

Phenomenology and the Closure of Metaphysics: Introduction to the Thought of Husserl*

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Metaphysical *speculation* inspired Husserl with a tenacious distrust. He always saw it as a rhetorical dogmatic exercise, a *dialectic* of words in the sense that Aristotle gave to the term “dialectic,” an art lying between rhetoric and analysis that argued about premises that were probable, not certain. To speculative metaphysics Husserl always contrasted the concrete, faithful, apodictic, and non-empirical *description* of what he called “the things themselves.” The “return to the things themselves” was, as is well known, the fundamental motif for phenomenology. The concept of “thing” (*Sache*) covers all $\delta\upsilon\tau\alpha$: a sensible or intelligible thing, mathematical truth or moral value, religious or aesthetic meaning, nature or culture, etc. To return to the things themselves is to respect the sense of all that can appear to consciousness in general, of all that gives itself and does so “in person” (*leibhafti*), as what it is, in its originary nudity, stripped of all supervening conceptual dress prior to being covered over by a speculative interpretation. The term “metaphysics,” in Husserl’s language, is often used to signify the dissimulation, by speculative dialectic, of the things themselves, of their authentic, originative sense.

[69]

This suspicion is explained at least in one of its aspects by the historical situation in which the young mathematician Husserl, a student of Kronecker and Weierstrass, got into philosophy, beginning in 1880, under the influence

[70]

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of his new teacher, Brentano. Who in Germany did not take as settled the collapse of the great post-Kantian metaphysical systems, Hegelian idealism in particular? But triumphant positivism and scientific optimism also began to tire. The crisis of metaphysics was strangely contemporary with a crisis of positive science, notably in the domain of the human sciences, the “sciences of the spirit” as they were then called. The immense ambitions inspired by the model of and the progress in the sciences of nature little by little crumbled. The simultaneity of the two crises did not happen by accident, and it delineated an historical space that is still ours today. This is why the effort to address these two crises simultaneously which Husserl held to from his first work to his last (*The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*¹) has marked the whole of our century’s philosophic thought—directly or indirectly, but still all through it. If, as it may be, there has never been a Husserlian philosophy of pure orthodoxy, if all phenomenologists have been “dissidents”—a sign of the fecundity of a thinking the inauguration and the movement of which were never proposed as a system of dogmas, as a metaphysical doctrine—still there is no philosophy today that does not essentially define itself in relation to phenomenology.

The Husserlian response to this double crisis was certainly revolutionary or radical. But as with most revolutions it took a path of return to an authentic tradition whose sense history would have perverted and whose origin it would have buried. It is always by recalling the positive sciences and philosophy to their originary vocation that Husserl “criticizes” them, puts them in question, or “brackets” them in their factuality. “It is we who are the true positivists,” he says quite early. And it is to “philosophy as rigorous science”—as he titles an article in 1911²—to which the task of a new critique and a new radical foundation of the sciences of nature and of the spirit shall return. At the close of his “Cartesian Meditations,” a great work of his maturity, Husserl still set authentic metaphysics, the kind that owed its fulfillment to phenomenology, in contrast to metaphysics in the habitual sense. The results that he presents, he says, are, then,

1. [*Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie. Eine Einleitung in die phänomenologische Philosophie*, ed. Walter Biemel, Husserliana VI (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1954); English translation: *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Philosophy*, trans. David Carr (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University, 1970). Henceforth cited as *Crisis*.]

2. [“Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft” (1911), in *Aufsätze und Vorträge (1911–1921)*, ed. Thomas Nenon and Hans Rainer Sepp, Husserliana XXV (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1987), 3–62 (original pagination: 289–341); English translation: “Philosophy as Rigorous Science,” trans. Marcus Brainard, *The New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy* II (2002), 249–95. Henceforth cited by the Husserliana and original pagination, respectively; the original pagination is included in the margins of the translation.]

metaphysical, if it be true that ultimate cognitions of being should be called metaphysical. But what we have here is *anything but metaphysics in the customary sense*: a historically degenerate metaphysics, which by no means conforms to the sense with which metaphysics, as “first philosophy,” was instituted originally. Phenomenology’s purely intuitive, concrete, and also apodictic mode of demonstration excludes all “metaphysical adventure,” all speculative excesses.³

[71]

Phenomenology therefore already appears at the same time as the resolute and bold *transgressing* of metaphysics (and thus the transgressing of all traditional philosophy of which it proclaims the end, as do Marx, Nietzsche, and Heidegger) and the most consistent *restoring* of metaphysics. If it takes a step beyond a certain kind of Hegelianism, that wherein the whole history of metaphysics is brought together and achieved, this is in order to return to origins, to the Platonic ideal of philosophy as ἐπιστήμη and to the Aristotelian project of φιλοσοφία πρώτη. The new metaphysics issuing from transcendental phenomenology will be rigorous science and first philosophy. It will command the whole system of knowing, assuring it *de jure* of its principles and its roots. The phenomenologist, “a functionary of humanity,” Husserl will say, will have the mandate to begin—philosophy is the science of true beginnings, of ῥιζώματα πάντων—and to *command*: the mission of the “archon,” in another of Husserl’s expression. Husserl’s whole itinerary is affected by this ambiguity: it keeps us in the field and in the language of metaphysics by the very gesture that carries it beyond metaphysical closure, beyond the limits of all that is in fact called metaphysics. The concepts to which phenomenology had to appeal bear the mark of this strange situation: traditional concepts for which it had to restore a youthfulness, which it had to awaken under their historical patina and sedimentations, enclose in brackets, make sure of with the help of neologisms, comment upon with infinite precautions, etc. These difficulties, one suspects, are not accidental and external to the very essence of the Husserlian project. What, then, is this project? What is its itinerary? What are these concepts?

§ 1. The Prehistory of Phenomenology

Why did Husserl in his first book, *Philosophy of Arithmetic* (1891),⁴ look to psychology for the resources for a first critique of metaphysics? He

3. [*Cartesianische Meditationen. Eine Einleitung in die Phänomenologie*, in *Cartesianische Meditationen und Pariser Vorträge*, ed. S. Strasser, Husserliana I (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1950), 166 (§ 60); English translation: *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorion Cairns (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1960), 139 (§ 60), translation slightly modified to accord with the French translation from which Derrida quotes the text: *Méditations cartésiennes. Introduction à la phénoménologie*, trans. Gabrielle Peiffer and Emmanuel Lévinas (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1931), 118 (§ 60). Henceforth cited as *Cartesian Mediations* followed by German and English pagination, respectively.]

4. [*Philosophie der Arithmetik (1890–1901)*, ed. Lothar Eley, Husserliana XII (The

was following, of course, a general tendency of the time and the milieu. But one also sees already an original preoccupation that will never leave him: that of the concrete origin in the subjective experience of perception for ideal meanings and scientific objects—in this case arithmetic objects, numbers—which, by reason of their exactness and their objective universal validity, seem to be *de jure* independent in their origins from all psychological experience, from the multiplicity of psychic events, from the acts of which they are the pole. Until this point the alternatives in the history of metaphysics had been the following: Sometimes their objectivity and universality is not honored—even if inscribed in their very meaning—and they are relegated to sense experience, to their psychological origin. This is the move empiricism makes, notably by English philosophers. In contrast, sometimes in order to take account of their universality, of their universal necessity, ideal objects and the mathematical verities that are the model for them are assigned an eternal place beyond experience and history, a *τόπος νοητός* for Plato, divine intellect for the great Cartesian rationalists, an a priori structure of the finite mind for Kant, whose notion of “universal forms of pure sensibility” secures an analogous function. At bottom one always refrained from taking up the difficult question of origin, and the history of metaphysics was the history of this abstention. In actual fact empiricism and rationalism were always obscurely side by side in this and their complicity will be Husserl’s target.

[72]

By trying still as a psychologist to describe the subjective, perceptual origin of number without erasing the universal, ideal sense of arithmetic values, Husserl hopes to shake metaphysics loose or renew it: “The results of this research are to be important as well for metaphysics and logic.” Ideal objects are produced by subjective acts and would be nothing without them: “We are forced to say: numbers are produced in the act of numbering; judgments are products in the act of judging.”⁵ In *psychic* activity, Husserl thinks, and here in a certain sense he makes a sacrificial offering to the psychologism that he will criticize a few years later. But already we see him anxious to analyze the specific character of the psychic acts that aim at what they have already engendered, ideal, permanent, and universal objects. On the other hand, following Brentano, he already recognizes the *intentional* dimension of the psychological consciousness that is always *consciousness* of something, always movement out of itself towards the object. Finally, if intentionality is still described as a real, natural character of consciousness, something that will not be the case later when the transcendental structure of consciousness makes it appearance,

Hague: Nijhoff, 1970); English translation: *Philosophy of Arithmetic*, trans. Dallas Willard (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2003).]

5. [The exact reference for these apparent quotations from Husserl’s *Philosophie der Arithmetik* has not been determined.]

the ideal products of this consciousness are not situated among natural objects and things in the world. There is a decisive break here with psychological empiricism: “Numbers are creations of the mind, to the extent that they comprise the results of activities that we exercise in regard to concrete contents. But what these activities create are not new absolute contents that we can subsequently find again somewhere in space or in ‘the external world’; they are properly concepts of relations that can never be only products, yet are not in any way found somewhere fully finished.”⁶

[73]

But in attributing the origin of ideal objects to some real intentional activity, to real psychic events, one still runs the risk of “reifying” them, of “naturalizing” them, of thus missing their ideal sense, their normativity, their universality value. This is why in the *Logical Investigations* (1900–01)⁷ Husserl breaks with the psychologistic bent of his first book and does not publish its second volume. In the Foreword to his *Logical Investigations* he retraces the path that led him to abandon his psychologism and undertake a “general critical reflection on the sense of logic and above all on the relationship between the subjectivity of knowing (*die Subjektivität des Erkennens*) and the objectivity of the content of knowing (*die Objektivität des Erkenntnisinhaltes*).”⁸ He was just trying a genetic transition from one to the other, but “as soon as one wanted to make the passage (*Übergang*) from psychological complexes of thinking to the logical unity of the content of thought (the unity of theory), neither strict continuity nor logical clarity comes forth.” Repudiating the psycho-geneticism that he will systematically criticize, he cites Goethe: “One is never more severe in regard to an error than when one has just abandoned it.”

Here is surely a turning point; but among the basic intentions to which Husserl remains faithful one is still the opposition to naive metaphysics. At the very moment of finally grounding pure logic as “epistemology” and “the science of science,” he still finds himself confronted by metaphysical confusion:

6. [Again, the exact reference for these apparent quotations from *Philosophie der Arithmetik* has not been determined.]

7. [*Logische Untersuchungen. Erster Band: Prolegomena zur reinen Logik*, ed. Elmar Holenstein, Husserliana XVIII (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1975) and *Logische Untersuchungen. Zweiter Band, Erster [und Zweiter] Teil: Untersuchungen zur Phänomenologie und Theorie der Erkenntnis*, ed. Ursula Panzer, Husserliana XIX/1–2 (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1984); English translation: *Logical Investigations*, trans. J. N. Findlay, 2 vols. (New York: Humanities Press, 1970); quotations are from the first volume.]

8. [*Logical Investigations*, Foreword to the First Edition, 42 (*Hua* XVIII, 7) (modified to accord better with Derrida’s reading). Since Husserl here in the German text has “general critical reflection on the **essence** of logic [*über das Wesen der Logik*],” and not “on the **sense** of logic [*sur le sens de la logique*]” (my highlighting), this latter in Derrida’s French text in *Alter* may be a typographical error. In the French of Derrida’s citation he is translating the text himself, rather than simply following the translation (as he does elsewhere here) by Hubert Élie, *Recherches logiques*, T. 1–3 (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1959).]

The task is to pin down and to test the untested, for the most part not even noticed yet very significant metaphysical *hypotheses that underlie at least all those sciences that are concerned with †real things. Such *hypotheses are, e.g., that ‡there is an external world, that it is spread out in space and time, its space being, as regards its mathematical character, three-dimensional and Euclidean, and its time a one-dimensional rectilinear manifold; that all **process is subject to the causal principle, etc. These *hypotheses, all to be found in the framework of Aristotle's First Philosophy, are at present ranked under the quite unsuitable rubric of ††“theory of knowledge.”

Such a metaphysical foundation is not, however, sufficient to provide the desired theoretical completion of the separate sciences. It concerns, moreover, only such sciences as have to do with †real things, which ‡‡is not the case for all sciences, certainly not the purely mathematical sciences whose objects are numbers, manifolds, etc., things thought of as mere bearers of ideal properties independent of real being or non-being.⁹

[74]

The metaphysical confusion between the ideal and the real is something for which Husserl later reproaches Aristotle, founder of metaphysics itself. In *Formal and Transcendental Logic*,¹⁰ at the point where he gives the concept of formal logic—and therefore of pure form—an extension without limit, he will accuse the whole tradition (with the exception of Leibniz, whose genial intuition was neither developed nor understood) of not having attained the notion of the *pure form* of judgment, logic oriented to the empty form of the object in general, the “something” in general, an indetermination so radical that it escaped the categories of the real or unreal. The metaphysical limitation of all formal thought was this something presupposed in an *ontologist* and *realist* way. There was interest in the object of thought in general, in the conditions of its possibility, only inasmuch as it was given as a *real entity*. Plato already made the ideality of the *eidos* an ὄντως ὄν. In short, Husserl took up again the Kantian question of the possibility of an object in general and of the objectivity of knowledge in particular, like him criticized metaphysics, and radicalized the critical project. In point of fact Kant saw in the real and factual structures of the human mind, of the finite mind, the condition of possibility for objectivity. His undertaking was therefore itself threatened by that original form of psychologism that Husserl named “transcendental psychologism.” Here we grasp the complicity between psychologism and traditional metaphysics: *a*

9. [*Logical Investigations*, 59 (*Hua* XVIII, 26–27). However, in order to accord better with the French translation that Derrida follows here (*Recherches logiques*, trans. Élie, T. 1, p. 9), certain renderings in Findlay's translation (in most cases more literally close to Husserl's German) have been replaced here and marked. The following are the renderings given by Findlay that have been replaced and marked in the quoted passage here: * – “presuppositions”; † – “actual reality”; ‡ – “an external world exists”; ** – “genesis”; †† – “epistemology”; ‡‡ “does not include all sciences.”]

10. [*Formale und transzendente Logik. Versuch einer Kritik der logischen Vernunft*, ed. Paul Janssen, Husserliana XVII (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1974; English translation: *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, trans. Dorion Cairns (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1969).]

misunderstanding as much of the specificity of ideality as of its normativity. Thus when the psychologism of the end of the nineteenth century (Mill, Lipps, etc.) treats logic as a branch or a part of psychology, as a science of the real events of consciousness, it commits an error that correlates with a metaphysical presupposition. When Lipps defines logic as a “psychological discipline” under the pretext that thought is also a “psychic event,” when he declares accordingly that “logic is a physics of thought or it is nothing at all,” he confuses the act and the object, fact and norm, is and ought, natural law and logical law.

In parallel to the critique of psychologism, the central theme of the *Prolegomena*, Husserl proposes a critique of the anthropologism, individual or specific, that bases ideal legality upon the factual structures of the human mind. The schema of the critique is always the same: norm is reduced to fact, universality to the value of particular conditions, and one ends up in relativism and empiricism, that is to say, in skepticism. Now skepticism is not a philosophy; it contradicts itself as soon as it presents itself as true, universally demonstrable theory. This soil of universal validity grounding all experience and all discourse is what Husserl, skeptical as he may be, sets his life-long energies to describe. Later, in “Philosophy as Rigorous Science,” the same arguments will be made against historicism. Here Dilthey is the favorite target. Despite the invaluable distinction between *understanding* in the human sciences¹¹ and *explanation* in the sciences of nature, despite Dilthey’s useful concept of *Weltanschauung*—the total vision of one’s own world in each epoch or community, the total vision in which religion, art, philosophy, etc., form a spiritual unity—it is nonetheless true that he reduces norm to fact. The norm of truth, the claim of truth, the sense of truth are missing as soon as one believes oneself able to base them on a *de facto* historical totality (epoch, community, vision of the world, etc.). The historical totality of the vision of the world is *finite*, whereas truth is ordained to have a value that is *infinite*, universal, unlimited *de jure* in space and time. It is always this possibility of truth—science and the project of philosophy as science—that demolishes historicism. Historicism, too, contradicts itself, like all empiricism, like all relativism, like all skepticism:

[75]

I do not understand . . . how he thinks that, from so instructive an analysis as he makes of the structure and typology of *Weltanschauungen*, he has obtained decisive arguments *against* skepticism. . . . History, or *empirical human science* in general, can of itself decide nothing either in a positive or in a negative sense as to whether a distinction is to be made between religion as a cultural formation and religion as idea, i.e., as valid religion,

11. [Parallel to the German *Geisteswissenschaften*, in contrast to the *Naturwissenschaften*, Derrida writes *les sciences de l’esprit*, but here the usual English rendering of the term is given. See Derrida’s own phrasing of the equivalence in the second paragraph of the essay.]

between art as a cultural formation and valid art, between historical and valid law, and finally between historical and valid philosophy.¹²

. . . we obviously still maintain that the principles of even such relative evaluations lie in the ideal sphere, which the evaluating historian who will understand more than mere developments (here, facts) can only presuppose and not—as historian—justify. The norm for the mathematical lies in mathematics, for the logical in logic, for the ethical in ethics, etc.¹³

This does not mean that Husserl excludes the possibility of an *internal* history of these norms themselves, a historical origin of these ideal systems. This history and this origin will be inquired into in the *Crisis* . . . and in *The Origin of Geometry*.¹⁴ They are transcendental and not empirical.

These norms, these logical laws, these ideal objects that form the fabric of language, the pure logical grammar that defines the conditions of a discourse endowed with sense, even if it is false (“the circle is square” is a proposition false but understandable, it has a meaning, it is counter-sense—*Widersinn*—but not nonsense—*Unsinn*, whereas “a green is where” does not correspond to the minimal grammatical conditions of any language), all this is the object of long, valuable analyses in the *Logical Investigations*. But these ideal objects are only *de jure* independent in regard to psychic, or real, factual, empirical, historical activities. Since they do not fall down from heaven and do not inhabit a τόπος οὐράνιος, they certainly have to spring from subjective experiences, they are constituted and intended by a non-empirical subjectivity. As long as the original field of this concrete subjectivity remains undiscovered and undescribed, Husserl will be accused of logicism and Platonic realism—and there are those

[76]

12. [In Quentin Lauer’s English translation of “Philosophy as Rigorous Science,” in Edmund Husserl, *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Quentin Lauer (New York: Harper, 1950), 71–147, the sentence here before the second ellipsis is from 127 n. k (*Hua* XXV, 45/326 n.), and the sentence after it is from 126 (*Hua* XXV, 44/325). Derrida quotes from *La philosophie comme science rigoureuse*, trans. Quentin Lauer (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1955), the first sentence from 103 n. a, and the second from 102–3. Lauer’s English translation in the second sentence has been modified with an underscoring of “*empirical human science*” to follow Derrida’s highlighting of it, while the entire phrase about religion (“and religion as idea, i.e., as valid religion”) that was somehow left out of the English is restored. (That phrase is included in Lauer’s French translation, and in the German in *Hua* XXV, 44/325.) Brainard’s translation also correctly includes the phrase about religion (281); see n. 2 above.]

13. [“Philosophy as Rigorous Science,” 129 (*Hua* XXV, 46/327); French trans., 105.]

14. [“The Origin of Geometry as an Intentional-Historical Problem” is published as Beilage III in *Hua* VI, where it carries no title. The title is that under which it was edited (with considerable modifications) by Eugen Fink and published in *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 1 (1929), 203–25. Derrida published a French translation of Beilage III, together with a 171-page “Introduction,” as *L’origine de la géométrie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962). A French translation of *Hua* VI was published as *La crise des sciences européennes et la phénoménologie transcendantale*, trans. Gérard Granel (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), which incorporated Derrida’s translation of Beilage III. An English translation of the latter is included in Carr’s translation of the *Crisis*, 353–78.]

who make the accusation. When from the last *Investigation* on he turns to the intentional origin of the objectivity of objects, he will be accused, inversely and from the same lack of understanding, of subjectivistic idealism.

§ 2. The Epoché and Static Constitution

Between the last volume of the *Investigations*, where the first properly phenomenological themes appear, and the elaboration of transcendental phenomenology, Husserl went through a period of profound discouragement. But it was also the time of maturing for what one could call phenomenology's *discourse of method*. Its principle rules, to put it in a word, are the rules of *reduction*: eidetic reduction, transcendental reduction.

Eidetic reduction is supposed to open access to the intuition of essence or εἶδος. The essence, according to the traditional metaphysical definition (that given by Aristotle and evoked by Husserl himself) is that which makes a thing what it is, the attribute or the bundle of attributes without which it would not be what it is nor appear as what it is. For example, it belongs to the essence of every body to be extended; one could not remove extension from a body without doing away with it as body. Extension belongs, therefore, to the general essence of any body, which is not the case for this or that sensible quality (color, taste, etc.). This is something I can know and assert *a priori*, universally and necessarily, therefore apodictically, without referring to any particular experience. I have no need to confront this or that body otherwise than as a contingent example, nor as the limit case some individual body, in order to have the intuition of the extensional essence of any body in general. Similarly, it belongs to the essence of the perception of external and transcendent things that it always offers only one or several facets of the object, never the totality of the object's profiles. If God himself perceived things in space, Husserl says, he would necessarily have to bear out this essential necessity. If one tried to imagine a body or a perception that escaped these two eidetic necessities, one would come up against consciousness of the impossible. The examples we just cited concern essences whose generality is quite broad: all bodies as such, all perceptions of external objects as such. But there are essences more or less general that pertain, for example, to any object—bodily or not—or concern only this or that kind of body, in the limit case this individual body actually perceived. Every individual existent has its essence and belongs to essential categories or regions. One will have to be careful to respect the hierarchy and articulation of essential generalities. The intuition of the essence consists in intending the essential, universally evident and *a priori* necessary character of any object or category of object. For that one has to “reduce,” put into parentheses, neutralize fact, individual brute existence, for example, the existence of this body, an existence that is contingent in relation to essential predicates that I can read off in it. I can have the intuition of ex-

[77]

tension as the essence of body, intend it through the contingent example of this or that body, all the while bracketing the existence of this body or, at the limit, of any individual body. The essence is not based in any individual existence. The technique of *imaginative variation*, which facilitates eidetic intuition, consists in modifying in imagination the characteristics of an object up to the point where this or that variation deprives the object of its possibility. For example, I can imagine bodies of any color, of any weight, etc., . . . I cannot imagine a body without extension. This is the sign that I am dealing with an invariant character, one that is *a priori* necessary and essential to any bodily object. Phenomenology will always deal only with essences, it will be the science of essences and all its propositions would therefore have to have the character of apodictic and unconditioned evidentness.

Nevertheless, this independence of the essence in regard to factual existence and this freedom from the intuition to which it gives rise risk being interpreted as metaphysical hypotheses. Is this not a hypostasizing of essences, a Platonic realism of essences, a new substantialism? Right when he restores the language of Plato—εἶδος—or of Aristotle—οὐσία, *quidditas*—Husserl vigorously rejects Platonism or substantialism. The essence *does not exist*. It is *nothing* beyond the *fact*, from which nonetheless one can separate it in eidetic intuition. It is an original and irreducible non-existence. Extension *is nothing* without the body, but it is not confused with any existent body. “All semi-mystical thoughts clinging especially to the concepts Eidos (Idea) and essence remain cleanly excluded from them” (*Ideas I*, § 3).¹⁵

[78]

The phenomenological reduction, or phenomenological epoché, puts into parentheses the totality of existent things in an analogical procedure—the totality of existent things, that is, the *world* itself. To put it into parentheses here is not to deny, reject, or doubt its existence in the style of skepticism or of Cartesian method. Nor is it a matter of an absolute idealism of the Berkeleyan type. It is about simply neutralizing the act by which I posit, affirm, or deny the existence of the world as I do in the natural attitude, the attitude of everyday life, as well as that of the scientist or the classical philosopher. By a modification that neutralizes the way I look at things, by a free act that itself belongs to the essence of consciousness, I can always intend the world and all that happens to it, all that depends on its existence, only as *phenomenon*: not as a thing or a world *that is appearing* to consciousness—since the existence of the thing or the world is of no interest to me—but as the *appearing* of the

15. [*Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie. Erstes Buch: Allgemeine Einführung in die reine Phänomenologie* (1913), ed. Walter Biemel, *Husserliana III* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1950); ed. Karl Schuhmann, *Husserliana III/1-2* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1976); English translation of the latter edition: *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. F. Kersten (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1983), 12—henceforth cited as *Ideas I* with original pagination, which is included in the margins of all three of these editions.]

thing or the world. The perception of the object is not the object perceived; the being-perceived of the object is not the object itself. Breaking off interest in this latter in its existence, I can direct my regard to its being-perceived or to the perception I have of it. Being-perceived and perception pertain to the lived experience of consciousness, the *phenomenon* of the world pertains to consciousness, it is essentially not in the world. And I reach the phenomenon in a proximity and a certitude that are absolute and indubitable. As Descartes already said, the human who suffers from jaundice can be mistaken in judging that the world *is* yellow, but he cannot be mistaken in being conscious that it *looks* yellow. Phenomenology in the strict sense of the term will be the description, in terms of eidetic necessity, of this phenomenal experience without which the world, being in general, would not appear, would make no sense, and would never give rise to language and knowledge. Only the phenomenological reduction, the *epoché* that suspends belief in, or the thesis of, the existence of the world can open up the space for phenomenological description. This will also be *transcendental* because it describes a non-empirical, non-mundane consciousness that is at the same time the condition of possibility for an object in general, for a phenomenon for consciousness in general. As a radicalization of the Cartesian and Kantian projects, the cogito, exempt from the epoché, is not a substance, not an existent something; for all existence is in the world. The conditions of possibility for the object are bestowed on originary concrete intuitions and not on the analysis of formal faculties belonging to the factuality of a finite mind. In both cases it is indeed a metaphysical remnant that sets limits to Cartesianism and Kantianism.

[79]

In a certain sense, the transcendental reduction is an eidetic reduction. What it permits describing will always be an essential necessity and not an empirical factuality. Empirical factuality is in fact “reduced” at the same time as the totality of the world in which it participates. By understanding the transcendental reduction as an eidetic reduction, one is sure to avoid empirical idealism or absolute idealism: it is not this or that empirical consciousness, this or that real subjectivity, that resists the hypothesis of the annihilation of the world (*Ideas I*, § 49), because it participates in the world. It is simply the essence, not the existence, of consciousness that is independent of the existence of the world: it is the condition of possibility for the appearing of the world in general.

The difficult problematic of the reduction is first laid out in *The Idea of Phenomenology* (lectures from 1907)¹⁶ and above all in *Ideas I* (1913). In reality it is quickly apparent that there is no single, unique reduction, no single motion of epoché to perform once and for all. The reduction is in progression in-

16. [*Die Idee der Phänomenologie*, ed. Walter Biemel, Husserliana II (The Hague: Nijhoff, 2d ed., 1973); English translation: *The Idea of Phenomenology*, trans. Lee Hardy (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1999).]

definitely as it continually meets naive, natural, and non-critical remnants, constituted structures that have to be reduced in order to recapture their constituting source. Nevertheless, even if the stage marked by *Ideas I* remains preliminary, it is already very important. It presents us with a strongly worked out description of the most general structures of transcendental consciousness such as it is disclosed at this first stage of the reduction: the ὕλη–μορφή correlation and the noesis–noema correlation. The ὕλη is the sensible material of lived experience: not the red of the thing that is in the world and that becomes thus excluded by the reduction, but the appearing of red as pure sensible quality; not sensation as a natural, physiological or psychological reality that is also in the world, but the phenomenon experienced that corresponds to it and is not in the world. This phenomenological “matter” is *not intentional* (which will pose formidable problems as to its relationship to intentional consciousness) and belongs to lived experience, to consciousness in a reell way. (Using German, Husserl contrasts “reell” against “real,” which always designates a natural reality.) It is animated, activated, by an intention that gives it form, by a μορφή that is intentional and itself also belongs to consciousness in a reell way. Once animated, it refers to a phenomenal object experienced, the *noema* or sense of the thing. To the noema there corresponds an act, the noesis, which intends the object. The noema, which is not a thing in the world but the sense of the object for consciousness (its phenomenon, what I can retain even in the absence of existent thing), does not belong to consciousness in a reell way, however, because it is for consciousness, because it is what confronts it.¹⁷ It is an intentional, not a real object for consciousness. The noesis is intentional and included in consciousness in a reell way. We thus get the following differentiation: reell and non-intentional ὕλη, intentional and not reell noema, intentional and reell μορφή and noesis (still in the phenomenological sense of “reell”).

[80]

Once again, among the conditions of objectivity in general, of the appearing of the world in general, at the “origin of the world” (Fink),¹⁸ one meets a non-reality and a non-reellity, that of the noema which does not belong to either consciousness or the world, which is not really either of consciousness or of the world. For the reasons given earlier, metaphysics cannot account for the puzzle. Such is the trans-metaphysical thrust that the epoché makes possible just when Husserl is still obliged to lay out its method in the concepts that are foundational for metaphysics: noesis, noema, ἐποχή, etc. The return to

17. [Derrida’s expression here is *son vis-à-vis*.]

18. [See Eugen Fink, “Die phänomenologische Philosophie Edmund Husserls in der gegenwärtigen Kritik” (1933), in *Studien zur Phänomenologie 1930–1939* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1966), 79–156, here 134; English translation: “The Phenomenological Philosophy of Edmund Husserl and Contemporary Criticism,” in R. O. Elveton, trans. and ed., *The Phenomenology of Husserl: Selected Critical Readings* (Seattle: Noesis, 2d ed., 2000), 70–139, here 119.]

Greek language, for the purpose of freeing description from the sedimentations that the tradition has deposited in each modern concept, marks very well the ambiguity of this situation.

§ 3. Genetic Phenomenology

Every metaphysical presupposition would have been blotted out if the structures of consciousness thus disclosed were absolutely originary, if they were not themselves already constituted, therefore in a certain sense still mundane. Husserl recognized in *Ideas I* that he had to continue deferring the problem of the constituting temporality of consciousness and continue to consider phenomenological temporality as *already constituted*.¹⁹ In the *Lectures on the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time* (lectures from 1904–1905, edited by Heidegger in 1928),²⁰ he had already studied the problem of phenomenological temporality in a set of remarkable analyses. But he was mainly interested in temporal *objects*, declaring that “we lack all names” for describing this “absolute subjectivity” that is the temporal flow (§ 36).²¹

[81]

19. In § 85 of *Ideas I*, dedicated to ὕλη and μορφή, Husserl writes: “At the level of consideration to which we are confined until further notice, a level which abstains from descending into the obscure depths of the ultimate consciousness that constitutes all such temporality as belongs to lived experience. . . .” [*Ideas I*, 171, slightly modified.] Later: “Be that as it may, this remarkable unity of *sensuous* ὕλη and *intentional* μορφή plays a dominant role in the whole phenomenological sphere (in the whole, i.e., within the level of constituted temporality that is to be constantly held to).” [*Ideas I*, 172; the parenthetical explicatory phrase, present in both *Hua* III (1950) and *Hua* III/1 (1976), and cited by Derrida, is left out of Kersten’s translation, for no apparent reason.] A little before this, after having compared the spatial and temporal dimensions of the ὕλη, Husserl justifies the limits of static description and the necessity of subsequently moving to genetic description thus: “as will emerge from investigations to follow later on, time is a name for a completely *delimited sphere of problems* and one of exceptional difficulty. It will be shown that in order to avoid confusion our previous presentation has remained silent to a certain extent, and must of necessity remain silent about what first of all is alone visible in the phenomenological attitude. . . . The transcendently ‘absolute’ that we have brought about by the reductions is, in truth, not what is ultimate; it is something (*etwas*) that constitutes itself in a certain profound and completely distinctive sense and that has its primal source (*Urquelle*) in what is ultimately and truly absolute.” [*Ideas I*, § 81, 162–63, slightly modified.] Will this limitation ever be removed in the working writings as they are to be found in the innumerable unpublished manuscripts that the Husserl Archives in Louvain are progressively bringing out? One comes upon reservations of this kind in all the great later books, in particular *Erfahrung und Urteil* (72, 116, 194, etc. [ed. Ludwig Landgrebe (Hamburg: Claassen & Goverts, 1948); English translation: *Experience and Judgment*, trans. James S. Churchill and Karl Americks (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University, 1973), 68, 106, 167, etc.]) and every time there is an allusion made to a new “transcendental esthetic” (the “Conclusion” of *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, § 61 of *Cartesian Meditations*).

[80]

[81]

20. [*Vorlesungen zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewußtseins*, ed. Rudolf Boehm, Husserliana X (The Hague: Nijhoff, 2d ed., 1969); English translation: *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time (1893–1917)*, trans. John Barnett Brough (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1991).]

21. [*Hua* X, 75/79.]

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After *Ideas I* the shift had to be made from *static* to *genetic* analyses. This was a great turn in Husserl's thought, but it did not mark a break, only a decisive step of progress in the continuous movement of explication. Genetic phenomenology, emphasizing the *passive* moment of transcendental constitution, what Husserl called *passive genesis*, developed in several directions.

First of all, it was a matter of the *genesis of the ego* itself. Until this point the egological form of consciousness had been considered as constituted at the moment the analysis began. What had to be done here, then, was to pose the genesis of the ego as a problem: a formidable problem that Husserl took up in particular in the *Cartesian Meditations* (1929)²² and *Ideas II* (1912–1928).²³ More difficult yet was the problem of the transcendental origin of intersubjectivity. This is the point on which the contemporary philosophers who most explicitly recognized their debt to phenomenology (Lévinas, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty) broke with Husserl. How could *the other* be constituted with the meaning of other, as an intentional ego-phenomenon, in the interior of the ego's "monadic sphere" towards which we were turned back by the reduction? Yet the impossible seemed to be necessary: all sense is in general sense for an ego. Admirable analyses of minute detail in the fifth of the *Cartesian Meditations* tried to describe the enigma of the appearance, in the ego, of the sense of something—the alter ego—that is not in the world, that is an *other* origin of the world.

[82]

It was all the more necessary to answer this question in that transcendental intersubjectivity is the condition of objectivity in general, therefore also of science. The objective is what holds not only for me but for everyone other than myself. The declared objective validity is to appeal to any other subject in general. This is why the problem of the genesis of the other ego connects, in *Formal and Transcendental Logic* (§§ 95–96), with that of the transcendental foundation of science and of logic as the science of science. Formal logic, the science of theoretical judgments concerning any possible object (the object in general in its pure empty form), is founded in a transcendental logic. It is again to the life of pure transcendental consciousness that we are referred in this great work of Husserl's, certainly his best elaborated and the most systematic.

22. Since the concrete monadic ego contains the whole of conscious life, real or potential, it is clear that *the problem of the phenomenological explication of this monadic ego* (the problem of its constitution for itself) *has to include all constitutive problems in general*. All things said and done, the phenomenology of this self-constitution for itself coincides with *phenomenology in general* (*Cartesian Meditations*, § 33). Thus, "the phenomenology developed at first is merely static . . . Questions of universal genesis and of the genetic structure of the ego . . . are still far away . . ." (§ 37) [*Cartesian Meditations*, 110/76–77].

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23. [*Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie. Zweites Buch: Phänomenologische Untersuchungen zur Konstitution*, ed. Marly Biemel, Husserliana IV (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1952); English translation: *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy. Second Book: Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1989).]

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But the level of classical logic is the level of judgment, of objective predication. It is itself founded on a deeper layer of experience, on a “logos of the aesthetic world,” that of sensibility and pre-predicative perception. Science and culture marked by science give us a measurable world the determinations of which are *exact* and subjected to objective causality and laws. But in what Husserl calls the life-world (*Lebenswelt*) perception delivers us non-exact forms (which is not a defect, an inexactness), vague contours, a non-objective style of causation. It is always in this perceptual and “subjective relative” experience that science is rooted; it is always to the life-world that it refers as the final recourse. One has to ask, therefore, how the objectivity and exactness of the sciences arise upon the ground of the life-world. This life-world also has its universal essential structures which phenomenology is supposed to be able to recapture by parenthesizing the whole set of the propositions of science. The questions concerning these three levels (pre-predicative experience, non-scientific predication in the life-world, objective judgments in science) are deployed in *Experience and Judgment* (composed and edited by Landgrebe in 1939 from texts certain ones of which date from 1919) and in the *Crisis*.

The formulation of these questions yields the sense of what Husserl calls the *crisis* of the sciences and of European humanity, at the moment of the rise of Hitlerism and of the historical agony that gripped Europe between 1930 and 1939. Crisis is *always* a forgetting of origin. The crisis of the sciences results from the fact that the subjective-relative origin and foundation of the ideal exactitude of science have been disguised. The sciences have lost their relationship to the life-world. One can no longer, therefore, know how the extraordinary chain of scientific progress became possible for us. The meaning of its history is stolen from us and its relationship to our existence is no longer apparent to us. This disguising of the origin has not only been produced in science but at the same time in the history of philosophy as well, in its fascination with the model of mathematics. All attempts to return to transcendental subjectivity (with Descartes, Hume, and Kant) have been covered over by what Husserl calls “objectivism,” in contrast to the “transcendental motive.” The *Crisis* follows this alternating of the concealment and the recovery of the transcendental motive that only finds full achievement in phenomenology—the achievement of a Τέλος that burst upon Europe with the advent of Greek geometry and philosophy and gave its meaning to Europe’s spiritual figure. Europe is not a politico-geographic aggregate but the unity of a responsibility for a task, a project (*Vorbaben*). Without this project of a science producing truths that are universal, and therefore infinitely transmittable by language and culture (see *The Origin of Geometry*), no culture would be able to open itself to the infinite. The τέλος of reason is, then, the condition for all pure and infinite tradition and history. This τέλος that, once dormant “in confusion and darkness” (that of nature, of animality, of pre-European mankind), burst upon Europe as the idea of the infinite, is indeed once

again the very τέλος of metaphysics as ontology, the science of being, language about being. Metaphysics is indeed for Husserl the knowledge of being as being: at once a practical and a theoretical imperative; theoretical reason is practical reason dominated by the idea of a task. “For philosophy and for phenomenology in its study of the correlation of being and consciousness, *that which is* is a practical idea, that of the infinity of theoretically determining work” (*Cartesian Meditations*, § 41).²⁴ Confronted with the crisis of the sciences, of philosophy, of mankind, one has to reawaken this ideal of reason and give back to it its archon function. In this sense the phenomenologist is indeed the “functionary for humanity”; for only the unity of this rational task can found and save the unity of mankind. The rational ideal is just that which presides at the birth of philosophy as metaphysics. And when Husserl renews and adapts to phenomenology all the concepts foundational for metaphysics (ἀρχή, τέλος, entelechy, etc.), he uses them in their fullest sense, in their sense restored to the fullest.

Heidegger, of whom it is well known what he owed to Husserl and how much he disappointed him in breaking with him, says that the thought of being was lost, or shrunken, or withdrawn when, at the birth of philosophy, being was determined *by metaphysics* as *presence*, as the proximity of the entity before the gaze (εἶδος, phenomenon, etc.) and then as *object*. This determination of being as *pre-sence*, then of presence as the proximity of the entity to itself, as self-consciousness (from Descartes to Hegel), *traced out the closure* of the history of metaphysics. The history of being, of the thought of being, would not be exhausted there, metaphysics would be, in all the senses of the word, but an epoch (a period of retreat and of necessary suspension which will be followed by another epoch; for the history of being is the history of its epochs). By privileging the language of metaphysics, the value of certitude as attached to the phenomenon present to consciousness, to the noematic object, to self-consciousness as self-proximity, to the living present (*lebendige Gegenwart*) as the ultimate and absolutely universal form of temporalization and of the life of consciousness, Husserl perhaps in this way worked an admirable modern revolution in metaphysics; the exit of metaphysics out of the whole of its history to return finally to the purity of its origin. It is perhaps from here that we have to take up the epoché, the phenomenological epoché and the historical epoch that joins it. *To begin thinking its closure, that is, also its future*. To begin again: this is perhaps what Husserl whispered as his death drew near: “Just now as I am reaching the end and everything is finished for me, I know that I have to start all over at the beginning”²⁵

[84]

24. [English translation modified to accord with the French translation that Derrida quotes.]

25. [According to Sister Adelgundis Jaegerschmid, on September 16, 1937 Husserl said the following to her: “Just now, when I am finished, I know that I am beginning from the start, for to be finished means to begin from the start.” See her “Conversations with

Translator's Note

The preceding essay, published for the first time in French in *Alter* in 2000, was published earlier in Greek in *ΕΠΙΟΧΕΣ* (Athens, February 1966), as noted in *Alter*. However, the history of its publication is a bit more complicated, and even the mention of its first appearance in Athens that Derrida inserts in his *La voix et le phénomène* is too modest to convey the closer connection between the book and this essay.²⁶

Derrida characterizes the essay as the attempt “to follow the movement by which Husserl, while constantly criticizing metaphysical speculation, really only aimed his criticism at the perversion or degenerating state of what he continued to hold to in his thinking and wished to restore as authentic metaphysics, as φιλοσοφία πρώτη,”²⁷ and this nicely indicates the way the essay differs from the thrust of *La voix et le phénomène*. The essay does not itself begin or enter into the “deconstructive” reading of the book, but rather lays out specifics of the compromise with metaphysics that Husserl retains in his critique of it, the doubleness of phenomenology’s relationship to metaphysics that lays itself open to the “deconstructive” critique that Derrida goes on to develop. But in addition to this linkage between the essay and *La voix et le phénomène* on the philosophical level, a close connection also is found on the level of the circumstances of composition.

An earlier version of the essay was published in *Philosophy Today* in 1967 as “Jacques Derrida’s Husserl Interpretation, Text and Commentary,” composed by Joseph Smith.²⁸ A brief comment at the head of the article explains its purpose: it was to represent a paper of some 130 pages that Derrida had sent in lieu of his attending the fifth annual meeting of the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy at Pennsylvania State University, October 20–22, 1966.²⁹ Professor Smith was asked to “summarize and select parts of this study and present them,” the resulting article consisting, then, of several pages of summary written by Professor Smith, brief commentary by him, several selections of Derrida’s text itself, and further commentary by Smith. The “summary” corresponds throughout to the text that follows above, though briefer, and the selected texts are manifestly draft portions of *La*

Edmund Husserl, 1931–1938,” trans. Marcus Brainard, *New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy* I (2001), 331–50, here 346.]

26. See Jacques Derrida, *La voix et le phénomène. Introduction au problème du signe dans la philosophie de Husserl* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967), “Introduction,” 3; English translation: *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl’s Theory of Signs*, trans. David B. Allison (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University, 1973), 5.

27. Derrida, *La voix et le phénomène*, 3–4/5 (translation modified).

28. *Philosophy Today* 11, no. 2 (Summer 1967), 106–23.

29. The meeting is actually named in Smith’s introductory comment as that of the “American Phenomenological Society,” which in the context of the otherwise clear facts can only be a misnomer for SPEP.

voix et le phénomène, a short selection corresponding to elements of several paragraphs in the “Introduction” and a larger selection noted by Smith as “a complete translation of the Section of Derrida’s paper entitled, ‘Le signe et les signes,’” which is the published book’s Chapter 1. The connection, therefore, is decidedly close and unmistakable, despite the differences.³⁰ In the selections, for example, the shorter text shows only a little of what is found in the actual “Introduction,” and the larger text as Smith translated it lacks the additions given in Chapter 1 as published. As for the “summary,” the French essay translated here is, again, a rephrasing and expansion in comparison to the corresponding text in Joseph Smith’s article in *Philosophy Today*.³¹

30. Unfortunately, Professor Smith has not yet been able to locate among his literary accumulations anything from this undertaking nearly forty years in the past as documentation of the whole relationship.

31. On the other hand, it is distinctly possible that a part of the 130-page manuscript was the basis for Smith’s “summary” and that this was left out of *La voix et le phénomène*—which could only be determined if that manuscript (surely from 1965, since the corresponding essay was already published in February 1966) were found.