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On Russell's projected Review of Husserl's *Logische Untersuchungen*

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Introduction

For a large part of the twentieth century, the phenomenological tradition in so-called 'continental' philosophy was seen as one which analytic philosophers in the English-speaking world could safely disregard. Whereas Edmund Husserl, a founding figure in the movement, had been influential both in Germanophone and Francophone philosophy during his own lifetime, British and American philosophy did not, as we shall see, welcome his influence until much later.¹ It was only brought to the surface during the fifties that Husserl had engaged in correspondence with Gottlob Frege,² with the ensuing discussion of Frege's influence on Husserl's anti-psychologism resulting in hundreds of academic papers and books.³ Furthermore, it turns out that various leading figures in analytic philosophy, such as Gilbert Ryle and Rudolf Carnap, were in fact at least partly influenced by Husserl at some stage in their careers, while others still, such as Wittgenstein or Austin, had at times employed the term 'phenomenology' as a

description of their own work in philosophy.⁴ Rather than encourage the study of the continental phenomenological tradition, the engagement of these figures with Husserl has in most cases had the opposite effect.⁵ Nevertheless, contemporary phenomenology may be said to be studied more in philosophy departments within the Anglophone world, which are affiliated with an analytic metaphilosophy, and less so under the banner of what has come to be called ‘continental’ philosophy.

There may be various philosophical reasons for this troubled relation, and I have elsewhere explored its causes in depth.⁶ In this paper I focus on one particular occurrence, or rather non-occurrence, which contributed to the ill-fated reception of Husserl’s thought in Britain. In what follows, I examine the circumstances around Bertrand Russell’s projected review of Husserl’s *Logische Untersuchungen* while serving his sentence at Brixton prison in 1918. I will be illustrating the relation between Russell’s failure to produce this review and the subsequent reception of Husserl’s presentation of his work to a British audience. The story ties together various historical factoids related to T. E. Hulme’s opposition to Russell’s pacifism, the international debate over the legacy of German Idealism, Russell’s imprisonment, and Husserl’s unfortunate arrival in Britain as the first Germanophone philosopher to visit the country after the war. Recounting this story shows that the Anglophone response to Husserl’s thought was shaped to a lesser degree by matters relevant to philosophical argument than it was by various contingent historical factors.

Russell and phenomenology

Let us first consider the background of Russell’s relation to phenomenology. It is well known that Russell’s ‘On Denoting’, published in *Mind* in 1905, had taken Meinong and his theory of objects [*Gegenstandstheorie*] as the target of its attack. Meinong, along with a large number of other important Germanophone philosophers and psychologists of his time (including for example Husserl and Freud) had studied under Franz Brentano, founder of the phenomenological tradition that Husserl would later reform. Meinong’s school, based in Graz, may be seen as one of the branches of the phenomenological tradition

springing from the work of Brentano, albeit one that remained marginal (if not wholly irrelevant) to the subsequent development of phenomenology from Husserl to Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and so on.⁷ By discussing Meinong's view of ideal entities (such as the 'golden mountain') that subsist rather than exist, Russell introduced the doctrines of this Austrian school to Anglophone philosophy. Nevertheless, his polemical treatment of Meinong could be seen as relegating this school to the realm of a 'woolly' type of thinking that is predominantly located on the 'continent'. It may be said that the style in which Russell deals with Meinong sets a precedent for later dealings with continental thinkers by analytic philosophers (e.g. Ayer's claims that Sartre and Heidegger's talk of 'nothingness' is nonsensical).⁸ And, in close parallel to its legacy (which in many cases has been one of directing one's fire against an enemy more distant than the one it is in fact aimed at), it has been argued that Russell's response to Meinong misconstrues Meinong's thought in a way which more closely resembles a younger Russell's idealist views than those explicitly put forth by Meinong.⁹

Though Russell's exchange with Meinong is one of the most well known historical ties linking Russell to the phenomenological tradition, there is more to Russell's relation to phenomenology than simply a polemical dispute. David Bell has pointed out the ties between Russell and Moore's rebellion against their Hegelian predecessors, and their relation to Germanophone reactions against the rise of experimental psychology (having in mind the phenomenological tradition in particular).¹⁰ Stout and Ward, two of the figures who were most influential on Russell and Moore, though later rejected as 'British Idealists', were in dialogue with Brentano and in fact imported Brentano's thought into a British context.¹¹ Indeed, Bell argues that Stout's conception of analytical psychology, which so influenced Moore's conception of analytical philosophy, was in fact an introduction of Brentano's ideas to an Anglophone audience.¹² And though subsequent portrayals of the birth of analytic philosophy see it as somehow being a particularly British philosophical revolution (with British realists rebelling against British idealists), it would be more accurate, according to Bell, to consider what later came to be called 'analytic philosophy' as having arisen from Moore and Russell's participation in a dialogue over the

emergence of empirical psychology that first took place amongst philosophers, psychologists, and logicians on continental Europe.

Hulme and Russell

This relation between the birth of analytic philosophy and the development of phenomenology was only recently paid substantial attention, through the interest in the history of early analytic philosophy that has developed in the past two decades or so. There is, nonetheless, one exceptional figure, contemporary to Russell, who had seen Russell's and Moore's thought to be related to Husserl's. The modernist poet, critic, and self-professed dilettante philosopher T. E. Hulme had also been an importer of German and French thought into Britain. Hulme had been a *persona non grata* at Cambridge: he had been expelled, and went on to travel around Europe, eventually bringing his impressions from Europe's intellectual scene back home. His central importing activity had been that of translating Bergson's *Introduction to Metaphysics* into English - an import which had partly been blocked by Russell's criticisms of Bergson in 1908.¹³

Hulme saw various parallels between Russell and Moore, on the one hand, and Husserl, on the other. Hulme had correctly viewed the anti-psychologistic outlooks that drove early analytic philosophy in Britain as comparable with the overall anti-psychologistic climate in Germanophone philosophy. In particular, he thought that Husserl's anti-psychologism in logic went hand-in-hand with Moore's anti-psychologism in ethics.¹⁴ Furthermore, Hulme had deemed that Husserl's idea of phenomenology as a rigorous science was aligned with Russell's ideas regarding scientific philosophy.¹⁵ Though this may not have been precisely correct, Hulme had pointed the way towards a comparison which historians of analytic philosophy would only seriously take into consideration more than half a century later.

There are two or three reasons why Hulme's association of Russell with Husserl did not catch on. The first, and more tragic, is the fact that Hulme was killed by a bomb in Oostduinkerke in 1917 while fighting in the First World War on the side of Britain.¹⁶ The second reason is not unrelated, but rather a

link in the causal chain that led to Hulme's death. Hulme had been polemically opposed to Russell on the matter of the war. Yet Hulme's opposition to Russell seems to have pre-dated their clash on the war. Indeed, it appears to lie at the root of Russell's critique of Bergson (since Russell's attack on Bergson targeted British Bergsonians such as Hulme, rather than Bergson himself).¹⁷

The story of Russell's disagreement with Hulme over the war is striking. With the start of the war, Hulme seems to have picked up a kind of proto-futurist fascination with war, and became one of its staunch proponents. It is this fascination that led him to enlist for military service, and eventually to his death. Russell, on the other hand, as is well known, had vehemently opposed the war and refused conscription. This had led to a public polemical exchange, in the pages of *The New Age* and *The Cambridge Magazine* between Russell and Hulme, who had written pseudonymously as North Staffs.¹⁸ Their clash included Hulme's attending one of Russell's 1915 lectures against the war at Cambridge, during which he seems to have thought it appropriate to demonstrate his opposition to Russell's views by conspicuously reading his newspaper throughout Russell's lecture.¹⁹

The war and Russell's imprisonment

It is well known that Russell's opposition to the war had led him into trouble. Russell became a vehement opponent of conscription, and had participated in pacifist demonstrations.

The fact that Russell had opposed the war put him in a position vastly different from that of most intellectuals, especially philosophers, of his time, not only in the British context but throughout the world. The First World War was, for many, not only one that would be fought in the trenches, but also to be fought with pen and paper at the level of intellectual polemic.²⁰ There was, for example, at the start of the war, that well-known manifesto signed by ninety-three German intellectuals (including many philosophers) defending Prussia's militarism in the names of Goethe, Beethoven, and Kant.²¹ Furthermore, under its Defence of the Realm Act, Britain not only prohibited the teaching of German at schools, but also banned all books written in the German language.

The war had been conceived by some of Germany's leading philosophers as one that German 'Kultur' was ethically obliged to fight against the mere 'civilisations' of France and Britain. The heads of Germany's Neo-Kantian schools, including Hermann Cohen, Paul Natorp, and Wilhelm Windelband, saw the war as a struggle between British and French technological civilisation opposed to a German ethico-philosophical culture that German Idealism had given rise to. Thus an international controversy would ensue, and it is notable that leading philosophers such as John Dewey in America and Emile Boutroux in France participated in the discussion. In Britain a number of writers would throw the blame for Prussian militarism onto Kant and Hegel.²² Yet, though Russell was no friend of German Idealism, his position against the war would mean that he did not participate in the British outcry against Kant and Hegel at this time.²³

Russell's opposition to the war would eventually lead, on 9 February 1918, to his being charged for violating the 1914 Defense of the Realm Act. Russell was tried and sentenced to imprisonment, which he served for five months in Brixton Prison. During this time, Russell had continued his philosophical work, while a lot of his time was apparently devoted to preparation for a future career as a public intellectual.

Brixton Prison and the projected review of Husserl's *Logische Untersuchungen*

Russell took with him a copy of the second volume of Husserl's *Logische Untersuchungen* to Brixton prison.²⁴ Russell read Husserl's *magnum opus* with the intention of preparing a review that would be published in *Mind*. Though Russell later claims that he did read Husserl work, for reasons that remain unknown, he did not write the review.

Russell's resistance to the war had in fact placed him in a unique position for producing this review: he had been one of the few intellectuals who, at the time, could afford to write favourably of a Germanophone author. Russell, as we have seen, had already been an importer into Britain of Germanophone thought (i.e. Frege and Meinong) prior to the war, and, it has been claimed, had been influenced by the Germanophone dialogue over the relation between philosophy and psychology that

Husserl's work had brought to the fore. In addition to the above, it was already the case that Russell and Moore's views had come to be compared to those developed by Husserl, particularly insofar as anti-psychologism was concerned. And this anti-psychologistic thesis was one that Husserl advanced in the work that Russell was to review.

Russell's reading of Husserl's work did lead to some brief contact between the two philosophers. On April 19 1920, Russell composed an apparently spontaneous letter to Husserl (currently held in the Louvain Archives), in which he reports that he had read Husserl's work while in prison, and that though he had intended to review it for *Mind*, this did not happen after all.²⁵ In the letter, Russell also acknowledges Husserl's interest in his own work.

Four years later, in his article titled 'Philosophy in the Twentieth Century',²⁶ Russell praises Husserl's *Logische Untersuchungen*:

But with the year 1900 a revolt against German idealism began, not from a pragmatist point of view, but from a severely technical standpoint. In Germany, apart from the admirable works of Frege (which begin in 1879, but were not read until recent years), Husserl's *Logische Untersuchungen*, a monumental work published in 1900, soon began to exert a great effect.[...] In England, G.E. Moore and I began to advocate similar views.²⁷

Not only does Russell call Husserl's book 'a monumental work', but he also places it alongside his own work, as well as that of Moore, James, Meinong, Frege, and others who contributed to the demise of German Idealism.

Nonetheless, by the time Russell published this, it was too little, too late. Despite this brief positive appraisal of the importance of Husserl's work by Russell, the fate of its dissemination in Britain was to encounter further obstacles.

Husserl's 1922 visit to Britain

Two years prior to Russell's praise, Husserl had been the first Germanophone philosopher to visit England after the war. Husserl had actively sought to make contact with British philosophers, and had arranged for a lecture series to be presented in London. He thus came to present four lectures at University College London in 1922, under the title of *Phenomenological Method and Phenomenological Philosophy*.²⁸ The lecture series was considered a fiasco.²⁹ Husserl's failure to engage the British public may be partly attributed to the fact that, though Husserl had produced various 'introductions' to phenomenology, they were not as introductory as the title suggests. Husserl described phenomenology as a 'transcendental idealism' which might have misled his audience of British philosophers (most of whom had not yet read Husserl's magnum opus, which Russell did not review for *Mind*) into thinking this an apt description of his overall views. The fact that the first Germanophone philosopher to visit Britain after the war called himself a 'transcendental idealist' did not sit well with the audience at UCL.

There was, nonetheless, one philosopher in the audience who would go on to study and teach Husserl at Oxford: this was Gilbert Ryle who, despite having been influenced by Husserl, would nonetheless eventually come to be among the first philosophers to, not un-problematically, diagnose the existence of a gulf between what he called 'Anglo-Saxon' and 'Continental' philosophy.

The various historical factoids that I have recounted in this paper shift emphasis away from this problematic image of philosophy as divided into two camps that Ryle and others had generated in the fifties. They show instead that there are accidental historical complexities, often having little or nothing to do with philosophy, that have determined the way philosophy is conceived today. The missed opportunities in the attempted import of Husserl's thought into an Anglophone context, constitutive as

they were of subsequent construal of an ‘analytic-continental divide’, are not, as has been shown above, primarily matters of philosophical dispute.

¹ See also Herbert Spiegelberg, “Husserl in England: Facts and Lessons,” *The Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, 1, no. 1, (1970): 4-17.

² Dagfinn Føllesdal, *Husserl und Frege: Ein Beitrag zur Beleuchtung der Entstehung der phänomenologischen Philosophie* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1958).

³ See Francois H. Lapointe, “The Anglo-American response to Edmund Husserl: A Bibliographic Essay,” *Man and World*, 12, no. 2 (1979): 205-245.

⁴ See Andreas Vrahimis, *Encounters between Analytic and Continental Philosophy* (UK: Palgrave-Macmillan, Forthcoming). Guillermo E. Rosado Haddock, *The Young Carnap’s Unknown Master: Husserl’s Influence on Der Raum and Der logische Aufbau der Welt* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008); Amy L. Thomasson, “Phenomenology and the Development of Analytic Philosophy,” *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 40, no. 1 (2002): 115-142.

⁵ I argue for this position at length in Vrahimis, *Encounters between Analytic and Continental Philosophy*.

⁶ See Vrahimis, *Encounters between Analytic and Continental Philosophy*.

⁷ See e.g. Robin D. Rollinger, *Austrian Phenomenology: Brentano, Husserl, Meinong, and Others on Mind and Object* (Frankfurt: Ontos Verlag, 2008).

⁸ See Andreas Vrahimis, “A. J. Ayer and French Philosophy in the Fifties,” *Journal for the History of Analytical Philosophy* (Forthcoming).

⁹ Alex Oliver, “A Few More Remarks on Logical Form,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 99 (1999): 247-272, 263-267.

¹⁰ David Bell, “A Very British Coup?,” in *German Philosophy since Kant*, ed. Anthony O’Hear (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999): 193-248.

¹¹ Bell, A Very British Coup?, 200-201.

¹² Bell, A Very British Coup?, 201-202.

¹³ See Andreas Vrahimis, “Russell’s critique of Bergson and the divide between “Analytic” and “Continental” Philosophy,” *Balkan Journal of Philosophy*, 3, no. 1 (2011): 123-134.

¹⁴ Thomas E. Hulme, “A Note-Book,” *The New Age*, 18, no. 10 (1916): 234-236. Both stances seem to have played some role in converting Hulme from his early Bergsonism to a kind of classicism which he outlines in his late works.

¹⁵ Thomas E. Hulme, “A Note-Book,” *The New Age*, 18, no. 8 (1915): 186-189, 187.

¹⁶ On the relation between philosophy’s casualties in the Great War and the subsequent development of the ‘analytic’-‘continental’ divide, see Peter Simons, “Whose Fault? The Origins and Evitability of the Analytic–Continental Rift,” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 9, no. 3 (2001): 295-311.

¹⁷ See Vrahimis, “Russell’s critique of Bergson and the divide between “Analytic” and “Continental” Philosophy”.

¹⁸ See Bertrand Russell, *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell (Vol. 13): Prophecy and Dissent* (London: Unwin, 1988), 321-323.

¹⁹ See Bertrand Russell, “Press Cuttings,” *The New Age*, 18 (1916): 408.

²⁰ See also Fred Brigham, *The First World War as a Clash of Cultures* (UK: Camden House, 2006).

²¹ Professors of Germany, “To the Civilized World”, *The North American Review*, 210, no. 765 (1919): 284–287

²² See Thomas L. Akehurst, *The Cultural Politics of Analytic Philosophy: Britishness and the Spectre of Europe*. (London: Continuum, 2010), 18-21.

²³ Russell would, nonetheless, take a similar line in the thirties; see Akehurst, *The Cultural Politics of Analytic Philosophy*, 26-27.

²⁴ Bertrand Russell, *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell (Vol. 8): The Philosophy of Logical Atomism and Other Essays 1914-19* (Cornwall: Routledge, 1986), 316, 327.

²⁵ Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations (Vol. 1)* (London: Routledge, 2001), ixiv.

²⁶ First published in Bertrand Russell, "Philosophy in the Twentieth Century," *Dial*, 77 (1924): 271-290.

²⁷ Bertrand Russell, 'Philosophy in the Twentieth Century', in *Sceptical Essays* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 53.

²⁸ Edmund Husserl, "Syllabus of a Course of Four Lectures on 'Phenomenological Method and Phenomenological Philosophy,'" *The Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, 1, no. 1 (1970): 18-23.

²⁹ See Spiegelberg, "Husserl in England".