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## ON THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL LANGUAGE IN THE CONTEXT OF WITTGENSTEIN'S MANUSCRIPTS FROM 1929–1933\*

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The article treats Ludwig Wittgenstein's manuscripts and typescripts where he formulates the problem of impossibility of “phenomenological language” defined by him as the “description of immediate sensual perception without any hypothetical supplementation.” One may find this phase of his philosophy (1929–1933) a bit paradoxical because the philosopher claims this phase, from the very beginning, to have been overcome; we deal here with philosophical self-criticism. The Lewis Carroll's paradox is considered in terms of analogy to this criticized project of “phenomenological language”—the paradox of a ridiculously exact map which coincides with the mapped area. We open up new possibilities for comparison between the Wittgensteinian project of the “primal language” and Husserlian, Heideggerian and Finkian projects of “phenomenological language.”

*Keywords:* Ludwig Wittgenstein, phenomenological language, primal language, Lewis Carroll.

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# О НЕВОЗМОЖНОСТИ ФЕНОМЕНОЛОГИЧЕСКОГО ЯЗЫКА (НА ОСНОВЕ РУКОПИСЕЙ ВИТГЕНШТЕЙНА 1929–1933 ГГ.)\*

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В статье обсуждаются рукописи Людвиг Витгенштейна, в которых он ставил проблему невозможности «феноменологического языка», который он определяет как «описание непосредственного чувственного восприятия, без добавок гипотетического». В этой фазе его философии (1929–1933) есть некоторая парадоксальность, так как она с самого начала описывается самими философом как уже преодоленная; мы имеем дело с философской самокритикой. В качестве аналогии по отношению к критикуемому проекту «феноменологического языка» приводится парадокс Льюиса Кэрролла: парадокс до нелепого подробной карты, совпадающей с картографируемой областью. Проводится сопоставление витгенштейновского проекта «первичного языка» и языка феноменологической философии XX века.

*Ключевые слова:* Людвиг Витгенштейн, феноменологический язык, первичный язык, Льюис Кэрролл.

Here the temptation to believe in a phenomenology, something midway between science and logic, is very great. [...] There is indeed no such thing as phenomenology, but there are phenomenological problems.

(Wittgenstein, 1978, 9, 15, 49)

The so-called “phenomenological phase”<sup>1</sup> (Kuusela, Ometita & Uçan, 2018, i; Hacker, 2019, 286) in Wittgenstein’s philosophy was not a long one: it was the period from 1929 to 1933. But it didn’t really last for four years; it rather was “have-been-passed” all those four years. Wittgenstein’s phase of search of the “phenomenological language” is a kind of paradox: each time it is already an overcome phase—he nearly always writes about it in the past tense. In this article I will discuss this project (rather

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<sup>1</sup> In Wittgenstein’s case the “phenomenological phase” is equivalent to the period of search of the “phenomenological language.” It was not the case for philosophers who considered themselves to be “phenomenologists”: for them it was one of the elements of phenomenological investigation, but not the central one.

untypical for the corpus of his work as a whole) in the context of the philosopher's working manuscripts.

Using the modality of something “always already discarded,” Wittgenstein describes the project as follows: “[The] phenomenological language: description of immediate sense perception without any hypothetical addition” (Wittgenstein, 2005, 349). Here it is possible to agree with Peter Hacker that it would be more appropriate to call this phase as the project of “phenomenalist language” (Hacker, 2019, 286), and not of a “phenomenological one,” although Wittgenstein persistently uses specifically this expression. I have already quoted, as the epigraph, the Wittgensteinian aphorism “There is indeed no such thing as phenomenology, but there are phenomenological problems” (Wittgenstein, 1978, 49)—from the very beginning of the described phase of 1929–1933, he proceeds from the impossibility to build a complete phenomenological philosophy, even if he does not deny the impulses (“phenomenological problems”) urging him towards it.

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After the first very enthusiastic attempt to bring together the “phenomenological phase” of Wittgenstein's thought and the phenomenological philosophy of the XX-th century (Spiegelberg, 1968), the researches and commentators, in fact with no dissent, split these traditions apart, insisting that Wittgenstein was talking about “phenomenology” in his own special sense (Inde, 1975; Gier, 1981; Hintikka, 1998; Park, 1998; Engelmann, 2013; Piekarski, 2017). This expression “in his own special sense” can sound a bit ironical because exactly at that period Wittgenstein moved from the criticism of the phenomenological language to the criticism of the private language which includes the usage of common expressions “in someone's own special sense.”

It is quite illustrative that from the very beginning, namely from 1929, the concept of “phenomenological language” appeared in Wittgenstein's manuscripts as a misconception already discarded. In a way this is each time an “already discarded” misconception which he never supported:

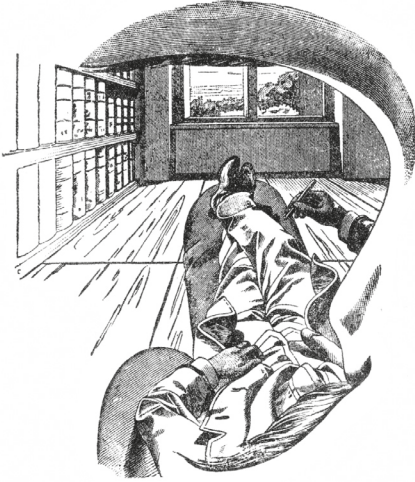
The assumption that a phenomenological language is possible, and that only it would express what we in philosophy must/want to say, is—I think—absurd. We must learn to live with our everyday language and only understand it correctly. [...] I do not now have phenomenological language, or ‘primary language’ as I used to call it, in mind as my goal. I no longer hold it to be necessary. All that is possible and necessary is to separate what is essential from what is inessential in our language. That is, if we so to speak describe the class of languages which serve their purpose, then in so doing we have shown what is essential to them and given an immediate representation of immediate experience. Each

time I say that, instead of such and such a representation, you could also use this other one, we take a further step towards the goal of grasping the essence of what is represented. (Wittgenstein, 1994, 102, 118; eng. tr. Wittgenstein, 1975, 51)

For us, Wittgenstein's readers, the idea of the "phenomenological language" is introduced as a retroactively discarded conception, an object of self-criticism. "I do not now have phenomenological language, or 'primary language' as I used to call it, in mind as my goal" (Wittgenstein, 1994, 118)—writes the Austrian philosopher. This expression "is no longer [considered] to be my goal" puts the reader into an untenable position: even if we work with manuscripts and typescripts we do not have access to the hypothetical phase during which the "phenomenological language" was still Wittgenstein's target. Strangely as it is, "[the] description of immediate sense perception without any hypothetical addition" (Wittgenstein, 2005, 349) seems itself to be a "hypothetical addition" to the corpus of the philosopher's works that has reached us. We are facing a strange temporal structure: the philosopher "in the past deemed" something to be a "phenomenological language," however, "now he understands" that it was superfluous and even absurd. Wittgenstein writes in *Remarks on Colors*: "Here the temptation to believe in a phenomenology, something midway between science and logic, is very great" (Wittgenstein, 1978, 15). The philosopher who considered the unsolved philosophical problems to be his own sins has a due understanding now how one should treat this temptation—one should fight it. But we, the readers, comprehend only this mise-en-scene—"before I believed..." but "I don't adhere to this view any longer":

Ich habe früher geglaubt, daß es die Umgangssprache gibt, in der wir alle für gewöhnlich sprechen und eine primäre Sprache, die das ausdrückt, was wir wirklich wissen, also die Phänomene. Ich habe auch von einem ersten System und einem zweiten System gesprochen. [...] Ich möchte jetzt ausführen, warum ich an dieser Auffassung nicht mehr festhalte. Ich glaube, daß wir im Wesen nur eine Sprache haben und das ist die gewöhnliche Sprache. Wir brauchen nicht erst eine neue Sprache zu erfinden oder eine Symbolik zu konstruieren, sondern die Umgangssprache ist bereits die Sprache, vorausgesetzt, daß wir sie von Unklarheiten, die in ihr stecken, befreien. (Wittgenstein as cited in Waismann, 1967, 45)

Wittgenstein implies that we have only one language, and this is a common language. Here he abandons his programme of inventing artificial, ideal languages (the hypothetical phenomenological language would be one of them). He clearly treats the "phenomenological" aspect of the language as an invention, but not as a natural feature of the everyday language, one of its modalities. Does it mean that the everyday language which he finally infers is necessarily not a phenomenological language, or,



Ernst Mach, Self-portrait, 1886  
 (Krois, J. M., Rosengren, M., Steidele, A., &  
 Westerkamp, D. (Eds.) (2007).  
 Embodiment in Cognition and  
 Culture. Amsterdam/Philadelphia:  
 John Benjamins Publishing. P.91)

rather, this is a language which does have a phenomenological dimension but is more capacious in a natural way than the phenomenological language? This fragment seems to highlight that Wittgenstein broadened his concept of everyday language, including the aspects that he previously considered to belong to the primal language expressing phenomena.

There is something strange in this new strategy (which appears to oppose the “evermore” discarded strategy of search of the “phenomenological language”). Namely: the everyday language should help itself; it contains an illness and the cure, a dead-end and the way out. In this context, the philosophers polemically mentioned by Wittgenstein adhered to quite different views—in particular, a vitalist Hans Driesch and an empiriocriticist Ernst Mach:

Phenomenological language: the description of immediate sense perception without any hypothetical addition. If anything, then surely a portrayal in a painted picture or the like must be such a description of immediate experience. Such as when we look through a telescope, for instance, and draw or paint the constellation we see. Let’s even imagine that our sense perception is reproduced by creating a model for describing it, a model that, seen from a certain point, produces these perceptions; this machine could be set into proper motion with a crank drive, and by turning the crank, we could read off the description. (An approximation to this would be a representation in film.) If that isn’t a representation of the immediate—then what can be?—Anything that claimed to be even more immediate would have to forego being a description. Instead of a description, what results in that case is that inarticulate sound with which some authors would like to begin philosophy. (“Knowing of my knowing, I consciously possess something.”—Driesch.) [...] One of the clearest examples of the confusion between physical and phenomenological language is the picture Mach sketched of his field of vision, in which the so-called blurredness of the shapes toward the edge of his visual field was reproduced by a blurredness (in a quite different sense) in the drawing. No, you can’t make a visible picture of your visual image. (Wittgenstein, 2005, 349, 337)

Here Wittgenstein clearly enters into polemics with the very concept of the philosophically exact self-portrait, similar to the one proposed by Ernst Mach, which includes not only the pattern of the perceived, but also the representation of perception as such. The idea of “phenomenological language” is coupled with the depiction of the

actual reality, for all the contradictory nature of this objective: “Anything that claimed to be even more immediate would have to forego being a description” (Wittgenstein, 2005, 349e) This paradox resembles the paradox of an absurdly exact map formulated by Lewis Carroll:

“We actually made a map of the country, on the scale of *a mile to the mile!*”

“Have you used it much?” I enquired.

“It has never been spread out, yet,” said Mein Herr: “the farmers objected: they said it would cover the whole country, and shut out the sunlight! So we now use the country itself, as its own map, and I assure you it does nearly as well”.

(Carroll, 1893, 169)

The “phenomenological language,” as presented by Wittgenstein, functions as a similar map, absurdly detailed. He discusses the “phenomenological language” in categories of belief, namely the belief he lost himself. As if the “phenomenological language” would only be a matter of belief, while discussing this belief is possible only when it is lost. But why actually should this project be a subject of belief? Wittgenstein does not give any answer to this question; instead he proposes to withdraw from believing in the actual possibility (and even more in the need) of the phenomenological language the same way as we stop believing in the existence of philosophical problems, considering them to be the results of misconception. Questions of philosophical nature should disperse in the way the spell induced by a witch clears off, together with the witch, when we realize that witches do not exist. Helpless roaming in a philosophical labyrinth—this is the image of philosophy Wittgenstein wants to draw us away from. However, he himself draws this image of philosophy, falling within the Carroll’s paradox of the “absurdly exact map”. The “phenomenological language” is tentatively structured as a dead-end from the onset and this way is created (!). Wittgenstein wants to disperse the spell, but instead he retroactively creates it. The philosopher continues to develop this imagery and views (comparable of the renowned *The Big Typescript*) in a fragment dating to 1936:

Warum verzichten wir plötzlich darauf, das Wesen der Sprache, & das Wesen der Welt, auszudrücken? „Phänomenologische Sprache“. Glaube an ihre Notwendigkeit. Es schien als sei unsere Sprache, irgendwie, roh, eine unvollkommene Darstellung der Sachverhalte & nur als rohes, unvollkommenes Abbild zu verstehen. Als müsste die Philosophie sie verbessern, verfeinern, um so den Bau der Welt verstehen zu können. Dann wurde es offenbar daß sie die [...] Sprache wie sie ist verstehen, d.h. erkennen müsse, weil nicht eine neue Klarheit, die die alte Sprache nicht gebe, das Ziel sei, sondern die Beseitigung der philosophischen {Irrgärten, bewilderment. Perplexities, Herumirren, Ratlosigkeit, Sich-nicht-erkennen, Perplex-sein, Rätsel, Irrfragen, ich meine eine Frage die dazu

gestellt ist in einen Irrgarten zu führen, wie sie etwa eine Hexe stellen könnte.} „Und Deine Schwierigkeiten sind Mißverständnisse“. — Wenn sie nicht Mißverständnisse wären, wenn wir wirklich weiter analysieren müßten um auf sichern Grund & Boden zu kommen, dann müßten wir uns fragen: durch welchen feineren Begriff haben wir den landläufigen Begriff „Wort“ (z.B.) zu ersetzen. Wir müßten dann die üblichen Wörter mit ihrem Gebrauch zur Seite räumen um in der Tiefe nach den eigentlichen Begriffen zu forschen nach denen wir die Sprache anpassen müssen. (Wittgenstein, 1936, Ms. 152, 91–92)

It is somewhat strange that Wittgenstein in this manuscript treats the expression of the substance of the language and that of the world as the most complete representation of state of affairs through the language. The language and the world for him remain something like two orders that should match correctly, although the very idea of the “phenomenological language” is not much likely to imply such an apposition. Complete versus incomplete depiction of state of affairs—what is fundamentally the difference? The completeness of depiction does not bring us closer to the “phenomenological language.” The “phenomenological language” is an expression, but not a depiction, where the language and the world get overlapped within this expression. The “phenomenological language” is the language which is created here and now, captured just at the moment of its origination, at the moment of occurrence of the verbal intention. Wittgenstein often operates with corporified objects here: the language, the world, which seem to exist already. In this case, he expresses, rather, an engineering-specific view of these concepts instead of the phenomenological one, even where he seems to be approaching the phenomenological (in the sense of the European philosophy of the XX century) scope of issues. “To improve the language,” “to comprehend the structure of the world”—he operates here rather with set constructions. One can get an impression from this manuscript that Wittgenstein—when he raises the issue of the “phenomenological language”—in one respect, keeps to the engineering and technical attitude towards the language, and, in the other respect, implicitly alludes that the phenomenological nature of the language implies some kind of idealism aimed to „Sprache wie sie ist [zu] verstehen, d.h. [zu] erkennen“, „in der Tiefe nach den eigentlichen Begriffen zu suchen nach denen wir die Sprache anpassen müssen“ (Wittgenstein, 1936, Ms. 152, 92). The profundity, genuineness, perception of the language as it is—it means that Wittgenstein once again cogitates on some ideal language and supposes the “phenomenological language” to be an ideal language. Essentially, he effects ideation through ready constructs, now simply projecting them towards the ideal depth. However, this is rather a step in the direction of metaphysics (which is more understandable from such a view point), but not phenomenology. The ideal language of the *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* echoes closely the ideal metaphys-

ical language with “authentic” concepts deep within, that can be “perceived as is” to a significantly greater extent than in the case of the “phenomenological language.” Paradoxically, Wittgenstein most closely approaches the comprehension of the “phenomenological language” when he discusses our everyday language and denotes it as “raw.” The raw language is far more phenomenological than the ideal, improved one. But the “phenomenological language” for Wittgenstein in this textual fragment is not the common everyday language, but rather something to believe or disbelieve (like one can believe or not believe in the existence of unicorns) and which, once gained, must somehow transform the common language. It means that this concept is still a construct, an invention for him. Wittgenstein writes about the language that should keep us away from philosophical labyrinths, dead-ends, bewilderment, perplexities, puzzles, deceptive questions. It means the ideal language should help us to avoid confusion. Is it possible to improve the language through invention, so that it would not confuse us? First, we need to identify the “right way” that would help us not to be led astray. What is the status of this right way? Does the adequacy of the language lie in its congruence with the reality, the capacity to mirror the reality as it is, while not without adding anything to it on our part? And where does this right way of following the reality bring us? It seems, we should think in the below manner: the state of affairs is as we know it, and we talk about it not to get confused. Therefore we face two isomorphic orders: the world and the language. The world, for the “phenomenological language” (in terms of the phenomenological philosophy of the XX century) which is always a bit “raw,” is also “raw.” It cannot be described by a set of rightful propositions since it is always elusive, incomplete, being not at all a totality of de-facto circumstances, but something that needs to be treated separately as a fundamental philosophical topic.

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The issue of (im)possibility of the “phenomenological language” was crucial at least for Husserlian, Finkian and Heideggerian phenomenologies. Husserl considered the strategy of building a highly technical phenomenological “newspeak”—the terminology comprising complex neologisms, eclectically based on Greek and Latin roots, a “transcendental language” (Husserl as cited in Fink, 1988, 104, 107). Heidegger, up to the end of the phenomenological phase of his philosophy, tended to the “transformation of language”, to the metamorphose (*Verwandlung*) already undergone by the existing language in the philosophical context, when the pre-existing meanings slightly shift to a direction not yet known (Heidegger, 1989, 78). Fink doubts the pos-



sibility of “transcendental language,” but still considers that one should implement the phenomenological “reduction of the language”; doing so, one should show, through the medium of the natural language, the content which is foreign to it, being always aware of irremovable divergence between the phenomenological sense and the natural word-meanings (Fink, 1988, 93, 104, 107). These are only few examples of a rich tradition of reflection on (im)possibility of the phenomenological language within the phenomenological philosophy of the XX-th century.

Wittgenstein is not involved in these debates, but we tried to make it visible how he approaches the similar problematics (in a way comparable with a natural language that shows the transcendental-phenomenological content which is foreign to it), being always aware of the irremovable divergence between the Wittgensteinian “phenomenological language” and the “phenomenological language” of the phenomenological philosophy (Husserl’s, Fink’s or Heidegger’s for example). To summarize: the “phenomenological language” for phenomenologists is a “bracketed language” (Husserl (as cited in Fink, 1988, 104)) or a “language in quotation marks”; Wittgenstein warns us against this strategy claiming that, when building terminology on indirect meanings, on words in quotation marks, “you’re using language in a queer way, because you’re almost deliberately preparing misunderstandings” (Wittgenstein, 1967, 65).

Wittgenstein is clearly and deliberately far from Husserlian and Heideggerian strategies (from technical neologisms and transformation of meanings in a direction not yet known); he is much closer to Fink who considered the “transcendental language” to be impossible. The main difference between their strategies consists in the fact that Fink (despite the irremovable divergence between the phenomenological sense and the natural word-meanings) considered the phenomenological language to be a (paradoxical, problematic, but still) desideratum, and Wittgenstein puts a ban on it, claiming it to be a hopeless direction.

One may still have an impression that, talking of the (im)possibility of the “phenomenological language,” Wittgenstein is rather substituting it by a certain metaphysical projection which partly inherits the attitude of his logical-positivist period. In search for the “phenomenological language,” he considers at this stage that one should withdraw from common expressions and their usage, from the “raw” everyday language—however, the “phenomenological language” treated in this manner proves to be another invention inspired by the same scientific/technical pathos aimed to improve the language, make it more correct, etc. It happens to be Wittgenstein’s invention, while the latter himself cautions against its usage.

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