

Chapter 6

Sense and Reference, Again

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Husserl's semantics is basically a *theory of meaning* (*eine Bedeutungslehre*). A preliminary issue it has to cope with is therefore the one of the *delimitation of meaning*: to delineate what is meaningful, and what is meaningless, if such a distinction makes any sense. As in any theory of meaning, Husserl's treatment of the question of meaninglessness must, as such, be revealing of what he takes to be the very nature of meaning.

As a first step into Husserlian semantics, then, I would like to go back over the problem of the theory – or theories – of 'nonsense' (meaninglessness) that is or are to be found in Husserl, an issue with which I already dealt several times, in my previous studies (cf. Benoist 2002a, pp. 67–172, 2005), but about which I only recently had the impression to reach some definitive clarity.

Expressions

The first thing we must emphasize is the very strict distinction that Husserl makes between what is an expression (*ein Ausdruck*), and, as such, has meaning, and what is not, and does not have any meaning. As it is well known, the *First Logical Investigation* starts with contrasting what is mere index (*Anzeichen*) and what is expression (*Ausdruck*) and *means* (*bedeutet*). The expressions as such, which do not constitute a species (*eine Art*) of the signs in the sense of indices, even if, *de facto*, in the communicative use of discourse, they always happen to function as indices (of the speaker's mental states, in particular those related to communicating) as well, 'have meaning'. In contrast to them, mere indices (indices that do not function as expressions

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simultaneously) have no ‘meaning’. The latter just bear a causally grounded relation to what they *designate*, while causality is not enough to ground any meaning proper.

That ‘meaningfulness’ is absolutely essential to expressions. In a passage of the §15 of the *Ist Logical Investigation* to which we shall return later, Husserl writes:

It is part of the notion of an expression to have a meaning: this precisely differentiates an expression from the other signs mentioned above. A meaningless expression is, therefore, properly speaking, no expression at all: it is at best something that claims or seems to be an expression (ein Irgendetwas, das den Anspruch oder Anschein erweckt, ein Ausdruck zu sein), though, more closely considered, it is not one at all. (2001a, p. 201)¹

Now, if one asks what is required for there be meaning, a first superficial answer might be: some *representational* – or to be assimilated – *format*. Meaning-bearing expressions (i.e. *expressions as such*) are not any mere designations, but *they present something in a certain way*. To put it in Husserl’s words, that sound quite Aristotelian, “each expression not merely says something, but says it *of something*” (2001a, p. 197). *To say something of something*: such is the essential structure of an expression – what one calls it to have a ‘meaning’.

Sense and Reference (in the Traditional Sense of the Term)

In such a definition, both sides are essential: (1) that, through meaning, *something like* (we’re going to discuss that ‘likeness’) a relation to an object is built (2) that such a relation goes through something that is *said* (the ‘meaning’ as such). In the case of mere indices, the second side is missing; the relation (or alleged relation, in the case of *things mistaken for indices*)² is, in such a case, not grounded in any content that would be expressed (‘said’).

However, one might have noticed that the emphasis of this two-sidedness is on the so-called relation to an object. In the context of the uprising against psychologism at the end of the nineteenth century, Husserl, following his fellow student Twardowski’s reconstruction, and correction of Brentano’s doctrine of intentionality (cf. Twardowski 1894), wants to emphasize the insufficiency of ‘sense’ as such, at least, in some understanding of that ‘sense’, that takes it to be a mere (mental) ‘content’: “a mere distinction between physical signs and sense-giving experiences (*sinnverleihende Erlebnisse*) is by no means enough” (Husserl 2001a, p. 188). As it was made clear by Twardowski as to names: “we distinguish, in the case of each name, between what it ‘shows forth’ [*kundgibt*] (i.e. mental states) and what it

¹ I always quote John N. Findlay’s translation of Husserl’s *Logical Investigations*, in the reprint published by Routledge, London, 2001, sometimes with slight (indicated) corrections.

² Indices cannot be, properly speaking, *false*. What might be erroneous is the judgements we make about them – or, more loosely, the *use* we make of them. On the contrary, in Husserl’s view – that consists in always interpreting the meaning in the descriptive way, as ‘objectifying’ – meaning is constitutively true or false – at least at a certain level, we shall see the qualification that is to be made according to the later doctrine.

means. And again between what it means (the sense or ‘content’ of its naming presentation) and what it names (the object of that presentation)” (*Ibidem*).

What is important here is the fact that the criticism is not only targeted at the ‘mentalism’ of the traditional ‘Lockean’ theory of meaning; but even more at the very idea of meaning as a mere ‘content’ (whether mental or not). That means that *it is not enough* to idealize meaning, making it an ideal (non-mental) content – as we certainly should do – but that, *in addition*, we must recognize, as associated to what is usually called ‘meaning’, that *aiming at an object* that, for instance, in the case of a name, is the named object.

In fact, for a knower of the Austrian tradition of the nineteenth century, it is obvious that Husserl’s target here is Bolzano and his theory of ‘objectless presentations’, according to which, at the semantic level, there are expressions that do bear meaning, and that, however, do not have any reference.

We cannot, in such a way, stay with meaning. We cannot stop short of reference – meaning by itself does not make sense.

We must elucidate the way in which that claim must be ascribed to Husserl, because it is not that obvious: in fact, we shall be able to affirm that only on the basis of a precise and corrective analysis of how we must exactly take ‘reference’ in order to conform to Husserl’s view.

Because, prima facie, what Husserl seems to do is just to make a (very strong) distinction between sense and reference. To make full sense of so to speak the ordinary problem of meaning, we have to take into account not only the sense proper but, in addition, the reference as well; but, precisely, we must *distinguish* them – what, apparently, the common sense, or the traditional (ideationist) analysis, does not make.

So, Husserl takes a lot of time and pain to make a distinction, that, as it has been much emphasized, sounds quite Fregean – he even mentions Frege, in a palinode of his early criticism: the distinction between what he calls sense (*Sinn, Bedeutung*) and what he calls object (*Gegenstand*), or ‘objectivity’ (*Gegenständlichkeit*, as an extended – in particular to the categorical level – sense of ‘object’). As, in a previous study (cf. Benoist 2002b), I already proposed an analysis of the bearing of Husserl’s maintaining the word ‘object’ for what Frege, disambiguating *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* against the ordinary German use, calls ‘*Bedeutung*’ (which we might, provisionally, translate by ‘reference’), I am not going to go back over that now. It will just be enough to draw the attention to the fact that, in Husserl’s view, every ‘reference’ in Frege’s sense is a kind or another of ‘object’ (even if it is therefore necessary to distinguish between diverse categorical kinds of ‘objects’) – which, of course, in Frege’s view, is not the case: concepts as such are legitimate references, although not being ‘objects’ (it would be, in Frege’s view, the worst categorical mistake – and the paradigm of *nonsense* – to call them ‘objects’).

Anyway, even if that divergence that it would be deeply mistaken to take just as ‘terminological’, definitely indicates something about Husserl’s theory, there remains that, on both sides, there seems to be that very clear-cut, and robust distinction between ‘sense’, and ‘reference’, as apparently *two different functions* of expressions.

I am not going to discuss here how far both functions might be interdependent in Frege’s perspective. There would be of course a lot to say about that, and, in particular I should observe that it is not clear at all that Evans’s very strong

interpretation of that problem (that tends towards the strong interdependence claim), as elucidating as it might be of *some* aspects of the Fregean construction, is the final word. In fact I would have strong reservations about it.

That which is clear at least, and that on which we're going to focus here is that *Husserl* endorses the strong interdependence claim *in some sense* – even if it is precisely in a sense that does not seem at all to be the one in which Frege might endorse the same claim, if and as far he endorses it at all.

The sense both authors would make of the interdependence claim, as far as they endorse it respectively, cannot be the same, because what Husserl places in that interdependence is nothing but the thesis of *intentionality* of meaning as such; a thesis for which no sense is to be found in Frege's construction, even if something like intentionality is not completely unknown to Frege, but in another, completely different sense, i.e. as the intentionality of judgement (or even more of *judging*) exclusively – an intentionality that is no way to be interpreted to the effect of a simple directedness to an *object*, as it is in Husserl.

The fact that the interdependence claim is to be identified in Husserl with the intentionality thesis itself, as applied to meaning – an application that in fact constitutes the first given version of the intentionality thesis in Husserl's thought, and to some extent its paradigm (rivalled, however, by the perceptual intentionality in a complex way³) – entails definitely that, if Frege turned out to endorse, even partially, the same claim (which he certainly does), the claim would anyway have very diverse, and maybe quite opposite meanings in both authors. It will become plain once we'll have cracked the nut of the Husserlian understanding of 'reference' and we'll have consequently made the due qualifications to our first use of the terms on which relies the attempted comparison between both authors.

Anyway, as a starting point, we cannot ignore, as obvious as it is, the very strong distinction Husserl makes between what would respectively correspond to Frege's *Sinn* and Frege's *Bedeutung*. As the text of the § 12 of the *Ist Logical Investigation* that we quoted previously goes on, each expression "not only has a meaning, but refers to certain *objects*" (2001a, p. 201). As if it were two different properties, for an expression, to have a meaning, and to refer to an object.

Husserl tries actually to tell both functions apart, contrasting them by disclosing the one as variable where the other remains invariant, in a quite Fregean way. There exist expressions that bear the 'same meaning', and, however, have different references, as there exist ones that, while bearing different meanings, relate in fact to the same reference, as so to speak diverse ways to the same point.

There is therefore undoubtedly some difference: it is definitely not the same to tell the meaning of an expression or to indicate its reference.

That indisputable difference must however not conceal the very strong connection that Husserl maintains between both dimensions. In the first place we must pay attention to the very way in which the philosopher introduces that 'reference'. That

³ In Husserl's view, the *basic structure* of intentionality is the one of the meaning intentionality; but the *telos*, and fulfilment of intentionality is the perceptual relation to the object, interpreted as an intentionality itself. We shall see the import of that ambiguity.

function of ‘reference’ corresponds to what Husserl calls “the third sense of ‘being expressed’”. That “third sense” “concerns the objective correlate meant by a meaning and expressed by its means” (2001a, p. 197): *die in der Bedeutung gemeinte und mittels ihrer ausgedrückte Gegenständlichkeit*. The ‘object’ of a discourse is definitely not the same as its ‘meaning’; but if it is, as such, ‘meant’ by that discourse, it is ‘in the meaning’ of that discourse as such, and ‘by the means’ of that meaning.

So, the reference function and the meaning function are not complete strangers to each other. Where there is ‘reference’, it is exclusively through meaning. It is the meaning that, so to speak, operates reference.

An expression only refers to an objective correlate because it means something [nur dadurch, daß er bedeutet, gewinnt ein Ausdruck auf Gegenständliches Beziehung], it can be rightly said to signify or name the object through [mittels] its meaning. (Husserl 2001a, p. 198)

Sense Without Reference? (Act I)

Now, the question arises obviously whether the dependence is reciprocal, in the sense that, as there is no reference but through, and so to speak (as Husserl himself puts it) *in* a meaning, there is no meaning without such a ‘reference’.

In fact, Husserl’s whole point, in the first step of his theory of meaning – the step we might entitle ‘criticism of the ‘folk theory of meaning’ – seems to be to reject a possibly natural conception of meaning according to which such a thing might happen: a meaning *without* reference, and ‘meaning’ and ‘reference’ might really not only be told apart (as they must be), but also really *separated*.

Husserl’s concern is not just to add a compartment to the so-called ‘natural’ theory of meaning, stressing the fact that there must be a reference *in addition* to the ‘content’ that the meaning would anyway be. The introduction of the reference as he understands it restructures and redefines the meaning as well, far from leaving it untouched: introducing the reference is, as a matter of fact, a *revision* of the theory of meaning itself.

That point is related to an aspect on which I have especially focused in my early work about Husserl’s theory of meaning, although probably not interpreting it correctly at first, that is to say the fact that Husserl endorses an *intentionalist* theory of meaning, a theory according to which meaning is in the first place a kind of intentionality – the one of the *Bedeutenden*, which is a *Meinen*. In some sense, as I put it, but maybe excessively, or too unilaterally,⁴ that means that meaning can no longer be just a ‘content’, as such separable and detachable. Or, more exactly, as I

⁴That has always been the core of my interpretation of Husserl’s theory of meaning, as an intentionalist one, as it is already to be seen in my first attempt in that field, 1995, “Husserl et le mythe de la signification (Je RL)”, *Tijdschrift voor filosofie*, vol. 57, pp. 526–552, reprinted as the chapter I of my book 1997, *Phénoménologie, sémantique, ontologie : Husserl et la tradition logique autrichienne*, P.U.F.: Paris. Unfortunately, in a first time, I tended to take it to the effect of some *unconditional* referring – in the sense of *being intrinsically relational* – of the meaning intention. A mistake that I subsequently rectified in my book 2001b, *Intentionalité et langage dans les Recherches logiques de Husserl*, P.U.F.: Paris, but taking the opposite direction this time too unilaterally as well.

would say now, it might be so only in a way that does not separate it from what it *cannot* be separated from, because what is connected to it in an *essential* way, what stands in some kind of *internal* relation to it; in other words, even the meaning that is idealized as a ‘content’ (and as such an object, an ideal object), abstracted from the act of meaning (or more exactly from the *real content* of that act, as a part of its), retains something from that act, something that it cannot lose without ceasing to be a ‘meaning’: that is to say, *its relation* (or, more exactly, as we shall see, its purported relation) *to an object*. “An act of meaning is the determinate manner in which we refer to our object of the moment” (*die bestimmte Weise des den jeweiligen Gegenstand Meinens*) (Husserl 2001a, p. 198). And even the idealized meaning, as an idealization, is the idealization of *an intentionality*. *Meaning is constitutively intentional*.

That means that, in some sense (we shall see which), *it cannot stop short of the object*. There is no meaning independently of that reference to an object, that, so to speak, is the other side of itself – and, finally, not anything else than itself. Husserl makes it clear in his critical remark against Twardowski at the §13: we must be warned

against the error of seriously thinking that sense-giving acts have two distinct sides, one which give them their meaning, while the other gives them their determinate direction to objects. (2001a, p. 199)

So, so to speak, from an intentionalist point of view – a point of view that takes the meaning to be an ‘intentional relation’ to an object – reference has to some extent to be internalized to meaning itself. In that sense – but how far does that sense go?, we still have to be more specific about that – *there is no sense without reference*, as reference is an internal feature of ‘sense’.

An Ostensible Possibility of Nonsense (Sense Without Reference – Act II)

However, now, an obvious difficulty seems to arise, which belongs so to speak to the infantile stage of the theory of meaning: that is to say, the obvious existence of cases where we have to do with a full-blooded expression, that, as such, bears a sense, but to which there is definitely no correspondent object.

On that issue, interpreters of phenomenology diverge. There seems to be a tempting solution that would be to acknowledge something like inexistent objects, treating inexistence as a property. A lot of phenomenologists are probably convinced even today that Husserl positively endorses that kind of Meinongian solution, firmly condemned by Brentano. That is however the case for nothing. Husserl keeps, even after the first edition of the *Logical Investigations*, rejecting any kind of ontologization – or even meta-ontologization, to follow Meinong until the end – of inexistence. If there is no ‘real object’ that corresponds to an expression, that just means that there is *no object (at all)* corresponding to it.

How to reconcile that with both (i) the idea that an expression has a meaning *anyway* (ii) the idea of the constitutive *intentionality* (as referred to an object) of such a meaning?

In fact, we might find a way out of that predicament, if at last we take into account a difference that turns out to be decisive for any understanding of Husserl's theory of meaning, and of the interdependence that that theory acknowledges between meaning and reference – a difference of which some traces are to be found in Frege as well,⁵ and that nevertheless is bound to play a completely different role in an *intentionalist* theory of meaning (that *identifies* meaning with some kind of intentionality or with some *abstractum* founded on it) like Husserl's than in Frege's.

Some contemporary scholars in philosophy of language, in particular Michael Dummett, distinguish between *reference* (with the verbal suffix) and *referent* (as an object). One even recently spoke of “reference without referents” (Sainsbury 2005). I think that tool, or a tool of the kind, is indispensable in order to make sense of Husserl's theory of meaning and the kind of internal connection it supposes between meaning and reference – reference, and not (or at least *not always*) referent.

Husserl's theory of meaning, that strives to be phenomenological, that is to say does not intend to put any artificial constraint on meaning, but just to describe that phenomenon as it is given, certainly does not want the meaning to be necessarily directed to something that exists. This theory makes room for the obvious existence of many meaning intentionalities that are just aimed at something that, in some sense, is *nothing*. I can definitely make a speech that has full sense (as it is proven by the fact that it will be correctly understood) about Santa Claus. That does not make Santa Claus any more exist. As the ‘Appendix to § 11 and § 20’ of the Vth *Logical Investigation*, decisive from that point of view (cf. Benoist 2001b), and often quoted as such, but little understood, makes it clear, in that case:

‘The object is merely intentional’ does not, of course, mean that it exists, but only in an intention, of which it is a real part, or that some shadow of it exists. It means rather that the intention, the reference to an object so qualified [die Intention, das einen so beschaffenen Gegenstand ‘Meinen’], exists, but not the object. (2001b, p. 127, translation slightly corrected)

This passage is definitely to remind to any commentator or philosopher who would indulge in the idea that Husserl wanted to populate the world of ‘shadows’ – the kind of shadow that is commonly associated with intentionality, on a certain conception of intentionality. To put it in modern terms, in the case in which the ‘referent’ does not exist, there is nothing but the intentional act of meaning (the ‘intention of meaning’, *Bedeutungsintention*), so the *reference* (as Findlay translates perfectly correctly) itself.

⁵ As far as Frege happens to be concerned with our *intentions* (*Absichten*, not intentionalities) to refer, as he certainly is in the theory of *presupposition* that he introduces to contemporary philosophy.

We must absolutely distinguish between the reference, that is to say, in Husserl's case, the directedness of and through the meaning towards something *as* an object, and the referent, that is to say the *object* itself to which the act is referred, if there is one.

Taking such a distinction into account, we can rephrase our previous claim: according to Husserl, *there is no meaning without reference*, but *there is certainly meaning without referent*.

The Ways of Reference

It would, however, be mistaken to conclude from that apparent independence of the reference, that persists even when there is no referent, that reference, as such, had nothing to do with the referent itself – when there is one – and should necessarily stop short of it. Of course, there is a natural relation between reference and referent when there is a referent: it is by virtue of what is called its reference that an expression that is true, or adequate, has the particular object – that exists – it has as a 'referent'. And reference as such, where there is a referent, gives access to nothing but that referent itself – one might even say that in such a case that Frege already described as a kind of 'success' (you *succeed* in your referring, in such a case), the reference exhausts itself giving access to the referent.

One more time, the appendix to the §§11 and 20 of the Vth *Logical Investigation* is clear:

If the intentional object exists, the intention, the reference, does not exist alone, but the thing referred to exists also. (Husserl 2001b, p. 127)

The best thing to do is to apply that general framework with which the theory (and criticism) of 'intentional objects' made in the Vth *Logical Investigation* provides us to the problem of the being 'relational' or not of the meaning, which constitutes the real core of all the intentionalist theory of meaning that is presented in the Ist *Logical Investigation*. The texts, from that point of view, are fully coherent.

In fact, there are diverse *ways of reference*, and reference is not as homogeneous as it seems. Significantly Husserl starts with the fact that we tend spontaneously to see our way to speak of 'intimation', 'meaning', 'object' as sort of "relational talk" (*beziehende Reden*) (2001a, p. 199). It is however exactly the problem: to know how far this being relational must be taken seriously. *Is meaning a relation or not?*

About that, Husserl's doctrine is perfectly explicit. *There might be a relation*, a real, full-blooded relation. It is exactly what happens when there is a referent, that exists, and even more (let us stay with that case for the time being) that exists in the way the meaning says it to exist (*as* the meaning says it). In that case we are allowed to speak of our words as entertaining a *relation* to an object that is what we have just called the 'referent'. This relation is a relation proper.

However, if there is no referent (if the act of reference remains empty, in a sense we're going to discuss), Husserl does not take any more than his master Brentano

that intentionality (meaning intentionality, as, contrary to Brentano, he recognizes such a *specific* intentionality, instead of making of intentionality some undifferentiated – or at least not differentiated otherwise than hierarchically, but undifferentiated at the level of representations – property of the mental contents in general) should be a relation. Because how to make sense of a relation to something that does not exist (Cf. Benoist 2007, pp. 79–103)? If it is a relation, it is at least not a relation proper.

Certainly, “an expression only refers to an objective correlate because (*gewinnt Beziehung auf Gegenständliches nur dadurch, daß*) it means something” (2001a, already quoted). That means literally (according to the real sense of *Beziehung*: relation) that an expression can as such acquire its *relation* to something like an object only through its meaning. That does not mean, however, that this meaning provides the expression *necessarily* with such a relation, nor that this meaning can do it by itself.

The phenomenological analysis (description) of the §9 already made it clear. Among the acts related to the meaningful use of an expression (in which only it is an *expression*), Husserl counts the acts by which the consciousness endows the expression with meaning, but also the ones that give “intuitive fullness” to the expression. The latter are not at all meaning acts, but perceptual (or analogous to perception) acts. In both kinds of acts “[the] relation [of this expression] to an expressed object is constituted (*die Beziehung auf eine ausgedrückte Gegenständlichkeit konstituiert sich*)” (2001a, p. 192). However, as to that ‘relation’, the following distinction is to be made. The so-called ‘objective’ (*Gegenständliche*) in question might precisely be intuitively given (*gegeben*) or not. Where it is given, Husserl says that the relation (to the ‘objective’) is realized (*realisiert*). In other words, in that case – and only in that case – it becomes *real* as such, there is really a relation.

If it is not the case, Husserl logically says that the relation is unrealized (*unrealisiert*), and, interestingly, comments this way: then, the relation is “confined to a mere meaning-intention”, as Findlay translates, or, more exactly, is “merely included in the meaning intention (*in der bloßen Bedeutungsintention beschlossen*)”. What a strange relation, that does not go beyond one of its fundamentals, is merely “enclosed” in it! It is, in fact, not any relation, but *the suggestion of a relation*.

One must not ignore the fact that, as it is common to that (‘post-Brentanian’) stage of the history of intentionalism, the standard remains the *name*, and, accordingly, Husserl’s conception of ‘reference’ as such certainly here finds its nurture in a reflection on the reference of that specific kind of words. When do we say exactly that a name really achieves its job of naming – and is no longer, as one says, ‘just a name’? Definitely when something is given – in the sense of intuitively, or at least extra-linguistically given – that corresponds to that name; then, the name is said to *name* that thing exactly. In other words, the name finds its real accomplishment in what Husserl will call ‘the cognitive function of name’, when naming is having a real grip on ‘the thing itself’.

The hunch, of which the friends of the object-dependence theory of names will take advantage, is that, to some extent, that makes sense for a name to be (as a

name) only if there is something to be named by it. Husserl, however, does not endorse that claim to the letter, and it is a clue about his real position as far as the question of ‘object-dependence’, and indexicality in general is concerned (we will have to return to that point). The way Husserl interprets that hunch is that, to make full sense of a name, it must be possible to have something *given* responding to it. So, “the naming becomes an actual, conscious relation between name and object named” (2001a, p. 192). As long as there is not such a given, there is only the “mere meaning-intention (*bloße Bedeutungsintention*)”.⁶ It is clear that there is something shadowy in such a naming that is not really a relation. However, although Husserl insists on that relational nature of the full-blooded nominal meaning, one must notice that it is an *epistemic relation* (a relation of access), which does not match the object-dependence theory exactly. It is not the same to say that, where there is a name, there must be an object, and that, where there is a name, an object must be *given*. The latter claim says at the same time, and depending on the interpretations, more or less than the former. More, because the fact that the name I am using is not empty does not mean that I have myself access to the object it names, nor that I even know that this name is not empty. Less, because, after all, we might perhaps conceive of situations in which something is *given* that responds to that name, but, however, that does not exist.⁷ So, the logic of intentionality does not coincide necessarily with the logic of object-dependence – a certain intentionality creates a relation between the expression as such and ‘something else’ (a givenness), but there is no relation *per se* (independently of that intentionality) between that expression and this object.

Now, Husserl holds that that kind of relation to an object (or at least a givenness), in which the expression might stand, is *extrinsic* to the expression as such: “relation to an actually given objective correlate, which fulfils the meaning-intention, is *not* essential (*ist außerwesentlich*) to an expression” (2001a, p. 199). It is perfectly clear: an expression remains the expression it is – therefore (1) still has sense (2) still has the *same* sense – even if there is no corresponding ‘intuition’ given. That does not mean that, if a corresponding intuition happens to be given, the expression itself, as such, does not stand in a full-blooded relation to the very object that that intuition gives (then, we must definitely say that it is that object as such that is ‘expressed’). However, that intuition might be cancelled whereas the expression remains an expression, and without any change in the meaning of that expression. Of course such a claim will raise some difficulty in the case of indexicals, but we shall examine that in another lecture.

⁶ Husserl always uses ‘*bloß*’, as Brentano did, in a privative way.

⁷ It is, of course, the case of hallucinations, which we’re not going to address here. The series of lectures on perception of 1907 *Ding und Raum* makes clear that Husserl, basically, is a conjunctivist, whatever might be said about it. The consequence is that he is really unlikely to endorse the object-dependence thesis thoroughly.

The Unboundedness of Meaning

The result is that there might be *sense without referent* – or more exactly without any epistemic certainty of there being a referent, which allows for real lack of referent as well. It is, in fact, one of the basic claims of Husserl's theory of meaning, that, in that sense, proves a *non-relational* one: meaning *might* be a relation, but is not necessarily one, and we have to distinguish between the two different ways of meaning – when it is a relation, and when it is not.

This is a point Husserl exploits systematically, fighting against a naïve theory of meaning one might call 'referentialism'. This would be the theory according to which for an expression to have a sense would just be to have a referent.

In the §15 of the *Ist Logical Investigation*, Husserl addresses the problem that we take to be revealing about any theory of meaning, that is to say the problem of nonsense. He criticizes the inaccuracy of some common use of the expressions 'meaningfulness' and 'meaninglessness'. He insists on the distinction he made between meaning acts properly speaking and fulfilling (intuitive) acts, and makes clear that fulfilling acts as such cannot be held for constitutive of the 'sense': the sense of an expression (and even more its mere meaningfulness, its having sense) does not depend on them.

One must absolutely distinguish between what is essential to an expression and what is only contingent on it (what happens to supervene additionally upon it).

On the one hand, *sense, as such, is essential*: without sense, an expression is not an expression, but only what Husserl happens to call a *pseudo-expression* (*Scheinausdruck*). On that understanding, there is no 'meaninglessness' proper. To go beyond the bounds of meaning is just to go beyond the bounds of expression.

On the other hand, 'referent' (or, more exactly: intuitive givenness of a referent) *is not essential*. An expression might be perfectly meaningful in the strict sense of the term without there being any adequate intuitive givenness corresponding to it. Even more: without there *possibly* being such a givenness.

We must actually introduce a further distinction, which is quite classical (passed on to Husserl by Bolzano): between *the mere lack of givenness* (the golden mountain that so far I have not succeeded in finding), and *the a priori impossibility of such a givenness* – as when there lies some contradiction, or at least incompatibility, in the demand the meaning exerts on intuition.

The second case, as in the example of the 'round circle', may produce a strong effect of oddness, and the consequence is that we might be really tempted to describe it as a piece of 'nonsense', and definitely it is one in a certain ordinary sense of the word 'nonsense'. There is, however, a paradox relative to that kind of 'nonsense' that Husserl emphasizes after his fellow student Marty, from whom he draws his inspiration here: that kind of nonsense, so to speak, *presupposes the sense* (in another sense of the term). It is only as far as an expression bears meaning, and in virtue of its meaning, that it might turn out to be a 'nonsense' in the new sense of the term – that is related to *the impossibility to give a referent intuitively presented*

for it. That nonsense, thus, settles on the ground of meaning, far from constituting a limit, or any kind of externality to it.

In that sense, there is some kind of *unboundedness of the meaning* – which is the result of the ‘austere’ conception⁸ according to which something either is an expression or not: there are no semi-expressions. We cannot make meaning as such dependent on the possibility to have a referent given.

Fulfilling Sense and Sense ‘Simpliciter’

There is, however, something more to say about that case of the impossibility of an adequate givenness – and very likely even about the ostensible mere ‘lack’ of such a givenness, like in the case of objects whose existence we have not experienced so far, but that *might* possibly exist.

In fact, the case is not that clear. Is it to be interpreted to the effect of a mere *lack* of corresponding intuition, as a naïve interpretation of the latter situation (no experience so far) might suggest? It might seem so at first sight – and I must confess I used to interpret it that way. To elucidate that point, and to understand why it is just *not* the case, we need consider a Husserlian distinction to which we have not yet paid attention: the distinction Husserl made before at the §14 of the same *Ist Logical Investigation*, between “fulfilling sense (*erfüllender Sinn*)” and “sense or meaning *simpliciter* (*Sinn oder Bedeutung schlechthin*)”.

This distinction is not absolutely clear in its detail, and it is really difficult to make good sense of it – personally, I felt for a long time really uneasy about it: I was not able to overcome the impression that there remained some opacity in that point. I only recently got the feeling that I had reached some clarity about it, and it was at the cost of a substantial revision of my previous (quite common) reading. What is unclear is what the ‘fulfilling sense’ exactly is.

Husserl defines it this way: “the object’s ideal correlate in the act of meaningfulness that constitutes it (*sein ideales Korrelat in dem ihn konstituierenden Akte der Bedeutungserfüllung*)” (2001a, p. 199). One must obviously take notice of the use of the verb ‘to constitute’ (*konstituieren*), even in the text of the first edition (1901), which means, in Husserl’s mouth: ‘to let appear in some way’, and pertains to what we might call the ‘format’ of appearing of the object. So, the so-called ‘fulfilling sense’ – that Husserl himself introduces with quotation-marks – is something about the (intuitive) acts in which the object that corresponds to the expression endowed with some ‘meaning’ might be *given*, it is something about the ‘givenness’ of that object.

There would be much to say about that uncontrolled – or let us say loosely controlled – extension of the sphere of ‘sense’ so as to include perceptual acts as

⁸ In a sense that is not unrelated to the one that is endorsed by Cora Diamond and James Conant in their interpretation of Wittgenstein.

well; something of those acts might be described as a kind of ‘sense’. As I have done that elsewhere (cf. Benoist 2001a, pp. 273–280, 2008, pp. 215–235), I am not going to reopen the case.

What seems to be clear is that ‘fulfilling sense’ (that is, as such, ‘fulfilling sense’ for an expression: it is a relative concept, and there is no fulfilment *per se*) is, in some intuitive acts, *what ‘corresponds’ to a given expression*.

This supposes some kind of ‘fit’. As ‘fulfilling sense’ is a relative – and, in fact, a semantic – concept, in some sense, the ‘fulfilling sense’ for an expression can be determined *a priori*. It seems, so to speak, to be *dictated* by the ‘meaning’ (*simpliciter*: what we usually call ‘meaning’) of the expression.

In other words, in some sense, a ‘fulfilling sense’ seems to correspond, at least ideally, to any meaning-intention as such. To mean something, *it is always to carve out the possibility of some corresponding intuition as well*. It is something about the intentional nature of meaning as such: as it structurally *aims at* something (is directed towards something), it constitutively opens up a possible way for something to be given.

So, *there is no meaning, no ‘sense simpliciter’, without a corresponding ‘fulfilling sense’* – that pertains to *the way the thing would be given if it was given according to that meaning that intends it* (if it was “given in the same manner in which the meaning means it (*in welcher ihn die Bedeutung meint*)”, Husserl 2001a, p. 199, translation slightly corrected). The end of the paragraph makes that point very clear. In a rather complicated new definition Husserl, then, says the fulfilling sense to be:

the identical content which, in perception, pertains to the totality of possible acts of perception (möglicher Wahrnehmungsakte) which intend the same object perceptually, and intend it actually as the same object. This content is therefore the ideal correlate of this single object, which may, for the rest, be completely imaginary (der übrigens ganz wohl ein fiktiver sein kann) (2001a, p. 200).

One might perhaps think, at first, that the existence of a ‘fulfilling sense’ relies on the possibility of real perception (as such a ‘sense’ would be found in the “possible acts of perception”) corresponding to the ‘meaning *simpliciter*’ of the expression. Or, as Findlay’s translation misleadingly suggests, that imaginary representations (a phrase that would exactly translate the notion of representations belonging to that which Husserl calls *Phantasie*) can do the same job in a pinch.

However, as a matter of fact, Husserl does not speak here of ‘imagination’, but of ‘fiction’ (*Fiktion*), which, in his conceptual toolbox, is not at all the same. When he says at last that there is a fulfilling sense even if the object is mere ‘fiction’ (*fiktiv*), in the terminology of the *Logical Investigations*, that means purely and simply that there is a ‘fulfilling sense’ even if there is *no object at all* (properly speaking) whose appearing is synthesized (‘constituted’) in it – even, so to speak, if that synthesis is defective.

This raises a real difficulty, because, in a first interpretation of ‘fulfilling sense’, it might seem, in such cases, that *there is no ‘fulfilling sense’ properly speaking*: because, where there is no corresponding intuition (either genuinely perceptual or ‘imaginary’), there should not be such a sense, that is supposed to be ‘the sense of the corresponding intuition’.

The Unboundedness of the Fulfilment

There seemed really to be some entanglement in that hint at ‘fulfilling sense’ even of fictitious meanings – therefore of meanings it seemed appropriate to interpret as *lacking every possible fulfilment*.

I have however found a way out by paying a closer attention to the details of the difficult §15. If the first interpretation were true, Husserl would make the distinction he’s making in terms of *the possibility of a fulfilment*, as opposed to *the impossibility of any fulfilment*. And it is indeed what he *seems* to do. But, at a closer look, it is in fact not what he is doing. There are not on the one side the meanings that allow for a fulfilment, and, on the other side, the meanings that allow for none. In fact, *all* meanings, as such, allow for some fulfilment. But the problem is whether this fulfilment might be *adequate* or not. So, the ostensible independence of meaning *simpliciter* from fulfilment must be retained, but it should be interpreted another way.

We must return to the very terms in which Husserl makes an expression’s being meaningful independent from its ‘fulfilment.’ First, we might observe something that is an obvious result of the point we previously made about ‘reference’ as distinct from ‘referent’ or even from corresponding ‘givenness’, but that we have not, so far, enough emphasized. When we say that meaning (‘meaning *simpliciter*’), as such, is essential to expression, and that, in that primary sense, there is no ‘meaningless’ expression, such a claim might turn out to entail more than the naïve, ‘contentual’ (non-intentionalist) conception of meaning would suggest. As Husserl makes it clear again in the § 15,

In meaning, the relation to an object is constituted (In der Bedeutung konstituiert sich die Beziehung auf den Gegenstand). To use an expression significantly (einen Ausdruck mit Sinn gebrauchen), and to refer expressively to an object (sich ausdrückend auf den Gegenstand beziehen) (to form a presentation of it), are one and the same (2001a, p. 201).

So, to mean something, and so to speak to represent something (to *refer*) it is quite the same for an expression. The result is obvious: there is definitely no expression without meaning, but, therefore, *there is no expression without reference as well*. The unboundedness of meaning, as far as expressions are concerned, is also *unboundedness of the reference*.

We must, however, notice that, then, we must pay all the attention it deserves to the distinction between *reference* and *referent*. There is no expression without reference (reference is an intrinsic function of expression), but there are certainly a lot of expressions without referents. We might definitely speak of Santa Claus, of the golden mountain, or of the unicorn – or even of the round square –, all that with some ‘sense’, even if that sense, at least in the latter case, does not comply with what we might call our ‘natural standard of sense’ (which seems always to presuppose a not too loose connection between the sense and at least the possibility – or *some kind* of possibility – of the referent).

In Husserl’s view, this possible lack of referent as such does not matter, as far as the meaningfulness of the expression is concerned. So, every expression is

meaningful, therefore includes a kind of *reference* (*sich beziehen auf*) that is internal to it, “it makes no difference whether the object exists or is fictitious (*fiktiv*) or even impossible” (2001a, p. 201).

Of course, that does not mean so far that that referring (*sich beziehen*) is successful and that there subsists a real *relation* (*eigentliche Beziehung*) between the meaningful expression and an object. This is the case only if the object is given in conformity with the demand the meaning puts on it.

So, there is always a *reference*, but there is not always a givenness that matches it. We must however still make a step further, a step that might seem really difficult, but that is quite decisive: that is to say, to some extent, beyond the unboundedness of the meaning, beyond the unboundedness of the reference, we must at last allow for an *unboundedness of the fulfilment*, as strange as it might seem, that, far away from conflicting with the boundedness of the referent (not all expressions have a referent) we have just emphasized is, in fact, its phenomenological condition.

We have seen before that every expression, according to Husserl, has a ‘fulfilling sense’, even if it is fictitious – which seems really weird, as it seems that we have to define fulfilment as some kind of ‘corresponding intuition’, and as ‘fiction’ in Husserl’s sense (in the sense in which he speaks of ‘fictitious objects’, which are *non-objects*) is supposed to be characterized by the lack of any corresponding intuition.

Considering the problem from the point of view of the so-called ‘impossible objects’, we have however to reformulate all that. What does Husserl really say about the cases in which meaning cannot find any intuitive counterpart, like the cases of self-contradiction or of any *a priori* incompatibility of determinations? He does not speak, in fact, about such cases, as much of ‘impossibility of the fulfilment’, as of the impossibility of an *adequate* fulfilment; or he speaks even of an ‘impossible fulfilment.’ It might seem to play on words, but an *‘impossible fulfilment’* and *‘the impossibility of any fulfilment’*, it is not the same at all.

Authors like Sigwart confused “the true meaninglessness [...] with another quite different meaninglessness, i.e. *the a priori impossibility of a fulfilling sense*” (2001a, p. 202). In the latter sense, “an expression has meaning only if a *possible* fulfilment (*eine mögliche Erfüllung*), i.e. the possibility of a unified intuitive illustration (*die Möglichkeit einheitlicher Veranschaulichung*), corresponds to its intention”. What we should ask is: as contrasted to *what* might a ‘fulfilment’ be called ‘possible’? What would be an ‘impossible fulfilment’? And, immediately, the comment Husserl makes suggests an answer: ‘possibility’, as a determination applied to ‘fulfilment’ has something to do with *unification*. Is ‘possible’ every fulfilment that allows for its own unification at the intuitive level.

That seems to leave some room for the opposite case of the ‘impossible fulfilment’: the one in which it is impossible to operate such a unification, or at least *not thoroughly possible*. And it is so:

In the contrary case we apprehend the ideal impossibility of meaning-fulfilment (die ideale Unmöglichkeit der Bedeutungserfüllung) through an experience of the incompatibility of the partial meanings in the intended unity of fulfilment (auf Grund des Erlebnisses der ‘Unverträglichkeit’ der partialen Bedeutungen in der intendierten Erfüllungseinheit). (Husserl 2001a, p. 202, translation corrected)

It is perfectly clear: in the case of the so-called ‘impossibility of fulfilment’, there is, in fact, *an experience of that impossibility*, and therefore, to some extent, a ‘fulfilment’, but, so to speak, a ‘negative’ fulfilment: the experience of the incompatibility of the partial meanings, and of the impossibility of a smooth unification – which supposes that unification is at least, so to speak, attempted, and *intended* as such.

Husserl will take up that problem again in the chapter IV of the VIth *Logical Investigation*, entitled “Compatibility and Incompatibility” (*Verträglichkeit und Unverträglichkeit*). In fact, such a *negative fulfilment* has a name: *conflict* (*Widerstreit*), and is a genuine form of fulfilment, as a use of intuition that makes intuition ‘correspond’ to a piece of meaning. However, of course, such a ‘correspondence’ goes only as far as it is possible, and leads us, as such, to an impossibility, whose experience is its core.

In that chapter of the VIth *Logical Investigation*, Husserl divides the meanings into the *real* (i.e. possible) ones, and the *imaginary*⁹ (i.e. ‘impossible’) ones. ‘Real’ meanings are those that *might* be fulfilled without conflict (even if they are not necessarily *actually* fulfilled, in the sense that we have not necessarily the corresponding intuition at our disposal); ‘imaginary’ meanings are that whose fulfilment raises a conflict between different incompatible moments of intuition, and in fact *consists in such a conflict*.

Thus, there is, as strange as it might seem, no meaning without fulfilment, and, finally, there turns out to be some ‘*unboundedness of the fulfilment*’ itself. If we step back to the case of the ostensible mere ‘lack of referent’ (and not impossibility *a priori* of such a referent), we might risk the following hypothesis: even in that case there is no real ‘lack of fulfilment’. The inexistence of the referent (therefore the lack of referent) has so to speak to be ‘*seen*’. Of course, that raises a difficulty because an absence as such cannot be seen. But that simply means (and it is something that comes out very clearly in the presentation Husserl makes of his logic of truthmaking (*Wahrmachung*) and invalidation (*Falschmachung*) in the VIth *Logical Investigation*), that, in Husserl’s view, the falsity of a meaning has always to be identified with some *mistake* (or at least to be intuitively *interpreted* that way): *something is mistaken for something else*. One has something given to oneself *as* what is intended, and however, it is not what is intended, it conflicts in some way with it – that is to say, with the representation one has of it. (This does not mean that Husserl endorses descriptivism necessarily, as we shall see in the lecture about indexicality: we might make sense even of indexical mistakes, grounded in the very indexicality of some representations as such) That means also that, for an inexistence to appear, to be ‘given’ as far as it might be given, there must be some *positive background* and basis against which and in contrast to which that inexistence might be perceived privatively in the mode of conflict: as if someone’s not being there would necessarily *appear* as her being elsewhere, or more exactly in some relation to her positive being elsewhere (as ‘incompatible’ with it).

⁹ In a sense that has much more to do with the ‘imaginary numbers’ – that are ‘impossible’ as such – than with imagination.

This doctrine, whose presence in Husserl's early work is not often observed, is not that idiosyncratic. It is one possible doctrine about 'truth- and false- making', the one that David Armstrong precisely lists as 'incompatibilism' (cf. Armstrong 2004, pp. 60–63),¹⁰ or at least some *epistemic* version of such a doctrine.

Whatever, what matters for our purpose here is that, now, we must definitely recognize the impossibility not only of any expression without meaning, not only of any expression without reference (that is to say that does not *claim* to refer, but that is 'reference' as such), but of any expression without any kind of 'fulfilment'. Now we can make full sense of the enigmatic doctrine that was exposed at the §14 of the *Ist Logical Investigation*: definitely, every expression as such defines by itself some 'fulfilling sense', that corresponds to its 'meaning *simpliciter*' (which does not mean that every expression, as such, whether having a possible fulfilment or not, is *actually* 'fulfilled'), a 'fulfilling sense' that is exactly *the way in which such an expression would be fulfilled in some intuitive acts*. So, this way, which belongs to the expression as such (it is, so to speak, the virtual projection of the expression onto a possible intuition), maps a certain configuration of intuition. After that, that configuration might happen to be 'impossible' or 'possible' in the senses we have just defined (that is to say either to include a *conflict* or not). In any case, according to Husserlian intuitionism, there is the possibility to construct a 'corresponding' intuition; but the point is to know whether meaning here makes *incompatible* demands on intuition or not, and, consequently, if such an intuition is 'smooth' or not.

So, the problem is not anymore to know whether there might be a fulfilment or not – there must definitely be one, *it is a part of the 'meaningfulness' of the expression*, contrary to what we might have thought first – but, as the text puts it exactly, whether there is an *adequate* fulfilment or not, thus, whether the intuition can or not be made consistent with the meaning: might the things be given in the way they are meant? The paradox is that, in order to know that, one must in some sense already structure their givenness by the standard of that meaning: it is if and only if they are structured by that meaning that the things will come out as not being the way that meaning represents them. The impossibility of fulfilment (that is to say of adequate fulfilment) arises only *on the ground of fulfilment* and supposes some format already given for the fulfilment: what Husserl calls 'fulfilling sense'.

Once you're on the ground of sense, there is no way to cancel the reference (you might bracket the referent, as the 'transcendental reduction' will do, but there still remains the 'reference') – and even more: *no step beyond intuition. One might not construct any meaning to which it is impossible to have a corresponding intuition*. The only (substantial) price to pay is to make room for 'conflicts' on the ground of intuition – from which results what Husserl calls 'inadequacy' on the part of the meaning. Such is the *intuitionism* that phenomenology endorses as far as theory of meaning is concerned.

¹⁰ Armstrong traces back the *ontological* version – which is not exactly the same, of course – of that kind of solution to Raphael Demos, "A Discussion of Certain Types of Negative Propositions", *Mind*, 26, 1917, pp. 188–196.

Appendix: In Defence of the Common Sense

That ‘intuitionism’, however, has paradoxical consequences, to the effect that it seems to lead, if we take into account the development of Husserl’s thought, to some vindication of the *common sense theory of nonsense*, from which Husserl seemed first to distance himself, according to which an expression like ‘round square’ for example, to some extent, has *no sense*.

As a matter of fact, if we take a closer look at the fact that to any expression might correspond some ‘fulfilment’, there might turn out to be some more complicated situations about that fulfilment than the ones we have grossly distinguished, that is to say either ‘possibility’ or ‘impossibility’. In particular, there might come out substantially diverse kinds of ‘impossibility’ that do not bear at all the same way on the logical and phenomenological status of the expression itself.

As of the 1st *Logical Investigation*, Husserl has made a distinction between two kinds of conflict: real *contradiction* (when one says A and non-A at the same time), *Widerspruch*, and that kind of *incompatibility* (*Unverträglichkeit*) that is not a contradiction. In the IVth *Logical Investigation*, he makes clear this distinction:

we draw a line between material (synthetic) absurdity (materialer, synthetischer Widersinn) and formal, analytic absurdity (formaler oder analytischer Widersinn). In the former case, concepts with content (first order material kernels of meaning) must be given, as is the case, e.g., in the proposition ‘A square is round’ and in all false propositions of pure geometry, while the latter covers every purely formal, objective incompatibility, grounded in the pure essence of the semantic categories, without regard to any material content of knowledge. (Husserl 2001b, p. 72)

We must observe that, then, Husserl takes a proposition like ‘A square is round’ that entails some kind of (geometrical, therefore *a priori*) incompatibility, to be *false*. This is not obvious at all: a certain common sense will very likely take it to be neither true nor false, but a mere piece of nonsense. However, if we consider more complex examples, that are not as intuitive, like the one Husserl took in the §15 of the 1st *Logical Investigation*, ‘a regular decahedron’ (2001a, p. 202), maybe it makes better sense: it is a full bloodied (informative) truth, that a decahedron cannot be regular, and, conversely, ‘this decahedron is regular’ is necessarily *false*.

But, at the paragraph §10 of the IVth *Logical Investigation*, Husserl deals with examples that do not seem as easy. For instance, he gives this example: ‘This algebraic number is green’. What is exactly the logical status of that kind of sentence? According to Husserl, first, it is a genuine (well-formed) expression. The proof is that we can form it by substituting ‘This tree’ by ‘This algebraic number’ in ‘This tree is green’, which is a perfectly correct expression. “Any nominal material – in a wide sense of ‘nominal material’ – can here be inserted” (Husserl 2001b, p. 63). The result is really an expression, to the effect that it definitely has a *meaning*: “In each case we have once more a meaning unified in sense”. Of course, such a possibility to save the sense depends on the respect paid to the meaning category (*Bedeutungskategorie*) of the substituted term, that must be

preserved in the substitution if one wants to benefit from the meaningfulness of the original expression so as to build by variation other meaningful expressions.

In such free exchange of materials within each category, false, foolish, ridiculous meanings (falsche, dumme, lächerliche Bedeutungen) – complete propositions or elements of propositions – may result, but such results will necessarily be unified meanings, or grammatical expressions whose sense can be unitarily accomplished. (Husserl 2001b, p. 63, translation slightly corrected)

So, the problem is: what is the semantic status of such ‘false, foolish, ridiculous meanings’? Are they mere ‘pieces of nonsense’, as the common sense probably would say?

Husserl firmly resists that idea in the §12 of the same IVth *Logical Investigation*: one must absolutely distinguish between real nonsense (*Unsinn*), which is mere lack of sense (no meaning was given, or some impossibility results from the grammatical combination of meanings, due to the ‘meaning categories’ involved), and ‘absurdity’ (*Widersinn*). We “exaggerate and call the latter ‘senseless’ (*sinnlos*), when it is rather a sub-species of the significant (*ein Teilgebiet des Sinnvollen*)” (Husserl 2001b, p. 67). In fact, all those expressions that sound ‘ridiculous’, as far as they are real expressions, endowed with meaning (but with an *absurd* meaning), must be interpreted in the way the §14 will make explicit: that is to say, as *material absurdities*, that, in virtue of the very meanings they combine, are *false*. So a sentence like ‘This algebraic number is green’ is just *false*: an object belonging to the ontological category of numbers cannot bear any property belonging to the category of colours. This is an intuitive incompatibility, that can be experienced in a definite fulfilment in the mode of *conflict*: you just cannot make your intuitive number (in the sense of ‘categorical intuition’, then) bear the givenness of such a property, it is *a priori* impossible – as a result of the ontological and, correlatively, phenomenological (i.e. intuitive) kinds of both concepts.

Such a result would definitely be uneasy for the common sense. We probably do not want to hold such a proposition – if we take it for a proposition at all – for ‘false’, but for ‘absurd.’ It is exactly what Husserl’s further research on the nature of fulfilment allows to account for. In *Formal and Transcendental Logic* (1929), Husserl in fact goes over that issue of the logical status of some manifest ‘absurdities’ again, and qualifies his doctrine noticeably.¹¹ At the §89 of *FTL*, Husserl deals with this nice piece of ordinary nonsense: “This colour plus one makes three”. In such a case, “we say that the sentence ‘*makes no proper sense*’ (*gibt keinen eigentlichen Sinn*)” (1969, p. 216). That means that “it is impossible, in actual thinking, to acquire the judgement as a possible one – not, however, because it contains an analytic or extra-analytic contradiction, but because it is, so to speak, *exalted above harmoniousness and contradiction* in its ‘senselessness’ (*ist in seiner Sinnlosigkeit über Einstimmigkeit und Widerspruch erhoben*).”

¹¹ John Drummond and Vincent Gérard drew my attention to that point. I bought it in “Le primat de la référence” in my book: 2005, *Les limites de l’intentionnalité. Recherches phénoménologiques et analytiques*, Vrin: Paris, but still without assessing all its bearing.

So, according to the later Husserl, such an expression, in spite of its grammatical well formedness, *has no meaning* – thus, as such, is not really an expression. The problem, so Husserl, is that *even ‘contradiction’ presupposes some unity of ‘sense’*. The conflict, as we put it before, can only settle on the ground of some positivity that has to be itself interpreted as some kind of (wider) *unity*. What is absolutely not to reconcile does not belong as such even to the sphere of conflict – is not representable as a conflict.

The problem is a problem about *content*. We cannot build a unitary meaning with any contents. There are conditions on those contents, if the meaning, in some paradoxical sense, must ‘make sense’. As such, those contents involved in one meaning (by one expression) must belong to some unitary horizon, at least, if not better, the one of ‘the world’, as the general horizon of the experience. “The ideal existence of the judgement-content depends on the conditions for the unity of possible experience” (Husserl 1977, p. 217).

The idea is very simple: *we cannot fulfil ‘anything’*. Fulfilment supposes that we stay within the bounds of what might be either true or false, because what proposes a possible (even if bound to come out as ‘impossible’ at last) setting for the intuition. There are however things that it does not even make sense to demand on intuition – definitely not to give a round square, which is impossible but whose impossibility it is possible to experience, but, for instance, to give a green algebraic number, in which case it is even impossible to see what one must *try* representing. There are ostensible expressions that do not have any conditions of fulfilment (any ‘fulfilling sense’), because they are structurally disconnected from the general conditions of experience, that constitute the universal ground of meaning, due to its intentional – that is to say *orientated towards fulfilment* – nature.

In fact, one might possibly think that a recalcitrant exception to the doctrine held in the *Logical Investigations* has been found here: there are, finally, expressions ‘without fulfilment’, and we must disconnect meaning from fulfilment. But it is not at all the case: it means just that such ‘expressions’ must not anymore be held for genuine, full-blooded expressions. Common sense is vindicated, and those purported ‘expressions’ have to be called, in a new sense (closer to the common sense), real *pieces of nonsense*. There is not only (merely) grammatical nonsense, but also a kind of nonsense that results from *the impossibility* (in the radical way, that time, and not as some *possible* – representable – *impossibility*) *of the fulfilment* – when the fulfilment really *lacks*, and it makes *no sense* to seek it. This case is ‘nonsense’ as well. Proof, one more time, of the power of the fulfilment and of its bearing on meaning as such.

As such, the possibility of fulfilment (not necessarily of an *adequate* fulfilment and, thus, not necessarily of a ‘possible’ fulfilment), seems to be a universal condition of meaning, as Husserl, as he went deeper and deeper into the logic of fulfilment, wound up by taking the existing case of meaning intentionality *without fulfilment* – whose *ostensible* meaning (because, in that case, one would definitely not be allowed to speak of more than ostensible meaning) hinders the very possibility of any fulfilment – as a *pathological condition of that intentionality*. Meaning intentionality is the first one, and, to some extent, the paradigm of intentionality

(in general). But it cannot stand by itself. One cannot ignore that it is meant for relation – even if not necessarily relational, as it might essentially fail in its attempt to relate, but, then, even that failure makes sense only again.

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