

Carnap and Husserl

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The first part of this entry details what is known about the personal encounters between Carnap and Edmund Husserl. The second part looks at all the places in Carnap's works where Husserl is cited. More biographical information on the period we consider can be found in chapters 3 and 4.

Personal encounters

Most of the biographical information given in this section is taken from the *Husserl-Chronik* (Schumann, 1977) and from Carnap's diaries (Carnap, 2022). Another useful source has been Ludwig Landgrebe's autobiography (Landgrebe, 1975). Landgrebe moved to Freiburg in 1923 and was Husserl's assistant for seven years. He later lived in Prague, partly overlapping with Carnap's stay there.

In a letter from 1976 Landgrebe wrote to Karl Schuhmann, the author of the *Husserl-Chronik*, that Carnap had participated in Husserl's seminar at Freiburg during three consecutive semesters beginning with the summer semester of 1924. Carnap's diaries show that Landgrebe's estimate is not quite correct: Carnap participated in Husserl's seminar just one semester, namely the winter semester of 1923/24. He joins the seminar a few weeks into the semester (21.11.1923) and reports to take part in what appears to be every meeting — 12 meetings in total — until the end of the semester (27.2.1924).

Carnap does not report to have participated in any seminar by Husserl after the winter of 1924. That he occasionally participated in seminar meetings cannot be excluded, but that he did so regularly can be excluded. Husserl's seminar always took place on Wednesdays. From Carnap's diaries in this period one sees that, on most Wednesdays in question, he was not in Freiburg, hence he could not have attended any seminar there.

The title of Husserl's seminar was "Phänomenologische Übungen für Fortgeschrittene". The discussion took place at "dizzying heights for a beginner", according to Landgrebe (1975, 138), who also reports that Carnap was a very lively participant. Other participants included Dmytro Chizhewsky and Fedor Stepun.

Little can be inferred from this title about the topics the seminar dealt with. Often, the announcement of Husserl's seminar refers to a work in philosophy or to a specific topic. For instance, in the winter semester of 1924/25, the work referred to is Berkeley's *Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, and in the summer semester of 1925, the topic listed is the analysis and description of "rein geistige Akte und Gebilde". Sometimes, however, the announcement is more generic, as it was in the winter semester 1923/24.

Carnap reports twice on his own contribution to the seminar: once (19.12.1923) he had offered a brief commentary on the contents of the previous meeting, apparently arguing that the matter — whatever it was — had already been settled, to which Husserl had objected that it is still problematic; another time (23.1.1924) he spoke about about his method of quasi-analysis. The best clue to the content of the seminar comes, not from these two remarks, but from Carnap's reading list coupled with another testimony of Landgrebe's. In November 1923, the month Carnap joined the seminar, he reports to have read Georg Simmel's *Die Probleme der Geschichtsphilosophie* (see Carnap 2022, 747). The philosophical works surrounding this entry in the reading list often concern mathematics or physics, and they are often contemporary publications. Simmel's work has neither of these characteristics. Its occurrence on the reading list just before Husserl's

Ideen raises the question whether Carnap's reading of it is somehow related to his participation in the seminar. Indeed, Landgrebe reports that Simmel's book was the topic of Husserl's seminar in the summer semester of 1924. Landgrebe's report is, again, from about 50 years after the fact, so he could well be off by one semester. It could also be that Husserl chose the same work two semesters in a row. In any event, there are good reasons to assume that Simmel's work was the topic of Husserl's seminar in the winter semester 1923/24. The work exists in two quite different editions, published in 1892 and 1905, respectively. In both editions, especially the first — of three — chapters will have been of interest to Carnap, since it deals with the understanding of other persons through their words and deeds, a topic that is central to Carnap's discussion of the "heteropsychological" in the *Aufbau*. Carnap does, however, not cite Simmel in the *Aufbau*, nor, as far as I know, in any other work.

In the winter semester of 1923/24, Husserl gave, besides the seminar for advanced students, also a lecture course open to all students. The class met for one hour four days per week from the beginning of November until the end of February. Carnap's diaries attest that he attended four out of the 54 lectures that made up this course. After his first attendance, on 13.11.1923, he notes "nicht sehr gefallen". He appears to have decided already then that this is not for him and that he will concentrate on the seminar instead. He does report attending three more lectures between the end of January and mid-February (24.1, 31.1, and 14.2). His attendance in these three lectures is, however, connected with his participation in a discussion group on epistemology organized by Carnap's Freiburg friend and fellow Husserl student, Bernhard Merten. From mid-January until the end of March 1924, the group met every Thursday evening at Merten's home in Freiburg after Husserl's lecture. At least some members of the group — including Merten and Landgrebe — regularly attended Husserl's class first. It is natural to assume that Carnap, on the three Thursdays that he was in this class after Christmas, simply came along with them.

In the following semesters Husserl continued to give a course with four lectures per week (on ethics, history of recent philosophy, and phenomenological psychology, respectively). Again it is clear from Carnap's diaries that he could not have been a regular participant.

Husserl's notes for the course of 1923/24, as edited by Landgrebe, have been preserved for posterity as the book *Erste Philosophie*, in two volumes (Husserl 1956, 1959). The book is divided into 54 chapters corresponding to the 54 lectures that made up Husserl's course. The *Husserl-Chronik* states explicitly that on 13.11.1923, when Carnap first attended, Husserl gave lecture 7 of his course. For the second part of the course, the *Husserl-Chronik* gives only the day of the first lesson, namely 8.1.1924. Assuming that Husserl followed the schedule of four lectures per week, one can calculate from this that Carnap attended lectures 37, 41 and 49.

Husserl was a champion of the realist tradition in logic that postulates an objective, timeless, and intersubjectively available existence to the contents of acts of judgement. In his later years, he also emphasized the subjective side of logic. The subjective side of logic was indeed one of Husserl's main concerns in both *Formale und transzendente Logik* and the posthumously published *Erfahrung und Urteil*, two central works from his later career. It was also the topic of the seventh lecture in his course on first philosophy. The lecture appears to have been programmatic. It set out general characteristics of a science of subjectivity, or more precisely, the subjective side of cognition (*Erkennen*), a science that Husserl also suggests calling a logic of cognition. Just as logic in a more usual sense, a logic of cognition is to be general and deal with all acts of cognition independently of their content. Of special interest is the way in which objects are given to us in consciousness. Investigating this will involve investigating, not only theoretical

cognition, but also ethical and aesthetic cognition, since all of these are bound together in our cognitive lives.

It is not surprising that this lecture did not appeal to Carnap. Husserl's idea of a logic of cognition would have seemed quite foreign to him, inspired as he was in the 1920s by Whitehead & Russell's *Principia Mathematica* and Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, both of which promote an objective and mathematized view of logic.

The first part of Husserl's course offered a critical history of the idea of first philosophy from Socrates to the then present day, with special attention to British empiricism. In the second part, the students were offered a more systematic introduction to phenomenology, with emphasis on the so-called phenomenological reduction. In the lectures we reckon that Carnap took part in, Husserl dealt with topics that would have been familiar to readers of *Ideen*, of which Carnap certainly was one: the empirical I versus the transcendental I (lecture 37), phenomenological reflection (lecture 41), and the notion of horizon, that is, roughly, what is implicit, but not directly given, in an intuition (lecture 49).

Husserl regularly invited students to his home at the weekends. Carnap reports to have been to two such visits. On the first Sunday (25.11.23) after he started attending the seminar, all the seminar participants were there for tea, he writes. At the time, Carnap was exploring the possibility of writing his habilitation with Husserl and appears to have discussed the matter during this Sunday tea. It may have been on this occasion, also, that Carnap handed Husserl a copy of his dissertation, *Der Raum* (see Carus 2016, 142, fn. 20). Carnap's other visit to Husserl's home was on the last Saturday of the year (29.12.23). Perhaps giving expression to a sense of alienation, Carnap writes that Husserl "sees himself in the role of Galileo as the founder of scientific philosophy". Husserl, for his part, appears not to have been especially impressed by Carnap. In a letter to Heidegger in May 1928, discussing candidates for the vacant chair of philosophy at Kiel, Husserl dismisses Carnap as, in effect, unqualified, or, more precisely, as "being too far behind" other suggested candidates (Husserl 1994, 157). (Carnap had been listed as a possible candidate by the incumbent chair holder, Heinrich Scholz.)

After Carnap's last visit to Husserl's seminar in the end of February 1924, no more meetings between the two are recorded in Carnap's diaries. Carnap had the chance to witness Husserl in November 1935, when the latter gave a number of lectures in Prague, including two that formed the basis for his famous work *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie*. Carnap knew that the lectures took place, but from his diary entry on 15.11.35, it appears that he had made a principled choice not to attend them. He says curtly, "I will, however, not go there". Carnap's view of Husserl's philosophy might by that time have changed from what it was in the early 1920s. Landgrebe reports that, during discussions in Prague, Carnap had said that he regarded Husserl's *Formale und transzendente Logik* as "höchst gefährlich", that is, "highly dangerous", and that he saw in it a path to irrationalism (Landgrebe 1975, 144). There was little understanding going in the other direction as well. In September 1935, the first conference on unified science took place in Paris. Husserl knew about this conference and asked in a letter to his Paris colleague Aron Gurwitsch whether he had been there to challenge its "curious naivety" (Husserl 1994, 111).

Husserl in Carnap's works

Carnap cites Husserl in both of his main philosophical works from the 1920s, but, as far as I know, never again. Although a number of Husserl's works are cited, only the *Ideen* is actively employed. We may therefore restrict our attention to references to this work in *Der Raum* and the *Aufbau*. It should be remarked that, to some readers (Mayer, Rosado Haddock), Husserl's influence on the *Aufbau* is ubiquitous and not adequately covered by Carnap's explicit citations.

Carnap was conversant with at least some of the important concepts from Husserl's *Ideen* already while writing his dissertation. His reading lists indeed reveal that he was reading this work in the summer of 1920.

According to Husserl, phenomenology has as its domain of study experiences — not the actual experiences of a given person, but rather what Husserl calls the essences, or ideas, of such experiences. Phenomenology, we might say, deals with certain general objects whose individual instances are actual experiences.

A fundamental tenet of phenomenology is that to every appropriately general kind of object there corresponds an original mode of givenness of objects of that kind. Thus, objects of nature are given to us in ordinary perception, in contrast, say, to imagination or picture-seeing. Essences (“Wesen”), or ideas, are given to us in what Husserl calls eidetic intuition (*Wesensschauung*).

In *Der Raum* (22-24), Carnap employs the concept of eidetic intuition to explain how we come to know the basic laws of intuitive space. The law, for instance, that through any two points there passes at least one straight line is not known through repeated observation of points and lines in the actual world. It is sufficient — and necessary — to have grasped the essences *point* and *line* in order to see that this law is correct. The type of cognition in which one grasps essences is precisely what Husserl calls eidetic intuition.

Continuing a tradition in logic that goes back to Plato and Aristotle, Husserl takes essences to be ordered into genus/species hierarchies. For instance, the essence *red* falls as species under the essence *colour* as genus. A path upward in such a hierarchy Husserl calls generalization, and a path downwards he calls specialization. Along a different dimension one can also pass from the redness of a given object to the “formal essence” *property*. Husserl calls this process formalization and contrasts it with de-formalization or materialization, in which a form is filled, as it were, with material content. Other formal essences are object, relation, state of affairs, set and number. The science that studies such formal essences Husserl calls formal ontology. It is contrasted with regional ontology, which studies the essences belonging to a region, a certain unified collection of highest genera. Examples of regions are nature and consciousness. Different from both the genus/species relationship and the formal/material relationship is the relation between an essence and an individual instance of it, such as the relation between *red* and the individual red of a book cover on my desk. Husserl calls this relation subsumption.

Carnap (*ibid.* 60-61, 85) appeals to these notions in explaining the relation between the three kinds of space that he distinguishes: formal space, intuitive space, and physical space. He considers the geometry of formal space as part of formal ontology and the geometry of intuitive space as part of a regional ontology. The latter can thus be reached from the former by means of materialization, or — in Carnap's terminology — substitution. The geometry of physical space is an empirical science — factual science, in Husserl's terminology — and its relation to the geometry of intuitive space is that of subsumption: physical geometry is an individual instance of intuitive geometry.

Whereas, in *Der Raum*, Carnap refers only to the first chapter of the *Ideen*, in *Aufbau*, his references stretch over the whole book. Only one of these references, however, accompanies an application of Husserlian ideas. The other references serve, in effect, to distantiate Carnap's constitution theory from Husserl's phenomenology.

An essential component of Husserl's phenomenology is the so-called phenomenological reduction, a method by which the domain of pure experience is given to us. It consists in “bracketing” the character of an intentional experience that attributes a form of being to its object. Carnap (§64) refers to this method in clarifying how one is to understand the experiences that make up the basis of his constitution system: they are to be taken purely as they are given, without the invocation of being or not-being. Here we thus see Carnap's making use of an important Husserlian notion. Carnap's other

references to the *Ideen* in the *Aufbau* rather contrast his project and method with Husserl's.

According to Husserl, every experience is experienced by a subject, sometimes called the transcendental subject. A subjectless experience is therefore a contradiction in terms for Husserl. Carnap, by contrast, emphasizes that his elementary experiences are subjectless (§65).

An intentional experience is an experience *of* something. A perception is an intentional experience, whereas a mere feeling of pain may not be. The relation between the experience and what it is an experience of may be called intentionality. The main goal of phenomenology is to shed light on intentionality. For the phenomenologist, intentionality is unique as a relation. It does not, for instance, relate objects in the way, say, family ties do, since one side of the relation is no object at all, but a subject. For Carnap, by contrast, intentionality is just another relation in his constitution system, and it allows for a certain formal characterization (§164).

Phenomenology is an eidetic science, since it deals with essences. In this it agrees with mathematics. Phenomenology differs from mathematics in that the essences it studies are not exactly definable, but inherently vague. According to Husserl, this has as a consequence that phenomenology cannot be an axiomatic science, but must be descriptive: all of its insights are immediately evidentiable, unlike mathematical theorems, which are justified by sequences of inference (i.e. demonstrations). Husserl does, however, leave it open that there may be an exact science — a mathematics — of experience. Carnap (§3) says that his constitution theory has similarities with such a science. By definition, a mathematics of experience would not be phenomenology. Carnap thus implicitly recognizes that constitution theory is not a form of phenomenology.

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