**The Temptations of Phenomenology: Wittgenstein, the Synthetic a Priori and the ‘Analytic a Posteriori’**

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**Abstract:** Wittgenstein’s use of the “phenomenology” to describe his own work in *Philosophical Remarks* and *The Big Typescript* has occasioned much puzzlement and confusion. This paper seeks to shed light on what Wittgenstein meant by the word through a close analysis of key passages in those two works. I argue against both the view espoused by Nicholas Gier that Wittgenstein held “grammatical” phenomenological remarks to be synthetic a priori and the view expressed by Moritz Schlick that Wittgenstein held grammar to be tautological. During a very short period, this papers argues, lasting no longer than a few months in 1929, Wittgenstein conceived of phenomenology as something that sought to establish what one might call "analytic a posteriori” truths through an essentially Husserlian method. By the end of 1929, I argue, he had abandoned that in favour of the view expressed in the slogan “phenomenology is grammar”, though “grammar” here is *not* confined to the tautological, but intimately linked to Wittgenstein’s notion of “the understanding that consists in seeing connection”>

‘The temptation to believe in a phenomenology, something midway between science and logic, is very great’

(*On Colour*, II3)

During his first year back at Cambridge in 1929, Wittgenstein wrote a great deal, including – indeed, centring on - an extended discussion of what he called “phenomenology”. When, in the spring of 1930, he was asked by Trinity College, Cambridge to show some of his recent work to Bertrand Russell, he made a selection of the remarks he had written the previous year and had them typed. After it had been read by Russell, this typescript - TS 209 in von Wright’s catalogue - was returned to Wittgenstein and remained in his possession until his death, when it became the responsibility of his executors. In 1964, some thirty-five years after most of the remarks in it were written, it was published as *Philosophische Bermerkungen*, an English translation of which, *Philosophical Remarks*, was published in 1975. A later typescript, TS 213, usually referred to as ‘The Big Typescript’, which contained a large section entitled ‘Phenomenology’, was finally published in its entirety in 2005, after parts of it (but not, controversially, the section on phenomenology) had been published in 1974 as *Philosophical Grammar*.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Even before the publication of these typescripts, two commentators, C. A. van Peursen and Thomas N. Munson, had noticed affinities between Wittgenstein’s work and Husserlian phenomenology.[[2]](#footnote-2) Their discussions of these affinities, however, were, of necessity, short on detail, concentrating for the most part on the entirely general point that Wittgenstein’s emphasis on, and preference for, a conception of philosophy that saw it as descriptive rather than explanatory was something he shared with Husserl.

With the publication of *Philosophische Bemerkungen* in 1964, it was possible to explore these alleged affinities in greater detail. The fact that Wittgenstein evidently regarded his own work as (in some sense) phenomenology, even if only for a short time, seemed to provide, at least prima facie, some justification for the links made by van Peursen and Munson. The possibility that Wittgenstein, widely regarded at that time as the very paradigm of an analytic philosopher, might have important things in common with the phenomenological tradition should have been a topic of intense interest. After all, just a few years earlier, in 1958, at the now infamous Royaumont conference, several analytic philosophers had, notoriously, defined their method and style of thinking by contrasting it explicitly with the phenomenological school.[[3]](#footnote-3) The most combative in this respect was Gilbert Ryle’s paper, ‘Phenomenology versus ‘‘The Concept of Mind’’’, in which Ryle’s dismissive attitude towards Husserl contrasted sharply with his admiration for Wittgenstein, whom he credited, along with Frege and Russell, with having played a leading part in ‘the massive developments of our logical theory’. The study of this latter, Ryle insisted, was a prerequisite for understanding ‘our philosophical thinking’, a fact which ‘is partly responsible for the wide gulf that has existed for three-quarters of a century for the wide gulf between Anglo-Saxon and Continental philosophy’.[[4]](#footnote-4)

There was, manifestly, something almost wilfully blind about Ryle’s attempt to characterise as “Anglo-Saxon” a logical theory developed largely by Frege and Wittgenstein, and in 1993 Michael Dummett, in his *Origins of Analytical Philosophy*, took steps to correct this bizarre conception of the history of the analytic tradition.[[5]](#footnote-5) On Dummett’s rival account, what Ryle calls ‘our logical theory’ has its origins not in Cambridge, but in Germany. ‘The roots of analytical philosophy', Dummett pointed out, `are the *same* roots as those of the phenomenological school’.[[6]](#footnote-6) The two traditions, however, ‘may be compared with the Rhine and the Danube, which rise quite close to one another and for a time pursue roughly parallel courses, only to diverge in utterly different directions and flow into different seas’.[[7]](#footnote-7) Thus, though Dummett’s account put the *origins* of the analytic and the phenomenological traditions close to one another, it placed their final destinations far apart from each other.

On either Ryle’s or Dummett’s account of the history of the two movements, then, the apparent revelation in *Philosophische Bermerkungen* that Wittgenstein regarded himself – in 1929 and 1930 at any rate – as a phenomenologist surely deserved sustained attention and analysis. And yet, to begin with at least, there was a curious silence on the subject. None of the early reviews of the book discussed in any detail Wittgenstein’s repeated use of the word “phenomenology”, and many of them ignored it altogether. The first sustained attempt to wrestle with the issue did not appear until four years after the *Bermerkungen* appeared, when Herbert Spiegelberg published an article that finally made a concerted effort to spell out, and to make some start in answering, the questions raised by Wittgenstein’s use of the word “phenomenology”.[[8]](#footnote-8) In this article, Spiegelberg listed six questions (or, in the cases of 2 and 3, groups of questions) that he thought needed to be addressed:

1. What did Wittgenstein really mean by “Phänomenologie”?

2. When did he adopt it? For what reasons? What were his relations to the Phenomenological Movement of the time?

3. How far did he abandon this Phänomenologie? When? For what reasons?

4. What was its role in Wittgenstein’s development?

5. What is its philosophical merit?

6. What is its significance for other phenomenologists?[[9]](#footnote-9)

‘Some of these questions’, Spiegelberg wrote, ‘can probably never be answered. Some require full access to Wittgenstein’s and others’ extant papers and correspondences.’[[10]](#footnote-10) ‘All of them,’ he added, ‘presuppose a much fuller knowledge of Wittgenstein’s philosophy than I can muster.’[[11]](#footnote-11)

In the subsequent forty-three years, surprisingly little has been published that attempts to rise to the challenge of answering Spiegelberg’s questions.[[12]](#footnote-12) Nevertheless progress has been made in answering at least some of them. The early work by Karuda, Gier and Spiegelberg himself tended to concentrate on question 2, particularly on the issue of Wittgenstein’s relations with the Phenomenological Movement of his time. The most extended discussion of this is by Gier in his 1981 book, *Wittgenstein and Phenomenology*, in which he draws a series of interesting comparisons between Wittgenstein’s later work and ideas to be found in the writings of Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. Gier makes little or no attempt to answer Spiegelberg’s questions 5 and 6, and, like Spiegelberg, offers what I attempt to show below is a very unconvincing answer to question 3 (what he has to say about questions 1 and 4 will be discussed later).

In my view, both Spiegelberg and Gier are hampered in their attempts to answer these questions by their adherence to the belief that Wittgenstein’s discussions of phenomenology in *Philosophical Remarks* and the Big Typescript are characteristic of his entire output from 1929 until his death. Their answer to Spiegelberg’s question 3 is that Wittgenstein never did abandon phenomenology. Both are inclined to read the whole of Wittgenstein’s later work as a contribution to the phenomenological tradition. For them, the question is not why Wittgenstein abandoned phenomenology, but rather why he stopped using the *word* “phenomenology”. Spiegelberg’s answer to that is that Wittgenstein wanted to ‘avoid technical jargon’.[[13]](#footnote-13) Why Wittgenstein did notwant to avoid technical jargon in the years 1929-33 is something about which Spiegelberg is not at all clear. Gier’s answer to the same question is that Wittgenstein stopped using the term “phenomenology” when his thinking developed from one kind of phenomenology to another; when, that is, he moved away from a Husserlian search for essences and towards a *Weltanschauungsphilosophie* that has more in common with Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and the existentialists than with Husserl. As Wittgenstein associated the word “phenomenology” only with the Husserlian kind, Gier suggests, he stopped using the word, even though his philosophy could still rightly be described as phenomenology.[[14]](#footnote-14)

That Wittgenstein’s later work can, in some sense, be correctly described as “phenomenological” – if not as “phenomenology” – is something about which there is fairly general agreement. It is certainly something upon which Wittgenstein himself insisted on many occasions. In any case, it is not something I want to challenge. Nor would I entirely reject Gier’s characterisation of the general development of Wittgenstein’s later work as being a movement away from a Husserlian kind of phenomenology towards something that might be called a *Weltanschauungsphilosophie*. However, I cannot help feeling that something important about Wittgenstein’s discussion of phenomenology in *Philosophische Bermerkungen* has slipped Gier’s grasp, and that this is connected with Gier’s unsatisfactory answers to Spiegelberg’s questions 1 and 4 – what Wittgenstein meant by “Phänomenologie” and what role the notion played in his philosophical development. When we get clearer about *these* questions, I believe, we can provide a better answer to the question of when and why Wittgenstein abandoned the term.

One of the chief reasons that Gier is unable to provide satisfactory answers to these latter questions is that he is stubbornly attached, in the face of all the evidence to the contrary, to the idea that at the heart of Wittgenstein’s phenomenology was a commitment to the Kantian notion of the synthetic a priori. Gier’s attachment to this idea leads him time and time again to misread crucial passages and remarks by Wittgenstein. For example, he is extremely puzzled by the exchange between Schlick and Wittgenstein that took place in Vienna on 30 December 1929.[[15]](#footnote-15) “What answer,” Schlick asked Wittgenstein, “can one give to a philosopher who believes that the statements of phenomenology are synthetic a priori judgments?” Wittgenstein replied:

If I say “I have not got stomach-ache”, then this presupposes the possibility of a state of stomach-ache. … The negative proposition presupposes the positive one and vice versa.

Now let us take the statement, “An object is not red and green at the same time”. Is all I want to say by this that I have not yet seen such an object? Obviously not. What I mean is, “I cannot see such an object”. “Red and green cannot be in the same place”. Here I would ask, What does the word “can” mean here? The word “can” is obviously a grammatical (logical) concept, not a material one.

Now suppose the statement “An object cannot be both red and green” were a synthetic judgment and the words “cannot” meant logical impossibility. Since a proposition is the negation of its negation, there must also exist the proposition “An object can be red and green”. This proposition would also be synthetic. As a synthetic proposition it has sense, and this means that the state of things represented by it can obtain. If “cannot” means logical impossibility, we therefore reach the conclusion that the impossible is possible.

Here there remained only one way out for Husserl – to declare that there was a third possibility. To that I would reply that it is indeed possible to make up words, but I cannot associate a thought with them.

The “third possibility” which Wittgenstein mentions here is, presumably, something that is neither a material nor a grammatical proposition, something, as he would later put it, ‘midway between science and logic’. Though he had himself, just a few months before this conversation with Schlick, believed in such a possibility – believed, indeed, that phenomenology might provide it – he could not have made it clearer than he does here that, by the end of 1929, he dismissed it. ‘An object is not red and green at the same time’ is, he is quite clearly insisting here, not a synthetic proposition, and therefore, a fortiori, not synthetic a priori (a category in which, in case, Wittgenstein does not believe); it is a statement of grammar.

Schlick was at the time of this conversation writing a lecture called ‘Gibt es ein materiales Apriori?’[[16]](#footnote-16) in which he took Husserl to task on this very point. Husserl’s view that phenomenological statements (Schlick’s example is the Wittgensteinian one: ‘A surface cannot be simultaneously red and green’[[17]](#footnote-17)) are synthetic rests, Schlick claims, on a failure to realize that such statements are really concerned with the rules for using words, and: ‘Whatever follows from these rules, follows from the mere meaning of the word, and is therefore purely analytic, tautological, formal.’[[18]](#footnote-18) ‘The first who, to my knowledge, has given the correct solution of the problem,’ Schlick goes on, ‘is Ludwig Wittgenstein (see his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* and essay in the *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 1929) to whom we owe fundamental logical clarifications which will decisively influence the future course of philosophy.’

In the light of Wittgenstein’s discussion of phenomenology in *Philosophical Remarks*,Schlick’s use of Wittgenstein in his battle against Husserl’s phenomenology might seem to be charged with irony. As we shall see, however, by the time this discussion took place, Wittgenstein had abandoned the Husserlian views he had expressed in the first part of 1929. Schlick’s claim that Wittgenstein regarded phenomenological statements as grammatical is – in December 1929 - perfectly correct; his implication that Wittgenstein regarded statements of grammar to be tautologies is, on the other hand, demonstrably mistaken.

Partly because of the rapidly changing nature of his views in 1929, and partly because of the different emphases he put on his views at different times, it is all too easy to misunderstand what Wittgenstein was saying about grammar in 1929 and how it relates to a) phenomenology and b) the analytic/synthetic and the a priori/a posteriori distinctions. The mirror image of Schlick’s mistaken attribution to Wittgenstein of the view that grammatical statements are analytic is Gier’s insistence that they are synthetic a priori. Referring to Wittgenstein’s argument quoted above that phenomenological statements like ‘An object is not red and green at the same time’ cannot be synthetic, Gier describes it as ‘inexplicable’[[19]](#footnote-19), indicating a ‘serious inconsistency in Wittgenstein’s approach to the synthetic *a priori* during this period’[[20]](#footnote-20), and finally as ‘a deep mystery’.[[21]](#footnote-21) ‘I believe,’ Gier writes, ‘it is safe to assume that [on Wittgenstein’s view] all grammatical propositions are synthetic *a priori*.’ But, of course, as Wittgenstein’s carefully expressed argument in his conversation with Schlick quoted above suffices to indicate, it is *not* safe to assume this. The conclusion to that argument – an argument as precise and rigorous as any to be found in Wittgenstein’s writings and conversations – is that grammatical (phenomenological) propositions *cannot* be synthetic.

Gier’s evidence that Wittgenstein believes the opposite is flimsy and easily countered. ‘In 1939,’ he writes, ‘he [Wittgenstein] told his class that the very proposition he discussed with Schlick, “A patch cannot be at the same time both red and green,” is synthetic *a priori*.’[[22]](#footnote-22) The passage Gier cites in support of this claim comes from Wittgenstein’s 1939 lectures on the philosophy of mathematics:

There are propositions regarded as synthetic *a priori*, like “A patch cannot be at the same time both red and green.” This is not reckoned a proposition of logic. But the impossibility which it expresses is not a matter of experience – it is not a matter of what we have observed.[[23]](#footnote-23)

It is strange, I think, that Gier should interpret Wittgenstein’s statement that these propositions are *regarded as* synthetic a priori as Wittgenstein telling his class that they *are* synthetic a priori. It is more natural, surely, to interpret Wittgenstein as drawing attention to an inclination, a *temptation*, to look at these propositions in a certain way. Indeed, this passage contains a striking echo of the later remark from *On Colour* quoted at the beginning of this article. Propositions like ‘A patch cannot be at the same time both red and green’, Wittgenstein tells his class, are not based upon observations, and yet, equally, they are ‘not reckoned’ to be propositions of logic. They therefore *seem* to occupy a place somewhere between the realm of the observable (science) and logic, thus tempting one, as he would later put it, to ‘believe in a phenomenology’. What Wittgenstein is doing here is not characterising these propositions as synthetic a priori, but rather trying to understand and explain how the “bewitched” philosopher might so regard them.

A similar problem arises with respect to two further passages that Gier cites as evidence of his interpretation. The first, found in *Philosophical Remarks* reads as follows:

What I said earlier about the nature of arithmetical equations and about an equation’s not being replaceable by a tautology explains – I believe – what Kant means when he insists that 7 + 5 = 12 is not an analytic proposition, but synthetic *a priori*.[[24]](#footnote-24)

The second, from the Big Typescript and *Philosophical Grammar* reads:

Isn’t what I am saying here what Kant meant by saying that 5 + 7 = 12 is not analytic but synthetic *a priori*?[[25]](#footnote-25)

The similarity of these two extracts has misled Gier into regarding them as iterations of the *same* remark[[26]](#footnote-26), a remark, he says, that ‘is nothing short of startling in view of his [Wittgenstein’s] firm rejection of such propositions in the *Tractatus*, and his inexplicable reiteration of this rejection in a conversation with Schlick in 1929’.[[27]](#footnote-27) In his later, 1990, article, Gier goes further, claiming that in the *Remarks* Wittgenstein provided a *proof* that (in Gier’s words) ‘an arithmetic equation could not be replaced by a tautology, thereby explaining “what Kant means when he insists that 7 + 5 = 12 is not an analytic proposition, but synthetic *a priori*.”’[[28]](#footnote-28) ‘The only way,’ Gier goes on, ‘to reconcile this proof with his answer to Schlick is that somehow he thought that a grammar of colour was analytic, but that a grammar of arithmetic was synthetic’, but this will not do, because ‘there is no evidence that Wittgenstein made any exception to his firm commitment to a full-fledged material a priori.’[[29]](#footnote-29) In Wittgenstein’s view, Gier again insists, ‘all grammatical propositions are synthetic.’[[30]](#footnote-30)

All this, I maintain, is deeply confused and mistaken. For one thing, though the two remarks about saying what Kant meant sound virtually identical, when seen in their respective contexts, they are making significantly different (though, of course, related) points. In the *Remarks*, the statement about Kant is made in the context of a discussion about the nature (tautological, synthetic, a priori, etc.) of arithmetical propositions; in the Big Typescript, it is in the context of discussing proof by mathematical induction.

Let us look at this difference in more detail, starting with Wittgenstein’s “proof” in *Philosophical Remarks* that an arithmetical proposition cannot be replaced by a tautology. Wittgenstein does indeed offer such a proof, or, anyway, he provides an *argument* to that effect, and I would not want to attach too much importance here to the difference between a proof and an argument. However, I believe, Gier is wrong to suppose that Wittgenstein intends this to be a proof that arithmetical propositions are synthetic.[[31]](#footnote-31) Wittgenstein offers as a tautology, the following statement, to which he assigns the letter *A*:

(E | | | | |) etc. • (E | | | | | | |) etc. ⊃ (E | | | | | | | | | | | |)[[32]](#footnote-32)

He does not give any grounds for regarding this statement as a tautology, but I think what he has in mind is that it is an instance of something like the following:

((Ea • Eb • Ec • Ed • Ee) • (Ef • Eg • Eh • Ei • Ej • Ek • El)) ⊃ (Ea • Eb • Ec • Ed • Ee • Ef • Eg • Eh • Ei • Ej • Ek • El)

which (so long as one could persuade oneself that it is a well-formed formula) is indeed a tautology.

What *is* clear is that Wittgenstein wants to show that the arithmetical equation ‘5 + 7 = 12’ is not identical with, or replaceable with, this (or, it is surely implied, any other) tautology. ‘We can,’ he says, ‘completely disregard the special structure of the proposition *A* and pay attention solely to the relation, the connection, between the numerical signs in it. This shows that the relation holds independently of the proposition – i.e. of the other features of its structure which make it a tautology.’[[33]](#footnote-33) He goes on:

For if I look at it as a tautology I merely perceive features of its structure and can now perceive the addition theorem *in* them, while disregarding other characteristics that are essential to it as a proposition.

…the 5 strokes and the 7 combine *precisely to make 12* (and so for example to make the same structure as do 4 and 4 and 4). - It is always only insight into the internal relations of the structures and not some proposition or other or some logical consideration which tells us this. And, as far as this insight is concerned, everything in the tautology apart from the numerical structures is mere decoration.[[34]](#footnote-34)

In other words, there are structural features of proposition *A* which make it a tautology, and there are relations, internal relations, between the numerical signs in the proposition, insight into which is required to see that 5 + 7 = 12. But those structural features of the proposition and those arithmetical internal relations should not be confused with one another. Proposition *A* is a tautology and it is an instance of the arithmetical equation ‘5 + 7 = 12’. It is not, however, Wittgenstein insists, an *expression* of that arithmetical relation; rather, it is an *application* of it.[[35]](#footnote-35) What makes it a tautology and what makes it an application of an arithmetical rule are two different things. It is not a statement of arithmetic *in virtue* of being tautological; neither is it a tautology *because* it is an application of an arithmetical rule. It is an application of arithmetic because the strokes on the left of the material implication sign and the strokes on the right of it add up to the same number. It is a tautology because, quite separately, it has a tautological structure, let us say the structure, A • (B • C) ⊃ A • B • C.

In thus showing that ‘7 + 5 = 12’ cannot be replaced by the tautology *A*, Wittgenstein claims to have said what Kant *meant* by saying that the expression was synthetic a priori. He does *not* say that he believes arithmetical equations to be synthetic, however. The closest he gets to that is the following: ‘No investigation of concepts, only direct insight can tell us that 3 + 2 = 5’.[[36]](#footnote-36) But the consequence he draws from this is not that ‘3 + 2 = 5’ is synthetic, but rather that it is not tautological. Arithmetical equations, like phenomenological statements such as ‘An object is not red and green at the same time’, are part of *grammar*: ‘Arithmetic is the grammar of numbers’.[[37]](#footnote-37) His remark that he had said what Kant meant should not be taken to imply that he thought Kant was *correct* in calling arithmetical statements synthetic a priori. Rather, it means that Wittgenstein considered himself to have succeeded where Kant failed: to have demonstrated the non-tautological character of arithmetical expressions precisely *without* succumbing to the temptation to believe in the synthetic a priori, his reasons for rejecting which were spelled out so convincingly to Schlick. As he told Schlick, Wittgenstein was unable to ‘associate a thought’ with the words ‘synthetic a priori’, i.e. he thought the phrase was meaningless. He nevertheless thought he knew why Kant, Husserl and others felt compelled to invoke such a notion, and the reason he thought he knew *that* was that he himself had felt the same compulsion.

In the Big Typescript, Wittgenstein’s remark that what he was saying was what Kant meant by ‘5 + 7 = 12 is synthetic a priori’ is made in a rather different context. It comes at the end of a section entitled: ‘Induction, (x).φx and (∃x).φx. To What Extent does Induction Prove a Universal Proposition True and an Existential Proposition False?’ in which Wittgenstein casts doubt on the conception of mathematical induction that sees it as a demonstration of the truth of a universal proposition. The universal proposition Wittgenstein uses as an example in this discussion is: (n): n > 2 .⊃. 3 × n ≠ 5, and the inductive proof he considers goes like this:

3 × 2 = 5 + 1

3 × (a + 1) = 3 + (3 × a) = (5 + b) + 3 = 5 + (b + 3)[[38]](#footnote-38)

It may not be entirely obvious (it was not to me) how this inductive proof is supposed to work. I think, however, it is as follows. The first step is to establish that, where n = 2, 3 × n = 5 + 1, from which, of course, it follows that 3 × n is greater than 5 and therefore that 3 × n ≠ 5. The next step, as in any mathematical induction, is to show that, if 3 × n > 5 (and thus 3 × n ≠ 5) is true for any arbitrary number, a, then it is true for a + 1. The first stage in such a proof is to assume that the statement is true for n = a. I.e., 3 × a > 5. If this is so, then 3 × a = 5 + b (where b is some positive number). Now, 3 × (a + 1) is equal to 3 + (3 × a), and, according to the previously established equation, we can replace 3 × a with 5 + b, thus arriving at the equation: 3 × (a + 1) = 3 + (5 + b), which, rearranged, gives 3 × (a + 1) = (5 + b) + 3, and, rearranged again, 3 × (a + 1) = 5 + (b + 3), from which, of course, it follows that 3 (a + 1) is greater than 5. Thus, for any (positive) number, a, if 3 × a > 5 is true for a, then it is also true for a + 1. We know that 3 × n > 5 (and thus 3 × n ≠ 5) is true where n = 2. Therefore, as a result of the induction, we know that 3 × n ≠ 5 is true for any number greater than 2.[[39]](#footnote-39)

Having given what would normally be regarded as an inductive proof of the proposition (n): n > 2 .⊃. 3 × n ≠ 5, Wittgenstein proceeds to give reasons for doubting whether we really should it regard it in this light. Some of the issues at stake here had been raised in earlier sections of the Big Typescript. For example, in a section entitled ‘Proof, and the Truth and Falsity of Mathematical Propositions’, Wittgenstein says:

A “proposition of mathematics” that is proved by an induction is not a “proposition” in the same sense as the answer to a mathematical question unless one can look for the induction in a system of checks.[[40]](#footnote-40)

And in a section called ‘To What Extent does a Proof by Induction Prove a *Proposition*?’ he makes the claim that the algebraic law of commutation – a × b = b × a – can be proved by calculating that 25 × 64 = 160 and that also 64 × 24 = 160, and then remarks: ‘It is *only* in the sense in which you can call working out such an example a proof of the algebraic proposition that the proof by induction is a proof of the proposition.’[[41]](#footnote-41)

His discussion of the induction of (n): n > 2 .⊃. 3 × n ≠ 5 amplifies and sheds light on these remarks. He begins by imagining someone making such a ‘system of checks’ as he describes above, saying ‘Let’s check whether f(n) [shorthand for the expression (n > 2) ⊃ (3n ≠ 5)] is valid for all n’, and then checking that it holds for n = 2, n = 3 and n = 4. At this point, Wittgenstein imagines him breaking off and exclaiming ‘I already see that it’s valid for all n’.[[42]](#footnote-42) In other words, this man has done exactly what Wittgenstein had earlier described: he has found the induction in a series of checks, analogous to someone who satisfies themselves that the law of commutation holds by working out an example.

It is crucial to Wittgenstein, however, that this man did not check – still less prove – the truth of the universal proposition; rather, he checks the truth of a series of propositions - (3 × 2) ≠ 5, (3 × 3) ≠ 5, (3 × 4) ≠ 5 – and, in checking those, comes to see that every statement of that form has to be true. And this, Wittgenstein insists, is all that is achieved by an induction:

If I call the induction “the proof of a general proposition”, I can’t ask whether that proposition is correct (any more than whether the form of the cardinal numbers is correct). Because the things I call inductive proofs give me no method of *checking* whether the general proposition is correct or incorrect.[[43]](#footnote-43)

This notion of *checking* had earlier been invoked by Wittgenstein as an alternative to the notion of proving a proposition to be true. In the section quoted earlier called ‘Proof, and the Truth and Falsity of Mathematical Propositions’, for example, Wittgenstein says this:

In order to understand the sense of 25 × 25 = 625 I may ask: how is this proposition proved? But I can’t ask how its contradictory is or would be proved, because it makes no sense to speak of a proof of the contradictory of 25 × 25 = 625. So if I want to raise a question which won’t depend on the truth of the proposition, I have to speak of *checking* its truth, not of proving or disproving it.[[44]](#footnote-44)

In considering the question of whether the universal statement that appears as the purported conclusion to the inductive proof given earlier can properly be called a proposition, Wittgenstein, as so often (as, for example, in his response to Schlick’s question about Husserl’s synthetic a priori), considers the proposition’s negation. Earlier in the Big Typescript, he had spelled out what he regarded as a crucially important principle:

Now it is part of the nature of *what we call propositions* that they must be capable of being negated. And the negation of what is proved also must be connected with the proof; we must, that is, be able to show in what different conditions it would have been the result.[[45]](#footnote-45)

‘When we say that induction proves the universal proposition,’ he now says, ‘of course we want to switch to the mode of expression that it proves that *this* and not its contradictory is the case.’[[46]](#footnote-46) But what is the contradictory, the negation, of the universal proposition (n): n > 2 .⊃. 3 × n ≠ 5? Well, it would be (∃n): ~ (n > 2 .⊃. 3 × n ≠ 5), i.e., (∃n): n > 2 .⊃. 3 × n = 5, or ‘there is a number which, when multiplied by 3 is equal to 5’. And has the inductive proof shown this proposition to be false? No, because the induction was something that was seen in a series of checks that, e.g., 3 × 2 = 5 + 1, 3 × (a + 1) = (3 × a) + 3. But, if we ask of the first of these, ‘3 × 2 = 5 + 1 as opposed to what?’, the answer will be something like 3 × 2 = 5 + 6[[47]](#footnote-47). ‘But, of course,’ Wittgenstein says, ‘this opposite doesn’t correspond to the proposition (∃x).φx’.[[48]](#footnote-48) ‘If I call the induction “the proof of a general proposition”’, Wittgenstein goes on, ‘I can’t ask whether that proposition is correct (any more than whether the form of the cardinal numbers is correct). Because the things I call inductive proofs give me no method of *checking* whether the general proposition is correct or incorrect.’[[49]](#footnote-49) Thus, ‘we find it odd when we are told that the induction proves the universal proposition… After all, we weren’t first given an alternative’. We have not, that is, shown the proposition ‘There is an n greater than 2, such that 3n = 5’ is false. Indeed, we have not even considered such a proposition. So the induction does not give us a method for deciding which of two contradictory propositions - (n): n > 2 .⊃. 3 × n ≠ 5 and (∃n): n > 2 .⊃. 3 × n = 5 – is true. ‘The proof by induction isn’t something that settles a disputed question.’[[50]](#footnote-50)

Before he gets onto the comparison between himself and Kant, Wittgenstein ends the section under discussion with a consideration of the ‘inductive property’ of periodicity, his example of which is dividing 1 by 3. When we divide 1 by 3, we get 3 with the remainder 1, and, if we divide it again we, of course, get the same result, so, however long we carry on with this procedure, we cannot get anything other than a series of 3s. Wittgenstein imagines a group of people who have not realised this and so argue about whether the quotient of 1/3 does or does not contain only threes. Then, just like the man who saw the induction in the worked out examples of 3 × n ≠ 5, Wittgenstein imagines a man who notices the inductive property and says: ‘now I know that there must be only threes in the quotient’.[[51]](#footnote-51) The discovery of periodicity, Wittgenstein insists, as he had earlier insisted about induction, ‘decides nothing that had been left open’.[[52]](#footnote-52) Rather, what it does is clarify to this man ‘the grammar of his question and the nature of his search’.[[53]](#footnote-53) ‘The discovery of the periodicity,’ Wittgenstein concludes, ‘is really the construction of a new sign and a new *calculus*.’ It is immediately after making *that* point that Wittgenstein says: ‘Isn’t what I am saying what Kant meant, by saying that 5 + 7 = 12 is not analytic but synthetic a priori?’[[54]](#footnote-54)

Whatever Wittgenstein means by this comment in this context, it cannot be *exactly* what he meant in *Philosophical Remarks*, because the referent of the phrase ‘what I am saying’ is different in each case. In the earlier case, it was that arithmetical statements are not tautologies; in this case, it is that induction (or seeing an inductive property) does not consist in deciding which of two alternative propositions, p and ~ p, is true. Whereas it is fairly easy to see the connection between the first of these and Kant’s notion of the synthetic a priori, it is rather harder with respect to the second. It should be noted, however, that, at the point in the Big Typescript at which Wittgenstein makes his comment about Kant, he has already made the point he makes in the *Remarks* that an arithmetical equation cannot be replaced by a tautology. Indeed, some of the sentences from that section of *Remarks* reappear verbatim in the Big Typescript. E.g.

No investigation of concepts, only direct insight can tell us that 3 + 2 =5.

That is what makes us rebel against the idea that *A* could be the proposition 3 + 2 =5.[[55]](#footnote-55)

These sentences from the *Remarks* are repeated, practically word for word, in a section of the Big Typescript entitled ‘2 + 2 = 4’, except that *A* is replaced by a different formula.[[56]](#footnote-56) The import of these sentences, surely, is that Kant is right to insist that arithmetical statements are not analytic; they are not arrived at by analysing concepts, they are not tautologies or “true by definition”.

Does it follow that they are synthetic? Gier clearly thinks it does. Just as Schlick moves from Wittgenstein’s rejection of the synthetic nature of phenomenological statements to his supposed view of them as analytic, Gier moves from Wittgenstein’s rejection of the tautologous, or analytic, nature of arithmetical statements to his supposed acceptance of them as synthetic a priori. The strongest evidence for Gier’s reading of Wittgenstein comes from MS 125, written in 1942-4, which forms Part IV of the third edition of *Remarks on the Foundation of Mathematics* and Part III of the first edition, which is the one Gier cites.[[57]](#footnote-57) There, Wittgenstein says:

The proposition[s] ‘*a = a’*, ‘*p* ⊃ *p*’, ‘The word “Bismarck” has 8 letter’, ‘There is no such thing as reddish-green’, are all obvious and are propositions about essence: what have they in common? They are evidently each of a different kind and differently used. The last but one is the most like an empirical proposition. And it can understandably be called a synthetic *a priori* proposition.

It can be said: unless you put the series of numbers and the series of letter side by side, you cannot know how many letters the word has.

It might perhaps be said that the synthetic character of the propositions of mathematics appears most obviously in the unpredictable occurrence of the prime numbers.

But their being synthetic (in this sense) does not make them any the less *a priori*. They could be said, I want to say, not to be got out of their concepts by means of some kind of analysis, but really to determine a concept of synthesis…

The distribution of primes would be an ideal example of what could be called synthetic *a priori*, for one can say that it is at any rate not discoverable by an analysis of the concept of a prime number.[[58]](#footnote-58)

Are these remarks evidence that Wittgenstein regarded arithmetic as synthetic a priori? No, like the other passages cited by Gier in support of this reading, these remarks show, first that Wittgenstein was emphatic in his rejection of the view that arithmetical statements are analytic and second that, because of his insistence on this point, he was sympathetic to those who are tempted to regard them as synthetic a priori. But notice that every time he describes arithmetic propositions as synthetic a priori, he qualifies it in some way: ‘it *can understandably be called* a synthetic *a priori* proposition’, it ‘*might perhaps* be said’, ‘their being synthetic (*in this sense*)’, ‘an ideal example of what *could be called* synthetic *a priori’.* Like the quotations discussed above – and, indeed, like, even, his response to Schlick about Husserl – what these remarks show is that Wittgenstein felt he understood why people might want to say that arithmetical statements were synthetic a priori, why they might be tempted to place them in a place midway between the grammatical and the material.

The reason he felt he understood this, I believe, is that he considered himself to have succumbed to this temptation at the time he wrote the remarks on phenomenology that appear in *Philosophical Remarks*. This brings us back to some of Spiegelberg’s questions:

1. What did Wittgenstein really mean by “Phänomenologie”?

2. When did he adopt it? For what reasons? What were his relations to the Phenomenological Movement of the time?

3. How far did he abandon this Phänomenologie? When? For what reasons?

Briefly, my answers to the chronological questions are that Wittgenstein adopted phenomenology sometime in the spring of 1929 and that he abandoned it in October 1929. After this very brief period, during which his position came, I believe, rather close to Husserlian phenomenology, he switched to the view found in the Big Typescript/*Philosophical Grammar* that is summed up in the slogan ‘phenomenology is grammar’. This slogan I take to mean something like: the problems that one might be tempted to solve with phenomenology are better addressed through an analysis of grammar.

As for what he meant by ‘phenomenology’, I think the key to this is contained in his remark to Schlick about Husserl and his later remark from *On Colour*. I.e., what Wittgenstein meant by ‘phenomenology’ in (the first nine months of) 1929 was something that was neither grammatical nor material, a ‘third possibility’ that was midway between logic and science. It was not identical with Kant’s synthetic a priori, but might, I think, be characterised rather as the ‘analytic a posteriori’.[[59]](#footnote-59)

That name is suggested by some remarks Wittgenstein makes in his 1929 paper, ‘Some Remarks on Logical Form’,[[60]](#footnote-60) which, to a large extent, is a response to the penetrating criticisms of the *Tractatus* view of logical necessity that Frank Ramsey had made in his review of the book for *Mind*.[[61]](#footnote-61) Regarding Wittgenstein’s claim in the *Tractatus* that (in Ramsey’s words) ‘the only necessity is that of a tautology, the only impossibility that of contradiction’, Ramsey says:

There is great difficulty in holding this; for Mr Wittgenstein admits that a point in the visual field *cannot* be both red and blue… Hence he says that ‘This is both red and blue’ is a contradiction. This implies that the apparently simple concepts red, blue … are really complex and formally incompatible. He tried to show how this may be, by analysing them in terms of vibrations. But even supposing that the physicist thus provides an analysis of what we mean by ‘red’, Mr Wittgenstein is only reducing the difficulty to that of the *necessary* properties of space, time, and matter or the ether.[[62]](#footnote-62)

The statement ‘This is red and this is blue’ is *necessarily* false, and yet it is not a contradiction as the *Tractatus* understands that term, because it is of the form ‘p and q’, not ‘p and not-p’. In proposition 6.3751, Wittgenstein had inferred from this that ‘This is red’ and ‘This is blue’ could not be elementary positions and, as Ramsey mentions, attempted to show how they might be further analysed by appealing to a physical theory of colour that sees different colours as corresponding to, and accounted by, different velocities of particles of light.[[63]](#footnote-63) What Ramsey points out is that this manoeuvre cannot work; whether the sentences concern colours, velocities of particles or positions of particles, the compound still comes out as of the form ‘p and q’, not ‘p and not-p’.

In ‘Some Remarks on Logical Form’, Wittgenstein accepts that colour ascriptions are elementary and that ‘This is red and blue’ does not express something that could possibly be true. He therefore has to give up the claim that all logical impossibilities are contradictions of the form ‘p and not-p’, and to accept (what in the *Tractatus* he had explicitly rejected), that the truth or falsity of one elementary proposition might logically imply the truth or falsity of another. For example, from the truth of ‘This is red’ we can infer the falsity of ‘This is blue’, from the truth of ‘This is 6 inches long’ we can infer the falsity of ‘This is 7 inches long’, and so on. In, e.g., statements of colour, length, time, we (as he put it in conversation with the Vienna Circle) do not lay a single proposition against reality, we lay a *system* of propositions against reality: ‘from the existence of one state of affairs the non-existence of all the other states of affairs described by this system of proposition can be inferred’.[[64]](#footnote-64)

In ‘Some Remarks on Logical Form’ Wittgenstein discusses how this new view of elementary propositions affects the use of truth tables to represent truth-possibilities, arguing that in some cases the truth tables of two propositions have only three rows: ‘p and not-q’, ‘not-p and q’ and ‘not-p and not-q’. In those cases, the top line, ‘p and q’, disappears, since it does not represent a possible state of affairs. But how do we know which truth tables have only three lines? It is this question that sends Wittgenstein in the direction of phenomenology, or what I have called the ‘analytic a posteriori’. Near the beginning of ‘Some Remarks on Logical Form’, Wittgenstein describes the ‘task of the theory of knowledge’ to be the finding of atomic propositions and the understanding of ‘their construction out of the words or symbols’. [[65]](#footnote-65) The way to accomplish this, he suggests, is ‘to express in an appropriate symbolism what in ordinary language leads to endless misunderstandings’. Where ordinary language disguises logical structure, ‘we must replace it by a symbolism which gives a clear picture of the logical structure’. He goes on:

Now we can only substitute a clear symbolism for the unprecise one by inspecting the phenomena which we want to describe, thus trying to understand their logical multiplicity. That is to say, we can only arrive at a correct analysis by, what might be called, the logical investigation of the phenomena themselves, i.e. in a certain sense *a posteriori*, and not by conjecturing about *a priori* standpoint… An atomic form cannot be foreseen. And it would be surprising if the actual phenomena had nothing more to teach us about their structure.[[66]](#footnote-66)

Once we have learned, ‘in a certain sense *a posteriori*’, about the structure of phenomena, the structure of appearance, we will know the rules of syntax that prevent such combinations as ‘This is red and blue’, and thus know which lines on certain truth tables have to be left out. ‘Such rules,’ Wittgenstein says at the end of the paper, ‘cannot be laid down until we have actually reached the ultimate analysis of the phenomena in question. This, as we all know, has not yet been achieved.’[[67]](#footnote-67)

Wittgenstein’s view at this time seems to have been this: If it is impossible that something can be both red and blue, then it ought, in a ‘perfect notation’, to be impossible to *say* that it is both red and blue. As it is not impossible to say that in our ordinary language, it follows that our ordinary language is, in this sense, deficient, and we need to look elsewhere; we need to find a language the syntactical rules of which reflect the ‘ultimate analysis of the phenomena in question’. In other words, we should look for the syntactical rules that tell us what is or is not possible in the language of phenomenological description.

Thus, in *Philosophical Remarks*, we find Wittgenstein seriously entertaining the idea of a ‘phenomenal language’, which would be more fundamental, more primary than our ordinary, secondary physical language. This brings him (and therein lies the apparent irony I mentioned earlier in Schlick’s contrast between Husserl and Wittgenstein) squarely into the realm of ideas occupied by Husserlian phenomenology. For the first ten months of 1929, Wittgenstein’s thought moved in a direction strikingly similar to that Husserl’s thinking had taken a few decades earlier as he endeavoured to pursue the ‘logical investigation of the phenomena themselves’ he believed to be necessary for an understanding of the logic of elementary propositions. Like Husserl’s, Wittgenstein’s phenomenology was a search for the essential, the fundamental, the simple. ‘There appear to be simple colours,’ he says in one of his earliest remarks on the subject. ‘Simple as psychological phenomena.’

What I need is a psychological or rather phenomenological colour theory, not a physical and equally not a physiological one.

Furthermore, it must be a theory in *pure* phenomenology in which mention is only made of what is actually perceptible and in which no hypothetical objects – waves, rods, cones and all that – occur.[[68]](#footnote-68)

In the original version of this, written in February 1929, Wittgenstein had not used the word ‘phenomenology’; rather, he had spoken of a ‘psychological colour theory’, a ‘*pure* psychological colour theory’.[[69]](#footnote-69)

The move away from psychology to phenomenology had been made earlier by Husserl himself in *Logical Investigations*, the two editions of which, published in1900 and 1913 respectively, offered significantly different answers to the question ‘what is phenomenology’. In the first, Husserl’s answer was: ‘Phenomenology is descriptive psychology’. ‘Epistemological criticism,’ he continues, ‘is therefore in essence psychology, or at least only capable of being built on a psychological basis. Pure logic therefore also rests on psychology’.[[70]](#footnote-70) In answer to the obvious follow-up question - why, in that case, does he devote so much space (247 pages in the English edition) in the ‘prolegomena’ to the book to an attack on ‘psychologism’ – Husserl replies that, on his view, the foundation that psychology provides for logic is a *purely descriptive* and that therefore ‘it is *not the full science of psychology that serves as a foundation for pure logic*, but certain classes of descriptions’.[[71]](#footnote-71) In the second edition, Husserl strives to put more distance between phenomenology and psychology. ‘Phenomenology,’ he now says, ‘is not descriptive psychology’:

Its peculiar ‘pure’ description, its contemplation of pure essences on a basis of exemplary individual intuitions of experiences (often freely imagined ones), and its descriptive fixation of the contemplated essences into pure concepts, is no empirical, scientific description. It rather excludes the natural performance of all empirical (naturalistic) apperceptions and positings. Statements of descriptive psychology regarding ‘perceptions’, ‘judgments’, ‘feelings’, ‘volitions’, etc., use such names to refer to the real states of animal organisms in a real natural order.[[72]](#footnote-72)

This striving to separate phenomenology from anything empirical led Husserl later in his career to invent his own terms – noesis, noemata, hyletic data, etc. – in order to avoid using words that carried with them the assumptions and hypotheses of natural science.

Famously, Husserl’s technique for isolating the purely phenomenological, separating it from anything contaminated by the ‘naturalistic attitude’, was to ‘bracket’ all that we know about the natural world and to concentrate only, as Wittgenstein had put it, on the phenomena *themselves*, or, in Husserl’s words, the phenomena *as such*. And in Wittgenstein’s brief phenomenological period, we find him doing exactly the same thing. Wittgenstein’s analogy of the relationship between the phenomenological and the naturalistic was as follows:

If I compare the facts of immediate experience with the pictures on the screen and the facts of physics with pictures in the film strip, on the film strip there is a present picture and past and future pictures. But on the screen, there is only the present.[[73]](#footnote-73)

Put like this, Wittgenstein’s project of phenomenology was to describe what was appearing on the screen without reference to the film strip. Again like Husserl, Wittgenstein found that our ordinary language, mired as it is in the words, assumptions and hypotheses of natural science, is not fit for this task: ‘With our language we find ourselves, so to speak, in the domain of the film, not of the projected picture’ and so ‘we need a way of speaking with which we can represent the phenomena of visual space, isolated as such.’[[74]](#footnote-74) Thus, ‘phenomenological language isolates visual space and what goes on in it from everything else’.[[75]](#footnote-75) In the secondary language of physical space, visual space is called subjective, but in the primary language ‘the representation of visual space is the representation of an object and contains no suggestion of a subject’.[[76]](#footnote-76) The guiding thought behind all this is that: ‘Immediate experience cannot contain any contradiction’.[[77]](#footnote-77) So, if he could, using a phenomenological language, describe phenomena *themselves*, without any attempt to explain them or to root them in our knowledge of the physical world, then, he believed, he would at last be able to give the logic of elementary propositions.[[78]](#footnote-78)

Given that these are the views that Wittgenstein expresses in sections V, VII and XXI of *Philosophical Remarks*, it is remarkable that on the very first page of the same work there is an explicit rejection of just those views:

I do not now have phenomenological language, or ‘primary language’ as I used to call it, in mind as my goal. I no longer hold it to be necessary. All that is possible and necessary is to separate what is essential from what is inessential in *our* language.[[79]](#footnote-79)

The explanation for the contrast between these remarks and those already quoted lies in the composition of TS 209 and in the fact that in 1929 Wittgenstein’s views were changing very rapidly. For, though it appears at the beginning of TS 209 (and hence of *Philosophical Remarks*), the above passage was written some months later than those quoted earlier. To be more specific, it comes from MS 107, where it is dated 29 November 1929. The earliest remark I know of in which he announces his newfound scepticism about phenomenological language is from the same manuscript volume and dated 20 October 1929. There he says that ‘the assumption that a phenomenological language would be possible and that only it would say what we should/must say in philosophy, is – I think – absurd. We must get along with our usual language and only understand it right. That is, we must not allow ourselves to be misled by it into speaking nonsense.’[[80]](#footnote-80)

If *Philosophical Remarks* is regarded as a book then it would be utterly bizarre that it begins with a repudiation of the very views that it later expounds. But, of course, TS 209 was not prepared for publication, it was prepared as a record of the work he had been doing in 1929, and, as such, quite naturally included the range of views he had adopted during the rapid development of his thinking during this time. Of course, it would have been easier to see the development if he had arranged his remarks chronologically, but I think he had a strong reason for putting his rejection of phenomenological language before his advancement of it, namely to indicate the great importance he attached to this particular step in his development.

Merrill and Jaakko Hintikka, in their 1986 book, *Investigating Wittgenstein*, have described this abandonment of phenomenological language as ‘the decisive turning-point in Wittgenstein’s philosophical development in 1929’[[81]](#footnote-81) and ‘the *only* initial change in his philosophical position’. I am inclined to agree with them about the importance of this shift, but reject one of their main reasons for thinking it so important. For them, the shift in October 1929 represents an abandonment, not only of views that Wittgenstein had expressed in February of that year, but also of the logic of the *Tractatus.* They believe that the objects of the *Tractatus* are the phenomena of immediate experience and that the elementary propositions of the same work are statements of phenomenology. So, as Gier has put it, ‘the Hintikkas claim that Wittgenstein’s phenomenology should be dated from 1913-1929, rather than the 1929-1951 which Spiegelberg and I propose’.[[82]](#footnote-82) In my view the actual dates should be February-October 1929.

Little more, I think, is needed to refute the Hintikkas’ view than a consideration of proposition 6.3751 of the *Tractatus*. For there, Wittgenstein explicitly *rejects* the idea that the phenomenological statement that it is impossible for two colours to ‘to be in one place in the visual field’ can be regarded as ‘the logical product of two elementary propositions’, and suggests, as a possible analysis into *more* elementary propositions, the replacement of these phenomenological statements by statements of *physics*. His phenomenology of Sections VII and XXI of *Philosophical Remarks* is, in accordance with what he had said in ‘Some Remarks on Logical Form’, the very reverse of this Tractarian view: bracketing physics (the film strip) in order to concentrate on what he now regarded as more fundamental, indeed ‘primary’, namely the visual field (the projected image).

Thus, when he says in November 1929 ‘I do not now have phenomenological language, or ‘primary language’ as I used to call it, in mind as my goal’, the reference to his previous views is not to views he held at the time of writing *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, but rather to views he had held just a few months previously. The key to Wittgenstein’s abandonment of phenomenology – conceived of as the (‘in a certain sense *a posteriori*’) ‘logical investigation of the phenomena themselves’ – is to be found, I think, in his recognition that what he was looking for was to be found in *grammar*, i.e., in the syntactical rules of our *ordinary language*, the rulesthat determine what it does and does not make sense to say.

Schlick, I believe, was right to attribute to Wittgenstein the view that what phenomenologists sought through an investigation of immediate experience was actually to be found through a better understanding of our ordinary language, but his statement of Wittgenstein’s position - ‘Whatever follows from these rules, follows from the mere meaning of the word, and is therefore purely analytic, tautological, formal’ – is nevertheless wrong at extremely important points. As we have seen, Wittgenstein emphatically did not believe that phenomenological statements, statements of grammar, were analytic or tautological, and it is very misleading to characterise him as holding that what follows from the grammatical rules that determine what does and does not make sense to say ‘follows from the mere meaning of the word’. This makes it sound as if we could take a dictionary definition of a word, together with statements from a reliable English grammar book and infer from these that, e.g., ‘this is both red and blue’ is nonsense.

This is not how Wittgenstein saw it. To appreciate his view – and to understand what he meant *in the Big Typescript* when he wrote that what he was saying was what Kant meant by ‘7 + 5 = 12’ is synthetic *a priori*’ – we must, I think, give due prominence to his emphasis on the importance of an ‘*übersichtliche Darstellung*’ (translated in *Philosophical Remarks* as a ‘*bird’s-eye view*’, elsewhere as ‘perspicuous representation’).[[83]](#footnote-83)

Crucially, in the *Remarks*, Wittgenstein’s paradigm example of something that gives us such a ‘*bird’s eye view* of the grammatical rules’ is not a grammatical textbook, neither is it a proposition or series of propositions. It is rather a *three-dimensional object*: the colour octahedron, which, he says, ‘is grammar, since it says that you can speak of a reddish blue but not of a reddish green, etc.’[[84]](#footnote-84) The visual, non-propositional nature of Wittgenstein’s prime example of a perspicuous representation is, I think, of fundamental importance. The ‘grammatical rules’ to which he appeals as an alternative to the ‘analytic *a posteriori*’ analysis he briefly sought through phenomenological analysis are not the kind of thing which one customarily finds in a book of grammar. They are not propositions *at all*, which explains why they are neither analytic nor synthetic. They are things that one *sees*, not things that one can *say*.

Wittgenstein’s development during 1929 goes, I think, through these stages:

1. He starts by thinking that, to explain why ‘this is red and green’ is a contradiction, he needs to show why, in this and similar cases, the truth table for a conjunction has only three lines. The top line of the truth table for conjunction in those cases – the line where both conjuncts are true – does not really describe a possibility and so should not appear on the table. It does not describe a possible phenomenal reality and so should not, strictly speaking, be a possible proposition.

2. As our ordinary language seems to allow one to form such conjunctions, one must seek logical reality in the more fundamental language of phenomenology.

3. Then the thought occurs to him:

How strange if logic were concerned with an ‘ideal’ language and not with *ours*. For what would this ideal language express? Presumably, what we now express in our ordinary language; in that case, this is the language logic must investigate.[[85]](#footnote-85)

4. So, what he is concerned with *is*, after all, the logic, the grammar, of our ordinary language. His investigation is not, then, *a posteriori*. It cannot proceed by an investigation of *phenomena*:

If I could describe the point of grammatical conventions by saying they are made necessary by certain properties of the colours (say), then that would make the conventions superfluous, since in that case I would be able to say precisely that which the conventions exclude my saying. Conversely, if the conventions were necessary, i.e., if certain combinations of words had to be excluded as nonsensical, then for that very reason I cannot cite a property of colours that makes the conventions necessary, since it would then be conceivable that the colours should not have this property, and I could only express that by violating the conventions.[[86]](#footnote-86)

5. Thus, what we need to show that something *cannot possibly* be both red and green is not an analysis of phenomena, but an understanding of language, of the conventions, the rules, that prevent one from meaningfully asserting of something that it is both red and green. These conventions govern what it does and does not make sense to say; therefore there is no non-question-begging way of expressing them in meaningful propositions. In the language of the *Tractatus*, they need to be *shown* rather than *said*:

I do not call a rule of representation a convention if it can be justified in propositions: propositions describing what is represented and showing that the representation is adequate. Grammatical conventions cannot be justified by describing what is represented. Any such description already presupposes the grammatical rules. That is to say, if anything is to count as nonsense in the grammar which is to be justified, then it cannot at the same time pass for sense in the grammar of the propositions that justify it (etc.).[[87]](#footnote-87)

6 It follows that, as philosophers, we are not looking for the propositions that state the rules that exclude certain expressions (like ‘that is red and green’); rather we are looking for ways to enable someone to command a clear view of the grammar of our language. The ways of doing this are many and varied. What they have in common is that their result is that someone *sees* that something or other ‘*must* be the case’, which is another way of saying that certain expressions *have no meaning*.

The movement from 1 to 6 is, I believe, reflected in the different contexts provided by the *Remarks* and the Big Typescript for Wittgenstein’s comparison between what he is saying and what Kant meant when he invoked the synthetic a priori. In the *Remarks*, the context is a discussion about the nature of arithmetical equations: are they or are they not tautologies? Wittgenstein’s answer is that they are not, which, in a readily intelligible sense, connects his thought to Kant’s view that such equations are synthetic a priori. The Big Typescript/*Philosophical Grammar* contains, as I have said, many of these remarks designed to show the non-tautological nature of arithmetical equations, and yet he re-positions his remark about Kant, placing it now at the end of his discussion of mathematical induction and periodicity. Why?

The answer, I think, is to be found in the chapter of the Big Typescript entitled ‘Philosophy’, and, in particular, the section on ‘The Method of Philosophy’, where Wittgenstein says:

The concept of a surveyable representation [*übersichtliche Darstellung*] is of fundamental significance for us. It designates our form of representation, the way we look at things. (A kind of “*Weltanschauung*”)

This surveyable representation provides just that kind of understanding that consists in our “seeing connections”.[[88]](#footnote-88)

This notion of a surveyable representation is picked up again in the section called ‘Phenomenology is Grammar’, where he says:

The investigation of the rules of our language, the recognition of these rules, and their clearly surveyable representation amounts to, i.e., accomplishes the same thing as, what one often wants to achieve in constructing a phenomenological language.[[89]](#footnote-89)

He goes on to compare the understanding of an ecclesiastical mode of music – which requires one to ‘hear something new, something that I haven’t heard before’ – with suddenly being able to see 10 lines, which previously he had only been able to see as two lots of five, as a ‘characteristic whole’.[[90]](#footnote-90)

It is this ‘understanding that consists in seeing connections’ that is demonstrated by the people he imagines in his discussions of mathematical induction and periodicity who suddenly *see* that (n): n > 2 .⊃. 3 × n ≠ 5 *has* to be true for all values of n and that the quotient of 1/3  *cannot possibly* contain anything but 3s. What they are seeing is not the truth of a proposition, but rather something about the grammar of our numerical expressions. The statements ‘(∃n) n > 2 .⊃. 3 × n = 5’ and ‘the quotient of 1/3 contains at least one 4’ are not false but meaningless, as is the statement ‘this is red and it is green’. The rules that show these expressions to be meaningless are not propositions – whether one conceives these propositions to be tautologies, synthetic a priori or ‘analytic a posteriori’ – rather they are what one *sees* when one achieves insight into how we use the words of our language. The ‘temptations of phenomenology’ are those of imagining that there is any more to it than that.

1. Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *The Big Typescript TS 213*, edited and translated by C. Grant Luckhardt and Maximilian A. E. Aue (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005); Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Philosophical Grammar*, edited by Rush Rhees (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974). For a detailed analysis of the relationship between these two texts, see Kenny, Anthony, ‘From the Big Typescript to the *Philosophical Grammar*’, in *The Legacy of Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984): 24-37. For a detailed history of TS 213, see the editors’ and translators’ introduction to *The Big Typescript TS 213*. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See Van Peursen, C. H. ‘Edmund Husserl and Ludwig Wittgenstein’, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 20 (1959) No. 2: 181-97 and Munson, Thomas N. ‘Wittgenstein's Phenomenology’, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 23 (1962) No. 1: 37-50 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For an extremely enlightening account of the Royaumont conference, see Overgaard, Soren, ‘Royaumont Revisited’, *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 18 (2010) No. 5: 899-924. The papers given at the conference were published (in French) in *La philosophie analytique* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1962). English translations of J. O. Urmson’s paper, ‘The History of Analysis’, and of P. F. Strawson’s paper, ‘Analysis, Science and Metaphysics’, together with the discussions that followed each of them, can be found in Rorty, Richard M. (ed.), *The Linguistic Turn* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967): 294-330. For an English translation of Gilbert Ryle’s paper, ‘Phenomenology versus “The Concept of Mind”’, see Ryle, Gilbert, *Collected Papers Volume 1* (London: Unwin, 1971): 179-196. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ryle, *Collected Papers Volume 1*, 182. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Dummett, Michael, *Origins of Analytical Philosophy* (London: Duckworth, 1993) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid., 26 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See Spiegelberg, Herbert, ‘The Puzzle of Wittgenstein’s Phänomenologie’, *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 5 (1968) No. 4: 244-56. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid., 244 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Ibid, 244-5 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. See (in chronological order) Karuda, Wataru, ‘Phenomenology and Grammar: A Consideration of the Relation between Husserl’s Logical Investigations and Wittgenstein’s Later Philosophy’, *Analecta Husserliana*, 8 (1978): 89-107; Gier, Nicholas F. *Wittgenstein and Phenomenology: A Comparative Study of the Later Wittgenstein*, *Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty*, Albany: SUNY Press, 1981; Spiegelberg, Herbert, ‘Wittgenstein Calls His Philosophy “Phenomenology”’, *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, 13 (1982) No. 3: 296-99; Reeder, Harry P. *Language and Experience: Descriptions of Living Language in Husserl and Wittgenstein*, Washington D.C.: University Press of America, 1984; Hintikka, Merrill B. and Hintikka, Jaako, *Investigating Wittgenstein*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1986; Reeder, Harry P. ‘Wittgenstein Never Was a Phenomenologist’, *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, 20 (1989) No. 3: 49-68; Gier, Nicholas F. ‘Wittgenstein’s Phenomenology Revisited’, *Philosophy Today*, 34 (1990) No. 3: 273-288; Rigel, Elizabeth ‘The Duality of Wittgenstein’s Phenomenological Actuality’ in *Wittgenstein and Contemporary Theories of Language* edited by P. Henry and A. Utaker (Bergen: WAB, 1992) 62-83; Noë, Robert Alva, ‘Wittgenstein, Phenomenology and What it Makes Sense to Say’, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 54 (1994) No. 1: 1-42; Park, Byong-Chul, *Phenomenological Aspects of Wittgenstein’s Philosophy*, Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1998; Morgan, Matthew R. ‘Husserlian Aspects of Wittgenstein’s Middle Period’, *Pre-Proceedings of the 26th International Wittgenstein Symposium* (Kirchberg am Wechsel: Austrian Ludwig Wittgenstein Society, 2003) 245-247; Boos, William, ‘A Metalogical Critique of Wittgensteinian Phenomenology’, *Quantifiers, Questions and Quantum Physics: Essays on the Philosophy of Jaakko Hintikka*, edited by Daniel Kolak and John Symons (New York: Springer, 2004) 75-99; Gálvez, Jesús Padilla (Ed.), *Phenomenology as Grammar*, Frankfurt: Ontos Verlag, 2008; Overgaard, Soren, ‘How to Analyse Immediate Experience: Hintikka, Husserl and the Idea of Phenomenology’, *Metaphilosophy*, 39 (2008) No. 3: 282-304; Zhang, Qingxiong, ‘Wittgenstein’s reconsideration of the transcendental problem - With some remarks on the relation between Wittgenstein’s “phenomenology” and Husserl’s phenomenology’, *Frontiers of Philosophy in China*, 3 (2008) No. 1: 123–138; Overgaard, Soren and Zahavi, Dan, ‘Understanding (other) minds; Wittgenstein’s phenomenological contribution’, in *Wittgenstein’s Enduring Arguments* edited by Edoardo Zamuner and D. K. Levy (London: Routledge, 2009) 60-86. This might seem a fairly long list, but fifteen publications in forty-three years is, I would insist, surprisingly little. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Spiegelberg, Herbert, ‘The Puzzle of Wittgenstein’s Phänomenologie’, *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 5 (1968) No. 4: 254. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. See Gier, Nicholas F. *Wittgenstein and Phenomenology: A Comparative Study of the Later Wittgenstein, Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty*, Albany: SUNY Press, 1981: 113 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. See *Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle: Conversations Recorded by Friedrich Waismann*, edited by Brian McGuinness, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979): 67-8 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Published in English as ‘Is There a Factual *A Priori*?’, in Schlick, Moritz, *Philosophical Papers Volume II (1925-1936)* edited by Henk L. Mulder and Barbara B. van de Velde-Schlick (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1979): 161-170. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Ibid, 165. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Ibid, 169. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Gier, *Wittgenstein and Phenomenology*, 35 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Ibid., 157 [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Ibid., 158 [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Ibid. See also ‘Wittgenstein’s Phenomenology Revisited’, 276 [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Diamond, Cora (ed.), *Wittgenstein’s Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics Cambridge, 1939* (Hassocks, Sussex: Harvester, 1976), 232 [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. *Philosophical Remarks*, 129 [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. *The Big Typescript TS 213*, 451; *Philosophical Grammar*, 404 [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. See *Wittgenstein and Phenomenology*, 35, where Gier quotes the remark from *Philosophical Grammar*, but cites the *Remarks* as one of its source. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. ‘Wittgenstein’s Phenomenology Revisited’, 276. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. I earlier argued that the view Schlick attributes to Wittgenstein – namely, that grammatical statements are analytic – is likewise confused and that his mistake and Gier’s are mirror images of each other. It might be supposed that, to argue that both are mistaken is to argue that Wittgenstein believed in a ‘middle way’ between the analytic and the synthetic, a belief that his comments to Schlick show he did *not* hold. This, however, is to mistake what Wittgenstein meant by ‘middle way’; he was not dismissing the possibility of a middle way between the analytic and the synthetic (he did, I maintain (and will seek to establish below), believe in *that* middle ground, and he believed grammatical rules to occupy it). What he did not believe existed was any “middle way” between *rules of grammar* and material, synthetic statements, between, that is, logic and science. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. *Philosophical Remarks*, 126 [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Ibid, 126-7 [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Ibid, 126 [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Ibid, 129 [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Ibid, 130 [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. *The Big Typescript TS 213*, 448; *Philosophical Grammar*, 400 [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. I am grateful to my son, Zeno (whose mathematical gifts are much greater than my own), for talking this proof through with me. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. *The Big Typescript TS 213*, 423; *Philosophical Grammar*, 367 [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. *The Big Typescript TS 213*, 444; *Philosophical Grammar*, 396 (the wording quoted is that in the *Grammar*) [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. *The Big Typescript TS 213*, 448; *Philosophical Grammar*, 400 (where it is translated slightly differently). [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Ibid, 449 and 401 respectively (I have used here the translation in the *Grammar*, which seems to me slightly better). [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Ibid, 423 and 366 (again, the wording quoted is that in the *Grammar*). [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Ibid, 429 and 376. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Ibid, 448 and 400-1 [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Ibid, 449 (where the multiplication sign has been replaced – surely erroneously – by the sign for addition) and 401. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Ibid, 449 and 402 [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Ibid, 450, 402. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Ibid, 450, 403 [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Ibid, 450, 403 [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Ibid, 451, 404. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. *Remarks*, 129 [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. *The Big Typescript TS 213*, 409, *Philosophical Grammar*, 347 [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. See *Wittgenstein and Phenomenology*, 35 and 158 (also ‘Wittgenstein’s Phenomenology Revisited’, 276), where Gier cites *Remarks on the Foundation of Mathematics* (New York: Macmillan, 1956), 125-6. The relevant passages appear in the third edition (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978), 245-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. *Remarks on the Foundation of Mathematics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978), 245-6 [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. There is a similarity between this notion of the ‘analytic a posteriori’ (a term that, of course, is not used by Wittgenstein, or, as far as I know, by *anyone*) and the notion of the ‘phenomenally analytic’ that P. F. Strawson uses in the final chapter of *The Bounds of Sense*. There, Strawson invokes the notion as a partial defence of Kant’s theory of geometry, arguing that what Kant says about geometry might be accorded some legitimacy if interpreted as being about, not physical geometry, but ‘phenomenal geometry’. This latter, Strawson says, would study, for example, ‘phenomenal straight lines’, which ‘are not physical objects, or physical edges which, when we see them, look straight… [but] rather just the looks themselves which physical things have when, and in so far as, they look straight’. (Strawson, P. F. *The Bounds of Sense*, London: Methuen, 1966,282). Like Wittgenstein in his use of the notion I am calling the ‘analytic a posteriori’, Strawson invokes the notion of ‘phenomenally analytic’ in an effort to find some middle ground between the tautological and the synthetic. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Copi, Irving M. and Beard, Robert W. (eds.), *Essays on Wittgenstein’s Tractatus* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), 31-8. The paper was written for (but not read at) the 1929 Annual Joint Session of the Aristotelian Society and Mind Association, held in Nottingham, 12-15 July. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. *Mind*, 32 (128), 1923, 465-78, reprinted in *Essays on Wittgenstein’s Tractatus*, 9-23. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Ibid, 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Quite apart from the logical difficulties mentioned by Ramsey, this particle theory of light and colour had, of course, at the time Wittgenstein was writing the *Tractatus*, long been abandoned in favour of a wave theory that regards different colours as produced by different *frequencies*. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. *Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle*, 64 [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. *Essays on Wittgenstein’s Tractatus*, 32 [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Ibid, 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. *Remarks*, 273. It is important to note that in *Philosophical Remarks* the remarks do *not* appear in the order in which they were written. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. See MS 105, 89-90 [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Husserl, Edmund, *Logical Investigations Volume One* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), 262. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Ibid, 262-3 [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Ibid, 261 [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. *Philosophical Remarks*, 83. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Ibid, 98 [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Ibid, 103. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Ibid, 100 [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Ibid, 102 [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Soren Overgaard and Dan Zahavi, in their essay ‘Understanding (other) minds: Wittgenstein’s phenomenological contribution’ (in Zamuner, Edoardo and Levy, D. K. (eds), *Wittgenstein’s Enduring Arguments* (London: Routledge, 2009, 60-86), quote some comments I made about these Husserlian passages from section VII of the *Remarks* in a much earlier, very different and unpublished version of this current paper. There, I described them as ‘absurd’, ‘embarrassing’ and a ‘momentary lapse’. I would not now speak so disparagingly of them, though, as I hope to show, Wittgenstein’s adherence to this way of looking at things was indeed ‘momentary’. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Ibid, 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. MS 107, 175. There are very good discussions of the change that took place in Wittgenstein’s thought in October 1929, and the contrast between what he wrote after that change and what he had written earlier on phenomenology, in Paul, Denis, *Wittgenstein’s Progress 1929-1951* (Bergen, Wittgenstein Archives, 2007) and also in Noë, Robert Alva, ‘Wittgenstein, Phenomenology and What It Makes Sense to Sat’, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 54 (1), 1994, 1-42 [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. *Investigating Wittgenstein*, 138 [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. ‘Wittgenstein’s Phenomenology Revisited’, 276-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. See *Remarks*, 52 [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Ibid, 75 [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Ibid, 52 [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Ibid, 53 [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Ibid, 55 [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. *The Big Typescript: TS 213*, 307-8 [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Ibid, 320 [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Ibid, 322 [↑](#footnote-ref-90)