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Absolute Consciousness in *Ideas I*

ONE OF THE MOST controversial claims advanced by Husserl in Volume I of the *Ideas* is that consciousness is a realm of absolute being. Philosophical absolutes of any sort should always be treated cautiously. Oftentimes the appearance of such absolutes testifies more to a certain myopia on the part of their advocates than to the discovery of genuine first principles. It is often said, and perhaps with some justification, that this is true of Husserl's thought as well. An even more serious challenge, however, is posed by the view that not only is the manner in which Husserl moves to an absolute deficient, but also that the very ideal of a philosophical absolute as found in Husserl's phenomenology is little more than a relic of a kind of historical naïveté.¹

In the pages to follow, judgment on this issue will be reserved until adequate interpretive analyses of the relevant texts have been developed. While a philosophical commitment to truth prescribes that we be wary of absolute claims, such a commitment likewise demands that the nature of the absolute in question, and the grounds advanced for it, be given a full hearing. Hence, one of the central concerns of this work will be with the nature, function, and significance of the allegedly absolute character of consciousness in Husserlian phenomenology.

First, we shall try to see the way in which this absolute emerges in *Ideas I*, reserving the development in the *Cartesian Meditations* for the next chapter. The manner in which this theme shall be approached initially will be via a contrast between the philosophical and non-philosophical attitudes, and the nature of the transition from the latter to the former. This mode of access to the problematic finds its legitimation in the fact that Husserl conceives of the domain of the absolute as the subject matter for philosophical thought. The

nature of philosophical thinking takes shape in light of that about which it thinks. The same is true for nonphilosophical thinking. Thus, we begin with the posing of the problem in terms of the movement from the nonphilosophical to the philosophical.

THE PREPHILOSOPHICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL ATTITUDES

Husserl's claim that consciousness is a realm of absolute being is the product of a lengthy meditation reflexively directed upon capturing the essence of consciousness in itself. The point of departure for this inquiry is a description of the experiential content of ordinary human life and of the presuppositions which delimit the significance of this life activity.² Thus, Husserl's aim, in the true spirit of phenomenology, is to avoid all conceptually bound and constructed beginnings via a descriptive return to those most general characteristics of our predominant form of experience.

Husserl begins the second section of *Ideas I*, a section intended as a preliminary introduction to the fundamental phenomenological outlook, with a brief characterization of the prephilosophical life. In so doing, Husserl is concerned with uncovering something in that life which can serve as an impetus for philosophical activity. In other words, the seeds of the transition from the prephilosophical to the philosophical must be contained in the former. Despite the widening abyss (*chorismos*) between the two in the subsequent development of the philosophical position, the possibility of such a turn must somehow be grasped within the natural life of human activity. In Plato's "myth of the cave," for example, we are never told explicitly the motive behind the first awakenings of the prisoner to the possibility of another realm beyond that of the images. It is only in the discussions of desire (*eros*) in other dialogues, as well as in the erotic tendencies exhibited by Glaucon in the *Republic* itself, for example, that we find the grounds for the transcendence of the entire realm of opinion (*doxa*). The suggestion is clear: that somehow the structure of human experience itself (*eros*), in the recognition of *doxa* as *doxa*, allows for a kind of philosophical transcendence. For in Plato, as in ancient philosophy in general, human life begins in *doxa*, and if philosophy is to be possible, therein must lie its origins.

Thus, as far as *Ideas I* is concerned, we can see that Husserl does not begin with an abstract scientific norm as the ground for philosophical reflection. There is no appeal to a historical, philosophical *telos*, nor do we begin with cognition as a developed epistemological

problem.³ Rather, Husserl starts with a description of the presence of man in the world, and the presence of the world for man. His aim is to portray the most immediate way in which this encounter between man and world exhibits itself. The presence of the world of *doxa* is not exclusively one of a totality of objects to be known by a cognizing subject: "This world is not there for me as a mere world of facts and affairs, but with the same immediacy, as a world of values, a world of goods, a practical world."⁴ The question that needs to be asked bears upon the way in which this lived world not only generates sciences in the natural sense, as articulations of the laws governing the regularity of that which is given in ordinary experience (*doxa*), but also how it brings to birth philosophical reflection, and thereby delimits its nature.

A possible objection arises here, however; namely, that such a search for the ground of continuity between the naive and transcendental perspectives in Husserlian philosophy is fundamentally misdirected. Eugen Fink, for example, claims in an article authoritatively sanctioned by Husserl that from a natural or prephenomenological (prephilosophical) perspective, the transcendental turn is completely unmotivated.⁵ On the one hand it is this unmotivated character of the transcendental reduction which nonphenomenologists (neo-Kantians in particular) find so vexing.⁶ "The reduction becomes knowable only with the transcending of the world."⁷ The entire philosophical problematic generates itself anew at the transcendental level. At the same time, Fink notes, it is precisely the attempt to find motivations for transcendental phenomenology at the natural level that undermines the genuine transcendental meaning of Husserl's philosophy. For this reason, all initial presentations of the reduction and its relation to the natural attitude are inherently false: both are themselves transcendental concepts which presuppose the effective performance of the reduction.

Yet this description of the situation governing the relationship between the prephilosophical and the philosophical in no way obviates the legitimacy of the preceding reflections. The entire spiritual force of Husserl's phenomenology lies in the demand that one *see* what is meant. Phenomenological speech is descriptive speech, whose purpose is not to generate an accurate image of the original, but rather to make the original itself evident to clear intuition. The truth or falsity of this speech lies in its ability to render the phenomena intuitable in themselves. It must be recognized that all of Husserl's major works published in his lifetime are *introductions* to phenom-

enology. They do not present a complete system of results as the product of phenomenological reflection, but rather beckon the reader to engage actively, along with the author, in the philosophical activity. If we return to the example of Plato's "myth of the cave," we can say that Husserl's works aim at showing the reader the way up to the sunlight, and not simply at describing the world of reality so that the cave dwellers might evaluate such results in light of the norms governing doxic life.⁸

Thus, when Fink claims that all initial accounts of the phenomenological reduction are necessarily false, he is correct to the extent that the meaning of the reduction, and correlatively of transcendental subjectivity, has not yet been brought to full intuition. Inappropriate interpretive horizons structure our initial intuitions so as to cover over the full significance of the phenomena. But this cannot mean that these accounts fail to "re-present" the reality under discussion, for the phenomenological conception of truth is not a representational one. Phenomenologically speaking, these accounts are false if they "cover up" the phenomena which they intend to disclose. The adequacy of certain ways to the reduction, for example, and the accuracy of certain formulations of what is being pointed to, are indeed legitimate questions of debate. But to claim that the falsity involved in all initial characterizations of phenomenological consciousness is something other than this, or something other than the incompleteness of the yet-to-be-fulfilled intuitions is to misunderstand the intuitional character of Husserl's thought from the ground up.

We can see, therefore, that the task of uncovering the impetus for the philosophical in the prephilosophical life is not eliminated by the nonworldly nature of transcendental consciousness. From the standpoint of transcendental philosophy, the mundane or naive world of experience can be fully understood only when traced to its origins in transcendental subjectivity. Any form of inquiry or investigation, reflexive or otherwise, which remains strictly within the realm of the doxic, is doomed to an incompleteness in principle. For the natural attitude works with presuppositions (regarding Being, existence, transcendence, truth, possibility, actuality, relations, etc.) which always remain unclarified. Yet transcendental consciousness, in turn, despite its essential lack of dependence upon the world, is what it is only in its interrelationship with the world.⁹ The ideal possibility of a transcendental subjectivity for which there is no world, whose constitutive activities lack the regularity of synthesis according to a priori rules, need not immediately concern us here. Perhaps for such a

consciousness there would be no world, no natural attitude, no prephilosophical position, and hence no philosophy as a distinctive striving for a holistic comprehension of that life. Our concern is to come to terms with the motives for the philosophical enterprise, and the ideal possibility uncovered in eidetic intuition of a consciousness for which neither philosophy nor natural life has significance is vacuous.

The purpose of these considerations is the establishment of the fact that there are determinate and concrete ties in Husserl's phenomenology between the natural and the philosophical attitudes. Moreover, it is only through an analysis of these connections that the deepest motives, the original philosophical *telos*, underlying Husserl's transcendental turn can be unveiled. At the same time, we wish to preserve the distinction, in all its fullness, between these two attitudes. Our question bears upon the way in which the prephilosophical structures the philosophical problematic, while simultaneously is completely transcended by the latter. Husserl insists that as long as we remain bound to the natural attitude and to the presupposed criteria for intelligibility which are functional therein, we are barred from grasping the distinctive meaning of any transcendental concept.

If we take, for example, what is entailed in the notion of constitutive phenomenology, and the attempt to think of the relation between the self and its objects without performing the transcendental reduction, then the transcendental concept of constitution is completely unintelligible. We might insist, for example, that the relation between self and world, or between self and objects in the world, is either creative, receptive, or some combination of these two.¹⁰ Constitution must lie somewhere under these headings. But Husserl's claim is precisely that constitution, as the genesis of meaning, cannot be grasped in terms of these worldly concepts. Such concepts are mundane and presuppose a ground of relation as well as an ontological concept of *relata*. The meaning of this concept (transcendental or not) becomes determinate when one sees the phenomena to which it refers.¹¹ In the case of constitution, the phenomenon is a transcendental one, a transcendental experience which is to be seen nowhere "in the world." From a worldly or doxic perspective, it is completely unintelligible.

If the world of experience is the whole, the ultimate horizon of meaning, then such a transcendental concept must be as opaque and senseless as would be an account of the realm of genuine sunlight

to the Platonic cave dwellers. No descriptive accounts aimed at *representation* will be of any value until one can be brought to see. This is why intuition must replace experience (*Erfahrung*) as the ultimate court of appeal, if the realm of *doxa* is to be disclosed as *doxa*, and not presupposed as the whole.¹²

This example of the concept of constitution was drawn upon to stress the radical split between the transcendental and the nontranscendental in Husserlian phenomenology. Husserl's phenomenology necessarily becomes constitutive phenomenology once the transcendental turn is effected. Thus, what emerges as the genuine philosophical problematic, namely problems of constitution, are meaningless from the prephilosophical perspective. Not only does the positive work of solving these problems via transcendental reflection and analysis remain unintelligible from the natural standpoint, but more radically, from such a perspective these problems don't even exist. Transcendental phenomenology not only generates unintelligible solutions, but creates its own problems as well: "therefore, phenomenology's basic problem does not even exist before the performance of the reduction."¹³ And furthermore, "there is no problem already given within the world which can serve to occasion our setting phenomenology into practice."¹⁴

But at the same time, it must be recognized that constitutive phenomenology, both with respect to its problems and its solutions, is not really generated *ex nihilo*. There may be a total transmutation of an original problematic when it is raised to the transcendental level, yet the original problem still persists, even if only in a "determinately negated" fashion. In other words, the interrelation and inner dynamic between the prephilosophical and philosophical states of mind bear a resemblance to the kind of Hegelian dialectic found in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* whereby an earlier stage of consciousness is preserved in a determinately negated form in the *Experience* of a higher level.¹⁵ The world for natural consciousness and the world seen by transcendental consciousness as the noematic correlate of constitutive intentionality is the identically same world. The positive doctrine of constitution is an immediate response to a transcendental problem, and the latter is a reformulation of a pretranscendental world problem which retains an identity within difference with the original.

THE PROBLEM OF THE REDUCTION

But what is the pretranscendental (pre-philosophical) world problem which occasions the radical reflexivity of phenomenology? Is it a problem of knowledge in the sense of a quest for epistemic certitude? Is the absolute sought by Husserl an epistemological one which would function as a kind of Archimedean point? Is the beginning question of philosophy directed toward that which is first in the order of knowledge? The question of knowledge, posed in terms of certitude or indubitability, can arise within a world-immanent framework and hence readily suggests itself as the motive underlying the turn to the subject in Husserl's thought.¹⁶ As such, it would provide a ground of continuity between the transcendental and pretranscendental, a question raised at one level finding its answer at another. This line of interpretation elevates apodictic certitude to the status of the final cause underlying the Husserlian project.

A second possibility, however, is that the guiding concern animating the development of transcendental phenomenology is more oriented toward the question of the Being of the world. This would suggest that an ontological problematic is at the root of Husserl's turn to subjectivity. Or are these two problems identical? Is the ancient dictum of Parmenides, that "thought and Being are the same," applicable in this context as well? And if not, just how are we to see the relationship between the epistemologically directed quest for apodicticity and the ontological problem of the Being of the world? This is a complex and difficult question, and if any light can be shed on it, it will only come at the end of our analyses. For now, let us look to the way in which Husserl introduces the motives for the transcendental turn in *Ideas I*.

A description of prephilosophical life uncovers the general thesis of the "Being out there" of the natural world.

I find continually present and standing over against me the one spatio-temporal fact world (*Wirklichkeit*), to which I myself belong. . . . This fact world . . . I find to be "out there," and also take it just as it gives itself to me as something that exists out there.¹⁷

From a scientific standpoint which remains within the context of this given world, there occurs a certain *natural* identification of various ontological conceptions. That is to say,

the concepts true Being, real Being, i.e., real empirical Being, and—since all that is real comes to self-concentration in the form of a cosmic unity (*zur Einheit der Welt*)—"Being in the world" are meanings that coincide.¹⁸

The latter formulation is a reflective one based upon the pregiven data found in the former. It is a kind of fledgling philosophical realism, a realism which, as presupposed, supplies the backdrop for all particular and determinate forms of human interaction and expression.

Thus, what Husserl claims to be at the core of ordinary experiential life is the unrelenting Being as presence of the world. From a modern theoretical position, one which is explicitly linked with the above-mentioned realism, "the world is the totality of objects that can be known through experience."¹⁹ But from a pretheoretical position, one which forms the point of departure for the introduction to phenomenology in *Ideas I*, the world is simply that which, "prior to any thinking, bears in its totality and in all its articulated sections the character 'present,' 'out there.'"²⁰ The three characteristics, then, of the world as lived prephilosophically are: (a) its presence, that it is *vorhanden*; (b) that it is "out there" (*da*), that it has *Dasein*; and (c) that these attributes are prior to any judgmental act; that the world is already present, out there, independently of our thinking it.

It is within this context that Husserl first introduces the important phenomenological concept of horizons. The co-presence of self and world which lies at the basis of the natural attitude cannot be thought wholly in terms of a spatial proximity between two discrete entities. Such an analogy is one dimensional. While there may always be a focal point for our experiential life in terms of a particular and determinate object, such determinacy always takes shape against a background of indeterminacy.²¹ Thus there are two components through which the prephilosophical world emerges, as a co-presence of determinacy and indeterminacy. Accompanying any determinate act is an indeterminate horizon, which, in natural experience (in contrast, for example, to mathematics) is of a spatio-temporal nature. It is the interplay of these two forms of presence and absence which constitutes the dynamic of human life.

The way in which the world announces itself, the how of its *Dasein* and *Vorhandenheit*, its presence "out there," takes place at three different levels. The worldly character of the world which Husserl is describing as the primal phenomenon of prephilosophical

life possesses an inner complexity which must be understood if any meaningful transition to a philosophical level is to be effected. At the first level we have the pregiven existence of particular determinate realities. These may be other people, aesthetic objects, particular moral dilemmas or theoretical problems, and so forth. Husserl draws upon perception as an exemplary form of intuitive presencing in accounting for this level. Accompanying any such particular instances are the immediate coperceived or coapprehended surroundings. Acts of meaning not only seize the particular, but simultaneously illuminate a field of particulars. Just as in greeting a friend in a crowd I select him over a multitude of other persons who are also present, or in reflecting upon a particular moral decision I coapprehend the immediate antecedent and consequent events, a selected particular gains its determinations in a field of particulars.

At a third level, however, is the infinite indeterminacy of that "misty horizon" which Husserl calls "the form of the world as world."²² All of these levels are contained in each lived moment and bestow upon our prereflective, prephilosophical life a specific tone and character. But this last level, as *world form*, is the continual presupposition of the natural attitude. Within it all particular affirmations and negations take place. Through the movement of experiential life we not only change our minds about *what* things are, but also about the very fact *that* they are at all. This happens not only at the level of particulars, for we can also deny the existence of an entire region of Being. In combatting a dualism, for example, we may deny that mind or spirit *is*; all that *is*, is body qua matter in motion. Such a "scientific" position leaves untouched the thesis of the world, merely reinterpreting the phenomena that present themselves against its background.

The thesis of the world, then, is not a product of any cognitive or judgmental act, nor the result of a multiplicity of such acts. We can bring the thesis of the world to explicit judgmental form, but we do so only upon the basis of a prior experience of this phenomenon. But "experience" again, is used only analogically here, for experience (or intuition in general) gives us only particulars, or multiplicities of such particulars. Of course these particulars need not be facts, as spatio-temporally individuated, but can be essences as well. Yet nowhere do we find, as the correlate of any particular act, nor as the product of a synthesis of such acts, the *world form* as infinite horizon. It is always already there, as the ultimate presupposition for human activity. This is why when Husserl does introduce

the *epoche* he insists that it cannot be accomplished through the bracketing of particulars, even if that were to be carried out ad infinitum. It must be done in one stroke, through which the *holistic* nature of the "world-presupposition" is put out of play.

We can say, therefore, that what has emerged at the core of natural human life is a certain thesis concerning the Being of the world. Here Being is understood in the sense of *Dasein*, though obviously not in the Heideggerian sense. What is at issue is the most primitive differentiation between self and nonself: that I am, and that others (both things and persons) are, and that we share a common world. All higher forms of cultural interaction and achievement, all forms of community, presuppose the legitimacy of this initial distinction. Husserl sees this at the vital center of experiential life. Thus, all consciousness is essentially intentional.

But how are we to understand the introduction of the phenomenological *epoche* and reductions through such reflections? Even if we grant Husserl this moment of pure description, what motives emerge therein for transcendental philosophy? Why alter, or attempt to alter, this standpoint which affirms the "being out there" of particular entities against the background of a *world form*? Sections 31 and 32 of *Ideas I* are directed toward the establishment of the possibility, on grounds of principle, of altering this thesis. But why? With respect to motives, none seem immediately forthcoming. Husserl claims it to be a possibility which lies within our perfect freedom. But why this possibility rather than others for which we are free? Does this apparent lack of motivation affirm Fink's previously mentioned thesis? Or are the motives essentially epistemological? Is this not really the problem of epistemic transcendence, of knowledge and certitude? Does not Husserl directly proceed to establish a sphere of beings which is absolute and indubitable? And thus, does not the deepest motive lie in the demand for apodicticity, a demand intrinsic to the idea of "rigorous science"? Let us simply allow Husserl to answer. With respect to the being and presence of the world and the alteration of the thesis which presupposes and affirms it, he says:

A procedure of this sort, possible at any time, is for instance, the attempt to doubt everything which Descartes, with an entirely different end in view, with the purpose of setting up an absolutely indubitable sphere of Being, undertook to carry through.²³

Thus, whatever the motives are for the phenomenological *epoche*, they clearly are *not* epistemological in the Cartesian sense. Such a quest for apodicticity is explicitly rejected by Husserl. We must be cautious not to confuse a possible product of the *epoche*, a concept of apodicticity, with its philosophical *telos*. Correlatively, we must not presuppose that either an exhaustive or original account of its meaning is accomplished when we focus upon the indubitability of the *cogito*.

The suggestion that I would put forth in contrast to these previously mentioned interpretations of the *epoche*, is that the deepest motives underlying this philosophical turn are ontological in nature. In general, Husserl's use of *ontology* is limited to those discussions of regional eidetics as material ontologies, as well as formal ontology.²⁴ These are eidetic disciplines concerned with the delimitation of the Being of objects, with regard to particular types of objectivity, and objectivity in general, respectively. They seek to discover a priori truths concerning the essential "whatness" of objects. Such eidetic sciences, however, presuppose the "thatness" (*Dasein*) of the objectivities in question. But it is precisely the positing of this "being there already" that forms the essence of the natural attitude. And neither material nor formal ontologies come to terms with this aspect of the ontological problematic. This is why transcendental consciousness proves to be "the original category of Being."²⁵ A doctrine of categories (material or formal) is directed toward the essential "whatness" of objects. But it presupposes the more primordial concept of transcendental Being, in and through which transcendent beings come to be as beings.

It should be noted, however, that there is a certain lack of continuity in the development of the fundamental phenomenological outlook in Part II of *Ideas I*. First we find descriptions of prephilosophical life, focusing upon certain theses concerning the Being of the world. Next comes the suggestion that this can be altered. To live in the continual mode of affirmation regarding the Being of particular beings is obviously not exhaustive. But what Husserl is claiming is that beyond such particular suspensions, or a multiplicity of such suspensions, lies the possibility of a wholistic suspension of the thesis of the *world form* itself. The only possible motivation for such a move that retains the ontological sense of the problematic which animated it is a radical "science of Being."²⁶ We must render the origins of the general thesis transparent in order to comprehend its meaning. But upon what basis is a science of Being in this sense to be erected? In asking, "What can remain over when the whole world

is bracketed?"²⁷ Husserl is posing the question of the context within which, or the standpoint from which, this philosophy is to emerge.

It is obvious that, like every other intelligible problem, the transcendental problem derives the means of its solution from an existence stratum which it presupposes and sets beyond the research of its inquiry.²⁸

The difficulty lies in finding such an "existence-stratum" which is not a product of the affirmation of the Being of the world. The possibility of presupposing its existence, insofar as the ideal of a full philosophical account is concerned, is excluded in the case of phenomenological reflection, for it is just this seemingly universal existential presupposition which the *epoche* wishes to make thematic. What is so curious is that in securing this realm, Husserl initiates a series of psychological reflections. The connection between psychology and a science of Being can only be intimated here insofar as we know that establishing a realm of Being which does not presuppose the affirmation of worldly Being is the governing idea behind these thoughts.

If we are to understand the way in which the science of psychology and a science of Being are interrelated, we must look carefully at the movement of thought whereby psychology is transcended. And this movement is none other than that from the prephilosophical to the philosophical.

THE WAY TO THE REDUCTION IN *IDEAS I*

With the beginning of the second chapter of Part II, Husserl initiates the transition from the empty or formal possibility of a universal *epoche*, to the question of its meaning qua serviceability. What possible function could this alteration of perspectives serve? More pressing than the specific function, however, is the possibility of any function whatsoever. That is to say, if the universal *epoche* carried out with respect to the existence of what is, is truly universal, no content would remain which might be made a theme of reflection. If the source of all existence, with respect to its meaning, lies in the thesis of the natural attitude which affirms the being out there of the world, and ultimately of all transcendent entities, then all Being, all existence, falls within the scope of such an *epoche*. Nothing would thereby remain after this abstention but silence.

How could the *epoche* be limited so as to leave a residuum of some sort?²⁹ The possibility of such a limitation, which would simultaneously preserve the true nature of the *epoche*, could only emerge insofar as an existence-stratum, or region of beings, were discovered which does not rely upon the thesis of the natural attitude for the sense of its existence. But this involves denying the wholistic claim inherent in the natural attitude. The concepts "true Being," "real Being," and "Being in the world" can no longer coincide.³⁰ What Husserl hopes to show is that consciousness, when considered in its purity, is not a being in the world. This is the "yet to be defined" distinctive characteristic of the new region whose discovery marks the genuine *telos* of phenomenological reflection.

Husserl begins his line of thought, then, with a phenomenological psychology, one which proceeds on the basis of the natural attitude. We abstract from the realm of physical phenomena to the psychological, considering lived experiences as part of the whole which is the world. We assume the distinction between nature and consciousness, two parts whose sum equals all that is real. In Sections 35 through 38 certain essential characteristics of lived experience (*Erlebnisse*) are discovered, characteristics which will reinforce this distinction between nature and consciousness. First, it belongs to the essence of consciousness that it be differentiated into the modes of actuality and inactuality; that is, "the stream of experience can never consist wholly of focal actualities."³¹ Second, all consciousness is intentional.³² Third, all consciousness is characterized by a directedness of the *ego* towards an object, thus moving away from the non-egological position of the *Logical Investigations*. This intentional directedness which persists throughout the modal alterations between actuality and inactuality has the structure of *ego-cogito-cogitatum*. And fourth, to the essence of each *cogitatio* "belongs in principle the possibility of a 'reflexive' directing of the mental glance toward itself naturally in the form of a new *cogitatio* and by way of a simple apprehension."³³

It is on the basis of these eidetic descriptions that we come to learn what consciousness is in itself. This kind of eidetic psychology constitutes a regional ontology. And it is only one of a multiplicity of such ontologies which are necessary if we are to clarify the essential differences between various kinds of "beings in the world." In this regard, Husserl can be seen as implementing Brentano's demand for a scientific distinction between the psychological and physical, now with the aid of the method of essential intuition. As a particular material

ontology, eidetic psychology has a formal ontology standing above it, though not in the form of a higher genus.³⁴ But this does not immediately imply that these two types of ontology exhaust the entire Being problematic. Have we said everything that can be said about the objectivity of the object, or about the subjectivity of the subject, when they have been considered both in terms of their formal and material a priori structures?

It should be noted that beginning with Section 39 of *Ideas I*, the investigation takes a fundamentally new direction. A certain plateau has been reached such that Husserl now introduces reflections on the *existence* of those particulars which are instances of the essences thus far disclosed. If there are to be any *real* particulars which instantiate these eidetic characteristics, it seems that they must belong as "real events to the natural world."³⁵ This claim is not derived from the preceding psychological reflections, but rather is presupposed by them, just insofar as they are psychological, that is, viewed within the presupposed world form.

Section 38 must be taken as a transitional point. Not only is the essential property of reflexivity introduced as a fourth eidetic character of consciousness seen psychologically, but also the "how" of the presence of consciousness to itself in such reflection is mentioned. Husserl draws the distinction between immanent and transcendent perceptions, claiming that for the former, "their intentional objects, when these exist (*existieren*) at all, belong to the same stream of experience as themselves."³⁶ Here we have a consideration of the existence of conscious acts introduced within a purely eidetic context. This transition from essence to existence, however, should not be taken as a logical implication, such as in the ontological argument of Anselm, for Husserl as noted above, specifically says, "when they exist at all." If the objects of immanent acts exist, then they must belong to the same stream as those acts. This is intended as an essential truth which, like all essential truths, does not establish the fact of existence. Yet it is an essential truth about existence, or more particularly, about the locus of existence.

The significance of this onset cannot be underestimated for the proper understanding of Husserl's claims concerning the absolute nature of consciousness. None of the other eidetic truths related to the existence of consciousness in any fashion. To assert that consciousness is modally differentiated in terms of possibility and actuality, that it is intentional, that it is directed from an ego pole (egological) toward an object (*cogitatum*) pole—all claim what con-

sciousness is, regardless of its existence. The existence aspect is simply presupposed as a psychical, physical, or psycho-physical event in the real world. But with the claim concerning the locus of the existence of the objects of immanently directed acts, a new dimension is introduced, one which is to provide the possibility for a more complete ontological characterization of the phenomena in question.

Within this stream there is an essentially unmediated unity between act and object. Such essential unity is lacking in transcendently directed acts.

The perception of a thing not only does not contain in itself, in its *reellen* constitution, the thing itself, it is also without any essential unity with it, its existence naturally presupposed.³⁷

Here again we return to the presuppositional nature of existence which is the theme of the thesis of the natural attitude. It is at this point in the text that the thesis of the natural attitude, phenomenological psychology, and transcendental phenomenology converge. The theme is existence, and with existence we are brought to the verge of the transcendental-philosophical domain.

In emphasizing the theme of existence in this fashion, we must continually keep in mind that the investigations are still eidetic in nature. Essential analyses can never establish the *fact* of existence. Judgments about the fact of existence, whether or not a certain thing or reality *is*, must take place under the guidance of "existence-giving" modes of intuition. Not all "object-giving" modes of intuition present consciousness with allegedly factual objects or states of affairs. Eidetic intuition, for example, gives "irreal" or ideal essences. But while such intuition cannot render evidence for the fact of existence, Husserl claims that it nonetheless can disclose the meaning of the existence of different types of objectivity. In other words, if I want to know whether a certain thing exists or not, I will turn to empirical experience. Eidetic intuition is not intended to replace a defective form of access to reality, as if only a separate faculty of reason gives us truths about the world. But if I want to know what I mean when I claim, on the basis of that empirical experience, that a certain thing exists, then I must turn to an eidetic investigation, and ultimately, Husserl will contend, an eidetic investigation of transcendental subjectivity.

It should not be surprising, therefore, that in Section 39 and following, a new line of inquiry is undertaken. Up to this point

Husserl's concern has been with the essence of consciousness; with those characteristics which it necessarily possesses just insofar as it is consciousness. As an a priori science concerned with a concrete region, and not with the pure form of objectivity in general, this eidetic psychology is a material ontology. As such, however, it is laden with "existential" presuppositions. And this is precisely what Husserl points out at the beginning of Section 39.

Our inquiries were eidetic; but the individual instances of the essences we have referred to as experience, stream of experience, "consciousness" in all its senses, belonged as real events to the natural world.³⁸

Working within the confines of a psychological *epoché*, physical nature and its relation to the psychically immanent need not be made a theme, any more than the physicist must clarify the psychological dimension to his *knowledge of nature*. But even in the absence of specific thematization, the presuppositions of the natural attitude regarding the existence of conscious experiences still function as an interpretive horizon whereby acts are grasped *as real*, spatio-temporal events within the one, universal, causally interrelated nexus of the world.

Husserl's task in the sections to follow is to render explicit that *as*, to trace it to its "ultimate source,"³⁹ to examine its credentials and legitimacy insofar as its claims are wholistic in nature. In other words, from the pretranscendental perspective,

consciousness and thinghood form a connected whole, connected within the particular psychological unities which we call *animalia*, and in the last resort within the real unity of the world as a whole.⁴⁰

The question which is asked bears upon the unity of the whole; that is,

can the unity of a whole be other than made one through the essential proper nature of its parts, which must therefore have some community of essence instead of fundamental heterogeneity?⁴¹

The way in which this inquiry is pursued is in terms of the existence of consciousness and the existence of thinghood; the latter chosen only as an exemplary form of all transcendent objectivity.

If the philosophical (transcendental) level is to be attained, the existence problematic itself must be introduced. What it means for a being to be can no longer be straightforwardly posited by the general thesis of the natural, prephilosophical life. From Husserl's perspective, all traditional insoluble dilemmas of philosophy (what the Greeks called *aporiai*, as well as all illegitimate forms of philosophical realism and idealism, are nourished by the thesis of the natural attitude concerning the existence of the *ontos on*, the "really real." Husserl will attempt to clarify the sense of the existence of beings by returning to that source from which their existential meaning is determined. And this return to origins is a return to *modes of givenness*, whereby the very event of self-presenting (*leibhatigen*) takes place. As Levinas correctly points out, Husserl's project is to locate existence in the presence of things to conscious life, and not in a hypothetical mute opposition.⁴²

But the temptation again arises to interpret the meaning of these reflections as basically epistemological. To talk about "modes of givenness" is to talk about the "for us"; what is at issue is a characteristic of human knowledge and not of the things themselves. A being's mode of givenness discloses the way in which that entity is given to a *human* subject, and these ways are products of our forms of knowing. But Husserl anticipates this possible line of interpretation, and devotes the entirety of Section 43 to rejecting it. What he attacks here is the well known Kantian distinction between the finite and infinite intellect. It is thus a critique of Kant himself, as well as of neo-Kantian interpretations of Husserl's own work.

Husserl's position is that reflection on the modes of givenness of different types of objects discloses something about the objects themselves, and not merely something about our finite forms of knowledge. To posit an infinite intellect for whom natural objects are not given perspectively is an absurdity, for it subverts the very meaning of the Being of the objectivity in question. If God is to know nature as nature, then he knows it perspectively, and hence imperfectly. This imperfection is a negativity built into the very Being of nature, and as long as nature is to be nature, this characteristic of its existence must be preserved.

Thus an object discloses itself as it does, via a particular mode of givenness, according to laws of its own content. Perception, for

example, of a physical object is perspectival "in accordance with the object's own meaning."⁴³ This existential emphasis upon modes of givenness holds for immanent objects as well. It is a product of their existential sense that they do not show themselves through a plurality of aspects, but rather as "fully" and "bodily" present to intuitive reflection. The question is not how *man* comes to know, but how *things* admit of being known. The epistemological characteristics rest upon an ontological basis. Via a consideration of modes of givenness, Husserl claims to have passed beyond a treatment of human (finite) forms of knowing (cognition) to the objectivity of the object itself. Moreover, these reflections penetrate to a level beyond that of either material or formal ontologies. This level is *existence* itself.

THE ABSOLUTE OF CONSCIOUSNESS

On the basis of these insights, Husserl proceeds to posit the absolute Being of the immanent and the merely phenomenal Being of the transcendent. There has yet to be any consideration of the dubitable and the indubitable, the adequate, apodictic, or assertoric. No such Cartesian epistemological conceptions are yet present. Furthermore, Husserl has specifically and emphatically rejected any attempt to interpret the results obtained thus far as bearing on our forms of knowledge alone. If all our *noeses* of the transcendent give us only perspectives, this is a result of the kind of existence belonging to the transcendent, and of the correlation between the noetic and noematic.

What has been brought to our attention, therefore, is one vital distinction between the meaning of the existence of the immanent and the meaning of the existence of the transcendent. In order to say that "consciousness is" and to say that "reality is," one must recognize the fundamental equivocation on the verb "to be." It cannot be claimed, then, that Husserl and Kant both deny existence to be a predicate. For the most fundamental difference in Husserl's thought, that between the transcendental and the nontranscendental, is grounded in the distinction between the sense of existence in the two. Simply because Husserl's phenomenology is eidetic, and hence does not establish the fact of existence, does not exclude it from considering the meaning of existence. As we have seen, what Husserl has established thus far is that, "It is an *essentially* valid law that *existence* in the form of a thing is never demanded as necessary by virtue of its givenness."⁴⁴ And in contrast, "Every immanent per-

ception necessarily guarantees the *existence* of its object."⁴⁵ At the level of material ontologies the consideration of existence as a predicate may be superfluous, but a full philosophical account of the Being of entities must recognize the fundamental difference in the very existence of consciousness and transcendent reality.

This opposition between perspectival and non-perspectival modes of givenness, however, is only one dimension to the question of the meaning of the existence of the immanent and transcendent. Another aspect of the same issue bears upon the notions of "unperceived experience" and "unperceived reality."⁴⁶ Before we can turn our attention to this dimension of the existence of beings, however, we must clarify the sense of the absolute givenness of the immanent in reflection. In claiming that an experience is given absolutely in reflection, in accordance with its existential sense, Husserl is not saying that an experience so given is perceived in its completeness. The incompleteness or *inadequacy* which manifests itself in immanent perception, however, is "fundamentally other than that which is of the essence of transcendent perception."⁴⁷ This inadequacy has to do with the temporality of consciousness itself; that any reflection upon an act finds that act within the temporal flux of living consciousness. As such, the ideal of immediate and total givenness seems continually to elude our grasp. The "unmediated unity of a single concrete *cogitatio*,"⁴⁸ which at first seemed to be within reach, is now ruptured by the all pervading temporal flow. Husserl's response to this problem, in *Ideas I* at least, is to acknowledge it and yet simultaneously to insist that the main point established in the preceding sections still retains its validity.

There persists the essential difference between givenness *through* a multiplicity of perspectives and givenness *in* a single view which may exhibit an inner, temporal multiplicity. The distinction between modes of givenness, and hence between the meaning of existence, still retains its legitimacy. If, furthermore, Husserl's main concern in these pages were epistemological, this phenomenon of temporality would immediately present a most serious challenge to the claims for apodicticity.⁴⁹ But Husserl never discusses this problem. Instead, he insists that the essential difference between the Being of consciousness and the Being of reality still holds.

We can now turn to a second major distinction between the senses of existence for experience and reality. Husserl tells us:

It is a mark of the type of Being (*Seinsart*) peculiar to experience that perceptual insight can direct its immediate, unobstructed gaze upon every real (*wirkliche*) experience, and so enter into the life of a primordial presence. This insight operates as a "reflection," and it has this remarkable peculiarity that that which is thus apprehended through perception is, in principle, characterized as something which not only is and endures within the gaze of perception, but *already was before* this gaze was directed to it.⁵⁰

Here Husserl is discussing that characteristic of beings which we might call their "availability for perception" (or for any other form of attention). In Section 35 Husserl pointed out that a modal form of the *cogito* as act is marginal actuality. For transcendent beings, this possibility means to be already an *object* of consciousness, in the form of an item within the horizon of possible objects. Just insofar as transcendent beings are available for perception, they have already been perceived as possible objects. This is not meant to say, of course, that such objects "are" only when a subject attends to them. Husserl's position is not that of a subjective idealism, and he need make no appeals to a divine subject to account for the subsistence of independent entities. But he does insist that the only meaning which this independence can have is that such entities are "perceived" as possible objects which, at least *in principle*, could be experienced. This type of "being there already" bears only an analogical resemblance to that which is exhibited in experiential being. For in the case of lived experiences (*Erlebnisse*), their very meaning is to be there prior to any sort of reflection. That is to say, "All experiences are conscious experiences."⁵¹ Experience is not only "consciousness of" but it is also "consciousness of consciousness of." This original, "prereflexive" awareness, therefore, is nonobjectified. All *objects* of consciousness, as intentional correlates, are products of a synthesis of a multiplicity of perspectives. As such, they are objectively constituted. Prior to any reflective consciousness, however, we are conscious of our experiencing itself. Experiences, therefore, are not constituted in the same fashion as transcendent entities.

The presence of what is actually not perceived in the world of things . . . is essentially different from that mode of Being of which we are intrinsically sensible, the Being of our inward experiences.⁵²