

# THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL FALLACY AND SARTRE'S ILLUSION OF IMMANENCE: ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY OF MIND AND PHENOMENOLOGY AGAINST MENTAL REIFICATION

– Simon Gusman –

**Abstract.** Throughout the history of analytic philosophy the notion of the ‘phenomenological fallacy’ originally formulated by Place, has been used to criticize reification of the mental. Although this fallacy was originally not used to criticize the phenomenological tradition, it has popped up recently in debates between analytic philosophers and phenomenologists. However, a study of the history of both traditions reveals that a polemical notion similar, if not identical, to the phenomenological fallacy can be found within the phenomenological tradition, namely Sartre’s ‘illusion of immanence’. In this article, I will explicate these two polemical notions and place them in the context of their respective traditions. This will reveal that both notions must be understood as criticism of a certain form of representationalism I will call ‘dual-world representationalism’. This deep-rooted similarity between analytic philosophy of mind and phenomenology, in turn, sheds a new light on current discussions between the two traditions. On a final note, I compare the criticism to the views of Metzinger, a contemporary analytic philosopher who uses the phenomenological fallacy to accuse his adversaries.

**Keywords:** phenomenological fallacy, illusion of immanence, mental reification, phenomenology, representationalism, analytic-continental divide, Jean-Paul Sartre.

## 1. Introduction

Although there have been many intersections in the last years, there is still much bad blood between phenomenology and analytic philosophy of mind. An example of this is the notion of the ‘phenomenological fallacy’, originally formulated by U.T. Place.<sup>1</sup> This is a polemical term used in analytic philosophy of mind to accuse someone of mistaking their own experience of the world for how things are when we abstract from their experience. It is ambiguous whether the fallacy is meant to accuse phenomenologists, as the term ‘phenomenological’ is used to refer

---

<sup>1</sup> Place [1956].

to both the phenomenological method and movement on the one hand, and to phenomenal experience on the other.<sup>2</sup> However, this choice of words becomes precarious and can be misinterpreted easily when the two traditions meet, as they often have in recent years.

However, in recent debates between the two traditions, the analytic philosopher Thomas Metzinger uses the fallacy to accuse those who think that the objects of our phenomenal experience genuinely exist, of committing what he calls the error of phenomenological reification: they treat the contents of experience as though they were internal and nonphysical things, rather than a temporal process.<sup>3</sup> He does not accuse a specific philosopher, but thinks it is the view of common sense or 'folk-psychology'.<sup>4</sup> However, in his discussion with phenomenologist Dan Zahavi, he also regards the phenomenological tradition as a 'dressed-up form of folk psychology'.<sup>5</sup> Thereby, he implicitly does accuse phenomenology of committing the phenomenological fallacy. Furthermore, he regards Zahavi's attempts at introducing notions of the phenomenological tradition in contemporary debates to be solely of historical value.<sup>6</sup> He goes on to ask: 'Where is the phenomenological contribution that lives up to the standards of conceptual precision of today's best current philosophy of mind?'<sup>7</sup>

Many theoretical reasons can be given as to why an accusation of committing the phenomenological fallacy addressed at phenomenology is unfounded. In this article, however, I will show that the accusation is questionable from a historical perspective. A very similar polemical notion can namely be found within the phenomenological tradition. This is the 'illusion of immanence' coined by Sartre, little more than a decade before Place.<sup>8</sup> A closer study of the phenomenological fallacy on the one hand and the illusion of immanence on the other will show that, historically, analytic philosophy of mind and phenomenology are actually very similar in their criticism of the reification of the mental.

---

<sup>2</sup> Zahavi [2005] p. 11–12.

<sup>3</sup> Metzinger [2003] p. 22, 271.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 22.

<sup>5</sup> Metzinger [2006] p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*. Zahavi has done a great deal of introducing notions from the phenomenological tradition, primarily of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, in analytic debates. The most prominent publications are: Gallagher, Zahavi [2008]; Zahavi [2014].

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>8</sup> Sartre [1940, 2004a].

The first part of this article will be an examination of the phenomenological fallacy as it was introduced by Place in his article *Is consciousness a brain process?*<sup>9</sup> Place's position will be elucidated by comparing it to a similar view found in the works of one of his main inspirations, Gilbert Ryle's *The Concept of Mind*.<sup>10</sup> Ryle offers similar criticism, albeit in the debate concerning imagination rather than perception, as Place does. It will be shown that the criticism of reification is rooted in the criticism of a broader view, namely a form of representationalism that entails a dualism of an inner and outer world. In the second part, I will focus on the similar criticism of mental reification and representationalism found in the phenomenological tradition, focusing on Sartre's illusion of immanence as presented in *The Imaginary*.<sup>11</sup> The notion will be traced back through the inspiration he took from Husserl, in order to clarify the notion and show that the criticism is more broadly represented within the phenomenological tradition. Sartre and Husserl also offer their criticism of reification in different debates. Sartre, like Ryle, discusses imagination, while Husserl discusses both perception and mental life in general. On a final note, I will briefly compare Metzinger's own views on experience to the criticism offered in both traditions, in order to show that he himself commits the phenomenological fallacy he uses to accuse phenomenology.

## 2. The Phenomenological Fallacy: Place and Ryle

As said, the term 'phenomenological fallacy' has been coined by Place. In his article, it is Place's goal to debunk certain presuppositions about consciousness which stand in the way of a scientific explanation of consciousness. One of these presuppositions is the idea that there are two sets of events in reality, one physico-chemical, and another psychical.<sup>12</sup> This idea is caused by a certain mistake. The definition, which is also quoted by Metzinger,<sup>13</sup> is as follows:

This logical mistake, which I shall refer to as the 'phenomenological fallacy,' is the mistake of supposing that when the subject describes his experience, when he describes how things look, sound, smell, taste, or feel to him, he is describing the literal properties of objects and events on a peculiar sort of internal cinema or televi-

---

<sup>9</sup> Place [1956].

<sup>10</sup> Ryle [1949].

<sup>11</sup> Sartre [2004a].

<sup>12</sup> Place [1956] p. 49.

<sup>13</sup> Metzinger [2003] p. 22.

sion screen, usually referred to in the modern psychological literature as the 'phenomenal field.'<sup>14</sup>

The phenomenological fallacy, as described here by Place, is a certain form of representationalism.<sup>15</sup> This is a view of perception which states that our perceptual experience does not grant us direct access to the world around us, but only via representations or duplications of the objects in the world, projected inside of us.

In contrast with Metzinger, Place does not associate the fallacy with the view of common sense, but rather with the bunk of psychologists, physiologists and past philosophers, none of which he refers to by name.<sup>16</sup> However, like Metzinger, Place thinks the fallacy has experiential origins. What gives rise to the fallacy are experiences in which there seems to be an object present to us, but there is actually none. He gives the example of the afterimage: If you look at a red light, and move away your gaze, you experience a green blob. There is nothing green in your surroundings, so you infer that there must be something green somewhere else. Because it is not outside, it must be somehow inside of you. This type of reasoning causes people to assume the existence of some kind of mental realm. Once the existence of this realm is posited, this reasoning concerning absent objects is then applied to all experience. This causes the mental realm to be conceived of as some kind of a copy of the outside world. So, when we describe our experience, we describe the features of these copied images. According to Place, this is a mistaken assumption:

The phenomenological fallacy [...] depends on the mistaken assumption that because our ability to describe things in our environment depends on our consciousness of them, our descriptions of things are primarily descriptions of our conscious experience and only secondarily, indirectly and inferentially descriptions of the objects and events in our environments.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Place [1956] p. 49.

<sup>15</sup> Representationalism as understood here is the idea that we do not directly perceive the world outside of us but only perceive internal objects that act as pictures or signs of the objects in the external world. This view should not be confused with the more recent form of representationalism present in philosophy of mind in which the conscious experiences themselves are regarded as representational, not their objects. These two forms of representationalism are often contrasted by the first classic representationalism as opposed to modern representationalism. Cf. Seager, Bourget [2007].

<sup>16</sup> Place [1956] p. 49.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*.

This mistake is the reason why the mental realm is compared to a cinema or television screen on which a projected image of the world can be seen. When we look at a television program about trains, we only see trains on a screen, which depict trains somewhere in the world. In the case of the afterimage, there is some kind of disturbance in this process which causes something to appear on the screen which does not correspond to something outside of us. This view is the inversion of how perception works according to Place. When we describe how something looks, sounds, smells, tastes or feels, we describe actual properties of those things. Only secondarily can we describe our consciousness of them. When we describe our experience, we do not describe properties of our experience, or as Place calls them, phenomenal properties. Rather we describe 'the things themselves',<sup>18</sup> as Place, perhaps unknowingly, invokes the famous phenomenological slogan.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, committing the phenomenological fallacy amounts to more than just mental reification. It means adhering to a certain representationalist view of perception, of which reification is only one facet. In this view, we do not directly perceive the objects in the outside world, but rather objects within ourselves. This seems to correspond to the phenomenological reification Metzinger stresses.<sup>20</sup> But the view is more elaborate than just this. The objects are conceived of as having the same kind of sensible properties that things in the outside world have, i.e., colors, sounds, smells, shapes, etc. Because of their similarity to things in the outside world, they are also conceived of as spatial, which causes the mental realm itself to be seen as a literal place, a spatial container of some sort. Place calls this the 'mysterious internal environment' and the 'mythological "phenomenal field"'.<sup>21</sup> This place mirrors the outside world not only in its structure, but also in its content. That is to say, the inner environment depicting the outside world, hence the metaphor of cinema or television. Thus, if I look at a chair, there is an image of chair projected in the inner realm which represents the chair in front of me, but is a different object. This view is a specific subversion of representationalism, as it adds the idea that the representations have the same threefold structure as the physical

---

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>19</sup> Husserl stated in the introduction to his *Logical Investigations* that 'we must go back to the "things themselves"' (Husserl [2001a] p. 168). He meant by this that in order to fruitfully study our experience, we must get rid of our theoretical presuppositions and focus solely on experience, and the things as they appear in experience, themselves. This became one of the central ideas of phenomenology, and 'to think things themselves' became the unofficial slogan. Hickerson [2007] p. 19.

<sup>20</sup> Metzinger [2003] p. 22.

<sup>21</sup> Ibidem, p. 44, 49.

world, namely that of objects with properties that reside in a spatial container. It is a kind of duality which entails duplication not only of an object, but also of worlds: one physical world outside of us, and another psychological world on the inside.

Although Place is the first one to use the term 'phenomenological fallacy', he mentions Wittgenstein and Ryle as philosophers who already took steps towards his goal to show that consciousness is ultimately a brain process.<sup>22</sup> Ryle criticizes a similar view, especially considering the duplication of worlds.<sup>23</sup> The primary focus of his main work, *The Concept of Mind*, is to get rid of 'Descartes' myth' and 'the dogma of the ghost in the machine', which entails mind-matter dualism. He also emphasizes the spatial nature of this view, calling it the 'two-worlds myth', 'two-worlds story' or 'two-worlds legend'.<sup>24</sup> This myth is, however, a less precise position than Place's dual-world representationalism. It encompasses all philosophical positions that make a strict distinction between the physical and the mental, and claim that although bodies exist in the physical world, mental events exist in another realm. This view is not only prevalent in philosophy of perception, but prominent in many philosophical disciplines. It is also considered to be the view of common sense, and Ryle ultimately blames the way we ordinarily speak about the mental for it.<sup>25</sup> Ryle's aim is to reexamine mental concepts in order to show that they do not entail separate mental and physical processes.

In his discussion of the mental activity of imagination, Ryle criticizes a version of the two-world story that corresponds more closely to the representationalism of the phenomenological fallacy. We are easily tempted to say of imaginations or images that they exist within the mind, but this amounts to a mistake similar to the type of reasoning about after-images Place mentions:

What are spoken of as 'visual images', 'mental pictures', 'auditory images' [...] are commonly taken to be entities which are genuinely found existing and found existing elsewhere than in the external world. So minds are nominated for their theatres.

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibidem, p. 44.

<sup>23</sup> Although Wittgenstein employs the same kind of reasoning in the *Philosophical Investigations* mentioned by Place, he does not address the problem in terms of two worlds. He does this explicitly, however, in the posthumously published *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology* [1990] and *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology* [1998]. Although written before Place's article, they were not published until 1980 and 1982, respectively. Therefore, I will not discuss them here any further.

<sup>24</sup> Ryle [2009] p. 1, 5, 13, 118, 121.

<sup>25</sup> Ibidem, p. 1.

Ryle speaks of the mental images involved in imagination in the same way as Place talks about perception in general. Because images are not outside of us in the same manner as physical objects, they must exist inside of us. The kind of spatial reasoning is similar. People ask the question about the location of the after-image and conclude that because it is not in the surroundings, it must be in a mental location. In the same way, because we talk about seeing mental images as in Ryle's case, we ask the question where they are, assuming that they have a location. This means that the images are taken to be genuinely existing entities in a mental world in the same manner as physical entities relate to the outside world. Instead of the television screen, Ryle invokes the similar metaphor of the theatre, and also calls it 'a gallery which only he can visit'.<sup>26</sup> The story is thus the same as the one Place criticizes. This view of imagination invokes two worlds which share the same threefold structure of objects, properties and spatiality, and the mental world is seen as representing the outside one. Unlike Place but like Metzinger, Ryle regards this to be the view of common sense.

According to Ryle, the idea that causes this conception of the mental is that seeing and picturing are the same process. The only difference is that the things observed are situated in different worlds. The difference between these worlds is that the physical world is accessible to everyone, while the internal world is a private affair. This misconception arose because we speak about mental imaginary as things seen by the mind's eye. Furthermore, because seeing and picturing are regarded as similar activities, the things pictured are conceived of as accurate portraits of things in the outside world. Thus, if someone is picturing a mountain, we regard this image of the mountain as having the same relation to the mountain as a photograph of the mountain has.<sup>27</sup>

This confusion about picturing and seeing brings us to the main difference between Place and Ryle. Although the duality of worlds and the representational structure is identical, Ryle's argument is aimed at those who consider imagination to be similar to perception, while Place's argument is aimed at a theory of perception. The position of the phenomenological fallacy is about our access to the outside world, whereas the position Ryle criticized is a wrong conception of mental imaginary. The difference is that for Place all perception of the outside world requires representation, while for Ryle only imagination does so. In Ryle's version, sensory perception is seeing an object outside of you, while picturing is seeing

---

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 224.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*.

a representation inside of you. In Place's view, sensory perception itself evokes the uses of the world of images.

Place does not discuss the difference between sensory perception and imagination. However, if we consider the fact that the afterimage is seen as an anomaly on the screen, we can argue that in imagination something similar is the case. Something is depicted on the inner screen, which does not immediately correspond to something present outside of us. If we consider this, and the fact that Ryle dismisses any kind of 'two-world story', we can say that the underlying representational model is the same, regardless of where one draws the line between when objects appear in the inner world. That is, whether representation is involved only in imagination or in all forms of experience.

Ryle dismisses the two-world myth by showing that the way we speak about mental images as things that can be seen by the mind's eye is wrong. He thinks that there is a process of imagination, but that this does not entail images.<sup>28</sup> Rather, if we imagine seeing a chair, we imagine a chair in front of us, or perhaps in another place in the physical world, but never detached from the physical world.<sup>29</sup> Even if we imagine something for which there is no equivalent in the world, for example a dragon, we imagine a dragon as if it were in the world.<sup>30</sup> Upon closer inspection, imagination does not work the same way as seeing, and we do not need mental pictures to account for it. In Ryle's words: 'there is thus no need to treat minds as the clandestine habitats of such fleshless beings'.<sup>31</sup> This alternative is similar to Place's debunking of the phenomenological fallacy. Once we realize that we do not describe our experience in terms of properties of objects in the phenomenal field, but describe our experience by reference to the objects outside of us, there is no need to invoke the existence of a mental realm. In the case of the afterimage, we describe properties of objects that would ordinarily cause us to have that experience. So the green afterimage is not something before us, but an experience that corresponds to the experience of seeing something green which is there.<sup>32</sup>

Whether this solution is convincing or not, Place thinks that now nothing stands in the way of a full explanation of conscious experience in terms of brain processes. He thereby paves the way for a position that is now adhered to by

---

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 224–225.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 233.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 228.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 232.

<sup>32</sup> Place [1956] p. 49.

Metzinger and other analytic philosophers of mind: that ultimately neuroscience can give a full explanation of conscious life.<sup>33</sup> This motive, however, is absent from Ryle's thought. Place even thinks Ryle's theories in the end still allow too much of the inner processes.<sup>34</sup> Ryle's aim is not to do away with the dual-world view to ultimately choose between those worlds and opt for the physical one, but rather to re-evaluate the words we use to describe the mental.

Thus, although the alternatives and the debates in which this theme surfaces differ, the criticism of these early philosophers of mind is the same. Both philosophers dismiss the reification of the mental, and both thinkers discuss this in the context of a broader criticism of a view of mental representationalism that involves a dual-world structure.

### 3. The Illusion of Immanence: Sartre and Husserl

We have seen that Metzinger's use of Place's phenomenological fallacy should be understood not just as a criticism of the reification of the mental, but of a dual-world representationalism which entails this reification. As we will see, criticism of this very specific view of the mental can also be found within the phenomenological tradition. As said in the introduction, a striking similarity is the polemical term similar to the phenomenological fallacy. It is found in Sartre's discussion of the imagination in *The Imaginary*.<sup>35</sup> In this work, before giving his own theory of imagination, he presents the view he aims to criticize:

[W]e have so far committed a double error. We thought, without justifying it to ourselves, that the image was *in* consciousness and that the object of the image was *in* the image. We depicted consciousness as a place peopled with small imitations and these imitations were the images. Without any doubt, the origin of this illusion must be sought in our habit of thinking in space and in terms of space. I will call it: the *illusion of immanence*. [...] [I]f we accept the illusion of immanence, we are necessarily led to constitute the world of the mind from objects very similar to those of the external world and which, simply, obey different laws.<sup>36</sup>

[W]e would fall into the illusion of immanence: we would implicitly suppose that there exist two complementary worlds: one of things and one of images [...]. This is

---

<sup>33</sup> Metzinger [2009] p. 1.

<sup>34</sup> Place [1954], [1956] p. 44.

<sup>35</sup> Sartre [2004a].

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 5–6.

putting images on the same plane as things, giving both the same type of existence.<sup>37</sup>

These quotes show the striking similarity between the view Sartre criticizes and the one addressed by Place and Ryle. Sartre's polemic notion – the illusion of immanence – consists of the same errors as its analytic counterpart. The mental is wrongly taken to be of a spatial nature. He also uses the same 'two world' terminology as Ryle, an external and a mental world: 'one of things and one of images'.<sup>38</sup> The reification is also present, as the inner world is taken to contain literal objects, images, with the 'the same type of existence' as things.<sup>39</sup> In his earlier work, *The Imagination*, Sartre had another polemical term for this, etymologically similar to reification. He accused Descartes, Hume and Leibniz of 'thingism'.<sup>40</sup> The third factor of the threefold structure is also present, as Sartre draws attention to the fact that these image-things are regarded as having the same kind of phenomenal properties, such as colors, shapes and smells, as things. As Sartre states: 'The illusion of immanence consists in transferring the externality, spatiality, and all the sensible qualities of the thing to the transcendent psychic content'.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, Sartre addresses the idea of the projection or depiction of the outer world, as the images are taken to be small imitations of things in the outside world. Finally, Sartre emphasizes, like Ryle, that this is the view of common sense, as well as that of many past philosophers, as Place does.<sup>42</sup>

Thus, the illusion of immanence and the phenomenological fallacy are very similar polemical notions used to address the same dual-world representationalism. However, Sartre is not addressing a view of perception as Place does. Like Ryle, he discusses this view in the debate concerning imagination.<sup>43</sup> Sartre uses the same type of reasoning concerning the misidentification of picturing as a form of seeing. He uses the example of looking at a chair, then clos-

---

<sup>37</sup> Ibidem, p. 43

<sup>38</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>39</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>40</sup> Sartre [2012] p. 6, 20.

<sup>41</sup> Sartre [2004a] p. 53.

<sup>42</sup> The fact that Sartre argues against common sense shows that the idea, shared by Metzinger and Zahavi, that phenomenology is a dressed-up version of folk psychology, is not in accordance with Sartre's own ideas on what phenomenology entails. Zahavi [2005] p. 12; Metzinger [2006].

<sup>43</sup> Apart from the many similarities in the criticism they offer, Sartre's and Ryle's alternatives are also very similar. For a comparison of the two accounts of imagination see: Turner [1968]; Ricoeur [1981].

ing your eyes and imagining the same chair.<sup>44</sup> Although Sartre thinks that both are acts of consciousness of the same object, namely the chair in the world outside of us, this criticism of mental imagery hinges on the idea that it can be compared with perception, which is assumed to be non-representational. Thus, Sartre's aversion against the inner world seems to be only applicable in the context of imagination, showing that his illusion of immanence is not the same as the phenomenological fallacy after all. However, if we take a closer look at the origins of the illusion, namely the ideas of Husserl that inspired Sartre, we will see that this is not the case. The illusion of immanence is embedded in Sartre's broader criticism of mental reification and the inner world in general, which is aimed at all consciousness, including perception.

Sartre's debt to Husserl becomes apparent when we look at Sartre's choice of words of the 'double error' in his formulation of the fallacy. At first glance, there seems to be no reason to divide the illusion in two errors. This seems to be, however, a reference to Husserl's appendix to the fifth logical investigation,<sup>45</sup> in which he distinguishes two 'ineradicable errors' concerning perception.<sup>46</sup> The first one of these errors is the 'image theory'. This image theory is the idea that each conscious act addressed at an object outside of us is mediated by an image or 'image-representation'.<sup>47</sup> Needless to say, this image theory is very similar to the theory of perception Place criticizes. However, it should be noted that Husserl's image theory is not the full-fledged dual-world representationalism as described by Place, Ryle and Sartre. He stresses the thing-like nature of the image, but does not yet speak in terms of an inner world in which the image resides.<sup>48</sup>

The second error seems to be where Sartre found the inspiration for calling the illusion that of immanence – a choice of words he does not explicitly justify. Husserl calls it the 'doctrine of the "immanent" objects of acts'.<sup>49</sup> This is the idea that although mental acts do not require a representational image in the sense of a mental copy or depiction, there is still reason to assume a so-called intentional object inside of consciousness. The type of existence is 'merely immanent', as op-

---

<sup>44</sup> Ibidem, p. 7.

<sup>45</sup> Cumming [1992] p. 46.

<sup>46</sup> Husserl [2001b] p. 125.

<sup>47</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>48</sup> Husserl does make one small remark here that relates to a spatial account of consciousness: 'One should not talk and think as if an image stood in the same relation to consciousness as a statue does to a room in which it is set up.' [2001b] p. 126.

<sup>49</sup> Husserl [2001b] p. 125.

posed to the genuinely existing image in the image theory.<sup>50</sup> This exposition of the doctrine of immanent objects is rather short, but Husserl discusses this topic more elaborately elsewhere, in a text called *Intentional Objects*, written earlier but published posthumously – and therefore unknown to Sartre.<sup>51</sup>

Husserl begins with describing several problems concerning non-existent objects that arise in the image theory. Consider the following: If one thinks about something which does not exist, the object may not exist, but there is still an image inside the inner realm which represents it. However, this image must exist if we are to be conscious of it. This causes two problems. The first problem is that the image of a non-existent object cannot be a true representation, because it cannot represent non-existence and exist at the same time. If it is no true representation, it cannot play its role as a mental image.<sup>52</sup> The second problem is that the image is used to ‘point at’ or make judgments about that object.<sup>53</sup> If the object does not exist, the image itself is the object at which the experience is pointed, thus abandoning the function of the image altogether. These problems show that the image theory cannot handle non-existent objects.

The doctrine of immanent object serves as a solution to these problems. It states that every conscious act contains an object, but this object has no “‘true’ existence’, it exists as ‘merely intentional’.<sup>54</sup> Whether the object truly exists or not is judged in a succeeding experience called an ‘existential judgment’. In this judgment, the intentional object is compared to a state of affairs in the outside world.<sup>55</sup> The first problem of the image theory seems not to arise, as all intentional objects have the same type of ‘merely intentional’ existence, whether the object is judged to exist or not. The second problem also seems to be avoided, as the ‘pointing’ of every intentional object is only determined in the existential judgment, and not in the experience itself.

Although it may look like the problems of the image theory are avoided, Husserl stresses that the doctrine of immanent objects entails the ‘false duplication which also doomed the image theory’ and ‘merely repeats the difficulty, only in

---

<sup>50</sup> Ibidem, p. 126.

<sup>51</sup> This text was written in 1894 and 1895, but was not published until 1979 (Husserl [1994], footnote 1). It is therefore safe to say that Sartre had not read this text when he wrote his works on imagination, and probably not in the last year before his death in 1980 either.

<sup>52</sup> Husserl [1994] p. 347–348.

<sup>53</sup> Ibidem, p. 348.

<sup>54</sup> Ibidem, p. 349.

<sup>55</sup> It should be noted that in most versions of representationalism the notion of the existential judgment does not make sense. If all consciousness requires representation, the things themselves can never be directly accessed in order to be compared to their representations.

different words'.<sup>56</sup> The first problem, that of the correspondence of the immanent object to the represented object, remains. Because the immanent object has another type of existence, it can never truly correspond to the outside world in which things fully exist or do not exist. It would simply be another object existing within consciousness, and for Husserl it is 'totally incomprehensible why we [...] allow it to be regarded as only a 'modified' existence'.<sup>57</sup> Things simply exist, or do not: there is no middle ground.

Furthermore, an existential judgment would only make sense if it is the existence of the immanent object itself that is judged about. If this is not the case, then merely thinking about Berlin and judging that it exists are conscious acts with two different objects. The first one is about the intentional object as it exists inside of consciousness, the second one is about the state of affairs as it exists in the outside world. This does not make any sense according to Husserl, for 'whether we merely represent Berlin, or judge it to be existing, in either case we are dealing with Berlin itself'.<sup>58</sup> This also goes for non-existent objects. Merely thinking about a centaur concerns the intentional object, while the thought 'centaurs does not exist' is about the outside world.<sup>59</sup> The existential judgments are by definition not about the immanent object but about a state of affairs in the world. This object always has a mere intentional type of existence, and cannot therefore be judged to truly exist or not. Existential judgments would therefore only make sense if they were about the true object. Thus, the solution of allowing the existence of mere immanent objects does not solve the problems of the image theory at all and there is for Husserl no further reason to assume such objects.

As said, Sartre had no access to Husserl's precise criticism of the doctrine of immanent objects as described here. He does, however, find his inspiration in Husserl's alternative to the immanent object.<sup>60</sup> Without going into details, Husserl refines the concept of intentionality by stating that consciousness is always structured as being directed at an object that transcends consciousness.<sup>61</sup> Even in cases where there is no object in the outside world, the object is still presented as being outside of the act.<sup>62</sup> The division between the intentional act of consciousness on

---

<sup>56</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 351.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 350.

<sup>60</sup> Sartre [2012] p. 129–130.

<sup>61</sup> Føllesdal [1978] p. 89.

<sup>62</sup> Føllesdal [1969] p. 680.

the one hand and the transcendent object on the other is Husserl's essential discovery according to Sartre.<sup>63</sup> He regards the notion to have 'as a goal the fighting of the errors of a certain immanentism that wants to constitute the world from contents of consciousness'.<sup>64</sup> However, Sartre means by immanentism any theory that allows for contents of consciousness. Sartre considers Husserl's notion of intentionality 'the essential principle of phenomenology'.<sup>65</sup> He uses it in his own theory of imagination by defending the view that what we call an image is actually an intentional act and not a thing.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, the notion is the main inspiration for Sartre's entire early philosophical project: to purge consciousness from all its contents.<sup>67</sup> For Sartre, this means that all (non-reflective) conscious experiences are always directed at an object outside of consciousness, even in the case of non-existent objects which exist as 'negatives' (negative entities) in the world outside.<sup>68</sup> It should be noted however that Sartre's purge of all contents from consciousness was seen by many followers of the latter as a deformation of Husserl's concept of intentionality.<sup>69</sup> Sartre himself admitted that he was 'exhausting' Husserl, and was creating his own ideas at Husserl's expense.<sup>70</sup>

Thus, Sartre's extensive debt to Husserl's criticism of the doctrine of immanent objects is more than that which gave the illusion its name. Sartre's notion merges Husserl's criticism of the image-theory and immanent objects, and adds the dual-world terminology. The fact that Sartre is continuing Husserl's criticism of these errors concerning perception, and that the notion is embedded in Sartre's broader project of radicalizing the notion of intentionality gives, us a reason to assume that the illusion of immanence is meant to be used in the context of all forms of experience, and not just imagination. This means that the illusion of immanence can be seen as a true phenomenological equivalent of the criticism of du-

---

<sup>63</sup> Sartre [2003] p. 17.

<sup>64</sup> Sartre [2012] p. 130.

<sup>65</sup> Sartre [2004b] p. 6.

<sup>66</sup> Sartre [2012] p. 144.

<sup>67</sup> Blosser [1986] p. 1; Sartre [1970].

<sup>68</sup> Sartre [2003] p. 45.

<sup>69</sup> Sartre [2004a] p. ix, note 8.

<sup>70</sup> Sartre [1984] p. 183–184. The idea that Sartre has a more radical conception of the emptiness of consciousness than Husserl is strengthened by the fact that at one time he accuses Husserl of the illusion of immanence (Sartre [2004a] p. 59). This seems to be in line with Sartre's addition of the spatial approach to the mental, which is not yet found in Husserl's appendix to the fifth logical investigation. In his main work, *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre criticized Husserl again for having too spatial an account of consciousness (Sartre [2003] p. 50–61). For a further discussion of the differences with regard to their thought on images, see: Cumming [1992] p. 48–56.

al-world representationalism offered in the analytical tradition and thereby of the phenomenological fallacy.<sup>71</sup>

#### **4. Metzinger's Fallacy**

We have seen that both the analytic and the phenomenological tradition have pointed their arrows at dual-world representationalism. Let us now make a small excursion to the contemporary debate. Metzinger is an avid defender of representationalism.<sup>72</sup> His theory of perception is centered around the idea that our experience is a representation or simulation of reality.<sup>73</sup> According to him, the world we perceive is not the world as it really is out there. Our brains simulate a world-model in which only the aspects of the real world outside of us that are relevant in light of reproductive success and survival are present.<sup>74</sup> Our ancestors, for example, adapted to see a specific range of the color spectrum. It was much later that scientists discovered that there is a broader range than we can experience. Such scientific discoveries have shown us that our 'phenomenal world-model' of reality is only a fraction of an 'inconceivably richer physical reality'.<sup>75</sup>

At first glance, this seems inconsistent with the idea that the inner world is a copy or depiction of the outer world, as is stressed by Place, Ryle and Sartre, because our world model is extremely selective in what it represents.<sup>76</sup> However, if the inner and outer world are fundamentally different, Metzinger's own idea that we have to have an internal representation in order to survive falls flat. The properties of the world that are relevant to our survival can only be highlighted if they exist out there in the first place. Furthermore, the idea that the two worlds do correspond to a certain level but may also have discrepancies is compatible with Place's description of the phenomenological fallacy, where the afterimage is seen as an anomaly in the process of representation. Therefore, Metzinger does adhere to the view that the inner world depicts the outside world:

---

<sup>71</sup> Apart from Sartre's broader project, another reason to say that the illusion of immanence also applies to perception is that Sartre singles out Hume as someone who falls prey to the illusion. Immediately after introducing the illusion, he quotes Hume's theory of impressions and ideas (Sartre [2004a] p. 5–6). This is often seen as a classic example of an image theory of perception, viewing the mind as a theater in which perceptions appear (Hume [1978] p. 251–253; Bobro [2011]). Hume's distinction is also criticized by Ryle, albeit in the context of sensation (Ryle [2009] p. 226–227), and he names him in the discussion of imagination (Ryle [2009] p. 247).

<sup>72</sup> Metzinger [2000], [2003] p. 1.

<sup>73</sup> Metzinger [2003] p. 13–14, [2009] p. 23.

<sup>74</sup> Metzinger [2003] p. 17, 203, [2009] p. 6.

<sup>75</sup> Metzinger [2003] p. 213, [2009] p. 6.

<sup>76</sup> Metzinger [2009] p. 22.

[T]he book you are holding right now – that is, the unified sensations of its color, weight, and texture – is just a shadow, a low-dimensional projection of a higher dimensional object “out there.” It is an image, a representation [...] <sup>77</sup>

Here it is clear that the inner representation has fewer qualities than the object outside, but it still has strong correspondence to the outside object that it represents. This quote also shows more aspects of Metzinger's dual-world representationalism. Not only do we have the world-simulation and the outside world, but the inner world also has objects with sensible qualities that represent the outside world. He even uses the term “image” to describe the mental objects, implicitly invoking the classic image theory as described by Husserl. <sup>78</sup> The similarities go further, as he also uses the metaphor of projection, reminiscent of Place's internal cinema. <sup>79</sup> This is emphasized by another cinematic metaphor he uses to describe our experience, namely that of ‘technicolor phenomenology’. <sup>80</sup> Thus, it seems that Metzinger himself falls prey to the phenomenological fallacy. According to his own theory of perception, we do not perceive the world outside us, but rather an internal world which contains objects that are sensible projections of the world outside us.

A possible objection is that Metzinger's ultimate goal is to show that there is only one world: the inner world is *not* a real world, it is *only* a simulation. There is a process of simulation we call experience, but experiences are not ‘countable entities’. <sup>81</sup> This would seem to diminish the claim that he is a dual-world representationalist: there is only one real world, and one illusionary. The critics of the dual-world view, however, stress that although the inner world is conceived as spatial and filled with objects, it is not of the same material as the world. The two worlds, although alike in structure, exist on a different plane. Place calls it the ‘mythological’ phenomenal properties and objects, Ryle states that the mental ‘consists of consciousness’ like the physical is composed of matter. <sup>82</sup> Although Metzinger wants to show that the inner world is only a simulation, it is still a necessary component of his account of perception. We can never escape the simulation, as we are

---

<sup>77</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>78</sup> Ibidem, p. 7, 8, 22, 45, 46. For a discussion of Metzinger's representationalism in light of Husserl's views see: Rinofner-Kreidl [2004].

<sup>79</sup> Metzinger [2003] p. 548, [2009] p. 6, 22.

<sup>80</sup> Metzinger [2003] p. 549, [2009] p. 23.

<sup>81</sup> Metzinger [2009] p. 21.

<sup>82</sup> Place [1956] p. 49; Ryle [2009] p. 3.

biologically incapable of doing so.<sup>83</sup> Only scientific data can show us that it is only an illusion.<sup>84</sup> Although he ultimately prefers the physical world as the real one, he still posits two parallel worlds peopled with objects and properties, thus committing the phenomenological fallacy himself.

## 5. Conclusion

The study of the phenomenological fallacy and the illusion of immanence has shown that prominent representatives of both the early analytic philosophy of mind and the phenomenological tradition offer similar criticism of mental reification. In both traditions, this criticism of reification is embedded in a broader criticism of what I have called dual-world representationalism: a form of representationalism that entails dualism between an inner and outer world. Prominent representatives of both traditions argue against a spatial conception of the mental, a literal inner world, in which literal sensible objects reside that depict the outside world. It is also stressed by many that this is the view of common sense, showing that it is difficult to describe the mental without somehow giving it a place and speaking in terms of depiction.

Dual-world representationalism can manifest itself in various forms in different debates about mental activity. In debates about perception addressed by Place and to a lesser extent by Husserl, the idea is that we only perceive the outside world indirectly, mediated by the inner world. In debates about imagination, addressed by Ryle and Sartre, this view amounts to the idea that imagination is the perception of things inside us, analogous to ordinary perception of the world outside. However, in the different debates the underlying criticism of reification and representationalism is the same. This analysis shows that from a historical perspective, Metzinger's implicit accusation that phenomenology falls prey to the phenomenological fallacy is unfounded. Furthermore, Metzinger himself falls prey to the fallacy by defending a form of dual-world representationalism in the form of the inner world-simulation that contains projections of things in the physical world outside.

Metzinger says in his reply to Zahavi that historical scholarship is important, but that it should not be a history of claims, but a history of the arguments given to support those claims.<sup>85</sup> In that vein, rather than only showing that the criticism is prevalent in the history of philosophy, it is important to give argu-

---

<sup>83</sup> Metzinger [2009] p. 41.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 9.

<sup>85</sup> Metzinger [2006] p. 2.

ments against dual-world representationalism. Although the authors discussed give many of them and most of them hinge on the idea that the position is incoherent, let me stress the following one. Although the inner world represents the outside world, we can never know how faithful this representation is, and different people may have different views on the world which may lead to all kinds of conflicts. If all our experience only takes place inside inner worlds, then different human beings would have no shared world, resulting into solipsism and rendering intersubjectivity impossible. This is a serious threat for a philosophical account of meaningful co-existence. Metzinger does not seem to be concerned with this, though, as he refers to the problem of whether there is a world outside of experience only mockingly: 'In philosophy, we call this game *epistemology* – the theory of knowledge. We have been playing it for centuries.'<sup>86</sup>

## References

- Blosser [1986] – P. Blosser, "The status of mental images in Sartre's theory of consciousness," *Southern Journal of Philosophy* (24/2) 1986, pp. 163-172.
- Bobro [2011] – M. Bobro, "Hume's Image Problem," *Philosophy Now* (83) 2011, p. 13-15.
- Cumming [1992] – R.D. Cumming, *Phenomenology and Deconstruction, Volume Two: Method and Imagination*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1992.
- Føllesdal [1969] – D. Føllesdal, "Husserl's Notion of Noema," *The Journal of Philosophy* (66/20) 1969, p. 680-687.
- Føllesdal [1978] – D. Føllesdal, "Brentano and Husserl on Intentional Objects and Perception," *Grazer Philosophische Studien* (5) 1978, p. 83-94.
- Gallagher, Zahavi [2008] – S. Gallagher, D. Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind: An Introduction to Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science*, Routledge, London 2008.
- Hickerson [2007] – R. Hickerson, *The History of Intentionality: Theories of Consciousness from Brentano to Husserl*, Bloomsbury, London 2007.
- Hume [1978] – D. Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1978.
- Husserl [1994] – E. Husserl, "Intentional Objects", trans. D. Willard [in:] *Collected Works V: Early Writings in the Philosophy of Logic and Mathematics*, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht 1994, p. 345-248.
- Husserl [2001a] – E. Husserl, *Logical Investigations Vol. I*, trans. J. N. Findlay, Routledge, London 2001.
- Husserl [2001b] – E. Husserl, *Logical Investigations Vol. II*, trans. J. N. Findlay, Routledge, London 2001.

---

<sup>86</sup> Metzinger [2009] p. 21.

- Metzinger [2000] – T. Metzinger, “The subjectivity of subjective experience: A representationalist analysis of the first-person perspective,” *Neural correlates of consciousness: Empirical and conceptual questions*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA 2000, p. 285–306.
- Metzinger [2003] – T. Metzinger, *Being no one: The self-model theory of subjectivity*, MIT Press, Cambridge 2003.
- Metzinger [2006] – T. Metzinger, “Reply to Zahavi: The Value of Historical Scholarship,” *Psyche* (12/4) 2006, p. 1–4.
- Metzinger [2009] – T. Metzinger, *The Ego Tunnel: The science of the soul and the myth of the self*, Basic Books, New York 2009.
- Place [1954] – U.T. Place, “The concept of heed,” *British Journal of Psychology* (45/4) 1954, p. 243–255.
- Place [1956] – U.T. Place, “Is consciousness a brain process?,” *British Journal of Psychology*, (47/1) 1956, p. 44–50.
- Ricoeur [1981] – P. Ricoeur, “Sartre and Ryle on Imagination”, trans. R. Bradley DeFord, [in:] *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*, P.A. Schilpp (ed.), Open Court Publishing, La Salle, IL 1981, p. 167–178.
- Rinofner-Kreidl [2004] – S. Rinofner-Kreidl, “Representationalism and Beyond: A Phenomenological Critique of Thomas Metzinger's Self-Model Theory,” *Journal of Consciousness Studies* (11/10–11) 2004, pp. 88–108.
- Ryle [2009] – G. Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, Routledge, London 2009.
- Sartre [1940] – J.P. Sartre, *L'imaginaire: psychologie phénoménologique de l'imagination*, Gallimard, Paris 1940.
- Sartre [1970] – J.P. Sartre, “Intentionality: A fundamental idea of Husserl's phenomenology,” trans. J.P. Fell, *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* (1/2) 1970, p. 4–5.
- Sartre [1984] – J.P. Sartre, *War Diaries: Notebooks from a Phoney War, November 1939–March 1940*, trans. Q. Hoare, Verso, London 1984.
- Sartre [2003] – J.P. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. H. Barnes, Routledge, London 2003.
- Sartre [2004a] – J.P. Sartre, *The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination*, trans. J. Webber, Routledge, London 2004.
- Sartre [2004b] – J.P. Sartre, *The Transcendence of the Ego: A sketch for a phenomenological description*, trans. A. Brown, Routledge, London 2004.
- Sartre [2012] – J.P. Sartre, *The Imagination*, trans. K. Williford & D. Rudrauf, Routledge, London 2012.
- Seager, Bourget [2007] – W. Seager and D. Bourget, “Representationalism about consciousness” [in:] *The Blackwell Companion to Consciousness*, S. Schneider and M. Velmans (eds.), Wiley, New York 2007, p. 261–276.
- Turner [1968] – R. Turner, “Sartre and Ryle on the Imagination,” *South African Journal of Philosophy* (April) 1968, p. 20–28.
- Wittgenstein [1993] – L. Wittgenstein, *Last Writings on the Philosophy of Psychology, Volume II*, trans. C.G. Luckhardt and M.A.E. Aue, Blackwell, Oxford 1993.

Wittgenstein [1998] - L. Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology, Volume I*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, Blackwell, Oxford 1998.

Zahavi [2005] - D. Zahavi, "Being someone," *Psyche* (11/5) 2005, p. 1-20.

Zahavi [2014] - D. Zahavi, *Self and Other: Exploring Subjectivity, Empathy, and Shame*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2014.