



The Meaning of Being: Husserl on Existential Propositions as Predicative Propositions

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Abstract

This essay examines how Husserl stretches the bounds of his philosophy of meaning, according to which all propositions are categorical, to account for existential propositions, which seem to lack predicates. I examine Husserl's counter-intuitive conclusion that an existential proposition does possess a predicate and I explore his endeavor to pinpoint what that predicate is. This goal is accomplished in three stages. First, I examine Husserl's standard theory of predication and categorial intuition from his 1901 *Logical Investigations*. Second, I show how Husserl imposes those 1901 insights to uncover the predicate of the existential proposition in unpublished manuscripts and lectures. He determines that the existential proposition predicates of the subject, that it corresponds to an actual object. This analysis reveals that Husserl's descriptions of existential propositions from the late 1890s employed both static and genetic methodologies. In those texts, he carefully untangles and clarifies the co-enmeshed passive and active moments of consciousness and shows that the passive givenness of certain circumstances is the condition of possibility for our active verifying of propositions. Finally, I execute a critical assessment of Husserl's thought to reveal that, while his insights about existential propositions are largely correct, they are augmented by re-construing them within the context of his mature philosophy. Only by renouncing his metaphysical neutrality and by accounting for intersubjectivity, can Husserl properly clarify existential propositions.

Keywords Logical investigations · Phenomenology · Metaphysics · Intersubjectivity · Semantics · Ontology

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1 Introduction

Edmund Husserl wrote that the interpretation of “existential propositions, is not only a mere question regarding grammatical interpretation. We are concerned here with a fundamental question of logic and descriptive psychology” (Mat = Materialien I, pp. 207–208).¹ Indeed, Husserl emphasized that the success or failure of his science hinged upon his answer to the difficulty of the expression of existential propositions (See Varga 2016, pp. 250–251). Drawing from Kant’s analysis, Husserl goes even one step further, claiming that “not only merely psychological, but also metaphysical interests depend on a correct analysis of the form of the [existential] statement” (Mat I, Husserl 2001, p. 208).²

Specifically, this problem concerns how the ‘is’ of the expressed existential proposition, ‘S is’, does or does not diverge in function from the ‘is’ in the expressed predicative proposition, ‘S is P’. In his seminal 1901 *Logical Investigations* (Hua = Husserliana XIX. Hereafter, LU), Husserl arrives at an initial decision about how the ‘is’ functions in existential propositions on the basis of two of his conclusions about the nature of all propositions. First, as a result of his belief in the “limitlessness of objectifying reason” (Hua XIX. Husserl 1984, p. 95/1970, p. 223),³ Husserl asserts that all propositions can ideally be determined as true or false. Second, Husserl concludes that a proposition only has a truth value, because it makes a claim about some object as being this way or that. More specifically, Husserl asserts that all propositions have a truth value, because they all ascribe some predicate of a subject. That is, Husserl concludes that all propositions are categorical (*kategorisch*) (Hua XIX. Husserl 1984, pp. 667–670/1970, pp. 278–279; Mat II. Husserl 2001, p. 174).⁴ If a meaning was not categorical and made no such predicative claim, it could not be determined as true or false and would thus be no proposition at all (See Ierna 2008, pp. 58–65).⁵ As Husserl believes that all propositions

¹ While all translations are mine, I provide references to the corresponding English translation where available, following a slash after the German pagination. Quotes from the *Logical Investigations* always come from the First Edition.

² Clarity regarding Husserl’s definitions of propositions, judgments, expressions, and signified states of affairs is necessary from the start. A proposition is, according to Husserl, an ideal meaning. This ideal meaning can be instantiated in a categorial judgment, which is a temporally and psychically executed intention. An expression that is composed by an individual is given its meaning by the categorial judgment. The expression signifies the state of affairs, see Byrne 2017a and 2017b.

³ Husserl’s insight, that objectifying reason is unbounded in its range means that all objects and states of affairs “must, ideally speaking, permit expression through wholly determinate word-meanings”, which can be recognized as “corresponding truth-in-themselves” (Hua XIX. Husserl 1984, p. 95 /1970, p. 223). See Plotka 2009, pp. 18–26; Soldati 2008, pp. 67–73.

⁴ In other words, categorial (*kategorial*) judgments express categorial (*kategorisch*) propositions.

⁵ For example, because a name does not predicate something of an object, it has no truth value. Husserl even further asserts that names, which do have some descriptive elements, still do not express propositions. For example, Husserl famously concludes that the name, “the postman hurrying by” (*der vorübergehende Postbote*. Hua XIX. Husserl 1984, p. 485/1970, p. 152) is no proposition, but rather a non-independent (syncategorematic) part of a potentially whole meaning. According to Husserl, when uttering this expression, one is not making any claim about the postman. Only when something is properly and explicitly predicated of the postman, for example, that he is wearing grey clothes, is the meaning then a proposition with a truth value, which could be determined by examining the clothes of that mail carrier.

are categorical, he naturally concludes that existential propositions are categorical; existential propositions ascribe a predicate of a subject. Accordingly, for Husserl, there is no difference in the general operation of the ‘is’ in normal predicative and existential propositions. In both cases, the ‘is’ predicates a predicate of its subject.

Yet, if all propositions ascribe a predicate of a subject, what predicate is ascribed to the subject in the proposition, expressed as, ‘S is’? This question cannot be easily resolved, because the most obvious candidate for the predicate—being—is not a property or predicate of the object. Husserl writes, “Being is no real predicate. Being is no real part, no real side of a real object. Being is absolutely nothing, which could be constitutive of an object” (Mat II. Husserl 2001, p. 165. See Hua XL. Husserl 2009, p. 69). Because being cannot be the predicate of the existential proposition, Husserl must dedicate himself to determining what this apparently missing predicate actually is for his philosophy to maintain its tenability. If Husserl were to leave this problem unresolved, he would be unable to justify a central claim of his theory of judgments and propositions—that all propositions are categorical—and he would leave unanswered some of the fundamental questions of grammar, logic, and psychology.

Despite the importance of the difficulties surrounding these questions concerning existential propositions, one will search in vain in LU for any extensive description of them. There are only several brief statements in Sect. 39 of the Sixth Investigation that address the execution of existential judgments, which are at best cryptic in nature. The contemporary literature, following Husserl’s lead, has also frequently overlooked the importance of the difficulties concerning existential propositions and judgments for the early Husserl.⁶

Yet, even before publishing LU, Husserl had already provided a thoroughgoing descriptive account of existential propositions and judgments. In many of his early manuscripts and lectures, he worked arduously to solve the numerous problems concerning how we should understand the verb and the predicate in the expression of existential propositions. Because this often-overlooked tenet of Husserl’s philosophy is critical for the success of descriptive psychology and phenomenology as a whole, the goal of this essay is to provide a first study that is exclusively dedicated to clarifying Husserl’s analysis of existential propositions and judgments.

By accomplishing this task, this essay also reshapes the currently accepted understanding of the evolution of Husserl’s thought. I disclose that Husserl’s analysis of consciousness, from the start, employed both “static” and “genetic” methodologies. Daniel Sousa explains these two approaches by asserting that static philosophy, “as an eidetic science, has as its goal the definition of the invariant structures of human experience”, whereas genetic phenomenology deals with, “the

⁶ Even though there is—to my knowledge—no essay that is exclusively dedicated to engaging with Husserl’s theory of existential propositions, there are several works, which do, if only briefly, address that tenet of Husserl’s philosophy. For example, see; Pietersma 1986, p. 32; Rollinger 1999, pp. 226–229 and 2003, p. 209; Staiti 2015, pp. 822–823; Varga 2006; Yun 2007, pp. 138–142. Christian Breyer’s work (Breyer 2004) engages most with this tenet of Husserl’s theory, but also discusses Bolzano’s understanding of existential propositions at length. However, as I demonstrate in note 16 below, Breyer misrepresents Husserl’s theory, where this leads him to an incorrect interpretation of the evolution of Husserl’s philosophy.

analysis of the passive geneses and the layers of meaning sedimentation” (Sousa 2014, p. 28. See Hua XI, Husserl 1966, pp. 340–343). Many thinkers have concluded that Husserl only executed a genetic study in his later works and that this kind of analysis was superior to Husserl’s early static philosophy. For example, Janet Donohoe writes, “Much of the second half of [Husserl’s] philosophical life was devoted to a genetic phenomenology as a supplement to the static phenomenology of his earlier writings ... his phenomenological philosophy prior to 1917 was not equipped to address such topics with the complexity they require” (Donohoe 2016, p. 11). In contrast, I reveal that during Husserl’s analysis of judgments from the late 1890s, he carefully untangles and clarifies the co-enmeshed passive and active moments of consciousness. He goes to great lengths to show that the passive givenness of certain circumstances is both the condition of possibility for and limits our potential active verifying of judgments.

In what follows, in section two, I discuss how Husserl, in LU, describes the verb and predicate of the expression of the simple predicative proposition, ‘S is P’. In section three, I can then outline Husserl’s descriptions of the enigmatic existential ‘is’ as a predicative ‘is’ from his often-overlooked early lectures and manuscripts.⁷ Finally, in the conclusion to this paper, I pull back from dense exegetical analysis to critically assess Husserl’s theory of existential propositions. I discuss whether Husserl’s descriptions are in line with ‘the things themselves’. By doing so, I properly contextualize Husserl’s insights within his *oeuvre* and further flesh out his observations in important ways. Specifically, I show how the insights of Husserl’s mature philosophy provide the proper context from within which Husserl’s theory of existential propositions can be interpreted. Only once Husserl later adopted a correct metaphysical stance and accounted for the impact of the intersubjective community on the activity of constitution, could he correctly present and construe his descriptions of existential propositions.

2 The Predicative ‘Is’

To state Husserl’s most lucid insight at the start, he asserts that the predicative ‘is’ signifies a predicative link or form, which is responsible for predicatively linking a predicate to a subject. For example, for the expression, ‘The paper (specifically, a piece of paper here on the table before me) is white’, the predicative ‘is’ signifies the objective link, which connects the white-color-predicate to the piece-of-paper-subject. To begin my analysis of how Husserl understands the predicative ‘is’ and its signified predicative link, I discuss two elements of his methodology.

⁷ In addition to discussing Husserl’s insights from LU about predicative propositions generally, this essay most frequently investigates Husserl’s 1896 Logic Lectures (Mat I) and his 1902/03 Logic Lectures (Mat II. Husserl 2001). While there are important differences between the two lecture courses, Husserl frequently repeats or revises some sections of the former in the latter (See Rollinger 2003, p. 207). To properly substantiate my interpretation, I also draw from four texts from Hua XL. Husserl 2009. Three were written in the latter half of the 1890s (Hua XL. Husserl 2009, pp. 68–81, 166–118, 118–120) and one was composed in the Winter semester of 1983/94 (Hua XL. Husserl 2009, pp. 32–50). Finally, to contextualize my reading within Husserl’s *oeuvre*, I occasionally discuss passages from Hua I, III-1, XVI, XX-2, XXII, XXIV, and XXX.

First, Husserl does not study the predicative link or form by investigating it in abstract terms or via “signitive” consciousness.⁸ To properly clarify the predicative ‘is’, Husserl rather goes to “the things themselves”. He claims that we can only clarify the meaning of the predicative ‘is’ by describing our “intuition” of its signified predicative form. Husserl defines an intuition as an intention that is directed at an object or state of affairs that, “can either be actually present through accompanying intuitions, or at least appears in representation, e.g., in a mental image” (Hua XIX. Husserl 1984, p. 44/1970, p. 192). While there are many different kinds of intuitions, what unites them is that during any intuition, the intuited object discloses itself to me as it actually is or as an image. In any intuition, the intuited object appears in one way or another, such that it is manifest, disclosed, and often known. For concrete examples, during a perceptual intuition, the perceived object appears directly before my eyes ‘in person’ and in imaginative intuition, the image appears in my ‘mind’s eye’.

To properly clarify the predicative ‘is’, by intuiting its signified predicative form, Husserl asserts that I must execute a particular kind of intuition, which he calls a categorial (*kategoriale*) intuition.⁹ During a categorial intuition, I see a whole state of affairs that appears before my eyes. When I categorially intuit the state of affairs, which is referred to by the expression, ‘The paper is white’, I see the whole state of affairs, where the white-color predicate is predicatively linked to the paper subject. The radical tenet of Husserl’s theory of categorial intuition is that when I categorially intuit this state of affairs, I do not just intuit the paper and the white and link them together in my mind or in signitive consciousness (See note eight above). Instead, the predicative form between the paper and its white is also intuitively given. I *intuit* or *see* the predicative link between the paper and its whiteness (Hua XIX. Husserl 1984, pp. 698–700/1970, pp. 298–299; Mat II. Husserl 2001, pp. 180–185).¹⁰ To clarify the predicative ‘is’, Husserl studies its signified predicative form as it appears to me during my categorial intuition of a whole state of affairs. The phenomenologist examines and describes that predicative form as it is intuitively presented ‘in person’.

Second, in line with his descriptive psychological approach, Husserl will clarify this predicative link by studying the *experience* by means of which we come to intuit the predicative state of affairs (Hua XIX. Husserl 1984, pp. 681–685, 698–709/1970, pp. 286–289, 298–304). He describes the ‘procedure’ through which we can intuit a predicative state of affairs, so as to clarify our experience of each of its moments. Specifically, Husserl describes how I execute three ‘steps’ when

⁸ In signitive or non-intuitive consciousness, my intention is directed at an object or state of affairs that does not appear in person via perception and is not represented imaginatively. Husserl writes that, “A signitive presentation does not present analogically, it is ‘in reality’ no presentation, in it nothing of the object comes to life” (Hua XIX. Husserl 1984, p. 670/1970, p. 233). See Byrne 2020a, 2020b, 2020c, and 2020e.

⁹ For an overview of Husserl’s theory of categorial intuition, see Bernet 2010; Lohmar 2008.

¹⁰ Accordingly, for Husserl, categorial intuition is not just predicating *or* intuiting. It is *both*. It is so-to-speak predicatively seeing. I am, in executing a categorial intuition, both ascribing a predicate to a subject and seeing that that predicate belongs to the subject. As Cobb-Stevens writes, “Rather than presenting some particular thing, say a red chair, a categorial intuition presents the chair’s being red, the red quality’s belonging to the chair” (Cobb-Stevens 1990, pp. 43–44).

performing a categorial intuition. By discussing these three steps, Husserl introduces a method by means of which he can identify and describe the subject, the predicate, and the predicative link or form of any state of affairs. This method will naturally prove useful in his attempt to pinpoint the predicate of existential propositions. Simply stated, in our example, Husserl claims that I intuit, during the first step of this procedure, what will be the subject, in the second step, what will be the predicate, and in the third step, the predicative link or form between them (Mat II. Husserl 2001, p. 180).

For the expressed predicative judgment, ‘The paper is white’, in the first step of this three-step operation, I execute a “single-rayed” (*einstrahlig*) perception, which is directed at the subject of the proposition, that is, the whole piece of paper (Husserl calls this the “total-perception”. Hua XIX. Husserl 1984, p. 682/1970, p. 287).¹¹

Two of Husserl’s conclusions about single-rayed perceptions are necessary to highlight. The first concerns the structure of these intentions. On the one hand, a single-rayed intention is the simplest kind of intention that Husserl identifies. The act possesses no (categorial) structure and its object is equally simple, as it confronts me in ‘one blow’ (Hua XIX. Husserl 1984, pp. 676–681/1970, pp. 283–286). For example, a single-rayed perception could occur when I simply glance at the paper in front of me or when I look out my window and see a tree without formulating any thoughts about either the paper or the tree. On the other hand, a single-rayed perception has its own kind of structure inherent to it. There are parts of this intention (called by Husserl, “partial intentions”), which are directed at each part of the object. For the whole single-rayed perception of the paper, there are partial intentions that are directed at the white color, the size, and the shape of the paper. Husserl writes that such a single-rayed perception, “intends to grasp the object itself: and so must its ‘grasping’ therefore reach to all its constituents in and with the whole object” (Hua XIX. Husserl 1984, p. 682/1970, p. 287. See Mat II. Husserl 2001, p. 180).

Husserl’s second insight about single-rayed perceptions, which requires mention, is that he accounts for how the single-rayed perception, as an intuition, sets the object before me ‘in person’, via his infamous content-apprehension schema. To have this paper or indeed *any* object or part of an object intuitively appear before me, Husserl claims that I must apprehend certain contents to intuitively represent that object. In the case of single-rayed perception, the contents that are apprehended are called “sensations”.¹² Via apprehension of the sensorial content, that content comes to intuitively represent the paper, where I then perceive it before me. To be noted is that, according to the early Husserl, for the content to intuitively represent

¹¹ To be noted is that all categorial intentions are founded in and presuppose single-rayed acts. The categorial intention is a new act, which intends a novel categorial object, which was not given in the single-rayed intentions. Husserl writes that a categorial state of affairs, “can only be constituted in founded acts of the sort in question, which can achieve ‘self-givenness to perception’ only in acts built up in this manner” (Hua XIX. Husserl 1984, p. 683/1970, p. 288).

¹² Sensorial contents are substantially present and are part of the stream of consciousness. They are unrepeatable, as they are continually changing and flowing. Moreover, in and of themselves, these contents are not intentional, but are rather experienced or lived through (Hua XIX. Husserl 1984, p. 397/1970, p. 104). Sensorial contents only can become intentionally representative via their apprehension.

its object, it must be similar to that intuited apparent object. Husserl writes, “only that content, which resembles or is like the object, can intuitively represent that object” (Hua XIX. Husserl 1984, pp. 622–623/1970, p. 244. See Hopp 2008, pp. 229–231). This curious—and as Husserl would later realize, incorrect—idea means that, in order to perceive a white or green object, I must respectively experience either quasi-white or quasi-green sensations. To translate this into the language of Husserl’s genetic phenomenology, one can say that the passive givenness of the sensations constrains—via the requirement of similarity—my possible active apprehensions, such that I cannot apprehend these contents to intuitively represent any object I would like.

Step two of the three-step process of categorial intuition can occur when I execute a “second” (“*zweite*”) single-rayed intuition that is attentively directed at what will be the predicate of the state of affairs, which is, in this case, the white property of the piece of paper (Hua XIX. Husserl 1984, p. 681/1970, p. 287; Mat II. Husserl 2001, p. 180. See Lohmar 2008, pp. 214–215). In this second intuition, I simply turn to and focus my perception on the white of the whole paper. Once I have executed both the first “total-intention” and this second perception, I can experience a coincidence between them. The first total-perception of the paper has a partial intention, which is directed at the white color of the paper, and this coincides with the “second” perception, which is also directed at the white color (Mat II. Husserl 2001, p. 180). Husserl calls the experience of the coincidence, the “special-perception” (*Sonderwahrnehmung*. Hua XIX. Husserl 1984, p. 681/1970, p. 287).¹³

Step three of this process is the execution of the categorial intuition. Importantly, just as is the case for single-rayed intuition, Husserl claims that during the categorial intuition, I apprehend certain contents to intuitively represent some objective correlate. Specifically, in step three, I categorially apprehend the coincidence between the two perceptions, which is experienced during the special perception. By executing that categorial apprehension, the predicative form, which is signified by the predicative ‘is’, becomes intuitively represented. To reiterate: by categorially apprehending the coincidence between the first whole perception and the second more focused perception, the categorial predicative form becomes intuitively represented (Hua XIX. Husserl 1984, p. 701/1970, p. 300; Mat II. Husserl 2001, p. 180). When I apprehend that coincidence, I not only intuit the predicative link or form, which is signified by the predicative ‘is’. Rather, I am then categorially intuiting the whole state of affairs, signified by ‘The paper is white’. When I am intuiting the predicative link between the white and the paper, I am *eo ipso* categorially intuiting the white color as predicatively linked to the paper. With this in mind, we can say that, for Husserl, the predicative ‘is’ is clarified when we understand that the predicative link—that is, the ‘thing itself’, which the predicative

¹³ To be clear, only the “apprehending matters” of these two perceptions coincide. The apprehending matter, which is one moment of the apprehension, determines which object is represented and the properties of the represented object, such as its color and size (Hua XIX. Husserl 1984, pp. 429–430/1970, p. 121). In what follows, whenever I discuss coinciding intentions, the reader should understand that the coincidence between the apprehending matters of two acts is specifically being addressed. I have talked at length about Husserl’s account of the apprehending matter and the role that it plays in categorial intuition in my Byrne (2020a).

‘is’ signifies—is intuited as a part of a whole categorial state of affairs by apprehending the coincidence between two single-rayed perceptions.

The critical ramification of Husserl’s observations about the method of categorial intuition is that, just as the sensorial contents serve as a passive check on single-rayed perceptions, so also does the coincidence of the two perceptions serve as a passive limitation for what kind of active categorial intuitions I can execute. This coincidence must first be passively experienced, for it to be possible for me to execute the active apprehending of that coincidence to intuitively represent the predicative link between the subject and its predicate. As Staiti writes, “In Husserl’s model, the standard form of categorial judgment ‘S is P’ does not indicate the synthesis of two ideas but rather the active recording of a passive synthesis of coincidence between something and one of its properties” (Staiti 2015, p. 823). Husserl thus recognizes in his early writings that both single-rayed and categorial intuitions involve a passive and an active element, where the passive serves to restrict the possible ways that I can execute the active apprehension and intuition.

3 The Existential ‘Is’

While Husserl extensively discusses the experience of simple predicative propositions in LU, in that work, he does not examine existential propositions. This despite the fact that he must account for those propositions if his philosophy is to be tenable. In order to maintain the central claim of his theories of meaning and judgment—that all propositions are categorial—he must show how even these enigmatic propositions have a predicate. As stated above, Husserl still does address existential propositions and their predicates in his lectures and manuscripts that were composed contemporaneously with the publication of LU. By studying his descriptions of existential propositions from these early unpublished works, this paper can demonstrate how Husserl can sustain his theory of judgment and, when combined with the above analysis, the paper presents a comprehensive account of Husserl’s theory of the concept of being.

In order to discuss how Husserl tackles existential propositions, it is necessary to first introduce his descriptions of the experience of existence during single-rayed intuitions. Husserl concludes that whenever I execute a single-rayed intuition (or indeed any intention), I am taking a stance with regards to the existence of the object or synonymously, I am executing a doxic position-taking (*Stellungnahme*).¹⁴ There are two fundamental (“objectifying”) positions that I can take concerning the existence of an object during a single-rayed intuition or any intention; I can take either a positive or a “neutral” stance (Mat II. Husserl 2001, p. 173, 178–179, 181; Hua XIX. Husserl 1984, pp. 657–661/1970, pp. 165–167. See Płotka 2017, pp. 110–114). On the one hand, during a single-rayed perception, I normally assume a positive position, where I take the object, which I see, to exist. When I perceive the paper before me, I ‘believe’ that it actually exists in the world. On the other

¹⁴ Husserl would adopt this terminology of “position-taking” in his later writings. In LU and his early texts, he primarily calls position-taking, “act-quality”. I opt for the former term over the latter, as I find that it helps one to better understand what Husserl is actually talking about.

hand, if I were to imagine or, what Husserl calls, “merely present” the same paper, I would take a neutral position concerning the object’s existence. When I take that neutral position while imagining or merely presenting the paper, its existence is left in suspense, as I do not take a stance one way or the other regarding its existence. Another helpful example is the case where I merely present or imagine a centaur. When doing so, I am not taking any position regarding the centaur’s existence. I merely ‘entertain’ the image of the horse-man in my mind without believing or disbelieving in its existence. The question of existence is simply not of concern during this imagination.

There are two points about such doxic position-takings, which are important for the purposes of this paper. First, Husserl claims that, during a single-rayed perception, when I take the stance that the object exists, my positive position-taking is not a predication or categorial judgment about the existence of the object. It is rather a pre-predicative and a pre-categorial stance towards it (Hua XIX. Husserl 1984, pp. 427–429, 468–470/1970, pp. 120–121, 143–144). To reiterate: During a single-rayed perception, I make no categorial judgment about whether this object exists or not. Second, even though I here take the stance that the object exists, I do not see existence as a property of the object, as I do with the object’s color or shape. As stated in the introduction, Husserl knows that being is not and cannot be experienced as a property or predicate of any object (Mat II. Husserl 2001, p. 165; Hua XL. Husserl 2009, p. 69).

If being cannot be intended as a property of an object in single-rayed intuition and cannot be predicated of the object in a categorial intention, how then does Husserl account for existential propositions? Simply stated, because he believes that existential propositions *are* predicative propositions, he can directly employ his insights from LU about predicative propositions to clarify existential propositions, expressed for example as, ‘The paper is’ or ‘The paper exists’. In his early lectures, Husserl lays out the three-steps of categorial intuition for an existential proposition to clarify what its actual predicate is and to describe our experience of that predicate and of the whole state of affairs.

As outlined in section two, Husserl observes that during the first step of categorial intuition, I execute a single-rayed total-intention, which is directed at what will be the subject of the state of affairs. For the existential proposition, expressed as ‘The paper is’, the subject that I intend via the first single-rayed act is obviously the whole paper. Yet, Husserl notes that this first intention for the existential proposition is not—as was the case in the simple predication discussed above—a single-rayed perception. Instead, this act is a mere single-rayed presentation, which takes a neutral stance towards the existence of the paper (Mat I, Husserl 2001, pp. 223–224). In this mere presentation of the paper, I take no position concerning whether the paper exists or not.

For the second step of this categorial intuition for the existential proposition, we remember that Husserl concluded that I execute a second single-rayed intention, which is directed at what will be the predicate of the state of affairs. However, because Husserl has correctly recognized that existence is no real predicate or property of the subject, there is no piece or moment of the paper called ‘being’, which I could direct my second intention at. Despite this fact, Husserl can still conclude that I do predicate something of the paper during the existential judgment.

This is because he realizes that an existential proposition is no simple predication. Instead, the existential proposition is (but is also more than) an identifying proposition (Mat II. Husserl 2001, p. 174). The existential proposition does identify the *whole* subject with itself. When I express an existential proposition, I am not predicating this or that partial property of the paper, such that I do not need to direct my second single-rayed intention at some (impossible) property called ‘being’ or any other specific property of the paper. Instead, because the existential proposition identifies the whole paper with the self-same whole paper, the second act also correlates to that *whole* paper (Hua XL. Husserl 2009, p. 119; Hua XIX. Husserl 1984, p. 679/1970, p. 285). The second act is directed at the self-same whole subject as the first intention and reaches all of its constituents, that is, all of its properties and parts. When I execute these two intentions, there is not a partial coincidence, but rather a total coincidence between the two acts, which I experience during the special-perception (See note 13 above). Now, *if* it were the case that I were *only* executing an identifying categorial intuition (and not a categorial intuition for the existential proposition), expressed as, ‘The paper is one with itself’, this total coincidence between the two total-intentions is the content that can be apprehended to intuitively represent the predicative form. *This* intuited predicative link, which would be expressed here by the identifying ‘is’ predicates of the subject that it is one with itself (Mat I, Husserl 2001, p. 224; Hua XIX. Husserl 1984, p. 679/1970, p. 285).

Even though the existential proposition is an identifying proposition, *it naturally does more than just identify the subject with itself*. To reiterate: When I execute the categorial intuition that verifies the existential proposition, expressed as, ‘The paper exists’, I do not just intuit the paper as an identity with itself. Rather, for the existential proposition—and here’s Husserl’s key point—*I categorially intuit the paper as an identity with itself as existing*.

This categorial intuition is only possible in those cases where the second single-rayed act is an (adequate or inadequate)¹⁵ perception. Here, the second act is an

¹⁵ For Husserl, the question of whether I can apodictically know, that is, know with absolute surety that my expressed existential proposition is true and that the object does exist depends upon whether my perception is adequate or inadequate. On the one hand, when I adequately perceive an object, I see all of it at one time. According to Husserl, when the object completely appears to me in this way, it is impossible that the object could be otherwise than it appears or that it could surprise me by radically changing in some way (Hua XIX. Husserl 1984, pp. 586–589/1970, pp. 218–220). As such, Husserl concludes that I can apodictically know that any object I adequately perceive does exist and that my expressed existential proposition about that object is true. On the other hand, during an inadequate intuition, some parts of the object are hidden or obscured, such that a new (previously hidden) intuitive appearance of the object could always contravene my conception of the object. I could always be wrong about an inadequately perceived object. Any predication of a predicate to that object, including color, size, shape, and indeed even *existence* would always remain tentative and in doubt. For example, when looking at this paper, it inadequately appears to me, as only the one side facing me appears “intuitively”, whereas the backside and inside of the sheet of paper do not. There is thus always an ideal possibility that I could turn the paper over once more and see that the backside of the paper is now blue or the paper could simply disappear in my hands, thereby revealing that my perception of the paper was a hallucination the entire time. As the paper is given inadequately, I could never apodictically know that it exists and that my existential proposition is true, as my perception of the paper could always be revealed to be hallucination (Hua XIX. Husserl 1984, p. 647/1970, p. 260). At the same time, in these early lectures, Husserl surprisingly observes that for both the commonplace categorial intuition for the existential proposition, “the perception does

inadequate perception, which is a total-perception that is directed at the same whole paper as the first total mere presentation. During the single-rayed perception, as is the case in most perceptions, I execute a positive position-taking. I take the (non-predicative and non-categorical) stance that the paper exists (Mat I, Husserl 2001, p. 223). The second step of this categorial intuition for the existential proposition is then, according to Husserl, a special-perception, where I experience a total coincidence between the first total mere presentation of the paper and the second total perception of the same sheet of paper.

When I experience this coincidence between the mere presentation and the perception of that same paper, I can execute the third step of this categorial identifying intuition for the existential proposition. I categorially apprehend the coincidence between the two acts. In doing so, I am not just identifying two perceived papers to see that they are one and the same. Rather, I learn something additional about the paper. I categorially intuit and learn that the paper, which was not taken as existing or as non-existing during the mere presentation, is an actually existing paper, as is seen in the perception. I identify the (merely presented) paper with a (perceived) paper that exists. When I execute this categorial intuition, I no longer just take the pre-predicative position that the paper exists, but actively, categorially, and explicitly predicate it of the paper (Mat I, Husserl 2001, p. 223; Mat II. Husserl 2001, pp. 180–183).

As should be clear, this is not to say that I now predicate some property ‘being’ of the paper, but rather, I categorially intuit that, “The presented object S corresponds to an actual object” (Mat I, Husserl 2001, p. 224). For Husserl, the existential ‘is’ predicates of the subject that it is one with itself *as existing*. Otherwise stated, the predicate of the existential proposition, which is ascribed to the subject, is that it, “corresponds to an actual object” (Mat I, Husserl 2001, p. 224).

In sum then, by discussing the three-step process of categorial intuition for the existential proposition, Husserl has clarified our experience and the origin of those propositions. He has identified the predicate of the existential proposition and

Footnote 15 continued

not have to be adequate” (Mat II. Husserl 2001, p. 162). Only after “the experience of perceptual illusion, does this [inadequate] verification become insufficient” (Mat II. Husserl 2001, p. 162). With this insight, Husserl is prefiguring a conclusion he would only arrive at in his *1907 Lectures on Thing and Space* (Hua XVI, pp. 128–135/1997, pp. 106–112). In those lectures, Husserl saw that practical interest often provides the norms for the ideal of perception, such that, in many cases, certain perspectival perceptions of the object suffice for my current interest. Maxime Doyon explains, “In everyday experience, perception usually follows a *natural* or *practical* direction of interest in lifeworldly things, and in this context a perception is said to be ‘optimal’ when such things fulfill our practical intention, that is to say, when their appearances fully match our practical or pragmatic expectations” (Doyon 2018, p. 172). In the current case, Husserl is asserting that pragmatically or practically only a brief continual perception and a categorial intuition based thereupon would be required for me to know that the object exists. I only have need of further inspection after the existence of the object has been put into doubt for some reason or if some other theoretical or practical interest emerged (See Summa 2014, pp. 212–233)

described the categorial intuition by means of which we come to predicatively know that the subject exists, that is, corresponds to an actual object.¹⁶

By arriving at these insights about existential propositions, Husserl is confirming that a categorial intuition of existence also activates certain passively given possibilities. This passive limitation ensures that I cannot intuitively identify two different objects as identical or see any object I like as existing. Only when there is a passively given total coincidence between the two single-rayed acts, that is, when the two objects share all of the same constituents, can I actively apprehend that coincidence and categorially intuit that this object is identical with itself. Moreover, only if that object can be and is passively given in both a mere presentation and an intuitive act can I actively categorially intuit that the object exists. This reveals that Husserl's analyses, found in his manuscripts and lectures from the late 1890s and early 1900s, could already be classified as a genetic study of the passive and active moments of categorial intuition. Husserl describes how I am able to execute an active categorial intuition for the existential proposition on the basis of a passively given coincidence between two single rayed intentions. In other words, the passively given pre-categorial or pre-intellectual world serves as a check on what I could categorially intuit as obtaining or as being. Husserl's later genetic investigations, as can be found, for example, in his *Analyses concerning passive and active Syntheses* are thus not a radical break from his earlier works, nor do they comprise the introduction of a fundamentally new method. Rather, this difference could more appropriately be characterized as a shift in emphasis.

¹⁶ Before broaching the conclusion of this essay, I note that Husserl's early theory of existential propositions was largely maintained throughout his philosophical career and that it continued to influence his thinking up until his death. While there are many different ways that these descriptions continued to have an effect on Husserl (See note 15 above), in this footnote, I only address one point. Specifically, I contend that Husserl believed – from these early lectures up until his death – that the existential proposition signifies the state of affairs. For both the early and later Husserl, the existential proposition predicates of the *paper itself* that it exists. Emphasis on Husserl's preservation of this conclusion is necessary, because in the only other article that addresses Husserl's theory of existential propositions in detail, Christian Breyer argues that Husserl concludes that the existential proposition signifies the state of affairs *only after* his 1908 discovery of the noema and noematic meaning. Breyer asserts that in his early works, Husserl believed that existence, that is, correspondence to truth is not predicated of the signified subject, but rather of the ideal meaning (or as Breyer calls it, the “idea”) of the expression. Breyer writes, “[Husserl] states that in such sentences ‘exists’ functions as a ‘modifying’ predicate, to be applied to the respective idea in itself expressed by the preceding singular term rather than (as surface grammar suggests) to the object (if any) satisfying that idea in itself” (Breyer 2004, p. 74). In contrast to Breyer's interpretation; however, in his early works, Husserl repeatedly and explicitly denies that the existential proposition predicates existence (correspondence to an actual object) of the meaning or proposition of the expression. He writes that when we judge about existence, “We are not only not judging about the subjective presentation or conviction, but also not about the meaning-content, that is, about the logical presentation or proposition” (Mat II. Husserl 2001, p. 164. See Hua XL. Husserl 2009, p. 75, pp. 116–117). And again, Husserl claims, “The phenomenological analysis shows entirely clearly that, when we state the result of a verification in the form of a proposition about being or obtaining, we are not judging about the act or its meaning-content, but rather about the thing itself” (Mat II. Husserl 2001, p. 164). In sum, Husserl's conclusion, that existence is predicated of the object and not the ideal meaning is maintained in both his early and later works. Husserl's discovery of the noema and noematic meaning did not change this insight about the concept of being, but rather seemed to solidify it.

4 Critical Assessment

With Husserl's admittedly counterintuitive theory laid out via this exegetical analysis, only now is it appropriate to inquire; does Husserl's philosophy actually properly clarify the existential proposition by describing our categorial intuition of the signified of that proposition? As Husserl writes in his foreword to the second edition of the *Sixth Investigation*, "In any case, to devote less study to a theory than is necessary to grasp its meaning, and yet to criticize it, certainly violates the eternal laws of literary conscience" (Hua XIX. Husserl 1984, p. 538/1970, p. 179).

To answer the question straightforwardly,¹⁷ I contend that Husserl's account of existential propositions, in its broad strokes, is correct. Husserl is right to claim that 'being' never appears as a property of the subject. Moreover, I believe that he is correct to state that the existential 'is', like the identifying 'is' predicates of the subject that it is one with itself. Both identifying and existential propositions do not deal with ascribing some partial property of the subject (identity, like being, never appears as a property of the subject), but rather concern the status of the subject as a whole. Finally, when phenomenologically examining my own experience, I find Husserl's descriptions of the categorial intuition of the existential state of affairs to be correct. I concur that the categorial intuition for the existential proposition is not a synthesis of ideas, but rather the activity of registering that which is passively given; namely, the coincidence between the mere presentation and the perception of that same subject. I accordingly affirm that Husserl's concluding insight, that the existential 'is' predicates of the object that it is one with itself as existing, to be largely accurate to the things themselves.

At the same time, Husserl's analysis of existential propositions is not without error. These problems; however, do not concern the above outlined conclusions that I have endorsed. Instead, they pertain to the general framework of Husserl's philosophy, from within which his insights about existential propositions can be understood and cashed out. This is to say that Husserl's early philosophy—which he still classified as a descriptive psychology—was inchoate in ways, which inevitably lead to incorrect interpretations of the results of his analyses of existential propositions. In what follows, I briefly discuss two of these overarching mistakes, how they result in awry implications of his conclusions about existential propositions, and how Husserl came to correct these errors in his later philosophy. By doing so, I properly contextualize and further flesh out Husserl's observations in important ways.

First, in his early writings, Husserl maintained what both Dan Zahavi and Jocelyn Benoist have called a "metaphysical neutrality" (Benoist 2002; Zahavi 2002).

¹⁷ The veracity of Husserl's conclusions can only be fruitfully assessed from within a Husserlian framework. Any attempt to criticize Husserl's account of existential propositions 'from the outside', that is, from another philosophical perspective, with different grounding assumptions, would be unproductive. If one refused to adopt the idea that philosophy should be carried out as an eidetic non-naturalistic study from a first-person perspective, one could certainly not fruitfully engage with Husserl's theory of existential propositions, as they would not embrace the foundational tenets or methodology of his study of those propositions. Rather, such an analysis would become concerned with debating the viability of phenomenology as a method. I naturally will not engage in such debates, as this would lead far afield of the goals of this paper.

Simply stated, in adopting this position, Husserl seems to establish a divide between objects as they really are out there in the world and objects as they appear to me. He then concludes that his descriptive analysis is only interested in accounting for the latter and rejects all questions about the former as purely metaphysical speculation (Hua XIX. Husserl 1984, pp. 6, 26–28/1970, pp. 249, 264–266). As Dan Zahavi writes, “[Husserl’s] task is not to examine whether (and how) consciousness can attain knowledge of a mind-independent reality. These very types of questions, as well as all questions as to whether or not there is at all an external reality, are rejected by Husserl as being *metaphysical questions*, which have no place in epistemology” (Zahavi 2002, p. 93).

Husserl’s adoption of this metaphysical neutrality produces untenable ramifications for his theory of existential propositions. Specifically, all of Husserl’s descriptions concerning the categorial intuition of the paper as existent and indeed his conclusions about the existential proposition, ‘The paper exists’, would *only* concern the appearance of the paper and not the paper itself. To again quote Zahavi, “According to Husserl we do indeed intend real existing objects. But that our intentional objects are real and existing is a purely descriptive characterization ... all that is signified by the expression ‘real object’ is that the intended object *appears* as existent” (Zahavi 2002, p.106). Equally problematic is that, as a result of Husserl’s metaphysical neutrality, he is unable to distinguish between true intuitions and hallucinations or illusions (Hua XIX. Husserl 1984, pp. 358–360, 387/1970, pp. 537–538, 559. See Byrne 2020d). As such, if the descriptive psychologist were hallucinating a paper and then categorially hallucinated it as existing, her expressed proposition, ‘The paper exists’, would be *correct*, because the descriptive psychologist’s statement only addresses the appearance of the paper and does not concern if that appearance is the result of a hallucination or illusion. The proposition would only become falsified after a new *appearance* revealed the perception to be a hallucination or illusion (See note 15 above).

In the years following the publication of LU and his contemporaneously composed lectures, Husserl did recognize the untenability of his metaphysical neutrality and instead developed his phenomenology as a transcendental idealism. As is well known, when Husserl proposes his transcendental idealism, he identifies the object that appears with the object itself (perhaps first in the 1906 *Introduction to Logic and Theory of Knowledge* lectures, but certainly by the time he composed the 1913 *Ideas I*). There is, for the later phenomenologist, no world behind appearances, which is distinct from the world as it appears (Hua III-1, Husserl 1977, pp. 206–210/1983, pp. 217–221). From within his transcendental idealism, Husserl can properly cash out his theory of existential propositions. He can now claim that the phenomenological description of the categorial intuition of the paper as correspondent to an actual object concerns the paper itself and not just the appearance of the paper. Moreover, he can conclude that the proposition, which ascribes existence to a paper, which appears via a hallucination, would be incorrect, even when the paper temporarily appears as correspondent to an actual object.

The second overarching miscalculation in Husserl’s early philosophy that obscures his theory of existential propositions, could more appropriately be classified as an omission. Specifically, in his early work, Husserl largely avoided the

issue of intersubjectivity. He only discussed existing objects as they are constituted by the solitary conscious subject (See Overgaard 2002). In adopting this methodology; however, Husserl's descriptions cannot capture what it means for an object to be existent and what I mean when I express an existential proposition. An existent object cannot be fully or even correctly understood as one that only the single conscious subject can intuit as existent.¹⁸ When I state, 'The paper exists', I do not mean that it exists just for me.

Instead, an existent object can only be accurately described as an object that is accessible via intuition to other conscious subjects. My existential proposition, 'The paper exists', is also an implicit affirmation of the fact that the paper exists for everyone and that all conscious subjects ideally could recognize it as existing. In his *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl states this point explicitly, whereby this provides the correct overall context for interpreting his account of existential propositions. He writes, "I *experience* the world (including others)—and, according to its experiential sense, *not* as (so to speak) my *private* synthetic formation but as other than mine alone, as an *intersubjective* world, actually there for everyone, accessible in respect of its objects to everyone" (Hua I, p. 123/1960, p. 91). To be noted is that this correction was also inspired by Husserl's first error, which was discussed just above. While Husserl, in abandoning his metaphysical neutrality, recognizes that objects, which are the results of hallucinations, cannot be veridically predicated existence, because he—in his early works—only focused on the constitution of the object by the single conscious subject, he had no philosophical tools to account for how one can recognize an existential proposition as incorrect while the hallucination is ongoing. Yet, after Husserl brings in and discusses the issue of intersubjectivity, he can then demonstrate how other conscious subjects in my community can serve to correct my expressed existential propositions (and indeed any proposition that I express). That is, he can show how others in my intersubjective community can disclose to me that my existential proposition is invalid, even when the object continues to appear harmoniously to me in my hallucination.

By executing this critical assessment at the end of the paper, I revealed that Husserl's early theory of existential propositions, while largely correct, is augmented when it is re-construed in the context of his mature philosophy. Husserl came to recognize that existence cannot be accounted for by studying subjective constitution alone. Rather, existence and existential propositions can be properly understood when one takes the right metaphysical stance concerning the objects of consciousness and when one discovers the importance of the intersubjective community. Only once Husserl accurately describes the trilateral nature of consciousness—as involving the subject, the object, and intersubjectivity—can existential propositions be accurately described and interpreted.

¹⁸ To be clear, this conclusion only concerns objects that are perceived via the external sense. In contrast, my own acts and ego obviously can only be seen by me via internal perception and are not directly intuitively accessible to others (Hua XIX. Husserl 1984, p. 667/1970, pp. 277–278).

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