

Husserl on Significance at the Core of Meaning

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ABSTRACT: I reconstruct the notion of significance [*Sinnhaftigkeit*] in the later Husserl, with attention to his conceptions of judgment and transcendental logic. My analysis is motivated by the idea that an account of significance can help to connect analytic, Anglo-American conceptions of meaning as a precise, law-governed phenomenon investigated via linguistic analysis and Continental European conceptions of meaning in a broader “existential” sense. I argue that Husserl’s later work points to a transcendental-logical conception of a founding level of *significance* [*Sinnhaftigkeit*] prior to language, and that this conception meets characteristically analytic demands for precision and governance by logical constraints. At the same time, since it is based in descriptions of perceptual intentionality at the level of essential possibility, it leaves room for an account of meaning as a partially undetermined phenomenon of lived experience, and not just of our language and concepts, and thereby meets the characteristically Continental demand to take at face value meaning’s vagueness and indeterminacy in everyday human life.

Introduction

At the core of Husserl’s considerations of meaning is a very intuitive idea that our philosophical training, as twenty-first century inheritors of the legacy of the linguistic turn,¹ has likely primed us to reject: prior to any philosophical theorizing, our experience’s *making sense* is due to its bearing a fundamental *significance*—a sort of basic meaningfulness that, while it may be expressible in language and categorizable via concepts, is in some basic sense *always already there for us* independent of those vehicles. Meaning, from this broader phenomenological perspective,

¹ I take the linguistic turn to have occurred in the Continental tradition as well as the analytic. See Colebrook (2010).

is an attribute first and foremost of lived experience. In this paper I argue that Husserl in his later work² makes room for this insight, without violating the strictures that rightly led many analytic philosophers in the past century to resist it, via the notion *significance* [*Sinnhaftigkeit*].

In line with strictures rightly imposed on any theory of meaning in accordance with basic precepts of the linguistic turn, Husserl recognizes such a basic level of meaning that can be rigorously studied because it is governed by logical properties and constraints. But in Husserl's case the lawfulness of such governance is neither exclusively derived from an analysis of language or concepts, nor rooted in rationalist preconceptions based on the exactness of formal logic. He attempts to get at the deepest foundations of meaning as a phenomenon lived and experienced by human beings, in ways we cannot presume are exhaustively mediated by language or conceptual schemes. The resultant account of meaning is *precise*, but without pretending to an exactness beyond what is prescribed by the phenomena themselves. In short, Husserl's later account of meaning offers an appropriately *exact* analysis of the often *inexact* phenomenon of significance in lived experience. It thus fulfills characteristically analytic expectations for rigor in analysis while also making room for characteristically Continental demands to take on its own terms the vagueness and indeterminacy of meaning characteristic of our human condition.

The first section sketches the later Husserl's account of indeterminate, anticipatory horizons as "stocks of sense" and situates it with regard to his theory of judgment, his conception of transcendental logic, and his development of the distinction between sense [*Sinn*] and linguistic or expressed meaning [*Bedeutung*]. The second section shows how Husserl locates the lawfulness

² I use "Husserl's later work" very broadly, to refer to his thinking from around the time of *Ideas I* until very late works such as the *Crisis* and *Experience and Judgment*. Periodization is not my primary purpose in this paper, and many of these ideas are already nascently present prior to *Ideas I* or developed in subtle ways after it.

governing anticipatory horizons in the noematic core or core of sense, notes important precursors to this conception in the Fourth Logical Investigation, and sets up a contrast between my interpretation of the role of pre-predicative sense in the following sections and that of Sokolowski. Sections three to five reconstruct Husserl's conception of significance as an operative notion in his transcendental logic and theory of judgment and meaning.

Sense, Horizons, and Judgment in Husserl's Transcendental Logic

Beginning in the period of the specifically transcendental phenomenology of *Ideas I* (1913), Husserl recognizes a distinction between a broader conception of meaning as such, and a narrower conception of meaning as related to expression. Sense [*Sinn*] is reserved for the broader usages, and refers to an aspect of meaning not captured by what Husserl considers logic's traditional focus:

[A]s soon as one seriously looks for the ground of them [i.e., expression and meaning [*Bedeutung*]] these problems are generally the first that urgently press for phenomenological inquiries into essences. [footnote:] That was in fact the path on which the *Logical Investigations* strove to penetrate into phenomenology. A second path from the opposite side, namely, from the side of experience and sensory givennesses ... did not come to full expression in that work. [end footnote] From there, one is led to the question of how the "expressing" of the "expressed" is to be understood, how expressed experiences stand in relation to unexpressed ones, and what the latter undergo when they come to be expressed. One will find oneself referred to their "intentionality," to the "sense [*Sinn*] immanent" to them, to "matter" and quality (i.e., the act-character of the thesis), to the differentiation of

this sense and these essential, inherent aspects (that lie in it prior to being expressed), from the meaning of expression as phenomenon itself and its own inherent aspects, and so forth. In today's literature, one still sees repeatedly how little the enormous problems, alluded to here, tend to be appreciated in terms of their full, deep-lying sense. (Husserl 2014, 247/ 1976, 287)

As the footnote to the passage suggests, whereas the *Logical Investigations* began largely³ from (what Husserl would now call) *noetic* considerations of meaning, in his later work on meaning Husserl strives to build up the account of meaning via a "second path," beginning from the side of the experience, or the *noematic*. As the passage also suggests, Husserl has come to see sense [*Sinn*] analysis as transcendently prior to the analysis of expressed meaning (*Bedeutung*), which is understood to be founded upon it.⁴ The roots of this idea are already established in revisions for the second edition of the *Logical Investigations*. There, Husserl writes that sense is inherent in the content of intentional acts, and already present in intuition:

Logical concepts, as valid thought-unities, must have their origin in intuition... we can absolutely not rest content with 'mere words,' i.e., with a merely symbolic understanding

³ For Husserl's own later reflections on the largely noetic character of the *Logical Investigations*, see the 1913 Foreword to the Second Edition (Husserl 2000, 48/ 1975a, 13-14) and Husserl 2002, 58-59. The first edition of the *Logical Investigations* should not be construed as *exclusively* noetic, however: see Husserl's comments on the more ontological (and thus, from the perspective of the later terminology, more noematic) character of the Prolegomena and of the Third and Fourth Investigations in Husserl's critical discussion of Meinong at Husserl 1975b, 42-43/ 2002, 302-304. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for helpful discussion of this point.

⁴ For a detailed treatment of the founding relation as a technical mereological notion in Husserl's logic, including an attempt at formalization, see Fine 1995.

of ‘words,’ *such as we first have when we reflect on the sense [Sinn] of the laws for ‘concepts,’ ‘judgments,’ ‘truths,’ etc. (together with their manifold specifications) which are set up in pure logic.*⁵

The first part of this passage from the *Logical Investigations* is already present in the 1901 edition, but the latter part, which I have placed in italics, was added only in the 1913 edition, reflecting Husserl’s newfound broader notion of sense underlying the determination of logical concepts.⁶

In line with this new emphasis on sense, Husserl argues in the 1920/21 lecture course on transcendental logic (later published as the *Passive Synthesis* lectures) that to capture the lawful properties at the most general level of logical analysis, “we must liberate the concept of sense [*Begriff des Sinnes*] from its relation to expression” (Husserl 2001, 33/ 1974, 374; my emphasis). Even if all *Sinn*-content is, in principle, capable of being expressed or made thematic as *Bedeutung*-content, there is still something important about the founding role of *Sinn* that, from the standpoint of a phenomenological-transcendental theory of logic, cannot be gotten directly from analyses limited to *Bedeutungen* (Cf. Drummond 1990, 189ff).

It is clear in this 1920/21 text that Husserl considers the claims of transcendental logic to be not first order, but second order in a Kantian or neo-Kantian sense: they do not concern the metaphysical status of the objects of experience as such but rather the conditions of their possibility

⁵ Husserl 2000, 251-252/ 1984, 10 (my italics reflect text added in the second edition).

⁶ See Hardy, Translator’s Introduction to Husserl 1999, Pradelle 2016. For the *Sinn/Bedeutung* distinction in early Husserl, see Hill 1991, 29- 42; Vandeveld 2008; Roy 1996. Husserl does not adopt the more familiar Fregean use of *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*, though he does explicitly acknowledge it in the *Logical Investigations* (Husserl 2000, 292/ 1984, 58).

as intentional and meaningful for the transcendental subject.⁷ In this respect, Husserl's conception of logic follows Kant's distinction between a pure, general logic, which abstracts away from the relation to the object as the content of cognition and thus from the faculty of sensibility (Kant 1998, A55/B79, A132/B171), and transcendental logic, which is not so abstracted.⁸ And Husserl's conception of logic, like that of most of his late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Kantian-influenced contemporaries, takes as its central unit of analysis not consequence-relations between propositions—as is common today—but inferential relations between acts of judgment (Rump 2021, 83; Cf. Smith 2009, 645, 655; Martin 2006, 88). If, following the strategy of the first chapter of the *Analytic of Concepts* in the first *Critique*, we develop the logical analysis of the categories of meaningful experience starting from the analysis of judgment (Kant 1998, A69/B94), and if we do not already assume that meaning is an exclusively linguistic affair, then nor should we look only to linguistically mediated acts of judgment *qua* predication in order to establish the basic categories of meaning.

Instead, in his later work, Husserl conceives of judgments as the higher-level continuations and refinements of logical structures and relations already present in lived experience prior to or below the level of predication.⁹ Linguistic expression, on this view, reflects upon, records, and refines, and thereby makes thematic, lower-level experiences of sense, but it remains ultimately

⁷ See Kant 1998, A A56-57/B80-81; Beiser 2009, 12-13. This “second order” move is open to the transcendental phenomenologist insofar as the phenomenological reduction brackets the existential status of the existing object, but not its presence as, in Crowell's formulation, a “normatively structured unity of meaning” (2013, 11ff.).

⁸ Kant 1998, A55/B80-A57/B81. Thanks to Tyke Nunez for helpful conversation on this point.

⁹ This also means, of course, that Husserl's distinguishing of sense and linguistic meaning is tied up with his contemporaneous genetic turn; due to space constraints, the role of genetic phenomenology is treated only implicitly in my interpretation in this essay.

founded upon them. For the analysis of this founding level, Husserl looks to the preconditions for the intentional act of judging itself and attempts to analyze the law-governed structures in accordance with which judgments originate in intuition.

This leads Husserl in his later work to the identification of a more original, *pre-predicative* level of intentionality on the basis of which predicative judgments are made (Husserl 1969, 208-22/ 1974, 216-20. See Pradelle 2016, 195ff). (Husserl is not always clear on whether he takes judging to function exclusively in the context of predication. While he most often talks this way, he sometimes identifies *any* position-taking in an act with, e.g., “judging in the broadest possible sense” (Husserl 2019, 298/ 1956, 95), and in at least one passage he explicitly uses the term “pre-predicative judgment” [*vorpredikative Urteil*].¹⁰) Experience at the pre-predicative level does not present objective certainties issuing in verifiable expressions, and we can only speak of a “forestage” [*Vorstufe*] of cognition and knowledge proper, since there is as yet no active, volitional turning of the ego toward the object in spontaneity (Husserl 1973, 198/ 1939, 232). Despite the lack of such willful intentions (volitional mental states), I the subject nonetheless already operate in the context of “consciousness in the mode of certainty of belief” insofar my consciousness is always already directed at a world “pregiven” for me and already “imbued with sense” passively and in receptivity.¹¹ The world is always already minimally meaningful for me as a vaguely

¹⁰ Husserl 1973, 61/ 1939, 63 (as the section in which this passage appears bears the heavy editorial hand of Landgrebe, the degree to which it is attributable exclusively to Husserl is contestable). For an overview of the different levels of judgment in Husserl, including discussion of the pre-predicative, see Kidd 2021.

¹¹ Husserl 1973, 30-31/ 1939, 26. In *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, Husserl further explains this notion by referring to “modalities of certainty” that “belong already to the intentionality of experience” (Husserl 1969, 209f/ 1974, 217).

predetermined intentional (in the phenomenological, non-volitional sense) horizon, and such significance, as presented in perception, is a necessary precondition for predicative judgment (Cf. Textor 2017).

When Husserl describes the content of these intentional horizons with regard to meaning, he does not do so in terms of *Bedeutung*, but of *Sinn*: prior to any volitional, thematic directness occurring at the “specified and determined” level of predication, intentionality always already possesses a

[S]tock of sense [*Sinn*] which, although it does not become thematized, extends beyond the apperceptions, beyond the total stock of the particular things perceived. In the advance from the specific stock of the particular apperceptions already carried out to a new stock there prevails a synthetic unity; the newly apperceived fills, as it were, the horizon which was previously still empty, still undetermined as to content, with anticipated sense; it fills a horizon already indicated but not yet specified and determined. (Husserl 1973, 34/ 1939, 30)

Lived experience is thus said to be shaped both by knowledge of the already-determined content of specific apperceptions *and* by horizontal, anticipatory knowledge or “*Vorwissen*” (Husserl 1973, 32/ 1939, 27), already operative in the intentional background as “stocks” of “anticipated sense.”¹²

In cases where a series of perceptions are experienced as perceptions of the same object, “the perceptions that constitute the series stand in a law-governed relation of anticipation and fulfilment to each other” (Textor 2017, 295). Such anticipations of content go beyond what is

¹² This idea is spelled out in greater detail in Husserl’s account of pre-predicative “types.” See Lohmar 2003 (for types as partial determinations of sense: 108).

direct and immanent in any one moment of experience, if such a moment is understood as the sum of the “specified and determined” contents of linguistically or conceptually mediated predicative judgments about perceptual contents.¹³

In his later work, Husserl increasingly emphasizes that such anticipatory intentionality is not only not necessarily volitional; it is also operative even without our active, conscious awareness—it need not become “thematized” in consciously entertained propositions or expressions (Cf. Føllesdal 2006, 107). The “synthetic unity” that obtains in such cases is a passive unity prior to conscious, active thought (indeed, this notion stands at the core of Husserl’s conception of “passive synthesis”).

Importantly, while it is true that there is something “not yet specified and determined” at the non-thematic level of these anticipatory intentional horizons—we should not expect the same degree of precision as we would of thematic, explicitly expressed, linguistic-propositional expectations of content—it is not the case that, at this level, anything goes. *There is still a sort of content—still logical constraints on meaning—in play, even in passivity.* This is clear in Husserl’s *First Philosophy* lectures, where he discusses the same topic in terms of a distinction between two *different types of validity*, (1) “*current validity* lying in the active enactment of acts,” which is correlated with “*thematic* objects of acts,” and (2) “*potential* or perhaps *habitual validity*, which is a special mode of validity which reveals its sense [*Sinn*] and its accomplishment by being translated into a respective actuality,” and which is correlated with “all other objects belonging to the *unthematic background*.”¹⁴ It is tempting to construe the constraint that grounds the validity of

¹³ For a more detailed account of the temporal structure of such anticipations, see Madary 2016.

¹⁴ Husserl, 2019, 346/ 1959, 144. Husserl uses “validity” here not as it is used in contemporary logic, but in a broader

the second type linguistically or conceptually, as, e.g., consisting of the totality of one's available vocabulary or conceptual schemes. But for Husserl the limits of my language are not the limits of my world. What ultimately constrains validity of the potential or habitual sort is what above was called "stocks of sense." *Sinn* is still a vehicle of meaning, but that meaning is conceived as extending to the level of *the horizontal structure of the intentional act itself* (paradigmatically, in perceptual horizons), and thus beyond the level of predication and the linguistic expression of *Bedeutungen*.¹⁵

With respect to this point, the interpretation I am offering here differs importantly from Sokolowski's much weaker interpretation of pre-predicative sense in *The Formation of Husserl's Concept of Constitution*. Further attention to this difference will be instructive for my interpretation of significance in the following sections. On Sokolowski's account,

Before the categorical act of judging takes place, there are *only* the fluid anticipations of meaning or sense, but such anticipations are not the same as fixed senses. They are *only* the 'lived' pre-conceptual or pre-categorical foreshadowing of the type of object we call a sense, and *they can be understood only teleologically, that is, in function of the terminal sense they anticipate*. There is no crystallized meaning in pre-predicative encounter. (Sokolowski 1964, 172, my emphases)

neo-Kantian and ultimately Lotzean sense, according to which validity (*Geltung*) is contrasted with real existence (*Wirklichkeit*). See Willard 1972, 98; Gabriel 2002, 45f; Martin 2006, 100. On the characterization of such validity as habitual, see the account of the centrality of habitualities for genetic constitution in Sokolowski 1964, 187ff.

¹⁵ Cf. Lohmar's discussion of habitualities as part of the structure of "fore-prehension" (*Vorgriff*) in Lohmar 2003, 112f.

With the exception of the italicized phrase, I agree with the letter, but not the spirit, of Sokolowski's claim. It is indeed true, and important to emphasize, that for Husserl there is no "crystalized meaning" or "fixed sense" in pre-predicative experience. But, contra the thrust of Sokolowski's characterization, this does not mean that there is no meaning involved *at all*, or that the contributions of the pre-predicative are "only" important in Husserl's account insofar as they are parasitic upon or understood teleologically in relation to meanings at the level of predicative judgments of "terminal sense."

On the interpretation I am urging here, Sokolowski's further claim that "In pure encounter, we achieve the presence of objects before any sense is deposited in them by judgment" is similarly misleading in spirit, if not in letter: while it may be true that sense is deposited in objects by judgment, this should not be taken to imply (as it seems to, for Sokolowski) that, *prior* to judgment, the objects are unshaped by sense *at all*. On my reading, there is *already* a sort of partial logical constraint on *potential* meaning, manifested at the level of *horizons*. This, I argue below, is what Husserl refers to in later work as "significance" (*Sinnhaftigkeit*).

Horizontal Potential Meaning as Free, but "Not Completely Free"

In his account of phenomenological constitution in §149 of *Ideas I*,¹⁶ Husserl discusses the *noema* in the paradigmatic case of intentional directedness to an object: the perception of a material (physical) thing.¹⁷ Although "we can bring the noema or sense of the thing to a point where it is

¹⁶ Husserl 2014, 297-98/ 1995, 345-6. All subsequent quotations in this and the following paragraph are taken from this passage.

¹⁷ Though I cannot discuss this difficult interpretive issue here, in line with the "East Coast" interpretation, I take the noema to be the object of the intentional act *as intended*, i.e., the intentional correlate of the intending *noesis*. It is

adequately given to us,” no individual intuition of a material thing can be completely given, since, e.g., it will always have a backside which is hidden from us. And yet, every such incomplete givenness “contains in itself a rule for the ideal possibility of its perfection.” In the intuition itself we envision future possibilities that accord with our current sense of the object, and, “to a great extent, as this process of phantasy progresses, envisioning [*veranschaulichen*] its object ever more perfectly and determining [it] more precisely, we are *free*.”

Nevertheless, Husserl hastens to add, “*we are not completely free*, insofar as it is incumbent upon us to proceed via a *coherent* sequence of intuitions, in which the determinable subject is identically the same and *can* continue to be determined the whole time in a coherent manner.” While the exact future possibilities that will be realized are of course open to the contingencies of my future experience and to thematic investigation, the “rules” for their perfection are said, in the same passage, to be “absolutely discernible” at any given moment, in the essence of the noema.

This description of partial determination or partial unfreedom—appearing in *Ideas I* in the context of a noematic analysis of possible combinations of *Sinn* in intuition—mirrors a description in the heart of Husserl’s earlier discussion of meaning in the Fourth Logical Investigation, where it appears in the context of an analysis of possible combinations of *Bedeutungen*. In that earlier description, Husserl insists that there must be “a priori laws of essence governing all meaning-combinations [*Bedeutungsverknüpfung*].” This is true in general: “In no sphere is it possible to combine items of any and every kind by way of any and every form: the sphere of items sets a

not itself a mediating sense (*a la* “West Coast” interpretations) but is part of the sense-bearing structure of intentionality. The noema, the object *as intended* (*as meant*), thus belongs with the content, rather than with the object (the object *that* is intended), in the tripartite act-content-object structure of intentionality.

priori limits to the number of combinatorial forms, and prescribes the general laws for filling them in.”

This lawfulness applies both to “material combinations, limited to a single sphere of fact,” and to “formal, ‘analytic’ combinations,” which are “not bound up with the peculiarities of the sphere of fact, nor with the factual essence of their combining members” (Husserl 2000, 510/ 1984, 325). He gives the following example:

The expression ‘This tree is green’ has unified meaning [*ist einheitlich bedeutsamer*]. If we formalize this meaning (the independent logical proposition) and proceed to the corresponding pure form of meaning, we obtain ‘This S is P’, an ideal form whose range of values consists solely of independent (propositional) meanings. It is now plain that what we may call the ‘materialization’ [*Materialisierung*] of this form, its specification in definite propositions, is possible in infinitely many ways, but that *we are not completely free in such specification, but work confined within definite limits*. We cannot substitute any meanings we like for the variables ‘S’ and ‘P’. Within the framework of our form we can change our example ‘This tree is green’ into ‘This gold . . .’, ‘This algebraic number . . .’, ‘This blue raven etc., is green’: any nominal material—in a wide sense of ‘nominal material’—can here be inserted, and so plainly can any adjectival material replace the ‘P’. In each case we have once more a meaning unified in sense [*einheitlich sinnvolle Bedeutung*], i.e., an independent proposition of the prescribed form, but if we depart from the categories of our meaning material [*Bedeutungsmaterien*], the unitary sense [*Sinneseinheit*] vanishes. (Husserl 2000, 511/ 1984, 327, first emphasis mine)

In addition to the formal categories to which meaning material may belong, exemplified in the passage above in the references to nominal and adjectival form, Husserl's complex analysis in the Fourth Investigation also takes account of the material or "stuff" [*Stoff*] that "fills" those forms. It is this combination of stuff and form that is responsible for the "unitary sense" in any expressed meaning. In the case of a particular concrete meaning—concrete in that it is intentionally directed to a specific object—"every concrete meaning represents a fitting together of stuff [*Stoffen*] and forms." (Husserl 2000, 513/ 1984, 329, translation modified).

Both form and stuff are involved in the distinction between countersensical meanings (*Widersinn*), in which "an object (e.g., a thing, state of affairs) which unites all that the meaning conceives as pertaining to it by way of its 'incompatible' meanings, neither exists nor can exist, through the meaning itself exists," from nonsense (*Unsinn*), in which "the possibility of a unitary meaning itself excludes the possible coexistence of certain partial meanings in itself" (Husserl 2000, 517/ 1984, 335). Husserl also further distinguishes, within cases of *Widersinn*, between those cases where the incompatibility is a result exclusively of form, and those where the incompatibility is determined by the "stuffs," arising from the "ultimate material core of meaning [*sachhaltige letzte Bedeutungskerne*]" as exhibited in concrete cases (Husserl 2000, 523/ 1984, 343, translation modified).

If we return to the later discussion of this simultaneous partial determination and partial freedom in *Ideas I*, we see that Husserl again characterizes the givenness or rational evidence of essence involved in terms of an ultimate "core" of meaning. But here—as we should expect given Husserl's newly announced wider focus on meaning in terms of a core not of *Bedeutung* but of *Sinn* and his newfound focus on the noematic—this is framed rather differently, as the "noematic furnishing of the core of sense [*noematischen Ausstattung des Sinneskernes*]" (Husserl 2014, 296/

1995, 344). Both earlier and later formulations emphasize that there is strict—indeed, essential and *a priori*¹⁸—logical constraint at play in the constitution of meaning. But the later framing further allows for this constraint to be operative even in passivity or receptivity, even as *the full parameters of the constraint, qua content of transcendental logic*, is simply not the sort of thing that can be exactly determined in advance. Intentionality at this level operates only in a vaguely “anticipatory” manner, whereas full determination occurs only at the higher or more exact level of predicative judgments (Husserl 1973, 238/ 1939, 284). Gone also from the formulation in *Ideas I* is the emphasis on concrete cases, not only with regard to form, but also with regard to stuffs—here discussed in terms of “posits, whose determinate content is taken in terms of its *regional* determinateness.” Even in the case of the analysis of the region of material things, Husserl now claims, we are interested not simply in concrete cases of actually fulfilled intentions, but in “the phenomenological constitution of the thing *in general*,” in its “noematic composition [*noematischen Bestand*],” according to which “[t]o each noema there corresponds essentially a group of possible noemas whose unity consists in their capacity to be synthetically united through their congruence with one another” (Husserl 2014, 296/ 1995, 344).

In Husserl’s later work, then, alongside the newfound emphasis on passivity and the horizontal preconstitution of possible meaning as discussed above, the role of “stuffs” in “filling in” meanings is extended from concrete cases of meaning in thematized intentionality to cases of

¹⁸ Although Husserl seeks to avoid using the term “a priori” in *Ideas I* (see Husserl 2014, 7/ 1995, 8), since essences are conceived as a priori laws it is accurate to say that we intuit material a priori laws *in lived experience*. This is one way of expressing Husserl’s claim to the phenomenological intuition of essences (*Wesensschau*), a claim that he later modified in light of the sorts of considerations addressed in this essay, but never abandoned (see Livingstone 2002).

unthematized, potential meaning, now characterized in terms of “stocks of sense,” where “the newly apperceived fills, as it were, the horizon which was previously still empty, still undetermined as to content, with anticipated sense” (Husserl 1973, 34/ 1939, 30; cited above). Insofar as they indicate the shape of *possible determinations of sense*, noematic horizons manifest the transcendental-logical constraints on meaning broadly conceived, but they are indeterminate insofar as they do not delineate a simple, finite list of possible future experiences or possible worlds, and are not exclusively a function of linguistic capacities or conceptual schemes.

Put differently, despite their indeterminacy and their pre-predicative, modal status, anticipatory intentional horizons as discussed in Husserl’s later work still mark essential constraints on *judgment itself* in accordance with Husserl’s second-order inquiry: they demarcate at the level of the noematic core a sort of basic unity or coherence—a *significance* we are confronted with in experience, at the level of *possible sense*. Thus, while Sokolowski is right to claim that prepredicative anticipations are “‘lived’ pre-conceptual or pre-categorical foreshadowing[s] of the type of object we call a sense,” they are not *only* that; nor must they be understood *exclusively* as a “*function of the terminal sense they anticipate.*”¹⁹ They play an

¹⁹ We need to be careful here to distinguish between the lived experience itself and the subsequent reflection upon it that allows us to recognize its meaning-bearing structure, as in the case where we take meanings as our intentional objects, as Sokolowski does when he refers to “the type of object we call a sense.” It is quite plausible to claim that the subsequent reflection (and surely the presentation of it in writing, as occurs in this paper) presupposes concepts and even linguistic meaning. But it need not follow from this that conceptuality or language is already operative in the apprehension of meaning in lived experience *itself*. See Husserl’s distinction, within the pre-predicative, between explication and simple apprehension (Husserl, 1973, 103ff/ Husserl 1939, 115ff). Hopkins 1989 makes a closely related point in his response to the supposed “thematic paradox” that arises for Husserl’s conception of reflection.

important role, not reducible to the anticipation of specific “terminal senses” or to “concrete meanings,” in the (partial) predetermination of the very content available to judgment.

States of Affairs, Situations, and Preconstituted Sense

The remainder of this essay further sketches this interpretation by turning to some of Husserl’s later remarks about significance [*Sinnhaftigkeit*], taking as my starting point the above claim that the governing constraints on such anticipatory horizons are located ultimately in the noematic core. My account is an *interpretive reconstruction* of the notion significance as an *operative notion* in Husserl’s texts. The exegetical strategy of focusing on operative notions was first elucidated by Eugen Fink (1976) and also famously used by Landgrebe (1981). Fink proposes that we distinguish in the work of any philosopher between “thematic” and “operative” notions. Whereas thematic notions are the exact concepts expressing fixed and explicitly defined relations by which a philosopher systematically builds a theory, operative notions function in a less exact manner, as a sort of placeholder for problem spaces which we can grasp in a general way, but which we recognize will demand further clarification (Fink 1976, 203). Since Husserl never—to my knowledge—explicitly introduces *Sinnhaftigkeit* as a technical notion, I am interpreting Husserl’s usage of that term as “operative” for his philosophy in Fink’s sense.

As a starting point for this interpretation, note that while pre-predicative experience is never fully responsible for the content of currently valid predicative judgments, due to its role being limited to the quasi-determination of horizons below the predicative level, Husserl’s view is that such horizons still found judgments insofar as they are *a formally and materially significant precondition* for the analysis of a judgment’s truth value. The considerations of transcendental

logic are in this respect prior to or deeper than, but not irrelevant to, considerations of truth (see Alweiss 2013). In contrast to the analysis characteristic of what Husserl calls the “old logic” of non-contradiction, in *Formal and Transcendental Logic* he discusses a “pure analytics” which “asks about judgments purely as judgments, purely about the judgment-relationships that affect the possibility or impossibility of a proper performing [of judgment], and does not ask at all about whether such relationships have a reference to the possible truth of judgments” (Husserl 1969, 333/ 1974, 328-29). Independent of the question of the coherence or compossibility of sets of judgments or of the truth value of propositions, Husserl insists that we can ask about the essential laws that govern the possibility of judging experiential contents as such—put differently, the laws that determine the combinability of the content of experience as at least minimally *significant*, and thus first available for judgment as a categorial object.²⁰

From a transcendental perspective concerned with possibilities of meaning or “potential validity,” not just actualized meaning or “current validity,” we cannot simply begin from the

²⁰ It may be objected here that my discussion of the logical constraint of horizontal possibilities via the sense of intentional objects above was limited to the case of the perceptual noema of a physical thing, and that this is a very different sort of intentional object from the *categorial object* I am discussing here. However, with regard to the sorts of considerations relevant for my analysis in this paper, the cases are not importantly different: both involve eidetic structures revealed phenomenologically by an analysis of underlying sense as a phenomenon of meaning *qua* structure not of language but of intentionality. This is evident even in passages where Husserl specifically distinguishes between these two types of intentional objects, such as the discussion of categorial and aesthetic synthesis in *Ideas II* (Husserl 1989, 19-23/ 1952, 18-21). While it is true that the essential structures revealed function at different levels and in different domains, such that, e.g., one sort of noema will manifest adherence to causal constraints, and the other to grammatical constraints, *both* will also manifest adherence to constraints pertaining to essential sense. Only as such could they be *significant* in lived experience at all.

linguistic analysis of predicative expressions referring to states of affairs, as is done, according to Husserl, by the “old logic.”²¹ Husserl recognizes that, e.g., the state of affairs *that the door is open* is not simply the content of an expression corresponding to a true judgment: that state of affairs is also, and indeed, on the transcendental account, at a more originary level, *itself* a logical objectivity: from the perspective of phenomenological reflection, it is itself the noematic sense of an act of judging.²² Such a sense can feature meaningfully in further judgments even without its truth value *qua* proposition being determined, as the above-noted example does in the judgment expressed in the sentence

(1) That the door is open is bad if one wants to keep the cat from getting out.

We need not predicate truth or falsity of every phenomenon of experience we take to be significant. Indeed, for Husserl, it is the categorial objects (states of affairs) *that make possible* syntactical differences at the level of predication and expression; categorial intuitions do not reflect or presuppose categories first defined by linguistic usage, as we are apt to think if we limit our analysis to the concerns of pure instead of transcendental logic.²³

²¹ Ironically, of course, the conception of the judgment that Husserl opposes to what he calls “traditional logic” can itself be traced to Aristotle. See Cobb-Stevens 1998.

²² See Drummond’s (2007) entries for, “Proposition”(171); “State of affairs”(194).

²³ See the discussion of the relation between predication and logical substrates at Husserl 1976, 581-82. See Sokolowski: “because subject, predicate, and copula are transformations of the *presentation of things*, the place where they are originally at work and *from which they get their sense* is in our cognitive intercourse with the things in experience” (Sokolowski, 1981, 132, second emphasis mine). In line with the interpretation in the previous

Husserl's analysis of meaning is thus ultimately concerned with the underlying structures that constitute judgment content and in that manner make judgments of truth and falsity *possible* (see Alweiss 2013, Zuidervaart 2018). Judgments constitute states of affairs as distinct logical objects or "categorial objectivities" *via* the act of predication, but *on the basis of* the underlying experience's pre-predicative content (Husserl 1973, 198, 237/ 1939, 233, 282; Husserl 2014, 24-5/ 1995, 28-30; Husserl 1987, 163-64). Ultimately, then, we must ask how the elements contained in states of affairs themselves came to be available for predicative judgment. The components of the judgment *qua* judgment (not the linguistic components of the *Bedeutungen* through which they have been expressed at a higher level) must first be combinable or compossible in coherent, experientially significant states of affairs.

In *Experience and Judgment*, Husserl's technical term for these underlying combinations or relations of objects, *prior* to their being objectivized and thematized in the judgement as states of affairs, is "situations" (*Sachlagen*). He gives the example of the state of affairs expressed by the proposition "The earth is larger than the moon":

The state of affairs itself as a sense-structure [*Sinnesstruktur*] is not something which can be exhibited in the sense-pole [*Sinnespol*] "earth," in the way in which internal (e.g., qualitative) and relative determinations belong as moments of sense [*Sinnesmomente*] to the objective sense [*objektiver Sinn*] according to which this object "earth" is receptively apprehended. What corresponds in receptivity to such a state of affairs is *relations* or, as

section, I would take issue with Sokolowski's characterization of this intercourse as necessarily "cognitive." It has been underappreciated in the literature to what extent this complicates Husserl's account of the relationship between categoriality and signitive/ significant intentions in the Sixth Logical Investigation and its revisions. Treatment of this complicated issue exceeds my scope here. See Melle 1999.

we prefer to say, *situations* [*Sachlagen*] [...] Situations are founded objects; they refer ultimately to objects which are not situations. Every object is the possible and actual substratum of several situations; therefore, every situation is such in its turn. Every object is also a “source” [*Quelle*] of situations, i.e., it establishes situations by itself, inasmuch as it is explicable only so far as it bears elements which come to prominence in possible intuitions. [...] On the basis of these situations—among which, as is immediately obvious, nothing more must be understood, to begin with, than passively constituted relations, which themselves need not yet be objectified—*predicative judgments* can be formed *in conformity with different aims*. (Husserl 1973, 239-240/ 1939, 285-286)

The passage suggests that Husserl takes sense to be operative in the analysis of judging (and thus of logic and meaning) at at least three different levels: 1) in the passive/receptive apprehension of simple objects; 2) in the passive/receptive apprehension of situations, which are relations of simple objects; and 3) in the active/objectified predicative judgment of such situations resulting in states of affairs. On this basis, Husserl can claim that *Sachlagen* are the “passively preconstituted fundament [*Fundament*]” of states of affairs, and this fundament itself has its “source” [*Quelle*] in non-situation objects. Thus, contra the interpretation of Sokolowski as discussed at the end of Section I above, simple objects (understood noematically as sense-poles) themselves constitute the deepest—if most indeterminate—level of noematic *Sinn*, even prior to thematization and judgment. Indeed, Husserl says this explicitly: “The objects of receptivity are pre-given in an original passivity with their structures of association, affection, etc. Their apprehension is a lower level of activity, the mere act of receiving *the sense originally preconstituted in passivity*” (Husserl 1973, 241/ 1939, 288, translation modified).

Core Forms and Core Stuffs

Husserl analyzes this preconstituted level of noematic *Sinn* in even greater detail in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, where it appears in a somewhat different guise than in the analyses from *Experience and Judgment* just discussed.²⁴ Transcendental-logical analysis looks beyond singular terms as the components of predicative judgments (what Husserl takes to be the strategy of the “old logic”) to the underlying noematic cores to which those terms correspond:

[J]udicial action continuously presupposes things given beforehand. These can be formations originating from earlier judgments; but finally we come to something corresponding to the ultimate stuffs and their substantival and adjectival forms, namely to the passive and subsequent active experience that gives us something individual beforehand, and to the prior formings brought about here by a merely experiencing-explicating process of taking cognizance [*erfahrend-explizierender Kenntnisnahme*] (Husserl 1969, 337/ 1974, 332).

²⁴ In *Formal and Transcendental Logic* (Husserl 1969/1974), for instance, the term *Sachlage* appears only twice (pp. 62 and 86) and in neither instance appears to be used a technical or thematic concept. This is of course due to the different foci of these two works in their final form: on the theory of judgment and on logic, respectively.

This analysis or explication²⁵ of the ultimate level of the noema, the “noematic core” or “noematic furnishing of the core of sense [*noematischen Ausstattung des Sinneskernes*]” reveals it to consist of what Husserl calls “core stuffs” and “core forms.”²⁶

This distinction of course mirrors that in the Fourth Logical Investigation, discussed in Section II above, between forms and stuffs at the “ultimate material core of meaning” (Husserl 2000, 523/ 1984, 343, translation modified; cited above). But whereas that earlier account was developed prior to Husserl’s more careful distinguishing of *Sinn* from *Bedeutung*, the later account is focused—as we should expect—on the project of uncovering the deepest constituents of noematic sense:

Suppose that what we have comprehended in principle, but not actually grounded in detail, were actually shown, namely that, thanks to an uncoverable intentional genesis of judgments, every judgment—understood not only as being an indication that is significant

²⁵ For Husserl’s conception of analysis as explication, see Husserl 1973/ 1939, §22; also see Textor 2017, 297. As Beaney (2007) notes, this notion is especially useful for clarifying differences between the conception of analysis operative in phenomenology and in early analytic philosophy.

²⁶ Husserl 2014, 272/ 1995, 316 (cited above). I will use as the main source of my analysis of these notions Appendix I to *Formal and Transcendental Logic* (1969/1974). This material derives from the lectures on formal logic delivered in Göttingen in winter semester 1910/11, which were themselves reworkings of the 1908/09 winter semester lecture course on “Alte und Neue Logik” now published in *Husserliana Materialien* 6 (Husserl 2003). This material was further reworked for lecture courses in winter semester 1912/1913, 1913/14, and 1917/18. The last of these is now published in *Husserliana* XXX (Husserl 1996). Husserl also writes in the third appendix to *Formal and Transcendental Logic* that the theme of ultimate stuffs at the level of passive experience is to be treated separately, and these analyses are to be found in Part I of *Experience and Judgment* (1973/1939), the same portion of that text from which my above account of pre-predicative experience and “stocks of sense” is drawn. For other accounts of core forms and core stuffs, see Bachelard 1968, Welton 1983, Hanna 1984, Drummond 2003.

[*Sinnhaft*] from the purely grammatical standpoint but also as having a significant [*Sinnhaft*] material homogeneity among its cores—necessarily has such a relation to a unitary sphere of experience (a unitary material province) that it can be brought to either a positive or a negative adequation; then what we have set up as the subjective version of logical principles, the turning of them into principles concerning evidence, is indeed established. (Husserl 1969, 221-222/ 1974, 229-230)

According to the later account in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, whereas formal moments (“forms”) determine the syntactic organization of the judgment and the corresponding state of affairs, material moments (“stuffs”) consist exclusively of the synthetic content or “material” so organized. Husserl claims that this form-content structure repeats at deeper levels, but not in the manner of an infinite regress: we ultimately arrive, at the deepest level of noematic analysis—at the “core of sense”—at the limit-concepts of core forms and core stuffs.

In a formulation that accords with my account of anticipatory horizons in Section II, John Drummond calls this an “anticipatory categoriality” prior to the full-blown categoriality of predicative judgments.²⁷ On the material side, core stuffs cannot be entirely unarticulated, since they must follow *some* rules that determine their (possible) ordered combination. As Drummond puts it, core stuffs “are not indifferent to syntax.” Every core stuff will be sortable under one or another core form determinant of its anticipatory categoriality or formal combinability in a predicative judgment (Drummond 2003, 134). In light of this, all core stuffs are said ultimately to

²⁷ See Drummond 2003. Pradelle (2016, 195f) similarly discusses a “weak syntax” in contrast to the “strong syntax” of logic in the predicative sense. For a detailed comparison with Kant on these issues, see Lohmar 1998.

belong to one of two proto-syntactic core forms: substantivity or adjectivity (Husserl 1969, 307ff/ 1974 309ff).

Apropos of my claims above, however, Husserl makes clear that this analysis of core forms, while related to syntax, is *not to be understood as an analysis of language*: “What is said about adjectivity, substantivity, etc., must not be understood as if we were concerned here with differences of linguistic form. Even though the designations of these core-forms are drawn from the designation of linguistic forms, nothing more is meant by them than *difference in the manner of apprehension [Erfassung]*” (Husserl 1973, 210/ 1939, 248-249; Cf. Welton 1983, 80-81). We are not dealing here with the syntactical combinability of *words* that express *predicative judgments*, but with the combinability of objects in *Sachlagen*, as discussed in the previous section, that makes the meaningfulness of such expressions *possible*.

This can be seen in the fact that we cannot perform a meaningful judgment of the putative content corresponding to a non-syntactical or grammatically incomprehensible statement, such as

(2) Or and table is.

The fact that (2) is non-grammatical *reflects* (rather than determines) the fact that there is no compossibility of judgment contents here; the purported judgment attempts to represent an illicit (and thus impossible) state of affairs, where that illicitness is due ultimately to an incompatible arrangement of substantival and adjectival core forms and thus an impossible situation [*Sachlage*]. Since there can be no such situation, there can be no judgment of it resulting in a state of affairs. Thus (2) quite literally *lacks sense* (in Husserl’s terminology introduced above: is *Unsinn* (Husserl 2000, 49 / 1984, 302; Cf. Bachelard 1968, 150)), and its having sense is ruled out because the core

forms involved cannot harmonize into a coherent noematic core. This account of the role of core forms in determining noematic sense is one central part of the analysis of the “compossibility of judgments purely as judgments.”

However, from the standpoint of a transcendental-logical analysis that understands formal structures as constituted in and through experience, Husserl insists that there is another element involved in significance: core stuffs themselves provide the *material* organized by core forms. The sortability of core stuffs into proto-syntactic categories (anticipatory categorial forms) does not exhaust their transcendental-logical import. The core stuffs *themselves* have material import analytically distinguishable from their proto-syntactical properties, insofar as the latter only *partially* determine the live possibilities for predicative judging.²⁸

Recalling the discussion of “meaning material” [*Bedeutungsmaterien*] in the Fourth Logical Investigation, in *Formal and Transcendental Logic* Husserl also discusses this sub-syntactical *material* import of core stuffs in relation to *significance*:

The possible unity of... a judgment content, thought of as a unity that can be posited in some modality or other, *is restricted by conditions*. The mere unitary grammatical understandableness, the *purely grammatical significance* [*Sinnhaftigkeit*]... *is not the only significance that logical analytics presupposes*. As we see, the concept of the distinct judgment—the judgment that can be properly effected syntactically—which is presupposed in consequence-logic and therefore in the formal principles of truth, is in need of a supplementary essential determination and a correspondingly *deeper* clarification. The

²⁸ See Hanna: “[T]he ultimate cores of propositions have to be harmoniously related prior to there being any proposition at all. Therefore harmony of the substantive core-stuffs precedes even the grammar of pure logic or syntactics” (1984, 338f).

unitary effectibility of the judgment content is prior to and a condition for the effectibility of the judgment itself. (Husserl 1969, 217/ 1974, 225; translation modified)

On the one hand, the basic experiential significance involved in making judgments can be understood in a “purely grammatical” way corresponding to the proto-syntactical lawfulness of core forms as discussed in the earlier paragraphs of this section. But note how this description of *Sinnhaftigkeit* highlights an aspect of it that is *not* grammatical.²⁹ It is clear from the following subsection of the text (§89b) that the “deeper clarification” and essential determination” of restriction by conditions is to come from analysis of the “material homogeneity” of cores or noematic “core-stuffs” (Husserl 1969, 218-219/ 1974, 228).

Take Husserl’s own example:

(3) The sum of the angles of a triangle is equal to the color red.

²⁹ The very same distinction between propositional or grammatical significance on the one hand and a “deeper” significance on the other is noted again a few pages later: “Suppose that what we have comprehended in principle, but not actually grounded in detail, were actually shown, namely that, thanks to an uncoverable intentional genesis of judgments, every Judgment—understood not only as being an indication that is significant [*Sinnhaft*] from the purely grammatical standpoint but also as having a significant [*Sinnhaft*] material homogeneity among its cores—necessarily has such a relation to a unitary sphere of experience (a unitary material province) that it can be brought to either a positive or a negative adequation; then what we have set up as the subjective version of logical principles, the turning of them into principles concerning evidence, is indeed established” (Husserl 1969, 221-222/ 1974, 229-230).

Husserl claims that this sentence fails to fulfill the conditions for “unitary significance [*Sinnhaftigkeit*]” (Husserl 1969, 220/ 1974, 228). There is a problem with meaning here, but it is neither one of comprehensibility as such—unlike (2), (3) is syntactically comprehensible; it is grammatically well-formed and in that sense understandable—nor a straightforward violation of the law of non-contradiction. The problem is rather that the core stuffs corresponding to the subject and predicate terms, though they individually meet the *formal* (proto-syntactic; grammatical) requirements for a predicative judgment, are *materially* incompatible: in Husserl’s language, “sum of the angles of a triangle” and “equal to the color red” are logical moments containing, in addition to their core forms, core stuffs that do not “have ‘something to do with each other’ *materially*.”³⁰ In the case of (3), since we are dealing with expressions of putative judgments whose cores are *not* “congruous in respect of sense [*sinngemäß zusammengehören*]” (Husserl 1969, 220/ 1974, 228), there can be no *Sachlage*—in this case, no relation expressed in the judgment “is equal to”—as the fundament of the expressed combined meaning (see Romano 2015, 79). Thus the putative judgment corresponding to this sentence cannot be true *or* false: if there is no *Sachlage*, there cannot be any judgment or resulting state of affairs. In this respect, (3) appears to be like (2), which we discussed above as an example of *Unsinn*.

(3), however, is an example of what Husserl, already in the *Logical Investigations*, calls *Widersinn*. While not entirely without sense (not *Unsinn*), it is still absurd insofar as “an object (e.g., a thing, state of affairs) which unites all that the unified meaning [*Bedeutung*] conceives as pertaining to it by way of its ‘incompatible’ meanings [*unverträglichen*] *Bedeutungen*], neither exists nor can exist, though the meaning [*Bedeutung*] itself exists” (Husserl 2000, 517/ 1984, 335;

³⁰ Husserl 1969, 219/ 1974, 226-228. Cf. Bachelard 1968, 150; Welton 1983, 91-2. My exegesis in this paragraph largely follows Bachelard.

see also Bell 1999, 88-90). The two logical moments in (3) have at their cores (expressed, respectively, by the words *sum* and *red*) stuffs that are *grammatically compatible* in the sense in which, in Drummond's phrase, they are "not indifferent to syntax" (2003, 134; cited above): the first is substantival and the second is adjectival, and, from a purely formal perspective, substantival and adjectival forms are syntactically compatible (compare: "the *cat* is *gray*"; "the *remainder* is equal to *five*"). This explains the sense in which, for cases like (3), Husserl claims that the "meaning itself exists" even though it can have no corresponding object.

But (3) lacks significance—fails to exhibit *Sinnhaftigkeit*—because the core stuffs themselves, though *formally compatible*, are *materially incompatible*: there simply cannot be "an object (e.g., a thing, state of affairs) which unites all that the unified meaning conceives as pertaining to it" (Husserl 2000, 517/ 1984, 335). There can be no situation [*Sachlage*] here—no categorial noematic object—because of a failure of compatibility not of forms, but of filling (core stuffs). When Husserl makes this point in the Fourth Logical Investigation—prior to the explicit introduction of the *transcendental* logical framework—he presupposes that the evidence of such incompatibility can only be got from "concrete meaning," in the presence of a judgment of an *actual* object of experience. From this perspective, the analysis of prepredicative meaning cannot but be arrived at via a sort of retrospective counterfactual analysis, on the basis of existing concrete judgments. It is this perspective, I believe, that underlies Sokolowski's claim that pre-predicative meanings can only be understood "*in function of the terminal sense they anticipate*" (1964, 172; cited above).

But, in line with my above account of Husserl's later adoption of a specifically *transcendental* logical framework, this perspective does not apply to the later analysis of core stuffs in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*: here, the incompatibility of stuffs at the level of the

“noematic furnishing of the core of sense [*noematischen Ausstattung des Sinneskernes*]” (as opposed to the earlier account of the incompatibility of stuffs at the “ultimate material core of meaning [*sachhaltige letzte Bedeutungskerne*]”) is not only something that can be analyzed retrospectively, on the basis of concrete judgments; it is something we can already discover via the transcendental-logical analysis of the *possibilities* for judgment, even in cases where eventual determination—the fulfillment of a subset of anticipated “stocks of sense” in an intended object—has not yet occurred.

Significance and the Harmonious Unity of Possible Experience

Thus far I have reconstructed Husserl’s notion of significance only by *via negativa*, in terms of *violations* of the requirements of formal compatibility of core forms and material compatibility of core stuffs. Do Husserl’s references to significance also allow for a *positive* characterization of the latter notion? To see how they do, we can begin by expressing the basic constituents of (3) in a That- clause, in the same manner as (1) above:

(4) That the sum is equal to the color red is...

(1) presented a state of affairs with significance (the door being open) via a That-clause which counts as a meaningful expression regardless of the truth value of the judgment corresponding to it, because it refers to a categorial object (and more specifically to that object’s noematic sense or core). In (4), however, if we try to fill in for the ellipses in order to embed the That-clause in a

complete sentence, we can do so intelligibly only if the rest of the sentence is taken to refer to the That-clause *as a linguistic meaning*: while it may make sense to say

(5) That the sum is equal to the color red is incoherent

it does not make sense to say

(6) That the sum is equal to the color red is lovely

unless, perhaps, I am expressing aesthetic approval of a bizarre linguistic formulation found in a surrealist literary work. In such a case, (6) would be parsed more correctly as an elliptical form of something like “That *she [the author] says that* ‘the sum is equal to the color red’ is lovely.” And this, in turn, is intelligible insofar as the object is not the purported state of affairs but rather the author’s (or the text’s) *saying*. In both (5) and (6), if we pose the question, *What* is incoherent/lovely? our answer seems necessarily to refer to a linguistic object; there is no underlying non-linguistic *Sachlage* capable of founding the judgment and thereby constituting a state of affairs. Put differently, in order to make sense of these propositions as judgments, we have to, as it were, read quotation marks indicative of expression into them.³¹ What we really mean in this abnormal case is something like:

³¹ In the *Logical Investigations*, Husserl calls this sort of case a “heterogrammatical mode of expression” that “functions abnormally” (Husserl 2000, 514/ 1984, 331). My analysis suggests that this critique of heterogrammaticality can be transposed from the level of expressions and *Bedeutung*, considered for the most part noetically, to the later-emphasized, broader level of *Sinn* and *Sinnhaftigkeit*, considered also noematically, where

(5b) That “the sum is equal to the color red” is incoherent.

Or

(6b) That “the sum is equal to the color red” is lovely.

By contrast, it *does* make sense—quite normally without quotation—to say

(7) That the door is open is lovely.

I might say this in any number of everyday situations, e.g., when expressing my approval at the transparency with which an academic department conducts its meetings, or when seated inside at a restaurant on one of the first warm days of spring. In saying this, I am not predicating loveliness of an *expression* about open doors, but rather of a categorial object, a state of affairs in lived experience. On the Husserlian account, in (7), unlike in (5) and (6), there is a *Sachlage* that is *and was*, in the manner I have been attempting to isolate, *already meaningful*, prior to the judgment, and which indeed essentially founds the judgment and its corresponding expression. The fact that there is such a possible meaning-object (or harmonious collection of non-situation objects) *just is* the fact that there is significance. And this fact can be established even in the absence of the

the relevant notion of grammar is prelinguistic rather than linguistic. As I note below, however, this analysis of formal or syntactical components (core forms) is complemented by an analysis of material components (core stuffs).

concrete presence of the object—as it just was for you, the reader, if you followed the explanation in the previous sentences while an open door was not perceptually present.

But what ultimately *determines* that there is a meaning-object in (7) and not in the previous cases? With regard to core forms, (5), (6), and (7) all employ proto-syntactically compatible substantival and adjectival forms: none of these examples is senseless (*Unsinn*). In (5) and (6), however, the core stuffs that provide the “material filling” of the respective substantival and adjectival forms do not go together materially, whereas in (7) they do. Recall, from Section II, my analysis of Husserl’s claim from *Ideas I* (itself a modification of a claim in the Fourth Logical Investigation) that, concerning the horizons of future possible experience “*we are not completely free*, insofar as it is incumbent upon us to proceed in the sense of a *coherent* sequence of intuitions” (Husserl 2014, 297-98/ 1995, 345-6; cited above). In *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, immediately after the account of significance I have discussed above, Husserl claims similarly that “[p]rior to all judging, there is a universal experiential basis. It is always presupposed as a *harmonious unity of possible experience*. In this harmony, everything has ‘to do’ materially with everything else” (Husserl 1969, 218/ 1974, 226). It should be clear from the considerations above that the ultimate determinants of this coherence or harmony cannot be contingent or idiomatic features of linguistic usage, since on Husserl’s account these features are already founded upon and presuppose such compatibility. While I have presented this in the previous sections, in the case of categorial intuitions, via the numbered sentences characteristic of linguistic analysis, for Husserl the ultimate level here is not language or concepts but *noematic core stuffs*, at the level of intentionality as such.

Of course, the above question might be posed again at this level: What *originally determines* this material harmonious unity—the material compatibility in (7) and material

incompatibility in (5) and (6)? But it follows from my interpretation above that—at least from the standpoint of Husserl’s theory of meaning and judgment and his conception of transcendental logic—there is no room for any further explanation of the harmony of core stuffs that would not already presuppose it. At this point in the analysis, from Husserl’s standpoint, the explanatory project of the theory of meaning has reached bedrock, and our spade is turned: we can offer nothing further than description responsive to the actual *and possible* content of the objects—the things themselves. There may be more to say about the prior experiences through which *we arrived at* this harmony, but there is nothing more to say about its *predetermination as such*.

Conclusion

I have argued that Husserl’s operative notion of significance can be interpreted as the predetermined harmonious unity of the possible sense of experience as logically constrained by the formal compatibility of core forms and the material compatibility of core stuffs at the deepest level of noematic analysis, and that it is this significance that ultimately grounds linguistic meaning and predicative judgment. As I suggested at the outset of this paper, insofar as this serves as a further explication of the ultimate preconditions for experience being meaningful at all, even if only in an anticipatory and partially indeterminate manner, and without the exactness provided by linguistic predication, this notion can be seen to make room for the more “existential” sort of meaning characteristically discussed by Continental philosophers, in which meaning appears in the context of human life as indeterminate, inexact, or uncertain.³²

³² Space constraints do not allow me to spell out this notion more fully here. For a related account of the broader

Mainstream work on the theory of meaning in the twentieth century has not so much rejected this Husserlian approach as remained ignorant of or ignored it, due in part to Husserl's failure to adopt the advancements of quantificational logic, in part to the overwhelming influence of the linguistic turn, and in general to the deepening chasm between Continental and analytic methods. It is hoped that the interpretation offered here shows how it is possible for a theory of meaning to help bridge that chasm by keeping concerns for exactness and precision and concerns for fidelity to the indeterminacies of lived experience fully and simultaneously in view.³³

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conception of meaning in the Continental tradition, but framed in the more traditional register of linguistic analysis, see Martinich 2013. My suspicions about the fruitfulness of such a framing should be clear from the present essay.

³³ Earlier versions of parts of this paper were presented at meetings of the American Philosophical Association, Central Division (2019); the Husserl Circle (2018, 2016); the Creighton University Philosophy Papers in Progress series (2018); and the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (2016). Thanks to respondents and audiences at those meetings for valuable discussion and feedback.

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