

# Journal for the History of Analytical Philosophy

Volume 9, Number 11

## Editor in Chief

Audrey Yap, University of Victoria

## Editorial Board

Annalisa Coliva, UC Irvine  
Vera Flocke, Indiana University, Bloomington  
Henry Jackman, York University  
Kevin C. Klement, University of Massachusetts  
Consuelo Preti, The College of New Jersey  
Marcus Rossberg, University of Connecticut  
Anthony Skelton, Western University  
Mark Textor, King's College London

## Editor for Special Issues

Frederique Janssen-Lauret, University of Manchester

## Review Editors

Sean Morris, Metropolitan State University of Denver  
Sanford Shieh, Wesleyan University

## Design and Layout

Daniel Harris, Hunter College  
Kevin C. Klement, University of Massachusetts

ISSN: 2159-0303

[jhaponline.org](http://jhaponline.org)

© 2021 Jacob Rump

## The Fate of the Act of Synthesis: Kant, Frege, and Husserl on the Role of Subjectivity in Presentation and Judgment

Jacob Rump

I investigate the role of the subject in judgment in Kant, Frege, and Husserl, situating it in the broader and less-often-considered context of their accounts of presentation (*Vorstellung*) as well as judgment. Contemporary philosophical usage of “representation” tends to elide the question of what Kant called the constitution of content, because of a reluctance, traced to Frege’s anti-psychologism, to attend to subjectivity. But for Kant and Husserl, anti-psychologism allows for synthesis as the subjective act necessary for both “mere presentation” and judgment. In *Begriffsschrift*, Frege alludes to a significant logical role for the subjective act of judgment, and in later work, traces of this logical role remain in the intensional notions of grasping a thought and judging as acknowledging its truth. But Frege’s anti-psychologism blocks interpreting these subjective notions in term of synthesis. Although similar in certain ways to Frege and equally anti-psychologistic, Husserl’s theory of judgment in the *Logical Investigations* maintains a role for subjective syntheses for presentations *and* judgments, and goes beyond Kant in allowing for a kind of objectivity at the level of non-judgment presentations. These two great anti-psychologists at the dawn of the parallel heydays of linguistic and phenomenological analysis are thus differentiated by the fates they assign to the act of synthesis.

*Special Issue:* Frege in Philosophical-Historical Context  
Edited by Sanford Shieh and Juliet Floyd

# The Fate of the Act of Synthesis: Kant, Frege, and Husserl on the Role of Subjectivity in Presentation and Judgment

Jacob Rump

## 1. Introduction

The theory of judgment plays a central role in the history of early analytic philosophy, and connects it with important dimensions of the Kantian and neo-Kantian traditions that preceded it. The theory of judgment also distinguishes early analytic philosophy from work on similar topics later in the twentieth century that moved away from the focus on judgment as the touchstone for logic and bears important similarities to and differences with work on judgment in the early period of phenomenology. This paper investigates the theory of judgment in Kant, Frege, and Husserl by situating it in a broader and less-often-considered context: the authors' accounts of the presentation (*Vorstellung*) of content, and the question of the role of subjectivity in both presentation and judgment.

From the Fregean perspective, the topic of this paper may seem ill destined from the start: isn't the role of the subject and the analysis of merely subjective mental contents precisely what Frege ruled out in his crusade against psychologism? I argue that while this characterization is accurate for Frege's conception of judgment after the introduction of the *Sinn-Bedeutung* distinction in the early 1890s, his position is more ambivalent in the earlier *Begriffshrift*. This ambivalence can be understood as a Kantian heritage, and from the Kantian perspective Frege's later position, which banishes the notion of presentation from

logical considerations due to its connotations of subjectivity, is not necessarily superior. For it misses—or, rather, rules out—the important Kantian notion that judgments, as well as the presentations that underlie them, are synthetic acts of the subject. This emphasis on the synthetic act is maintained in Husserl's *Logical Investigations*, and in a way that—on the phenomenologist's view—does not invite psychologism by infecting objectivity with a problematically empirical subjectivity. In the second edition of the *Logical Investigations*, these issues are presented as central to the delimitation of the unique domain of phenomenology. Thus the two great anti-psychologists at the dawn of the parallel heydays of linguistic and phenomenological analysis can be usefully differentiated by the respective fates they assign to the act of synthesis.

At the heart of this difference is a puzzle about the role of the subject in judgment—what David Bell has described as “the seeming impossibility of ascribing to subjectivity an ineliminable role in judging, without thereby imperiling the very possibility of judgements that are objective.” (Bell 1987, 222) On the one hand, judgment seems to be an inescapably subjective act or action: part of what makes the judgment a judgment is the fact that it is an accomplishment of the judger. On the other hand, insofar as it is subjective, it is not clear how judging could result in the sort of objectivity that it must result in in order for judgments to stand at the basis of an account of logic and of knowledge.

In Section 2, I show how Kant wrestled with this issue in part by expanding its scope from the domain of judgment alone to the epistemically prior domain of presentations or representations (*Vorstellungen*). The contested status of this Kantian term lurks in the background of the theories of judgment of Frege and Husserl. Kant's account of *Vorstellungen* is closely tied to his considerations of the role of the subject in judging via the act of synthesis, considerations which I show stem from his transcendental-epistemological concerns.

In Section 3 I turn to Frege: In his later work, Frege associates the Kantian notion of presentation exclusively with the psychological, and thus banishes all discussion of it from his account of the logical. However, in the earlier *Begriffshrift*, he still includes a significant role for the subjective act, as indicated by his use of the terms *Vorstellung* and *Vorstellungsverbindung* in the account of judgable content, and his introduction of the judgment stroke. In the later work, a trace of the role of the subjective act can still be found in the notion of the “grasping” of a thought (propositional or sentential intension). But neither the earlier nor the later notions of the subjective act can be interpreted in terms of the Kantian conception of *synthesis*. At the dawn of linguistic analysis, synthesis is fated to be a disappearing act.

In Section 4 I turn to Husserl, in whose work a role for the subjective act of synthesis is maintained. According to Husserl’s phenomenological conception of analysis, despite concerns about psychologism similar to Frege’s, accounting for objective content requires epistemological as well as logical considerations. These epistemological considerations, on Husserl’s view, demand rather than rule out attention to synthesis as a subjective act of content-constitution, since the fulfilment of intentional acts—which, rather than linguistically modelled intensions, are the basis of Husserl’s theory of judgment—is conceived as an act of synthesis. Husserl’s account of judgment and presentation in the *Logical Investigations* thus not only marks the beginnings of the breakaway of phenomenology from more linguistically oriented forms of analysis; it also constitutes a continuation of the Kantian account of the subjective act of synthesis in its theory of judgment and presentation. Indeed, it goes beyond Kant in explicitly allowing for a certain “narrow” conception of objectivity, and not mere subjective validity, in syntheses at the level of mere presentations. At the dawn of phenomenological analysis, the act of synthesis is destined for a happier fate.

## 2. Kant

### 2.1. “*Vorstellung*”

The differences between Frege and Husserl that I focus on below stem from their different ways of taking up the Kantian and neo-Kantian theory of judgment, especially in relation to term “*Vorstellung*.”<sup>1</sup> Painting in broad brushstrokes, we can say that, for Kant, the term marks the meaningful engagement between mind and world. Content is constituted or placed before—*stellt vor*—the mind via acts of *synthesis*. Some further discussion of issues surrounding the translation of “*Vorstellung*” will serve to introduce the key aspects of the Kantian picture for the interpretation of Frege and Husserl that follows.

On the one hand, translating the term as “idea” (as in, e.g., translations of Frege’s “The Thought”) fails to capture the sense in which *Vorstellungen* present the world to me via my outer experience, and not merely via inner episodes; in the Kantian context, *Vorstellungen* are not mere acts of introspection. Kant’s theory of judgment and presentation can be read as a theory of intentionality, and in this respect, although the objects of presentations of outer intuition are existence-independent, the connection between the subject’s presentations and a world to which they in principle refer is built into the *Vorstellungen* themselves, insofar as they are intentional entities.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>*Vorstellung* is a common German word that was often employed as a term of art in Germanophone logic and epistemology in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It has no exact equivalent in English. Common translations are *presentation*, *representation*, *idea*, *image*, *belief*, but none of these fully capture the meaning of the term, which has several related but distinct senses even in everyday German usage. I justify my preference for “presentation” below.

<sup>2</sup>Pereboom (1988) explicates Kant’s intentionality by “moving from discourse about intentional relations to the semantic level, the level of discourse about sentences reporting intentional relations.” While I agree that Kant’s theory is intentional, I find this shift of levels to be problematic, for reasons which should become clear below.

On the other hand, the more common translation of *Vorstellung* as “representation” has the problematic implication of a mere discovery or mimetic copying of something existing independently in the world, which is misleading in the other direction, since in the Kantian context the term *Vorstellung* is bound up with the process of *constitution*, which need not be a *re-presenting* of anything. (Kitcher 1990, 66) Take the following passage summarizing the basic thesis of transcendental idealism from the *Transcendental Aesthetic*:

[A]ll our intuition is nothing but the *Vorstellung* of appearance [*Erscheinung*]; . . . the things that we intuit are not in themselves what we intuit them to be, nor are their relations so constituted in themselves as they appear to us; and. . . if we remove our own subject or even only the subjective constitution [*Beschaffenheit*] of the senses in general, then all constitution, all relations of objects in space and time, indeed space and time themselves would disappear, and as appearances they cannot exist in themselves, but only in us. (Kant 1781-87 [1998], A42/B59–60)

Though we are apt not to notice, due to present-day reliance on the term, the translation of *Vorstellung* as “representation” here would not make literal sense; the whole point of the sentence is that appearances—the way things appear to us—cannot be taken as equivalent to the way things are in themselves. Thus the *Vorstellung* at the level of appearance, prior to judgment (what I will hereafter call a *first-level Vorstellung*) is neither a re-presentation of a prior appearance nor a presentation of a presentation, as the term “representation” as an ordinary, non-philosophical-jargon term would suggest; there is no prior, subject-independent appearance already in the world that is being copied or repeated by the subject. The *Vorstellung* is first constituted in and by the subjective, synthetic act.

The term *Vorstellung* appears not only in Kant’s discussions of intuition, belonging to the faculty of sensibility, but also in his considerations of judgment, belonging to the faculty of

the understanding. Kant claims that all actions [*Handlungen*] of the understanding can be traced back to judgments. (1781-87 [1998], A69/B94) Cognition in the understanding takes place not through first-level *Vorstellungen* in the form of intuitions immediately related to objects, but through second-level *Vorstellungen* in the form of concepts only mediately related to objects. Thus, in the case of judgment, we do indeed have a presentation of a presentation: Kant defines judgment as “the mediate cognition of an object, hence the presentation of a presentation [*Vorstellung einer Vorstellung*] of it.” (Kant 1781-87 [1998], A68/B93; compare Shieh 2019, 20–27, 39) But this characterization applies only to the second level of *Vorstellungen*, not to the first.

The difference between first and second-level *Vorstellungen*—between mere presentations and higher-level presentations in judgment—coincides in Kant with the distinction between subjective and objective validity. (1781-87 [1998], B141) Subjective validity—as exhibited, e.g., in the *Prolegomena*’s account of “judgments of perception” (1783 [2004], 4:299)—concerns the merely “empirical, hence contingent” relation between *Vorstellungen* in the perception of an individual subject. In the case of objective validity, by contrast, “these two *Vorstellungen* are combined in the object, i.e., regardless of any difference in the condition of the subject, and are not merely found together in perception.” (1781-87 [1998], B141–42)<sup>3</sup>

But the fact that the validity accorded to the second level is considered objective rather than subjective does not imply that at this second level there is no contribution of the subject. Rather, the fact that both levels involve a sort of subjective act points to a continuity between them, a continuity that is central for the Kantian account of constitution and that is marked by Kant’s use of the same term for both. In light of these considerations, I will

<sup>3</sup>The relationship between the *Prolegomena*’s “judgments of perception” and subjective validity as the latter features in the first *Critique* has received ample attention in the literature. For a helpful recent overview and novel interpretation, see Sethi (2020).

use “presentation” to translate “*Vorstellung*” for all authors in the remainder of this essay.<sup>4</sup>

## 2.2. “Representation” and the role of subjectivity in transcendental logic

Today, we are so accustomed to peculiar, counter-intuitive usages of the term “representation” in the philosophy of mind and epistemology that these considerations may well appear pedantic. But contemporary usage of “representation” covers over and allows us to ignore the question, from a meaning-theoretic standpoint, of the origin of the content that is represented: how does that content *as content*, and not merely as a bundle of empirical sensations, *arise*? How does it *become meaningful*? A central motivation for ignoring this question is that it seems to invite problematic considerations of subjectivity. As Bell notes, such considerations have been conspicuously absent from twentieth-century analytic philosophy—an absence that can be attributed, at least in part, to the influence of Frege’s anti-psychologism. As a result, “suspicion of the subjective has led contemporary philosophers to approach notions like thought, understanding, meaning, and judgement as though objectivity, reflexivity, and rationality were the sole areas of legitimate philosophical concern.” (Bell 1987, 224)

---

<sup>4</sup>The term “presentation” has its problems as well. For instance, it might still be taken to imply that the thing presented exists independently of the creative act of the subject, even if it does not suggest, as does “representation” that the thing can be or already has been made present independent of that act. If careful attention is not paid to the differences between the two levels at which presentations are operative in Kant’s account as discussed earlier in this paragraph and in more detail below, it might also be taken to imply the false view that presentations offer immediate access in the case of judgements. Despite these shortcomings, the term seems obviously preferable to “idea,” with its Early-Modern and empirical-idealist colorings, and to “representation,” for reasons related to its contemporary usage as discussed in the following paragraph.

Read in line with this contemporary usage, the above-discussed translation of “*Vorstellung*” as “representation” seems to rely on the same assumption underlying the suspicion of the subjective: it presupposes a fundamental, principled division between an individual, subjective mind and a separate, independent, objective world, where the subject’s role is to be analyzed from an empirical perspective, as a non-content-providing judge, and where the content exists independently of the acts of that judge. In short, “representation” smuggles in the assumption of the *subject-independence of objective content*, and is able to cover its tracks because the common construal of representations in terms of propositions or concepts positions content as simply already present in our language. But this assumption is foreign to Kant, whose methodology was not linguistic analysis and for whom, as the block quote above suggests, subjectivity plays a necessary role in the constitution of appearances, and thus—insofar as we cannot know the world in itself but only through such appearances—is a necessary condition for objectivity.

The challenge is to specify what exactly this necessary role of subjectivity amounts to. As Kant notes in the passage, we can view this necessity either from the standpoint of our “own subject,” or from the perspective of the “subjective constitution of the senses in general.” The latter standpoint corresponds to Kant’s discussion of “the transcendental unity of apperception” which unifies and connects disparate presentations into a single stream of experience (1781-87 [1998], A108) or the “‘I think’ which must be able to accompany all of my presentations.” (1781-87 [1998], B132) From either perspective, there is no appearance without a subject to whom it appears. When we view this necessity from the standpoint of “our own subject,” we tend to think of it as mere *empirical* necessity: of course *I* need to be (physically) present in order for things to appear *to me*. Kant’s point, however, is not empirical but transcendental. It concerns the possibility of appearance as such: the very notion of the appearance of a presentation implies a subject who could be having it; otherwise it



would not be (logically) possible to think thoughts about that object. In Kant's words, "something would be presented in me that could not be thought at all, which is as much as to say that the presentation would either be impossible or at least would be nothing for me." (1781-87 [1998], B132) For Kant, subjectivity is transcendently necessary for presentation and for judgment.

This consideration of the role of subjectivity arises from the standpoint of what Kant calls transcendental logic. Kant distinguishes between general logic, which abstracts away from the relation to the object as the content of cognition and thus from the faculty of sensibility (1781-87 [1998], A55/B79, A132/B171), and transcendental logic, which is not abstracted from sensibility outright but only from that which is empirical in it. (1781-87 [1998], A55/B80–A57/B81) When he derives the pure categories of the understanding beginning from the analysis of judgment (1781-87 [1998], A69/B94), this task is ascribed to transcendental rather than general logic:

Analytically, different presentations are brought under the same concept (a business [*Geschäft*] treated by general logic). Transcendental logic, however, teaches how to bring under concepts not the presentations but the pure synthesis of presentations... The same function that gives unity to the different presentations in a judgment also gives unity to the mere synthesis of different presentations in an intuition, which, expressed generally, is called the pure concept of the understanding. The same understanding, therefore, and indeed by means of the very same actions [*Handlungen*] through which it brings the logical form of a judgment into concepts by means of the analytical unity, also brings a transcendental content into its presentations by means of the synthetic unity of the manifold in general, on account of which they are called pure concepts of the understanding that pertain to objects *a priori*; this can never be accomplished by general logic. (Kant 1781-87 [1998], A78/B104–A79/B105, translation modified)

General logic is not capable of accomplishing this task, insofar as it cannot treat of the synthesis of presentations—the way in which they are brought together in the stream of experience

(further discussed below). Since it treats its subject matter analytically, it is not in the "business" of considering the subject as the point of origination or production of the presentation in a synthesis. But the very same action of the understanding that general logic views exclusively in formal terms is viewed by transcendental logic also in terms of a peculiar sort of content. This content is termed transcendental rather than empirical insofar as the "business" of transcendental logic is focused exclusively on the *a priori* possibility of presentational content. Transcendental logic thus requires the consideration of sensibility, but in its *a priori*, non-empirical aspects, not in terms of the empirical content of particular sensations.

### 2.3. Synthesis

Kant frames treatment of this transcendental content by transcendental logic in terms of the action (or act) of synthesis.<sup>5</sup> Wayne Martin has argued that the resulting conception of judgment as synthesis is the most fundamental of Kant's "loans" from the logic of his predecessors, and one that makes his work in logic and epistemology implicitly phenomenological: the construal of judgment as a kind of combination or synthesis allows Kant to focus on its phenomenological—as opposed to empirical—character as an act. (Martin 2006, 44) For Kant, the principles of this *a priori* synthesis belong to the critique of transcendental cognition, which he characterizes as "occupied not so much with objects but rather with our mode of cognition of objects insofar as this is to be possible *a priori*." (Kant 1781-87 [1998], A12/B25) Thus while individual synthetic acts indeed take place in the spatio-temporal world and thus can always be considered em-

<sup>5</sup>I take Kant to use *Handlung* (translated by Guyer and Wood as "action") and *Aktus* (translated as "act"), synonymously in the first *Critique*. Compare Kant's discussion of "actions of the understanding" [*Handlungen des Verstandes*] at A69/B94 (cited above) and "act of the understanding" [*Aktus des Verstandes*] at B111. Compare Longuenesse (2017, note 5 to section 5.5.1).

pirically, in transcendental logic they are being considered not from the empirical standpoint according to which they belong to the same domain of experience as the objects they present, but rather from the standpoint of the experiential structures of the subject that are the conditions of possibility of the content in and through which those objects are presented. Seen in this light, Kant's account can be considered phenomenological, not in the sense that it is concerned with the qualia or introspective feel of what it is like for individuals to judge, but in the sense that it accepts the subjective act of synthesis as a necessary condition *qua* structure of subjectivity for evidence in epistemology and logic.

But this Kantian phenomenology of synthesis is not limited to subjective acts at the level of judgment. As the block quote above suggests, the "same function" of synthesis is also operative at the level of subjective acts epistemically prior to judgment—the level of "mere synthesis of different presentations in an intuition" or what I have above called the first level of presentations. The non-empirical notion of a synthetic, subjective act is thus responsible for the continuity of Kant's account of constitution of content from its beginnings in the transcendental unity of apperception to its refinement in judgments in the understanding:

[T]he spontaneity of our thought requires that this manifold [of intuition] first be gone through, taken up, and combined in a certain way in order for a cognition to be made out of it. I call this action [*Handlung*] synthesis. . . The synthesis of a manifold, however, (whether it be given empirically or *a priori*) first brings forth a cognition, which to be sure may initially still be raw and confused, and thus in need of analysis; yet the synthesis alone is that which properly collects the elements for cognitions and unifies them into a certain content; it is therefore the first thing to which we have to attend if we wish to judge about the first origin of our cognition. (Kant 1781-87 [1998], A77/B103–A78/B104)

Synthesis is in fact already operative for Kant—even prior to presentation—in the "synthesis of apprehension in intuition" through which all cognitions are subjected to the inner sense—to

time. (1781-87 [1998], A99) It is this prior synthesis of apprehension which *provides for* the synthesis of the manifold described in the passage above, and thus for first-level presentations, in what Kant calls the "synthesis of reproduction in the imagination." (1781-87 [1998], A100)<sup>6</sup>

The A-Deduction places greater emphasis on this synthesis of the imagination, and presents it as a separate, non-intellectual form of synthesis which is the active process of a transcendental subject, independently of the conceptual contributions of the understanding. This has the effect of emphasizing the way in which, just as presentations are not exclusively in the purview of the judgment for Kant, the act of synthesis for Kant is not exclusively in the purview of the *conceptual*. While it yields only a subjective form of validity, and not the objective validity characteristic of the understanding and cognition at the level of judgment, in the A-Deduction Kant insists that synthesis at this prior level is still an important component of "the transcendental ground of the possibility of all cognition in general." The A-Deduction was for this reason especially important for phenomenologists such as Husserl and Heidegger, in whom the project of Kant's epistemology was taken up in a way that sought to preserve (and expand upon), rather than banish, Kant's account of the role of transcendental subjectivity in the *synthetic constitution of content* for judgment, and not merely for the judgment as such. (Rump 2020)

Judgment and its accompanying "second-level" presentation occur via yet a third synthesis, the "synthesis of recognition," and it is here, via "synthesis in accordance with concepts" that we achieve objective validity, in the purview of the understanding and cognition proper. (Kant 1781-87 [1998], B104) The B-

<sup>6</sup>Kant claims "The synthesis of apprehension is. . . inseparably combined with the synthesis of reproduction. And since the former constitutes the transcendental ground of the possibility of all cognition in general (not only of empirical, but also of pure *a priori* cognition), the reproductive synthesis of the imagination belongs among the transcendental actions of the mind." (1781-87 [1998], A102)

Deduction places greater emphasis on this higher-level conceptual function of synthesis, which Kant also calls “intellectual synthesis,” and the transcendental unity of apperception is derived via transcendental argument. The constitutive role of subjective validity is thereby de-emphasized, and references to the *Prolegomena*’s “judgments of perception” are dropped. (Sethi 2020) Alongside the translation of *Vorstellung* as “representation,” this has the effect of downplaying the importance of the subjective side of synthesis in Kant’s account and playing up the role of concepts in synthesis.<sup>7</sup> This was the more influential version of the Deduction among the neo-Kantians, who were in turn an influence on Frege (see Gabriel 2013). As we might expect given this lineage, with regard to the theory of judgment, Frege’s considerations come closest to Kant’s with regard to the second level of presentations—those appearing in judgments. The status of presentations in Frege at what Kant considered the first level is quite a bit more complicated. These complications sealed the fate of the act of synthesis in Frege and the tradition of analysis that followed him.

### 3. Frege

#### 3.1. The changing role of *Vorstellungen* in Frege’s theory of judgment

As of the *Grundlagen* (1884 [1953]), Frege associated the term *Vorstellung* exclusively with the experiential, subjective, and thus for him psychological presentation of content in the mind of an

<sup>7</sup>Compare Pereboom’s attempted corrective: “Judgment consists in a single act in which the mind apprehends an object by means of a concept. All the intentionality is contained within this act of the mind. There is no description of what it is for a concept, as an entity, to have the capability of representing things mediately by itself. For Kant these are capabilities not of concepts but of the understanding, capabilities exercised in acts of judgment. Kantian concepts are best viewed not as entities which represent on their own, but as abstractions from these cognitive capabilities exercised in judgment.” (1988, 328)

individual, and strictly separated it from his account of content in the a priori, objective sphere of mathematics and logic. This quarantining of presentation continues through uninterrupted into Frege’s much later work,<sup>8</sup> where the term appears most prominently as the subjective, contrast case to the objective notion of “thoughts” [*Gedanken*]: whereas thoughts are objective and subsist in a third realm, guaranteeing that the content in the purview of logic and determinations of truth value are properly objective, presentations are the merely subjective acts of individual thinkers, the realm of “the mental process of thinking and the psychological laws in accordance with which it takes place.” (Frege 1918 [1956], 289)<sup>9</sup>

In the *Grundlagen*, while Frege acknowledges that Kant used the term in an objective sense connected with the faculty of the understanding, he says that he sees in this use nothing but confusion, and presents his own more restricted use as the antidote to the problematic intermixing of the psychological with the logical:

A presentation [*Vorstellung*] in the subjective sense is what is governed by the psychological laws of association; it is of a sensible pictorial character. A presentation in the objective sense belongs to logic and is in principle non-sensible, although the word which means an objective presentation is often accompanied by a subjective presentation which nevertheless is not its meaning. Subjective presentations are often demonstrably different in different men, objective presentations are the same for all. Objective presentations can be divided into objects and concepts. I shall, myself, to

<sup>8</sup>For the remainder of this essay, phrases like “Frege’s later work,” “the later Frege,” etc., refer to the period subsequent to the introduction of the *Sinn/Bedeutung* distinction in the early 1890s, culminating in the connected essays “The Thought” and “Negation,” first published in 1918. References to “the early Frege” or “Frege’s earlier work” refer roughly the period of the *Begriffshrift*. Finer-grained periodic differentiations of Frege’s position are of course possible, but exceed the scope of this essay.

<sup>9</sup>In addition to this and the passage from the *Grundlagen* cited above, see the explicit association of *Vorstellung* (translated by the Quintons as “Idea”) with psychology at Frege (1918 [1956], 308).



avoid confusion, use presentation only in the subjective sense. It is because Kant associated both meanings with the word that his doctrine assumed such a very subjective, idealist coloring, and his true view was made so difficult to discover. *The distinction here drawn stands or falls with that between psychology and logic. If only these themselves were to be kept always rigidly distinct!* (Frege 1884 [1953], 37, note to §27, translation modified)

This explicit limiting of the term in the *Grundlagen* sets the stage for its use in Frege's later work. The limitation is somewhat surprising, however, given that only five years earlier, in the *Begriffshrift* (1879), the term *Vorstellung* is accorded a central role in Frege's treatment of judgment.

Take the account of judgment in *Begriffshrift* §2, where Frege introduces the judgment stroke. In distinguishing between the judgment stroke and the content stroke, Frege writes, "if the small vertical stroke at the left end of the horizontal one [the judgment stroke] is omitted, then the judgement will be transformed into a mere *combination of presentations* [*Vorstellungsverbindung*], of which the writer does not state whether he recognizes its truth or not." (1879 [1997], 52)<sup>10</sup> Frege further describes such a combination of presentations as that which, when represented by an appropriate symbol following the content stroke, counts as a "judgeable content." (1879 [1997], 53) The example he provides of unjudgeable content is the simple presentation "house." The contrast case, a judgeable content containing "house," is further characterized as a circumstance [*Umstand*]: "the circumstance that there are houses (or that there is a house) would be a judgeable content. The presentation 'house' is only a part of this." (1879 [1997], 53, note, translation modified). A complete judgeable (but not necessarily judged) content is thus not a singular presentation but a combination (*Verbindung*) of them—a notion suggestive of Kant's "mere synthesis of different presentations in an intuition" at the first level of presentation, which Kant characterizes in terms of mere subjective validity. In the

<sup>10</sup>Beaney translates the term "complex of ideas."

*Begriffshrift*, then, "presentation," in the guise of a "combination of presentations," still plays a central role in Frege's account of judgment.

In the text of Phillip Jourdain's (1980) account of §2 in his well-known summary of the *Begriffshrift*, the term "combination of presentations" is followed by a note marking Frege's own 1910 addendum to Jourdain's manuscript. Frege writes, closely echoing the passage from the *Grundlagen* cited above, "Instead of this word I now say more simply 'thoughts' [*Gedanke*]. The word 'presentation' is used, now in a psychological, now in a logical sense. Since obscurities arise from this, I have decided not to use it at all in logic." (Frege 1980, 184) With this pronouncement, it is clear that the Kantian conception of the subjective validity of presentations, as merely empirical, falls on the wrong side of Frege's strict distinction between logic and psychology.

Importantly, however, Frege's use of "*Umstand*" rather than "*Satz*" to characterize a combination of presentations suggests that the combination resulting in a judgeable content is *not* the result of linguistic predication linking subject and predicate. In the passage from §2 of the *Begriffshrift* referred to above, it is clear from Frege's analysis that presentational content is not simply an element of expression [*Ausdruck*] or equivalent to *linguistic* content. In his example of the judgment "⊥— A" (read as "Opposite magnetic poles attract one another"), Frege says that "— A" (the content stroke without the judgement stroke), "will not express [*ausdrücken*] this judgment, but should merely arouse [*hervorrufen*] in the reader the presentation of a mutual attraction of opposite magnetic poles. . . In this case we *paraphrase* [*umschreiben*] using the words '*the circumstance* [*Umstand*] *that*' or '*the proposition* [*Satz*] *that*.'" (1879 [1997], 53) Though we may paraphrase them in propositional (or sentential) form, Frege does not claim that the contents of combinations of presentations are as such linguistic or propositional.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup>Compare Shieh (2019, 39), who interprets Frege as suggesting that a content may be a representation of a representation, a proposition, or a circumstance.

It is tempting to downplay the importance of this observation, given the lasting influence of the linguistic turn and our contemporary way of thinking about logic as primarily concerned with consequence—both notions that suggest the primacy of the proposition as the unit of analysis. But seen in historical—especially Kantian and neo-Kantian—context, this conception is inaccurate. Frege shares with his German-language contemporaries and predecessors the notion that logic is primarily concerned with inference, where the fundamental unit of analysis is not the propositions that are the contents of the expressions of arguments, but rather the inferential relations that hold in the judgments those arguments express (Smith 2009, 645, 655; Martin 2006, 88). In the *Begriffshrift*, it is judgment itself, which we paraphrase in propositions, that is fundamentally at issue.<sup>12</sup>

In Frege’s later work, by contrast, his insistence on the priority of judgments over concepts, working in tandem with the context principle and the *Sinn/Bedeutung* distinction, yields a conception of analysis as beginning from proposition- or sentence-level intensional content and the truth-values that are the references of that content.<sup>13</sup> As Frege notes in Jourdain’s manuscript, after the introduction of the *Sinn/Bedeutung* distinction in the early 1890s, what the *Begriffshrift* called a “combination of presentations” or “judgable content” is re-cast and further sub-divided into the thought (*Gedanke*)—the *Sinn* or intension of a sentence or proposition (*Satz*)—and the truth-value of that thought as its *Bedeutung* (see Frege 1892 [1984], 186).

### 3.2. Judgments and presentations as acts in the *Begriffshrift*

As is well known, the term “judgment” (*Urteil*) contains an act/content or -ing/-ed ambiguity: it may refer to the act of

judging, or to the content judged. The same ambiguity is found in “presentation” (*Vorstellung*).<sup>14</sup> When the later Frege rejects the term “presentation” and further divides the notion of judgeable content in light of the *Sinn/Bedeutung* distinction, both new notions, the thought and its truth-value, are clearly content-notions, insofar as they are propositional or sentential as discussed above. But the precursor conception of a combination of presentations from which these terms evolved is not similarly propositional or sentential. This suggests that, in the less-linguistically oriented analysis of judgment in the *Begriffshrift*, Frege may be more open to the role of such a subjective act-notion than he would be in the later work, where the conception of judgment is more closely tied to his intensional semantics. This subsection explores that possibility with regard to the *Begriffshrift*’s accounts of the judgment stroke and combination of presentations.

Frege contends that acts of judging are not themselves content-providing, but he still takes them to be relevant to inference, and thus to logic, insofar as they are part of the broader analysis of judgment as the central notion in logic. This non-content-providing logical relevance is evident in Frege’s conception of the judgment stroke. As Frege explains in numerous places, and as famously argued in Peter Geach’s (1976) interpretation, the judgment stroke marks a distinction between content that is asserted as true, on the one hand, and content that is merely grasped, as in, e.g., hypothetical statements or the antecedent of a conditional, on the other. The judgment stroke, as contrasted with the content stroke, thus marks the act of *affirming* the judgable content as opposed to merely thinking, grasping, or understanding it, and does not affect the content thereby judged. As a part of his account of logic, of course, this act of affirming cannot be construed in Frege as a *psychological* act. Instead, several recent commentators have argued that we should interpret the

<sup>12</sup>A very similar point is made in Burge (1979, 416–18)

<sup>13</sup>Frege insists on the logical priority of judgments over both propositions and concepts. See Beaney’s introduction to Frege (1997, 13, 16) and Heis (2014).

<sup>14</sup>The explicit noting of the act/content distinction in the context of logic and the theory of judgment can be traced back at least as far as Bolzano. See the editors’ introduction to Moltmann and Textor (2017).

judgment stroke as a means of ascribing logical rather than psychological import to the act of judging itself, independent of its content.

Maria van der Schaar (2018) interprets the judgment stroke as marking the act of judgment “seen from a logical point of view” as opposed to empirically. (2018, 228–32) She treats it as a sign that *shows*, rather than describes, that a judgment has been made—a pragmatic sign of judgmental or assertive force.<sup>15</sup> To say that that the act of judgment can be seen from a logical point of view is not, however, to say that there is a separate *kind of act*—the logical judgment-act—as distinct from the empirical judgment-act. It is rather to say that the same act might be analyzed in either of these two ways, only the former of which is relevant for Frege’s conception of logic.<sup>16</sup>

In another, similar account, Mitchell Green (2002) interprets the judgment stroke as implying “assertoric commitment” rather than marking an individual act of assertion—“an account of commitment preservation that is sensitive to the mode under which a content is accepted as well as to that content.” The mode of acceptance has import independent of content for Frege insofar as “our ability to arrive at knowledge by chains of judgment is constitutive of our rationality no less than is our ability to discern the self-evidence of logical and arithmetical laws.” (2002, 226) In yet another such interpretation, Martin (2006) compares the judgment stroke to the act of signing an official document: the signature does not add new content to the document, but rather serves as an endorsement by the subject of what is al-

<sup>15</sup>Van der Schaar’s (2018) reading also fits with the above-expressed reservations about interpreting Frege’s early work on judgment and inference in a way that is anachronistically over-reliant on the model of his later intensional semantics: on her interpretation, “[b]y using the judgement sign in his logic, Frege goes beyond semantics,” since the logical import of the judgment is not that of linguistic or semantic content, or indeed of any *content* at all.” (2018, 231)

<sup>16</sup>See van der Schaar’s critique of Burge for endorsing the two-act or two kinds of judgment view. (2018, 236–38)

ready asserted as fact in the document. Nicholas Smith similarly interprets the judgment stroke as a *sui generis* sign which is not a content but rather “embodies an action (the action of assertion). When the judgement stroke is present, something is being done (an assertion is being made).” (Smith 2009, 642) All of these recent interpretations share an insistence that the act of judgment—*independent of its content*—has import from a logical as opposed to an empirical or psychological standpoint.

Furthermore, the logical import of this act is a direct result of its being an action of the subject. In an analogy akin to Martin’s, Smith compares the judgment stroke to the act of playing one’s tiles on the board in a game of Scrabble: the combination of tiles (in *Begriffshrift* terms: the combination of presentations or judgeable content) has already been accomplished on one’s own rail before one carries out one’s turn. But in carrying out one’s turn by playing the tiles on the board, one undertakes an action different in kind from the mere arrangement of the tiles: one does not produce additional content, but rather makes a claim to the content by asserting it—presenting or putting it into play. This act of claiming is inherently first personal: only I as the player (the judger) can enact a turn by placing the tiles on the board. But the import of this act is construed logically rather than empirically insofar as it is a matter of inferential or conceptual significance.

At the same time, the act marked by the judgment stroke cannot be interpreted as a descendant of the more specific Kantian notion of the subjective act of *synthesis*. This can be made clearer via a further distinction within notions of the judgment-act. As Michael Kremer has noted, there is arguably an ambiguity in Kant’s account of the act of judging between process and affirmation: judging can be understood either as (1) the “process of generating or grasping a content,” or (2) the “act of deciding for, or affirming this content,” where the content is taken as having been already generated or as already existing. (Kremer 2000, 560) The difference lies, roughly, in whether the act

of judging (1) establishes such content *as* content, or whether it (2) in some way determines that content to be true (I shall refer to these henceforth as (1) act-process and (2) act-affirmation notions). The judgment stroke, construed as a logical act as described above, is clearly an act-affirmation notion, as the notions of assertive force and assertoric commitment both imply. It affirms or shows something about the judgment content, but it does not in any way mark a process that establishes that content *as content*. Since, as an act-affirmation notion, the act of judgment has been divorced from any role in the providing of content, it doesn't make sense to consider it a specifically synthetic act in the Kantian sense of being constitutive or productive of content from a transcendental-logical point of view.

Is there a notion of the synthetic act involved, independent of judgment, in a combination of presentations? Extending Smith's analogy, we could say that the specifically synthetic function that plays a prominent role in Kant's account of first-level presentations, insofar as they are *combinatory*, would be akin to *arranging* the scrabble tiles on one's own rail, prior to playing them on the board. In Frege's *Begriffshrift*, this would correspond to something like the act or process of combining presentations independently of judging them. But, aside from using the compound term *Vorstellungsverbindung*, Frege does not frame presentations or their combinations as acts at this pre-judgment level. We have a notion of presentations in *combination*, but we do not have any account of how this came to be—of *combining*. Although Frege's early use is ambiguous (as he himself admits in the addendum to Jourdain's summary), it is thus more plausible to interpret "combination" in the description of judgable contents as a "combination of presentations" as exclusively a content-notion; the role it plays in Frege's early account of judgment, though suggestive of a role played by the subject, does not depend on its being interpreted as an act at all, and, *ipso facto*, not as a synthetic act. This is also consistent with the replacement of this term in the later work by "thought" (a content-notion), rather than by "grasping" (the act-notion connected to it).

### 3.3. Grasping and judging as acts in later Frege

What about the act of grasping a thought? In the later Frege, grasping is the entertaining of a thought without yet acknowledging it as true. (1918 [1997], 347–48) In the late essay "The Thought," for example, Frege accepts that thoughts can only be experienced insofar as they are apprehended by a thinker. (1918 [1956], 311) Although thoughts are logically independent of the subjects who think them, they are *practically* dependent on the existence of a subject, insofar as thoughts can be apprehended by none other than thinkers, and without at least one instance of such apprehension we could not have discovered the thought in the first place. (Sluga 1980, 115) So in this sense we do have an example of a subjective act in the later Frege, though the act involved is not the act of *judgment* per se.

Is grasping then an act-process or an act-affirmation notion? Following Kant, Kremer groups the notions of process and grasping together: "the process of generating or grasping a content." (2000, 560; cited above) Contra Kremer's Kantian categorization, however, in Frege the notions of process and grasping have come apart: he writes in "The Thought" that "the thinker does not create [thoughts] but must take them as they are. They can be true without being grasped [*Gefasst*] by a thinker and are not wholly unreal even then, at least if they *could* be grasped and by this means brought into operation." (1918 [1956], 311, translation modified) If the grasping does not create the thought but only takes it as it is, it is clearly an act-affirmation notion. And if the act of grasping a thought cannot be conceived as an act-process notion, then, like the act marked by the judgment stroke, *ipso facto* it cannot be an act of synthesis.

In the contemporaneous essay "Negation," Frege explicitly rules out the interpretation of grasping as something like an ordering, combining, or synthesis:

even the act of grasping a thought is not a production of the thought, *is not an act of setting its parts in order*; for the thought was already



true, and so was already there with its parts in order, before it was grasped. A traveler who crosses a mountain-range does not thereby make the mountain-range; no more does the judging subject make a thought by acknowledging its truth. (Frege 1918 [1997], 354, my emphasis)

With the explicit denial that the act of grasping (or thinking) can be understood as an act generating the thought by “setting its parts in order,” the small hint of a role for synthesis found in the early work’s appeal to a “combination of presentations” has faded away.

A notion of the judgment as an act is maintained in the later Frege’s account of judging as acknowledging the truth of a thought.<sup>17</sup> As with grasping, however, this cannot be construed as an act-process notion. A footnote in “Negation” provides a helpful illustration. The footnote occurs in a passage just prior to that quoted above, where Frege is criticizing those who have tried to explain the notion of judgment in terms of “compositeness” [*Zusammengestztheit*]. It begins by clarifying the act/content ambiguity, noting that it is “probably best in accord with ordinary usage if we take judgment to be an act of judging, as a leap is an act of leaping.” The second and final paragraph of the footnote further considers the consequences of treating judgment as an act:

If a judgment is an act, it happens at a certain time and thereafter belongs to the past. With an act there also belongs an agent and we do not know the act completely if we do not know the agent. In that case, we cannot speak of a synthetic judgment in the usual sense. If we call it a synthetic judgment that through two points only one straight line passes, then we are understanding by ‘judgment’ not an act performed by a definite man at a definite time, but something timelessly true, even if its being true is not acknowledged by any human being. If we call this sort of thing a truth, then it may perhaps be better to say ‘synthetic truth’ instead of ‘synthetic judgment.’ If we do nevertheless prefer the expression ‘synthetic

---

<sup>17</sup>For recent interpretations, see Textor (2010); van der Schaar (2018).

judgment,’ we must leave out consideration of the sense of the verb ‘to judge.’ (Frege 1918 [1997], 354)

Frege’s view appears to be that consideration of the judgment as an act cannot amount to anything other than consideration of the performance of a subject at a temporally specific moment—an empirical moment in the thought process of a specific individual. Such an empirical conception of the act of judging cannot play a role in the account of content that is “timelessly true, even if its being true is not acknowledged by any human being,” for the familiar reasons raised by his critique of psychologism.

Alternatively, judgment may be conceived as a non-empirical content-notion, as it is in the last two sentences of the passage above, in which case Frege’s preferred expression is “synthetic truth.” In this case, of course, what is acknowledged as true is the intensional or propositional content of the thought. In a way that mirrors Kant’s change of emphasis from the A to the B-Deduction, in Frege’s later work, once we have a notion of judgment content as in a sense “already” available in the propositional content of a thought, the urgency of the epistemological question of the origin of that content is further displaced or downplayed.<sup>18</sup> As we saw already in the analysis of the judgment stroke above, judgment may not be conceived *as providing content from the logical point of view*, as the notion of “synthetic judgment,” construed as an act, would suggest. For Frege, logic is not synthetic and synthetic acts are not logical, even if some contents of judgments (e.g., those of geometry) may be said to be “synthetic truths” in the Kantian sense. (Dummett 1982)

### 3.4. The disinheritance of synthesis

The previous two subsections have shown that Frege’s account of judgment and presentation stays true to its Kantian heritage

---

<sup>18</sup>This is consistent both with Frege’s neo-Kantian preference for the B-Deduction, as noted above, and with Dummett’s (1982) observation that Frege’s use of the term “intuition” virtually disappears from his work between 1885 and 1924. Further discussion of these issues exceeds my scope here.



insofar as it maintains a place for the subjective act, but increasingly disowns that heritage, for fear of psychologistic disrepute, when it comes to the notion that that act is synthetic or that it plays a role—even a non-empirical role—in the process of the constitution of content. Ultimately, this disinheriting of the synthetic act is tied to his disinheriting of transcendental logic. In Kant’s terminology, Frege’s concerns are limited to general logic.<sup>19</sup> While Frege’s account of judgment and presentation leaves room for interpreting the act as subjective and from a logical standpoint, it does not leave room for a specifically transcendental standpoint—for viewing the act as a *process of the subject constitutive of content from a logical point of view*. There is thus no room for what Kant called “transcendental content”—no room for a consideration of content via the subject that is not *ipso facto* empirical content.

Thus, where Sanford Shieh has recently argued that “Frege is silent on whether judgment has anything to do with the production of content-representations,” (2019, 40) I would go further and say that Frege is silent on this issue because there is no place in his logical system for the work of such synthetic production, and indeed no need for it given his narrower logical concerns. Nothing is left to do that work, because for Frege the subject seen from the empirical standpoint on the act is the only available candidate for doing the combining, and it has been ruled out as belonging to (or at least inviting) psychologism (compare Sluga 1980, 76). The subject seen from the logical standpoint on the act is only a passive affirmer with regard to content; it does not actively synthesize or combine via an act-process. From the logical standpoint, as the image of the traveler on the mountain-range suggests, the most we can say is that the subject is grasping a content-combination that is already objectively there, and in judging, acknowledging that content as true.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup>On Frege’s lack of a distinction between transcendental and pure general logic, see Nunez (2021).

<sup>20</sup>Compare Heis’s discussion of the difference between Frege’s concern in the 1880s with the question of “how concepts are formed” and the later “rather different question how concepts come to be fully grasped.” (2014, 277)

Here, in nascent form, is the assumption of the *subject-independence of objective content* that came to dominate the analytic tradition for much of the twentieth century—the assumption covered over by the widespread adoption of the term “representation” to refer to such content (see Section 2.3). In the Fregean tradition, left without a logical home, the act of synthesis was fated to disappear.

## 4. Husserl

### 4.1. Husserl’s threefold analysis of presentation

A different fate is evident, in a way that more closely echoes Kant, in Husserl. Husserl’s position on presentation and judgment foregrounds rather than distances itself from the synthetic act, and indeed goes beyond Kant in placing the contributions of subjectivity at the forefront of the method of phenomenological analysis. By the turn of the twentieth century, like Frege, Husserl recognized the danger involved in the use of “*Vorstellung*” because of its subjective, psychological connotations.<sup>21</sup> The *Logical Investigations* (2001) presents a theory of logic with a detailed critique of psychologism in the first (1900) volume’s *Prolegomena*, supplemented by related analyses of aspects of the theory of meaning, intentionality, judgment, and epistemology in the numbered Investigations of the second volume (1901; substantial revisions for the 1913 edition).<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup>I ignore in this essay the question of psychologism in Husserl’s thought prior to the *Logical Investigations*. This issue, especially with regard to Frege’s critical review of Husserl’s *Philosophy of Arithmetic*, has been treated in the literature in great detail, and the case for Husserl’s changing his position as a result of Frege’s criticisms has been questioned (see especially Mohanty 1982).

<sup>22</sup>There are important revisions to Husserl’s views in the second edition that go largely unremarked in English-language scholarship on Husserl, especially among historians of analytic philosophy working from Findlay’s English translation of the 1913 edition. The text of the two versions is disambiguated in the German *Husserliana* edition of the *Logical Investigations*. I discuss some of the relevant issues in the final sub-section below, but a detailed treatment

Working in the same broadly Kantian and neo-Kantian historical context as Frege, Husserl marks the distinction discussed above between act-notions and content-notions not only for judgment but also for presentation. (2001, Investigation V, §§32, 45) He explicitly sides with Natorp in ruling out of consideration acts understood from an empirical standpoint, in the sense of mental activities belonging to individual thinkers, but holds onto—and indeed foregrounds—the notion of the act in the Brentanian sense of an intending: “act” for Husserl means “intentional act.” (2001, Investigation V, §13, note 2)<sup>23</sup>

Husserl’s focus on the act from an intentional standpoint and analysis of fundamental concepts in this light allows him to avoid banishing the notion of presentation as a synthetic, content-providing act from the domain of logic outright. Take this passage from the introduction to the second volume of the *Logical Investigations*:

Among our introductory investigations we shall have to raise fundamental questions as to the acts, or, alternatively, the ideal meanings [*Bedeutungen*], which in logic pass under the name of ‘presentations’ [*Vorstellungen*]. The clarification and separation of the many concepts that the word ‘presentation’ has covered, concepts in which the psychological, the epistemological, and the logical are utterly confused, is an important task. Similar analyses deal with the concept of *judgment* in the sense in which logic is concerned with it. . . We are naturally not interested in a psychological theory, but in a phenomenology of presentation and judgement—

exceeds my scope here. For ease of reference across the different editions of the Findlay translation and the *Husserliana* edition, all citations from the *Logical Investigations* are given by section rather than page number.

<sup>23</sup>Sheredos (2017) has argued convincingly that Husserl’s conception of mental acts actually changes to a more activity-oriented conception in the period of *Ideas I* and *II*—a change made possible because of Husserl’s eventual acceptance of the notion of a transcendental ego, to whom—rather than an empirical ego—acts *qua* activities can be described. This reading would accord with many of the claims I advance here, especially concerning changes in the second edition of the *Logical Investigations*, but further examination of this issue exceeds the scope of this essay and I have avoided taking a stand on the issue of precursors to the transcendental ego in Husserl’s early work.

experiences as delimited by our epistemological interests. (Husserl 2001, Introduction to Vol. II, Part 1, §5)

The first sentence distinguishes between the act of presentation and its content (ideal meanings). But the rest of the passage also shows that Husserl is reserving for a usage of “presentation” an act-role that is not fully divorced from logical content. And the reason for this is a certain *epistemological* interest. Whereas Frege’s later use of “presentation” is primarily concerned with a strict separation between two domains, the psychological and the logical, the motivation for Husserl’s consideration of the term is a distinction between three domains: psychological, logical, and epistemological.<sup>24</sup>

The guiding interest here is not the logical per se, but the epistemological—a domain which Husserl clearly associates with phenomenology as a method of analysis.<sup>25</sup> For Husserl, epistemological considerations have an import in their own right that cannot be reduced to their role in logic. Phenomenology for Husserl, like descriptive psychology for Brentano, is a science that *precedes* logic, whereas for Frege logic is the more foundational science and is granted analytical and explanatory priority. (van der Schaar 2018, 235) Thus, while Husserl would agree with the Fregean notion that “it’s logic that underlies anti-psychologism, not *vice versa*,” (Shieh 2019, 48) he would hasten to add that there is yet another methodological element that underlies even logic: phenomenology—a notion contained in the passage cited above under the guise of the “epistemological” notion of presentation.

Epistemology is given pride of place because Husserl’s analyses of logical notions, while kept separate from empirical psy-

<sup>24</sup>Husserl in fact offers detailed discussions of the ambiguities of the term “*Vorstellung*” throughout the Fifth Investigation (see especially §44). Although I draw from these discussions below, Husserl’s treatment is too large and wide-ranging to be treated *en extenso* given the broader aims of this essay.

<sup>25</sup>For a comparison of phenomenology and Anglo-American linguistic philosophy as different forms of analysis, see Beaney (2007).

chology, are framed as analyses that must begin, in terms of the order or inquiry, with the connection to *experience*. This is apparent when we note that the passage quoted above does not suggest that the act-content distinction in the first sentence maps onto the threefold domain distinction in the second: Husserl does *not* claim that the presentation *qua* act is to be aligned exclusively with psychological analysis on the one hand, and the presentation *qua* content exclusively with logical and epistemological analyses on the other. As we shall see below, Husserl reserves a distinct epistemological-phenomenological role for the subjective notion of the act, a role which, contra Frege, is not fully divorced from considerations of objectivity.

#### 4.2. Husserl's intentional model vs. Frege's intensional model

Before turning to this distinct epistemological-phenomenological role, it will be helpful to lay out additional important aspects of Husserl's account in terms of their similarities and differences to some of the Fregean notions discussed in the previous section. Husserl characterizes the *Logical Investigations* as

a series of analytic investigations which will clear up the constitutive Ideas [*Ideen*] of a pure or formal logic, investigations which relate in the first place to the pure theory of logical forms. Starting with the empirical connection between meaning-experiences and expressions, we must try to find out what our variously ambiguous talk about 'expressing' or 'meaning' really amounts to. (Husserl 2001, Introduction to Vol. II, Part 1, §5)

The analysis of meaning-experiences is the task assigned to the First Investigation. The motivation here is two-fold: first, the analysis of judgment must begin with the relation that Husserl considers most fundamental for it: the intentional act. While I am stressing Husserl's Kantian heritage in this essay, it must not be forgotten that Husserl's early work was heavily influenced by and in part a response to Brentano. Husserl's detailed analysis

of presentation as the givenness of content in intentional experience is, in effect, an attempt to clarify ambiguities in Brentano's account of intentionality (Moran, Introduction to Husserl 2001, lvii). Husserl offers what can be called an "act-first" account of content. (Moltmann and Textor 2017)

Second, it is helpful to begin with the most obvious sorts of cases of intentional judgment—those marked by expressions and the meaning-experiences [*Bedeutungserlebnisse*] in which those expressions occur. The overall analysis, however, is not focused on the logical structure of expressions' semantic intensions, but on the epistemological-phenomenological structure of the underlying intentionality itself. It is an analysis by way of expressions, but is ultimately an analysis of the meanings of intentional acts, not of intensional contents. Thus the analysis of intentional meaning-experiences in terms of expressions in the First Investigation is conceived only as the *starting point* for Husserl's account, and not as the domain of the analysis of intentionality in its entirety. In the Fifth Investigation, where Husserl deals with the notion of intentional content more generally, and in the Sixth Investigation, where these considerations are applied specifically to a phenomenological analysis of knowledge, expressions are again used as a model for what Husserl takes to be fundamentally an analysis of intentionality.

Simplifying Husserl's complex account considerably, if I say "There is a mountain!" that expression is the expression of a judgment, both in the sense that it contains a judged content and in the sense that it is the expression of a mental *act* of judging—an expressive *experience directed at the world*. Mental acts of judging are, for Husserl, "a class of acts of particular interest to the logician," (2001, Investigation V, §28) but only one member of the broader class of intentional acts. Others would include perceiving, imagining, remembering, wishing, and merely thinking—all examples of presentations. What differentiates these types of acts is not what Husserl calls their matter (a perception, a wish, a mere thought, and a judgment may all have the same

content, *sensu stricto*), but rather what he calls the act's quality or character. (2001, Investigation V, §20) Matter and quality of the act together make up the "intentional essence" of the act. (2001, Investigation VI, §28)

All intentional acts are analyzed in terms of the structure of intention and fulfilment: if the intentional essence is realized (e.g., judged) in an intuitively present meaning-experience of the object, then that intention has been fulfilled. If not, the intention either remains "empty," or, in the case of an object inconsistent with the intention, "frustrated." (2001, Investigation VI, §11) In either situation, the intention remains unfulfilled. This is perhaps easiest to see in the case of a wish, which, in English, we commonly discuss in terms of fulfilment. But it applies for Husserl even at the level of the most basic acts of perception, outside the context of intentional acts of belief or knowledge, and even in the absence of language or expression: if I pick up an apple whose beautiful, unblemished, bright-red side is presented to me, and turn it around to reveal that that beauty continues uninterrupted on all of its sides, my intention concerning the beauty of the apple has been fulfilled. If the back side of the apple appears rotten, then that intention of beauty has been frustrated.

This view entails that the meaning content of intentions, including those that remain empty, in some sense points to its own conditions of possible fulfillment in intuition. Jocelyn Benoist puts the point nicely: "If it is possible for the things to be given *as they are meant*," then "to mean them, in some sense, is to mean *how they would be given if they should be given*, or, at least, it entails that . . . [I]ntentionality itself must allow fulfillment, and is not to be conceived independently of it, to the effect that the structure of intentionality must entail at least the *logical possibility of such a 'fulfilment'*." (2008, 84)<sup>26</sup> Insofar as they are characterized by a sharing of the intentional essence that they present, Husserl

<sup>26</sup>Benoist attributes this position not only to Husserl but also to the early Wittgenstein.

claims that acts of fulfilment are in fact "syntheses of identity" or "identification" between intention and intuition,<sup>27</sup> and, with regard to the role of intentional acts in knowledge, he even uses the Kantian term "synthesis of recognition." (2001, Investigation VI, §13) Fulfilling is a combination or bringing together of intention and intuition.

Husserl's idea in the first edition of the *Logical Investigations* (1901) was that the meaning content present in fulfilment is the instantiation in experience of an objective, ideal meaning anticipated in the act of intention. To put the idea in Kantian terms, the instantiation model is supposed to account for the epistemological importance of the presentation of content in subjective acts of intuition while still avoiding the error of psychologism by anchoring that content to something *objective* in the understanding.<sup>28</sup> For Husserl, such acts have a "phenomenological, thus purely descriptive content," (2001, Introduction to Vol. II, Part 1, §5, translation modified to reflect 1901 edition)<sup>29</sup> insofar as the object's presentational content is constituted in a subjective act of intuiting an object, but at the same time this presentation is the *mere instantiation* of an objective, ideal meaning content or intentional essence.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup>See the account of fulfillment as a synthesis of identification at Investigation VI, §§8, 24, and the analysis of perceptual fulfilment in terms of a "synthesis of identical thinghood (*sachlichen Identitaet*)" at Investigation VI, §14. Even frustration of an intention is considered a synthesis at Investigation VI, §11.

<sup>28</sup>Compare Martin (1999). Note that for Husserl such intuitive presentation is not limited to sensory intuitions of empirical objects. This point is further clarified below.

<sup>29</sup>Many of the phases like this one, characterizing phenomenology as a kind of Brentanian descriptive psychology, were removed from the second edition in response to accusations that Husserl had relapsed into psychologism.

<sup>30</sup>This involves something akin to what Searle would later call a "mind-to-world" direction of fit between ideal meanings, and their *instantiation* in the content of intentional acts which then serve as confirmation of fulfillment in intuition, or what Husserl calls evidence (*Evidenz*; for a detailed account of the role of the technical notion of *Evidenz* in the *Logical Investigations*, see Heffernan 1983, Part I). In terms of Husserl's later terminology, this account is focused on *noetic* aspects of intentionality and largely ignores *noematic* aspects.



In at least two major respects, then, Husserl's model of intentionality in the *Logical Investigations* parallels the later Frege's model of intensionality in terms of the grasping and judging of thoughts: first, both accounts appeal to the level of expressions to explain the underlying conception of presentation and judgment, even as, for both authors, logic is ultimately about judgments themselves and not about the propositions corresponding to them or the expression of those propositions. Second, both accounts rely on a notion of ideal, objective contents—Frege's "thoughts" and Husserl's "ideal meanings" or essences—instantiated in presentations. But they differ significantly in assigning negative (Frege) and positive (Husserl) status to synthesis with regard to the act, and in whether priority should be assigned to the content (Frege) or the act (Husserl) in the analysis of presentation and judgment.

### 4.3. First-level presentations as capable of a "narrower sense" of objectivity

This and the following subsection further clarify how this picture operates in Husserl with regard to presentations and judgments, allowing for further development of the comparison with Frege and especially Kant. I begin with first-level presentations.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup>For the sake of completeness, this is also the place to note an Husserlian parallel to Kant's account of the act of synthesis prior to first-level presentations. In writings from the years between the first and second editions of the *Logical Investigations*, Husserl also characterizes as synthetic the underlying kinaesthetic and temporal syntheses through which appearances are constituted. This recalls the "synthesis of apprehension" in Kant, where, prior even to what I have referred to above as "first level" of presentations, cognitions are subjected to time as the inner sense (and, by extrapolation, also to space as the outer sense in the case of presentations originating in external perception). Just as, for Kant, it is this prior synthesis of apprehension which *provides for* the synthesis of the manifold, and thus for first-level presentations in what Kant calls the "synthesis of reproduction in the imagination," so for Husserl do such temporal and spatial syntheses produce the presentations involved in the fulfilment of simple intentions.

The Fifth Investigation is devoted specifically to intentional experiences and their content, and the fourth chapter focuses specifically on presentations as they feature in the analysis of judgment. Husserl begins the chapter by applying the act-content distinction to presentation, using his conception of intentional matter in place of the more general notion of content, and suggesting a construal of the presentational act (or act-quality) as "on a level with Judgment, Wish, Question, etc." (2001, Investigation V, §32) On this construal, he argues, the putatively self-evident (and Kant-reminiscent) proposition that "*each intentional experience is either itself a (mere) presentation, or is based on such a presentation*" rests on an ambiguity:

In its first half, the proposition, correctly interpreted, speaks of 'presentation' in the sense of a certain sort of act, in its second half in the sense of the mere matter of acts... This second half by itself, i.e. every intentional experience is based on a presentation, has genuine self-evidence, if 'presentation' is interpreted as completed [*komplettierte*] matter. The false proposition we reject arises if 'presentation' is here given the sense of an act as well. (Husserl 2001, Investigation V, §32)

But Husserl does not want to give up on this proposition fundamentally linking intentionality to founding presentational acts. Instead, he argues, we can accept the proposition in its entirety provided we can reinterpret presentation-acts in a way that avoids the ambiguity.

Husserl's subsequent reinterpretation follows the same strategy as in the First Investigation: beginning from language, and treating presentations on the basis of "talk of *names* as '*expressing*' presentations." The analysis takes as its model predication (S is P) as it pertains to categorial statements expressing acts of judgment, and construes acts of presentation at a different, lower level, on the basis of the names that enter into such predica-



tions.<sup>32</sup> On this analysis, Husserl claims, the term “presentation” can

cover acts in which *something becomes objective to us in a certain narrower sense of the word*, one borrowed from the manner in which percepts and similar intuitions grasp their objects in a single ‘snatch’, or in a single ‘ray of meaning’, or borrowed, likewise, from the one-term subject-acts in categorical statements. (Husserl 2001, Investigation V, §33, my emphasis)

In one-term subject acts in categorical statements of judgments about other judgments, such as the phrase “That S is P” in “That S is P is delightful,” Husserl claims, “The state of affairs is ‘objective’ in much the same sense as a thing caught in a single ‘mental ray’ of perception or imagination or pictorial inspection [*Bildschauung*].” (2001, Investigation V, §33, translation slightly modified) The “narrower” objectivity ascribed to presentations is thus to be understood on analogy with (“borrowed from”) the way in which we are presented with a unified object in such cases.

In line with this new interpretation of presentation, Husserl refers to first-level presentations as “nominal acts” (modelled on naming) and to judgments as “objectifying acts” (modelled on asserting). Objectifying acts are capable of objectivity in a *wider* sense, but nominal acts refer to presentations capable of objectivity exclusively in the “narrower sense” just discussed. Husserl also hastens to add that the class of nominal acts is not limited specifically to grammatical acts of naming. It could include other sorts of first-level presentations, such as, presumably, the “percepts and similar intuitions [that] grasp their objects in a single ‘snatch’,” in the passage above. As in the First Investigation, the analysis of language is here a paradigm or a model, capable of serving as evidence insofar as “Naming and asserting do not merely differ grammatically, but ‘in essence’, which means that

<sup>32</sup>For the account of judgments as modelled on predication, see Husserl (2001, Investigation V, §28).

the acts which confer or fulfil meaning for each, differ in intentional essence.” (2001, Investigation V, §37)

The distinction between judgments as objectifying and first-level presentations as nominal acts bears an obvious resemblance to Kant’s distinction between the faculties of sensibility and understanding. Indeed, Husserl notes that his account of the difference between sensuous intuition (in acts at the first level) and categorial intuition (in acts at the second level) gives “much needed clarity” to the “old epistemological contrast between sensibility and understanding.” (2001, Introduction to Investigation VI) But Husserl does not simply adopt this Kantian contrast. He calls for “a necessary widening of the notion of perception beyond the bounds of sensibility [*Schranken der Sinnlichkeit*].” (2001, Introduction to Investigation VI) We can see this widening in the passage above when Husserl includes “other intuitions” alongside percepts in the class of acts of presentation that “grasp their objects in a single ‘snatch’.” In line with this extension of intuition beyond the sphere of sensibility, Husserl also argues (contra Kant) that we have intuitions not only of simple perceptual objects but also of categorial objects, thus blurring the line between what Kant considered the separate faculties of sensibility and understanding. (2001, Introduction to Investigation VI, translation modified)<sup>33</sup>

Along with this widening of the domain of intuition and the rejection of the sensibility-understanding distinction comes a rejection of the Kantian idea (at least as presented in the B-Deduction) that first-level presentations, independent of judgment, cannot play an objective epistemological role: what Kant called “subjective validity” is not fully divorced from objectivity for Husserl, as we can see most clearly in the analysis of first-level acts of presentation as capable of revealing objectivity in a narrower sense. Such acts of intuition are not categorial, and are not properly judgments, but for Husserl that alone does not mean that

<sup>33</sup>Compare van Mazijk (2019).

they are merely empirical sense-perceptions contingent to individuals. An act of imagining, for example, may function as an intuitive presentation, and in that presentation, intentions may be fulfilled, frustrated, or remain empty, even if we are not yet at the level of categorial intuitions as featuring in a judgment. My act of imagining may reveal, e.g., certain essential properties of a triangle, or of the possible ways that colors may be presented to me in a painting. (2001, Investigation V, §40)<sup>34</sup> But what is revealed thereby is not merely subjective validity in that it is not limited to contingent aspects of my individual empirical psychology: from a logical point of view, the fulfillment of such an act may also reveal essences or essential properties of the presentation of such content for *a subject as such*.<sup>35</sup> If such revealing is ascribed to psychology, then it is an a priori, eidetic psychology, not the empirical psychology which both Husserl and Frege warned against.<sup>36</sup>

This notion is further demonstrated in Husserl's references to Kant's "judgment of perception"—always in scare quotes—in the Sixth Investigation. When Husserl claims that "*between* percept and sound of words another act (or pattern of acts) is *intercalated* [*eingeschoben*]," the intercalated act is clearly not itself an expression. And it is this act which he takes to be "the true giver of meaning, [which] must pertain to the significantly functioning expression as its essential constituent, and must determine its possession of an identical sense, whether or not this is associated with a confirming percept," (2001, Investigation VI, §4) In the case of a nominal act, the intercalated act is a first-level presentation, and need not be "associated with a confirming percept" insofar as the class of intuitions that may (partially) fulfill an intention has not been limited to the Kantian faculty of sensi-

<sup>34</sup>Compare the account of memory as intuition in van Mazijk (2019).

<sup>35</sup>Husserl would later express this view, beginning in *Ideas I* (2014) with explicit reference to the notion of a transcendental ego. But the point can be made without entering into the additional interpretive difficulties this notion entails.

<sup>36</sup>Thanks to an anonymous referee for very helpful discussion of this point.

bility. Although such cases do not rise to the level of judgments for Husserl, and thus are not examples of Kant's "intellectual synthesis," they are still acts of fulfillment, and *as* fulfillments, are still, for Husserl, acts of synthesis—what Kant would call "syntheses of reproduction in the imagination." They are responsible for the "identical sense"—the synthesis of identity or identification—shared by the intention and the fulfilling intuition.

Here is the core of Husserl's famed notion of the "intuition of essences" (*Wesensschau*). While cases of non-perceptual presentation cannot provide the same completeness or degree of fulfillment as perceptual cases, they may nonetheless reveal objectivity in the narrower sense. In effect, Kant's distinction between subjective and objective validity has been re-situated: there is no longer a strict distinction between faculties of sensibility and understanding, such that only the latter may grant objective status to the content of presentations (compare van Mazijk 2019). Husserl can allow for objectivity arising via a synthesis of fulfillment in intuition.

#### 4.4. Second-level presentations: judgments as acts of synthesis

Husserl analyzes second-level presentations in judgments—objectifying acts—via the same conception of fulfillment as synthesis.<sup>37</sup> In this case, what is shared in a synthesis of identity between the intentional act and the corresponding fulfilling act is a state of affairs, which is itself a type of intentional object—what Husserl calls a "categorial object." (2001, Investigation VI, §45) Such fulfillment results in the state of affairs becoming "intentionally objective to us." (2001, Investigation V, §28) In this

<sup>37</sup>Husserl's already complicated account of judgment became even more complex in later works—especially *Experience and Judgment*—and moved beyond the close association with predication characteristic of the account in the *Logical Investigations*.

latter sense, Husserl's account parallels not only Kant's account of the objective validity of intellectual synthesis, but also Frege's account of judgment as acknowledging the truth of a thought.

In the case of an intended state of affairs that is not fulfilled, we have a conception roughly analogous to Frege's thought that is grasped, but not acknowledged as true. Here too, language serves as a model for the underlying intentional analysis: Husserl addresses such cases under the guise of "an original understanding of a statement which we do not ourselves judge true," in which "what is said is 'merely entertained' in consciousness, is *pondered* and *considered*." (2001, Investigation V, §29) Is the relation between the intentional act of mere pondering and the intentional act of judgment in Husserl then akin to that between grasping a thought and acknowledging it as true in the later Frege?

Since Husserl divides intentional acts into quality and matter, we might think that the Husserlian notion of the quality of the act of judgment lines up with Frege's notion of assertoric force and thus with the phenomenon Frege attempts to capture with the judgment stroke as discussed above (Section 3.2): something epistemically relevant for logic, but not itself contributing content to the judgment. But Husserl insists that the transition from "pondering" to judgment is not a simple change in act-quality (2001, Investigation V, §29). Instead, what distinguishes the judgment from mere pondering is the fact that it occurs in a context of fulfilment:

[W]hat analysis really discovers is first mere presentation (which here includes the interrelated acts of mere entertainment, putting the question, and consideration) passing over by way of fulfilment into a judgment of like material. The judgment is not intrinsically the acceptance of a previously given mere presentation: it is accepting, assertive *only in a context of fulfilment*. Only in this context has it this relational character, just as in it alone the 'presentation' (or pondering) has the relational character of an intention directing itself to such assent. (Husserl 2001, Investigation V, §29, my emphasis)

For Husserl, judgment is not merely an acknowledging of the truth of content already simply presented in thought or intuition. It is not a mimetic re-presentation of already-complete intentional content, but a second-level presentation of intentional content based *both upon the underlying presentations and the intentional context of their synthesis*.<sup>38</sup> When I judge "That S is P is delightful," the judgment is not simply concerned with a *proposition*, already available to us in language or concepts; it is still itself about the broader experiential context through which that proposition is synthesized by the judger.

In terms of Frege's analogy (Section 3.3), then, while Husserl would agree that the traveler (the subject) does not *create* the mountain range in an empirical sense (we cannot invent reality, and thinking something is so does not make it so), this does not mean for Husserl—as it seems to for Frege—that the subject does nothing more than simply grasp the propositional content of the judgment and then acknowledge it as true. In terms of the distinctions introduced in Section 3, judgment is not merely an act-notion, but an act-process notion—precisely what Frege avoids in his much more-limited appeal to the subjective act as affirmation in the guise of "grasping" and in his preference for the term "synthetic truth" over "synthetic judgment." As in Kant's notion of intellectual synthesis, in Husserl the synthetic, subjective act-component is considered necessary for the structure of judgments as well as underlying presentations.

#### 4.5. The "distinct descriptive dimension" of phenomenological analysis

But by according this role to the subjective, synthetic act, does Husserl not invite the very psychologism Frege warned about? How can the above considerations amount to anything other than psychologism? Recall the discussion above (Section 4.1)

<sup>38</sup>See Kidd (2021) for a helpful account of the notion of a context of fulfilment in Husserl's later account of judgment.

of Husserl's analysis of presentation into *three* fundamentally different domains: the psychological, the logical, and the epistemological. On Husserl's view, while it is true that logic is ultimately concerned with the ideal, objective content of judgments, we cannot ignore the epistemological—and, ultimately, phenomenological—problem of the *source* of that content. Husserl thinks that this content is revealed through the analysis of a distinct descriptive domain that is, like that of logic, objective. But it is objective in a way that does not stand in opposition to the subjective and that cannot be fully removed from its “context of fulfillment” in experience. Invoking the terms introduced in the discussion of Kant in Section 2, then, we can say that Husserl rejects the assumption of the *subject-independence of objective content* prominent in the history of the analytic tradition.

Despite this, the act of synthesis does not amount to empirical-psychological genesis for Husserl, because the question is not approached from the standpoint of the individual, empirical-psychological origin of judgment content *for me*, but rather the logical standpoint of the eidetic or essential origin of that content *as content for the acts of a subject as such*. It falls under the purview of what Kant called transcendental logic, in that it is concerned with the non-empirical contribution of content via subjective acts.

Whereas for Kant, first-level presentations are capable of only subjective validity, for Husserl, they are capable of “narrow objectivity” insofar as the content under consideration is not the content of an individual subject's perceptual experiences considered empirically, but the intentional essence of presentations in intuition more broadly construed, for the subject as such, and in cases where those presentations fulfill a correlating intention. This constitutes what Kant called “transcendental content.” For Husserl, such content is still marked by fulfillment, and thus still exhibits evidence [*Evidenz*], even in cases where it does not figure in an objectifying act.

What is missing in Frege, from this perspective, is the notion of a transcendental content as revealed through a *phenomenology of judgment*—not an empirical account of what it feels like for the individual subject to judge, or a logical account of the act independent of content, but a transcendental-logical and more broadly epistemological account of how judgment content arises for a subject as such, which includes an account of the constitution of that content below the level of the judgment itself.

The methodological operation through which we isolate such content of intentional acts for analysis is what Husserl would later call the phenomenological reduction—an idea developed in the period between the first and second editions of the *Logical Investigations* and presented explicitly in Husserl's programmatic statement of transcendental phenomenology in *Ideas I* (1913).<sup>39</sup> In line with this development, in the second, 1913 edition the *Logical Investigations* contemporaneous with his new work, Husserl explicitly includes the content revealed through phenomenological analysis of intentional acts under the domain of intentional content.<sup>40</sup> A long autobiographical note added in the second edition clarifies this further isolation of a unique phenomenological dimension:

It became plainer and plainer. . . as I reviewed the completed Investigations. . . that the description of intentional objectivity as such, as we are conscious of it in the concrete act-experience itself, represents a *distinct descriptive dimension where purely intuitive description*

---

<sup>39</sup>The account of the phenomenological reduction is clearly in place by the 1907 lecture course *The Idea of Phenomenology* (1999), and is discussed in manuscripts a few years prior to it. This development is thus part and parcel with Husserl's increasing concern with epistemological issues, and especially with the Kantian background of those issues, as discussed here.

<sup>40</sup>What I have presented in the following paragraphs is a much-simplified account of this transition. More-detailed considerations of the basic issues may be found in Drummond (2002). The full story here also involves modifications with regard to Husserl's association of the notion of phenomenological content with what he calls “reell” content, but exploration of this technical notion exceeds my scope in this paper.

*can be adequately practised*, a dimension. . . which also deserves to be called ‘phenomenological.’ These methodological extensions lead to important extensions of the field of problems now opening before us and considerable improvements due to a fully conscious separation of descriptive levels. Cf. my *Ideen zu einer reine Phänomenologie*. . . , Book I, and particularly the discussion of *Noesis and Noema*. (Husserl 2001, Investigation V, §16, translation modified, my emphasis)

In the 1913 edition, Husserl’s thought reflects a revision—in line with his contemporaneous, more Kantian-inspired and explicitly transcendental philosophy in *Ideas I*—to the instantiation model as presented in the 1901 edition as discussed above: the content which is the focus of phenomenological analysis is now conceived as located in the *correlation between* the intentional act and its object. (Drummond 2002, 38–39)

Presentational content is thus no longer considered the instantiation of content (modelled on linguistic expressions) pre-existing on the side of the ideal, for which we gain evidence from the analysis of expressions of judgments. And it is not merely a subjective component of individual intentional act-experiences conceived empirically. Rather, it is now considered—in alignment with Husserl’s account of presentation and judgment—to be *constituted* in the very correlation between the mind and the world. Thus judgment content is objective not *despite* its subjective presentations, but *because of* and *through* them: objective intentional content is an accomplishment of the subject’s synthetic act seen not from an empirical, but from a transcendental standpoint. The space opened up thereby, and the content within it, are what Husserl came to see as the unique domain of analysis for phenomenology.

## 5. Conclusion

Whereas Frege was at first ambiguous about, and later explicitly rejected, the role Kant assigned to the subjective act of synthesis

in the account of presentation and judgment, because of the perceived threat of psychologism, Husserl rejected the notion that synthesis posed a threat and attempted to develop the role of the subjective act of synthesis more fully. In this sense, Kant’s “phenomenological” consideration of the judgment in terms of synthesis becomes, in Husserl, a foundational notion for phenomenology as a distinct method of analysis.

From a purely logical perspective, there are good reasons to think that Frege’s account is superior, especially insofar as it allows for the analysis in terms of functions and arguments that is the cornerstone of modern quantificational logic.<sup>41</sup> Husserl never took this step, and continued to treat logical questions via a subject-predicate analysis of judgment. (Romano 2015, 84) But from the perspective of the more robust epistemological concerns that Husserl shares with Kant, the disappearance of the act of synthesis in later Frege is a significant loss, in that it results in downplaying, rather than attempting to answer, the puzzle about the role of the subject in judgment—the puzzle with which this essay began. Husserl’s attempted answer to the puzzle in the *Logical Investigations*, moving even beyond Kant’s account in the positive role it assigns to presentations, may be more problematic than Frege’s in other respects, but we can at least say that in the phenomenological treatment of presentation and judgment, the role of subjectivity is more fully investigated and the act of synthesis does not suffer the same ill fate.

---

<sup>41</sup>Shieh argues that, while it may at first appear that Kant can adopt Frege’s logical framework and still hold on to his fundamental view of judging (including judging as a subjective act of synthesis), the Kantian conception is ultimately unable to account for Frege’s function/argument distinction (2019, 42–47).



## Acknowledgements

Earlier versions of parts of this paper were presented at the 2019 Journal of the History of Philosophy Master Class on “The Lesser-known Frege in Kantian Context,” and at the 2019 meeting of the Society for the Study of the History of Analytical Philosophy. Thanks to the audiences for both presentations, and to Juliet Floyd, Sanford Shieh, and two anonymous referees, for helpful comments.

**Jacob Rump**  
Creighton University  
JacobRump@creighton.edu

## References

- Beaney, Michael, 2007. “Conceptions of Analysis in the Early Analytic and Phenomenological Traditions: Some Comparisons and Relationships.” In *The Analytic Turn Analysis in Early Analytic Philosophy and Phenomenology*, edited by Michael Beaney, pp. 196–216. New York: Routledge.
- Bell, David, 1987. “The Art of Judgment.” *Mind* 96(382): 221–44.
- Benoist, Jocelyn, 2008. “Fulfilment.” In *Phenomenology as Grammar*, edited by J. P. Gálvez, p. 77–96. Frankfurt a. M.: Ontos.
- Burge, Tyler, 1979. “Sinning Against Frege.” *Philosophical Review* 88(3): 398–432.
- Drummond, John, 2002. “The Logical Investigations: Paving the Way to a Transcendental Logic.” In *One Hundred Years of Phenomenology: Husserl’s Logical Investigations Revisited*, edited by Frederik Stjernfelt and Dan Zahavi, p. ?? . Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- Dummett, Michael, 1982. “Frege and Kant on Geometry.” *Inquiry* 25(2): 233–54.
- Frege, Gottlob, 1879 [1997]. “Begriffsschrift Selections.” In *Frege (1997)*, pp. 47–78.
- , 1884 [1953]. *The Foundations of Arithmetic*, Second revised edition. Oxford: Blackwell.
- , 1892 [1984]. “On Concept and Object.” In *Frege (1997)*, pp. 181–93.
- , 1918 [1997]. “Negation.” In *Frege (1997)*, pp. 346–61.
- , 1918 [1956]. “The Thought: A Logical Inquiry.” *Mind* 65: 289–311. Translated by Anthony M. Quinton and Marcelle Quinton.
- , 1980. *Philosophical and Mathematical Correspondence*, edited by Gottfried Gabriel, Hans Hermes, Friedrich Kambartel, Christian Thiel and Albert Veraart. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- , 1997. *The Frege Reader*, edited by Michael Beaney. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Gabriel, Gottfried, 2013. “Frege and the German Background to Analytic Philosophy.” In *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Analytic Philosophy*, edited by Michael Beaney, pp. 280–97. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Geach, Peter, 1976. “Saying and Showing in Frege and Wittgenstein.” *Acta Philosophica Fennica* 28: 54–70.
- Green, Mitchell S., 2002. “The Inferential Significance of Frege’s Assertion Sign.” *Facta Philosophica* 4: 201–29.
- Heffernan, George, 1983. *Bedeutung und Evidenz Bei Edmund Husserl*. Bonn: Bouvier Verlag.
- Heis, Jeremy, 2014. “The Priority Principle from Kant to Frege.” *Noûs* 48(2): 268–97.

- Husserl, Edmund, 1999. *The Idea of Phenomenology*, translated by Lee Hardy. Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- , 2001. *Logical Investigations*, translated by J. N. Findlay. New York: Routledge.
- , 2014. *Ideas for a Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy: First Book: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, translated by Dan Dahlstrom. Indianapolis: Hackett.
- Jourdain, Phillip E. B., 1980. "Gottlob Frege." In [Frege \(1980\)](#), pp. 179–206.
- Kant, Immanuel, 1781-87 [1998]. *Critique of Pure Reason*, edited and translated by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- , 1783 [2004]. *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics that will be able to come forward as Science*, translated by Gary Hatfield. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kidd, Chad, 2021. "Husserl's Theory of Judgment and Its Contemporary Relevance." In *The Husserlian Mind*, edited by Hanne Jacobs, p. 232–44. New York: Routledge.
- Kitcher, Patricia, 1990. *Kant's Transcendental Psychology*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kremer, Michael, 2000. "Judgment and Truth in Frege." *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 38(4): 549–81.
- Longuenesse, Beatrice, 2017. *I, Me, Mine: Back to Kant, and Back Again*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Martin, Wayne M., 1999. "Husserl's Relapse: Concerning a Fregean Challenge to Phenomenology." *Inquiry* 42(3–4): 343–69.
- , 2006. *Theories of Judgment: Psychology, Logic, Phenomenology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mohanty, Jitendranath, 1982. *Husserl and Frege*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Moltmann, Friederike and Mark Textor, eds., 2017. *Act-Based Conceptions of Propositional Content*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Nunez, Tyke, 2021. "Kant, Frege, and the Normativity of Logic: MacFarlane's Argument for Common Ground." *European Journal of Philosophy*.
- Pereboom, Derk, 1988. "Kant on Intentionality." *Synthese* 77(3): 321–52.
- Romano, Claude, 2015. *At the Heart of Reason*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Rump, Jacob, 2020. "Synthesis." In *The Routledge Handbook of Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy*, edited by Daniele De Santis, Burt C. Hopkins and Claudio Majolino, pp. 376–88. New York: Routledge.
- Sethi, Janum, 2020. "'For Me, In My Present State': Kant on Judgments of Perception and Mere Subjective Validity." *Journal of Modern Philosophy* 2(9): 1–20.
- Sheredos, Benjamin, 2017. "Act Psychology and Phenomenology: Husserl on Egoic Acts." *Husserl Studies* 33(3): 191–209.
- Shieh, Sanford, 2019. *Necessity Lost: Modality and Logic in Early Analytic Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sluga, Hans D., 1980. *Gottlob Frege*. New York: Routledge.
- Smith, Nicholas J. J., 2009. "Frege's Judgement Stroke and the Conception of Logic as the Study of Inference not Consequence." *Philosophy Compass* 4: 639–65.

Textor, Mark, 2010. "Frege on Judging As Acknowledging the Truth." *Mind* 119(475): 615–55.

van der Schaar, Maria, 2018. "Frege on Judgment and the Judging Agent." *Mind* 127(505): 225–50.

van Mazijk, Corijn, 2019. "Husserl's Covert Critique of Kant in the Sixth Book of Logical Investigations." *Continental Philosophy Review* 52(1): 15–33.