Phaenomenologica 238

James Richard Mensch

Husserl's Phenomenology

From Pure Logic to Embodiment

Phaenomenologica

Series Founded by H. L. Van Breda and Published Under the Auspices of the Husserl-Archives

Volume 238

Series Editors

Julia Jansen, Husserl Archives, Leuven, Belgium

Stefano Micali, Husserl Archives, Leuven, Belgium

Editorial Board

R. Bernet, Husserl-Archives, Leuven, Belgium

R. Breeur, Husserl Archives, Leuven, Belgium

D. Lories, CEP/ISP/Collège Désiré Mercier, Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium

U. Melle, Husserl-Archives, Leuven, Belgium

R. Visker, Catholic Univerisity Leuven, Leuven, Belgium

Advisory Editors

R. Bernasconi, Memphis State University, Memphis, USA

D. Carr, Emory University, Atlanta, USA

E. S. Casey, State University of New York at Stony Brook, Stony Brook, USA

J. F. Courtine, Archives-Husserl, Paris, France

F. Dastur, Université de Paris, Paris, France

K. Düsing, Husserl-Archiv, Köln, Germany

J. Hart, Indiana University, Bloomington, USA

K. Held, Bergische Universität, Wuppertal, Germany

K. E. Kaehler, Husserl-Archiv, Köln, Germany

D. Lohmar, Husserl-Archiv, Köln, Germany

W. R. McKenna, Miami University, Oxford, USA

J. N. Mohanty, Temple University, Philadelphia, USA

E. W. Orth, Universität Trier, Trier, Germany

C. Sini, Università degli Studi di Milano, Milan, Italy

R. Sokolowski, Catholic University of America, Washington, DC, USA

B. Waldenfels, Ruhr-Universität, Bochum, Germany

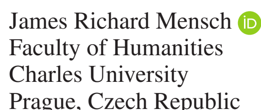
SCOPE: Phaenomenologica is the longest running phenomenological book series world-wide. It was originally founded as a companion series to the Husserliana, and its first volume appeared in 1958. To this day, the series publishes studies of Husserl's work and of the work of related thinkers, investigations into the history of phenomenology, in-depth studies of specific aspects of phenomenology and phenomenological philosophy, and independent phenomenological research by scholars from all over the world. This unique series now unites several generations of phenomenologists, including Emmanuel Levinas, Jan Patočka, Eugen Fink, Roman Ingarden, Alfred Schutz, Bernhard Waldenfels and Marc Richir.

Initial inquiries and manuscripts for review should be sent directly to the attention of the Series Editors at phaenomenologica@kuleuven.be.

James Richard Mensch

Husserl's Phenomenology

From Pure Logic to Embodiment

James Richard Mensch 
Faculty of Humanities
Charles University
Prague, Czech Republic

ISSN 0079-1350 ISSN 2215-0331 (electronic)
Phaenomenologica
ISBN 978-3-031-26146-6 ISBN 978-3-031-26147-3 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-26147-3

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s), under exclusive license to Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2023
This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.
The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use.
The publisher, the authors, and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

This Springer imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

This book is dedicated to Barbara Weber,
my friend and philosophical colleague
for many years.

Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge the Faculty of Humanities, Charles University for its support of the research that led to this book.

Introduction

The Liberating Impulse of Phenomenology

Phenomenology along with its offspring constitutes one of the two great streams of philosophy today.[1] Along with its rival, analytic philosophy, its practice has spread from its original, European base to embrace much of the world. A glance at the membership of the Organization of Phenomenological Organizations shows that phenomenological societies are present in every inhabited continent. Beyond philosophy, fields as diverse as organizational studies and architectural studies employ its conceptions. Its fecundity, moreover, has resulted in a plurality of different schools and movements: Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, Deleuze, Derrida, Marion, and Richir among others have their followers, commentators, and disciples. In this plethora of different practices, it is easy to forget what unites the various elements of the phenomenological tradition. A good way to see this is to recall the revolution in thinking that phenomenology brought about. In its way, it mirrors the transformation brought about by the eighteenth century Enlightenment. As defined by the German philosopher, Kant, "Enlightenment is our departure from our self-imposed immaturity [*Unmündigkeit*]. We are immature when we cannot use our understanding independently. Immaturity is self-imposed when its cause is not a lack of understanding. Rather, we lack the resolution and the courage to use it without being directed by another." Kant exhorts us, "*Sapere aude*!" that is, "have the courage to use our own understanding."[2] The courage advocated by phenomenology is that of consulting our own experience. It is this courage that unifies phenomenology.

---

[1] Such offspring include what is commonly called "continental philosophy," insofar as it arises in relation and at times in reaction to Husserl's phenomenology.

[2] "AUFKLÄRUNG ist der Ausgang des Menschen aus seiner selbstverschuldeten Unmündigkeit. Unmündigkeit ist das Unvermögen, sich seines Verstandes ohne Leitung eines anderen zu bedienen. Selbstverschuldet ist diese Unmündigkeit, wenn die Ursache derselben nicht am Mangel des Verstandes, sondern der Entschließung und des Mutes liegt, sich seiner ohne Leitung eines andern zu bedienen. Sapere aude! Habe Mut, dich deines eigenen Verstandes zu bedienen! ist also der Wahlspruch der Aufklärung" (Immanuel Kant, "Was ist Aufklärung? " *UTOPIE kreativ*, vol. 59 (January 2004), pp. 5–10), p. 1. Available at https://www.rosalux.de/fileadmin/rls_uploads/pdfs/159_kant.pdf. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from the German in this book are my own.

To see what this involves, we can turn to the etymology of the term, "phenomenology." Coming from two Greek words, it means the attempt to explicate the logos of appearing. Logos, in Greek, has multiple meanings; the basic ones are "word," "speech," and "reason." Thus, phenomenology means not just the attempt to linguistically describe phenomena—in particular, to describe how things appear as they appear. It also involves grasping the rationality of appearing. For Husserl, rationality and appearing are intimately connected. Rationality, in fact, is inherent in the structure of appearing.

Such structure comes from the fact that appearing is built up in layers. Take, for example, the appearing of a three-dimensional object. It appears as three dimensional because we take the side it presents to us as but one of the many sides that it could exhibit were we to view it from a different angle. Its appearance thus betrays our previous experience of objects' having different sides. Generally speaking, for such objects to appear as they do, we must first have had the experience of the series of perspectives—the adumbrations or shadings in Husserl's terminology—by which such three-dimensional objects show themselves. Such experience, however, is not sufficient. We must also link the perspectives to a common referent—i.e., to the object that is showing itself in these different perspectives. This object cannot be identified with any one of its appearances; nor can it be identified with their sum, i.e., the experience we have already had of the object. The first identification would make us say that every new appearance presents us with a new object. The second identification would rule out further experience from presenting the same object. In fact, for a three-dimensional object to appear, we must first pick out a pattern of appearances in our ongoing visual experience. We must then assign these appearances to a common referent, taking it as that which is showing itself through such appearances. There are, in fact, many more stages in the grasp of a spatial-temporal object. On the lowest level, there are those that build up its temporal sense as it shows first one side and then another. The process is complicated; and, as Husserl says, we are not born with the ability to engage in it. We first have to learn how to see objects.[3] Doing so, we learn how to "constitute" them, i.e., build up their presence by going through this process. The term "constitution" mirrors Kant's threefold synthesis of apprehension, reproduction, and

[3] As Husserl writes, "in infancy we had to learn to see things." For the infant, "the field of perception" does not yet contain such objects (Husserl, *Cartesianische Meditationen*, ed. S. Strasser (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff 1963), p. 112. An indication of such learning is presented by the neurologist, Oliver Sacks, in his article, "To See and Not See." He reports that those who are born blind and have their sight restored through surgery face "great difficulties after surgery in the apprehension of space and distance—for months even years" (*The New Yorker*, May 10, 1993, p. 63). Reporting on one particular individual, Virgil, he writes: "He would pick up details incessantly—an angle, an edge, a color, a movement—but would not be able to synthesize them, to form a complex perception at a glance" (ibid., 64). He was, in other words, unable to form a complex visual field, let alone represent objects as he approached them. A rewritten version of this account appears in Sachs, *An Anthropologist from Mars, Seven Paradoxical Tales* (New York: Vintage Press, 1996), pp. 244–296.

recognition, through which we apprehend an appearing object by synthesizing or putting together its appearances.[4]

For both Kant and Husserl, this conception of constitution or synthesis is foundational for the rationality of appearing. For both, the rules of constitution, basically those of uniting multiplicities in higher level unities, are, formally speaking, the rules of logic.[5] This is why logic applies to the world—i.e., why our logical inferences hold for the objects and objective relations that we observe. To constitute is to build up a sense-filled, logically coherent world. Phenomenology in its study of appearing uncovers the rationality of the world. It is not just a descriptive but also a prescriptive science. As constituted, appearing cannot violate the basic, logical rules of reasoning. Thus, a study of constitution shows that we must first constitute sensuously appearing objects before we constitute the connections that unite them into states of affairs. Such connections are the *non*-sensuous higher level "categorial forms" such as the logical connectives "and," "or," "if," etc. A philosophy that claimed that such forms were intuitable like the objects they linked could never be backed up by experience. In Husserl's scathing words, "Even a divine physics can no more take thinking's categorial determinations of reality and make out of them something that can be simply intuited, than divine omnipotence can make it possible for someone to paint elliptical functions or play them on a violin."[6]

To see phenomenology in both its descriptive and prescriptive aspects as liberating is to see it as embracing a call to trust our own understanding and experience. It is to liberate ourselves from all authority except that which can be traced to experience and the rationality inherent in this. This reliance on experience is, for Husserl, "the principle of principles." This asserts "that every perception that presents something originally is a legitimate source of knowledge, that everything that is originally offered to us in 'intuition' (so to speak, offered in its incarnate actuality) is to be accepted as it is presented, but only within the limits in which it presents itself." For Husserl, "no conceivable theory can cause us to err in this."[7] A theory that robs us of our autonomy is, he will argue, self-defeating. The same holds for claims that

[4] Husserl explicitly identifies constitution with synthesis. He writes: "What is called constitution, this is what Kant obviously had in mind under the rubric, 'connection as an operation of the understanding,' synthesis. This is the genesis in which the ego and, correlatively, the surrounding world [*Umwelt*] of the ego are constituted. It is passive genesis—not the [active] categorial action which produces categorial formations ..." (Ms. B IV 12, pp. 2–3, 1920). I am grateful to the Husserl Archives in Louven, Belgium for permission to quote from Husserl's unpublished manuscripts.

[5] This is why Husserl can claim that "an all-sided ... solution of the problems of constitution would obviously be equivalent to a complete phenomenology of reason in all its formal and material formations" (*Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie, Erstes Buch*, §153, ed. Karl Schumann [Den Haag: Matinus Nijhoff, 1976, p. 359). This will be cited throughout as *Ideen I,* Schumann ed.

[6] Husserl, *Ideas I*, §52 (*Ideas for a Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy First Book*: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology), trans. Daniel Dahlstrom (Indianapolis: Hacket Publishing Company, 2014), pp. 98–99. This will be cited throughout as *Ideas I*, Dahlstrom trans.

[7] *Ideen I,* §24, Schumann ed., p. 51.

base themselves on experiences available only to a privileged few. Implicit in the principle of principles is the contention that the evidence of originary experience is something that we all could possess. This means that were we properly situated, we could perform the experiments and record the observations behind, for example, a scientific claim. We also could, were we properly trained, verify the inferences made from such observations. The revolutionary import of this is that authority is based not on persons or the offices they hold. Its ultimate ground is our experience with its implicit rationality. To apply this to philosophy is to undergo a liberation. It is to free oneself from its plethora of pronouncements, schools, and authorities. In this, it shares the liberating impulse of analytic philosophy with its linguistic turn, i.e., its attempt to trace the problems that have bedeviled philosophy to the misuse of language. Phenomenology's liberation involves the turn to appearing, specifically to the phenomenological basis for philosophical assertions. Thus, for phenomenology, it is not just enough to cite a philosophical authority to establish a given claim. One must look to the evidence and logical inferences used to establish it. This point is often overlooked in scholarly writings—including those on authors within the phenomenological stream. If we follow Husserl's principle of principles, it is not sufficient to outline an author's position. We must engage it phenomenologically; we have to consider the evidence and inferences that underlie the author's assertions. The citation of secondary sources advances such engagement only when it assists us in this.

Husserl's principle of principles holds not just for philosophy, It is applicable to all the branches of knowledge with their theoretical claims. Take, for example, Darwin's theory of evolution. Its assertion that species evolve is founded on a number of subsidiary theses or claims. There is the Malthusian thesis that species produce more offspring than can possibly survive in a given environment, the result being that individuals within a species (and closely related variants) compete for the same scare resources. There is also the claim that random variations constantly occur among the individuals composing a species. Those variations that help an individual compete, it is claimed, will help it survive and, consequently, allow it to breed more offspring. Such offspring will pass these traits to their offspring, helping them compete, and so on through the generations of evolving species. The theory, of course, involves many more claims than this. The point is that each claim has its evidence, which is available to careful observation. Each claim is also logically connected to others such that its validity or invalidity affects their role in the theory. So linked, each also finds its point of unification—its ultimate reference point—in Darwin's theory. To phenomenologically validate Darwin's account of evolution is thus to regard the observational evidence he provides and the logical connection of his claims. Do they fit together? Do they provide a coherent whole? Here, their ultimate point of unification is his conception of the evolution of the species. It is what ties together all the partial theories, individual observations, implications, etc. The conception serves the same role as the spatial-temporal object, which stands as the reference for all appearances that display its aspects.

Husserl's Phenomenology

The broad stream of phenomenology is marked by its focus on appearing as such. Not all phenomenologists follow Husserl in his assertion of the inherent rationality of appearing. Many attempt to strip the Kantian influence from his thought. Some phenomenologists, notably Heidegger, replace this with the pragmatic demands imposed by our being-in-the-world. These, rather than the inherently logical structure of constitution, shape our apprehension of reality. The result is that things appear in terms of their use values. In Heidegger's words, "The wood is a forest of timber, the mountain a quarry of rock; the river is water-power, the wind is wind 'in the sails.'"[8] The demands of our being-in-the-world—the needs this imposes on us—make us focus on the uses to which we can put the forest, mountain, river, and wind. Other phenomenologists, for example, Merleau-Ponty, begin, not with our being in the world, but rather with the embodiment or "flesh" that situates us. They focus on how this shapes our apprehension of reality. Still other phenomenologists, such as Levinas, see this shaping influence in the presence of the other person, i.e., in the ethical demands that he or she places on us. In this plurality of figures, the choice of Husserl to present phenomenology may seem problematic. Yet, in a certain sense, he stands as the central reference point for the subsequent practitioners of this stream of philosophy. Not only is he, along with Brentano, the founder of this movement. The other major figures, with the exception of Heidegger, constantly refer to him. Their acceptance and rejection of his positions shape their own approaches, which, for all their special qualities, remain within the tradition that he originates. He remains, in this sense, a central reference point.

Husserl's penchant to constantly revise what he wrote meant that relatively few of his works saw publication in his lifetime. Contemporary readers of his major works had to content themselves with *Logical Investigations* (1899–1901), the first volume of *Ideas* (published in the *Yearbook for Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* in 1913), the lectures on the *Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness* (1928), and the French translation of *Cartesian Meditations* (1931). Readers had to wait till 1950 for the German original of *Meditations*, while the English translation appeared only in 1960. The lectures on Internal Time Consciousness, which were organized by his assistant, Edith Stein, bears witness to the difficulties of getting his works into press. It was she, not Heidegger its nominal editor, who labored to arrange the various lectures and appendices composing it into a coherent whole. Most of the other work Husserl produced remained in manuscripts. Rescued by the Belgian monk, Van Breda, just before the Second World War, these manuscripts can be found in various archives. Working mainly in the Leuven and Cologne archives, scholars have gradually edited and published them in the Husserliana series. Together with the Documenta, it now contains more than 50 volumes.

[8] Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1968), p. 70.

This steady stream of work means that Husserl's impact can be divided into two stages, the first consisting of the works appearing in his lifetime. This was supplemented by the influence of his students in Göttingen and Freiburg. This influence, however, did not follow Husserl into retirement. On the one hand, Heidegger, developed a new form of phenomenology that gradually eclipsed his own. On the other, the rise of the Nazis caused Husserl's work to be almost completely forgotten. With many of his followers in exile, by war's end he became almost "entirely unknown."[9] In the decades following the war, however, Husserl again became a force in phenomenology. The availability of his manuscripts and the increasing stream of publications resulting from these made him a presence in the philosophical scene. Thus, Merleau-Ponty went to Louvain to consult the manuscript that was later published as the second volume of *Ideas*. Many of Husserl's insights into embodiment, including those of double touch, i.e., the bodily intertwining of the sensing and the sensed, became crucial concepts in Merleau-Ponty's work. Similarly, others were influenced by his works as they appeared. The result was that he again became current, serving a reference point in the critiques of phenomenologists from the 1960s onward.

Given this, a study of Husserl's phenomenology has an import beyond Husserl studies. It allows the readers of other phenomenologists to see their critiques of Husserl from a Husserlian perspective. Doing so, they are invited to evaluate them phenomenologically. This means regarding the evidence and reasoning that they employ not just in such critiques, but also in the advancement of their own claims. It is with this in mind that Husserl's principle of principles has been applied to this exposition of his work. The aim of this study is not just to outline Husserl's positions, but also to indicate the evidence and reasoning behind them. It is to invite the reader, in the spirit of the enlightenment, to employ his own experience and understanding in evaluating them.

The Original Motivation of Husserl's Phenomenology

Husserl's career as a philosopher is marked by a remarkably persistent motivation. In *Logical Investigations* published at the turn of the century, he writes that his goal is that of answering "the cardinal question of epistemology, the question of the objectivity of knowledge." For Husserl, all his other questions "essentially coincide" with this question.[10] Husserl does not so much ask whether such knowledge is possible, but rather how it is possible. His focus is on the conditions for the possibility of objective knowledge.[11] This goal does not change when he adopts the stance

[9] Sebastian Luft and Søren Overgaard, "Introduction," *Routledge Companion to Phenomenology* (New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 5.

[10] Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, trans. J.N. Findaly, 2 volumes (New York: Routledge, 2001), vol. 1, p. 14. Occasionally, my translations, which follow the German text, will vary from this translation.

[11] See ibid., "Prologomena," §65–§66.

of transcendental idealism. In defending his adoption of this position during the First World War, he describes his work as the continuance of his search for the conditions of the possibility of such knowledge. He writes that

> it simply concerns a motivated path which, starting from the problem of the possibility of objective knowledge, wins the necessary insight that the very sense of this problem leads back to the pure ego existing in and for itself, the insight that this ego, as a presupposition for knowledge of the world, cannot be and cannot remain presupposed as a worldly being, the insight that this ego must … through the phenomenological reduction and the epoché with respect to the being-for-me of the world, be brought to transcendental purity.[12]

Such "transcendental purity" signifies stripping the ego of its "worldly being," i.e., its being as a causally determined object in the world. For Husserl, the causal determination of the ego or self undermines the possibility of objective knowledge. Caught in the causal nexus, the self would grasp objects, not according to their features, but rather as it has been caused to do by the functioning of its brain and senses—a functioning that would be determined by its particular biology.

Bringing the ego to "transcendental purity" avoids this difficulty. But this immediately lands us in another problem—that caused by isolation of the transcendental ego. Stripped of its worldly being, is not this ego an isolated self? But how could a solitary self obtain objective knowledge? Thirty years after *Logical Investigations*, Husserl raises this question in the Cartesian Meditations. He writes that it concerns

> the objection by which we first let ourselves be guided, the objection against our phenomenology insofar as it claims to be transcendental philosophy and, thus, claims to solve the problems of the possibility of objective knowledge. It is that it is incapable of this, beginning as it does with the transcendental ego of the phenomenological reduction and being restricted to this ego.[13]

The difficulty is that objective knowledge does not just signify the knowledge that agrees with its object; it also means the knowledge that others can confirm. As Husserl puts this, "Considered as objective, the sense of the being of the world and, in particular, the sense of nature includes ... thereness-for-everyone, thereness as always co-intended by us whenever we speak of objective actuality."[14] What we have, in fact, is an equivalence between the two "worlds," since for Husserl, the intersubjective world is also an objective world. It is "a world for everyone, accessible to everyone in its objects."[15] Given this, Husserl's guiding motivation drives him to solve the intersubjectivity problematic. He must give an account of how "pure" egos apprehend each other, how they communicate and confirm their claims to knowledge.

---

[12] Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie, Drittes Buch*, ed. Walter Biemel. (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), p. 150. This will be cited as *Ideen III*.

[13] Husserl, *Cartesianische Meditationen*, ed. S. Strasser (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1963), p. 174.

[14] *Cartesianische Meditationen*, p. 124, italics added.

[15] Ibid., p. 123, italics added.

In *Logical Investigations*, the problem of objective knowledge is raised in the context of the general climate of skepticism that obtained at the end of the nineteenth century. At issue are the logical and noetic conditions for any theory. The former are required for it to be a logically self-consistent whole. Such conditions concern the validity of the inferences used to argue for the theory—for example, the inference: if p then q, but p obtains, therefore q must obtain. If we cannot assume the validity of such inferences, then we cannot put together a theory. The noetic conditions concern the possibility of something being known. They are those of evidence as stated in Husserl's principle of principles. Now, according to Husserl, skepticism is inherent in any theory "whose theses either expressly state or analytically imply that the logical or noetic conditions for the possibility of any theory are false."[16] If the theory is self-referring, i.e., if its claims include itself, then it is "self-destroying" since it undercuts its own noetic and logical possibility. If it is not self-referring, it is meaningless. It hasn't the meaning specified by the notions of noetical and logical possibility. Formally regarded, the skeptical theory is like the liar's paradox. If Meno the Cretan asserts that all Cretans are liars, what are we to conclude? If Meno's statement is true, then he is lying. But if so, then it is false that all Cretans are liars. The same holds with skeptical theories according to Husserl: If they are true, they are false.

To take an example of a self-undermining theory, suppose someone, regarding Darwin's theory, asserts that "even logic alters with the development of the brain."[17] In such cases, as Husserl writes in *The Idea of Phenomenology*:

> Thoughts of a biological order intrude. We are reminded of the modern theory of evolution according to which man has evolved through natural selection in the struggle for existence and, with man, his intellect has also naturally evolved and, with his intellect, also all of its characteristic forms—in particular, the logical forms. Accordingly, is it not the case that the logical forms and laws express the accidental peculiarity of the human species, a species which could have been different and will be different in the course of future evolution? Cognition, therefore, is doubtless only human cognition. It is something bound up with human intellectual forms, something incapable of reaching the nature of things themselves, of reaching the things in themselves.[18]

Such thoughts did not just occur to Husserl. Nietzsche undermines the "logical or noetic conditions" for the possibility of a theory when he writes: "we have senses for only a selection of perceptions—those with which we have to concern ourselves in order to preserve ourselves."[19] This means that "the measure of that of which we are in any way conscious is totally dependent upon the coarse utility of its becoming conscious."[20] We are conscious of things if this helps preserve us. The same holds for our knowledge. In Nietzsche's words: "The meaning of 'knowledge' ... is to be

---

[16] *Logical Investigations*, vol. 1, p. 76.

[17] Ibid. vol. 1, p. 317, n. 8.

[18] *Die Idee der Phänomenologie*, ed. W. Biemel (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), p. 21.

[19] *The Will to Power*, §493, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), p. 272.

[20] Ibid., §473, p. 263.

regarded in a strict and narrow anthropocentric and biological sense. ... The utility of preservation—not some abstract-theoretical need not to be deceived—stands as the motive behind the development of the organs of knowledge—they develop in such a way that their observation suffices for our preservation."[21] The self-undermining character of such assertions is obvious. If, in fact, our rationality were determined by the particular line of our evolutionary development—i.e., by the exigencies of preservation that it incorporates—then how could we know this? To assume that our "organs of knowledge" were capable of such knowledge would be to assume that they had developed such that they could objectively grasp the evolutionary process that produced them. To argue for this, however, would presuppose the objective validity of the theory of evolution. But how could we assume this if even our logic alters with the structure of our brain?

Nietzsche's biological relativism stands as but one example of a general trend that marked European thinking. Marxism, for example, asserts that everything is economically relative. Yet if we assert that all assertions are determined by the economic class of the speaker, how can we know whether or not this assertion is itself similarly determined. Would not such determination not affect Marx's class analysis. Similarly, if we embrace historicism and assert that everything is historically relative—that is, claim that what one says is determined by one's position in history—would not this assertion not apply to itself? The same holds for a pychologogism asserting that everything is psychologically relative, i.e., dependent on a person's psychological make-up. If this is true, then so is the assertion of such relativism. The same self-referential inconsistency applies to linguistic relativism—the claim that all statements are determined by the speakers' particular language games.[22] In all such cases, if you apply the theoretical claim to the theory itself, it loses its objective, non-relative validity. Furthermore, such claims undercut each other without leaving room for any possible mediation. We cannot, for example, decide whether everything is linguistically or psychologically relative. What, for instance, should we do were we confronted with Wittgenstein and Freud's explanations of each other's positions—or Marx's explanation of both of their claims?

To escape this welter of competing claims, we need to assert that there is a non-contingent structure of proof and evidence. No theory can maintain its validity if it undercuts the logical reasoning it employs or the evidence it presents for its premises. Husserl, thus, urges us to focus on such evidence, including the evidence for the inferences a theory employs. This focus turns us to the phenomena themselves. It makes them a subject of special study. The original motto of phenomenology was, then, to turn away from such contending theories. Its exhortation, "back to the

---

[21] Ibid., §480, pp. 266–7.

[22] To avoid such self-reference, appeal is often made to Russell's theory of types. But as Fitch indicates, self-reference applies to all sufficiently general theories. This is because to be meaningful as a theory with "maximum theoretical generality," a theory of theories must involve some self-reference even though this violates its strictures against self-reference. Otherwise, it would not have the *sense* of a theory. See "Self-Reference in Philosophy," in Contemporary Readings in Logical Theory, eds. I. Copi and J. Gould (New York: MacMillan 1967), pp. 158–60.

things themselves” [*Zurück zur Sachen selbst*], urges us to focus on the appearing that serves at basis for every assertion, every theoretical claim.

The Tensions Inherent in Phenomenology

Logical Investigations indicates the influence of two opposing fields: mathematics and psychology. Husserl studied mathematics in Berlin with Leopold Kronecker and Karl Weierstrass. He gained his PhD in Vienna, with a thesis on the mathematical theory of variations (*Variationstheorie*) and, for a time, worked as an assistant to Weierstrass in Berlin. Returning to Vienna, he studied psychology (at that time a division of philosophy), first with Brentano, who published his *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* in 1884, and then with Carl Strumpf, the author *of Psychology of Tone* (two volumes, 1883/90). Working under Strumf, he wrote his habilitation dissertation, *On the Concept of Number* (1887). The latter became his first major work, *Philosophy of Arithmetic* (1891), whose goal was to establish a psychological foundation for arithmetic. Brentano did not just provide Husserl with background in psychology. He also introduced him to the concept of intentionality. As Brentano defines it, intentionality signifies that “[e]very mental phenomenon is characterized by … the reference to a content, a direction towards an object … In presentation something is presented, in judgment something is affirmed or denied, in love loved, in hate hated, in desire desired, and so on.” This quality, he adds, “is characteristic exclusively of mental phenomena. No physical phenomenon exhibits anything like it. We can, therefore, define mental phenomena by saying that they are those phenomena which contain an object intentionally within themselves.”[23] Husserl will later refine and develop this concept, integrating it into his conception of constitution. It will remain, in his focus on the intentional acts of consciousness, a fundamental feature of his phenomenology. As for mathematics, the dominant influence was that of Gottlob Frege.[24] His critique of *Philosophy of Arithmetic* led Husserl to fundamentally revise its positions in his next book, *Logical Investigations*. Rather than seeking a psychological basis for arithmetic, Husserl now described it as a science of ideal, as opposed to empirical possibilities. The former only concern the content of what we assert. The ideal relations of such content, such as that of $2 + 2 = 4$, Husserl insisted, exist independently of their comprehension.

The tension between the psychological and the mathematical perspectives is evident throughout Husserl’s work. On the one hand, we see the influence of Brentano in the minute descriptions of the intentional acts of consciousness. On the other, we have Husserl’s striving for the universal validity that he sees as characterizing

[23] Franz Brentano, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, trans. A. C. Rancurello, D. B. Terrell and L. L. McAlister, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 88.

[24] As Dermot Moran points out, other influences include Bernard Bolzano (1781–1848) and Frege’s teacher, Rudolf Hermann Lotze (1817-1881). See his “Introduction” to *the Logical Investigations*, trans. J.N. Findlay, New York, International Library of Philosophy, 2001, p. xxx.

mathematics. Can Husserl's descriptions of consciousness achieve the validity and precision of mathematics? Can they form, like mathematics, a "rigorous science"? To satisfy this demand, Husserl takes phenomenology as an "eidetic science," i.e., a science that uncovers the essential structures of the acts it describes. The phenomenologist discovers these through the method of "free variation." He uses his imagination to vary the components laid bare by his descriptive work. The impossibility of setting aside some of these shows that they cannot be changed. They are essential to the act in question. Thus, no matter how much you vary the perception of color, such a perception also requires a grasp of extension. Similarly, an apprehension of the pitch of a tone requires you to grasp its loudness and duration. This solution, we should note, is not without its difficulties. In particular, it brings with it the problem of the ontological status of the eidetic. How is it related to the real causal relations that define the material world? Husserl writes, "My act of judging that $2 \times 2 = 4$ is no doubt causally determined, but this is not true of the truth $2 \times 2 = 4$."[25] The latter is an eidetic, not a real, empirical relation. It is inherent in the structure of counting. But as the Dutch scholar, Theodor De Boer, asks: "How can one combine the postulation of eternal norms with a naturalistic interpretation of consciousness?"[26] In other words: how can a causally determined mode of judging grasp such an eidetic, eternal relation?[27] Such questions, we saw, led Husserl to strip the subject of its worldly being and adopt the stance of transcendental idealism.

Another tension involves the relation between appearance and reality. Phenomenology exhorts us to return to the things themselves. But what exactly are they? Are the phenomena it studies the appearing of things or the things that appear? Is it interested only in the appearance and not in the reality that appears? Husserl asserts that you cannot separate the two. We can only posit the reality on the basis of the evidence we have for it; we can speak of what appears only in terms of its appearing. A critic, however, would reply that there is a real world out there independent of my apprehension. I am subject, for example, to its causal influences whether I am aware of them or not. For Husserl, however, the belief in the universal sway of physical causality is part of the natural, scientific attitude—an attitude that achieves ascendency with the discoveries of Galileo, Kepler, and Newton. Like every theoretical stance, its basis, he asserts, must be the evidence we have for it. We have to see how far such evidence supports its claims. To uncover this, Husserl introduces the phenomenological epoché. Derived from a Greek term, ἐποχή, signifying a cessation or suspension, it designates the suspension or bracketing of the claim we are examining. As Roman Ingarten points out, we employ it to avoid a petitio principii.[28] This is the logical fallacy of assuming, as part of one's argument,

---

[25] *Logical Investigations*, vol.1, p. 80.

[26] "Zusammenfassung," *De Ontwikklingsgang in het Denken van Husserl* (Assen: Van Gorcum & Company, 1966), p. 582.

[27] This is the issue in James Mensch's book, *The Question of Being in Husserl's Logical Investigations* (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981).

[28] See Roman Ingarden, *On the Motives which led Husserl to Transcendental Idealism*, trans. A. Hannibalsson (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975), p. 12.