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Real Possibilities for Husserl's Correlation between Truth and Evidence

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Already before endorsing transcendental idealism, Husserl pairs truths and possibilities of evidence. This 'correlationism' is central for phenomenological metaphysics, but it remains disputed how correlationism determines truth and evidence, including whether it gives a form of priority to either notion. I approach these questions by focusing on the employed notion of possibility and its changes between Husserl's early and later work.

While originally formulating correlationism in terms of *ideal possibilities*, Husserl realizes that this cannot be extended to account for contingent truths. He then discusses the correlation principle in terms of those ideal possibilities that are *motivated*. But this faces simple objections: 1.) possibilities can be motivated by false beliefs, and 2.) we can be contingently ignorant about possibilities of evidence. The problem is that the shift from ideal to motivated possibility replaces an alethic with an epistemic notion of possibility. One may in response try to characterize real possibilities in terms of the contingent truths of the actual world, but then the characterization of truth in terms of real possibilities becomes circular. A more promising alternative is to replace the noetic factor 'motivation' with a noematic factor 'potentiality'. On this reading, the correlationist thesis asserts that any obtaining state of affairs has a potentiality for recognition in evident judgement.

Husserl's 1900/01 *Logical Investigations* are often described as 'realist,' in contrast with a transcendental version of phenomenology that takes centre stage in the 1913 *Ideas I* (see e.g., Spiegelberg 1982: p. 70; Bell 1990: pp. 157–172; Sokolowski 2000: p. 213; Moran 2000: p. 125; Hopp 2020: p. 273). The crucial difference is normally taken to be methodological, as Husserl begins from ca. 1905 to develop a theory of the phenomenological reduction, which indicates a radical break, rather than a gradual revision. But through Husserl's invention and reinvention of phenomenology, he maintains variants of a correlation principle, for example

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here in the 1900 *Prolegomena*:

> [E]videntermaßen [besteht] die allgemeine Äquivalenz zwischen den Sätzen "*A* ist wahr" und "es ist möglich, daß irgend jemand mit Evidenz urteilt, es sei *A*." (Husserl 1975: §50)
>
> Evidently, there is a general equivalence between the sentences "*A* is true" and "it is possible, that someone judges with evidence that *A*." (Husserl 2001b: §50)

This equivalence originates in Husserl's "artful" combination (Simons 2006: p. 128) of Bolzano's correspondence theory of truth with Brentano's account of truth as possible evidence (Brentano 2009: p. 82. See also Benoist 2002; Rollinger 2010: pp. 38, 81–82; Naberhaus 2011). The correlation between truth and possible evidence is not an unexamined background assumption, but one that exhibits a more gradual change in Husserl's metaphysics. Patzig (2011: p. 57) argues that Husserl's connection between truth and evidence becomes so narrow that he ultimately "melts down" truth in possible evidence. This verdict has been disputed (Ströker 1978: p. 6), but it raises the question whether, and in what sense, there is a priority for either side of the correlation between truth and evidence, and whether this priority is shifting. This is ultimately not only a question about Husserl, but for anyone who wants to endorse broadly Husserlian semantics, metaphysics, and epistemology.

Two attempts to *synthesize* Husserl's work as a whole suggest the approach to this question that I am following here. Hardy (2013: p. 100), who emphasizes Husserl's earlier writings, understands correlationism as the thesis that every true proposition has a corresponding *ideal possibility* of evidence. Zahavi (2017: p. 72), who emphasizes Husserl's later writings, insists that true propositions are correlated with *motivated possibilities* of evidence. By focusing on this notion of possibility, we can see how the correlation between truth and possible evidence changes. I first give some more context to Husserl's correlationism, and consider how it should be stated (§ 1.1). I then give an overview over the different notions of possibility that are scattered through Husserl's work, and how I interpret them in the discussion that follows (§ 1.2). Husserl was right to be dissatisfied with his earlier account, but also his revision faces two simple objections (§§ 2.1–2.2). I conclude that, from a systematic point of view, Husserlian phenomenologists should heed the distinction between alethic and epistemic notions of possibility, and formulate a correlationist thesis with an alethic notion of real possibility (§ 2.3). Understanding real possibility in terms of truth, however, would turn the correlationist thesis into a mere statement of epistemic optimism, where truth retains a clear conceptual priority over possible evidence. An alternative would be to revise Husserl's later view, where I propose to shift the criterion for real possibility from judging subject to the judged object. Rather than relying on motivation in actual consciousness, the distinction between ideal and real

possibility can be based on potentialities in the actual world (§ 2.4).

1. Husserl's Correlation between Truth and Evidence

An "equivalence" between truth and possible evidence is a symmetric relation, which suggests that truth and evidence are on a par. But in the *Prolegomena*, there are some hints to a priority of the notion of truth. Husserl considers whether mathematical conjectures that no human can prove could still be considered true, and what would come of the connection between truth and possible evidence in such cases. His answer is that the possibility of evidence need not be confined to what actual people can do, but refers to a wider, ideal possibility of evidence.

> Was psychologisch unmöglich ist, kann ideal gesprochen sehr wohl sein. Die Auflösung des verallgemeinerten 'Problems der 3 Körper' [...] mag jede menschliche Erkenntnisfähigkeit überschreiten. Aber das Problem hat eine Auflösung, so ist eine darauf bezügliche Evidenz möglich. (Husserl 1975: §50)
>
> What is psychologically impossible may very well be ideally possible. The solution of the generalized '3-body problem' [...] may transcend all human cognitive capacity, but the problem *has* a solution, and the inner evidence which relates to it is therefore possible. (Husserl 2001b: §50)

The order of explanation shows a priority of truth. The mathematical problem has a solution and *therefore* evidence is possible. Truth takes the lead and its correlation to evidence allows to infer that there are ideal possibilities of evidence that transcend human capacities. This is important for Husserl's rejection of psychologism, because these *ideal* possibilities of evidence need not be in the domain of empirical psychology, which is concerned with facts about human subjects.[1]

Such idealized possibilities of evidence are a promising account for necessary truths: the only contingencies about evidence of necessary truths concern the powers of the knowing subjects. Empirical, contingent truths, are more complex, because we can also vary the truth or falsity of a judgement itself. The possibilities of evidence that can be correlated with empirical truths therefore need to be fewer than the ideal possibilities of evidence. Husserl states that real possibilities are strictly narrower than ideal possibilities in the sense that any real possibility is an ideal possibility, but not vice versa (Husserl 2002: §48, 178–181). Which ideal possibilities are also real possibilities? Husserl's answer, to be explored and criticized below, is that real possibilities are motivated in previous experience:

> die Möglichkeit der Erfahrungserkennt-[n]is, [...] die gefordert ist durch den
>
> the possibility of cognitive experience, [...] which is demanded by the mean-

1. Parsons (2004: pp. 190–191) argues that this idealization also addresses an objection that Ehrenfels raised to Brentano.

> Sinn der "Existenz eines Dinges," kann nur gefasst werden als reale Möglichkeit, und das sagt wieder Möglichkeit für ein aktuelles, reale Möglichkeiten motivierendes Bewusstsein. (Husserl 2002: S. 270. See also Husserl 2003b: S. 140)
>
> ing of "existence of a thing," can only be grasped as real possibility, and that in turn means possibility for an actual consciousness that motivates real possibilities. (translated by the author)

That the correlation between truth and the possibility of evidence is first formulated in terms of ideal possibilities and later in terms of real possibilities leads to the divergence between Hardy's and Zahavi's interpretations. Let me now refine the statement of correlationism before discussing with which modal notion it should be expressed.

1.1. Stating Correlationism

When Husserl speaks about possibilities of evidence, he considers acts that can have a variety of contents, which need not be propositional. Straightforward perceptions, for example, are directed at perceptible individual objects. In truthful perception, an objectual representation is matched up with a perceptual presentation. This objectual account of fulfilment is then extended to acts with propositional content[2] (Husserl 1984: VI, §§36–40). This puts Husserl in the unique position that his theory of truth operates at the propositional as well as the subpropositional level (Zuidervaart 2016). I will return to this in § 2.4, but for the most part of this essay I will follow Hardy (2013: p. 100) and Zahavi (2017: p. 72) in expressing correlationism as a biconditional between true propositions and the possibility of evident judgement that *p*.

I take this to be not so much in tension with using formal accounts of possibility and knowledge that start from propositional contents, but as an additional feature: Husserl's semantics and theory of fulfilment can also discuss the subpropositional contents of judgements. But whatever that discussion looks like, it is not helpful if it leads to an implausible theory at the later, propositional level.[3]

The simple, propositional statement of correlationism then states that a proposition *p* is true if and only if it is possible that somebody evidently judges that *p*.

2. Husserl speaks of act *matter*, because he distinguishes different axes along which acts can be classified to be of the same type. I speak here of propositional content to simplify the presentation, since the focus is on different modal notions, rather than the semantics.

3. Mohanty (1984) discusses Husserl's notions of possibility in terms of essences and their compatibility. While this allows to speak of possible *individuals*, we want to relate possibilities to *truth*, without first developing an account of sub-propositional truth. Considering only the propositional case, however, allows the succinct statement of different proposals in propositional logic. Note also that cases of sub-propositional fulfilment, such as the perception of an apple, have an intimate relation to acts with propositional content, such as 'there is an apple in front of me.' This suggests that focusing on propositional truth comes only at a limited loss of generality.

Or formally:

$$\textsc{Corr}\ \ \mathit{True}(p) \leftrightarrow \Diamond EJ(p) \qquad \text{(CORR)}$$

where $\Diamond$ reads 'it is possible, that' and $EJ(p)$ means that somebody evidently judges that p.

One may wonder if this thesis should also reflect distinctions between kinds of evidence. Heffernan (1998: p. 59) speaks of the 'contextual relativity' of evidence: what counts as the 'self-givenness' of an object changes with the domain of objects in question. Whereas perceptual evidence always leaves open a possibility of error, evident judgement about one's own mental lives has no such fallibility. It even seems that object domains should be *defined* by the structure of evident acts in which they are given. Then the notion of evidence grows as "complicated as life itself." But at the same time, the typically unachievable standard of evidence remains a guiding principle for judging rationally (Heffernan 1998: p. 63). The possibility of evident judgement that we consider here is not based on the 'lax' notion of evidence, which also goes by the name of "justification." The correlation thesis concerns this guiding ideal: evidence in the strict sense, where that which is meant can be identified with what is given (Husserl 1984: VI, §38). Starting from the 1907 lecture *The Idea of Phenomenology*, Husserl uses the name 'evidence' not for a reflective act which identifies the content of empty intention and fulfilling act, as he did in the *Logical Investigations*, but as a name for the fulfilling act (Husserl 1973a: pp. 9–10). He also moves away from the ideal of adequate evidence as complete identification. Identity of intended and fulfilling act contents remains unachievable for example in the perception of physical objects, because any perspective presents only an incomplete perspective on the physical thing. But even where such strictly 'adequate' evidence is never realized, we can still make sense of it as a rule that organizes an infinite collection of possibilities of perception (Bernet 1978: p. 265). The infinite number of perceptions of the same object cannot in fact be traversed, but each of them can be realized. So despite the necessary incompleteness of sensory perception, there are still possibilities of perception in terms of which we can understand what truth about empirical objects amounts to (Soffer 1991: pp. 88–89; Bernet 2004: p. 15). What counts here are the good cases, where things are as they appear. The highest achievable standards of evidence can differ between situations or depend on practical purposes and what is at stake (cf. the truth of the market, Husserl 1974: §105, 284). But there are highest standards that can be met. We may be wrong about whether we have achieved the highest standard of evidence ourselves, but this does not mean that we never do, let alone that we never could (Husserl 1969: §58). Thus we can ask how possibilities in which we have met the highest standard of evidence are connected with the truth of what is presented—orthogonal to the question whether the highest standard of evidence achieves an

identification ('adequate evidence') or is beyond conceivable doubt ('apodictic evidence,' comprehensively discussed in Levin 1970) or whether it is good enough as a basis for our epistemology (Larsen 2023).

In gold-standard cases of evident judgement, things are presented in a coherent way that no subsequent experience could contradict with better evidence. This kind of evidence therefore excludes undetected, but detectable error. Such evident judging implies its success, like 'proving' and 'seeing'. One cannot prove that p if p is not the case, and one cannot see the grandfather if the person turns out to be the grandfather's twin brother. For evident judging in this strict sense, one cannot evidently judge and remain in need of correction. Formally put, strict evidence of a proposition implies the truth of the proposition that is given: $EJ(p) \rightarrow Tr(p)$.

It is worth noting that CORR should be necessary, if it is supposed to express a deep (or conceptual) relationship between truth and possible evidence, rather than a contingent fact. Consider by contrast a correlation between hearts and kidneys: it is presumably true that every animal with a heart is an animal with a kidney and vice versa, although there is no mereological or conceptual relationship between hearts and kidneys. But this heart-kidney correlation could come apart if the evolutionary history of animals were different. The coordination between truth and possible evidence that is expressed in CORR should not be such a contingent fact. But in what follows, I leave the necessity of CORR implicit to focus on a different question: How should we interpret the notion of possibility, here expressed by the $\Diamond$ operator?

1.2. Kinds of possibility

We already encountered Husserl's distinctions between different kinds of possibility. For a discussion of the correlation between truth and evidence, we need to consider

1. logical possibility
2. ideal possibility ($\Diamond_I$)
3. *real possibility* ($\Diamond_R$)
4. motivated possibility ($\Diamond_{MA}$ for actual motivation, $\Diamond_{MI}$ for idealized motivation)

Husserl sometimes uses these terms loosely; in particular, ideal possibilities are often called 'logical possibilities,' to mark their contrast from the *real* possibilities (Rollinger & Sowa 2003: XXI, fn. 1). The distinction between ideal and logical possibilities is not strictly required for the discussion that follows. But in a clear outline of Husserl's thinking about modality, it would make sense to keep them

apart, given Husserl's emphasis on the distinction between formal and material laws of essence (Husserl 1995: §10, 26). The formal laws of essence hold for any domain of objects whatsoever. There are no F's that are not F's, irrespectively of what *F* means. Such content-agnostic laws are the only constraints on logical possibility. By contrast, ideal possibility is also constrained by material laws of essence that depend on what we are talking about. It requires an understanding of the terms involved to see the necessary truth of "there are no frogs that are mammals." Likewise, it is no formal contradiction that there is a thing that is at the same time red all over and green all over, so it can be considered a logical possibility. But there is a conflict between the *material* essences of 'green all over' and 'red all over,' hence it is not ideally possible that a thing is red all over and green all over. Since only ideal possibilities describe what could actually be the case, this is the notion of possibility that maps onto what is nowadays called metaphysical possibility (Mohanty 1999: pp. 171–172; Spinelli 2021: p. 153). While formal sciences can determine (and axiomatize) formal laws of essence, it is the task of phenomenology to traverse object-domains descriptively and to spell out the material laws of essence that structure them (Husserl 1995: §75, p. 157).

We already see that such a permissive interpretation of logical possibility is unsuitable for expressing correlationism. The most permissive option correlates truth and *ideally* possible evidence, as in the *Prolegomena*, or in a 1902/1903 lecture where Husserl writes that the 'reduction to the ideal possibility is the foundation of our theory of cognition' (Husserl 2001a: p. 199, translated by the author). This is the version of correlationism stressed by Hardy (cf. 2013: p. 100). Another prominent account of correlationism might *appear* to interpret it also in terms of ideal possibilities. Soffer describes Husserl's notion of truth as first developed for eidetic truths (which are necessary), and then generalized to include contingent truths e.g. about the physical world (Soffer 1991: pp. 66, 76). Since our actual powers are limited, we need to abstract from contingencies about our intellectual and bodily makeup; otherwise the correlation principle would be anthropocentric, succumbing to relativism. The relevant possibilities of evidence therefore need to be *idealized* in some fashion. Soffer ultimately arrives at the following account:

> Corr-sof The judgement 'A is true' is logically equivalent to 'it is possible for a cognitively perfect consciousness to judge with [maximal] *Evidenz* that A is the case' (Soffer 1991: pp. 74, 88–89)

'Maximal' evidence depends on the domain of objects and is whatever is the best form of evidence in which they can be given. This accounts for Husserl's claim that physical objects are given in perspectives, even to (cognitively perfect) Gods (Husserl 1995: §44). We therefore do not need to claim that the best possible evidence is apodictic or even adequate—Soffer's notion of 'maximal evidence' serves the same purpose as the notion of 'strict' evidence introduced above.

The possibilities that Soffer considers are idealized in the sense that the knowing subjects have further cognitive capacities than we actually do. This way, we can make sense of theorems that we are never in a position to prove (Husserl 1975: §50). When Soffer speaks of 'real possibilities,' she refers to actual cognitive capacities. What varies are only the capacities of the knowing subjects, not the world that is known. But Husserl frequently speaks of ideal possibilities as possible ways the world *could* be, not just possibilities of knowing about the contingent, actual world (Husserl 1995: §100; Husserl 2003b: p. 186). Soffer's idealized possibilities are therefore not Husserl's 'ideal possibilities,' but refer to what could be known under idealization of our cognitive capacities.

But can we account for Husserl's correlation between truth and evidence in terms of ideal possibilities, as Hardy (2013) suggests? The problem becomes plain for contingent truths. To account for the truth of 'there are three apples on the tree,' it is not enough that there is an ideal possibility for a cognitively perfect consciousness to count 'three apples on a tree,' because it is also an ideal possibility for a cognitively perfect consciousness to count 'four apples on a tree'. Since ideal possibilities are independent of all contingency of the actual world, we lack a particular reason to correlate contingent truth with one ideal possibility rather than the other.

A straightforward suggestion would be to consider the ideal possibility in which the number of apples is the same as in the actual world (more sophisticated ideas in a similar spirit are explored in Edgington 1985; Edgington 2010; Schlöder 2021). This has the drawback that we need to invoke the notion of (unknown) contingent truth about the actual world, to determine which ideal possibility is correlated with that truth. If this is put formally as

$$Tr(p) \leftrightarrow \Diamond_I EJ(p) \wedge Tr(p)$$

the right-to-left direction is now trivial. The correlation thesis then simplifies to the principle that every truth can (ideally) be judged with evidence

$$Tr(p) \rightarrow \Diamond_I EJ(p)$$

As a characterization of contingent truth, this only amounts to a statement about in-principle possible evidence, given a truth. If we want to understand (contingent) truth as the limit of possible evidence, we need to spell out a way of selecting among the ideal possibilities of evidence which is different from 'possibilities in which we know the truth'—I return to this in § 2.4.

While Husserl continues to correlate ideal possibilities of evidence with "ideal being," such as mathematical states of affairs or essences, he becomes more explicit about needing a narrower notion to describe the correlation between truth and evidence for contingent truths in the actual world (e.g. Husserl 2003b: p. 120). In a 1908 manuscript, Husserl discusses that there is the *ideal* possibility

to encounter a diamond the size of the sun, whether or not such a diamond exists. The real possibilities that can be correlated with the existence of an *actual* diamond have to be narrower.[4] Husserl promptly suggests that such "real possibilities" should be identified with "motivated possibilities."

> Ja, was heißt denn "Es bestehen die und die Wahrnehmungs-, Begründungs-, Erkenntnismöglichkeiten"? In einem "*leeren*" Sinn bestehen Erkenntnismöglichkeiten für jedes *realiter* "*bloß Mögliche*," aber nicht Wirkliche, z.B. für einen Diamanten von der Größe der Sonne. Ist in Wirklichkeit ein Ding, so bestehen nicht bloß solche logischen Möglichkeiten, sondern *reale Möglichkeiten*; und das hat keinen anderen Sinn als den, dass es *motivierte Möglichkeiten* sind, die ihre Motivation in einem aktuellen Erkenntnisbewusstsein haben. (Husserl 2003b: 37, see also 60-61)
>
> What then means "there are such and such possibilities of perception, justification, cognition"? In an "*empty*" sense, possibilities of cognition obtain for any *really* [realiter] "merely possible," but not actual [Wirkliche], e.g. for a diamond the size of the sun. If a thing is in actuality [Wirklichkeit], there are not merely such logical possibilities, but *real possibilities*; and that has no other sense than that they are *motivated possibilities*, which have their motivation in an actual [aktuellen] cognitive consciousness. (translated by the author)

The same consideration can be found in the 1913 typeset proofs for a revision of the *Sixth Logical Investigation*, which contain a new chapter on different kinds of possibility.[5] Husserl here aims to adapt the *Logical Investigations* so they cohere with the *Ideas I*, where he uses the notion of real possibility. For the distinction between ideal and real possibility, Husserl writes that

> Während Wirklichkeiten, Wahrscheinlichkeiten, reale Möglichkeiten u. dgl. setzende Anschauungen fordern, die gar nicht ohne weiteres in unserer Freiheit stehen, *genügt für die ideale Möglichkeit überall die bloße Phantasie*. (Husserl 2002: §48, 180; Rollinger & Sowa 2003: S. XXVI)
>
> While realities, probabilities, real possibilities and the like demand positing intuitions, which are not just like that in our liberty, *ideal possibility is everywhere content with mere phantasy*. (translated by the author)

4. But they are still different from the sense in which Soffer uses 'real possibility' when describing what we are *actually* in a position to judge with evidence. The lack of oxygen in space is not supposed to invalidate the claim that there is a 'real possibility' of perception for objects located on distant planets (cf. Husserl 2003b: pp. 115–116).

5. Although these remained unpublished, Melle considers these drafts of 'exceptional quality' (Melle 2002: p. 114). The second edition of the First to Fifth Investigations also (deceptively) announces the revision of the Sixth investigation as complete and in print, which suggests that Husserl intended to publish this material. Melle explains Husserl's dissatisfaction not with the quality of the work, but the structure of the *Sixth Investigation*. Where the first edition introduces categorial acts only in the second half, the revised investigation would have needed to discuss them from the start; a change that turned out too demanding to complete.

This collects several of the points I relied on for my interpretation: contingent existence requires a narrower notion of possible evidence than ideal possibility, and this narrower notion Husserl calls real possibility. Unlike for the ideal possibilities of phantasy, we cannot wilfully decide which of these possibilities to live through. The positing of contingent realities demands more than the compatibility of essences. Contingent particulars do not manifest in free phantasy, but in real possibilities where they impose their givenness on us. While ideal possibilities of evidence are correlated with that which could be, real possibilities of evidence are correlated to what actually is. In a 1908 manuscript, Husserl admits that there are 'difficulties, but solvable difficulties' (Husserl 2003b: p. 64) with his account; but the explication of 'real possibility' is consistently given in terms of motivation.

> Das Ding ist Ding der *Umwelt*, auch das nicht gesehene, auch das real mögliche, nicht erfahrene, sondern erfahrbare, bzw. vielleicht erfahrbare. *Die Erfahrbarkeit besagt nie eine leere logische Möglichkeit*, sondern eine im Erfahrungszusammenhang *motivierte*. (Husserl 1995: §47)
>
> The thing is the thing of the environment; so, too, is the thing not seen, also the really possible thing, the thing not experienced but capable, or perchance capable, of being experienced. *The possibility of being experienced never designates an empty logical possibility*, but instead one *motivated* in an experiential connection. (Husserl 1982: §47)

What is this motivation in experiential connection? It means that the possibility of evidence, while not actual, is already more than just phantasy. 'Motivation' is a complex notion in Husserl, and often introduced as a rational analogue to the arational force of causation. Without here giving a theory of motivation, it is clear that it refers to a form of justificatory, but fallible support. The standard phrase is that a motivated possibility is a possibility "for which something speaks" (Husserl 2002: §48, 178); more detail is given in a 1909/10 manuscript:

> Was ist eine reale Möglichkeit? Nun, eine Möglichkeit, für die etwas spricht, im Gegensatz zu einer leeren, bloß logischen Möglichkeit. (Und das ist leicht noch näher zu charakterisieren: in sich verträglich, vorstellbar, ohne inneren Widerspruch, zunächst ohne formal-analytischen, eventuell aber auch ohne materialen Widerspruch, wobei das kontradiktorische Gegenteil ebenso möglich ist, im selben Sinn. Andererseits, für das eine spricht etwas, es ist Objekt einer
>
> What is a real possibility? Well, a possibility for which something speaks, in contrast with an empty, merely logical possibility. (And this is easily characterized further: self-consistent, imaginable, without inner contradiction, firstly without formal-analytic contradiction, eventually[6] also without material contradiction, where the contradictory opposite is possible as well, in the same sense. On the other hand, for one [sci. possibility], something speaks, it is the object of a

vernünftigen Anmutung.) (Husserl 2020: S. 203)	reasonable deeming.) (translated by the author)

Real possibilities are distinguished from logical possibilities by their epistemic support. We also find here the other characteristics by which I have distinguished real, logical, and ideal possibility.[7] The freedom from formal and material contradiction are mentioned separately, and these I used to distinguish between ideal possibilities and the even wider logical possibilities. A real possibility does not exclude its "contradictory" opposite, in the sense that both a possibility and its negation can be motivated. When I judge that p, I cannot at the same time judge that p is not, but there can be balances of deemings (Anmutungen) between incompossible real possibilities. In the terminology of contemporary epistemology, real possibility requires only a credence, not a belief. The belief would have to settle for one of the incompatible options (either it rains, or it does not), while motivating deemings can pull into incompatible directions.[8]

There are also notions of "real possibility" in Kant and James, and Kant is even explicitly mentioned as drawing the same distinction (Husserl 2003b: p. 12). But Kant's real possibilities depend on the essences of real objects, not the justification of judging agents.[9] Real possibilities from James' *The Will to Believe* however,

6. Reading "zunächst [...] eventuell" as "firstly [...] eventually" instead of "firstly [...] possibly."

7. Empty possibilities do not neatly fit the list above, because Husserl's use of that expression seems to shift with context. Empty possibility refers to the use of a *wider* kind of possibility where a narrower notion would have been called for. It is neither necessary that empty possibilities are logical possibilities, nor that they are impossible in an absolute sense; they only need to be *inappropriately* wide for the context under discussion (e.g. Husserl 1995: §48). This contextual notion of possibility can be set aside here.

8. Husserl connects his considerations about deemings to the theory of probability. This raises the question how he would understand the rationality of such probability attributions. To discuss Husserl's deemings in terms of Bayesian epistemology would lead too far, but it is worth noting that not all non-contradictory propositions are real possibilities. There are contingent propositions for which 'nothing speaks'. An obvious interpretation would be to say assign such possibilities a credence 0. But this means that rational belief change could not be described by Bayes' theorem alone. The Bayesian rule for updating credences is that $Pr(h|e) = \frac{Pr(h)Pr(e|h)}{Pr(e)}$; with a probability of the hypothesies $Pr(h) = 0$ in the numerator, the posterior probability of the hypothesis always remains 0, no matter which probabilistic information (evidence in the Bayesian sense) we add. But this updating rule is the only way to respect the axioms of probability theory (for the 'diachronic dutch book argument,' see Teller 1973; Lewis 1999). So either even unmotivated possibilities have non-zero credence, or the transition from empty to motivated possibility seems to require a pinch of irrationality.

9. Kant introduces real possibility in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. They are a narrower notion than the *logical* possibility that holds for everything that is thinkable, but the additional constraints are objective (Kant 1998: Bxxvi). A proposition is a real possibility if it is free from logical incompatibility *and* non-logical incompatibility (Stang 2016: p. 97). The 'real' therefore grounds different kinds of possibilities. Smit (2009: pp. 200–202) and Stang (2016: pp. 207–208) also point out that Kant distinguishes between two kinds of real grounds that

are very similar to Husserl's motivated possibilities, but this appears to be a coincidence.[10] We therefore have to stick to Husserl's words to assess and develop a notion of real possibility.

Husserl speaks more frequently of "real possibility," without distinguishing it from "motivated possibility" (Husserl 1991: pp. 21, 110, 290; Zhok 2016: p. 219). Since "motivated possibility" makes the connection to motivation explicit, it is not surprising that it has also become the standard term in the recent literature (Fink 1939: p. 263; Aguirre 1991: p. 151; Wiltsche 2017: p. 819; Walsh 2017: p. 415). This overabundance of terms allows to now depart from Husserl's usage to formulate an alternative. Let me stipulate that "real possibility" shall refer to whatever notion of possibility extends correlationism to contingent truths. Husserl understands real possibilities as motivated possibilities—a proposal I will now criticize. I consider Husserl's original account of *actually* motivated possibility ($\Diamond_{MA}$) and variations that idealize across possible motivations ($\Diamond_{MI}$). After arguing that the underlying problem is a shift from an alethic to an epistemic notion of possibility, I spell out how to think of real possibility in terms of potentialities in objects.

2. Lessons for Phenomenological Metaphysics

Motivated possibilities have *actual*, not just possible justification. But to distinguish real possibility from ideal possibility in terms of occurrent justification

restrict possibility. The *rationes essendi*, the "grounds of being," are what determines whether an object is possible. Kant's real possibility, based on the rationes essendi, still seems closer to Husserl's ideal possibility, with its restriction by formal and material essences. But Kant also knows *rationes fiendi*, the "grounds of becoming," which determine the actuality of an object, such as its causal relations to other objects. Such grounds of becoming can exist only for contingent objects; an essence does not have a *rationes fiendi*. This seems closer to the kind of constraint on ideal possibilities that Husserl was looking for: those that determine that the world is one way rather than another. Yet a notion of possibility based on such grounds of becoming would still not depend on actual states of justification.

10. In James' case, what makes a possibility a real possibility, is a question of belief.

> A live hypothesis is one which appeals as a real possibility to him to whom it is proposed. If I ask you to believe in the Mahdi, the notion [...] refuses to scintillate with any credibility at all. [...] To an Arab, however (even if he be not one of the Mahdi's followers), the hypothesis is among the mind's possibilities: it is alive. This shows that deadness and liveness in an hypothesis are not intrinsic properties, but relations to the individual thinker. (James 1912: §I)

The subject-dependence of that notion is immediately clear, and James draws attention to it right away. But despite these similarities and the fact that Husserl was an avid reader of James' *Principles of Psychology*, Husserl's notion of real possibility appears not to originate in *The Will to Believe*. The essay is in Husserl's library and the pages have been cut open, but there are no margin annotations that Husserl frequently left in books he studied. Moreover, the *Will to Believe* entered the library in Lorenz' 1899 translation where 'real possibility' is translated as 'wirklich als Möglichkeit'. The similarity to James' use of the term therefore seems coincidental.

quickly raises problems. Ideal possibility is only constrained by laws of essence, and they are independent of which subject is phantasizing. What possibilities are motivated, on the other hand, depends on the idiosyncratic experiences of particular subjects. Unfortunately, motivated possibilities of evidence are neither necessary nor sufficient for the truth of a proposition. There is a suggestive revision of Husserl's account, namely to idealize actually occurring motivation to some possible motivation. But this either collapses the difference between motivated and ideal possibilities, or it only masks the problems in understanding correlationism with motivated possibilities of evidence.

2.1. Error and Ignorance

Husserl's interpretation of real possibility as motivated possibility faces an objection from error and an objection from ignorance. The problem with error is that possibilities of evidence can be motivated without a corresponding truth. Somebody's testimony or a report in a newspaper can lead me to believe that the King is in Windsor Castle. Such a posit need not be based on evident judgement, but it should motivate possibilities of evident judgement. My posit that the King is in Windsor Castle makes it a "live option" to see him there, perhaps sitting at the dining table. To evidently judge that the King is sitting at the dining table therefore becomes a motivated possibility. But there was no guarantee that my original posit was correct: the King might be in Buckingham Palace instead. The objection from error arises even with the strict notion of evidence, because nowhere do we need to assume that an *evident* judgement goes wrong. The point of relying on motivated possibilities of evident judgement was that there are more truths than we *actually* judge with evidence. But among all the possibilities for which somethings speaks, there can also be some that are not actual. To make things worse, deemings can support incompatible possibilities. If I learn that the King has gone to bed, this motivates both the possibility to see him in his night gown in Windsor Castle and to see him in his night gown in Buckingham Palace, when only one of these possibilities can be correlated to a true proposition. The objection from error shows that motivated possibility of evident judgement is not sufficient for the truth of that judgement.

The objection from ignorance pulls in the other direction. Consider unknown depths of the Mariana Trench and its creatures. We might one day discover fish that we easily recognize as such, and thus confirm that some possible fish in fact exist. This might be described as the actualization of motivated possibilities of discovery. But there might also be completely different creatures, perhaps challenging what we take to be fish and demanding a new category of aquatic life. Such genuine surprises should be possible, even if we cannot imagine them now. The reason to think so is that some surprises *were* possible, but unmotivated—or was there always motivation for the possibility to encounter creatures as odd as

jellyfish? And many such surprises may still be open, even if no specific one of them can be named now, as they can only be recognized in hindsight. The objection from ignorance shows that motivated possibilities of evidence are not necessary for the truth of a proposition.

If there are lingering doubts about genuine surprises, the objection from error can be used to argue for the same conclusion, since error also conceals motivation (and therefore, creates ignorance of some possibilities). If *all* the deemings I have about the King's location are misleading, *only* seeing him in the wrong palace becomes a real possibility. When nothing speaks for the King being in Buckingham Palace, then seeing the King in Buckingham Palace would be merely an ideal possibility. But the King may in fact still be in Buckingham Palace, perhaps obscuring his location with a hired double to avoid an encounter with anti-monarchists. The problems with motivated possibilities should now be clear: on the one hand, they come too easily, because not all our deemings lead to the truth, and on the other, they are too hard to secure, because we might be persistently ignorant or misled. The motivated possibility of evident judgement that p is therefore neither sufficient nor necessary for the truth of p.

2.2. Possibly Motivated Possibilities

Husserl's proposal invites tinkering with idealizations (like distinguishing empirical and pure grammar, Husserl 1984: IV, §14). The strict notion of evidence was an idealization from our actual practices of judgement, so perhaps we need a similar idealization to make sense of motivated possibilities. In the face of the problem of ignorance, we should consider only better informed circumstances. In the face of the problem of error, we should consider only *benign* circumstances which are not misleading. In his own copy of the *Ideas I*, Husserl writes 'rationally motivated' ('vernünftig motivierte') into the margin where he describes motivated possibilities (quoted on p. 1088, marginalia see Husserl 1976: p. 497). This of course raises the question how we should distinguish rational from irrational motivation; believing your friend's testimony about the whereabouts of the King does not seem irrational, even if the most reliable friend might get things wrong some time. And to consider a motivation rational exactly when it leads to the truth would beg the question.

In the case of Soffer, we saw how idealizations to cognitively perfect beings might help. Could such idealizations also turn (contingently) motivated possibility into the kind of real possibility that we are looking for? Let it be an ideally motivated possibility ($\Diamond_{MI}$) that p, exactly when it would be an actually motivated possibility ($\Diamond_{MA}$) that p for a cognitively perfect being in benign epistemic circumstances (no lies, no misleading information, etc.). This idealizes in several ways. First, it includes motivations that are not actually given, but could be given. Even if I have never thought about unknown fish or extraterrestrial beings, there *could*

be a situation where meeting them in the flesh would be a motivated possibility—say after finding remains of an unknown deep-sea creature, or receiving a radio signal from a distant star. Second, the idealization trims out the motivation of possibilities that were motivated by misleading or incomplete information, or by errors on the side of the subject. Even if the King hired a doppelgänger to make everyone believe he is in Windsor Castle, I could have a connection to somebody on the inside who tells me that it is all a ruse. In both versions, it is not actual, but possible states of motivation that determine what is a motivated possibility. This would constitute a decisive departure from Husserl, who writes in the *Ideas I* or his *Proof of Idealism* (Husserl 2003b: pp. 133, 140), that only *actual* being, and *actual* evidence can be correlated to true being and true propositions. And yet, such an additional layer of idealization only defers the problems. Idealizations of motivated possibilities of evidence either coincide with ideal possibilities of evidence, offering no restriction from ideal to real possibility; or they still face the problems of error and ignorance.

When put formally, it is apparent that this proposal runs into a regress. We were looking for a notion of possibility ($\Diamond_?$) that was then baptized *real possibility*.

$$Tr(p) \leftrightarrow \Diamond_? EJ(p)$$

The suggestion was that these could be understood as a kind of idealization of motivated possibility $\Diamond_{MI} EJ(p)$. These are possibilities for which something *could* speak (if we had better information, were not deceived, etc.). If I were not in error about the King's whereabouts, then seeing him in the flesh would be a motivated possibility. If we had more information, learning the truths about unknown fish would be motivated possibilities. So, to avoid the problems with actually motivated possibilities, we say that there is a relevant kind of *possibility* that EJ(p) is an actually motivated possibility.

$$\Diamond_{??} \Diamond_{MA} EJ(p)$$

But now we know no more than in the case of $\Diamond_?$: how should we spell out *which* possibilities of actual motivation to consider? Understanding $\Diamond_{??}$ as ideal possibility is again too general. Regardless of whether the King is actually in Windsor, it is ideally possible to have deemings that speak for seeing him in the flesh in Windsor. If p can be imagined to be actual, then we can also imagine circumstances in which p would be a motivated possibility, and the distinction between ideal possibility and idealized motivated possibility collapses.

An alternative is to understand $\Diamond_{??}$ as another iteration of actually motivated possibility $\Diamond_{MA}$. So while currently nothing motivates the possibility to meet an alien form of life, it is arguably a motivated possibility that we receive a radio signal, which in turn make such an encounter a motivated possibility. Some motivated possibilities would provide new motivations that then turn hitherto

merely ideal possibilities into motivated possibilities. Iterating actually motivated possibilities of evidence expands what can be correlated to true propositions, thus apparently helping with the problem of ignorance. In the limiting case, one might even consider an infinite chain of motivational relations through which all reality could extend ('hineinreichen') into consciousness (Husserl 1989: p. 158; 1966: p. 213; 1995: §48. See also Husserl 1973b: p. 293). So there might even be a chain of possible motivations that allow us to correlate more ideal possibilities than those which are actually motivated: $\Diamond_{MI} EJ(p) \stackrel{def}{=} \Diamond_{MA} \ldots \Diamond_{MA} EJ(p)$. But the same problems apply, even if they are now less obvious. There are still more possibilities motivated (or motivated to be motivated, etc.) than turn out to correlate with truths—what I called the problem of error. So we need some principle of rational motivation to select only the 'benign' motivations that can be correlated to truth. And the iterated motivations do not seem to help with the problem of ignorance either: For a given p, why should we not *contingently* be in a situation where our state of motivation does not support the possibility (that motivates the possibility, etc.) that p could be evident? This is even more striking if we remember that CORR was supposed to be necessarily true: it would be enough if there is a possibility in which p is true but no chain of motivation would turn the ideal possibility of judging evidently that p into a real possibility. What would have happened if for example jellyfish had become extinct and no fossils had survived—could their earlier existence still reach into the motivation of possible evidence?

With these difficulties in stating the correlation between truth and possible evidence, one may wonder whether the lesson is not to give up the 'rigidity' of the notions of truth and possibility that Husserl began with. The radicalization of the shift to motivated possibilities is to argue that actual experience "*creates* the room for possibilities" (Zhok 2016: p. 233), rather than selecting them from ideal possibilities. If one bites the bullet, by letting real possibility depend on actual states of evidence, the correlation thesis passes this dependency on to the concept of truth. The consequences appear hard to swallow. Consider an investigator looking for the cause of a train accident, who has already collected different reports and pictures. Among many observations, the investigator had noticed that the serial number of the train axle does not match the records of the company. But he does not understand how it could have happened that a recently serviced train derails. Only as he pores over the records, he realizes that a cheap substitution must have caused the accident. What turned this into a motivated possibility was merely a review of already possessed documents and clues. Could such reconsiderations change the truth about an accident that happened much earlier? Even if Husserl's shift to motivated possibilities comes with an emphasis of subjective aspects, like the precision standards of the "market truth" (Husserl 1974: §105, p. 284), motivated possibilities are too unstable to yield a coherent

notion of 'relative truth'. Rather than trying to salvage this shift to motivated possibility by spelling out a theory of relative truth, I think the problem arises earlier, namely in the way that Husserl moves from ideal to real possibilities.

2.3. What went wrong? Epistemic and Alethic Modality

The problem in the transition from ideal to motivated possibilities comes into sharper focus when looking at it through the distinction between epistemic and alethic modalities. That distinction goes back at least to G.E. Moore's notes from ca. 1941, published posthumously as the *Commonplace Book* (Moore 1962: pp. 185–187), and proved influential (Hacking 1967, referenced in Kripke 1990: pp. 103, 141; DeRose 1991). Moore notes that an assertion "It is possible that Hitler is now dead" is contradicted by someone who says "but I know he is not!" This is different from the sense of "possible" in "it is possible for water to boil at room temperature" (my example).

The latter is an example of an alethic possibility, the kind that is of more interest to most metaphysicians. Alethic notions of possibility can differ in scope (like practical vs. physical vs. metaphysical possibility), but obtain equally for anyone. Much debate has focused on the relation between these different kinds of possibility, and whether they can be unified in a single account: for example, by identifying a body of truths, like "the laws of nature," that have to remain fixed to consider something not only a logical, but also a natural possibility.[11]

Epistemic possibility on the other hand depends on states of information. It is the sense of possibility in which the inspector might say "it is possible that the butler is the murderer" because for all he knows, that possibility cannot be ruled out. A basic account of epistemic possibility could hold that p is possible for a subject S if and only if p is logically compatible with all that S knows. The extension to possibility 'for all we know' then follows from whatever procedure we rely on to aggregate the knowledge of groups. Even when aggregated, this notion of possibility depends on a body of knowledge and can alter without any changes in what the considered proposition is about. Moore's test alone is enough to realize that motivated possibility is an epistemic notion. "It is possible that Hitler is dead now" may well express that there is some motivation to believe that Hitler is, in fact, dead now. But that motivation is undercut if somebody knew that Hitler is still alive.

Alethic possibilities appear to stand in a hierarchy of generality. Anything that is practically possible is technologically possible, which in turn is physically possible, and all that is physically possible is logically possible. We have already seen that every real possibility is an ideal possibility (cf. again Husserl 2002: §48, 178–181) and that reality 'selects' from the ideally possible streams of conscious-

11. For a systematic overview, see Roca-Royes 2023.

ness a number of real possibilities. Ideal possibility is an alethic notion; so it seems that the real possibility could just be one of these narrower alethic notions. But in understanding real possibility in terms of motivation, Husserl shifts from an alethic to an epistemic notion of possibility.

What makes this shift even more curious is that Husserl himself approaches and endorses the epistemic-alethic distinction of modalities. In a manuscript from ca. 1921, he writes that for actuality, all possibilities are either in truth, or they are not. The sense in which possibilities 'remain open' refers to that which a cognizing subject has not decided yet (Husserl 2003b: p. 186). Since he still endorses that phantasy traverses ways that the world could have been—ideal possibilities—this means that 'remaining open' has to refer to a different kind of modality than ideal possibility—namely epistemic possibility. Moreover, Husserl already relied on a distinction between epistemic and alethic possibility in a 1908 lecture, when criticizing the idea that there are "assertoric, problematic, and apodictic" modalities:

> Was [...] vorgebracht wird, ist eine Vermengung von psychologischen und bedeutungslogischen Unterscheidungen. [...] Man kann freilich Urteile des Inhalts bilden "Ich bin gewiss," [...] "Ich vermute" [...]. Es mag innerhalb der Logik im weiteren Sinne eine objektive Wahrscheinlichkeitslehre [...] etc. geben: in der Lehre von den Urteilen im Sinn von Urteilsbedeutungen ist nicht ihre Stelle. Dasselbe gilt für die Möglichkeits- und Notwendigkeitsurteile, sofern ihr Sinn mitbeschlösse irgendeinen subjektiven und empirischen Gehalt, der Beziehung hätte auf den Urteilenden, auf seine Meinungen, Kenntnisse, Vermutungen u.dgl. Solche Unterschiede gingen die formale Logik nichts an. (Husserl 2003a: pp. 229-230)
>
> What is presented [...] is a mingling of psychological and semantic distinctions. [...] One may of course form judgements of the content "I am certain," [...] "I assume" [...]. Logic in the wider sense may contain an objective doctrine of probability [...] etc.: in the doctrine of judgements in the sense of judgement meanings is not its place. The same applies to judgements of possibility and necessity, insofar as their meaning were to contain any subjective or empirical content that were in relation to the judging subject, its opinions, knowledge, suppositions etc. Such differences would be of no concern to formal logic. (translated by the author)

Husserl clearly separates the logical meaning of 'possibility' and judgements about the state of a judging subject. But when Husserl identifies real and motivated possibilities, he seems himself to "mingle" psychology and semantics. The objections from ignorance and error show that this is a mistake. Whatever crucial role motivated possibilities play in Husserl's genetic phenomenology and his description of horizonal intentionality, they cannot serve as the *real possibility* of evidence that is correlated with truth.

2.4. Keeping the world fixed

Such difficulty in defining real possibilities is surprising: After all, we seem to know exactly which sorts of possibilities Husserl has in mind. We already know how the contingency of the world distinguishes some possibilities from others. Husserl describes "existence" as just such a selection of real possibilities out of the range of ideal possibilities. The *object*, by existing, imposes a selection on the possible streams of consciousness.

> Die Existenz besagt eine *Auszeichnung im Heer der Möglichkeiten*, und *korrelativ* zu dieser Auszeichnung steht die Regel der real möglichen Erfahrungen gegenüber den "durch" die Existenz des betreffenden Dinges *ausgeschlossenen* ideal möglichen. [...]
> Die Wirklichkeit des Dinges wählt aus den Mannigfaltigkeiten möglicher Bewusstseinsströme aus. (Husserl 2002: §61, p. 269; see also Husserl 1973b: p. 292–293)
>
> Existence predicates a *distinction in the host of possibilities*, and *correlated* with this distinction is the rule of really possible experiences, in contrast with the ideal possibilities that are *excluded* "through" the existence of the relevant thing. [...] The reality of the thing selects from the manifold of possible streams of consciousness. (translated by the author)

Positing the King in Windsor excludes the possibility in which he is in Buckingham, and positing a green door excludes the possibility that the door is red. This is the straightforward sense in which positing acts select real possibilities from the ideal possibilities. But the problem here is that Husserl describes the *actual* positing acts as inducing the selection of real from ideal possibilities. This leads to an epistemic notion of possibility which, as I have argued, is unfit to spell out a correlation between truth and possible evidence. For real possibility as an alethic notion, it is clear that we should not look at the actual *posits* but at the *posited*. The real possibilities of evidence are those in which the actual world manifests. Even truths in which we have no reason to believe possess a potential to manifest. To understand real possibility as an alethic notion—and only then is it a plausible ingredient for a correlation thesis—it has to be based in the contingent potential of the real world to manifest itself, not in the contingent justificatory states of a knowing consciousness.

A simple response is to just accept that the concept of truth is precisely what allows us to speak about the world as being in a particular way, setting aside all questions of misleading evidence or ignorance. That an object imposes a selection of possibilities on the real world can be understood in terms of fixing the truths about that object, as to each object there "belongs an ideally circumscribed totality of true sentences, in which is thought what the object is" (Husserl 2003b: p. 146). When I posit that there is a red door, the totality of sentences that are true about that object is unknown. But whatever this totality will turn out to be, that the

door is red, not green, selects from all the ideal possibilities which are consistent with essential laws, seeing it as a *red* door as a real possibility (for a cognitively perfect subject). So even if nobody knows that there is a door at all, that the door is red is what also makes it a real possibility to see the red door, while seeing a blue door is merely an ideal possibility.

On this account, the notion of *real possibility* relies directly on a prior understanding of truth. Formulating CORR with real possibilities then cannot serve as a *definition* of truth. Formally considered, we might express the requirement that only true propositions have *real* possibilities of evident judgement, by a conjunct $Tr(p)$ to the right-hand side of the correlation. If moreover, we abandon the considerations from actual motivation and make this requirement of truth the *only* condition by which we choose real from ideal possibilities, we can even define real possibilities of evident judgement as those ideal possibilities that are true $\Diamond_R EJ(p) := \Diamond_I EJ(p) \wedge Tr(p)$. This is exactly where we arrived after adjusting Soffer's account for contingent truths, leaving only that for every true proposition, there is an ideal possibility of evident judgement:

$$Tr(p) \rightarrow \Diamond_I EJ(p)$$

Since evidently judging that p is a (particularly demanding) form of knowing that p, this amounts to a general *knowability thesis*: the claim that every true proposition can be known. Such a principle has been contested, because it threatens to collapse into the claim that every truth is actually known (Fitch 1963; Edgington 1985; Williamson 2000: ch. 12; Salerno 2009; specifically discussing Husserl, see Kinkaid 2022; Bös 2024). Also whether possible knowledge can imply actual truth has been challenged (Heylen 2022: p. 2251). So even this more modest version of correlationism faces logical challenges that arise from the knowability of all true propositions. Yet at the same time, it is not clear whether this 'repair' of a correlation with ideal possibilities really does what it should: rather than expressing a correlation, it has become a statement of optimism about our epistemic capacities; rather than telling us something about truth, it has become a statement about the limits of knowledge. Possibilities of evidence were interesting insofar they promised an insight into what a phenomenological notion of 'truth' amounts to in the first place. The way that Husserl developed his account of real possibilities was unsuccessful, but I think there is a systematically similar, more promising alternative.

So how can we avoid the error identified in § 2.3? When Husserl discusses the restriction from ideal to real possibilities, he refers to *posits* that, unlike acts of free fantasy, we are not at liberty to make (cf. the quotation on p. 1087, Husserl 2002: §48, 178–181). But these acts of posit have the noetic side of the positing subject and the noematic side of the posited object. Spelling out real possibilities as those which are motivated relies on a criterion on the noetic side—motivation,

an epistemic factor. But we want to retain an alethic notion of possibility: it should be the *objects* that limit what can be judged about them. That acts of posit are beyond our control needs to be explained from the noematic side. And so I suggest that a more promising way to understand real possibilities is in terms of a criterion on the object side of positing acts.

Potentiality has been explored as the general modal property, of which *disposition* or *ability* are special cases (Vetter 2015). My ability to tie my shoelaces is a potentiality and so is the disposition of glass to break, and other kinds of properties might be similarly related to the possible, but non-actual. Vetter's goal is to explain metaphysical possibility in terms of iterated potentiality (i.e. p is possible if a number of objects have the potentiality to have the potentiality ... that p.) We are not looking for an alternative notion of metaphysical possibility, which is already supplied by Husserl's *ideal* possibility, explicated in terms of formal and material essences. But non-iterated *potentiality* can serve as a general enough modal property to express the correlation thesis without explicitly reintroducing the notion of truth on the right-hand side.

Avoiding the problems of error and ignorance is not the only reason to express the correlation thesis in terms of potentialities. Potentialities can also give an account of subpropositional fulfilment, and therefore work well with Husserl's account of the relation between subpropositional and propositional meanings. It is in fact *more* basic to speak of the potentiality of an entity to break, float, etc. than of the joint potentialities of objects X to be such that p. This is precisely parallel to Husserl's account of how objectual acts (wit subpropositional meanings) combine into acts with propositional meanings. The act which fulfils the propositional content of 'the knife is on the table' depends on the fulfilment of the objectual content of 'the knife' and the objectual fulfilment of 'the table.' Having a sub-propositional notion of 'possible fulfilment' would be welcome, as one of the most attractive features of Husserl's account of 'truth as the limit of fulfilment' is that it generalizes to sub-propositional contents (Zuidervaart 2018: p. 126). On the other hand, since we already rely on a story about how sub-propositional meanings combine into acts with propositional content, the same account should explain how the potentialities of objects contribute to the possibility of states of affairs. That a group of objects X has a potentiality for it to be such that p means that the $x_i \in X$ have mutually non-exclusive potentialities that jointly make it the case that p. On that account, it is a real possibility that p if one thing or several things have a (joint) potentiality for it to be the case that p. The actual existence of these potentialities is what tethers real possibility to the actual world and demarcates it from ideal possibilities. With this account of real possibility, and borrowing Soffer's idealization to cognitively perfect consciousness, we can formulate a new version of the correlation thesis for contingent truth:

> Corr-pot p is true if and only if one or multiple things have a (joint) potentiality to make a cognitively perfect consciousness judge evidently that p.

Defining real possibility in terms of potentiality takes into account the contingent state of the world and does not collapse into ideal possibility. A tree with three apples has the potentiality to make a perfect consciousness judge 'there are three apples on the tree,' even if no such subject is around. But the same tree does not have the potentiality to make a perfect consciousness judge 'there are four apples on the tree.' Since the potentialities are independent of actually occurring states of information, this is an alethic notion of possibility, and it is not subject to the problems of error and ignorance.

I want to emphasize again, that we are not looking at *iterated* potentialities here, because the goal is different from Vetter's: we are trying to give an account of how real possibilities depend on actuality, not a general theory of metaphysical possibility. Iterated possibility would not be compatible with the factivity of real possibilities of evidence, i.e. that only *true* propositions have a real possibilities of evident judgement. Take a sheet of glass G that has the potentiality to break. The realization of that potentiality creates new potentialities: after G breaks, it has the potentiality to contribute to a state of affairs that 'a subject judges evidently that G is broken'. If we want real possibilities of evidence to obtain only for true propositions, then there should not be a real possibility that 'a subject judges evidently that G is broken' as long as G only has the potentiality to break. Therefore, we have to rely on non-iterated potentiality.

The factivity of real possibilities of evidence might be a more general concern, since potentialities obtain for many kinds of non-actual states of affairs. But the correlation thesis is only a general claim about a general kind of potentiality that obtains everywhere: the potentiality to contribute to evident judgement. This potentiality is non-factive, insofar as such judgement does not actually have to happen. The real possibility of evidence refers to the non-iterated potentiality of objects to contribute to evident judgements that present them as they are. This is not in conflict with objects also having other potentialities in which they are different; that different potentialities exclude their realization is to be expected. A cube of ice has the potentiality to melt and the potentiality to support a vase. But melting comes at the cost of the potentiality for structural support. And so does any realization of a potentiality change to which evident judgements an object can contribute. A tree may bear three apples but have the potentiality to bear a fourth. Realizing the potentiality to bear the fourth apple makes it impossible to realize the tree's potentiality to make a subject judge evidently that the tree bears three apples.

Real possibilities account for the problems that ideal possibilities faced in accounting for contingent truths. Necessary truths do not depend on the state

of the world in such a way, and we can simply continue to understand them as correlated with ideal possibilities of evidence. The resulting account is a combination of essentialism and potentialism: formal essences constrain logical possibility, material essences constrain ideal possibility, and real possibilities are based in potentialities of actual objects. Vetter (2021) herself has argued that 'possibility-first' potentialism and 'necessity-first' essentialism should not be combined, because such a combination would struggle with the duality between necessity and possibility ($\Box p \leftrightarrow \neg\Diamond\neg p$). But Vetter's concern is with theories of metaphysical possibility, and it was never our intention to reduce ideal possibility to real possibility (even though such a project might find inspiration in Zhok 2016). If essences constrain ideal possibility, and potentialities are the basis of real possibilities, there is no such conflict, because real possibility is *meant* to be narrower than ideal possibility. Vetter's reasoning becomes relevant once we try to explain ideal possibility as iterated real possibility, i.e. the idea that it is ideally possible that p exactly when it is a real possibility for there being a real possibility, ... that p. But real possibility and ideal possibility are two different notions, as can also be seen by the fact that ideal possibility is transitive, whereas real possibility is not (Bös 2024); and besides relying on iterated potentiality, one could also rely on real possibilities of coherent imagination. But to explain ideal possibility in terms of real possibility was not the goal. What we have seen is that non-iterated potentiality sustains a notion of real possibility that allows to state a correlation between contingent truth and real possibilities of evidence.

Conclusion

We can at this point return to the question whether Husserl "melts down" truth into evidence. Patzig is right insofar as Husserl attempts to understand real possibility as an epistemic modality, where actual evidence also determines which ideal possibilities of evidence are correlated with contingent truth. Ströker is right insofar as this step is a mistake; real possibility should be an alethic notion. But to define real possibility in terms of contingent truth would surrender the promise of correlationism to elucidate truth in terms of its relation to evidence. As a proposal to develop Husserl's notion of real possibility in a way that does not raise the problems of error and ignorance, I have suggested to distinguish ideal and real possibility in terms of actual potentiality. This fits with Husserl's sub-propositional account of meaning and fulfilment and avoids the objections to motivated possibilities. The correlation thesis then states that all contingent states of affairs have the joint potentiality to become evident to a cognitively perfect consciousness.

In moving from the noetic notion of motivation to the noematic notion of potentiality, new questions arise about the correlated *subjects* of evident judge-

ment. The phrase 'cognitively perfect consciousness' that I borrowed from Soffer deserves further elaboration, since a phenomenological account of truth would want to explore how such cognitive perfection is related to actual subjects. Likewise, there are promising ways to think about sub-propositional fulfilment as the actualization of simpler potentialities. These I cannot offer in the present article, but I hope to have elucidated Husserl's notions of possibility and their role in correlationist metaphysics, a challenge that they face, and what a notion of real possibility could look like instead.

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