

Introduction

On Husserl's Dream

In a *Beilage* to the German edition of his last work, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (1935), Husserl laments that, “Philosophy as science, as serious, rigorous, indeed apodictically rigorous science—the dream is over [*der Traum ist ausgeträumt*].”¹ This statement is particularly striking given that Husserl’s philosophical corpus seeks to establish phenomenology as an “absolute science” upon which all other scientific endeavors may be grounded. One almost feels betrayed: by what right does Husserl declare that the dream is over? And what exactly does he mean? One possibility is that Husserl had a change of heart at the end of his life that led him to acknowledge the futility of his earlier work, much like Thomas Aquinas, who famously called his life’s work “straw”: “*mihi videtur ut palea*.” A more likely possibility—especially given the context of “*der Traum ist ausgeträumt*”—is that Husserl was not abandoning the dream of absolute science, but expressing disappointment in his followers who gave up the dream. Indeed, Husserl had good reason to be disappointed, given that his most famous student and successor at the University of Freiburg, Martin Heidegger, actively opposed the idea of phenomenology as a science: “Philosophy never arises from or through science. Philosophy can never belong to the same order as the sciences. It belongs to a higher order.”²

Contemporary phenomenology has more-or-less followed Heidegger’s lead in rejecting the dream of absolute science as a modernist, metaphysical ideal. There is certainly ample reason to be suspicious of absolute science: the atrocities of the twentieth century are vivid reminders of the moral turpitude of universal visions of absolute truth. Yet, in giving up the dream—in giving up all aspirations to absolute science—phenomenol-

ogy gives up too much. It gives up any ability to ground the sciences, to determine the boundaries of scientific inquiry, and to provide answers to meta-theoretical questions about the ethical status of the sciences. Natural science, for instance, can come up with ingenious ways of destroying or preserving life, but it cannot tell us whose life to destroy and whose to preserve. For that, one *needs* absolute science; one *needs* a way to ground the sciences in the broader context of the life-world. In other words, Husserl's "dream" of absolute science is not a metaphysical ideal, but a practical necessity. Any philosophical proscription of absolute science (*à la* Heidegger) has drastic practical consequences: by abandoning absolute science, by abstracting science and philosophy from their life-world contexts, by removing the moral and meta-theoretical limits provided by absolute science, something like National Socialism becomes possible—a possibility all too real for Husserl in 1930s Germany.

In this investigation, I intend to dream Husserl's dream again, to reopen the question of absolute science, navigating between the practical necessity of such a science and the temptation to universalize it—a temptation from which Husserl was not completely free. I also intend to renew a line of inquiry inaugurated by Heidegger. In his lectures from the Winter semester of 1920–21, Heidegger argues that Paul's first and second letters to the Thessalonians illustrate a crucial point about "factual existence": "In Christian life experience, it arises from the sense of the surrounding world, that the world does not just happen to be there. The significance of the world—also that of one's own world—is given and experienced in a peculiar way through the retrieval of the relational complexes in the authentic enactment."³ Heidegger's insight (by way of Paul) is that the experienced world is not simply "there," but is somehow "enacted" by the experiencing self: "the experiencing self and what is experienced are not torn apart."⁴ Yet Heidegger finds Paul's rabbinical mode of explanation to be "insufficient."⁵ Soon after the 1920–21 lectures, Heidegger pivots from scriptural study to the analytic of finitude found in *Being and Time* (1927).

Heidegger's reading of Paul's letters is intriguing, but ultimately problematic because it tells only half the story: If scripture requires phenomenological clarification, might it not also be the case that phenomenology requires scriptural clarification? While Heidegger opened the door to a phenomenology of scripture, it is Husserlian phenomenology—with its dream of absolute science—that will allow us to walk through. To that end, part I of this investigation examines static, genetic, and constructive (or generative) modes of Husserlian phenomenology, tracing a philosophical trajectory that culminates in a radicalized theory of absolute science.

Drawing specifically on the work of Eugen Fink, I will argue that absolute science is a hermeneutical enterprise encompassing *constituted* Being, the *constituting* source of Being, and phenomenological reflection on Being. Practically speaking, this means that absolute science has a circular structure: analysis of a phenomenal object leads to reflection on the performance of phenomenology, which leads to a phenomenologically clarified reflection on the object, which leads to further reflection on the phenomenological method and so on. In absolute science, the phenomenological method is reformed and radicalized in the process of performing phenomenological analysis. To put it in Fink's terms, absolute science has as its thematic object the synthetic unity of phenomenologizing, constituting, and constituted modes of transcendental life.

Yet if speculation about absolute science were purely theoretical, it would be incomplete; absolute science only becomes *absolute* in concrete application. That is to say, the method of absolute science cannot be specified in advance; it must be derived from concrete engagement with phenomena. Thus, in part II, I develop an absolute science of scripture, focusing on the kenōsis hymn (Phil. 2:6–11). I argue that the hymn presents a kenotic reduction that is similar to Husserl's phenomenological reduction, though far more radical. On the one hand, the kenotic reduction points toward a phenomenological re-reading of the kenōsis hymn, which addresses interpretive issues related to the hymn in the context of Paul's letter to the Philippians. On the other hand, the kenotic reduction points toward a radicalization of the phenomenological method. Scripture and phenomenology elucidate one another within the circular hermeneutic of absolute science.

With regard to the hymn itself, what is "emptied" is not Christ's divinity, nor his status vis-à-vis God, but the status of the *cosmos* as the primary source of truth and value. The kenotic reduction opens up the possibility that worldly authority and value are not primary but *derivative*. In kenotic *epochē*, the *cosmos* is bracketed as the ground of truth and value, and the world is revealed as a *new creation*, which is renewed and sustained by God's infinite love and power. Kenōsis, in this reduced sense, is not an "emptying out" but an "overflowing" of God's love onto creation. Additionally, the kenotic reduction suggests a reformulation of the phenomenological concept of space-time. By combining Fink's reflections on "horizontality" with Jean-Yves Lacoste's notion of the "eschatological I," I will argue that the new creation is an eschatological horizon, whose fundamental spatio-temporal structure is the re-presenting of God.