgenstein 1961) In the *Remarks*, Wittgenstein's most substantial analysis of phenomenology, we also find:

Physics differs from phenomenology in that it is concerned to establish laws. Phenomenology only establishes the possibilities. Thus, phenomenology would be the grammar of the description of those facts on which physics builds its theories. To explain is more than to describe; but every explanation contains a description. (Wittgenstein 1975)

Wittgenstein echoes a conceptual relationship between phenomenology and science that one sees both in the *Tractatus* and in Husserl. Both Husserl and Wittgenstein attempt to grasp the essential rules which allow for the designation of a space of possible states of affairs or experiences; and since this phenomenological logic sets up the scaffold upon which the true facts, or particularizations, of physics hang, we see how physics depends upon phenomenology. Husserl thus claims:

All natural science is naïve in regard to its point of departure...As a result, the following is clear: should

there be decisive arguments to prove that physical natural science cannot be philosophy in the specific sense of the word, can never in any way serve as a foundation for philosophy, and can achieve a philosophical value for the purposes of metaphysics only on the basis of a prior philosophy, then all such arguments must be equally applicable to psychology. Now, there is by no means a lack of such arguments (Husserl 1965).

Both Husserl and Wittgenstein then concur that philosophy, *qua* phenomenology, is non-reducible to neither psychology nor physics.

In that phenomenology establishes the possibility of physics, and thus the physical sciences, which extrapolate their general laws from particular instances, both Husserl and Wittgenstein concur that phenomenology must itself be outside of the arena of physics. How they delineate an area of study that is outside physics is somewhat distinct. Husserl, after the developments set forward in his *Ideas I*, believed that one could achieve a phenomenological attitude, allowing for a sort of phenomenological perception to occur, by invoking the *epoché*. Wittgenstein, however, in attempting to extrapolate thoughts from language use, believes that:

All our forms of speech are taken from ordinary, physical language and cannot be used in epistemology or phenomenology without casting a distorting light on their objects.

The very expression 'I can perceive x' is itself taken from the idioms of physics, and x ought to be a physical object – e.g. a body – here. Things have already gone wrong if this expression is used in phenomenology, where x must refer to a datum. For then 'I' and 'perceive' also cannot have their previous senses. (Wittgenstein 1975)

What is Wittgenstein describing other than the requirement that investigations pursued *under the epoché* be described in a unique, *phenomenological* language? In other words, if phenomenology is not scientific, and if our natural language, like the "natural attitude," is embedded in physicalistic grammar, then when Husserl uses terms that seem ordinary, like "I," "perception," and "object," these words mean something quite different than what we'd normally mean by them. Husserl *needed* a phenomenological language, a 'primary' language, for ordinary language is ill equipped to reflect the fine-grained distinctions Husserl asks of it.

What Wittgenstein is responding to are attempts to describe immediate experience in its purity, without considering the fact that *to describe* requires some kind of medium. Wittgenstein recognizes that medium to be language. Nevertheless, it cannot be *ordinary* language (which remains in the natural attitude), but a primary language, one that can transcend the effects physics has had. In the following, Wittgenstein describes a moving, mechanical reproduction of a visual experience, in order to produce an identical experience in someone else ("you will now see exactly what I saw, as I saw it), and then responds:

Isn't it clear that this would be the most immediate description...? ...Anything which tried to be more immediate still would inevitably cease to be a description. Instead of a description, what would then come out would be that inarticulate sound with which many writers would like to begin philosophy. ('I have, knowing of my knowledge, consciousness of something.') (Wittgenstein 1975)

Throughout the *Remarks*, Wittgenstein discusses visual space and color, toothaches and pain, the experience of memorial-time and harmony from a phenomenological perspective. He recognizes repeatedly that physics cannot give an account of "subjective" or "qualitative" experience, and also recognizes that phenomenology remains within a descriptive domain of possibilities as a description of the structure, or grammar, of experience. Wittgenstein further claims, "The worst philosophical errors always arise when we try to apply our ordinary –physical– language in the area of the immediately given" (Wittgenstein 1975). Is Wittgenstein calling for a language that can express what is left after a Husserlian style reduction?

Wittgenstein's phenomenological language must also include *intentionality*, for, "If you exclude the element of intentionality from language, its whole function then collapses" (Wittgenstein 1975). The "directedness" of intentionality, therefore, cannot be found in consciousness, nor is it found in objects, but is to be found in the meanings of language. Language doesn't then have a *derivative* intentionality, but is the primary source of reference through its meanings. He says, later in the *Philosophical Grammar* that, "The German word for 'meaning' [*Bedeutung*] is derived from the German word for 'pointing' [*deuten*]" (Wittgenstein 1974). If Wittgenstein remains faithful to Frege, *Bedeutung* names the relationship between words and objects, between a Thought and its truth-value. He rejects the idea that a proposition acts as a proper name, whose object is its truth-value, in the *Tractatus*. Rather a proposition becomes *thought* only as it is written or spoken, whose *Sinn* is its possibility (determined by its grammar) and whose *Bedeutung* is the actual state of affairs. *Bedeutung* is referential, for Wittgenstein, but, as *Bedeutung*, has its existence only in language. Much of his later philosophy is dedicated to dispelling the myth that there is anything particularly mental, or mysterious, about *Bedeutung*, and thus, nothing particularly *mental* about intentionality. So intentionality, the possibility of directedness, is a function of language mapping onto the world; intentionality becomes not the Husserlian "mark of the mental" but the mark of the linguistic.

Wittgenstein's prominent use of "phenomenology" occurred near the zenith of Husserl's phenomenological movement. Consequently, his use of the term would have Husserlian connotations, and would require explicit distinctions for it not to have this connotation. His use is similar in a broad sense to the Husserlian program, including his anti-psychologism, his emphasis on a formal description of immediate experience, his insistence that such a primary description is not found through materialist physics, and the insistence on the intentionality in language. The simplest explanation is that, directly or indirectly, Husserl influenced Wittgenstein in a significant fashion.

Literature

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