

PHENOMENOLOGY AS TRANSCENDENTAL IDEALISM

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What does it mean to philosophize phenomenologically?

“[...] without having seized upon the peculiar ownness of the transcendental attitude and having actually appropriated the pure phenomenological basis, one may of course use the word, phenomenology; but one does not have the matter itself.”¹

Phenomenology is a particular kind of philosophy. It can be recognized as one of the most influential philosophical trends since the beginning of the 20th century, which has produced or influenced numerous well-known thinkers².

One of the main works of Edmund Husserl, the founder of phenomenology, which contributed decisively to the breakthrough to this philosophical school at the beginning of the 20th century, carries the title: *Ideas to a pure phenomenology and phenomenological philosophy* (1913). This unusual, twofold title, seemingly clumsy and sounding somewhat redundant, nonetheless brings out a clear message: the attribute “phenomenological” does not *ipso facto* define a “philosophy”. And in reverse it seems to imply that “the” philosophy need not in the first place be phenomenological and that it indeed was (not yet) phenomenological up to a certain point of time³. In fact, Husserl is very much after a renewal of the concept of philosophy, and this makes delimiting phenomenology from the traditional understanding of philosophy necessary. The newness of this concept of philosophy should especially be understood with reference to the fact that Husserl fundamentally criticizes the philosophical situation of his time and intends to lead philosophy back to what in his eyes are its essential origins.

Phenomenology, having always aspired after the justification of knowledge, contains a fundamentally *critical* dimension. In what does its critique of philosophy consist, and to what extent is the return to the origins of philosophy instrumental to this critique?

To illustrate this first of all generally: Philosophy has, for Husserl, since the last decades of the nineteenth century, been developing on the wrong track or even come to nothing in two decisive ways, namely, in its relation to the world as the totality of beings and appearances on the one hand, and in its relation to itself as the fundamental kind of discourse which is supposed to clarify the world’s sense of being (*Seinssinn*). Philosophy either holds on the merely positively given, empirically provable, mathematically explainable and becomes thereby the maid of the natural sciences, or buries itself into the academic business, studies the history of philosophy and thus lose all relations to a constantly and increasingly evolving reality. In both

¹ Hua III/1, p. 200; Kersten p. 211.

² Meanwhile, it has become self-evident to speak of several generations of phenomenologists. Their most significant representatives are, in my opinion, Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Max Scheler, Eugen Fink, Roman Ingarden, Jan Patočka, Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-Toussaint Desanti, Jacques Derrida, Paul Ricoeur, Hans Blumenberg, Michel Henry, Jean-Luc Marion, Marc Richir, Klaus Held, Bernhard Waldenfels, László Tengelyi, Günter Figal.

³ In this title the psychological-empirical “purification” of phenomenology and the transcendental-phenomenological foundation of philosophy reciprocally refer to each other.

cases the fundamental tendency remains the same: philosophy no longer concerns itself with *the origin of being and sense*, but with its *factual residues* in what is objectively perceivable and given (empiricism, positivism, functionalism), or it exhausts itself in the superficial repetitions of theories of past thinkers and results in an individual discipline turned away from the world (“philosophy” in the sense of a purely academic history of philosophy). Both scenarios belong together: There exists a certain correlation between the orientation towards rigid objectivity, the constitution and genericity of which is ignored or overlooked, and the reproducing of an originally living thinking which dies out and becomes mere words in these reproductions. In contrast Husserl calls for a return “to the things themselves”. How is this to be understood?

The “things themselves” for phenomenology are, like its title clearly suggests, “phenomena”. The “phenomenon” in phenomenology points at the outset towards a difficult aspect which opens up a horizon of interpretation for it, on account of which it is to become a (virtually infinite) “working philosophy” from the very beginning. *Phenomena are the “things” in their (possible) appearance*. Philosophy can only meaningfully deal with “something” when this “something” “gives itself”. Objectivity cannot be decoupled from its *relationality to thinking*. This does *not* mean that we have to imagine things as if a consciousness or a knower always stands opposed to them. Nor does it mean that a mental act of thinking has to be concretely performed here. What is expressed is rather the idea that it is a seemingly *natural* but in truth *metaphysical* prejudice that things could be seen to exist purely “in themselves”. Phenomenology’s point of departure – at least that of Husserl’s – will then be to make this *relationality (Bezüglichkeit)* to a fundamental philosophical *theme*. In this way phenomenality becomes at the very outset originary inner *correlativity (Korrelativität)*. Differently put: The thing, understood as *phenomenon*, has always two aspects: An “objective” aspect to be ascribed to the “transcendent” side of the thing – whether it is a mine of marlstone or of lignite that is found on a geological terrain is, for example, something that comes to a possible consciousness in a certain sense “from the outside”; and, this is normally harder to recognize, a “subjective” aspect which denotes precisely the thing’s way of being given to consciousness, that is, the side of “immanence”, as it were, which importantly is not to be understood as an “inside” in the psychological sense. To clarify what this “immanence” means, it is helpful to turn to a comparison with Kant, who will allow an important distinction to be made.

The idea that our knowledge has to do with “appearances” and not with “things themselves” is famously developed first by Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Without going into details of his “Copernican revolution”, one important aspect should be emphasized here: Kant’s “*phenomenalism*” is justified by the fact that he was concerned with proving the possibility of *necessary* knowledge. Kant’s basic thought was that “necessity”, that is, the well-organized and *apodictic* determination and structuredness of what exists, cannot come from the chaotic sensible manifold, but must be “added into” that which is objectively experienced *through the subject*. For Kant, this is nonetheless solely valid for *epistemological* purposes, that means according to the following judgment: should knowledge be justified, subjective a priori accomplishments (to be traced back to the “transcendental subject”) must be assumed. In this sense this “subjective aspect” has no ontological relevance and the whole approach never goes beyond a basic framework which remains hypothetical and logical.

Husserl proceeds very differently. The correlation of subjective ways of givenness and objective givenness *inherent* to the phenomenon – which Husserl also calls the correlation of “noesis” (constituting *act* of thinking) and “noema” (the *content* of thought, namely, of constituted objectivity as a unity of sense), or for short the “noetic-noematic correlation” – is not something that merely needs to be assumed as the transcendental condition of knowledge in order to explain how knowledge is possible. It much rather makes up its own entirely new

area of “transcendental experience”⁴ that can be investigated. In this way the phenomenological concept of the transcendental is assigned with a *genuine* status of being which is clearly distinct from what objectively exists. The clarification of the phenomenological concept of being thereby opens up a proper field of problem within phenomenological research.

The phenomenological concept of phenomenon is therefore distinguished by a correlative structure *inherent* to phenomenality. Thus understood, this correlativity is not an apodictic claim, but a given field of investigation, and its analysis presents a project that has to be continually reconceived. In this connection the unique *style* of phenomenology should be mentioned: it consists in making sure that what is demonstrated, in its being demonstrated, is and remains “demonstrable” in every step of its analysis. As a result, its corresponding style of writing may appear to be “didactic”, but it is above all its function to make that project accessible to every new conception and at the same time to make it possible to continually and repeatedly return to that project. This attests not least to the self-reflexive dimension of phenomenological analysis, in which each gain of knowledge refers to the patient and transparent seeing by whom it is seen.

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The task of this lecture is to introduce phenomenology once again to the claims to knowledge and being, which have been grasped at the height of its first appearance with Husserl. The opening quotation above expresses this when Husserl asks his readers and allies to understand phenomenology as “transcendental idealism” and to make the “transcendental basis” one’s own. This idea will be time and again elaborated in details in what follows. For now an introductory remark:

The object as such of phenomenology is intentionality, that is, the genuine phenomenological correlation. This is not to be taken ostensibly to mean the relation between a concrete object and a subject of consciousness which *stands opposed* to it, but a *structure* which has to be analyzed and which is “*inherent*” to every phenomenon (i.e. to everything that appears to consciousness)⁵. It is decisive that a shift in the direction of looking takes place. Husserl understands and expresses this turn of direction mostly as the “turning backward” of looking *away from* its “closedness” in objects and *towards* the constituting accomplishments of consciousness which bring these objects precisely to appearance. Such a manner of speaking can give rise to a misunderstanding. It might appear that this turn of direction implies an opposition between to independent entities which are only then placed into a relation with each other. But this is precisely how the phenomenological correlation is not to be understood. The peculiarity of the transcendental-phenomenological approach consists rather in seeking an access to meaning-constituting accomplishments that does not presuppose the *pre-existence* and *pre-givenness* of an *empirical-real* subject. All efforts are devoted to achieve the analyses of the meaning-constituting accomplishments which make up the field of “transcendental experience” and therefore first and foremost make the meaning of real existence, pre-givenness and permanence intelligible. As we will see, Husserl characterizes this task as the challenge of phenomenology “to create a ground [of knowledge and being] for itself through its own powers”⁶. The task will therefore be bring this basic transcendental-“idealistic” attitude *into*

⁴ Cf. Hua VIII, p. 76, 169ff. or §63 of the *Cartesian Meditations*.

⁵ Marc Richir characterizes this structure (in its unique phenomenological “character of absoluteness”) with full right as “that instable limit, not locatable on its own, beyond which the performance of the methods of the epoché and reduction can no longer be shown as a meaningful possibility of experience” in Richir 2000.

⁶ Hua VI, S. 185; Carr 181.

phenomenology in such a way that this internal reflection on the originary transcendental sphere and, of course, just as much *this sphere itself* may become a phenomenological phenomenon.

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To conclude these introductory reflections, four theses which can serve as the operative guidelines for the attempt to be developed here to define phenomenology, will be presented now. Accompanying each of these thesis, a counter-thesis which the thesis is supposed to refute will be formulated.

First thesis: *thesis of twofold presuppositionlessness*. Phenomenology is defined by an *ontological* and an *epistemological* presuppositionlessness. “Ontological” presuppositionlessness means – and the minimal anti-realistic position of phenomenology amounts to just this – that phenomenology never departs from any *pregiven* being, that is, neither a pre-existent *objective* being “in itself” nor a really existing (concrete, empirical) *subject*. The *epistemological* presuppositionlessness concerns, on the other hand, the fact that the validity of any sort of position-taking – be it metaphysical or natural-scientific – regarding the world or beings in general is suspended.

Second thesis: *thesis of geneticized givenness*. Opposed to the thesis of the absolute *non-pregivenness* of (subjective and objective) being is the thesis that phenomenology targets a *givenness* which is experienceable in the widest sense and to be exhibited in its constitutive sense, and that phenomenology consequently neither offers conceptual-grammatical analyses nor represents an argumentative-logical standpoint. This thesis is nonetheless consistent with the first thesis, insofar as the *givenness* at stake – namely, the *geneticized* – can and must be radically distinguished from any realistic *pregivenness*. The given is not *pregiven*, precisely because its own givenness is only unfolded and exhibited in the first place in the geneticizing procedure of phenomenology.

Third thesis: *thesis of correlativity*. The third thesis – namely, that phenomenology always has the phenomenological *correlation* as its theme – must also be understood only on the basis of the first two theses. Correlationism is nothing *presupposed* – which would be the case for the being-in-itself in metaphysical realism or dogmatism – but that fundamental structure of everything given *which can be only exhibited in phenomenological geneticization in the first place and thereby analyzed in its various forms*. It is therefore also misleading to identify phenomenology with the standpoint of the so-called “first-person-perspective”. If it is meant by this that one does not look at what exists from an (illusory) “objective” standpoint, but must take up the perspectivity of a personal subject which is nonetheless *assumed* to exist, then such a view would be clearly contradicted by the first thesis of phenomenological presuppositionlessness. The change of perspective involved in phenomenology thus does not take place from the object to the subject (or to the person), but, as already shortly mentioned, from objectivism to correlationism, the latter of which emphasizes the irreducible subject-object structure *intrinsic* to all appearing beings.

Fourth thesis: *thesis of intelligibilization*. Phenomenology aims at the elucidation of sense and its “making-intelligible”, not at a positive or positivistic determination of what exists or a purely logical legitimation of knowledge. The concept of “intelligibilization” should make clear that it is not “explanatory models” or “epistemic justification”, but a “transcendental *making-intelligible*” that concerns phenomenology. Phenomenology therefore proceeds *regressively* (which does not, however, exclude phenomenological *construction*), that is, it departs from given experience in order to make its sense and validity understandable, and not progressively – one could say, borrowing from Kant’s methodological practice in the *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able to Come Forward as Science*, that it is in its regressive nature that phenomenology’s *transcendentalism* consists. Thus it is particularly countersensical – and this must be emphasized in all its radicality – to want to place

phenomenology in competition with the natural sciences in any way. The natural sciences are individual sciences that seek to accumulate knowledge in the framework of their own presuppositions; phenomenology, in contrast, remains true to the classical conception of philosophy, insofar as it interrogates the experience of the world in its sense and its validity of being.

Phenomenology as transcendental idealism

The purpose of the next part is to show to what extent phenomenology can (or *must*) be determined as a transcendental idealism and what exactly phenomenology as a transcendental idealism consists of. In addition, I would like to address systematic problems (or at least a central problem) concerning which it is not certain whether they have actually been solved yet. In any case, these problems predominate in contemporary debates, which is why phenomenology is not a tradition that is “dead” but continues to make vital philosophical contributions in a systematically crucial way.

Phenomenology as “transcendental idealism” is thus the subject – to understand what it is about, it is necessary to go back to Kant. The main task of Kant’s theoretical philosophy is formulated in the heart of his most important work, namely in the deduction of categories in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant defines this “deduction” concept in it thus: It is a matter of “*explaining the way in which concepts a priori [a priori here understood primarily as an adverb, not as an attribute⁷] can refer to objects.*”⁸

Two words are decisive here: 1/ “object reference” and 2/ the way, how this should take place, namely: “a priori”. What does this mean?

The problem raised by Kant is particularly relevant for phenomenology, and first of all for the phenomenology founded by Husserl.⁹

Indeed, the general framework of epistemology is very similar in Kant and in Husserl, only the expressions differ. The basic idea is that in epistemology we are not only dealing with the *things* in the world, but that a *relation* of our cognitive faculties to the objects, which are not understood as being *in themselves*, but as *appearing*, is predominant. The “wherein” of this referentiality is understood by Kant as “*Vorstellung*” (representation), by Husserl as “intentional (conscious) experience” or simply as “intentionality”. For Kant, *Vorstellung* always means: the way of relating to an object (directly in *Anschauung*, indirectly in *Begriff*). And in Husserl, too, at the end of § 14 of the second *Cartesian Meditation*, intentionality is called the basic property of consciousness, “to be consciousness of something”, which also expresses the reference to the object.

For the labeling of phenomenology as “transcendental idealism”, § 41 of the fourth *Cartesian Meditation* is very significant. Immediately before this paragraph, namely at the end of § 40, Husserl formulates “the great problem”, which he also calls the “Cartesian problem”. What is it? This problem consists in proving how intentional experiences can acquire “objective meaning”. I quote, “But how can this business, going on wholly within the immanency of conscious life, acquire Objective significance? How can evidence (*clara et distincta perceptio*)

⁷ This reading is based on Kant’s “Reply to Johann Wilhelm Andreas Kosmann” of September 1789, in which he states that a transcendental deduction from our ideas consists in “seeking out the grounds of possibility as they have a priori [...] objective reality”, I. Kant, *Briefwechsel*, Hamburg, F. Meiner, 1986, p. 415.

⁸ KrV, A 85/B 117 (highlighted by A.S.).

⁹ See on this A. Schnell, *Zeit, Einbildung, Ich. Phänomenologische Interpretation von Kants Kategorien-Deduktion*, Frankfurt am Main, V. Klostermann, „rote Reihe“, 2022.

claim to be more than a characteristic of consciousness within me?" (*Husserliana I*, 1973, p. 116).

We see that also here the problem is quite similar in Kant and Husserl. We have ideas, concepts, experiences of consciousness, and it is now a matter of showing that they are not mere "fictions of imagination", as Kant expresses himself frequently, but (can) relate to objects in such a way that an objectively valid knowledge also arises from them.

I now quote another famous sentence, taken from the just mentioned § 41 of the fourth *Cartesian Meditation*, which introduces the answer to this question (I will comment on it in more detail in a moment). The sentence reads, "Only someone who misunderstands either the deepest sense of intentional method, or that of transcendental reduction, or perhaps both, can attempt to separate phenomenology from transcendental idealism [...]" (*Husserliana I*, p. 119). This means that if one wants to understand in what way phenomenology is a transcendental idealism, it must be taken into account that phenomenology is an "intentional method" and that this method is based on the "transcendental reduction". This will now be explained in more detail.

That phenomenology has "intentionality" as its basic theme – that is, the reference of the experiences of consciousness to objects –, has already been said. But what is the "intentional method" or what does phenomenology as a method consist of?

The fact *that* phenomenology was primarily conceived as a method and must continue to be determined as such has already been mentioned very often. Here are a few quotations:

Husserl writes: "At the turn of the century as philosophy [...] struggled for a rigorously scientific method, there arose what was at once a new science and a new method [...] of philosophical [...] research. The new science was called phenomenology because it, or its new method, was developed through a certain radicalizing of an already existing phenomenological method [...] It was the radicalizing of these methodic tendencies [...] which led to a quite novel method of investigation [...] and at the same time to a quite novel treatment of questions that concern specific principles of philosophy[.]"¹⁰

Heidegger confirms this: "Rightly conceived, phenomenology is the concept of a method."¹¹

In Reinach, an early student of Husserl, we read: "This is the essential point: phenomenology does not concern itself with a system of philosophical statements and truths [...] but with a method of philosophizing required by the problems of philosophy."¹²

Marc Richir (the last great phenomenologist at the end of the 20th century) claims:

"[...] phenomenology is nothing but philosophy transformed into a method, and a method, again, of the description of 'what happens' in experience (the famous *Sachen selbst*), without there being, at least in principle and in accordance with the method, in all of this, a 'position-taking' or a metaphysical *saltus mortalitatis*[.]"¹³

But what exactly does this method consist of?

Husserl's basic concern is to design and realize a philosophy that is to be characterized by absolute "presuppositionlessness". One of the metaphysical, that means – at least this is how Husserl understands it – *phenomenologically unidentified* basic presuppositions consists in the assumption that the objects of the world exist "in themselves", exist in their "being-in-itself". But this is merely a *presupposition* – for if things were indeed always already given in themselves, that is, regarded in their non-relatedness to our conceptions, experiences, etc., *how*

¹⁰ Husserl, "The Amsterdam Lectures", in *Psychological and Transcendental Phenomenology and the Confrontation with Heidegger (1972-1931)*, Edmund Husserl. Collected Works, Vol. VI, p. 213f.

¹¹ Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, Indiana University Press, 1982, p. 20.

¹² A. Reinach, "Was ist Phänomenologie?" (January 1914), Munich, Kösel-Verlag, 1951, p. 21.

¹³ M. Richir, "Métaphysique et phénoménologie: Prolégomènes pour une anthropologie phénoménologique", in *Phénoménologie française et Phénoménologie allemande*, ed. E. Escoubas and B. Waldenfels, L'Harmattan, Paris, 2000, p. 115.

could we know about them? How could we assert anything at all about these things being in themselves without falling into a dogmatic attitude? (So, again, one can see the proximity to Kant's questions).

However, Husserl's "solution" now diverges from that of Kant. Initially, their paths seem to continue to run parallel. Kant answers this question in the deduction of the categories with recourse to the "transcendental apperception". The transcendental self-consciousness "causes" "unity" in the vividly given sensuous multiplicity in such a way that thereby representationality is produced as representationality and the a priori object reference (of the concepts) is established. But this represents with Kant only a *conceptual (transcendental)* argumentation. For him, all this is subject to a *hypothetical* questioning: *if* knowledge is to be possible, then transcendental apperception must be engaged in the indicated way. But now it is different with Husserl. Husserl also emphasizes the idea that the object-reference must be *a priori*. And he too claims transcendental subjectivity (though not reduced to self-consciousness). But for Husserl, conceptual argumentation does not suffice for this. For him, the "transcendental" does not designate *only* one manner of knowledge. The "transcendental" characterizes transcendental subjectivity in its transcendental *life*. The "transcendental" constitutes a sphere of its own, namely precisely that of the transcendental life itself. Only if the focus is directed to the constitutive accomplishments of this transcendental life – with its affectivity, corporeality, etc., to be interpreted *transcendentally* – can the elucidation of the meaning of every given in experience be realized. And the phenomenological (or transcendental) re-duction consists precisely in *introducing into this transcendental (living life) sphere*. Thereby, as it were, a "new world" comes into being. But not – as Nietzsche would say – a "back world". Also not – as Platonism claims – a "supersensible world". But how is the reference to the object explained by the immersion into this transcendental sphere, as it is supposed to be accomplished by means of phenomenology? For this purpose, several longer quotations from § 41 of the fourth *Cartesian meditation* shall now be consulted (p. 83 engl. transl.):

Manifestly the conscious execution of phenomenological reduction is needed, in order to attain that Ego and conscious life by which transcendental questions, as questions about the possibility of transcendental knowledge, can be asked. But as soon as – instead of transiently exercising a phenomenological epochè – one sets to work, attempting in a systematic self-investigation and as the pure ego to uncover this ego's whole field of consciousness, one recognizes that all, that exists for the pure ego, becomes constituted in *himself* [...]. Transcendency in every form is an *immanent* existential characteristic, constituted *within* the ego. *Every imaginable sense, every imaginable being, whether the latter is called immanent or transcendent, falls within the domain of transcendental subjectivity, as the subjectivity that constitutes sense and being.* [...] (*Husserliana I*, pp. 116-117, emphasized by A.S.).

The first point here is that the transcendental subjectivity is worked out as *constituting* every being. Decisive is then the following passage, in which the description of this transcendental subjectivity is furthermore shown as *self-explication* of it:

The "phenomenological self-explication" that went on in my ego, this explication of all my ego's constitutings and all the objectivities existing for him, necessarily assumed the methodic form of an a priori self-explication, one that gives the facts their place in the corresponding universe of pure (or eidetic) possibilities [...].

Genuine theory of knowledge is accordingly possible [*sinnvoll*] only as transcendental-phenomenological theory, which, instead of operating with inconsistent inferences leading from a supposed immanency to a supposed transcendency (that of no matter what "thing in itself", which is alleged to be essentially unknowable), has to do exclusively with systematic clarification of the knowledge performance, a clarification in which this must become thoroughly understandable as an *intentional performance*. Precisely thereby every sort of existent itself, real or ideal, becomes understandable as a "product" of transcendental

subjectivity, a product constituted in just that performance. *This kind of understandableness is the highest imaginable form of rationality.* All wrong interpretations of being come from naive blindness to the horizons that join in determining the sense of being, and to the corresponding tasks of uncovering implicit intentionality. If these are seen and undertaken, there results a universal phenomenology, as a *self-explication of the ego*, carried out with continuous evidence and at the same time with concreteness. Stated more precisely: First, a self-explication in the pregnant sense, showing systematically how the ego constitutes himself, in respect of his own proper essence, as existing in himself and for himself; then, secondly, a self-explication in the broadened sense, which goes on from there to show how, by virtue of this proper essence, the ego likewise constitutes in himself something “other”, something “Objective”, and thus constitutes everything without exception that ever has for him, in the ego, existential status as non-ego.

Carried out with this systematic concreteness, phenomenology is *eo ipso transcendental idealism*, though in a fundamentally and essentially new sense. It is not a psychological idealism, and most certainly not such an idealism as sensualistic psychologism proposes, an idealism that would derive a senseful world from senseless sensuous data. Nor is it a Kantian idealism, which believes it can keep open, at least as a limiting concept, the possibility of a world of things in themselves. On the contrary, we have here a transcendental idealism that *is* nothing more than a consequentially executed self-explication in the *form of a systematic egological science, an explication of my ego as subject of every possible cognition, and indeed with respect to every sense of what exists, wherewith the latter might be able to have a sense for me, the ego.* [...] *The proof of this idealism is therefore phenomenology itself.* (*Husserliana I*, pp. 117-119, emphasized by A.S.).

So what are the crucial points here for labeling phenomenology as “transcendental idealism”? Phenomenological interpretation is *self-explication of transcendental subjectivity*. Being is *meaning constituted* in the intentional performances of transcendental subjectivity. (En passant it can be pointed out here that this sense-formation not only engages perception, but also, to at least an equal degree, *imagination* [*Gebilde* -> *Einbildung*]). This is expressed in Husserl, among other things, in the fact that the *essence dimension* of any phenomenological analysis is only possible through the “phantasia” [qua one of the modalities of the imagination]).

It is useful to add Husserl’s definition of the “transcendental” from the *Krisis-Writing*. In doing so, two further determinations will then be added to what has just been mentioned. Husserl’s definition of this concept of the transcendental is first as follows: The “word ‘transcendental’” is used for a “motif” that is “the motif of inquiring back into the ultimate source of all the formations of knowledge (*Erkenntnisbildungen*), the motif of the knower’s reflecting upon himself and his knowing life in which all the scientific structures (*Gebilde*) that are valid for him occur purposefully, are stored up as acquisitions, and have become and continue to become freely available¹⁴”. “Transcendental” thus refers to that motivation which makes *phenomenologically* (with respect to the “immanent” given) and then also *scientifically* describable as “entities” comprehensible, which point back to a last source. But in what does this “last source” consist? It consists in the “functioning performances” of transcendental subjectivity, which for their part are phenomenologically – *but in a different sense than purely immanent description* – demonstrable and analyzable as “stored up” and thus “freely available acquisitions”. “Transcendental” does not mean: referring to mere *conditions* of the possibility of knowledge, but opening a phenomenological field, which as “knowing life” provides a contribution to sense-formation (in the sense of “*Sinngebilde*” and “*Geltungsgebilde*”) as active as it is veiled.

The two further points, then, concern the ideas that transcendental subjectivity is aptly called “ego” only if this is conceived of as a “*field*” and that within the transcendental sphere a distinction must still be made between *immanence* and *pre-immanence*. Immanence is the

¹⁴ E. Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, p. 97-98.

sphere of phenomenological description, while pre-immanence is that of phenomenological construction.¹⁵ Finally, it must be added that in these quoted passages, for the most part explicitly, but also in part implicitly, the three basic concepts of phenomenology – namely *intentional correlation*, *sense*, and *reflection* – come into play. In this regard, I would like to refer to § 48 of *Krisis* (concerning *correlation*) and to § 55¹⁶ of *Ideen I* (concerning *sense*) as well as to § 77 of *Ideen I* (concerning *reflection*).

These introductory considerations shall be concluded with some reflections regarding certain difficulties of phenomenological transcendental idealism as it has been presented here.

In the beginning, the essential relation of Husserl to Kant was pointed out. In the context of the explanations given, this was certainly not unjustified. In terms of the history of philosophy, however, the reference to Kant does not go far enough. If one wants to become aware of the essential systematic content of phenomenology, one has to go back even further, namely to the philosophy of the 17th century. Husserl himself, for his part, pointed out the relation of transcendental phenomenology to Descartes in important writings (not least, of course, in the *Cartesian Meditations* but also in *First Philosophy*). That his interpretation of Descartes is practically completely wrong is another matter and shall not concern us here. I am rather concerned with a systematically very important point, where Spinoza can or should also be consulted. Descartes starts from the meditating I and asks how the *relation to the external world* is possible. Spinoza starts from the divine substance and its ideas (especially the idea that every thinking person is also an idea of God) and asks about the possibility of its *existence*. What about Husserl? Husserl starts from transcendental subjectivity and thereby brackets every being-in-itself, but also every being – by eliminating “Generalthesis”. Thus, in the introduction and enforcement of the method of epochè and reduction, being (or any “really existing”) is ontologically invalidated. But how – and this is the basic question – can the *sense-formations* (Sinngelbilde) spoken of in phenomenology understood as transcendental idealism then be accorded a *status of being* at all? Or, to put it differently: do the analyses developed above not still have to be completed by *ontogenetic* analyses?¹⁷ Is the reduction of being to meaning legitimate? Descartes and Spinoza would not have been satisfied with such an assertion. They would have pointed out that the question of existence could not be answered without recourse to God. Kant rejected such a gesture and Husserl follows him in it. This is expressed in the *Phenomenology* by the fact that transcendental subjectivity takes the place of God, as it were – but is thus precisely a subject *without God*. In the further course of the history of phenomenology, opinions differ in this respect. Two camps, one could say, oppose each other – one camp that carries out the analyses strictly without any recourse to God and another camp that does not go along with the abandonment of the concept of God. It is, in my view, a desideratum of phenomenology, insofar as it takes seriously, for example, Heidegger’s rejection of a mixture of phenomenological and theological questions, to clarify how being and existence can be made intelligible phenomenologically. This would be achieved by highlighting a phenomenological transcendence – I would stress: an *irreflective* or *unreflective transcendence* – that does justice to the concerns of both camps (provided, of course, that they radically renounce dogmatism).

¹⁵ On “immanence” and “pre-immanence” in phenomenology, see A. Schnell, *Wirklichkeitsbilder*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2015 and *Seinsschwüngen*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2020.

¹⁶ See also the § 129 of the *Ideas I*.

¹⁷ On this question, see the excellent book by G. Jean, *Les puissances de l'apparaître. Étude sur M. Henry, R. Barbaras, et la phénoménologie contemporaine*, Dixmont/Wuppertal, Association Internationale de Phénoménologie, “Mémoires des Annales de Phénoménologie”, vol. XVII, 2021.

Phenomenological description and phenomenological construction

Phenomenological description. In his explanations of the phenomenological way of proceeding, Husserl mostly emphasizes its *descriptive* character. What is specific about phenomenological description and what distinguishes it from conventional ways of description?

The distinction relates first and foremost to the *critical* dimension of phenomenology. Phenomenology is the most attentive hunter of all forms of naiveté, and indeed, it has exposed a variety of naiveté. The most basic form of naiveté concerns the belief in the independent existence of given beings, a belief which is exposed and – in being exposed – avoided through the epoché. In its intentional analyses then phenomenology limits itself to that which appears phenomenally, which is to be investigated by “eidetic descriptions”. But here too phenomenology proceeds in the first place “naively” (Husserl speaks on this first level of a “naive-straightforward phenomenology”¹⁸), until a “theory and critique of phenomenological reason”¹⁹ is achieved, which in turn is completed by “higher-[level] descriptions”²⁰ thanks to which the naiveté of phenomenology can be completely eliminated. Husserl calls the “naiveté” on the first level of phenomenological description a “transcendental naiveté”²¹. By this he refers to the infinite research field of “transcendental subjectivity” *before any apodictic critique*, that is, before it becomes “guided by *the idea of an absolute cognition*, a cognition from absolute and all-sided justification.”²² This form of naiveté can be distinguished from the naiveté in the natural and “straightforwardly” (*geradehin*) oriented attitude by the fact that the latter remains absorbed in its object, whose independent existence it assumes.

How can the transition from the first to the second level of phenomenology be achieved, in order to expose the transcendental naiveté on the first level?

The first important point in the characterization of phenomenological description concerns the fact that it brings *intentional implications* implicitly contained all intentional relations to light. Intentional analysis departs from actual intentional lived experiences. But every actuality implies its potentialities. Every present (*gegenwärtig*) givenness or “presence” (*Präsenz*) signifies at the same time a co-presence (*Mitgegenwärtigkeit* or *Kopräsenz*) of horizontalities which are also given, even though they cannot be explicitly intended. These horizontalities are the necessary “surplus” of actual presence: The co-present exceeds in each case the actually given. But these co-present horizontalities are no mere “empty possibilities”, but prescribe for the actually present possibilities which either are already realized or are to be realized. Husserl calls these possibilities “potentialities”, which belong in each case to an “I can” or “I do”²³. Thus no intentional thinking can occur without bringing potentialities along, or put reversely, *every intentional relation constantly implies a horizon of potentialities*.

What is more, objects of consciousness do not simply come into consciousness from the outside, but is included in it “as sense”, that is, “as the intentional achievement of a synthesis of consciousness”²⁴. The intentional object is never presented as something conclusively given. Instead, it can only be presented by making explicit the actual and potential horizons which belong to transcendental subjectivity and which remain in each case open. In fact, horizontal

¹⁸ E. Husserl, *First Philosophy. Lectures 1923/24 and Related Texts from the Manuscripts (1920-1925)*, trans. S. Luft & T. M. Naberhaus, Dordrecht, Springer, 2019, p. 597.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., p. 371.

²² Ibid.

²³ [Translator’s note: Husserl’s well-known account of the “I can” and “I do” as the basic motivational structure of the personal ego can be found in: E. Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy. Second Book: Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution*, trans. R. Rojcewicz, A. Schuwer, Dordrecht, Kluwer, 1989, p. 270-280.]

²⁴ Hua I/80. Eng CM p. 42, translation modified.

intentionality (*Horizontintentionalität*) is an essential factor for the constitution of intentional objects, since the sense of objects is never completely, but always only “implicitly” intended and necessitates its own unfolding in *other* intentional experiences. In this way phenomenological description thus exposes the intentional implications which phenomenology must take into account in the analysis of intentional achievements.

From this perspective the central significance of *intuition* and thereby that of intuitive *evidence* comes into view. This is the third essential aspect of phenomenological description alongside the horizontality of potentialities and of the eidetic description of sense which corresponds to these potentialities²⁵. In truth, phenomenological description is only valid when that which is described can be given in evidential intuition. For Husserl this means that the analysis not only “sees” its object, but that this intuition has a legitimating character and gives evidence. This is the thought on which Husserl’s “principle of *all* principles” in §24 of *Ideas I* is based. According to this principle, every “fact” to which our cognition relates must be justified, and indeed, for this “every originally presentative intuition is a legitimizing source of cognition.”²⁶

Phenomenological construction. The stature of phenomenology as a *transcendental* philosophy finds expression lastly and most consequentially in the fact that its transcendental dimension also brings about a *constructive* aspect in its methodological way of proceeding. This alone makes it possible to bring transcendental critique to an end and to eliminate the last remnant of “transcendental naiveté”. In so doing, even the “principle of all principles” must be expanded, if not ultimately called into question.

The “fundamental phenomenological method”²⁷, as is well known, is constituted by phenomenological description and in particular by the phenomenological reduction. Yet this does not mean that that method limits itself to laying open the field of transcendental experience and its intentional implications. In fact, this concept of a “laying open” (*Freilegung*)²⁸ points implicitly towards fundamental characteristics of the phenomenological method, of which Husserl only became fully conscious in the later 1920s. Upon closer examination, while the *descriptive* phenomenological analysis, in its eidetic framework, is helpful and necessary for laying out the “really inherent” (*reell*) and immanent contents of consciousness²⁹, it nonetheless proves to be insufficient when it comes to descending onto the level of the *ultimately and originally constituting phenomena*. In truth, the field of transcendental subjectivity is not *merely* “given” or “present”, so that a description would *suffice* to lay out its structural moments, even if these moments are already only implicitly describable. Rather, there are hindrances which cover them up and which must be removed by a “deconstructive” line of work, which refers to that which Husserl calls an “unbuilding reduction” (*Abbaureduktion*)³⁰, and to which a positive counterpart corresponds, namely a phenomenological “construction”. By this neither a metaphysical nor a hypothetic-deductive construction is meant, and nor does a phenomenological construction merely display the “conditions of possibility” of experience in a formal and regressive manner. In contrary, it positions its object of investigation in each case

²⁵ Fink goes even so far as to claim that evidence is “the title of the *central* problem of Husserl’s phenomenology”: Fink, *Studien zur Phänomenologie*, p. 202.

²⁶ *Ideas I*, trans. Kersten, Kluwer 1983, p. 44.

²⁷ *Hua I*, 61, CM Eng p. 17.

²⁸ *Hua I*, 66, Eng p. 27.

²⁹ [Translator’s note: for the definition of the concept of “really inherent” (*reell*) as opposed to that of “real” (*real*) see §16 of the 5th *Logical Investigation* and §24 of *Ideas I*.]

³⁰ The “primordial reduction” developed by Husserl in §44 of the 5th *Cartesian Meditation* is a good example for such an “unbuilding reduction”. See further the manuscript C 17 in E. Husserl, *Späte Texte über Zeitkonstitution (1929-1934)*. *Die C-Manuskripte*. Husserliana Materialien, Volume 8, ed. D. Lohmar, Springer, 2006, p. 394f.

within the tension between what is phenomenally given and what has to be phenomenologically constructed, the latter of which is warranted by a “constructive intuition”³¹ within transcendental experience. This is not just to say that there is an actual experience of the transcendental, as it was the case already with the first representatives of classical German philosophy, but more importantly, that the experience which phenomenology addresses itself demonstrates transcendental structures.

More specifically, phenomenological constructions become necessary when phenomenological description reaches its limits, that is, when intuitive evidence no longer suffices for a de-cision (*Ent-scheidung*) between different “border-facts” (*Grenzfakten*) which present themselves factually. Two examples may illustrate this intuitively: Is original temporality “objective” or “subjective”? Does it belong to a “pre-objective” or “pre-subjective” dimension? Another question: Is the phenomenological ego solipsistic, that is, purely egological, or is it intersubjectively constituted? Here, only the constructive analysis of these originally constituting phenomena can bring light into the darkness. To construct in phenomenology thus means, through a zig-zag movement between the border-facts, to descend into the dimension – to be constructed – of that which is able to explain these facts. In so doing, the construction must constantly remain in keeping with these facts – it can by no means be fictional and limits itself in each case specifically to what is to be constructed. This makes it clear how Husserl’s transcendental idealism distinguishes itself from Kant’s: The former undertakes, thanks to the procedure of phenomenological construction, to legitimate cognition through phenomena which remain inaccessible in experience in the usual sense of the word and which phenomenological construction alone makes accessible. This is why the concepts of phenomenon and of the legitimation and justification of knowledge must be thought together in a constructive phenomenology³².

Some concepts of the phenomenological method

“... the meaning of the method can only be determined by the problem.”³³

In order to be able to introduce the phenomenological method, two guiding remarks are in place.

First, it must be stressed that this method cannot be naively detached from its object or material. Levinas has remarked early on, following Hegel’s critique of Kant’s methodological practice – at least according to how he interpreted this critique – of separating “method” and “truth”, that the attempt to fundamentally legitimize knowledge coincides with the *performance* of this legitimation on the phenomenologically most original level. This means that the method cannot be located outside the area of its subject matter. This point has been recently emphasized again in relation to Heidegger. Heidegger himself made this unmistakably clear in the *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, with a view to a concept of phenomenology that is too narrowly understood:

There is no such thing as *the* phenomenology, and if there could be such a thing it would never become anything like a philosophical technique. For implicit in the essential nature of all genuine method as a path toward the disclosure of objects is the tendency to order itself always toward that which it itself discloses. When a method is genuine and provides access to the

³¹ E. Fink, *Phänomenologische Werkstatt* (Volume 1). *Die Doktorarbeit und erste Assistenzjahre bei Husserl*, ed. R. Bruzina, Freiburg/Munich, Alber, 2006, p. 259.

³² For further details on the definition of “phenomenological construction”, readers are referred to my earlier work, *Wirklichkeitsbilder*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2015, p. 37ff.

³³ Fink, *Studien zur Phänomenologie*, p. 180.

objects, it is precisely then that the progress made by following it and the growing originality of the disclosure will cause the very method that was used to become necessarily obsolete. The only thing that is truly new in science and in philosophy is the genuine questioning and struggle with things which is at the service of this questioning.³⁴

Owing to this essential character of merging with the objects of its questioning, it would be meaningless to want to preface concrete phenomenological labour in advance with a “discourse on method” (Descartes).

Second: it should be remarked just as much that this character cannot be separated from what could be called the fundamental horizon of phenomenology. In what does this “fundamental horizon” consist?

Phenomenology understands itself as “absolute presuppositionlessness”. This means that it makes no antecedent decisions as to what the “matter” of philosophical analyses is and how it can be adequately investigated. These analyses nonetheless inscribe themselves within a fundamental, transcendental as well as specifically ontological framework, or precisely, a “fundamental horizon”. This means, more concretely, that it is framed in a configuration consisting of four vanishing points of sense-formation³⁵ – namely, that of “transcendentality”, “sensefulness”, “eidetics” and “correlationality”³⁶. They belong together with the basic concepts of the phenomenological method in the closest fashion and must therefore be first of all developed in details.

Phenomenology as philosophy of sense. An essential characteristic of phenomenology concerns its dimension of *sense*³⁷. The task of phenomenology is fundamentally – far beyond the clarification of the meaning of linguistic statements and signs in a narrow sense – “the clarification of sense”, that is, the making-intelligible of sense as such. It proceeds from the assumption that there is “sense” and that it is meaningful to understand and interpret it. But sense of *what*? Here, two pitfalls must be avoided: on the one side, the Scylla of an overly narrow reference to the positive givenness of what exists, and on the other the Charybdis of an abstract and hollow conception of a “sense of the whole” or of a vaguely employed “being” etc. Nor should sense be understood merely as the dimension of *representation*, as the element or form of mental representation in distinction from materially “real” beings. How, then, is “sense” and “sensefulness” to be positively determined?

Sense belongs intimately together with genuine understanding. Sense is that which inscribes our thoughts in a horizon of meaning (Heidegger would say “context of involvement” [*Bewandtniszusammenhang*]) – it does not merely point into a direction, but underlies every act of pointing into a direction, insofar as it projects and sketches out “that for which” every act of understanding is there, that is, its structure of directedness as such. It therefore designates neither the “object” or its way of “being given”, but rather the “play space” [*Spielraum*] or the “element” in which and through which that which appears appears with a more or less determinate meaning. It is the world-opening dimension in which the real appears in its minimal and necessary conditions of truth.

³⁴ Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, Indiana University Press, 1982, p. 328.

³⁵ The concept of “sense-formation” and its foundational status in phenomenology will be explicitly discussed and analysed in Chapter 4.

³⁶ True – as Heidegger remarked in the passage cited above – there is no such thing as “the” phenomenology, which is why this basic configuration of four vanishing points of sense-formation is only limitedly applicable to all existing phenomenological projects. But with *Husserl* it is definitely essential and presents thereby the basic background to which his successors will then consistently refer – whether affirmatively and in consolidation, or critically and in rejection.

³⁷ This is expressed already in Husserl’s definition of “phenomenon” as “a sense meant and undergoing verification”: Cairns CM p. 95.

What is more, sense lends a form of groundedness [*Bodenhaftigkeit*] to thoughts. In *Crisis* Husserl calls “the ground of sense” [*Sinnboden*] “an immense structural a priori”³⁸ constituting the basic presupposition of understanding and insight. Sense ties expressions, thoughts and contents of thought down to structural formations of understanding which emphatically do not lend themselves to formalistic models of explanation. The relation to sense thus cannot be reduced to an abstract or formal-semantic reference which would ultimately turn around in circles. This is why sense ultimately guarantees a specific “fullness of understanding” which resists all empty and thoughtless use of language. Sense contributes decisively to the fulfillment of understanding, and only thanks to it does understanding realize itself. It is thus the very “that for which” of understanding, fulfilling itself in each case of understanding, giving understanding, as it were, its grip and content, and saving it from being suspended in emptiness. The difficulty of understanding such a concept of sense lies surely in the fact that sense is no immediate object of consciousness, but must be conceived among the transcendental parameters which is given only in a “transcendental experience”³⁹.

Phenomenology as science of essence. The point where transcendental and sensefulness [*Sinnhaftigkeit*] intersect is designated by Husserl’s concept of “essence”⁴⁰. Husserl’s student Hedwig Conrad-Martius very aptly describes this overlapping of “sense”, “essence” and “eidos” in the transcendental framework as follows:

To the phenomenologist, the world is filled with a priori sensefulness. ‘Sense’ here is not meant in a teleological way, in which the real world or the real course of the world possesses an ultimate historical or trans-historical meaning and goal. ‘Sense’ means rather the same as ‘essence’, and essence is precisely the ultimate, qualitative and ownmost nature which gives every smallest and largest part of being its unexchangeable and irreducible position of meaning.⁴¹

The “objects” of phenomenological research, the “phenomena”, belong to a philosophical science precisely because they are examined in their universal *essential content*⁴². It is important to make clear, in this connection, why phenomenology is not simply psychology and still less coincides with psychologism, which reduces all knowledge to its embeddedness in psychic acts. The justification of this claim is famously delivered by Husserl’s critique of psychologism in the first volume of his *Logical Investigations* (1900/1901).

This critique depends on two main arguments. The first denounces the confusion of the act and the object of knowledge. Every piece of knowledge is wrought by psychic acts which are empirical and occur in time. In contrast, the object of knowledge, such as logical laws, but also all sensefulness in general, is ideal and extra-temporal. The latter – as mentioned already in our Introduction – is not reducible to the former and both are qualitatively heterogeneous. The question how they can relate to each other, of course, has to be posed. But were the answer to consist in an identification of both, then the unique and ownmost character of knowledge, namely its relation to universality and the eideticity of its objects, would be lost. The second argument against psychologism points out its self-contradictoriness. If all ideality were

³⁸ Carr *Crisis* p. 371. *Krisis* 380.

³⁹ The important role of understanding will be deepened in the next chapter.

⁴⁰ To be precise, a distinction would have to be made between “formal-logical” and “material” essences (or *eide*). The necessity of the first kind of essence is apodictic, whereas that of the second is marked by an “openness” to possible corrections.

⁴¹ H. Conrad-Martius, “Vorwort”, in A. Reinach, “Was ist Phänomenologie?”, Munich, Kösel, 1951, p. 10.

⁴² On this point (and this point alone), insofar as it is a science of essence, phenomenology has the character of being an individual science, which it does nonetheless in an exceptional way.

reducible to real psychic acts, the claim that this is the case would itself amount to the formation of a *universal* theory, but real empiricity is precisely not universality. Psychologism ineluctably undermines itself, because it raises in just this claim to theoretical universality.

Phenomenological correlation. The correlation which distinguishes transcendentalism, namely that of being and thinking, or of consciousness and object, has been discussed above. Now the concept of correlation must be determined in its genuinely transcendental-*phenomenological* meaning.

By highlighting a form of relatedness (*Bezughaftigkeit*) prior to the effectuation of an objective, conscious or in some way “egologically” formed agency, two lines of thought can be eliminated from the outset: that according to which objects must be understood as existing in themselves, and that which takes consciousness as a kind of “container” which somehow takes up objective determinations. Correlation or relatedness is in fact *always* precedent. It is the ownmost phenomenological a priori (in the literal sense) – Husserl speaks of the “universal a priori of correlation between experienced object and manners of givenness”⁴³. To understand this fully, however, it is necessary to show that a *three-level structure* is, from a fundamentally systematic standpoint, at stake in phenomenological analysis. The “universal a priori of correlation” is only then fully comprehensible and can be made fruitful for investigations when it becomes clear that different types of correlation are at play on these three levels. Let us begin to explicate these three levels or phenomenological “spheres”.

The first level is in fact not genuinely phenomenological. It corresponds to the “natural attitude” in which that which appears is taken as existing in itself. This applies both to the pre-philosophical consciousness and for the natural-scientific attitude beginning from (occidental) modernity. The “mathematization of nature” is in this sense just as well a theoretical option as mythological worldviews which may remain valid in other cultural worlds than the Judeo-Christian. If on this level one can speak of a “correlation” – admittedly in an unenlightened or pre-critical sense – then it is only insofar as the knowing subject and the known object in the broadest sense, particularly since Descartes’ introduction of the “cogito”, can be brought together in a relation. A specific epistemic function is however not always ascribed to the subject here. Rather, the decisive aspect of this first level is the tendency towards objectivation inherent to the natural attitude.

The second level, commonly regarded as the genuinely phenomenological, is the infinite field of research of “transcendental subjectivity” opened up by the epoché and the reduction. The definitive form of correlation here is named by Husserl as the “noetic-noematic correlation”. It encompasses in particular the sense-content of intentional objects (noemata) and their correlative consciousness (noeses). Husserl’s most famous analyses, such as that of the perception of transcendent objects and their continua of profiles, take place on this level, which is also known as “immanent consciousness”.

The third sphere finally is the level of “pre-immanent” or “pre-phenomenal” consciousness. It is explicitly opened up by Husserl in his analyses of time-consciousness, which belong for this reason to the most decisive analyses in the whole of phenomenology⁴⁴. For several reasons one can in fact no longer speak of “consciousness” here. Consciousness is undercut on this level, insofar nothing immanent to consciousness can be described here. “Pre-phenomenality” or “pre-immanence” here means in addition radical “anonymity”. For this some phenomenologists including Patočka introduce the concept of “asubjective phenomenology”. In this sphere, made accessible through phenomenological *construction* – to this we shall turn shortly –, analysis takes leave of every constitutive accomplishment oriented towards the *subject*, and correlatively, “objectivity” here is no presupposed being but solely the “polarity”

⁴³ Carr *Crisis* p. 166, Hua VI S. 169.

⁴⁴ See especially Texts No. 53 and 54 in *Husserliana X* and the first texts of *Husserliana XXXIII*.

of a precedent and pre-intentional correlation. Nonetheless, pre-phenomenal or pre-immanent correlativity is given. This makes a new form of phenomenological reduction (namely that which one could call “transcendental induction”) necessary, which Husserl however could no longer work out.

Epoché and reduction. The phenomenological “epoché” is the necessary point of departure of phenomenological research. It is necessary in that it corresponds most radically to the slogan of absolute “presuppositionlessness”. “Absolute” or “metaphysical” presuppositionless – to present this differently than in the first phenomenological thesis of our Introduction – is to be understood as the maxim according to which, in philosophical analysis, the philosopher is not to make any prior decision regarding how he stands, epistemologically and ontologically, towards the object of his analysis. The question of what can be understood as “existing” or “true” cannot be determined from the outset, i.e. before such determinations withstand every critique led by the radical task of ultimate foundation. Now among many metaphysical presuppositions there is one particular which enjoys a certain priority, indeed both in the ontological and gnoseological aspect, namely that which concerns the being of the world qua totality of what is. According to it, what is – the “existing” – is given “in itself”, exists independently of and outside any epistemic relation to the “being of the world”. It is on this presupposition that Husserl applies the basic methodological tool of “epoché”, namely the “suspension” and “bracketing” of any “positing of being” (*Seinssetzung*) and “ontological thesis” (*Seinsthesis*). This first step of phenomenological investigation thus requires, as it were, displacing the supposedly unshakeable being in itself into an ontological state of wavering uncertainty, in order to make possible a *presuppositionless* access to appearances.

But Husserl does not stop here. For him the disclosure of this state of “wavering” is inseparable from a second step, namely the realization that this radical “bracketing” of every positing of being opens up the perspective of originary correlativity (*Bezüglichkeit*). This latter procedure constitutes the phenomenological reduction. The “reductio” must be understood here as “reconductio”, that is as a “leading back” (to the transcendental⁴⁵ correlativity which opens up transcendence). In this general phenomenological framework it is by no means decisive how the “opposite poles” in this correlativity are to be defined in their manners of being. Husserl privileges “intentional consciousness”, while others, for example Heidegger, understand this originary correlativity less a conscious relation than an ontological one. But this substantial definition is for the time being only secondary, for it is the reduction to *correlativity* as such which here takes centre stage. This certainly implies that the objective correlate is opposed to an agency in some way to be understood “subjectively”, whose precise definition is just as certainly one of the fundamental tasks of phenomenological research. An exceedingly significant insight of Descartes is thereby reclaimed in phenomenology on a higher reflexive level which needs not be purely egological. Descartes saw the “ego (cogito)”, understood as “fundamentum inconcussum” (unshakeable ground) of certain knowledge, as a result from and within his radical hyperbolic doubt; and in phenomenology, the strict adherence to the suspension of the ontological thesis leads – in a parallel but as mentioned radicalized manner – back to originary correlativity.

In truth, the distinction between the epoché qua suspension of being and the reduction as the leading back to the correlativity which in the first place discloses every being-sense (*Seinssinn*) is not consistently observed by Husserl. Patočka explicitly emphasized this differentiation in order to allow such an important substantial distinction to be fixed also terminologically, whereas the two concepts often coincide with each other in Husserl’s work.

⁴⁵ The reduction can just as well be understood as the “leading back” to or the disclosure of transcendentality itself. It thereby fulfills a bridging function that is missing in Kant’s transcendentalism.

An interesting and noteworthy expansion – also a deepening – of the relation between the epoché and the reduction has been worked out more recently by Marc Richir. For him these two concepts belong still closer to each other on the systematic level than they do for Husserl and Patočka. According to Richir, the reduction fixes what the epoché has liberated in the first place. The epoché does not merely consist in a negative suspension, but also in a specific and positive disclosure. It discloses the “fluid” dimension of sense in contrast to the seeming fixation of “real” objectivities. The reduction then deepens the unique “beneath” (*Diesseits*) in distinction from the “beyond” (*Jenseits*) constituted by the disclosure of the fluidity of sense⁴⁶. The reduction thereby makes an entirely specific “positivity” visible where everything else disperses and breaks up *ad infinitum*. This introduction of the concept of a (transcendental-phenomenological) “positivity” illustrates the close relation between epoché and reduction: The epoché “transcends” the positivity in order to let that which “swings”, “vibrates” and “flashes” in the positivity shine forth; the reduction then takes, as it were, the positivity (not of real objects but of the genuinely “phenomenological” which Heidegger called the “inapparent”) upon itself in order to make accessible the sphere of the “beneath” which is precisely that of the phenomenological.

⁴⁶ It must be emphasized that this “beneath” (and everything that follows from it) does not signify a dimension *on the subject’s side*, but one which *precedes the division of subject and object*. The “this-sidedness” (*Diesseitigkeit*) does *not* therefore make the case for a subjectivism, but locates itself from the outset in an *anonymous*, pre-objective *and* pre-subjective field of phenomenological research.