

**Pierre-Jean Renaudie, *Husserl et les catégories: Langage, pensée, et perception*, Vrin, Bibliothèque d'Histoire de la Philosophie, 2015, 253 pp, € 24.00, ISBN: 978-2-7116-2635-9**

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Recent work on Husserl has sought to emphasize the extent to which Husserl's mature philosophy has a deep systematic unity and has pointed to Husserl's doctrine of categories in the *Logical Investigations* as providing the skeleton for this system.<sup>1</sup> Husserl's philosophy of the categories itself has also become something of a touchpoint in recent debates in ontology and (meta-)metaphysics, as Husserl's phenomenological methodology has been seen as charting out an approach to the categories which allows us to bracket the issues that frame the traditional debate between realism and conceptualism about categories. This is because Husserl's account has been seen to limit itself to describing the correlation that obtains between the contents of the categories (as what is meant "in" thinking and judging according to categories) and their intended objectivities (what is meant "through" them), without assuming that either one of these asymmetrically depends on the other, and without asserting in particular that there *are* such objective correlates.<sup>2</sup>

Though these recent more analytical engagements with Husserl's philosophy of categories have yielded fruitful results, they have also remained largely at arm's length from Husserl's own texts, and they have also not sought to demonstrate how such a "correlationist" approach might fit systematically with other commitments of Husserl's phenomenology. And even those more clearly focused on Husserl's texts and also more attentive to systematic issues in Husserl's philosophy have not explored in much depth how Husserl came to develop this approach to the categories, in particular, in his work prior to the *Logical Investigations*.

<sup>1</sup> David Woodruff Smith's recent *Husserl* (Routledge 2007; 2nd ed. 2013) is exemplary in this regard. Compare as well Jocelyn Benoist's *Phénoménologie, sémantique, ontologie* (Presses universitaires de France, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> The recent work of Amie Thomasson is exemplary in this regard.

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One of the many things that will be of interest in Pierre-Jean Renaudie's excellent study, therefore, is that it provides both systematically-minded interpreters and correlationist-leaning neo-Husserlians with the much-needed historical, textual, and philosophical background to the doctrine of the categories Husserl lays out in his 1900/01 masterwork. In its first few chapters, Renaudie charts out key episodes on Husserl's path to the *Investigations*' thesis that there is a rigorous, exact "reciprocity" or "parallelism" between the categories of "objects" and the categories of "meaning [signification]" (pp. 17–18). Rather than viewing categories as either merely "conceptual tools pertaining to thought" or the "highest genera of being", Renaudie concludes that Husserl takes the categories to be instead "the place of the correlation between these two", by "representing at the same time the conditions of the *apprehension* of objectivity and the structure of the *objectivity* apprehended as such, that with which we think or that which allows us to think and that itself which we think or which is thought" (p. 27; my emphasis).

The book also does much more than this, with Renaudie providing an equally sensitive exposition of Husserl's development of the *phenomenology* of the categories themselves—both as to how they are "given" as such to the mind, and as to how they function in everyday perceptual consciousness. On the former topic, Renaudie's book very admirably helps to fill a long-standing philosophical-conceptual gap in our understanding of the theoretical and historical motivations that contribute to Husserl's striking proposal of a special "*categorial intuition*". Concerning the relation between categories and perception, Renaudie helps to bring into focus aspects of Husserl's views that put him into a more direct conversation (and contrast) with more recent Sellars-inspired work (by McDowell and others) on "conceptualism" in the philosophy of perception. Here Renaudie argues that Husserl embraces a broadly conceptualist position on which "the categories describe correlatively the logical structure of all that can be thought [...] as much as all that can be intuited", such that "the scope of logic" itself, qua category-theory, is not "limited to the sphere of thought but extends to the domain of perception" (p. 19). Here again, however, Renaudie teases out a second form of correlationism in Husserl—now between the realm of the conceptual and that of the perceptual—one which also allows Husserl to escape impositionist worries about the categories being first external to what is given in sense and only secondarily "determining" them for the mind.

Finally, Renaudie also signals that he means to push forward existing discussions of Husserl's *Investigations* themselves, by making a start on charting out the systematic interrelations between Husserl's account of categories and his philosophy of *language*. Though this ultimately receives less of his attention than the previous topics, Renaudie puts forward the striking thesis that, rather than that between thought and perception, it is actually "the opposition between *language* and perception" which becomes "the pivot" of Husserl's inquiry into categoriality, with the core "tension" needing to be resolved arising from "the irreducible distance" that separates these "two regimes of intentional activity", that of "*saying*" and "*seeing*", "meaning" and "intuition" as "two opposing intentional modalities of relating to an object" (p. 24; my emphasis). One hopes that Renaudie will explore this interpretive thesis even further in future work.

Let me provide a short summary of the main narrative of the book, before raising some questions about some of Renaudie's key interpretive theses.

After an Introduction which sets out his main agenda, Renaudie's first two chapters are very effective in bringing out the various pathways that Husserl explored in the 1890s. Here Renaudie provides a very clear and engaging overview of the development of Husserl's views from the time of his very early 1891 *Philosophy of Arithmetic* up through his less familiar writings in the later 1890s on the logic and psychology of categoriality. Renaudie shows how Husserl begins to formulate various elements of the doctrine of the categories in the *Investigations* by taking his cues from the very specific inadequacies and forms of one-sidedness that he finds in the views of Kant, Bolzano, Brentano, Stumpf, and others. One especially key moment, Renaudie argues, is when Husserl builds upon by Stumpf's idea of a primitively (immediately, directly) given "fusion" of sense-qualities (e.g., tones into a musical chord; p. 66f), in order to articulate a more general idea of unities of multiplicities (whether sensory or otherwise) which are immediately (directly) given to the mind, independently of any mental act of "synthesizing" the multiplicities into the relevant unity. This provides Husserl with a way to avoid more radical idealist positions, and "recognize the existence of combinations present in the thing itself" (p. 31), and combinations, moreover, that "appear to us as a given, independently of all activity of thought" (p. 41).

Renaudie then shows how this engagement with Stumpf, von Ehrenfels, and others, leads Husserl in the later 1890s to undertake the more general "logical investigation" of the universal laws of wholes and parts "in general", whether sensible or otherwise, whether "given" to the mind (as "contents") or not (p. 86f). Renaudie highlights how this generalized theory of fusion foreshadows the later "eidetic reduction" (p. 93), and also how Husserl's shift to a "strictly logical analysis" thereby provides him with the beginnings of a way to avoid a more radical Meinongianism about abstract wholes and instead map out "a metaphysically neutral terrain"—an approach which, among other things, will ultimately provide the basis for Husserl "to pose anew the question of the distinction and the relations between the sensible and the intelligible" (p. 103).

In the third chapter, Renaudie finally turns more directly to the *Investigations* themselves, drawing out the extent to which this metaphysical neutrality is meant to be secured by Husserl's development of a phenomenology-slanted version of "object-theory". Renaudie shows how Husserl's analysis aims only to establish the "relations" thanks to which certain contents can "assume the *phenomenological* unity of an object", rather than to simply and straightforwardly posit these relations in a "naively realist *ontology*" (p. 109; my emphasis). This abstract generalized mereology of the objects of intentionality is then used to underwrite Husserl's analysis of the difference between the structure of the object as intended in *perception*—"the grammar of intuitivity"—and that of the object as intended in acts of *predication*, which involve further acts of identification (pp. 110–11).

Renaudie then shows, secondly, how the same mereology gives Husserl a way to describe how the intentionality of perception nevertheless "finds" that of predications (p. 114f), without this "founding" having any *metaphysical* import as to the objects of these intentions. Rather, both the distinction between perception

and predication, and the subsequent founding relation of predication upon perception, are taken to obtain neither at the physical nor the psychical levels, but at the “metaphysically neutral”, merely “logical” level, understood as the domain of ways of intending objects (pp. 125–6).

In Chapter 4, Renaudie uses the foregoing to build a very compelling case for seeing Husserl’s phenomenological transformation of the doctrine of fusion as playing a more central role than has typically been acknowledged in the emergence of Husserl’s signature doctrine of “categorical intuition” itself. Renaudie presents Husserl’s own “breakthrough” as arising from a kind of synthesis of this pair of ideas: (1) the abstract logical idea of a kind of *unity* (whole-part) that pertains to an intentional object, a unity whose laws are not specifically laws of anything sensible; and (2) the proto-phenomenological idea of a fused unity (whole) of parts simply being *made present* to mind without any acts of synthesis being involved in the “giving” itself. These thoughts taken together allow Husserl to escape two of the central dogmas of Kantianism: that active mental combination by our capacity for thinking (our “understanding”) is always and everywhere responsible for any unification present in consciousness; and that the only thing that can be immediately presented to consciousness in “intuition” (understood as immediate givenness to mind) are specifically sensible—even if “pure” (spatial, temporal)—contents. Husserl’s logico-phenomenological innovations allowed him to explore the possibility not only that unities could be present to mind without any special act of synthesis “unifying” them, but also that these unities themselves could very well be non-sensible, or at the very least involve non-sensible aspects.

As Renaudie then adeptly shows, Husserl’s argument for both the necessity, and then the possibility, of such intuitions goes through two crucial bridge-steps. The first draws on the common thought that perception can play a key role in demonstrating that our explicitly category-involving ways of meaning or intending objects (in, e.g., empirical judgments) are “fulfilled”, or are “true” to how these objects are really given as being. This demonstration, however, could only take place if sometimes perceptions themselves presented categorical structure sufficient to be “adequate” to our categorially infused intentions (e.g., predications; p. 150). Husserl’s account of how givenness (intuition) involving the categories is possible describes a process by which such intuitions can arise by being “founded” on a more originary having of simple sensible intuitions, with our consciousness of what is given in these intuitions then being “modified” in order to bring to light categorial objectivities already implicitly present in the object of the original simple intuition.

From here Renaudie argues that Husserl can thus be seen as aiming to highlight a kind of givenness that “finds its descriptive foundation in the *interior* of perception itself” (p. 157; cf. p. 168): “simple perception gives us already an object in which an intuition of another type—categorial—will always be able to subsequently recognize [*reconnaître*] a complex structuration” (p. 160). What categorial intuition presents, in its simplest form, are the non-sensible aspects of the sensory thing itself (e.g., its *being* a certain way). The categorial intuition is thus a second, “modified”, way of *being given* one and the same thing that was already given in simple intuition, yet without “altering” the *thing itself* which is so given (p. 167). This

makes the difference in the two kinds of intuition one of the “sense” in question and so points to a difference in the “grammar” of the ways of meaning involved in the two kinds of intuitions, rather than a difference in the ontology of the things to which the two intuitions are related (p. 170).

Yet even if Husserl means to foreground only a difference in the *sense* of two types of intuitions, rather than a difference in the *things* intuited, Renaudie notes that there nevertheless remains the question of what sort of mental *acts* are required for a *subject* to make the transition from simple to categorial intuition—i.e., from grasping a sense which gives a thing directly and simply, to grasping a sense which gives the being-a-certain-way of the thing—in other words, an account that would cash out what else besides simple intuiting makes possible (“founds”) categorial intuiting. This act-theoretic account forms the subject-matter of the fifth and final chapter. Renaudie notes that Husserl ultimately concedes that, even if the unities of the *objects meant* in such categorial intuitions are not constituted by mental acts of synthesis, the possibility of the mental *act* of categorially intuiting is itself something which depends on some kind of act of synthesis which links together (1) the initial simple intuition of the thing, with (2) an act of intending (e.g., judging) certain categorial objectivities (e.g., its *being-a-certain-way*) as present in the thing, with (3) an anticipated “fulfillment” of this intending of a categorial objectivity in a higher intuition whose way of giving the categorial dimensions of the object is “adequate” to the way in which it was intended (p. 180f).

But not only does Husserl think that “it is never simple sensibility which is able to furnish the fulfillment of categorial intentions”, he also thinks that the relevant “fulfillment resides always in a sensibility *informed by categorial acts*” (p. 189, my emphasis; here Renaudie is citing the Introduction to the 6th *Investigation*). This, however, would seem to suggest that it is the act of synthesis itself which is responsible for making (“forming”) what is given “in” the categorial intuition. Just this sort of reading seems to be endorsed by Renaudie: “the categorial syntheses are therefore able to intervene subsequent to intuition”, in “the production of *sense* (i.e., in the possibility of an intention being defined as directed toward the *object*)” (p. 189).

To be sure, this is still not an ontological “founding of *objects*”, and it is perhaps first and foremost a “founding of *acts*” (p. 195). Even so, the suggestion that this activity also seems to be what “founds” something in the logical level of *sense* does not seem to sit well with the logical idealism (or semantic objectivism) Husserl embraces about the level of meaning at the time. Indeed, it becomes unclear how Husserl’s views ultimately avoid collapsing back into the more (perhaps neo-) Kantian picture, where synthetic *acts* are precisely what function as the grounds for the relevant combinations of *ways of meaning* objects (*viz.* synthesis of concepts to form judgments). It *eo ipso* pushes Husserl away from a view that would hold the principle of combination of sense to be wholly logic-internal, such that, with respect to acts, they could simply just be given (or “grasped”, as a Fregean model might have it).

In any case, this leads to the more general question of the nature of the constraints on sense itself, and in particular the constraints (if any) on what sorts of objects can be intended as to be given in future categorial intuitions. The

dependence of categorial-intuitive sense on categorial-intentional acts (e.g. judgments) already suggests a degree of *independence* of the senses involved in categorial-intentional acts from the ways the objects are or will be actually given—and we do seem to be able to intend categorial determinations which will never be given in intuitions because they are *false* of their intended objects. Beyond this, however, Renaudie highlights a further “liberty”, or even “arbitrariness” (p. 196), that seems to be involved in our thinking even relative to those determinations which might turn out to be *true* of their objects: in general, “we exercise the ‘freedom’ of our thought in combining forms of meaning, without needing them to actually correspond to something in the object given in sensible intuition” (p. 194). In fact, Renaudie argues that “at the basis of the argumentation deployed by Husserl” there lies a commitment to “the *autonomy* of the forms of meaning” (p. 206; my emphasis): meanings “obey laws of their own and which are not at all a matter of the relation to whatever being would be” if the meaning were objectively valid (p. 207).

This might seem to open up room for a skeptical gap, in light of the ultimate “absence” of constraint on ways of intending by “what is objectively ‘intended’”—such that in principle our thought as a whole might be placed at a distance from its objects, and might thereby fail to get a “grip [*prise*]” on the world itself (p. 217). At this point, however, Renaudie reminds us of Husserl’s confidence that any such apparent gap can only be an illusory one. This is because “there is no sense in thinking an *actual* distance between thought and the world”—the thought is literally a “non-sense”—because “the opposition of the one to the other can only have *logical* sense” (p. 217). The distinction itself is one that has sense only *within* the realm of thinking itself: “we are not able to *begin* with the opposition of thought and object”, because “the separation of thought and object is effected *in the interior of thought itself*” (p. 225); the object “can only be thematized *in its difference from the thought of the object* [...] *by thought itself*” (p. 226).

In the Conclusion, Renaudie highlights the extent to which a very similar maneuver can be seen to have already been present in Husserl’s ultimate resolution of the traditional worry about a gap between thought and sensible *intuition* as well: “this classical opposition between the manner in which being is given and the manner in which thought is related to it, is one that certainly has a value, but a value that is strictly *internal* to the phenomenological analysis of forms [of intentionality]” (p. 231). It, too, represents a division *within* the forms of sense, the “logical” forms, understood in this broadened manner. Ultimately, then, it is the “syntactical elements of meaning” that lie “at the basis of [...] the production of sense” (p. 235) which constitute the widest domain of phenomenological analysis; the distinctions between thought and perception, and between thought and being, turn out both to rest on logical distinctions of species of sense.

Hopefully the foregoing conveys at least some of both the elegance and nuance of Renaudie’s reconstruction of the core dimensions of Husserl’s analysis of the categories (categorial acts, categorial intuition, categorial meanings [senses], categorial objectivities, etc.), the expertise with which Renaudie handles both Husserl’s primary texts and the influence of his historical context upon his emerging views, and the relevance and philosophical interest of the book’s main topics for a

wide audience. Let me conclude, then, by indicating several points at which Renaudie's interpretation might be expanded, both to incorporate discussion of more of Husserl's views (including his later development), but also to allow Renaudie to provide his own assessment of the defensibility of Husserl's views at the time of the *Investigations*.

One feature of Husserl's views which (as noted above) unfortunately get less focus than one might have expected, given Renaudie's subtitle, is the precise connection between the philosophy of categories and Husserl's philosophy of language in particular, i.e., Husserl's account of the *expressions* of sense and meaning (as, e.g., found in the first *Investigation*). Renaudie focuses much more on Husserl's logico-grammatical analyses of the forms and laws of meanings, along with the phenomenology of the mental acts in and through which the categories come to be involved in such meanings, rather than the relation of any of this to written, spoken, or bodily communication. Perhaps by "language" in the subtitle Renaudie ultimately means only to pick out instead something at the level of "grammar" (or even "logic"); in any case, drawing in this further connection would be a promising point for future development, as Husserl's philosophy of linguistic expression continues to receive less attention than his philosophy of mind, philosophy of logic, and epistemology.

A second issue pertains to the level of sense itself, as Renaudie does not specify whether there is any internal relationship between the sense contained in categorial intuition and the further semantical relation that obtains to make our judgments *true*. Renaudie does present Husserl's argument that the idea of a categorial intuition is needed to make sense of how perception could possibly ever function as "evidence" for the truth of our judgments (cf. p. 147f). Yet while this claims a clear epistemic value for categorial intuition, it still leaves us at one remove from the semantics of truth itself, in the sense of what makes the judgment true, rather than what makes us justified in taking it to be true. What makes our judgments true would seem to be the facts—that things, as to their own categorial aspects, are as they are judged to be—that the relevant "state of affairs [*Sachverhalt*]" obtains (cf. Husserl's *Prolegomena* §47). But then the truth-making relation does not seem to remain wholly within the level of logic, grammar, or sense—even if we grant that a coordination between kinds of sense might go some ways to articulating what it would mean to see that one's intention was fulfilled. Truth (and truth-making) understood as correspondence would seem to be ontologically committal in a way that goes beyond the limits of grammar, or perhaps shows grammar itself to be ontologically committal.

A third issue which merits further clarification is the precise relationship that Husserl takes to obtain between the sense of the categorial intuition and the immediate sense of a simple intuition. Let us assume, with Renaudie, that Husserl takes the *thing* in question to remain the same across both intuitions, with the difference lying only in the *way* in which the thing is given (in the *sense* of the two acts). Is there any further, more internal, relationship that obtains between these two senses, other than that they are both "of" the same thing? Does the sense of the categorial intuition include that of the simple intuition, as one of its parts—perhaps on the model of a shift from a simple <this> to the categorially determinate <this-(which-is-)F> ? Furthermore, can the idea of the co-reference of senses across these

two intuitions, itself be articulated wholly within the level of logic or grammar? Or will each sense include essentially an indexing to the objectivity in question (e.g., certain real psychical contents—e.g., sense-data—of an individual's consciousness, or a certain real physical body), and so be "object-dependent" in a way that would seem to force Husserl to forego any claim to the radical autonomy of sense?

In any case, it is surely striking that Husserl's developments *after* this time might be seen as pointing increasingly away from any commitment to the absolute autonomy of sense over and against all extra-logical, more straightforwardly metaphysical commitments. As emerges especially by the time of the *Crisis*, Husserl is, at the very least, sensitive to the possibility that ultimately a role must be given to embodiment, sociality, history, and other "real" dimensions of human existence, as functioning as "genetic" conditions for the realm of sense itself. And even if Husserl himself was never quite willing to fully relinquish the autonomy of "the logical", his successors provide considerable resources for mounting several types of critiques of this thesis—whether from the direction of the various neo-Marxist materialisms of the mid-century (whether from Adorno or Merleau-Ponty), or most recently in the form of the critique of all post-Kantian "correlationist" philosophies by those recently working under the banner of "speculative realism". To be sure, Renaudie's restriction of the present volume to Husserl's developments up to the time of the *Investigations* gives it a clarity of focus and also allows for refreshing conciseness. Still, in light of how rewarding the current study is, there is good reason to think that readers would also benefit from whatever light Renaudie can bring to key developments in Husserl's philosophy of the categories post-*Investigations*, along with whatever assessment Renaudie himself would argue for, concerning the continued viability of Husserlian correlationism in the present philosophical climate.