

## CATEGORY MISTAKES AND LOGICAL GRAMMAR: RYLE'S HUSSERLIAN TUTELAGE

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*Gilbert Ryle never pursued research under Edmund Husserl. However, Ryle was indeed Husserl's student in a broader sense, as much of his own work was deeply influenced by his studies of Husserl's pre-World War I writings. While Ryle is the thinker whose name typically comes to mind in connection with the concern over category mistakes I argue that (1) Husserl deserves to be known for precisely this concern as well, and (2) the similarity between them is no accident. Developing this reading of Ryle's Husserlian pedigree forces a broader re-evaluation of each of their roles in twentieth-century thought.*

Gilbert Ryle, not Edmund Husserl, is the thinker whose name first comes to mind in connection with the phrase “category mistakes.”<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Ryle is deservedly well known for his concern to diagnose category mistakes at the heart of traditional philosophical problems and for his systematic attempt to avoid such mistakes in his own work. Nonetheless, as I will argue, Husserl deserves to be known for precisely these concerns as well, and the similarity between them is no accident. No accident? To be sure, Gilbert Ryle never took courses with or pursued research under Husserl. He was not, then, Husserl's student in the most commonly accepted sense of the term. However, he was indeed Husserl's student in a broader and equally important sense. Notwithstanding Ryle's protests to the contrary, much of his own work was deeply influenced by his studies of Husserl's pre-World War I writings.

In section one of this paper, I show how Husserl's interests in logical grammar and the confusion of categories (*metabasis*) inform the contours of his work. In fact, based on an examination of his notion of *metabasis*, I argue that Husserlian phenomenology arises as a systematic attempt to avoid historically pervasive category mistakes at the root of logic and epistemology. In section two, I argue that Ryle's

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Michael Strawser for providing helpful comments on an early version of this paper, presented at the 2008 meeting of the American Philosophical Association's Pacific Division.

writings on phenomenology reveal a consistent interpretation that points to Husserl's influence, specifically on questions of philosophical method and the importance of logical grammar. In turn, this concern with logical grammar is expressed in Ryle's efforts to diagnose and avoid category mistakes at the heart of traditional philosophical problems. While Ryle is deservedly well known for this project, credit should also be extended to the largely unacknowledged influence of Husserl.

Husserl, not Ryle, is the twentieth century's original philosopher of the category mistake. Developing this reading of Ryle's pedigree forces an even broader re-evaluation of their respective roles in twentieth-century thought. Despite some obvious differences between them, identifying this line of influence allows us to see Husserl's place in the early twentieth-century project, exemplified by Ryle and Wittgenstein, to *dissolve* (*not solve*) existing philosophical problems. But regardless of origin and influence, each philosopher's logical concerns lead him to move philosophy of mind out of empirical psychology and beyond the mind-body substance paradigm. These moves survive as lasting contributions to the discipline.

### I.

To appreciate why Husserl deserves to be known for his concern with category mistakes, we must first recognise an important difference in the terms used by Ryle and Husserl. What Ryle calls a category mistake and considers a breach of logical grammar, Husserl, drawing from Aristotle, refers to as *metabasis eis allo genos* (a change into some other genus).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> To be sure, Husserl and Ryle do not have identical notions of logical grammar. For Husserl, the *a priori* laws of logical grammar only govern the distinction between sense (*Sinn*) and nonsense (*Unsinn*). Then, within the sphere of sense, Husserl distinguishes between consistent- and counter-sense / absurdity (*Widersinn*). This distinction is also governed by *a priori* laws of combination, though they are not, properly speaking, laws of pure grammar. Nonetheless, for Husserl, both nonsense (*Unsinn*) and counter-sense / absurdity (*Widersinn*) are the result of impermissible combinations of categories. See Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, 2 vols., (tr.) J. N. Findlay (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), 493ff. [Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen. Zweiter Band: Untersuchungen zur Phänomenologie und Theorie der Erkenntnis*, (ed.) Ursula Panzer, *Husserliana* XIX/1, XIX/2 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1984), XIX/1, 301ff.] Hereafter referred to as LI/Hua XIX.

Ryle, however, reads Husserl as though logical grammar governed both the distinction between sense and nonsense and the distinction between consistent-

Husserl's thought manifests a methodological preoccupation with the need to avoid *metabasis*.<sup>3</sup> In *Prolegomena to Pure Logic*, Husserl's arguments against psychologism revolve around the observation that the attempt to ground logic in an empirical psychology results in a *metabasis*.<sup>4</sup> Following this diagnosis, the need to avoid psychologism's error then determines the method (descriptive phenomenology) and the resulting idealism that characterise the *Logical Investigations*. That is, Husserl argues that circumventing psychologism's *metabasis* results in a non-metaphysical "idealism, which *alone* represents the possibility of a self-consistent theory of knowledge." (LI/1, 338/Hua XIX/1, 112, my emphasis) In later work, Husserl saw that the need to avoid *metabasis* rendered the transcendental reduction necessary.<sup>5</sup> In other words, the reduction appears as a necessary tool to avoid *metabasis*. Husserlian phenomenology, then, in both its descriptive and transcendental forms, rests on a systematic attempt to avoid *metabasis*, the sort of conceptual confusion epitomised, but not exhausted, by breaches of what Ryle calls logical grammar. To fully grasp this, however, let us look more closely at Husserl's notion of *metabasis*.

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and counter-sense (absurdity). Thus, consider how, in "Autobiographical," Ryle implies that Husserl's doctrine of logical grammar saves him from admitting illogical objects, à la Meinong, into his ontology. Ryle then links this to the distinction between sense and nonsense. See Gilbert Ryle, "Autobiographical," in *Ryle: A Collection of Critical Essays*, (ed.) O. P. Wood and G. Pitcher (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1970), 8. But if we follow Husserl's own use of the terms, it is not the doctrine of logical grammar that saves him from admitting illogical objects, but rather his understanding of counter-sense and its laws. Ryle's use of "logical grammar," then, extends to the level of consistent- and counter-sense. Thus, where Husserl restricts the extension of the term, Ryle expands it. We can see, however, that Ryle regards what Husserl calls counter-sense to involve a breach of logical grammar. Hence, when we talk of Husserl and the techniques he employs for the avoidance of counter-sense and *metabasis*, we are talking about what Ryle would consider a question of avoiding breaches of logical grammar.

<sup>3</sup> Portions of my present argument for this claim originally appeared in John K. O'Connor, "Anti-Psychologism and the Path beyond Reductive Egology in Husserl," *Philosophy Today*, vol. 51, supplement (2007), 14–22; and John K. O'Connor, "Precedents in Aristotle and Brentano for Husserl's Concern with *Metabasis*," *The Review of Metaphysics*, vol. 61, no. 4 (2008), 737–57.

<sup>4</sup> LI/1, 55–56. [Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen. Erster Band: Prolegomena zur reinen Logik*, (ed.) E. Holenstein, *Husserliana XVIII* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975), 22.] Hereafter referred to as LI/Hua XVIII.

<sup>5</sup> Edmund Husserl, *The Idea of Phenomenology*, (tr.) Lee Hardy (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1999), 30. [Husserl, *Die Idee der Phänomenologie*, (ed.) W. Biemel, *Husserliana II* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1950), 39. Hereafter referred to as IP/Hua II.

Initially, *metabasis* is explained as an error of scientific-field demarcation, but the concept ultimately applies to category confusion more generally. Thus, in the *Prolegomena*, Husserl introduces *metabasis* as

the confusion of fields [*Gebietsvermengung*], the mixture [*Vermischung*] of that which is heterogeneous in a putative field-unity [*Gebietseinheit*], especially when this rests on a complete misreading [*Mißdeutung*] of the objects [*Objekte*] whose investigation is to be the essential aim of the proposed science. (LI/1, 55/Hua XVIII, 22 [A], tr. modified)

Certainly, the emphasis here is on scientific fields, but by tracing Husserl's use of the central terms "*Vermengung*," "*Vermischung*" and "*Verwechslung*," we can see that the notion of *metabasis* also extends to category confusions in arguments and even to single statements. In sum, the category mistakes that Husserl groups under this heading include: a) blurring the boundaries between scientific fields; b) mistakenly switching categories in an argument—equivocation would be an example here; and c) attributing a predicate to a subject of an incompatible genus.

Psychologism commits a *metabasis*. The laws of logic are characterised by exactness, certainty and a lack of empirical content (or purity). Laws or statements with all of these properties can only be the product of an ideal science. Nonetheless, proponents of psychologism contend that empirical psychology provides a sufficient foundation for normative logic. But empirical psychology is a science of a real domain, a domain of temporally determined individuals. As such, it can never justify exact, certain and pure statements. Rather, it can only generate more or less vague, probable and factually-laden laws. As Husserl explains the matter,

There is an essential, quite unbridgeable difference between sciences of the ideal and sciences of the real. The former are *a priori*, the latter empirical. The former set forth ideal general laws, grounded with intuitive certainty in truly general concepts: the latter establish real general laws, relating to a sphere of fact, with probabilities into which we have insight. (LI/1, 185/Hua XVIII, 181 [A], tr. modified)

In short, psychologism unwittingly attempts to bridge an unbridgeable chasm; it confuses the proper domains of real and ideal sciences. As a result, the ideal laws of logic are misrepresented by applying to them

predicates that are only proper to the real. Psychologism is entangled in categorical confusion; it commits a *metabasis*.

Yet how can such a fundamental confusion be so pervasive? Equivocation. According to Husserl, all logical terms (e.g., “presentation,” “judgement,” “proposition”) are ambiguous. On one hand, they refer to real mental states. In this capacity, “judgement” refers to an individual’s position-taking, a concrete act of affirmation or denial. Even if a group of people were to agree to the observation that “it snowed early in the Wet Mountains this year,” we would say, following this sense of the term, that each, having judged this to be so, has his or her own judgement. On the other hand, logical terms refer to ideal objects.<sup>6</sup> In this sense, “judgement” refers to a single proposition, a trans-temporal entity that those in agreement affirm. It is this ideal entity that allows us to state that each member of a group has the *same* judgement despite the obvious individuation and real variation in mental states of those judging. But, according to Husserl, this ambiguity presents a problem for inattentive logicians.<sup>7</sup> The legitimate subject matter of logic consists of ideal propositions (or judgements or beliefs), but through equivocation and a related misattribution of evidence, these propositions end up being misinterpreted as real propositions (or concrete acts of judgement or belief). This link between equivocation and *metabasis* is evident in Husserl’s subsequent discussion of Mill’s logic. Mill confuses “proposition” (in its ideal sense) and “belief” (in its real sense). The result is that the principle of non-contradiction slips

<sup>6</sup> “It is clear, for the rest, that the terms in question, and all such as function in purely logical contexts, must be *equivocal*; they must, on the one hand, stand for class-concepts of mental states such as belong in psychology, but, on the other hand, for generic concepts covering ideal singulars, which belong in a sphere of pure law.” (LI/1, 181–82/Hua XVIII, 176–77 [A]) The claim that *all* logical terms are equivocal is a strong one, but this is not a slip of the pen, for Husserl makes the same claim elsewhere. Consider the following: “If the primitive conceptual distinctions of elementary logic had been completed, and terminology clarified on their basis, and we no longer dragged around with the wretched equivocations that attach to all logical terms—law of thought, form of thought, real and formal truth, presentation, judgment, proposition, concept, character, property, ground, necessity etc.—it would not be possible for absurdities as gross as relativism to be theoretically represented in logic and epistemology, nor could they have the plausibility by which even eminent thinkers are blinded.” (LI/1, 163/Hua XVIII, 152–53 [A])

<sup>7</sup> “Fundamental logical concepts have, up to this time, been quite imperfectly clarified: countless equivocations beset them, some so pernicious, so hard to track down, and to keep consistently separate, that they yield the main ground for the very backward state of pure logic and theory of knowledge.” (LI/1, 252–53/Hua XIX/1, 11) Translation modified to accord with A edition.

from its proper ideal sense, as in “two contradictory propositions cannot both be true” (LI/1, 112/Hua XVIII, 89), to a real sense, as in “two contradictorily opposed acts of belief cannot coexist” (LI/1, 113/Hua XVIII, 91) in the same mind.<sup>8</sup> What begins as a certain pure law of logic ends up as a dubious empirical statement of psychology.

Husserl’s early phenomenological method functions as an antidote to this type of systematic category confusion. With its presuppositionless clarification of concepts, descriptive phenomenology allows, even forces, the logician to recognise and to hold apart the ideal and real senses of terms. So long as these senses remain distinct, the method prevents the equivocal slip and confusion of evidence that grounds psychologism’s category mistake.

In Husserl’s later transcendental phenomenology, the reduction plays a similar role in the avoidance of an even more pervasive *metabasis*. There is, Husserl alleges, an equivocation at the basis of the natural view of knowledge. Those who reflect on the possibility of knowledge from within the natural attitude become entangled in an enigma that arises from equivocation with respect to the concepts “immanence” and “transcendence.” (IP, 27–28/Hua II, 34–36) “Immanence” as “being a real [*reell*] part of consciousness” and “immanence” as “being given (or evident) to consciousness” are not properly distinguished in the modern epistemological tradition. This failure allows the two senses to be confused and even implicitly combined. The result of this equivocation is to restrict all givenness, or all evidence, to only that which is properly within consciousness as a real [*reell*] part. Hume’s notion of “impression” provides the most obvious example of this mistake, but epistemologists from Descartes to Husserl’s psychologist contemporaries (and beyond) fall into the same conceptual confusion. Just as there is an equivocation with respect to the two senses of “immanence,” there is an analogous problem with “transcendence” and its two correlative senses, “*not* being a real [*reell*] part of consciousness” and “*not* being given (or evident) to consciousness.” These two senses are confused and combined, thus requiring anything that transcends consciousness to not be given to consciousness. Unfortunately for epistemologists, this confusion ultimately leads to a conception of knowledge that is impossible to fulfill: knowledge as somehow grasping that which is beyond apprehension. (IP, 27–28/Hua II, 34–36)

The reduction makes its debut in *The Idea of Phenomenology* as a tool to avoid this form of category mistake. Quite simply, philosophy cannot proceed on the basis of natural epistemological reflection

<sup>8</sup> Emphasis removed from quotations.

because the categorical confusion outlined above is endemic to the project. Husserl contends, then, that in order to avoid these pitfalls and to clarify the possibility of knowledge, philosophy must conduct its reflections from a new point of departure distinguished “in principle from every ‘positive’ science.” (IP, 20/Hua II, 24) Doing so requires us to abandon the natural attitude in its entirety, i.e., to “disregard and refrain from making any use of the entire intellectual achievement of the positive sciences as well as natural wisdom and lore.” (IP, 20/Hua II, 24) But this is nothing other than to employ the reduction. Following this path, the reduction arises as a means to avoid the counter-sensical quagmire of natural reflection.

Serving as a methodological tool to avoid *metabasis*, the reduction develops out of Husserl’s early concerns with field delimitation, equivocation and category mistakes. It establishes a secure starting point for phenomenology by leading to a field of experience that is protected against natural-reflective category mistakes. Thus here, too, at the gate of Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology, we find a methodological procedure designed to insulate philosophy against a pervasive category mistake. Stated differently, central to Husserl’s phenomenology, both early and late, is the recognition that philosophy must employ a new set of methodological tools to dissolve central philosophical problems which are based upon category confusion. Category mistakes—cases of *metabasis*—are a primary impediment to philosophy; resolving these confusions dissolves, or at least reconfigures, the seemingly intractable problem.

## II.

Although there is some dispute about Ryle’s links to phenomenology, one thing is certain: he wrote a fair amount about phenomenology and had, for at least a period, an interest in it.<sup>9</sup> Was his positive interest merely a youthful dead-end without lasting influence? Michael Dummett, for one, says “yes.”<sup>10</sup> Indeed, some of Ryle’s own statements have

<sup>9</sup> So, for example, in 1927, he published a review of Ingarden’s *Essentiale Fragen*; in 1929, he reviewed Heidegger’s *Sein und Zeit*; 1932 saw him contribute a piece on phenomenology to the Aristotelian Society; in 1946, his review of Farber’s *Foundations of Phenomenology* appeared; “Phenomenology versus *The Concept of Mind*” was presented in 1958; “Disgusted Grandfather of Phenomenology” appeared posthumously in 1976.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Dummett, *The Origins of Analytical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), ix–x. Cited in Amie L. Thomasson, “Phenomenology and

been interpreted (wrongly) as advancing this claim.<sup>11</sup> But even among those who discern phenomenology’s influence on Ryle, there is disagreement. Did Ryle’s position change as Robin Small maintains? Did he move from youthful appreciation to mature rejection of phenomenology? Certainly, the evidence provides *prima facie* support for this. While Ryle’s earlier works cast phenomenology in a critical but positive light, his later works are more antagonistic.<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, Small distinguishes between his pre- and post-war writings, characterising the former as marked by “qualified sympathy” to phenomenology, and describing the latter as involving “a remarkably cavalier approach” and a tone of “outright rejection” of phenomenology.<sup>13</sup> On closer inspection, though, I contend that the change is really more one of tone than of content. Ryle’s criticism remains consistent throughout his pre- and post-war writings and he does not introduce any new, decisive arguments that would constitute grounds for claiming a change in his philosophical position vis-à-vis phenomenology. That is, the rhetorical change that Small rightly recognises is not matched by a change in content. Ryle’s position is stable, and it is within this stable position that we can see Husserl’s influence on Ryle.<sup>14</sup>

To identify this consistent content, let’s begin with the distinction with which Ryle opens “Phenomenology,” his 1932 address to the Aristotelian Society. “I want to distinguish” he writes, “the question

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the Development of Analytic Philosophy,” *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 40, Supplement (2002), 116.

<sup>11</sup> “It is sometimes suggested that in my well or ill spent youth I had been for a while a disciple of Husserl’s phenomenology. There is not much truth in this.” Ryle, “Autobiographical,” 9. See below (in text) for my response to this misinterpretation.

<sup>12</sup> Robin Small, “Ryle and Husserl,” in *A Hundred Years of Phenomenology: Perspectives on a Philosophical Tradition*, (ed.) R. Small (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001). According to Small, the early, more positive works are Ryle’s “Review of Roman Ingarden’s *Essentiale Fragen: Ein Beitrag zum Problem des Wesens*,” *Mind*, vol. 36, no. 143 (1927); “Review of Martin Heidegger’s *Sein und Zeit*,” *Mind*, vol. 38, no. 151 (1929); “Phenomenology,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplement XI* (1932), hereafter referred to as PAS. The later, more antagonistic works are Ryle’s “Review of Marvin Farber’s *The Foundations of Phenomenology*,” *Philosophy: the Journal of the British Institute of Philosophy*, vol. 21, no. 80 (1946), hereafter referred to as RMF; and “Phenomenology versus ‘The Concept of Mind,’” in *Collected Papers* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1971).

<sup>13</sup> Small, “Ryle and Husserl,” 59.

<sup>14</sup> Both Amie Thomasson and Johannes Brandl regard Ryle as holding a stable position, but they disagree over its significance. See Thomasson, “Phenomenology and the Development of Analytic Philosophy,” and Johannes L. Brandl, “Gilbert Ryle: A Mediator between Analytic Philosophy and Phenomenology,” *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 40, Supplement (2002), 145.

[of] what Phenomenology is from certain special questions about certain special claims that are made for it." (PAS, 68) On one hand, then, there is phenomenology itself; on the other, special claims others make on its behalf. Ryle's assessment follows this distinction: phenomenology itself is largely affirmed, but the so-called special claims are rejected.

According to Ryle, "Husserl uses the term 'Phenomenology' to denote the analysis of the root types of mental functioning. And he tries to show (1) that Phenomenology is anyhow a part of philosophy; (2) that it is an enquiry which can become a rigorous *science*; (3) that it is *a priori*." (PAS, 69) Ryle affirms the legitimacy of the first and the third aspects of phenomenology identified above. There is, he points out, a warranted precedent for holding that "at least...an important part of philosophy" involves the analysis of mental operations. Not all philosophy has historically been analytical, but Ryle explicitly aligns Husserl with a legitimate analytical project that extends back to Plato and Aristotle. (PAS, 70) Broaching the question of Husserl's "a priorism," Ryle notes the innovation in distinguishing phenomenology (or philosophy more generally) from empirical psychology: "[T]he method of philosophy proper is *a priori*...being *a priori* phenomenology cannot employ as its premises either the particular observations or the inductive generalizations of empirical psychology." (PAS, 70–71) Husserl got this right not just for phenomenology, he argues, but for philosophy as such; phenomenology's claim for the necessity of a non-empirical domain and an analytic method is generalisable to philosophy.<sup>15</sup> Thus, summarising and affirming Husserl's accomplishments, Ryle writes, "What Husserl has done so far is (a) to distinguish, as his predecessors had largely failed to do, between the philosophical and the psychological methods of investigating consciousness; (b) to make clear that anyhow this part of philosophy is analytical and not speculative or hypothetical." (PAS, 74)

Nonetheless, criticisms, even in this pre-war work, are far from scarce. Husserl's alleged Platonism is an initial target, being faulted for its ontology and *Wesensschau* epistemology. (PAS, 72–73) Also under attack are the status of phenomenology as first philosophy and what Ryle—and others—regard as Husserl's "quasi-solipsistic" or "egocen-

<sup>15</sup> "This [i.e., phenomenology's a priorism and its relation to empirical psychology] seems to me to be true and generalizable"; "No philosophical propositions are empirical"; "with his [Husserl's] official view that the business of philosophy is not to give new information about the world, but to analyse the most general forms of what experience finds to be exemplified in the world I completely agree." (PAS, 71, 72)

tric metaphysic." (PAS, 81, 78) According to the criticism, this metaphysics arises on the basis of two additional false theories: Husserl's "doctrine of intentional objects" and his exclusive attribution of self-evidence to inner perception and of fallibility to transcendent perception. (PAS, 79, 81) In short, Ryle finds no fewer than five significant targets to attack. Make no mistake about it—the "qualified sympathy" is qualified indeed.

But before we take this critical deluge as a retraction of Ryle's prior affirmations, we should consider how he evaluates the force of his own attacks. Concerning Husserl's Platonism, he writes, "I do not think that the whole notion of phenomenology hinges on this *special theory*." (PAS, 73, my emphasis) On phenomenology's egocentric metaphysics, we read that "this seems to be the result of one or two false theories which need never and should never have trespassed into the analysis of types of mental functioning." (PAS, 78) And, even more to the point, we are told that these theories "are not arrived at by genuine phenomenological analysis." (PAS, 83) Finally, as the status of phenomenology as first philosophy is a consequence of this metaphysics, we can see now that for each of the five criticisms, Ryle directs the attack not at phenomenology as such, but rather at what he regards as Husserl's *mistaken application* of it. (PAS, 78) In other words, in accordance with the distinction that opens his address to the *Aristotelian Society*, Ryle's opposition truly is restricted to what he identifies as special claims made for phenomenology. In contrast, the legitimacy of phenomenology itself (as characterised by Ryle) is affirmed, while its lessons of field demarcation and analytic method are extended to philosophy in general.

This position remains constant. That is, in writings both earlier and later than the 1932 piece we have been discussing, a) some version of the distinction between what phenomenology is and "special claims" is operative, and b) affirmation of the first accompanies rejection of the second. Nor is it merely that he makes the distinction and related affirmation; rather, even the content is stable.

To see that this is the case, let us first look at the earlier works. There we can already find Ryle's concern with essences, eidetic intuition, inner perception and the subjectivist metaphysics he believed phenomenology entailed. The first two concerns appear as early as his 1927 review of Ingarden's *Essentiale Fragen*. The last two points are introduced in 1929, in his review of Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*. Furthermore, in each case, these objects of attack are distinguished from phenomenology proper, which itself receives a measure of endorsement. So, for example, we can see that an early version of the 1932

distinction and corresponding evaluation are implicit in the conclusion to the Ingarden review:

And while we may feel alarm and doubts in the face of the imposing hierarchy of Wesen, Wesenheit, Idee, Natur, Eidos, Wesens Gesetz, Morphe, etc. and scent danger in the doctrine of a special Intuition for “ideal” or “a priori” objects, we must follow with the deepest interest the explorations of this “presuppositionless philosophy” in the difficult country of first principles. (RMF, 370)

The distinction and evaluation are made explicit in the Heidegger review:

There is a progressive trend visible in the philosophy of Husserl and his followers towards a rarified Subjective Idealism or even Solipsism, a trend which, in my view, is not necessitated by the idea of Phenomenology, which I regard as good, but only by a particular elaboration of a part of a special theory of Meaning which is, if I am not mistaken, an evil legacy from the Locke-Brentano hypothesis of the existence of “ideas.”<sup>16</sup>

Finally, critiquing Heidegger, Ryle writes, “[B]oth the positive element of Humanism and the negative sceptical element of Relativism and Solipsism appear to be derived from views *interpolated into and not won by* the Phenomenological Method.”<sup>17</sup>

While these passages establish a consistent position in the pre-war works, what of the post-war writings? Admittedly, a change in tone and rhetoric threatens to obscure any continuity. How, then, can we justify a claim for pre- and post-war continuity? Since we have established a consistent interpretation in Ryle’s pre-war works, it would be better simply to ask what would justify the claim that a change in content occurred. We would need one of the following two conditions to be met: (1) Ryle would have to (implicitly or explicitly) reject the distinction between phenomenology proper and the special claims made for it<sup>18</sup>; or (2) Ryle would have to deny the merits he originally attributed to phenomenology proper, even if he maintains the distinction. Examining a characteristic post-war work—his 1946 review of Farber’s *The Foundations of Phenomenology*—reveals that *neither* condition is met.

<sup>16</sup> Ryle, “Review of Martin Heidegger’s *Sein und Zeit*,” 362.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 368, my emphasis.

<sup>18</sup> To implicitly meet this condition is to discuss phenomenology in a way that no longer fits the distinction.

Most of the criticisms presented are familiar: resistance to essential intuition, to phenomenology as first philosophy and to Husserl’s “full Cartesian metaphysic.” (RMF, 267) These were regarded as “special claims” in the pre-war work, and there is every reason to believe they remain so. Thus, phenomenology as first philosophy, and by extension, its metaphysics, are identified as “large claims made by Husserl for Phenomenology.” (RMF, 267) Against essential intuition, Ryle writes, “It is, therefore, nonsense (as we felt in our bones) to speak of ‘intuiting essences.’ The proprietary method claimed for Phenomenology is a sham.” (RMF, 267) But let’s be clear about this attack. Earlier in the review, Ryle points out that Husserl has “credited it [philosophical psychology] with a proprietary method” and assigned it the name “phenomenology.” (RMF, 265) The attack, as before, is on Husserl’s *special claim*. Continuing the quotation will help us see this.

Phenomenology, if it moves at all, moves only by the procedures by which all good philosophers have always advanced the elucidation of concepts, including consciousness-concepts.

Husserl’s practice bears this out. He often does produce acute and sometimes original and illuminating elucidations of such concepts. But he does so not by barely “constatating.” He argues.<sup>19</sup>

Thus the familiar critiques are here, and each is, as we have seen, a critique of a special claim. Even the harshest comment—that phenomenology’s method “is a sham”—is directed at a special claim. As Thomasson points out, this rejection of Husserl’s proprietary method is really a rejection of “the philosophical *interpretation* that Husserl (among others) gave of what he was doing in applying this method.” In contrast, the project and actual method (i.e., what is really being done) descending from Husserl is accepted by Ryle.<sup>20</sup> Thus, in the Farber review, the critiques are directed at special claims. That is, the first condition for concluding that Ryle’s position changed cannot be met. But what about the second? Does Ryle in his post-war work deny the merits he earlier accorded to phenomenology proper?

While the post-war works do introduce new criticisms of phenomenology, none deny the merits originally attributed to it. In fact, each

<sup>19</sup> RMF, 267. Ryle later summarises the evaluation: “Had his [Husserl’s] writings and teachings consisted even largely of his positive analyses of psychological concepts, a good deal of value would have been got from them. For despite his erroneous conviction that his method was novel, many of his particular results are fresh.” (*Ibid.*, 268)

<sup>20</sup> Thomasson, “Phenomenology and the Development of Analytic Philosophy,” 128.

work fits into the now-familiar pattern; criticism is reserved for special claims. Thus, we are told that Husserl was “insufficiently influenced” by Brentano’s distinction between grammatical and logical structure. (RMF, 263) Assessing the trajectory of Husserl’s work, Ryle writes that Husserl soon “Lost what humour he had ever possessed as well as nearly all his original clarity and vigour of style,” producing instead “a vast jargon of his own which subserves, apparently, the ends neither of brevity nor perspicuity.” (RMF, 268) Critiquing the direction of Husserl’s efforts, Ryle writes that instead of pursuing valuable positive analyses, “the great bulk of his labours was devoted to the profitless tasks of promising epoch-making results and of demarcating the sub-faculties of his new science.” (RMF, 268) Finally, in summary, we read that “Phenomenology was, from its birth, a bore. Its over-solemnity of manner...will secure that its lofty claims are ignored.” (RMF, 268)

Even though this final critique comes close to denying value to phenomenology as such, it still falls short. It addresses, exactly as Ryle states, the *manner* in which phenomenology is conducted. This is not a rejection of phenomenology’s merits. The Farber review is certainly no encomium, but a close reading shows that it does not undermine phenomenology’s merit as such, especially when this is divorced from its special claims and the manner in which its practitioners have carried it out.<sup>21</sup>

Hence, contra Small, appealing to Ryle’s own 1932 distinction enables us to track the consistency through his pre- and post-war writings. Recognising this stability, Thomasson has also argued that many of Ryle’s conclusions concerning philosophical method are derived from phenomenology. More precisely, she argues that the notion that philosophy must be distinct from empirical disciplines, and that it involves a method of conceptual analysis, comes from Brentano and Husserl.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, that this analysis involves discerning logical

<sup>21</sup> Finally, it is worth pointing out that, in the Farber review, as in the later “Autobiographical” and “Afterword,” Ryle uses the term “phenomenology” to refer to Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology and not his earlier descriptive phenomenology. See RMF, 265; Ryle, “Autobiographical,” 9; and Ryle, “Afterword,” *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, vol. 1 (1970), 13.

<sup>22</sup> Thus Thomasson writes, “It is this conception of philosophy as conceptual analysis that served as the general form of an answer to the questions that drove Ryle since the beginning of his career: What proper role can philosophy fulfill, and how is it related to and different from that of the natural sciences? The answer Ryle gives, borrowed from Brentano and Husserl and then generalized is: The proper role of philosophy is the analysis of concepts used in the sciences and

grammar, along with the idea that nonsense can be used as a key to discern breaches of such grammar, comes through Husserl as well.<sup>23</sup>

Ryle never acknowledged the extent of Husserl’s influence. In fact, one can easily take this passage from his “Autobiographical” to be a direct denial of any such influence: “It is sometimes suggested that in my well or ill spent youth I had been for a while a disciple of Husserl’s phenomenology. There is not much truth in this.” I contend, however, that this apparent denial of Husserlian influence, when examined carefully, is not what it seems to be. For Ryle, mitigating the denial, continues:

A good deal of phenomenology does indeed get into the second edition of Husserl’s *Logische Untersuchungen*, which is what I was reading.... So I did duly try to make out what this new “-ology” was, and why it was there.... I realized pretty soon that Husserl’s intentionalist, anti-psychologistic theory of Meaning/Nonsense, which was what interested me, owed nothing to his posterior Phenomenology, and bequeathed too little to it.<sup>24</sup>

Note that, in this passage, the term “phenomenology” no longer carries the same referent as it did in Ryle’s earlier work. Now Ryle separates phenomenology from other aspects of Husserl’s work, one of which involves the distinction between sense and nonsense (a central point of influence marked by Thomasson), such that his never having been a disciple of Husserl’s *phenomenology* in no way conflicts with claims of Husserlian influence. In fact, Ryle continues to profess his interest in aspects of Husserl’s work. Note also that conceiving of philosophy as involving conceptual analysis and as distinct from empirical disciplines are characterisations easily recognised in, according to Ryle’s later parlance, the non-phenomenological Husserl (that is, the pre-transcendental phenomenological Husserl). So Ryle’s denial of Husserlian “discipleship” is, in fact, a denial of interest in and influence by Husserl’s *transcendental phenomenology only*. But with the “denial,” he simultaneously acknowledges his interest in Husserl’s pre-transcendental phenomenology.

elsewhere.” Thomasson, “Phenomenology and the Development of Analytic Philosophy,” 122.

<sup>23</sup> As Thomasson summarises, “ideas from the *Logical Investigations* are a crucial original source both of Ryle’s general idea that philosophical analyses of meaning are based not in finding dictionary definitions but rather in uncovering the ‘logical grammar’ of expressions and of his more famous technique of using nonsense as a clue to category differences.” (*Ibid.*, 125)

<sup>24</sup> Ryle, “Autobiographical,” 9.

We have already examined the notion that philosophy is a non-empirical analytic practice. Now let us consider logical grammar. Toward the end of his life, Ryle described the Austrian tradition of logical objectivism as follows:

Because Mill was wrong, Heaven had to be stocked with Logical Objects. But could the Angel Gabriel admit Illogical Objects? Or must even Heaven kowtow to what Husserl, like Wittgenstein after him, called “the rules of logical grammar” or “logical syntax”? ... Although Husserl, unlike Meinong and like Russell, interested me by taking very seriously the opposition between Sense and Nonsense [a distinction based on logical grammar], he failed to make very much of it.... He did not hit upon the paradox-generators and therefore did not try to build up any general diagnostic or preventative theory.<sup>25</sup>

This profession of interest contains a mistake that at once threatens to minimise Husserl’s significance and increase Ryle’s own. Revisiting my arguments from section one, the following should now be clear: Far from “not making very much of” the distinction between sense and nonsense and issues of logical grammar, as Ryle contends, Husserl took them very seriously. In fact, they are manifestations of his under-recognised concern to avoid category mistakes. Furthermore, again contra Ryle, Husserl *did* establish a “general preventative theory” (more properly, “method”). Its name is phenomenology.

Recall that, in Husserl, just as psychologism rests on a category mistake, so too does modern epistemology. Just as psychologism’s mistake is avoidable only by adopting the method of phenomenological description, modern epistemology’s mistake is avoidable only by performing the reduction and entering transcendental phenomenology. We have, then, two moves that should be familiar to us from Ryle’s own work: 1) recognising a fundamental category mistake at the root of traditional philosophical questions, and 2) presenting a positive theory that is determined by the need to avoid this mistake. Nor may we dismiss these similarities as mere parallels, for there is strong evidence of Husserl’s influence. I shall conclude by pointing to a certain irony here. Ryle once derided Husserl for not following through on his own programmatic statements. (RMF, 268) Yet he was blind to the fact that, where Husserl did follow through, he was keenly concerned, as was Ryle himself, to identify fundamental category confusions at the root of traditional philosophical mistakes and then to

advance a theory whose outlines were determined precisely by the need to avoid such mistakes.

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.