

## The Place of Psychology in Husserl's Philosophy

### Abstract

Psychologism is a doctrine, which emerged in the 19th century as psychology had become a scientific endeavor. Husserl, at first, by the influence of Brentano who is both a psychologist and an empiricist, directed towards psychologism. However, Husserl thought that the influence of empiricism on psychologism is too great and the explanations of psychologism about intentionality and consciousness are not efficient. Thus, Husserl refused psychologism since it is impossible to obtain the objective truth by the science of psychology, which depends on individual experience and the actual and factual world. Instead, he established the science of phenomenology, which investigates the essence of consciousness in order to deduce and describe necessary and universal truths about experience. This paper intends to investigate the role of psychologism in developing the method of transcendental phenomenology.

### Key Terms

Psychologism, Phenomenology, Husserl, Brentano.

## Husserl'in Felsefesinde Psikolojizmin Yeri

### Özet

Psikolojizm, 19. yüzyılda psikolojinin bilimsel bir nitelik kazanmasıyla ortaya çıkmış bir akımdır. Husserl önceleri hem bir deneyimci hem de psikolojist olan hocası Brentano'nun etkisinde kalarak psikolojizme yönelmiştir. Ancak Husserl psikolojizmin deneyimcilikten çok fazla etkilendiğini ve yönelmişlik ve bilinçle ilgili açıklamalarının yetersiz olduğunu düşünür. Dolayısıyla, Husserl, tamamen bireysel deneye ve gerçek, olgusal dünyaya dayanan psikoloji bilimi ile nesnel doğruya ulaşmak mümkün olmadığı için psikolojizmi reddeder ve onun yerine deneyimin zorunlu ve tümel doğrularını çıkarsamak ve betimlemek amacıyla bilincin özsel yapılarını inceleyen fenomenoloji bilimini geliştirir. Bu yazı Husserl'in transandantal fenomenoloji yöntemini geliştirmesinde psikolojizmin oynadığı rolü ayrıntılarıyla incelemeyi hedeflemektedir.

### Anahtar Terimler

Psikolojizm, Fenomenoloji, Husserl, Brentano.

The rise of psychologism during the 19th century was marked by the influence of the "leading scientific ideas" to philosophy. And one of these "scientific ideas" was the science of psychology. According to psychologism, psychology as a science is an alternative to the idealistic doctrines, especially to the dominant Hegelianism by offering a method and a solution in order to answer philosophical questions and to develop and solidify idealism in philosophy (Abbagnano 1967: 520).

As the 18th century natural science approach became effective on psychology like all other fields, there appeared a tendency in psychology to explain all mental life by means of sensations in an attempt to become a natural science. One of the notable examples of this tendency is associationism. Psychologism is also close to empiricism. Since a number of theories and tendencies named under psychology assume that psychology is an empirical science, the idea that psychologism is a kind of empiricism is widespread. In psychology, like the social and natural sciences, truth and knowledge can only be achieved through experience. It is impossible to gain knowledge without experience. Accordingly, proponents of psychologism, just like empiricists, believe that "experience is not only the instrument of control and the criterion of the truth of knowledge; it is also the psychological origin of knowledge itself" (ibid., 520).

Brentano thinks that such an ideal of being scientific for psychology is wrong, and he tries to establish a new and a special method, which gives psychology an opportunity to imitate the method of natural sciences, or in other words, to become scientific. Accordingly, Brentano directed his attention to investigate psychological phenomena and in doing this, he tried to establish the theory upon the things themselves. For Brentano, the "method of the natural sciences" is the "true method of philosophy". That is why for Brentano, philosophy is "scientific in character". And for him, "basing knowledge upon immediate evidence" would lead to a "presuppositionless beginning in philosophy" (Farber 1943: 11). Various supporters of psychologism who claim that logic and epistemology are based upon psychology also show the same tendency.

At the beginning, Husserl also turned his attention towards psychologism under the influence of his tutor Brentano who is both an empiricist and pro-psychologism. Through Brentano, Husserl realized that philosophy is a science, and a rigorous science that could be the basis of the rest of the sciences. But it was Brentano's intentionality of mental acts that interested Husserl so much. Brentano borrowed the concept of intentionality from Medieval Scholastic philosophers and applied it to explain mental or psychic phenomena.

Brentano's ideas played an important role in shaping and the development of Husserl's phenomenology. First of all is Brentano's view that descriptive psychology should be accepted as a fundamental philosophical method against transcendental idealism of Kant, or absolute idealism in a more metaphysical (Hegelian) manner, or rational speculation and logic in traditional Scholasticism. The other is Brentano's introduction of the concept of intentionality as a criterion of "psychic phenomena" as opposed to traditional associationism about mental functions. Thus, instead of the passive approach of English empiricism, now it becomes possible to explain higher mental functions in a teleological manner. Third factor effective on the development of Husserl's ideas is the claim that inner perception, depending on which evident

(absolute) experiential knowledge can be established, is the main method of descriptive psychology.

The point of departure of Husserl's phenomenological philosophy is in fact historically Brentano's views. Intentionality is the bond that united Husserl and Brentano. For Husserl, intentionality is the essence of consciousness. That's why, according to Husserl, consciousness is always consciousness of something. "To the extent, however, that every consciousness is "consciousness-of", the essential study of consciousness includes also that of consciousness-meaning and consciousness-objectivity as such" (Husserl 1965: 90). Husserl, in his analysis of meaning, concluded that "to mean, signifies to intend and that, therefore, a meaning is an intention of the mind" (Lauer 1978: 29). In other words, intention is a "term" which signifies the operation of the mind when the "mind is related in one way or another to some object" (ibid., 29). Furthermore, Husserl's intentionality refers "not only to the mind's relationship but also to the term of that relationship, which is as instrumental as is the operation itself" (ibid., 30). But Husserl denounces psychologism on the grounds that its explanations on consciousness is inadequate because "it has neglected to consider to what extent the psychical, rather than being the presentation of a nature, has an essence proper to itself to be rigorously and in full adequation investigated prior to any psychophysics" (Husserl 1965: 102).

Husserl abandoned psychologism simply because he was not satisfied, and eventually disagreed, with the discipline's concept and explanation of intentionality and consciousness, which was influenced a lot by empiricism. But, since he was also accused of falling into psychologism by Frege, Husserl made the following comment in the Introduction to Ideas:

I mention this dispute here that I may state from the outset most emphatically, in the face of prevailing and far-spreading misinterpretations, that the pure phenomenology, to which in what follows we would prepare a way of approach, the same which emerged for the first time in the Logical Studies, and has revealed an ever richer and deeper meaning to me as my thought dwelt on it through the last ten years, is not psychology, and that it is not accidental delimitations and considerations of terminology, but grounds of principle, which forbid its being counted as psychology. Great as is the importance which phenomenology must claim to possess for psychology in the matter of method, whatever the essential "bases" it provides for it, it is itself (if only as Science of ideas) as little identifiable with psychology as is geometry with natural science. Indeed, the difference is more marked, and reaches deeper than this comparison would itself suggest. It makes no difference that phenomenology has to do with "consciousness" with all types of experience, with acts and their correlates; though in view of the prevailing habits of thought, it demands no small effort to see this (Husserl 1962: 62).

Thus, Husserl denounces psychologism on the grounds that it is impossible to reach objective truth with the science of psychology, which depends entirely on individual experiment and real, factual world; and instead of that, he develops the science of phenomenology, which investigates the essential structures of consciousness in order to derive and describe the universal and necessary truths of experience. This paper aims at investigating the role of psychologism in Husserl's development of the phenomenological method.

Husserl's criticism and rejection of psychologism can be considered in three consecutive phases. In the first phase, he wrote *Logical Investigations*, which exhibits his rejection of psychology as a theoretical foundation of logic. The second phase is also characterized by the beginning of his establishment of his own phenomenological philosophy while abandoning Brentano's descriptive psychology. In this phase, in which he wrote *Philosophy as a Rigorous Science*, he criticized psychology with a sort of criticism of naturalism within epistemology. Third phase is the phase where he wrote *Ideas*, in which he developed his phenomenological philosophy by completely rejecting psychologism.

But, before proceed any further about the details of his criticism of psychologism, the conceptual framework of his criticism of psychologism should be given. According to Husserl, people live together and communicate in a "natural attitude" which, supposes without any criticism that the world and things within it are formed independently from each other. In the natural attitude, the inner-subjective existence of the world is not questioned. As Husserl emphasizes in *Cartesian Meditations*, daily life is natural; whether it is thought or estimation or action, all experience are within this already given world. Phenomenology aims to go beyond the natural attitude and the phenomenological attitude that Husserl tries to develop aims to establish itself, the others and the world with a real scientific approach. Beyond a mere criticism of psychologism, Husserl, in fact from a broader perspective, opposes naturalism, which proposes to apply the method of natural sciences to other disciplines including the realm of consciousness. In order to get away from psychologism, naturalism and consequently from positivism, Husserl develops the method of phenomenological *epokhe*, which means abandoning the belief about understanding the world in the natural attitude. Husserl says that a phenomenologist should exhibit a sort of Cartesian doubt against beliefs and claims evident in itself, that is, s/he should parenthesize these suppositions and everything within the experiential world. The phenomenologist should abandon everything s/he previously believes and presupposes in order to concentrate on evident appearances, which phenomena offer themselves to consciousness. After the completion of this phenomenological reduction, there will remain only pure consciousness.

According to Husserl, who says that consciousness should be investigated in a phenomenological manner, or as a pure phenomenon or as it appears, phenomenology contains perception more than observation; instead of observing individual compounds of the flow of consciousness, it grasps the essence of phenomena by means of intuition. Even though both psychology and phenomenology are about consciousness, Husserl defines phenomenology as "a science, it is true, of consciousness that is still not psychology; a phenomenology of consciousness as opposed to a natural science about consciousness" (Husserl 1965: 91). According to him, "psychology is concerned with "empirical consciousness" with consciousness from the empirical point of view, as an empirical being in the ensemble of nature, whereas phenomenology is concerned with "pure" consciousness, i.e., consciousness from the phenomenological point of view" (ibid., 91).

According to Husserl, phenomenology as a science, which is pure and abstains from asserting any existential claim about the nature, every inner perception and such judgments founded upon experience are outside of its framework because it is only an

investigation of essences. Since phenomenological investigation is an investigation of essences, it is truly a priori. But, because the laws of psychology are under the influence of science and empiricism, they are natural laws; and a natural law cannot be "a priori". Husserl, in *Logical Investigations* says that: "no natural laws can be known a priori, nor established by sheer insight. The only way in which a natural law can be established and justified, is by induction from the singular facts of experience" (1970: 99). Thus, psychological laws lack exactness and genuineness because they are "vague generalizations from experience" (ibid., 98).

Chapters three through eight of *Logical Investigations* contain the criticism of psychologism in terms of pure logic. The strategy of Husserl, who determines the borders of logic in the previous chapters, is to show the inadequacy of psychology in giving wanted absolutisms from chapters three to eight. In *Logical Investigations*, one of the main aims of Husserl is to actually discriminate the real being (experiential, psychological, anthropological, currently happening, probably happening) from ideal being (objective, absolute, abstract, theoretical, a priori), affirm our sciences and classify the truth under ideal being in order to gain knowledge. However, since he also needs to relate the realm of psychology to the absolutely objective realm of pure theoretical logic, Husserl is careful not to completely abandon psychology.

He asks the following question in the first paragraph of the third chapter: "Which theoretical sciences provide the essential foundations of the theory of science?" (ibid., 90). The two preeminent disciplines that can provide this are psychology and pure theoretical logic. According to Husserl it is commonly held that psychology deals with thinking as it actually occurs whereas logic deals with thinking, as it ought to occur. The pro-psychologism argues that every thought, including correct judgment, has its origin and its organization in human psycho-physical processes. According to this view, any or all thinking is correct because thought is a natural product of working brain, meaning one cannot think otherwise than what one thought. If there are no options, then there is no possibility of false choice, either. Psychology purports to give a causal explanation for the judging something as true, and thereby, to show that logic is made possible by psychology instead of other way around. Husserl counters the basic argument of psychologism in many ways. First, he claims that logic provides the rules necessary to put together any scientific theory, psychology included. But, in that case, how does logic itself come to be true? Logic would have to provide for its own possibility as well. The pro-psychologism would see this as resulting in circular reasoning, where we apparently presuppose the rules of logic in order to establish logic. Husserl, here, warns against equivocating with the term "presuppose" (ibid., 95). Even though logical reasoning from logical laws is circular, reasoning according to them is not. Reasoning according to logical laws does not require any use of logical laws in one's premises; the laws underlie the reasoning, they are not stated in it. We do not presuppose the rules of logic to establish logic as a science; logic is those rules. Logic is he able to maintain the position of foundational science for all sciences.

In the fourth chapter of *Logical Investigations*, Husserl investigates the radical empiricism or skepticism he sees engendered by psychologism and how it precludes the possibility of a unified theory of anything. Psychology is an empirical science; its investigations and claims are based on observable evidence or facts. Therefore, the laws

of psychology are strictly generalizations from experience, and thus inexact and variable (ibid., 98). As such, they cannot even be called laws, and they certainly do not constitute any theoretical foundations. A priori laws alone can meet such a task. Causal laws are inductive and they yield only probabilities where certainty is required. Logical laws, on the other hand, are a priori and never about particular facts (ibid., 104-06). We know of logical laws through psychological intuition; but a law and knowledge of a law are two very different things. A law governs, whereas knowledge of a law does nothing of that sort (ibid., 108). If psychology were the foundational science, the empirical laws of psychology would be facts on the same level as the facts they are meant to investigate. Since, unlike truths, facts come and go, that is they change, psychological laws would come and go, that is they change as well, governing themselves in and out of existence. Even though psychologism wishes to lay claim to the title of fundamental science, its laws would make such a science an impossibility.

Husserl, after pointing out the defects in psychological conceptions of basic logical principles and syllogism in chapters five and six, proceeds to argue for an identification of psychologism with "skeptical relativism" in chapter seven. It is in this accusation that he causes the most damage to psychologism's claim to establish itself as the foundational science of all sciences, since relativism precludes the possibility of any such thing as an absolute foundation. According to Husserl, ancient forms of skepticism mean, "there is no truth, no knowledge, no justification of knowledge" (ibid., 136). In ordinary sense, skepticism means "doubt about the possibility of penetrating to a true reality behind mere appearance" (Patocka 1996: 33). Husserl says that skepticism as the "purely epistemic skepticism" means the "limit of knowledge to mental existence, and would deny the existence or knowability of things in themselves" (Husserl 1970: 137).

According to Husserl, skepticism is based on Protagorean formula that "man is the measure of all things" (ibid., 138). For relativism, the human person, or the subject, is the measure of all truth, judgment, and propositions. Hence, truth is relative, "relative to the contingently judging subject", which means that "for each man that is true which seems to him true, one thing to one man and the opposite to another, if that is how he sees it" (ibid., 138). Husserl specifies two types of skepticism as individual relativism and specific relativism or anthropologism, and claims that in relativism, individual and specific, no one can achieve "ideal unity". Only logical laws can achieve this "ideal unity".

Relativism is a form of skepticism because it denies the validity of objectivity. It limits knowledge on the individual subject alone. It is also a form of skepticism because it denies the possibility of truth, objectivity truth, which can be realized beyond the given facts. Relativism limits only truth and knowledge on the given facts, or on empirical experience and not on something that is ideal. One of the main reasons why Husserl rejected psychologism is his evaluation of psychologism as a kind of relativism because the laws of psychology are based on facts that are "contingent" and "individually and therefore temporally determinate" (ibid., 141). Because of this, it is impossible to arrive at truth based on facts. Truth about facts is the only possible thing, but not truth as such or the "truth-in-itself". Since psychologism denies the possibility of knowledge beyond the real and factual world, it cannot help but fall into skeptic relativism.

In order to understand better Husserl's criticism of psychologism as skeptical relativism, the prejudices of psychologism, which he discusses in the eighth chapter, need to be examined. These prejudices of psychologism, for Husserl, are the essence of psychologism. It is also in this chapter that he states most clearly his disagreement with strict anti-psychologism and claims to "occupy an intermediate position" (ibid., 175). Husserl begins his discussion of the prejudices by pointing out that both psychologists and anti-psychologists are guilty of not attending to the fact that logical laws are essentially theoretical and only peripherally put to a normative use.

The first prejudice of the psychologistic argument is that "prescriptions which regulate what is mental must obviously have a mental basis" (ibid., 168). In other words, the laws of truth cannot regulate our ability to regulate our ability to judge correctly from without but must be included in our mental make-up. But this would mean that the normative laws of logic, along with truths, could change from one mental configuration to the next, removing any justification for even calling them laws much less prescriptions of any kind and denying an absolute notion of truth. According to Husserl, "one must always distinguish between laws that serve as norms for our knowledge activities, and laws which include normativity in their thought content, and assert its universal obligations" (ibid., 168). The laws of logic are used as the norms in thinking at the same time they are mistaken to contain psychological content simply because they are used as norms. Husserl points out that the laws of logic are not norms *per se*; but they can only be used normatively.

Husserl also points out that psychologism ignore the difference between the "norms of pure logic" and the "technical rules of a specifically human art of thought" (ibid., 171). The former is used normatively in cognitive activity while the latter served as norms for our knowledge activities. The laws of logic are "ideal"; "spring from immediately evident axioms"; and "purely theoretical" (ibid., 171). The latter is "real"; "spring from the empirical facts"; and purely practical.

The second prejudice is that the mental acts of judging, presenting, proving and the like inform of us mental facts instead of objective truths (ibid., 177). The second prejudice of psychologism "appeals to the factual content of logic" (Patocka, 1996, p. 34). Husserl claims that the laws of logic do not have any factual content or "empirical extension". He further says,

We deny that the theoretical discipline of pure logic, in the independent separateness proper to it, has any concern with with mental facts, or with laws that might be styled 'psychological'. We saw that the laws of pure logic totally lose their basic sense, if one tries to interpret them as psychological. It is therefore clear from the start that the concepts which constitute these and similar laws have no empirical range. They cannot, in other words, have the character of those mere universal notions whose range is that of individual singulars, but they must be notions truly generic, whose range is exclusively one ideal singulars, genuine species (Husserl 1970: 181).

Husserl vindicates logic's purity with an analogy to the related and revered field of mathematics. According to him, like the mental acts of addition and multiplication to bring us to admittedly objective numbers, mental acts of judging, proving etc. bring us to the objective truths (ibid., 179-80). Furthermore, as he already pointed out, it is impossible for logic to have factual content simply because logic belongs to the "ideal

science" while psychology belongs to the "real science". The "ideal science" is a priori and its ultimate objects are "ideal species". It also set "forth ideal general laws, grounded with intuitive certainty in certain general concepts". On the other hand, the "real science" is empirical and its ultimate objects are empirical facts (ibid., 185).

The third and the last prejudice of psychologism is its "theory of evident givenness" (Patočka 1996: 37). This third prejudice of psychologism consists of the assumption that the truth is always associated with judgment, and that "the feeling of inert evidence" we have when making true judgments has a peculiarly mental character (Husserl 1970: 187). Logical laws are, then according to Husserl, are psychological propositions that delimit the necessary psychological conditions for having the inner feeling of correctness associated with a true judgment (ibid., 187). He further says that

the pure laws of logic say absolutely nothing about inner evidence (evident givenness) or its conditions. We can show, we hold, that they only achieve this relation through a process of application or transformation, the same sort of process, in fact, through which every purely conceptual law permits application to a generally conceived realm of empirical cases. The propositions about inner evidence which arise in this manner keep their a priori character, and the conditions of inner evidence that they assert bear no trace of the psychological or the real. They are purely conceptual propositions, transformable, as in every like case, into statements about ideal incompatibilities or possibilities (ibid., 189).

In short, Husserl does not agree with the idea that psychology is the theoretical foundation of logic and it is a branch of psychology simply because these two disciplines are distinct, and they are incompatible. The combination of these disciplines would only lead to skepticism because psychologism is unable to ground the absolute necessity of logical laws. But, here it should be noted that the kind of psychologism Husserl denounces is naturalistic and objectivistic psychologism.

In Philosophy as a Rigorous Science, the general intention of Husserl is that some fundamental mistakes of empirical psychology can only be corrected by a phenomenological psychology, which fills in the gap between philosophy and empirical psychology. It is only possible to establish philosophy as a rigorous science by explicating the conditions of being a rigorous science through systematical arguments in a decisive manner. The mistake Husserl criticizes is to establish philosophy as a science on a naturalistic foundation. Positivism cannot provide philosophy the quality of being a rigorous science and neither physical natural sciences nor psychology, which essentially depends on physiology can be a foundation for philosophy. According to Husserl, the fundamental error of this psychology is that "it places analysis realized in empathetic understanding of others' experience and, likewise, analysis on the basis of one's own mental processes that were unobserved at the time, on the same level with an analysis of experience (even though indirect) proper to physical science, believing that in this way it is an experimental science of the psychical in fundamentally the same sense as physical science is an experimental science of the physical" (Husserl 1965: 97). This is the attitude of the group of naturalistic psychologists, so called by Husserl, whose only job is to make experimental analyses.

Phenomenological analysis of essence, however, is basically conceptual analysis, which is disregarded in experimental analyses. If modern psychology wants to be a science of psychical phenomena rather than of the soul, then "it must be able to describe



and determine these phenomena with conceptual rigor, and it must have acquired the necessary rigorous concepts by methodical work" (ibid., 99). But, Husserl claims that we seek for this methodical work accomplished in exact psychology in vain throughout its vast literature. Furthermore, psychology "has neglected to consider to what extent the psychical, rather than being the presentation of a nature, has an essence proper to itself to be rigorously and in full adequation investigated prior to any psychophysics; it has not considered what lies in the sense of psychological experience and what demands being (in the sense of the psychical) of itself makes on method (ibid., 102). Empirical psychologists believe that psychology must bring that which is psychologically vague in naïve interpretation to objectively valid determination by the experimental method successfully used in natural sciences.

But "to follow the model of the natural sciences almost inevitably means to reify consciousness" (ibid., 103). The spell of naturalistic point of view both makes the psychical an object of intuitive investigation from the pure rather than from the psychophysical point of view and also blockes the road to a science which is on the one hand the fundamental condition for a completely scientific psychology and on the other the field for the genuine critique of reason (ibid., 110).

But, according to Husserl, as far as intuition extends, so far extends the possibility of a corresponding ideation or of seeing essences. To the extent that the intuition is a pure one that involves no transient connotations, to the same extent is the intuited essence an adequately intuited one, an absolutely given one. The field dominated by pure intuition includes the entire sphere that the psychologist reserves to him/herself as the sphere of psychical phenomena (ibid., 111). But, it is important to note that essential intuition is in no way experience in the sense of perception, recollection, and equivalent acts; furthermore, that it is in no way an empirical generalization whose sense it is to posit existentially at the same time the individual being of empirical details (ibid., 112). According to Husserl, all the problems that Hume tackled in the *Treatise* belong entirely to the area dominated by phenomenology, and the important question is that "how various perceptions or appearances come to the point of bringing to appearance one and the same object so that it can be the same for them and for the consciousness of unity or identity that unifies their variety" (ibid., 114).

The mistake of psychology is its desire to answer this question empirically on the basis of natural science whereas this question can only be answered by phenomenological essential investigation. Husserl also warns against confounding phenomenological intuition with introspection and claims that the designation of phenomenology as descriptive psychology is a misunderstanding that stems from the defective characterization of the method in *Introduction of Logical Investigations* (ibid., 115-16). Pure phenomenology as science, so long as it is pure and makes no use of the existential positing of nature, can only be essence investigation, and not an investigation of being-there; all introspection and every judgment based on such experience falls outside its framework. Thus, the fundamental error of modern psychology, preventing it from being psychology in the pure, fully scientific sense is its failure to recognize and develop the phenomenological method.

What Husserl tries to accomplish is to show that a really adequate empirical science of the psychical in its relations to nature can be realized only when psychology is

constructed on the base of a systematic phenomenology. He indicates clearly in *Ideas* that pure phenomenology is not psychology. According to Husserl, phenomenology is "a discipline which furnishes the essential eidetic basis of psychology and other sciences of mind" (Husserl 1962: 73). Thus, the intention of Husserl is not to develop a new psychology but rather to develop a science, which would provide essential foundations for all sciences of mind, including psychology, that pure transcendental phenomenology is that science.

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