

Leopold Blaustein's Critique of Husserl's Early Theory of Intentional Act, Object and Content

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Abstract: The aim of this article is to introduce the work of Leopold Blaustein—philosopher and psychologist, who studied under Kazimierz Twardowski in Lvov and under Husserl in Freiburg im Breisgau. In his short academic career Blaustein developed an original philosophy that drew upon both phenomenology and Twardowski's analytical approach. One of his main publications concerns Husserl's early theory of intentional act and object, introduced in *Logische Untersuchungen*. In the first part of the article I briefly present Blaustein's biography and some general features of his philosophy. The second part provides an overview of Blaustein's dissertation concerning Husserl's early phenomenology. In the third and final part I summarize Blaustein's research, including the critical remarks of Roman Ingarden.

Keywords: Phenomenology, Intentionality, Twardowski, Blaustein, Lvov-Warsaw School.

1. *Leopold Blaustein—a Student of Twardowski and Husserl*

Leopold Blaustein was born in 1905 into a Polish-Jewish family. From 1923 to 1927 he studied philosophy and German philology at the John Casimir University in Lvov. He was a student of Kazimierz Twardowski and is considered a member of the last generation of Twardowski's students known as the Lvov-Warsaw School. Blaustein also attended the lectures and seminars

of Roman Ingarden—a prominent former student of both Twardowski and Edmund Husserl.

Thanks to Twardowski and Ingarden, Blaustein became interested in Husserl's phenomenology. In 1925 he went to Freiburg im Breisgau to study phenomenology under Husserl and to work on his PhD dissertation concerning Husserl's concept of intentional act and object. In his recollections from the visit, Blaustein characterised Husserl as “the thinker, who inspired the whole world,” an “extremely good and honest person” and a “noble priest of philosophy who is completely devoted to phenomenology” (Blaustein 1930). Blaustein certainly admired Husserl and was deeply impressed by his achievements in philosophy, nevertheless he was skeptical about the project of phenomenology that Husserl was developing.

Blaustein finished his dissertation entitled *Husserlowska nauka o akcie, treści i przedmiocie przedstawienia* (*Husserl's theory of act, content and object of presentation*) under Twardowski's supervision and successfully defended in 1927. Over the next few years he taught high school philosophy in Lvov and was an active member of the Polish Philosophical Society. He continued to develop a wide range of scientific interests, including phenomenology, psychology, philosophy of education and esthetics. In 1927/1928 he visited Berlin where he met Carl Stumpf, and studied *gestalt* psychology under Max Wertheimer and Wolfgang Köhler.

His academic career ended with the break out of World War II. The exact date and circumstances of his death are unknown: according to one source he was murdered together with his wife Eugenia Ginsberg-Blaustein¹ and their young son by the Nazi Germans in the Lvov Jewish Ghetto in 1942 (Jadczyk 1997, Miskiewicz 2006).

What was Blaustein's view on phenomenology? It would not be correct to characterise Blaustein as a phenomenologist. On the one hand he was explicitly skeptical about the Husserlian project of phenomenology (Blaustein 1930). On the other, he admired Husserl's investigations into intentionality and acts of consciousness, although he disagreed with Husserl on few points, as we will see in the discussion of his dissertation. Furthermore, in his works concerning esthetics Blaustein used a descriptive quasi-phenomenological method and some of the phenomenological terminology. The originality of Blaustein's thinking is due to the fact that he synthesized to some extent two philosophical traditions: Twardowski's analytical philosophy (logical and conceptual analysis) and Husserlian phenomenology (description and analysis of acts of consciousness). Thus, following Miskiewicz (2006), the best way to characterise Blaustein's philosophy is analytical phenomenology. On the one hand Blaustein investigated such topics as immediate knowledge or intuition

¹ Eugenia Ginsberg-Blaustein was also a philosopher and student of Twardowski. See Ginsberg 1929 and 1938.

(*Anschaung*), on the other his research concerned specific cognitive phenomena and experiences, for instance experience of media (radio, film). A good example of Blaustein's methodological approach is his paper from 1931 entitled *O naoczności jako właściwości niektórych przedstawień* (*On intuition as a property of some presentations*), in which he discusses the problem of intuitive representations and their content. He refers to Twardowski's and Husserl's distinctions (matter, content, act, object) and uses a quasi-phenomenological method of reduction, i.e. he speaks about change of natural attitude to the attitude towards the phenomenal world. To some extent Blaustein accepts Husserl's method although he does not want to, or he does not believe in the possibility of suspension of previous knowledge and scientific language. Therefore he places emphasis on conceptual analysis in order to create the best possible and adequate description of lived experience. Consequently, he proposed further conceptual clarifications of the structure of experience (Blaustein 1931b, Miskiewicz 2006).

Blaustein's works include a monograph on Husserl published in 1928 (the first monograph concerning Husserl's phenomenology published in Poland) and many articles concerning psychology (1930b, 1931a, 1935), philosophy of culture and education (1932, 1934, 1935b), and esthetics (1930b, 1931a, 1935e, 1936, 1937). He developed phenomenological and psychological accounts of the experience of radio (1939) and film (1933, 1935a) which were original and innovative at the time (Rosińska 2001, 2005). Blaustein's work, especially in esthetics, was interdisciplinary. He combined phenomenological descriptions with psychological observations and experiments, employing an analytical approach to the language he used in descriptions. In the article on psychology of film perception (1933) Blaustein proposed phenomenological description and analysis of his experience in cinema. He discussed aesthetic and non-aesthetic (*e.g.* erotic or religious) experiences, which accompany perceptual experience of film. He emphasised the holistic and intermodal nature of such experiences. His works on film experience together with studies of experience of radio (1939) allow us to consider Blaustein as one of the first phenomenological theorists of media.

2. Blaustein's Critique of Husserl's Theory of Intentional Act and Content

Blaustein's PhD dissertation "Husserlowska nauka o akcji, treści i przedmiocie przedstawienia" (*Husserl's theory of act, content and object of presentation*) was published in 1928 in Lvov. The dissertation concerns Husserl's theory of intentionality from *Logische Untersuchungen* and the first book of *Ideen*. It consists of three parts. In the first historical part, Blaustein presents the historical background of the debate on intentional acts and objects, addressing the work of Bolzano, Brentano, Cornelius, Meinong and Twardowski. Blaustein spends the most time discussing Twardowski's *Zur Lehre vom Inhalt und Gegenstand*

der Vorstellungen, in which—according to Blaustein—Twardowski synthesised the ideas of Bolzano and Brentano. Blaustein not only reconstructs Twardowski's theory of mental acts but he also reveals the extent that he was under the influence of his teacher, Brentano. According to Blaustein, Twardowski's acceptance of Brentano's division of phenomena on psychic intentional acts and physical nonintentional events conflicts with the third component of the cognitive structure, namely the act's content. In Blaustein's opinion this difficulty was solved—albeit differently—by both Meinong and Husserl. The former included the content within the act of presentation, the latter differentiated two dependent components of the act: its quality and matter.

In the second part Blaustein introduces Husserl's theory of intentionality from *Logische Untersuchungen*. He defines and analyses crucial concepts of this theory including presentation (*Vorstellung*), consciousness (*Bewusstsein*), intentional act, intentional content, object, and finally, noema. The interpretation of the noema, as well as his treatment of *Ideen*, is the weakest part his work. As Ingarden (1929) pointed out, Blaustein's reading of *Ideen* is superficial; he did not fully grasp the evolution of Husserlian thought from *Logische Untersuchungen* to *Ideen*.

The third part of Blaustein's dissertation, which is most interesting for us here, is devoted to critical analysis of Husserl's theory and an introduction of Blaustein's own proposal. It is divided into two chapters. The first is devoted to a critique of Husserl's theory of act and object (*Gegenstand*) of presentation (*Vorstellung*). The second concerns Blaustein's skeptical arguments against Husserl's notion of content (*Inhalt*).

2.1. Sensations and Intentional Acts

In the first chapter Blaustein identifies five fundamental claims included in Husserl's theory of acts of consciousness and their objects (Blaustein 1928: 65; see Hua XIX/1: V and Hua XIX/2: VI):

- i) Consciousness is a coherent and continuous stream of lived-experience (*Erlebnis*).
- ii) Lived-experiences are both intentional acts and sensations (*Empfindungen*).
- iii) Intentional acts are an apprehension (*Auffassung*), interpretation (*Deutung*) of sense-data.
- iv) Distinction between the sensing act and sensed content is not valid.
- v) Distinction between sensations and objects' properties is necessary.

Blaustein begins his critique from the second claim. He criticises the notion of lived-experience (*Erlebnis*). In a similar way to Ingarden (1921) he argues that when Husserl describes consciousness by referring to the stream of lived-experience and then defines lived-experiences by their relationship with consciousness he falls into circular reasoning. However, the main target of Blaustein's criticism is that Husserl includes both intentional acts and

sensations in one category of lived-experience. In Blaustein's view none of Husserl's arguments for such identification is valid. In his opinion these two phenomena are essentially different. Intentional acts are always related to the ego (they are, as Husserl puts it, *ichlich*), whereas we cannot say the same about sense-data, which, on the contrary, are *ichfremd*—they do not belong to the ego. Furthermore, whereas intentional acts seem to be self-evident for consciousness, sense-data are not—they require interpretation, therefore they are not intentional themselves. Most important however is that intentional acts exist only in time, whereas sense-data, such as colors and tactile sensations, also have extension, localisation, shape etc. Generally speaking, sense-data are spatial whereas acts of consciousness are not (Blaustein 1928: 70).

The last argument is crucial for Blaustein in order to exclude sensations from the domain of psychic phenomena. One may defend Husserl using his distinction between spatiality understood as extension (*Ausdehnung*) and spreading out (*Ausbreitung*) (see Hua XIX/1: 272–274). Sensations would have only the latter, whereas the former would be used to describe material objects localised in space. This however, according to Blaustein, would still lead to the absurd consequence that psychic phenomena are spatial, even in the most primitive way. Therefore, Blaustein claims that sensations are not psychic phenomena and do not belong to the realm of lived-experience—only acts are lived through. What are sensations then? Surprisingly, Blaustein also rejects Brentano's view that sensations are mere physical phenomena, although he agrees with Brentano that psychical phenomena are intentional acts. Blaustein chooses a third option, situated between Husserl and Brentano, claiming that sensations belong to a "phenomenal world," which emerges between consciousness and the material world. As we will see later, Blaustein does not elaborate further metaphysical consequences of this claim and restricts his investigations only to the phenomenological and descriptive level.

As a result of excluding sensations from the category of lived-experience, Blaustein reduces this class of phenomena to intentional acts, and therefore modifies the first claim listed above concerning the nature of the stream of consciousness. According to Blaustein the stream of consciousness is the stream of lived-experiences, however, it only consists of intentional acts and perhaps different kinds of mental states and processes but certainly not sensations. This modification also leads to the redefinition of the concept of object of immanent apprehension and understanding of inner perception in general. Only intentional acts can be considered as objects given in immanent and adequate apprehension. Apprehension of sensations is thus transcendent, but can still be adequate, as Blaustein claims further.

Then Blaustein considers the third claim. For him the claim that intentional acts are an apprehension of sense-data is correct only if we accept the difference between apprehension (*Auffassung*) and interpretation (*Deutung*) (1928: 72–74). According to Blaustein, every intentional act is an

apprehension, however not every apprehension is an interpretation. Generally speaking, sensations (*Empfindungen*) or, to put it differently, sense-data, create a configuration, in virtue of which the object of presentation (*Vorstellung*) is constituted. The complex of sense-data can be thus called the presenting content (*Inhalt*) in virtue of which we attribute such and such properties to the apprehended object. However, we usually attribute to the object more than we apprehend in perceptual sense-data. For instance, in perception of a material three-dimensional object the sense-data only provides one side or, to put it differently, an adumbration (*Abschattung*) of the object. Nevertheless, we also attribute other sides and properties to the object, which are co-given with the presenting content. In such cases, according to Blaustein, the act of apprehension becomes the act of interpretation.

An apprehending act directed towards the sense-data makes it an intentional object, which is transcendent yet adequate. According to Blaustein that is how the “phenomenal world” is constituted. The “phenomenal world” is filled with apprehended sensual data and their complexes (shapes, colors, sounds etc.) which, in the act of interpretation, may become “phenomenal objects” (*Sehdinge*). Thus we may consider the “phenomenal world” as (adequately) apprehended—sensations and their complexes—and, as interpreted—adumbrations of phenomenal objects. Phenomenal objects must be distinguished from material objects, which belong to the “material world” given in the naïve attitude and ordered by causal laws. These two worlds co-exist and are correlated, for instance the apprehended sense-data are related to the perceived physical object’s properties. We can see here that Blaustein accepts Husserl’s distinction between sensations and objects’ properties (claim *v*), but not as a result of Husserl’s argumentation. Remember that for Blaustein, sensations do not belong to the content of consciousness, as Husserl would claim, but rather exist beyond consciousness and are apprehended as a part of the “phenomenal world”. As Blaustein remarks, he did not investigate the relationship between consciousness and the phenomenal and material world deeply enough in his dissertation, but this issue should be elaborated further (1928: 78).

Finally, changing the status of sensations and accepting the possibility that they are transcendent objects of apprehension leads to the rejection of the fourth claim. For Husserl, rejection of distinction between the sensing act and sensed content is a consequence of understanding sensations as lived experiences. Sensations are not presented in specific intentional acts but rather they are lived through (*erlebt*). Husserl proposes this view in order to omit problems with the Brentanian claim that sensations are objects of immanent apprehension. However, Blaustein criticizes Husserl for failing to notice the ambiguity in the concept of sensation—that it can be understood as an act of sensing, or as content, or as objects of apprehension. Following Blaustein, if we accept the view that sensations are transcendent to consciousness, that they

are in the "phenomenal world" rather than in the realm of consciousness, then this division is not only possible but necessary.

2.2. Intentional Content

In the second chapter of the dissertation's third part Blaustein focuses on Husserl's notion of intentional content (*intentionale Inhalt*). Importantly he accepts Husserl's distinction between the quality and matter of intentional acts (Hua XIX/1: 425–431), which as he claims is a further elaboration of Twardowski's account. Furthermore, he agrees to some extent with Husserl on understanding the matter of the act as intentional content. However, he makes a few critical remarks. First, Blaustein disagrees that we can have identical matter in different acts of consciousness. This would lead to idealisation of the matter and therefore to partial idealisation of consciousness' acts. According to Blaustein, matter being a dependent part of the act of consciousness is in time and thus it may be, at most, generically the same in different acts but never identical. Secondly he criticises Husserl for extending in *Logische Untersuchungen* the meaning of act and its matter in an unjustified way (1928: 84–91).

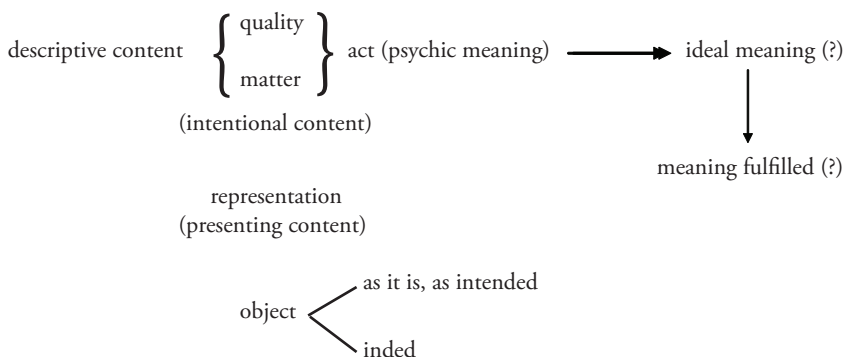
As it is known, for Husserl, lived experience (*Erlebnis*) can be either intentional acts or nonintentional sensation (claim *ii*). Intentional acts, according to the fifth claim from Husserl's logical investigations, are composed of two dependent parts: quality and matter (Hua XIX/1: 425–431). However, according to Blaustein, Husserl later extends the notion of act with the third component: the presenting content (*Vorstellungsinhalt*) or fullness (*Fülle*), that is a complex of (nonintentional) sensations presenting an object (Hua XIX/2: 606–616). The extensions of the concept of act lead to various difficulties. Most important for Blaustein is that the concept of intentional act becomes unclear. On the one hand, Husserl considers intentional acts in the Brentanian way as opposed to nonintentional sensations. On the other hand, we may think of act as intentional only in virtue of presenting content which, however, is constituted by nonintentional sensations. Therefore, as Blaustein suggests, the presenting content is relative to the act, however it is not its constitutive part, as quality and matter are. This is Blaustein's consistent strategy: to clearly separate acts of consciousness and intentionality from sensations. What, then, is the status of the act's matter? To answer this question first we have to consider the problem of descriptive or really immanent content (*reellen Inhalt*) and intentional content (*intentionale Inhalt*).

The notion of intentional content is considered by Husserl (Hua XIX/1: 411–416) in relation to the act's descriptive content, which is the unity of partial experiences (*Teilerlebnisse*). According to Blaustein, the descriptive content may be understood either in a minimal or extended sense. The basic understanding of descriptive content, with which Blaustein agrees, includes only the act's quality and matter. The extended meaning is widened by the

presenting content as above. Blaustein argues that the presenting content or the presenting fullness is not a part of the act's descriptive content.

In short, the concept of intentional content in *Logische Untersuchungen* is unclear for Blaustein, and may be understood in several ways. Blaustein, following Husserl distinguishes at least five candidates for intentional content including: *i*) intentional object, *ii*) intentional matter (dependent part of intentional act), *iii*) intentional essence (both matter and quality of act taken together), *iv*) signification (*bedeutungsmässig*) essence, *v*) act's (ideal or fulfilled) sense. Blaustein criticises each of these meanings in detail with the exception of the second one. According to him only in virtue of the act's matter, which is the act's proper content, can the act be directed towards an object. Therefore, if we want to use the notion of intentional content it should be used to designate the act's matter.

To sum up, Blaustein illustrates his interpretation and modification of Husserl's theory of intentional act and content with the following diagram (1928: 93).



We see that Blaustein adopts the narrow understanding of act as a combination of quality and matter. Intentional content, the most ambiguous of Husserlian terms, for Blaustein should be understood only as the act's matter. Blaustein rejects other possible meanings, such as intentional object or ideal meaning (either fulfilled or unfulfilled). Presenting content is understood, following Husserl, as the representation or the fullness of hyletic moments. However, contrary to Husserl, it is not a part of act (taken in the second broader sense). The concept of intentional essence is, according to Blaustein, redundant, and it is possible that ideal and fulfilled meaning are redundant too. Object of representation is not a part of act itself, but rather accompanies it.

3. Conclusion

Blaustein's interpretation and critique of Husserl's theory of intentional act, object, and content is original and interesting, however there is no doubt

that the weakest parts of it are superficial and insufficient analyses of *Ideen*. Although Blaustein explicitly states that exhausting analysis of *Ideen* in relation to *Logische Untersuchungen* is beyond his study, the key concept of noema (see Hua III: 200–242) could be elaborated in more detail. Blaustein understands noema as an object of representation as it appears after phenomenological reduction. The noematic sense or content may be understood as equal to the act's matter, and the act's quality is replaced by the concept of positing characteristic (*Setzungscharakter*). In an analogous manner to the act's matter and quality, noematic sense and characteristic constitutes complete noema. According to Blaustein, the problem with such reading of noematic sense, taken as a core of noema, is that it can be interpreted idealistically. As we have seen above, the concept of ideal matter is unacceptable to Blaustein. As he concludes, it is difficult to explain noema because the notion is unclear and ambiguous; its relation to intentional object is especially vague.

Blaustein is correct that the concept of noema is ambiguous—the best proof for that is found in the essentially different interpretations of Husserl based on this notion and related debate (*e.g.* Dreyfus 1982; Drummond 1990, 1997; Føllesdal 1969; Zahavi 2003)—but it is too important for the project of phenomenology to simply reject it as such (1928: 91–92). This is also an objection to Blaustein's work formulated by Roman Ingarden (1929). Furthermore, Ingarden criticises Blaustein for ending with a superficial conceptual analysis of Husserl and not going deeper into analyses of experience. Phenomenology is for Husserl primarily an analysis of experience. It is true that Blaustein's critique is mostly formulated in an analytical rather than phenomenological manner, and therefore seems weaker, but in spite of this it makes an important contribution to the debate on the intentional act, its object and content, as well as early Husserlian phenomenology.

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