Achieving Knowledge of Logical Laws in Husserl's *Logical Investigations*

Abstract

Husserl is a well-known critic of Psychologism. In contrast to the former, he holds that logical laws possess a universal and objective validity. He also holds that they can be known as a priori truths, and explaining how we can achieve this a priori knowledge of logical laws is a major goal of his seminal *Logical Investigations*. In this paper, I offer a sketch of his explanation. I focus, in particular, on the epistemic character of imagination and show how it could ground a priori knowledge of logical laws. Along the way, I point out various principles that Husserl must rely on about our various perceptual and cognitive faculties and their connection to each other and the world—as well as what principles he must introduce about the nature of possibility and impossibility. Assessing these principles turns out to be vital to assessing the viability of Husserl's account of how we achieve a priori knowledge of logical laws.

Keywords

Husserl, Phenomenology, Logical Investigations, Psychologism, Epistemology, Logical Laws, Impossibility

Introduction

In the *Logical Investigations* Husserl famously contends against Psychologism. He especially criticizes its depiction of logical laws as empirically derived laws of human thought—or, put more accurately, as empirical laws that speak only about what human beings must believe under certain 'regular' conditions while saying nothing about the world that is the object of these beliefs (Prolegomena §23, 105).[1] This thesis is especially troubling to Husserl on account of its consequences for human knowledge and science, for, as he understands it, a science is primarily the deductive arrangement of the truths of a properly defined subject matter (Prolegomena §62, 225, 227; §63, 228). A science is only secondarily the historical and often imperfect incarnation of this true science (Prolegomena §72, 246).

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[1] All citations and quotations of the *Logical Investigations* are from Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, 2 volumes, translated by J. N. Findlay.

Now, the laws that determine the deductive arrangement of these truths are the very above mentioned laws of logic. Thus, if Psychologism brings the objective validity of logical laws into question, it also brings into question the possibility of a valid human science. And Husserl fiercely resists this conclusion, offering many arguments against Psychologism in his preface to the *Logical Investigations*.

In contradistinction to Psychologism, Husserl maintains that logical laws possess a universal and objective validity and, further, that this fact can itself be known as an a priori truth—not just as an inductive generalization (§65, 830-31).[2] Thus, according to Husserl, his philosophy not only preserves the possibility of a valid human science, but it also confirms, with real knowledge, the genuineness of this possibility. We would not be asking a trivial question, then, if we asked how Husserl thinks he accomplishes this end. How exactly is it that we come to fully know logical laws in their objective and universal validity? In answering this question, we will have to turn to his difficult Sixth Investigation and attempt to make clear some important parts of his account of knowledge.

Preliminary Epistemological Distinctions: Intuition and Fulfillment

The phenomena of 'intuition' and 'fulfillment' are central to Husserl's account of knowledge. An intuition is an intentional act—that is, an experience or condition that is essentially of or about something[3]—that is capable of presenting to our consciousness actual objects as they truly are. Take perception as an example; when I walk home in the evening and behold a leafless tree being shaken by a frigid wind, my perception presents me with the tree itself, as it really is at that moment—leafless and shaking. However, intuition is broader than just perception; it also includes imagination, in which, imagined objects appear to us as close to the way they really are or would be. Consider, for example, the difference between merely thinking that someone you know has a striking smile and actually imagining this

[2] Unspecified citations like this one refer to the Sixth Investigation of the *Logical Investigations*.
[3]Some examples: a desire, as a desire, is f*or* something; love, as love, is *of* someone; a thought, as a thought, is *about* something.

person's smile. But imagination differs from perception in that imagination does not make us aware of its objects as genuinely existing objects. We are not aware of the real existence of the objects of our imagination merely by imagining them. Instead, we are presented with images or likenesses of the objects that we are imagining. As Husserl puts it, 'as opposed to imagination, perception is characterized by the fact that in it, as we are wont to press the matter, the object "itself" appears, and does not merely appear "in a likeness"' (§14a, 712).

Acts of intuition also have an important role to play in acts of fulfillment. Fulfillment occurs when there is a certain experience that involves an identical act of meaning—for example, thinking or asserting that 'there is a leafless, shaking tree'—and an identical act of intuition—perceiving that there is a leafless, shaking tree. By 'identical' I do not mean that the two different acts are qualitatively identical; rather, I mean that the intentional *object*—what is meant and what is perceived—of each is the same: 'we assert their [the meaning act and the intuitive act] *objective* identity. For we said, and said with self-evidence, that the object of intuition is the same as the object of the thought which fulfills itself in it' (§8, 696, my emphasis). In fulfillment, we perceive things to actually be just as we had meant them or thought them to be. We find that what we meant or thought and what we are now perceiving is the same (see §8, 694). What we had 'emptily' meant or thought now finds 'fulfillment' in our intuition.

Husserl also describes fulfillment as a specific 'phenomenological unity' (§8, 695) that involves the objective identity of what was (before) meant and what is (later) perceived. By 'phenomenological unity,' he means that fulfillment is more than the mere coincidence of having meant and then later perceiving the same thing. Something beyond the objective coincidence of a given meaning act and a given intuition must be present for fulfillment to exist, for we could always be perceiving what we had before meant or thought without *realizing* that we are now perceiving what we had before meant or thought. It is rather the

experience in which we *realize* that we are now perceiving what we before only meant or thought that is an example of fulfillment. Thus, fulfillment is its own kind of experience or act that requires, but is not simply identical to, the objective identity between an act of meaning or thought and an act of intuition.

Fulfillment can also occur in acts of recognition, when, without any prior thought or assertion, we recognize and become aware of the things that we are currently perceiving; for example, when I step out of my house on a cold winter morning and think ‘it's cold outside!’, it would not be correct to say that I am not experiencing any meaningful acts. I am thinking ‘it's cold outside!’ But, at the same time, this is also what I am perceiving. I perceive that it is cold outside. The very state of affairs that I am meaning or thinking is itself being presented to me in perceptual intuition, just as I am meaning or thinking it, and I realize this. This act of recognition is then another example of fulfillment. Fulfillment is important because of its relation to knowledge. In an experience of fulfillment, I can actually come to know that something is the case—or, as Husserl would say, certain things become evident to us through acts of fulfillment (§38, 765). As we will see, fulfillment has an important role to play in Husserl's account of how we come to know logical laws.

More Distinctions: Pureness and Fullness

Husserl makes many more distinctions beyond the basic ones I have just outlined, and it will be important for answering our question to understand some of them. Among acts of intuition, Husserl distinguishes between the ‘fullness’ of these acts and their ‘purity.’ Fullness is the degree to which an intuitive act presents its object as it truly is (§21, 729). This distinction has currency because it is possible for an object to more or less clearly appear to us in intuition. An object in imagination almost always falls short of the detail with which it appears in a corresponding perception. And even in perception, objects appear more and less completely. Take the example of seeing a painting in a museum at a distance. If it looks

beautiful or interesting, we might walk up to it to take a closer look. In doing so, we are not confronted with an entirely different painting. We continue to see the same painting (and this is why one moves closer), but we now see it with *more* detail. We perceive *more* of it than we perceived before. Now, if we utterly deprive an act of fullness, we would end up with an empty thinking or meaning act which thinks or means a state of affairs or an object, but in no way presents us with the actual object or state of affairs that we are meaning or thinking; neither does it present us with the incomplete images that are given in imagination. On the other hand, if we were to push fullness to its other limit, we would have a presentation of the object exactly as it is. We would be aware of its every feature and part—nothing would be missing.

Next, there is 'purity.' We can apprehend the ground for this distinction when we clarify what we said earlier about perception. It is true that perception is capable of presenting us with objects as they truly are, yet it remains fundamentally incapable of presenting us with objects *wholly* as they are. This is on account of the nature of perceived objects. They are, for example, many sided, and we think of them as such. But we are only capable of perceiving some part of these many sided objects at any one time. When I am perceiving the front of a church, for example, I take it that the church has a back or even an inside. Indeed, I would not even think that I was perceiving a church if I thought I was perceiving some 'face' with no inside and no back. Thus, since I take it that there are other parts of the church that I am not actually perceiving, they must be the intentional objects of conscious acts. However, these acts lack fullness, or, if these supplementary acts include imaginative acts, these imaginative acts probably differ in fullness from my perception of the front of the church. And even if I could imagine the other parts of the church exactly as they are, these imaginative acts would still not present me with those parts themselves, but rather with their exact images.

Now, if we take my consciousness of the church before me as a whole, we can

distinguish between the fuller perceptual acts directed toward some part of the church, say the front, and the other empty 'signitive' acts which are directed towards the unperceived parts. If we consider all of these acts together, we can define a limiting case in which all of them are perceptual and completely full acts and none of them are imaginative or empty signitive acts. This would be a completely *pure* act. And if we next stipulate that some of these acts lose their fullness, the overall pureness of my consciousness of the church decreases, until none of the acts are full and we reach the opposite limit—the completely impure act. Furthermore, if we take my actual consciousness of the church and distinguish the full act or acts from the un-full acts and then gather only the full acts together into a whole, then, we have an example of a pure but 'reduced' act (§23, top of 733).

Objectively Complete and Objectively Mutilated Intuitions

As we have seen in the previous section, it does not appear that objects could ever be present to us as they wholly are because at any given time we perceive only some of their parts or sides. It thus seems that we could never experience an act of fulfillment in which an object, like the church mentioned above, is present to us wholly as it is. And if this is true, then we would reasonably become suspicious of our ability to have adequate knowledge of an external object, since there will always be parts or aspects of it that do not appear 'in evidence' to us. Nevertheless, Husserl does hold open the possibility that external objects can be known to us as they genuinely are, at least with respect to their visible surfaces. They can be adequately present to us through a synthesis. A synthesis is the temporally extended unity of acts which themselves differ in intuitive 'content' but all intend the same object (§29, 746).

An example of a synthesis will make the idea clearer; consider something as simple as turning a coffee mug over in your hands so that you can see all of its sides. If we analyze this experience phenomenologically, we could distinguish many different acts which occur at different times and in which different parts of the cup are given with fullness. One intuitive

act will present one part of the side, while empty signitive or imaginative acts are directed toward other parts of the cup. Another intuitive act might present the bottom, with the sides and the inside being the objects of signitive acts. Perhaps there are even infinity many different acts we could distinguish within this experience of the coffee mug, yet all of them will be bound together in a continual perception (or intuition) of the *same* object, our humble coffee mug. Thus, according to Husserl, by the perception of an object's aspects and parts being spread out through a continuous experience, we can achieve an adequate presentation of an object, at least with respect to its visible surfaces.

By introducing the possibility of adequate presentation through a synthesis, Husserl also introduces the grounds for several more epistemologically significant distinctions. Although some synthetic intuitions may adequately present the visible exterior of their objects, they are neither completely full nor completely pure. These intuitions will still have isolable parts which are neither full nor pure. In our example above, consider that our synthesis will also include all of the empty acts directed toward the non-perceived parts of the coffee mug which accompany each full intuition of some part of it. Thus, we would not correctly describe a synthesis to call it simply pure or simply full, even when only taking into accounts an object’s visible surfaces (§29, 747). And for this reason Husserl introduces the term ‘objectively complete intuition.’ An objectively complete intuition is an intuition, including an intuition-synthesis, that adequately presents its object. As we saw before, we never experience simple acts that are objectively complete; it is only through a synthesis that objects are adequately given to us, at least with respect to their visible surfaces. However, if we were capable of adequately perceiving an object all at one blow, then this act would be full, pure and objectively complete. And perhaps if we consider the ‘pure but reduced’ act discussed before, then, in a sense, we would possess an example of a non-synthetic, objectively complete and pure intuition. Thus, Husserl asserts that while all pure acts are (or

would be) objectively complete, not all objectively complete acts are pure (§29, top of 746).

In light of the above distinctions about intuitions, new distinctions can also be made about their associated experiences of fulfillment. First, there is the fulfillment of a meaning in an objectively complete and synthetic intuition. In such a fulfilling act, the object is present fully as it is, in the way that it is meant: 'the fulfilling intuition, to the extent that its object is meant in any articulations and forms which have been drawn into the function of fulfillment, is intrinsically adequate to its object' (§29, 747). Husserl's example is a green house. Such fulfillment or illustration of a green house would require a green house to be present to us in its entirety. However, there is another kind of intuition which still serves as a kind of adequate illustration or fulfillment even though it lacks objective completeness. This kind of intuition would be 'objectively mutilated,' but it could still adequately 'illustrate' a meaning to the degree that each part of the meaning (a house, its being green) receives some degree of fulfillment; for example, if I want to see if my car is still parked outside somewhere, I do not feel the need to go out and look at my parked car from every conceivable angle. A quick glance from a window will suffice. Likewise, a green house seen from the front serves, in this sense, as an adequate illustration of a green house.

Essentia

Now we enter territory that is more directly relevant to our question, the investigation of possible meanings. This issue is important for our question because, in Husserl's account, logical laws ultimately take the form of kinds of possible meanings. In §30, Husserl says both what a possible meaning is and how we acquire knowledge of it as possible. However, before attacking his definition, it will be necessary to go through one more of Husserl's distinctions, 'essentia.' To quote Husserl:

> Distinctions of fullness in cases where quality [that character by which an intentional act is a certain kind of intention act] and matter [the character of being directed

> toward a certain intentional object] are identical, prompt us to frame one further important concept: we shall say that two intuitive acts have the same essentia, if their pure intuitions have the same matter (§29, 748).

Essentia is a classification of intuitive acts according to sameness of matter and sameness of degree of fullness; or rather, if that part of the matter (like the front of the house) is presented in with the same degree of fullness among two different intuitive acts, then they have the same essentia. It makes no difference that the complete matter of one act is 'a house' and the other is 'a house-front;' as long as the same matter, or part of the matter, receives the same degree of fullness, the acts have the same essentia. It will be important to note that a given essentia could span both perceptual and imaginative presentations of an object, as long as the perception and the imagination had the same matter, or matter-part, with the same degree of fullness. However, the perception and the imagination will still differ insofar as one presents an image of something with fullness while the other presents the thing itself with fullness.

Possible Meanings and Possibility

Husserl defines a possible meaning in terms of essentia. To wit, a possible meaning is an ideal meaning act which has a corresponding adequate (objectively complete) essentia or 'ideal fulfilling sense' (§30, 749). By 'ideal' Husserl means an existing universal type. He does not mean a Platonic ideal—a perfect example that all particular things somehow fall short of. An ideal meaning is thus a meaning act taken as a universal type, like the proposition 'dinosaurs roam the earth.' All particular examples of such a meaning—each time we think or assert 'dinosaurs roam the earth'—are then instantiations of this one ideal meaning act. A possible meaning is said to be ideal because the question 'is such and such a meaning possible?' does not ask whether an utterly particular thought or meaning act, which is the meaning act of some particular conscious being and exists only at some particular time, is possible. Clearly, it is possible if someone is experiencing it. Neither does the question ask

whether a particular meaning act has a real corresponding object. That would just be to ask 'is such and such?' or 'is such and such true?' The answer to these questions will most likely hinge on the existence of particular objects, but a possible meaning remains a possible meaning regardless of whether any particular being happens to exist or not to exist.

An ideal meaning act is possible, then, when there exists a corresponding ideal adequate fulfilling sense or, what is the same thing, a corresponding essentia. If we could (adequately) behold dinosaurs roaming the earth, the particular intuition that we would then experience would be an instantiation of an ideal fulfilling sense. However, what is required for a meaning to be possible is not that its fulfilling sense (or essentia) currently be instantiated, but that there actually be an ideal fulfilling sense that corresponds to a given ideal meaning. It is reasonable for Husserl to make adequate fulfilling acts the center of his theory of possible meanings because objectively complete intuitions are self-presentations of their object. They 'guarantee' the existence of their object. If an adequate perceptual intuition is being instantiated, its object *must* also exist. Thus, if an adequate intuition is possible, so must its object be possible.

There are some interesting features of this definition that come to light in thinking through an objection. Consider the following: if every thought or meaning intention that I can experience is an instantiation of an ideal meaning act, then we can prove any meaning possible by merely thinking 'the fulfilling sense of x.' Say, for instance, 'the fulfilling sense of a round square.' This objection fails for at least two reasons. First, 'the fulfilling sense of x' and 'x' are different meanings. Using the round square example, one meaning act is about a round square which is a kind of (impossible) geometrical figure. The other is about a fulfilling sense which is a kind of mental act. Thus, these acts are not identical in matter, yet the fulfilling sense or essentia is by definition identical in matter with that which it is the fulfilling sense of (§28,744, top).

Second, there is unquestionably the ideal meaning act ‘the fulfilling sense of x,’ since indefinitely many particular acts can mean this same thing. But an ideal *meaning* act is not an ideal *intuitive* act. Thus, the ideal meaning act ‘the fulfilling sense of x’ could itself be possible or impossible depending on whether *it* has a corresponding ideal fulfilling act. And the experience that would give us knowledge of whether ‘the fulfilling sense of x’ is a possible meaning would also give us knowledge of whether ‘x’ is a possible meaning, since fulfilling senses guarantee the existence of their objects and the object of ‘the fulfilling sense of x’ is an intuitive act which itself makes ‘x’ a possible meaning. Therefore, the existence of a particular ideal fulfilling sense is not given to us by our ability to just think about it. It is possible that the specific ideal fulfilling sense we intend does not exist. Indeed, the existence of some particular ideal fulfilling sense would most likely become known to us through an encounter with one of its instantiations. There is thus a way in which we can really be in the dark about whether a certain ideal entity, such as an ideal adequate fulfilling sense, actually exists.

That we can be perplexed about which ideal entities exist has important consequences for Husserl's account of how we come to know possibility and impossibility. This perplexity can arise because there is a difference between the intentional object of an act and a real object or being. An 'intentional object' is not in itself a real existing object. It is rather the character of an act of being directed toward some object. My thought about ‘Zeus,’ for example, has the character of being ‘Zeus-directed.’ The intentional character thus belongs to the act and does not require the actual existence of that which it is directed toward. In other words, an intentional character or act is *not* essentially relational. Therefore, our ability to think about something or to mean it, such as a certain ideal fulfilling sense, in no way shows us that this thing exists. Now, if we do accept that we can come to have knowledge of the existence of ideal types through coming to know their instantiations (see Investigation II,

§1)—for example, by experiencing adequate perceptions of their instantiations—our knowledge about what is possible and impossible still seems to outstrip what we are aware of through perception. It then becomes a real question for Husserl how we have knowledge of possibilities, or possible meanings, outside of our limited perceptual experience.

Some further discussion about how Husserl understands possibility will also be helpful for grasping the problem of the knowledge of possibility and impossibility as he encountered it. Husserl defines possible meanings by the ideal existence of corresponding adequate essentia, but he also gives a more general account of possibility. In that account, a possibility is, or is a necessary consequence of, the existence of an ideal species or type (§31, 752). Round things are possible if and only if there is this ideal type: 'round thing.' And, extending his account, it is possible for Joelle to run if and only if there is an ideal type of the state of affairs 'Joelle running.' Thus, for Husserl, every species or type can be instantiated. There simply cannot be a genuine type the instantiation of which is impossible.

But why, then, does Husserl define possible meanings in terms of objectively complete intuitive acts—and not by the existence of an ideal type that corresponds to what is meant by the meaning—for example, 'Joelle is running' and the state of affairs type 'Joelle running?' We have seen that intuitive acts guarantee the existence of their objects. Thus, if an intuitive act is possible, its object must be possible as well. There is thus an equivalence between the possibility of a given objectively complete intuition and the possibility of its object. And there is the following advantage to focusing on intuitive acts. It is far easier for us to know which adequate fulfilling senses are possible then it is for us to know through perception which objects are possible, for a given essentia straddles both perceptual and *imaginative* intuition. To know through perception would require an actual encounter with the object. However, the summoning of imaginative acts is much more in our power. Knowledge of possible meanings is in this way always at our fingertips. Yet, despite this rosy prospect, it

still remains to be seen why an imaginative act is sufficient for proving the possibility of a meaning, for imaginative acts are not self-presentations of their object. They do not guarantee the existence of their objects in the way that perceptions do.

Required Principles

In §36 Husserl says explicitly that the experience of an objectively complete imagination is enough for knowledge of possibility: ‘a thing counts as possible, if it allows itself, objectively speaking, to be realized in the form of an adequate imaginative picture’ (§36, 760). He then asserts that there is an ‘ideal linkage between perception and imagination, which assures us a priori that to each percept a possible image corresponds’ (ibid.). Every adequate perception that is capable of presenting the object itself thus has a matching adequate imagination. Therefore, if one of these paired imaginations exists, so does its corresponding perceptual act. And if this is so, we are free to restrict our definition of possibility to the existence of ideal imaginative acts. And further, it appears that we can adequately know that something is possible merely by reflecting on our imaginative presentations.

However, in regard to knowledge of possibility, let us note that this first principle states not only that every adequate perceptual act has a corresponding adequate imaginative act, but that this correspondence is *known a priori*. If this correspondence were not known a priori, then the discovery of the existence of an adequate imaginative intuition would not give us *knowledge* that there is (in the ideal sense) a corresponding adequate perception. And if we do not know whether there is an (ideal) adequate perception, we *do not know* the possibility of the object in question. Therefore, if we are to achieve knowledge of the possibility of a meaning through the knowledge of the possibility of an adequate imaginative intuition, the connection between possible adequate imaginative acts and possible adequate perceptual acts must already be known to us.

Some further principles are required to reduce the question of possibility to the question of imagination. Not only must there be, and it be known a priori that there is, an objectively complete imagination corresponding to every objectively complete perception, but there must also be, and it be known a priori that there is, an objectively complete perception corresponding to every objectively complete imagination. Otherwise, we would face the problem of ‘false positives’—cases in which we are presented with adequate imaginations to which there is no corresponding adequate perception. And if there were false positives, the only way to know which imaginations had corresponding adequate perceptions would be to experience these perceptual acts themselves. In other words, imagination would no longer be a touchstone for possibility; we would have to actually (adequately) perceive an object to know that it is possible.

There is another principle that Husserl's account of possible meanings requires. Everything that exists must be perceivable. ‘Perceivable’ does not here mean perceivable by human beings, with their particular perceptual limitations. It means perceivable in principle—that is, by some possible consciousness and in the wide sense of perception (perhaps ‘intuitable in principle’ is better). Husserl states his acceptance of this principle explicitly (§62, top of 822), and it supplies the ultimate justification for treating the possibility of a meaning in terms of the existence of corresponding adequate intuitive acts, for if there is something that is possible but that is, in principle, not adequately intuitable, then the meaning act that means this would still be a possible meaning, even though there exists no corresponding adequate intuitive act. However, the falsity of the above principle would not completely destroy Husserl's account of how we come to know possible meanings. He would have to give up the universal equivalence between the possibility of a meaning and the existence of a corresponding adequate essentia, but this equivalence could still hold for a restricted class of possible meanings. And those meanings would be the ones whose

possibility we could (at least more easily) come to know. So let us say that while Husserl does assert this principle in the *Logical Investigations*, it is not essential for an explanation of how we come to have knowledge of possible meanings.

Categorial Forms

We have so far examined Husserl's account of possibility—what principles it requires and how one comes to know what is possible. These are essential parts of his account of our knowledge of logical laws. Another essential part is the existence of categorial intuition and categorial form. Categorial form is the part of an intuition that can be distinguished from the straightforward presentation of a sensible subject (§45, pg. 784).[4] It is present in an intuition that does not present us merely with a thing, but with a state of affairs. If we see, for example, that a book is red, the 'being red of something' is the abstract categorical form. And what is presented by an actual intuition of this form is not just a thing, as in the case of simply seeing a book, but a state of affairs, as in the case of seeing *that the book is red*. Besides predicative 'judgments,' categorial forms also include meanings that make use of conjunctions and disjunctions—'and' and 'or' and other such not directly sensible parts of meanings.

What is most important with respect to logical laws is that categorial forms can be meant abstractly. We can call 'a and b' a categorical conjunctive form and then ask whether 'a and b' is a possible meaning. Finally, we settle this question of possibility with an appeal to categorial imagination. If we can adequately imagine an example of 'a and b,' like 'Bob and Marry,' then we can know that this categorial form is possible. And we could know that other logical forms such as 'All A's are B's' and 'All B's are C's' or even 'if A, then B' are possible in exactly the same way. But we have not yet fully answered our original question. Besides knowledge of possible, individual logical forms, knowledge of logic also involves knowledge of the possible combinations of these forms (§63, 826). And still more beyond that is required.

[4]Though this does not distinguish categorial intuition from straightforward non-categorial and 'non-sensible' inner intuition—that is, the intuitive presentation of our own conscious acts.

We must be capable of knowing which combinations are impossible too; for example, if ‘All A's are B's’ and ‘All B's are C's’ are true, then could ‘All A's are C's’ also be true? (§62, 823). However, this question need not be asked in terms of hypothetical truth evaluations. We can just as well ask whether the conjunctive categorial form: ‘All A's are B's and all B's are C's and all A's are C's’ is itself possible. And, again, we need only appeal to our imagination to know that it is possible.

Objective Conflict and Impossibility

Husserl's explanation for how we know impossible meanings is one of the most ingenious parts of his account of possibility and impossibility. And it turns out to be quite necessary in order to avoid a potential problem. Husserl does not define an impossible meaning merely as a meaning which lacks a corresponding adequate fulfilling sense. If this by itself were Husserl's definition, he would be faced with the problem of how we could ever really know what was impossible, for, while whatever *we* perceive is perceivable, we do not think that everything *we* cannot perceive is in principle unperceivable. And one could always then wonder why this same judgment does not stand for our particular imaginative faculties. If we cannot adequately imagine something, might that just be a result of some limitation to *our* imaginations? And without knowing the answer to this question, we could not claim to have a priori knowledge of impossible meanings; neither, then, could we claim to have genuine a priori knowledge of logical laws.

However, Husserl's approach promises to avoid the above problem altogether. He does so by taking impossibility to be a positive objective property: ‘impossibility is ranged beside possibility as an idea of equal title, which should not merely be defined as a negation of possibility’ (§30, 751). In other words, an impossibility is neither the absence of an ideal adequate essentia nor the absence of any other ideal type. It is rather the positive existence of a certain ideal type. This objective property, actually, a relation, can itself be combined with

different things or kinds of things, and these combinations can be known to be possible the same way that anything else is known to be possible.

The objective relation is ‘conflict.’ We experience conflict when we are unable to bring the parts of a complex meaning together into a unity in imaginative intuition. One classic example is the ‘round square.’ We find ourselves simply unable to imagine what this object would look like. However, as we noted above and as Husserl is quite aware, he must go beyond our factual inability to imagine something:

> But the *factual failure* does not establish a *necessary failure*. Possibly [sic] greater power could ultimately overcome the resistance. Nonetheless, in our empirical concern with the contents in questions, and our attempted removal of their 'rivalry,' we experience a peculiar relationship of the contents, again grounded in their specific being...*it is the relationship of conflict* (§32, 753, his emphasis).

By asserting that we are aware of this genuine and objective relation between the parts of a meaning, Husserl can overcome the objection that he is founding a priori knowledge on what looks like a generalization from an empirical observation. At least, he can overcome this objection as long as the proposition that conflict is a genuine objective relation is granted.

Conflict: Pro and Contra

As we have seen, Husserl’s account of our knowledge of impossibility is based on defining possibility as the existence of a positive objection relation—conflict. Should we grant the existence of this relation? Do we really encounter something *above and beyond* our inability to adequately imagine a round square when we try to imagine one? I do not know. But if conflict does not exist, then knowledge of impossibility would seem to require that we have an intuitive presentation of the absence or non-being of possibility—that is, on Husserl’s account, the absence or non-being of ideal types. But I, for one, do not believe I have had such an experience. Neither did Husserl rely on an intuitive presentation of the non-being of

ideal types in his account of knowledge of impossibility. And perhaps a reasonable conclusion from the non-existence of conflict, at least within Husserl's philosophy, would be that we do not have genuine knowledge of impossibilities.

But let us see what kind of case can be made for the existence of conflict. Husserl seems to believe that conflict is given to us in evidence (see §32, 754). We have an adequate imaginative intuition of things in conflict—the roundness and the squareness in the round square, for example. No *argument* is therefore necessary on his account. We possess authoritative intuitive evidence of conflict. But what if we do not find this evidence forthcoming? Perhaps we could persuade ourselves of the existence of conflict by the fact that, in certain cases, we really do believe a failure to adequately imagine something gives us knowledge that it is impossible, while, in other cases, we would not believe such a thing. I am incapable of adequately imagining the undead, but I would not say that this failure to imagine the undead gives me knowledge of their impossibility. My imaginative abilities are simply not powerful enough to decide this case. But the case of a round square is different. My failure to imagine a round square really does seem to give me knowledge of its impossibility. There is thus a difference among failures to imagine. One kind of failure to imagine does not give us knowledge of impossibility but another kind of failure really does seem to give us this knowledge. Husserl's account then has the virtue of agreeing with the fairly evident belief that our knowledge of impossibility is associated with our failure to imagine something. It also has the virtue of explaining how different kinds of failures to imagine have (apparently) different epistemic import; namely, one kind of failure to imagine something leads us to adequately imagine the conflict between the elements that were attempting to combine; another does not.

But there are other ways of explaining the epistemic difference between these two kinds of failures to imagine. We can distinguish between cases where we attempt to combine

properties that we cannot adequately imagine individually and cases where we attempt to combine properties that we can adequately imagine individually.[5] Thus, in the case of the undead, I cannot adequately imagine a corpse. Neither can I adequately imagine an animate body. I therefore cannot rule out that this failure to imagine the individual examples is the cause of my failure to imagine the combined example. But in the case of a round square figure, I can adequately imagine a round figure or a square figure. Thus, this latter case *appears* to give me knowledge of a round square's impossibility because I know that my failure to imagine a round square is not caused by my inability to imagine the individual components. This account in effect does away with conflict, but it would plausibly lead to the denial of knowledge of impossibility within Husserl's philosophy (see note 5 above). It therefore does violence to the fairly evident belief that we possess such knowledge, but it shares with conflict the virtue of explaining the epistemic difference between two kinds of failures to imagine. The unique virtue of conflict is then that it agrees with the (fairly) evident belief that we have knowledge of impossibilities and that this knowledge is related to our inability to imagine certain things. Husserl at least provides us with an explanation of how a failure to imagine something could lead to knowing that it is impossible.

However, there is a cost to taking impossibility as a positive relation. We can still distinguish between the non-being of a given possibility—that is, the absence of a certain ideal type—and the existence of a certain ideal type which involves things in conflict with one another.[6] As a result, impossibility will not be identical to the non-being of possibility.

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[5]This condition is offered by David Kasmier ('Husser's Theory of A Priori Knowledge: A Response to the Failure of Contemporary Analytic Rationalism,' 202) as the criterion for successful knowledge of impossibility. While this distinction is useful, I do not see how it could overcome the objection that our failure to imagine, even in these cases, may be the result of some particular limitation to our human imagination. Even if this limitation is exceedingly unlikely, the fact that we do not *know* that it does not exist by the very fact of our failure to imagine something shows that this criterion does not lead to true knowledge of impossibility.

[6]There are some places where Husserl seems to suggest otherwise—for example §34, 757. But even if he is proposing a universal equivalence between 'not' and conflict, 'not' clearly does not have the sense of 'conflict' in all cases. I may *not* have long hair, but it is still possible for me to have long hair. But if 'not' expressed conflict, then, by definition, it would be impossible for me to have long hair (see ibid.) In this case, and many others, we can clearly distinguish between 'not being a certain way' and 'being in conflict.' If we then take this

This is, in itself, a counter-intuitive result, but it also raises the following issue. Since impossibility is not the same as the non-being of possibility, it becomes a real question whether something can be both impossible and possible. Why can't there be one ideal type ‘an A that is B’ and another ideal type ‘A and B in conflict?’ To avoid concurrent possibility and impossibility, Husserl must assert that the non-existence of the ideal type ‘an A that is B’ necessarily follows from the existence of the ideal type ‘A and B in conflict.’ Further, in order for us to have satisfactory knowledge of impossibility, he must also assert that this consequence is known a priori. I say this because if we do not *know* whether this entailment holds, then, for all we know, ‘an A that is B” is both impossible *and* possible. And I say that knowledge of impossibility that does not exclude concurrent possibility is not satisfactory knowledge of impossibility.

Sketch of Logical Laws

Given the objective relation of conflict, it is fairly easy to see how Husserl can complete his account of knowledge of impossibility. The conflict of two elements A and B can itself be expressed in a unified meaning: ‘A conflicts with B’ (§33). We then turn our attention to this meaning and ask ‘is this meaning possible?’ And if the relation of conflict between A and B can be given properly in imagination (like when we try to imagine the round square), we know that ‘A conflicts with B’ is a possible meaning. Thus, something that is A and B is impossible.

We can now sketch how logical laws are known. Returning to our earlier syllogism: ‘All A's are B's and all B's are C's and all A's are C's.’ We already know that this is a *possible* complex categorial form, but now we can add that the following is an *impossible* categorial form: ‘All A's are B's and all B's are C's and not all A's are C's.’ This division between possible and impossible forms could then serve as the basis for valid and invalid forms of

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clearly distinguished sense of ‘not’ and apply it to ‘possible,’ we arrive at the negation or non-being of possibility—to wit, the non-being of certain ideal types.

inference. Very briefly, an argument form (A therefore B) would be valid when ‘A and B’ is a possible categorial form, but ‘A and not B’ is an impossible categorial form. If we make A, ‘all C's are D's and all D's are E's’ and then make B, ‘all C's are E's,’ our argument comes out as valid. This, of course, would not be the case if we replaced ‘All C's are E's’ with ‘All E's are F's’ because the conjunction of either this form or its negation with ‘A,’ as defined above, is possible. This is admittedly a sketchy account, but it is at least an indication that Husserl has provided himself some of the material necessary to scrape together an account of a priori logical knowledge.

Conclusion

Psychologism states that logical laws lack objective validity; they only tell us what subjects are psychologically disposed to believe given certain normal conditions. The best answer that Husserl could give to Psychologism would be to actually show that we have a priori knowledge of objectively valid logical laws. While he did not consider that he had completed his project in the *Logical Investigations*, he made significant progress towards giving that answer. For Husserl, the possibility of such an answer depends primarily on the epistemic character of fulfillment; on the possibility of objectively complete intuitions; on the existence of categorial intuition; and on several important principles about (a) the relation between our cognitive and perceptual faculties and the world and (b) the nature of impossibility.

The first group of principles includes the proposition that there is a harmony between imagination and perception, so that whatever is adequately imaginable is perceptible and vice versa. It also includes the proposition that there is a similar harmony between perception and being, so that whatever exists is in principle perceptible or intuitable. The second group includes the identification of impossibility with the objective relation of conflict as well as the proposition that conflict between two properties implies the absence of the possibility of

their combination. Furthermore, this entailment must be capable of being known a priori. And if these principles are worth granting, then Husserl’s philosophy has good prospects for providing this best answer to Psychologism.

Works Cited

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