



## How Does a Dark Room Appear: Husserl's Illumination of the Breakthrough of *Logical Investigations*

by Juha Himanka

### Abstract

*Evidence is the very core of Husserlian phenomenology, with the term "evidence" signifying for Husserl the phenomenological perspective on the question of truth. In contrast to the conventional philosophical understanding of "truth" in mainly epistemological terms, Husserl's notion of "evidence", as elaborated in his Logical Investigations (1900–1), is more essentially ontological, pointing to the way in which a phenomenon becomes clear to us in its constitution. Husserl's main point in the Sixth Investigation was that we can "see" how evidence functions when we compare something in the fullness of its presence with the emptiness of its absence. This paper considers the example Husserl offers of the room where the lights go off in order to illuminate the breakthrough for phenomenology achieved by Logical Investigations in its move beyond logic and epistemology to the primary level of pretheoretical experience as the reality of the real.*

Edmund Husserl's *Logical Investigations* (1900–1) was the breakthrough of phenomenology (HuaVI/169; HuaIX/§3; HuaXX(1)/293; HuaXXXV/373). The work was heralded both as a sensation (Stein, 1965/1987, p. 174) and as a shock (Levinas, 1949/1988, p. 115), and Wilhelm Dilthey even compared it to Kant's first critique (Heidegger, 1925/1979, p. 30).

What was this breakthrough? One could argue that the weightiest sentences in Husserl's publications after *Investigations* are the principle of all principles (*Ideas* I, §24) and the first methodological principle (*Cartesian Meditations*, §5). The principle of the *Cartesian Meditations* is sometimes called the principle of evidence, but actually the principle from *Ideas* might equally well be termed as such. Both principles state that evidence is the very core of Husserlian phenomenology. This suggests that a new view on evidence or truth also constitutes the breakthrough of *Investigations*, and the principles do indeed give us a viewpoint on Husserl's ground-breaking work. Husserl's main point in the *Sixth*

*Investigation* was that we can "see" how evidence functions as we compare something in the fullness of its presence and in the emptiness of its absence.

Now, in the wake of the centennial celebrations, *Investigations* has again drawn the attention of the philosophical world. Seminars have been arranged and new collections of commentaries published (Dahlström, 2003; Zahavi & Stjernfelt, 2002). Yet, perhaps the most important event is the publication - after a long wait - of the first supplementary volume to *Investigations* in *Husserliana*. This volume, Vol. 20/1 (Melle, 2002), contains Husserl's (1913) draft for the revision of the *Sixth Investigation* and for a preface to the new edition of *Logical Investigations*.

Husserl was very reluctant to return to his earlier works (HuaV/147-148; HuaVI/185; HuaDIII(6)/281; Fink, 1976a, p. 280; Landgrebe, 1988). When he did, there was always the danger that the work would turn into something else. When working on the second edition of *Investigations*, Husserl himself worried that

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this might happen to this work as well (HuaDI/171). He managed, however, to complete the second edition of the *Prolegomena* and the first five *Investigations*. There were changes, but the work did not turn into a “*völlig neues Werk*”, as Husserl had been afraid it might. Perhaps the biggest change was that the words *phenomenologisch* and *reell* were no longer used synonymously. Yet, there was still the *Sixth Investigation* to be prepared for the second edition.

What is there in *Investigations* that breaks through into a new line of thinking? The pivotal point of the work is its consideration of truth or evidence (Fink, 1966a; Tugendhat, 1967, p. 21). Martin Heidegger writes:

This elaboration of evidence was for the first time brought to a successful resolution by Husserl, who thus made an essential advance beyond all the obscurities prevalent in the tradition of logic and epistemology. (1925/1979, §9)

Husserl breaks through in his elaboration of evidence, and that is done in the *Sixth Investigation: Elements of a Phenomenological Elucidation of Knowledge* (cf. Øverenget, 1996). For Husserl, the term “evidence” signifies the phenomenological approach to the question of truth. It is not a solution to this question of philosophical questions, but, within *Husserliana*, “evidence” gathers together Husserl’s view on how this question should be dealt with. Normally in philosophical terminology we understand the concept “truth” mainly in terms of epistemology. In contrast to this, Husserl’s “evidence” can equally well be read as an ontological concept: it tries to point out how something becomes clear to us in its constitution. (Actually Husserl mainly uses epistemological terms in order to explicate truth, whereas Heidegger prefers ontological concepts.)

At the outset, however, Husserl’s radicality is not obvious. He seems to advocate a version of the correspondence theory of truth, and his main concern seems to be to investigate how meaning-intention corresponds to that which is meant. Nevertheless, Husserl himself saw that he had achieved something more radical than that. He also saw that his commentators did not realise how earth-shattering his work was (HuaDIII(6)/281, 286; HuaDIII(4)/85). For Husserl, phenomenology is essentially and necessarily radical (Mertens, 1996). In order to understand the breakthrough, we should try to reach this fundamental or even extreme aspect of Husserl’s thought.

Radicality means that we reach for the roots (*radix*) or origin of something. Richard Campbell writes:

A theory about any topic presupposes some prior understanding of it, a preunderstanding which is implicit in the ‘problem’ posed, and with which the theory is designed to deal, so is it with all these theories of truth. (Campbell, 2001, p. 344)

Husserl’s aim in *Investigations* is to reach the level that precedes the discussion between theories of truth - for example, the dispute between coherence theory and correspondence theory. The phenomenological point of view is explicated at the original level where *theoretical* critique is not yet valid (Mertens, 1996, p. 130). It has also been argued that a *theory* of evidence is impossible (Kulenkampff, 1973; cf. Mertens, 1996, p. 119n) and would constitute a vicious circle which presupposes that which it is supposed to investigate. Within the phenomenological approach, one “does not engage in theory” (Husserl, 1907/1999, p. 46; HuaII/58). From this point of view, we can also understand Husserl’s claim that phenomenology is the only concrete science: “though analysis proceeds by abstraction, still the concrete whole is always before the phenomenologist” (Cairns, 1976, pp. 46, 51; HuaV/152). From the phenomenological point of view, you can begin to consider the truth of any given whatsoever if you only manage to find the difference between its presence and absence. And, as one does not necessarily need to know what Kant, for example, wrote about this given something, it is really possible to turn away from theories and look to the things themselves. This also suggests that, in order to be faithful to Husserl’s insight, we should not read *Investigations* as part of the discussion between different theories. But what can we do instead?

In one of his recently published manuscripts, “Kritik der cartesianische Epoché” (1933), Husserl states that philosophy after Descartes [*der ganzen Neuzeit*] lacks the view on evidence as the kind of action [*Leistung*] where what is meant is brought to original self-givenness. Instead, modern philosophy understands evidence as apodictic evidence. Truth is understood in relation to certainty or indubitability. Husserl acknowledges the importance of apodictic evidence and, in his attempt to turn phenomenology into a first philosophy in the 1920s, he even sometimes gives priority to apodicticity over adequacy (Himanka, 2005b). Yet, in order to see the full radicality of Husserl’s original view on evidence, we should take seriously an earlier (1907) remark where he states that it is fundamental that evidence “signifies nothing other than *adequate* self-givenness” (Husserl, 1907/1999, p. 44; HuaII/59; my emphasis). It is easier to see the connection to other philosophical approaches when we take apodicticity or certainty into account. Yet, in order to see the radicality and originality of

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Husserl's account, we should restrict ourselves to adequate self-giveness. How are we to understand this self-giveness? (Himanka, 2005b.)

When Husserl characterises his view on evidence in his work towards the second edition of the *Sixth Investigation*, he notices that he has already outlined a view on fulfilment in his article, "Psychological Studies in the Elements of Logic", published in 1894. In it, Husserl writes about the "experience of the fact that the intuited *is also* the intended shall be designated as consciousness of the *fulfilled intention*" (Husserl, 1894/1994, p. 156; HuaXXII/109). At that time, Husserl was working with the basic problems of arithmetic, and numbers are a good example of Husserl's view of evidence.

In order to see evidence as fulfilment, we need to compare empty and full intentions. The intention of a number - say five - is fulfilled as I count to five: on the table there is a pencil (1), a telephone (2), a book (3), a cup (4) and a computer (5). As a result of counting, the number five is present to me. There are several ways for a number to be absent; J. Philip Miller (1982, p. 69) finds at least six senses in which we can speak of the absence of number. Let us take one example from Miller's exposition:

Suppose I emptily intend the number of apples in the bowl. I name the number - either by saying that there are 'four', or at least by asking just 'how many' there are - even though the apples themselves are not sensuously present. In such a case I intend a number, a determinate multitude, in its absence. (p. 67)

After that I might seek to bring this intention to fulfilment and count the apples in their sensuous presence. In this process, it might turn out that there is only one apple or even none. Miller continues:

There is not a 'number' of apples after all; the apples do not in fact make a multitude as I have anticipated. The 'one' or the 'none' that is now present to me is present precisely as a lack or 'privation' of number.

In this kind of process where we consider numbers as empty and fulfilled intentions, in absence and in presence, we see how a number is constituted or what makes a number a number. This is how the idea of evidence or truth in the phenomenological sense came to Husserl - and this is still perhaps the best example for any one of us to learn to recognise it.

Afterwards Husserl saw his early view on fulfilment as incomplete (HuaXX(1)/107n) and situated the real breakthrough in *Investigations* (HuaVI/169n-170n). What was lacking? According to Husserl's principle of principles, phenomenology aims to apprehend reality at the level where that which is studied is given to us in an original way (HuaIII/§24). A number is indeed given in an original way when it comes from absence to presence - but does this already suppose something more primitively given?

Section 18 of the *Sixth Investigation* considers the concept  $(5^3)^4$ . A number presented here "arises when one forms the product  $5^3 \times 5^3 \times 5^3 \times 5^3$ ". From this we can go further to the sense of  $5^3$ , i.e., to the formation of  $5 \times 5 \times 5$ . Going further back from here, we "should have to clarify 5 through the definitory chain  $5 = 4 + 1$ ,  $4 = 3 + 1$ ,  $3 = 2 + 1$ ,  $2 = 1 + 1$ ". Here we move from a more complicated and advanced level of the concept  $(5^3)^4$  to a primitive and reduced level of counting  $1 + 1$ . Have we thus reached the first level of constitution?

There is an even more primitive level of constitution that is supposed when we start to count: the things that we count must first be seen as things. The act of counting is "inevitably founded on a lower level act of sensuous intuition" (Miller, 1982, p. 66). The problem, then, is: how are we to explicate this pretheoretical level of sensuous intuition? At this level, one cannot argue much more than that evidence is evidence for evidence. In order to convince others, one has to turn from argumentation to demonstration and illustrative examples.

When we turn from the philosophy of arithmetic to the breakthrough of phenomenology in *Investigations*, we feel the need for a good example of fulfilment at this basic level of sensuous intuition (*Anschauung*). In his lectures on *Investigations*, Heidegger (1925/1979) takes a nearby bridge as an example:

I can now envisage the Weidenhauser bridge; I place myself before it, as it were. Thus the bridge is itself given. I intend the bridge itself and not an image of it, no fantasy, but it itself. (p. 41)

The main point in this is that even the envisaged bridge is given as itself and not as a representation. As I envisage the bridge, there is no representation present, and to suppose such an entity would mean a "theory without phenomenology". Such a theory would violate the phenomenological principle (HuaI/§5; HuaIII/§24). Now the bridge is given as itself: "And yet it is not bodily [*leibhaftig*] given to me. It would be if I went down the hill and placed myself before the bridge itself." The bridge in its

bodily presence is given more fully than a merely envisaged bridge. Heidegger then goes on to explain empty intending [*leermeinen*] and turns to language:

Empty intending is the mode of representing [*Art des Vorstellens*] something in the manner of thinking about something or recalling it, which for example can take place in a conversation about the bridge. (p. 41)

I might say to someone, “Meet me on the bridge tomorrow morning at 9 a.m.”. Heidegger has this kind of ordinary talk in mind when he explicates further:

A large part of our ordinary talk goes on in this way. We mean matters themselves and not images or representations of them, yet we do not have them intuitively given. In empty intending, too, the intended is itself directly and simply intended, but merely emptily, which means without any intuitive fulfilment. (p. 41)

Somehow we can see the difference between empty and fulfilled at the basic level of sensuous intuition. Yet, Heidegger’s example is problematic in the same way as was the example of numbers. In his exposition, Heidegger turns to a more advanced level of constitution than mere sensuous intuition. Empty intention is exemplified in our use of language, and not within the horizons of the primitive and immediate level of sensuous intuition.

Husserl’s radical approach to truth does not start from correct sentences, and he did not even value correct sentences as such (HuaV/96). This does not, of course, mean that correct sentences are not of central interest for philosophy. Instead, Husserl means that, in order to study their correctness, we must first turn to a more fundamental level of experience (Husserl, 1939/1985, §10). From the phenomenological perspective, it is clear that language is not a *direct* description of experience (Luft, 2002, p. 275). Yet, the emphasis on experience instead of proposition is not enough to explain the breakthrough of *Investigations*.

What we need, in order to show what Husserl means by evidence, is an example of the difference between empty and fulfilled that takes place at the sensuous level of intuition without reference to the higher levels of constitution. Perhaps the best attempt to illustrate this in *Husserliana* is the experience of the dark room.

Husserl does not present a definition of truth in order to defend it by arguments: he tries instead to show

how truth appears at the primary level. In this kind of approach, examples are the key. It is through following and repeating examples that we may learn to see how Husserl understands truth. There are examples - apple tree, paper, sound, and so forth - in *Logical Investigations*. Husserl also exemplifies intentions that cannot be fulfilled, such as contradictions. Yet, the problem is to explicate an empty appearance at the level of sensuous intuition. This is crucial, because, from the point of view of Husserlian phenomenology, other possibilities of givenness already suppose these more primitive modes of constitution.

Work on the second edition of the *Sixth Investigation* was very difficult for Husserl. In a letter to Johannes Daubert, he confesses that he has reached the limit of his powers (HuaDI/182). From our point of view, one of the main difficulties was how to present an example of the difference between empty and full at the primary level of sensuous intuition. Husserl attempts this in Section 19: “Die ‘Leermodifikation’ als allgemeine Bewußtseinsmodifikation”. In this attempt, Husserl turns from a fulfilled to an empty intention and does not start from symbols or signs. Husserl writes:

The lights in the room went off. The environment that was there is still there and not only as something that was there (as remembered), but as really present (*gegenwärtige*) - and it stays there in a completely (*völlig*) empty way. (§19; my translation)

Husserl claims that, in the room where the lights have gone off, the environment is still present to me in a way that cannot be limited to my recollection of the room with the lights on.

The difficulty in the phenomenological approach is how to see the direct way reality appears. In this example, the difficulty emerges in our memory. Is the dark room given only through memory or is it given directly as well, as being there now, as Husserl claims? He elaborates this way of appearing further:

The things no longer “appear” in the authentic sense (*eigentlichen Sinn*); they are not there intuitively (*intuitive*) in their bodily self (*leibhaften Selbstheit*); they are there exactly in the same manner as they appeared before, from a certain side and with certain adumbrations (*Abschattungen*) and so on. There is consciousness of them, but the whole phenomenon is transformed into emptiness. Things are “there”, in a manner of speaking, in bodily emptiness

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(in *leerer Leibhaftigkeit*), as a modification of bodily [presence]. (HuaXX(1)/97; my translation)

For Husserl, bodily presence is a superior way of being given. In this example, Husserl then ventures to say that in a way (*sozusagen*) there is also the possibility for empty bodily appearance. Is there? Does the dark environment appear “in person” (*leibhaftig*) but in an empty way? If so, we would have the illustration we were looking for.

Husserl emphasised that readers should not just accept what he has written, but should think these thoughts through themselves. In order to really understand the thinking of another, we ourselves should think and not just follow the other’s train of thought (HuaXXVII/217). In this case, we should experience the example.

When the lights go off, the appearance of my environment changes. I no longer see the things, but I do sense that I am in a room or space: there is something around me. This space is present to me at least as possibilities: I could, for instance, take a step on the floor. At least partly, these possibilities rely on my memories of the room. The difficulty is to see whether the environment is also given directly, without the help of memory. The task is difficult because my history - whether in darkness or in light - always determines the things I now see. As I wonder about this, however, I notice that I actually do sense the environment: I sense the floor under my feet. Even when there is no sound or smell, the environment is not given in a completely empty way - I always sense it through my body. Darkness does not separate me from my environment.

In the darkness I also taste something in my mouth. Even if I do not have gum or food, for example, in my mouth, I still in a way taste my spittle. I also feel my tooth and my tongue and I feel the air as I inhale. Yet, here it is difficult to say where my body’s borders end and the environment starts.

Husserl’s example is a room which in the darkness turns into an environment. We can suppose that there is no wind in the room. Yet there is no mention of the status of my body: am I staying still or moving? If I wave my hands in the air, I feel the air against my skin and sense the environment. Actually, I sense this more clearly when it is dark.

Although Husserl takes all bodily senses seriously and considers the many ways of sensing one’s environment, there is a strong emphasis on seeing. In the lectures on the *Idea of Phenomenology*, for

example, Husserl writes about phenomenology that “[I]t does all this in the act of pure seeing... . The procedure of seeing and ideating within the strictest phenomenological reduction is its exclusive domain” (Husserl, 1907/1999, p. 43). Although one must understand seeing (*schauen*) here in the widest possible sense, Husserl’s traditional concentration on seeing is a biased starting point. Does this problem harm the main point of the example, the demonstration of empty givenness?

The advantage of Husserl’s example is that it tries to situate the empty givenness at the very primordial level of sensing our environment. The problem with the example is how to be able to purify it in two respects: on the one hand, into pure seeing, and, on the other, so that it excludes my memories or background. Ultimately, this latter aspect would take us to the problem of history.

Phenomenology aims “to disclose reality ... as it shows itself *before* scientific inquiry”; it aims to provide a foundation for the sciences from pretheoretical experience (Heidegger, 1925/1979, p. 2). In this sense, phenomenology is primitive (Himanka, 2005a). With his example of the room where the lights go off, Husserl ventures to turn to this primitive level. The example illustrates the difference between fulfilled (presence) and empty (absence), which is at the very core of the phenomenological view on the reality of the real. It is clear that Husserl’s approach to viewing the difference between presence and absence explicates how beings are for us: numbers come to being in counting. Yet, as phenomenology aims to be a *streng* *Wissenschaft*, to cover all that appears (HuaI/37; HuaV/139, 159; HuaXVII/227; Hua XXV/3; HuaXXIX/12), one has to explore whether this approach is limited. In particular, one has to investigate whether the view on truth functions at the levels supposed by the higher forms of constitution. With the case of the dark room, Husserl exemplifies the phenomenological view at the very elementary level of sensuous intuition. Although this illustration turned out to be highly problematic, it also succeeds in showing a difference in fullness at this elementary level. The example shows us how the phenomenological approach functions at the elementary level of sensuous intuition. At the same time, Husserl’s example is so simple that it almost seems trivial. Yet, according to Husserl, it is the destiny of philosophy to find the deepest problems in trivialities (HuaXXIV/150).

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