

DONN WELTON

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# THE ORIGINS OF MEANING

*A Critical Study of the Thresholds of  
Husserlian Phenomenology*



MARTINUS NIJHOFF PUBLISHERS

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1983 **MARTINUS NIJHOFF PUBLISHERS**  
a member of the KLUWER ACADEMIC PUBLISHERS GROUP  
THE HAGUE / BOSTON / LANCASTER



## **Distributors**

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*for the United States and Canada:* Kluwer Boston, Inc., 190 Old Derby Street, Hingham, MA 02043, USA

*for all other countries:* Kluwer Academic Publishers Group, Distribution Center, P.O.Box 322, 3300 AH Dordrecht, The Netherlands

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**Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 83-13199**

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ISBN 90-247-2618-2 (this volume)

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Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, P.O. Box 566, 2501 CN The Hague, The Netherlands.

PRINTED IN THE NETHERLANDS

## PREFACE

Whenever one attempts to write about a philosopher whose native tongue is not English the problem of translations is inevitable. For the sake of simplicity and accuracy we have translated all of our quotations from the German unless otherwise noted. But for the sake of easy reference we have included the page numbers of the English translations as well as the German texts. Because there is a new translation forthcoming, we have not included references to the English translation of *Ideen I*. Since the German texts are readily available, we did not reproduce them in the footnotes. All quotations translated from Husserl's unpublished manuscripts, however, do include the German text in the footnotes.

This work is greatly indebted to the criticism and help of Professor Ludwig Landgrebe, whose support made possible two years at the Universität Köln. Garth Gillan and Lothar Eley also have contributed much to the basic direction of this work. Others such as Edward Casey, Claude Evans, Irene Grypari, Don Ihde, Grant Johnson, Martin Lang, J. N. Mohanty, Robert Ray and Susan Wood have been more than helpful in their discussions with me on these topics and in their criticisms of some of the ambiguities of an earlier draft. Likewise a special word of thanks to Reto Parpan whose insightful corrections were most valuable and to Nancy Gifford for her discussions on matters epistemological and for her help in the final preparation of the book. The contribution which the graduate students in the seminars in phenomenology at Stony Brook have made to the distillation and crystalization of some of the themes of this volume is greatly appreciated. Finally, Killian Richardson, Francine Schirizzo, Joseph Striano and especially Gary Aylesworth, Benedikt Haller, Elizabeth Lazeski, Armen Marsoobian, Dan Tate, Kathleen Wallace and Curtis Welton have rendered valuable service in their typing or proof-reading of the text.

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## INTRODUCTION

Phenomenology as transcendental phenomenology is centered in a description of meaning interpreted in relationship to acts of consciousness. Seen systematically, meaning is the category about which the transition from the natural to the phenomenological attitude pivots, as well as the category in terms of which the various components of mental acts are studied. For Husserlian analysis a transcendental clarification of meaning can be contrasted to a psychologistic interpretation, which reduces meaning to an element of mental acts naturalistically analyzed (images) or, further, to direct or indirect modes of referring. It can also be contrasted to a formalistic interpretation, which reduces meaning to the set of rules constitutive of its relationship to other intensional entities or, in the case of the transposing of its results ontologically, of its relationship to other parts and wholes. Over against the first, Husserlian analysis stresses the transcendence of meaning and the difference between meaning and mental representations. Over against the second, it recovers the interrelationship of experience and meaning and even the historicity of meaning. Yet once this is said, difficulties of untold complexity appear when we pursue a deeper study of this central motif of transcendental phenomenology, and when we attempt to integrate it into the difference between static and genetic method. It is within this problematic that the present work moves and has its being.

We would wager that the problem of meaning is the key to Husserl's phenomenology, not only systematically but also historically. The effort to introduce his thought by an elaboration of the different reductions or by the departure from one kind of reduction to another is to accept a later reflection by Husserl upon his own work as his starting point. This strategy does not catch the development of phenomenology as seen from *within* its peculiar problematic. Moreover, the different ways



into a transcendental analysis do not find their unity in a systematic analysis of their interrelationship as much as they do in a crisis they all attempt to handle, a crisis in Husserl's description of meaning and sense. Even though this book is not primarily a historical treatment of Husserl's thought, and even though we want to address ourselves to a matrix of philosophical problems, it may be the case that we have chosen a way that has the possibility of pointing out the motivation behind Husserl's long and interesting development.

The Husserl which emerges at the end of this study is the "other" Husserl, the Husserl after the collapse of the Cartesian program, a collapse which he could never admit but one which he himself effected in the various working texts of the 1920's. Landgrebe, in a superb article entitled "Husserl's Departure from Cartesianism," has given us a first sketch of this Husserl.<sup>1</sup> The present work will attempt to complement this picture by being the first to deal with the impact of genetic analysis on the interrelationship of perception and speech.<sup>2</sup> We are forcing Husserl, almost against his will, to confront the structure of the speech-act with the perceptual act and then to continue the phenomenology of meaning which he initiated in the 1920's. Yet we are justified in doing so, for it is when Husserl is engaged in his concrete descriptions of perception, in ferreting the structure of those acts most removed from cognition, that the Cartesian requirements are least constrictive and Husserl can give himself over to the pulse of what he is describing. These descriptions

<sup>1</sup>Ludwig Landgrebe, "Husserls Abschied vom Cartesianismus," *Philosophische Rundschau*, IX (1961), 133-77; reprinted in Ludwig Landgrebe, *Der Weg der Phänomenologie* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1967), pp. 163ff.; "Husserl's Departure from Cartesianism," trans. by R. O. Elveton, *The Phenomenology of Husserl: Selected Critical Readings*, ed. by R. O. Elveton (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1978), pp. 259-306; reprinted in Ludwig Landgrebe, *The Phenomenology of Edmund Husserl: Six Essays*, ed. by Donn Welton (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1981), pp. 66-121.

<sup>2</sup>The one work which is close to ours is Guido De Almedia, *Sinn und Inhalt in der Genetischen Phänomenologie E. Husserls*, *Phaenomenologica*, Vol. XLVII (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1972). While De Almedia devotes considerable space to the analysis of perception after Husserl's genetic turn he does not attempt to deal with the differences between it and speech nor does he suggest that we can confront the structure of one with that of the other.

almost seem to liberate Husserl's vision and he begins pursuing lines which were neglected in the earlier work. In particular they have repercussions on his study of language, and he becomes aware of the methodological restraints presupposed in his stratification of speech and meaning. By the late 1920's thought and speech are identified for originary speech. What we are requiring of Husserl is that he confront these two descriptions, that he continue his genetic analysis by showing how perception gives rise to speech and how speech gives rise to perception.

This problematic is by no means only a regional issue for Husserlian phenomenology. In a certain sense it is *the* problem not only in that it is the first but also in that all the subsequent moves are prefigured in it. In undertaking a study of perception and speech, we are also uncovering those commitments making possible the basic strategy of transcendental analysis. This book, therefore, is a study of the thresholds of Husserlian phenomenology.

There are two broad lines of criticism directed against Husserl's theory of perception and language. The first suggests that Husserl has misconceived the nature of language and, in particular, the nature of linguistic meanings. The second argues that a proper phenomenology of perceptual significance is impossible on Husserlian grounds. In reply to these ideas we will undercut the criticism of Husserl's theory of meaning from within both his static (Part I) and his genetic analysis (Part III), and we will argue that Husserl does explore the uniqueness of perceptual sense at considerable length (Part II). The positive orientation of this book, however, is toward developing a Husserlian theory of perception and speech. Our basic strategy will be to outline the description of meaning suggested by static phenomenology (Part I), motivate and then perform a genetic analysis of perception (Part II), and, finally, trace the impact of genetic phenomenology on Husserl's conception of language and on the relationship between language and perception (Part III). The thrust of Husserl's later phenomenology is to correct the images of static analysis by describing the noema not as an ideal object but as a *Regelstruktur*, and by describing conscious life not in terms of its typography but in terms of its systems of *Leistungen*. Consciousness is, above all, a process and not an ensemble of mental elements. What we will attempt to document is the thesis that the parallelism of speech and understanding

and of speech and perception is the result of a specific epistemological interest. The genetic turn relinquishes this parallelization. Thinking accomplishes itself from the outset as linguistic, and speech is already implicated in perception. Genetic analysis recaptures the sense in which speech and perception give birth to each other and opens the door to a description of the interaction of our linguistic manner of intending objects with the modes of their presence in perceptual fulfillment, i.e., to an analysis of what we will call the dialectic of meaning and sense.

There are several issues raised in this volume which, we trust, open new and important paths in Husserl research *per se*. The First Part deals with Husserl's logical grammar and may be the first attempt to sort out the difference between semantics and syntax, while establishing precise points of interdependence. This is also the first book to touch upon a few of the very important lecture manuscripts on the theory of meaning which Husserl composed between 1905 and 1908. In the Second Part we follow the developments leading into Husserl's genetic phenomenology of perception and outline a level of perceptual meaning distinct from and below that of the noema as logistically characterized. In arguing this we deal extensively with lecture manuscripts from 1920 to 1926 and, for the first time, integrate spatiality into his account. In the Third Part we attempt to do what Husserl only began, namely, to wed genetic analysis and his theory of speech. Because of the developments effected by his genetic phenomenology, we suggest that his theory of correspondence opens up the idea of a dialectical relationship between perception and language. It is our hope that this study shows that such an idea is actually required by the immanent movement of Husserl's own thought.

Having said this, however, we must admit that the point at which this book ceases to be a work on Husserl's thought and becomes an extension of Husserlian phenomenology has become increasingly difficult for us to locate. No doubt all expositions of as complex a thinker as Husserl are interpretations. But this work moves into areas where the texts themselves are indecisive, where our reading is necessarily a kind of philosophizing and where our interpretation is more of an extension of ideas, in keeping with the tenor of Husserl's

descriptions, than a straightforward review of what he discovered. Perhaps we have gone too far. Perhaps we have not gone far enough. This we will let you, the reader, decide. In any case our hope is that what we have written will not only add light to the interpretation of Husserl but will especially aid in our understanding of the altogether bewildering but wonderful relationship between speech and perception.



PART I

THE CONTOURS OF A LOGISTIC  
PHENOMENOLOGY OF MEANING

## CHAPTER 1

### EXPRESSION AND MEANING

While the discussions of Husserl's theory of signs and of meaning are many, we hope to break new ground in these first few chapters by introducing the development of his ideas in one of his lecture manuscripts between 1905 and 1908 and by discussing his own critical evaluation of the distinctions which he first proposed.<sup>1</sup> We detect in this text some interesting shifts

<sup>1</sup>In order to carry a discussion of Husserl's phenomenology forward we must assume that the reader is familiar with the general outlines of his thought. Fortunately there are several excellent introductions which can be consulted: Ronald Bruzina, *Logos and Eidos: The Concept in Phenomenology, Janua Linguarum*, Series Minor, Vol. XCIII (Paris: Mouton, 1970); Paul Janssen, *Edmund Husserl: Einführung in seine Phänomenologie* (Freiburg: Karl Alber, 1976); Paul Ricoeur, *Husserl: An Analysis of His Philosophy*, trans. by Edward Ballard and Lester Embree (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1967); and Richard Zaner, *The Way of Phenomenology* (New York: Pegasus, 1970).

Without a doubt the most important critique of Husserl's theory of meaning is that proposed by Derrida. See Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays in Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans. by David Allison (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1973) and *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry: An Introduction*, trans. by John Leavey, Jr. (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Nicholas Hays, 1978).

If a discussion of his ideas is missing from the early pages of this work, it is because his profound critique is such that it cannot be answered line for line, but only as a whole, only by proposing an alternative construction of the relationship between meaning, language, phenomenology and transcendental theory from within a Husserlian phenomenology. This we will do, in short, by taking Husserl's turn to genetic analysis seriously and by discovering there that cluster of motifs which Derrida claims cannot exist for Husserlian theory. This entire work, then, could be considered as an alternative reading of Husserl to what he proposes. More specifically, this work is an attempt at a Husserlian theory of meaning which opens upon pragmatics without reducing meaning to usage.

in his initial definition of expression and even in his concept of intentionality. The former will be handled in this chapter while the latter will be treated in Chapter Two and Three.

### 1.1. DEVELOPMENTS IN HUSSERL'S THEORY OF EXPRESSION

When Husserl speaks of the relationship between different kinds of signs, and between signs and meanings,<sup>2</sup> he does so from the perspective of what we might call the proto-logician. His classification is not meant to be exhaustive and it is undertaken in order to introduce us to a function of signs central to logistic phenomenology. This function is spoken of as the expressive or meaning-function (*Bedeutungsfunktion*) and, cor-

<sup>2</sup>In the First Investigation of the *Logische Untersuchungen* meaning and sense are not distinguished. Cf. Edmund Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen*, Vol. II, part 1: *Untersuchungen zur Phänomenologie und Theorie der Erkenntnis*, 2nd rev. ed. (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1913), pp. 23ff; Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, trans. by J. N. Findlay, 2 vols. (New York: The Humanities Press, 1970), I, 269ff. Only in the last section of the First Investigation does Husserl suggest that, in contrast to expressive meanings there might be a class of meanings which are not expressive, which is one of the characteristics of senses. But the examples he gives—"purely logical unities, concepts, propositions, truths, in short, logical meanings"—show that the issue here centers on whether the expression is essential or "contingent." In principle, however, such concepts admit of expressibility and that in such a way that the sign not only expresses the logical meaning but expresses it adequately, Husserl tells us. It is only in the Fifth and Sixth Investigation that Husserl draws a distinction between meaning and sense, using the asymmetry between the expressed meaning and the intuited meaning given perceptually as well as the phenomenon of "inadequate expressions" to establish his point. Cf. Edmund Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen*, Vol. II, part 2. *Elemente einer phänomenologische Aufklärung der Erkenntnis*, 2nd rev. ed. (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1921), p. 60; Eng. trans., II, 715. Also cf. Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie*, Book I: *Allgemeine Einführung in die reine Phänomenologie*, ed. and expanded by Walter Biemel, *Husserliana*, Vol. III (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1950), p. 304f., and section 7.2. of this work. For the sake of consistency and clarity, we will speak only of meaning and denoting in relation to language, and reserve "sense" for another usage yet to be defined.



respondingly, the sign characterized in terms of this function is labeled an expression (*Ausdruck*).

In the First Investigation Husserl's interests are directed to the logical core of language, to that kernel of language within which thought has its being. The class of signs which forms this core is the class of expressions. What Husserl proposes is a *semantic* definition of expression, one which measures the expression by its meaning. "A linguistic unit can be called an expression only because the meaning belonging to it is expressed."<sup>3</sup> "The essence of the expression lies exclusively in the meaning."<sup>4</sup> The expression (real), then, is a linguistic unit which *has* a meaning (ideal). One expression can be distinguished from another only if there is a difference in the meaning of each. This is not an argument against synonymy but a heuristic rule which takes different signs having the same meaning, should there be such, as identical from a logical point of view.

This idea, so central to the phenomenological project as formulated by Husserl, is not merely a blind assumption. It is with considerable care that Husserl circumscribes a ground upon which it can stand on its own. Let us, accordingly, begin again.

All signs, it is true, signify. In order for an item to be a signifier it must, in some sense, point, index, stand for, present, tag, etc. That for which it stands, that which it signifies has been called the signified. "Each sign is a sign for something."<sup>5</sup> The relation of signifier to signified is the minimal constitutive condition of there being a semiotic system, of there being, in the broadest sense, a language. Still not all signifiers "have a meaning,"<sup>6</sup> not all signs are, in Husserl's terminology, expressions.

Signs in the sense of indicators [*Anzeichen*] (notes, marks, etc.) *do not express anything* unless they have an expressive function [*Bedeutungsfunktion*] in addition to their indicative function [*Funktion des Anzeigens*].<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup>*Ideen*, I, 305.

<sup>4</sup>*Logische Untersuchungen* (2nd ed.), II/1, 49; Eng. trans., I, 289. The notion of meaning will be taken up in section 1.2.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 23; Eng. trans., I, 269.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*