

Łukasz Kosowski  
**Noema and Thinkability**  
An Essay on Husserl's Theory of Intentionality

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Łukasz Kosowski

# **Noema and Thinkability**

An Essay on Husserl's Theory of Intentionality



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## ABBREVIATIONS

The text employs the following abbreviations of Husserl's works.

**Hua III      Husserliana vol. III**

*Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie. Erstes Buch: Allgemeine Einführung in die reine Phänomenologie.* Ed. Karl Schuhmann. The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976. [*Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology* (B. Gibson, Trans.). London: George Allen and Unwin LTD, 1958.][*Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, First book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology* (F. Kersten, Trans.). The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1983.]

**Hua IV      Husserliana vol. IV**

*Ideen zur einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie. Zweites Buch: Phänomenologische Untersuchungen zur Konstitution.* Ed. Marly Biemel. The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1952. [*Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy. Second Book: Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution* (R. Rojcewicz and A. Schuwer. Trans.). Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publisher, 1989.]

**Hua X      Husserliana vol. X**

*Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstesens (1893-1917).* Ed. Rudolf Boehm. The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969. [*On the Phenomenology of the*

*Consciousness of Internal Time* (1893-1917) (J. B. Brough, Trans.). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991.]

Hua XVII **Husserliana vol. XVII**

*Formale und transzendente Logik*. Ed. Paul Janssen. The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974. [*Formal and Transcendental Logic* (D. Cairns, Trans.). The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978.]

Hua XIX/1 **Husserliana vol. XIX/1**

*Logische Untersuchungen*. Erster Teil. *Untersuchungen zur Phänomenologie und Theorie der Erkenntnis*. Zweiter Band. Ed. Ursula Panzer. The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1984. [*Logical Investigations* (2nd ed., Vol. I) (J. N. Findlay, Trans.). Suffolk: St Edmundsbury Press. Ltd, Bury St Edmunds, 2001.]

Hua XIX/2 **Husserliana vol. XIX/2**

*Logische Untersuchungen*. Zweiter Teil. *Untersuchungen zur Phänomenologie und Theorie der Erkenntnis*. Zweiter Band. Ed. Ursula Panzer. The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1984. [*Logical Investigations* (2nd ed., Vol. II) (J. N. Findlay, Trans.). Padstow, Cornwall: TJI Digital, 2001.]

Hua XXIII **Husserliana vol. XXIII**

*Phantasie, Bildbewusstsein, Erinnerung*. Texte aus dem Nachlass (1898-1925). Ed. Eduard Marbach. The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1980. [*Phantasy, Image Consciousness and Memory (1898-1925)* (J. B. Brough, Trans.). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, 2005.]

Hua XXXI **Husserliana vol. XXXI**

*Aktive Synthesen: Aus Der Vorlesung "Transzendente Logik" 1920/21*. Ergänzungsband zu "Analysen zur Passiven Synthesis" Ed. Roland Breeur. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers. [*Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis: Lectures on Transcendental Logic* (A. Steinbock, Trans.). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001.]

Ideas I **Hua III**

To Aleksandra

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Part of this book is drawn from my previously published material. Section 1 of Chapter Four is based on: *Noema in the light of contradiction, conflict, and nonsense: The noema as possibly thinkable content*, Husserl Studies, Vol. 24, No. 3: 243–259, 2008.



## INTRODUCTION

Difficulties arise when the fundamental notions of a theory are ambiguous. In phenomenology, such difficulties should not occur because its method accepts only conceptions which are grounded in the total clarity of the immanent perception. One might be all the more surprised by the fact that the notion of noema, which is fundamental to the entire phenomenology, is interpreted in several ways. Of course, not only noema but also plenty of other notions introduced by Husserl suffer from similar imperfections. However, the present study is devoted to only one of them, namely the conception of noema.

One can attempt to explain the lack of agreement with respect to the interpretation of noema by questioning the certainty of the results of immanent insight. On the other hand, there is also reason to mention that philosophers need time to realize exactly what they are dealing with. Even if we agree that the evidence of immanent perception is unquestionable, there is still a risk that the active ego will not be able to discern all of the characteristics of the noema necessary to understand it in an unambiguous manner. Nevertheless, regardless of the reasons for the variety of competing interpretations of noema, there is no doubt that this variety exists. And this fact circumscribes the subject of the present study.

The author believes that despite the diversity of interpretations of noema, no one has successfully provided an explanation of all of its aspects. To confirm this conviction, the difficulties of each separate interpretation will be exposed and analysed. Since a theory capable of describing noema unambiguously seems to be unattainable at the present time, the purpose of this study is not so ambitious. In place of such a theory, the author will make a proposal which can be regarded as the fundament of a new conception. In harmony with this goal, noema will be interpreted as the thinkable content. Undoubtedly, all the solutions that will be suggested there require further analysis. The present study therefore reopens discussion on noema rather than merely summarizes it.

Noema is the key point in Husserl's idea of intentionality. As is well known, Husserl (the founder of phenomenology) was inspired by his teacher Franz Brentano. Brentano was a proponent of the views held by scholastic philosophers who considered intentionality to be the fundamental characteristic of consciousness. However, Husserl is not the only student of Brentano who adopted this view. Here it is worth mentioning Meinong and Twardowski, who were inspired by their teacher to develop their conceptions of intentionality. In the contemporary literature, one can find numerous examples of analyses devoted to the identification of similarities and differences between their views. More than once, such elaborations have helped to clarify problems that could not have been resolved in other situations. Nevertheless, the present work will not concentrate on their views. Moreover, it will not consider (except in particular cases), any connections between Brentano and the conceptions of his students. Hence, the interpretations of noema presented here do not arise from an alternative reading of Husserl originating from the views of Brentano's students. On the contrary, this work will attempt to consider (with one exception to be mentioned later) only those readings of noema that directly refer to analyses from *Ideas I* (e.g. Gurwitsch's and Føllesdal's work).

The methodology adopted here combines a phenomenological description with theoretical reasoning. Such an approach is required as a result of the character of the present work, which gives significant attention to phenomenological and metaphysical matters.

This study is composed of four chapters that are arranged to provide concise explanations of the various interpretations of noema as well as the conception of thinkable content.

The first chapter is devoted to the fundamentals of phenomenology. Those in turn can be found in *Logical Investigations*. In the first chapter, notions specified by Husserl in the theory of parts and wholes are considered; these notions are of the highest importance with respect to the present enterprise. The author believes that without consideration of this part of Husserl's work, the remainder of his analyses concerning noema and noetic-noematic structure cannot be properly understood. Chapter one presents also the conceptions of experience that can be

found in *Logical Investigations* and explains the key notions relevant to the present study, including the subjects of intentional matter and quality. All efforts are aimed at revealing the strong connection of these notions with the concept of noema and noetic-noematic structure.

The second chapter is devoted entirely to the conception of noema found in *Ideas I*. It also contains detailed analyses of noetic-noematic correlation that are later compared to the concept of supervenience. Of course, the chapter does not say that noema supervenes on noesis; however, if there is a similarity between them, an analysis of this similarity would enrich both notions and be of use in further specification of noema. Therefore, this chapter does not present a type of phenomenological supervenience, or even attempt to find one. Instead, it suggests a possible method of interpreting the noetic-noematic correlation in order to specify a notion of noema.

The third chapter presents various conceptions of noema that in the author's opinion are the most influential and prominent. These include readings from Gurwitsch, Føllesdal, Smith and McIntyre, Drummond and Paśniczek. Roman Ingarden's conception of the purely intentional object will also be discussed in this chapter. A controversy exists because it is difficult to unequivocally establish whether Ingarden's idea is an interpretation of noema or a separate theory that was strongly inspired by Husserl. Regardless of the answer, there is no doubt that Ingarden's conception is very close to that of Husserl and this is the reason why the present study considers it. The second reason is that Paśniczek's conception makes use of Ingarden's solutions, and, therefore, the explanation of the former requires the explanation of the latter.

The fourth and final chapter is devoted to the idea according to which noema is interpreted as the thinkable content. This conception is supported there by two different methods. Firstly, it is shown that the idea of noema as thinkable content is implied by Husserl's analyses. The author will argue that certain cases of great importance for entire phenomenology can be understood only in the context of the conception of noema as thinkable content. The first method employed in this chapter will therefore infer the proposed interpretation from Husserl's original. Instead, the second method considers specific phenomenological

evidence. This is accomplished in the form of a discussion comparing the interpretation of noema presented in the last chapter with interpretations presented previously. Hence, the conception of noema as thinkable content is shown as being implied by the writings of Husserl and confirmed by the phenomenological intuition. The author believes that in the present study new characteristics of noema are revealed as a result of a fresh reading of classical questions.

## Chapter I

### Foundations of phenomenology

*Logical Investigations* are the most influential part of Husserl's philosophical output. This work was undertaken with the principal objective of overcoming problems generated by the view that only psychology and psychologically-oriented research is capable of yielding ultimate answers to the fundamental questions pertaining to truth and the essence of logical forms (see Hua XIX/1; 2001b).<sup>1</sup> The result, *Logical Investigations*, divided philosophers into at least two different groups. Some of them accept Husserl's argumentation against psychologism; however, they refuse all his latter works since, as they hold, once Husserl had overcome psychologism, he immediately fell into another form of this same approach. These philosophers usually agree with the first four investigations and refuse the fifth and sixth ones. In contrast, those who accept all of the investigations also accept the phenomenological part of Husserl work. For them, *Logical Investigations* is the beginning of radical phenomenology, meaning that, whether Husserl was aware of this or not, through systematically developed reflection, he finally entered a field of transcendently reduced consciousness. This group, according to historical testimony, developed one of the most influential trends in philosophy of the twentieth century.

The mature form of any science becomes hermetic because of its language. Phenomenology, like physics, mathematics or information technology, has its own conceptual apparatus and, in the same manner as other disciplines, is relatively inaccessible without the relevant

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<sup>1</sup> See also: (Dougherty 1979; Meiland 1976; Hanna 1993; Hill 1991, Part One: Logic, realism and the foundations of arithmetic; Huemer 2004; Metcalfe 1988; Mohanty 1997 and Picardi 1997).

knowledge. What is more, not only philosophical laics but also philosophy experts can become confused if they have not previously had experience with phenomenology. This situation is mainly conditioned by the fact that Husserl redefined most of the traditional terms; some of them, he totally refused. Moreover, he also introduced new phrases. Most of this work Husserl accomplished in *Logical Investigations*. Hence, studies of this work should precede any consideration of advanced phenomenological matters and especially the issue of noema.

This chapter comprises three sections and introduces notions fundamental to phenomenology. The first section is devoted to the theory of parts and wholes. It contains, among others, explanations of such important notions as the foundation and dependency relation, the conception of the abstract and the concrete part etc. The second section presents Husserl's account for the sensuous and the intellectual forms of unity (i.e., for the figural moments and the categorial forms). Finally, the third section is devoted to the concept of experience. It concerns such crucial notions as intentional matter and quality, sensuous data and functional moments of consciousness. The last section therefore considers phenomenological fundaments of noema and noetic-noematic structure.

## **1. The theory of parts and wholes in *Logical Investigations***

None of the phenomenological problems can be adequately explained without appealing to notions introduced by Husserl in the theory of parts and wholes. Therefore, let us briefly present the notions which are most important for the present purposes.

Husserl begins inquiry into the whole-part theme with a very general distinction, namely that between simple objects and complex objects (Hua XIX/1, pp. 229-30: 2001c/4-5).<sup>2</sup>

- 1) *the simple* object is an object that has no parts,
- 2) *the complex* object is an object that has at least two parts.

---

<sup>2</sup> The theory of parts and wholes was also developed by Husserl in *Experience and Judgment* (1948, pp 160-71: 1973/140-8).

As it is easy to notice, these definitions are formulated in terms of “having parts” and “not having parts”. However, Husserl claims that there is another and more natural sense of “complexity” as the plurality of disjointed parts (Hua XIX/1, p. 229: 2001c/4). This notion determines the following definitions:

1) *the simple* object is an object that cannot be divided into at least two parts,

2) *the complex* object is an object that can be divided into at least two parts.

Moreover, the term “disjoin” has more than one interpretation. The colour and shape of a thing are disjointed in a different manner than the bough and the trunk of a tree (Hua XIX/1, p. 229: 2001c/4). This difference is explained in terms of dependency and independency. Whilst the colour and the spatial shape are dependent on each other, the bough does not depend on the trunk. According to Husserl:

1) *the part is independent* only if it can exist without the supplementary content,

2) *the part is non-independent* only if it cannot exist without the supplementary content (Hua XIX/1, pp. 229-54: 2001c/4-18).

Gilbert Null, contemporary interpreter of Husserl, distinguishes between strong and weak supplementation. In his opinion, strong supplementation is specified as follows: “ $(x)(y)\{\neg(x \leq y) \rightarrow (\exists z)[(z < x) \& \neg Ozy]\}$ ”, i.e., “If one object is not part of a second then it has some proper part which does not overlap the second” (2007, p. 37).<sup>3</sup> He defines the proper part relation “ $<$ ” as asymmetric, transitive and irreflexive. Next he explains that the overlapping “ $O$ ” obtains between  $x$  and  $y$  when they share the same parts, which can be, but do not have to be, identical to them (p. 37).<sup>4</sup> Finally, the symbol “ $\leq$ ” stands for the relation of being a part and it means that “... $x$  is a proper part of or identical to  $y$ :  $(x < y)$  or  $(x = y)$  (p. 37). On the other hand, Null

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<sup>3</sup> Null’s (2007, p. 33) desideratum is to: “... use Edmund Husserl’s dependency ontology to formulate a non-Diodorean and non-Kantian temporal semantics for two-valued, first-order predicate modal languages suitable for expressing ontologies of experience (like physics and cognitive science)”.

<sup>4</sup> Null (2007, p. 37: “Oxy [Read:  $x$  **O**verlaps  $y$ ] **means**  $x$  and  $y$  share some part:  $(\exists z)[(z \leq x) \& (z \leq y)]$ ”.

explains weak supplementation as follows: “ $(x)(y)\{(x < y) \rightarrow (\exists z)[(z < y) \& \neg Ozx]\}$ ” (p. 37).

Next, in *Logical Investigations*, the theory of dependency is strictly connected with the concept of foundation. As Husserl explains, if any **A** cannot exist without supplementation by **B**, then an **A** requires foundation in **B**. This means that **A** is founded on **B** (Hua XIX/1, pp. 267-69: 2001c/25-7). The foundation can be: 1) reciprocal, 2) one-sided, 3) immediate, 4) mediate (Hua XIX/1, pp. 270-2: 2001c/27-8).<sup>5</sup>

Ad.1) *The foundation* is reciprocal or, as Husserl also says, mutual when the parts are non-independent of each other. He says: “Colour and extension accordingly are mutually founded in unified intuition, since no colour is thinkable without a certain extension, and no extension without a certain colour” (Hua XIX/1, p. 270: 2001c/27).<sup>6</sup> Instead of reciprocity, Null is talking about irregular foundation: “IFxy [read: x *Irregularly Founds* y] **means** x and y are distinct objects which found each other:  $(Fxy \& Fyx) \& (x \neq y)$ ” (2007, p. 49). The irregular founding relation is irreflexive, symmetric and non-transitive.<sup>7</sup>

Ad.2) *The foundation* is one-sided when the dependency of the founded part is determined by the independency of the foundational part. Husserl: “The character of being of a judgment is, on the other hand, one-sidedly founded on underlying presentations, since these latter need not function as foundations of judgments” (Hua XIX/1, pp. 270-1: 2001c/27-8).<sup>8</sup> This same relation is considered by Null as unilateral foundation. Null: “*Unilateral Foundation*. Ufxy [read: x *Unilaterally Founds* y] **means** x founds y and y does not found x:  $Fxy \& \neg Fyx$ ”. The unilateral founding relation is irreflexive, asymmetric and transitive (2007, p. 48).

<sup>5</sup> Null considers unilateral, regular and irregular types of foundation (2007, p. 48).

<sup>6</sup> Husserl (Hua XIX/1, p. 270): “So fundieren sich Farbe und Ausdehnung in einer einheitlichen Anschauung gegenseitig, da keine Farbe ohne eine gewisse Ausdehnung, keine Ausdehnung ohne eine gewisse Farbe denkbar ist”.

<sup>7</sup> He (Null 2007, p. 49) also considers regular foundation: “RFxy [read: x *Regularly Founds* y] **means** x is either y or unilaterally founds y:  $[UFxy \text{ or } (x = y)]$ ”.

<sup>8</sup> Husserl (Hua XIX/1, pp. 270-1): “Dagegen ist ein Urteilscharakter einseitig fundiert in den zugrunde liegenden Vorstellungen, da diese nicht als Urteilsfundamente fungieren müssen”.

Ad.3) Next, part **A** is mediately founded on **C** only if an **A** is founded on **C** and there is some other **B**, which is foundational for **A** and founded on **C** (Hua XIX/1, pp. 270-2: 2001c/27-8).<sup>9</sup>

Ad.4) Finally, part **A** is immediately founded on **C** only if an **A** is founded on **C** and there is not any **B**, which is foundational for **A** and founded on **C** (Hua XIX/1, pp. 270-2: 2001c/27-8).<sup>10</sup>

Hence, expressions like “something requires supplementation” or “something is founded on” mean the same as the expression “something is non-independent”. On the other hand, “something does not require supplementation” or “something is not founded on” means the same as “something is independent” (Hua XIX/1, p. 268: 2001c/25). If there is no need for some content to be supplemented, then this content is independent.

Inspired by Husserl’s analyses, Null specifies the notion of “Foundational Dependency”. Firstly, he defines the founding relation as reflexive:  $(x)Fxx$  and transitive:  $(x)(y)(z)[(Fxy \ \& \ Fyz) \rightarrow Fxz]$ . Next, he gives the notion of relative dependency: “ $Dxy$  [read: *x* is **Dependent relative to** *y*] **means** some discrete part of *y* founds *x*:  $(\exists z)\{[(z \leq y) \ \& \ \neg Ozx] \ \& \ Fzx\}$ ” (2007, p. 38). According to him, the relative dependency relation is irreflexive (p. 38). Finally, he defines foundational dependency: “ $FDxy$  [read: *x* is **Foundationally Dependent relative to** *y*] **means** *y* founds but is not part of *x*:  $[Fyx \ \& \ \neg(y \leq x)]$ ” (p. 38).

On account of the foregoing definitions the pivot for the logic of the parts and wholes distinction between 1) *moments* and 2) *pieces* can

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<sup>9</sup> This is how Robert Sokolowski (1968, p. 539) describes the foundation relation: “Husserl articulates a network of definitions and laws governing the many relationships that follow upon the distinction of moments and pieces. He distinguishes between *founded* parts, those that require the presence of other parts (part *A* is founded on part *B* if *A* cannot be had without *B*), and *founding* ones, those that serve as the condition for dependent parts without themselves necessarily being dependent (part *K* founds part *L* if *L* cannot be had without *K*; it is left undecided whether *K* needs *L*. If it does, then the founding relationship is reciprocal; if not, it is unilateral”.

<sup>10</sup> As regards the notion of dependency, see also: (Casari 2005; Poli 1993 and Simons 1992).