

Daniele De Santis [Ed.]

Edmund Husserl's Cartesian Meditations

Commentary, Interpretations,
Discussions

Phänomenologie

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34

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Commentary, Interpretations,
Discussions

VERLAG KARL ALBER



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Introduction

The present volume is based on a conference on the legacy of Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations* that took place in Prague, October 17–19, 2019, on the occasion of the 90th anniversary of Husserl's *Paris Lectures* of 1929. The structure of the present volume mirrors the overall structure of the conference, but new chapters have been added, while the original presentations have been rewritten or substantially reworked. My deepest gratitude goes to those who participated in the conference and—most importantly—to the two persons who helped me navigate those three days, including (but not limited to) carrying around the roll-up banner like an Olympic torch: Stela Chvojková and Anna Schubertová. Without them and the beautiful poster created by Anna herself, the event would never have turned out to be as successful as it eventually did.

If the question were why would one organize and publish a full volume on the *Cartesian Meditations* (the shortest book among those published by Husserl himself during his lifetime) and their legacy within the history of 20th century phenomenology, there would be two answers. In the first place, after the first volume of *Ideas* published in 1913, the text of the *Cartesian Meditations* offers the second great attempt Husserl made at a systematic presentation of all his philosophical ambitions and aspirations (the third attempt is found in the *Crisis*). But the *Cartesian Meditations* are not only Husserl's second attempt at systematizing his philosophy after the so-called »turn« to a transcendental form of thought; in the *Cartesian Meditations* Husserl speaks a language and resorts to a conceptuality that are far from being a mere variation on the language and the conceptuality introduced in the first volume of *Ideas*. In an even stronger tone, I would go so far as to affirm that the conceptuality of the *Mediations*, hence the very idea of phenomenology proposed therein, go beyond the theoretical framework of the first volume of *Ideas*. More specifically—and just to mention the most significant difference—while in

the first volume of *Ideas*, phenomenology is famously presented as the eidetic-material science of all the transcendently purified phenomena belonging to the new material »region of being« called »pure consciousness«, in the text of the *Meditations* the situation is radically different. Here I am not only referring to the problem of the constitution of transcendental intersubjectivity (the lack of which in the 1913 book Husserl himself denounced in the *Nachwort* to *Ideas*—see Husserl 1952, pp. 149–150 and ff.); I am mainly referring to the account of the transcendental subject as a concrete ego or monad—which, unfortunately, is only sketched in the *Fourth Cartesian Meditation*. What the new science called phenomenology is about is no longer the *region of being* (a term that Husserl never uses in the *Meditations* to characterize the »monad«) termed »pure consciousness«, the individuals of which are lived experiences (*Erlebnisse*); phenomenology is now presented as the »explication« (Husserl 1950, pp. 102–103; Husserl 1960, p. 68) of a historically and ontologically »concrete ego« for which the distinction between singularity (i.e., essence of the lowest level) and individuality no longer holds.

In a famous conversation with Dorion Cairns, Husserl allegedly explained this as follows:

Another matter of which Husserl spoke was the passage in the *Ideen* where he speaks of the conceivability of such a chain of hyletic data that there would be no constitution of an objective world. With Fink's help he tried to make clear to me that, whatever its value there, the non-being of the world was really impossible. It is valid only, so to speak, in the primordial sphere. But the primordial sphere is an abstraction: within the allegedly primordial sphere appear necessarily the motivations for the constitution of transcendental intersubjectivity. But the world is the necessary form of intersubjectivity. Hence the being of the self or the stream requires the being of a world. Ultimately it is a matter of the interpretation of the monads. (Cairns 1976, p. 40)

The famous annihilation of the world—which in *Ideas* was the means through which Husserl arrived at laying open the region »pure consciousness«—is now recognized as an »abstraction«, an »abstraction« from within the concreteness of the monad and its relation to the world. If this is the case, the framework of the *Cartesian Meditations*, hence its conception of phenomenology, does not simply diverge from that of the first volume of *Ideas*. Instead, the latter is included, so to speak, in the former. The monad designates a more

concrete form of subjectivity, of which pure consciousness as a region is only an abstraction. But the perspectives of the two books also differ with regard to the trajectory they follow and the corresponding strategy that Husserl adopts. The radical difference can be illustrated by resorting to the symbolism introduced by Oskar Becker in a famous 1930 discussion of Husserl's philosophy. In the first volume of *Ideas*, Husserl first moves »vertically« from the natural attitude (N) to the eidetic one (E), and then »horizontally« to the transcendental attitude (Φ), the sequence being NE Φ (Becker 1930, p. 140). In contrast, in the *Meditations* Husserl first moves »horizontally« from the natural attitude (N) to the »transcendental-factual« attitude (T), then »vertically« to the transcendental and eidetic dimension (Φ), the sequence being NT Φ . At the end of § 62 of *Ideas I*, Husserl had pointed out that »any attempt to begin naively with a phenomenological science of facts *in advance* of the development of a phenomenological doctrine of essences [is] nonsense«: the reason for this is that every question of possibility »can only be decided on the basis of eidetic phenomenology« (Husserl 1976, p. 134; Husserl 2014, p. 114). In contrast, in the *Cartesian Meditations*, the eidetic dimension is introduced only in § 34: »By the method of transcendental reduction each one of us, as a Cartesian Meditator, was led back to his/her transcendental ego—naturally with its concrete-monadic content as this factual ego (*dieses faktische*), the one and only absolute one« (Husserl 1950, p. 103; Husserl 1960, p. 69, translation modified). José Gaos rightly recognizes that here »la fenomenología trascendental es«, in the first place, »una fenomenología empírica o fáctica« (Gaos 1996, p. 28). Whereas in 1913 Husserl first lays claim to the possibility of eidetic knowledge in general, and then invests all his energy in bringing to the fore that new region of being which alone can grant the possibility of a new eidetic-material science, in 1929–1931 he first accomplishes the transcendental reduction to describe the concrete life of *my own* transcendental, yet factual ego—and then makes the case for introducing the method of self-variation.¹ And it is only on the basis of such a method that the eidos »concrete ego« can finally be fully investigated. Thus there could not be greater discrepancy between the two modes of proceeding (see also Franck 1981, pp. 66–67).

But *Cartesian Meditations* is also the one text in which Husserl affirms *apertis verbis* that the ultimate ambition of phenomenology is

¹ On this Husserlian methodological concept, see De Santis 2020.

to provide a new foundation for »metaphysics«: not only (in § 60 of the *Fifth Cartesian Meditations*) for the Leibnizian problem concerning the existence of one factual world over above an infinite number of possible other worlds (De Santis 2018), but also for what in the 1923 lectures he had once labeled »metaphysics in a new sense« (Husserl 1956, p. 188; Husserl 2019, p. 194, note). Such a metaphysics has to do with what Husserl usually calls »the supreme and ultimate questions«: »contingent facticity« (*zufällige Faktizität*); »fortune« or »destiny« (*Schicksal*); »the possibility of a ›genuine‹ human life as ›meaningful‹ in a particular sense«; »the sense of history« (Husserl 1950, pp. 39, 182; Husserl 1960, p. 156). These are all questions that—as Husserl himself writes to his lifelong friend Gustav Albrecht—revolve around »the ultimate being of the ›Ego‹ and the ›We‹ objectified as humanity (*als Menschheit*)« (Husserl 1994b, p. 84). The point here is not finally to discover some kind of *existential dimension* of Husserl's thought (to be piled up on the many Husserls with which we are already more or less familiar); rather, the point is to admit that even the great questions that bear upon the irrationality of our own human existence have their own place within the system of philosophy (on this topic, see De Santis 2021, pp. 237–238 and ff.).²

Although it would be wrong, and to a certain extent also misleading, to affirm that the *Cartesian Meditations* have yet to receive the attention they properly deserve, they have certainly not received enough attention in comparison to other Husserlian texts such as the late *Crisis*. One could rephrase what John Passmore once said about Lotze and state that *Cartesian Meditations* is undoubtedly one of »the most pillaged« Husserlian texts. If some of the concepts and problems these studies tackle (e.g., the concept of passive syntheses and the monad; the account of empathy and the problem of the other; the notion of appresentation, as well as those of pairing and association) have been used and abused over the course of 20th century scholarship and philosophy, the book as a whole—namely, the project it does present and the overall idea of philosophy it builds upon—is yet to be seriously taken into account and explored. The grandiose, seemingly »non-Cartesian« picture of phenomenology drawn by the *Crisis of European Sciences* has always been preferred over the alleged »Cartesianism« of the *Cartesian Meditations*. In this

² See also Altobrando's preface to one of the new Italian translations of the *Meditations* (Altobrando 2017).

respect, it would suffice to recall the harsh comment made by Heidegger in one of the few texts in which the *Cartesian Meditations* are mentioned: »despite intentionality, Husserl remains trapped in immanence—and the consequence of this position are the *Méditations cartésiennes*« (Heidegger 1986, p. 282; Heidegger 2003, p. 70).

It is not my intention to rehearse here the many reasons why Husserl kept reworking the book, and why in the end he never published any German edition of it;³ however, it is important to keep in mind the explanations Husserl gives to Roman Ingarden. In a letter from March 19th, 1930, Husserl confesses to his former Polish student that the German edition needs to be longer and more systematic so as to include »the supreme ›metaphysical‹ problems (*breiterer Exposition und Weiterführung bis zur obersten ›metaphysischen‹ Problematik*)« as well (Husserl 1968, p. 59). Later on, on November 13th, 1931, Husserl will explain that the difficulty of the book is such that an appropriate comprehension can be attained only if, after the *Fifth Meditation*, one goes back once again to the *First Meditation* (Husserl 1968, p. 73). It is not easy to tell concretely why this should be the case, but what Husserl seems to have in mind is some sort of *circularity* peculiar to the text; it is *as though* the Cartesian reform of philosophy described by Husserl at the outset of the book, hence the very new Cartesianism of phenomenology, could be properly and appropriately comprehended only after the system of philosophy has already been fully unfolded and the metaphysical problems bearing on our existence finally included.

But the decision finally to offer a full volume dedicated to the *Cartesian Meditations* and the many different aspects of their legacy⁴ is also due to another reason. As far as I know, the first reviews of the text were all quite—if not extremely—critical of Husserl's line of thought in this work (with one specific, important exception yet to be seriously considered).

For example, Jacques Maritain's article »Notes sur la connaissance«, published in the official organ of the Italian Neo-Scholastic movement, is *de facto* an extremely harsh review of the French edition of the *Meditations* and of the picture of phenomenology presented therein. Husserl's transcendental idealism is described in terms of a

³ See the monumental work by Bruzina 2004.

⁴ This is the main difference between the present volume and both Smith 2003 and Lavigne 2016 (two excellent, though different, introductions to the text).

thought unable to think and relate to a being independent of the thinking activity itself. It is a *cogito* able to think of the *ens* only as a *cogitatum*, and against which Maritain argues as follows: »On ne pense du pensé qu'après avoir pensé du pensable ›bon pour exister‹ [...], le premier pensé c'est l'être indépendant de la pensée, le cogitatum du premier cogito n'est pas cogitatum, mais ens. On ne mange pas du mangé, on mange du pain« (Maritain 1932, p. 20).⁵ In contrast to the teaching of Alexander Pfänder, whose concept of phenomenology Maritain famously praises at the beginning of his review (Maritain 1932, p. 13, note), Husserl's »néo-idéalisme« or »nouvel idéalisme transcendantal« falls prey to a crass confusion, the confusion between ontology and logic—*ens reale* and *ens rationis*: »elle [Husserl's own phenomenology] risque de s'engager, en dépit de toutes ses protestations contre le constructivisme, dans l'élucidation d'un univers de fictions« (Maritain 1932, pp. 18–19). But no less critical is Alan Stout's discussion of the *Méditations cartésiennes*, which appeared in *Mind* in the same year as Maritain's essay. Husserl adopts a full-fledged »Cartesian position«—the inevitable consequence of which is that »the being primarily known is only being for thought« (Stout 1932, p. 514). Husserl ends up embracing *volens nolens* both a form of radical »solipsism« and what Stout labels a »monadistic« view: bodies exist only to the extent that they play a certain role »within the experience« of minds (Stout 1932, p. 515). And yet for Stout, Husserl's overall methodological position can be detached from the idealistic theses endorsed in the *Cartesian Meditations*, for »both truth and falsity are relative to a real being which must be present to the judging mind. [And] to ascertain the character of this real being, so far as it is ascertainable, there seems to be no other method than that which is actually used by Husserl« (see Stout 1932, pp. 515–516). Following the same line pursued by Maritain, Marvin Farber will accuse the *Cartesian Meditations* of a crass confusion, or better, of an unforgivable »fallacy«: »the constitutive fallacy.« Husserl confuses »existence and meaning of existence« (Farber 1935, p. 384) based upon the »tacit assumption« that »being depends upon thought« so that »what can-

⁵ It is in connection to Maritain that Sartre's famous *Une idée fondamentale de la phénoménologie. L'intentionnalité* should be read. If the former accuses Husserl's phenomenology of digesting and swallowing up the transcendence of being, the latter will reply by showing that Husserl's theory of intentionality breaks once and for with any and every kind of »philosophie digestive« and, in particular, with the idea that »connaître, c'est manger« (Sartre 2003, p. 87).

not be thought cannot be« (Farber 1935, p. 385). In a way that is far more radical than Maritain's and Stout's, Farber criticizes Husserl for losing the »natural world«; if the »first being« is »transcendental intersubjectivity, or the totality of monads,» then phenomenology ends up »forget[ting] its own ›mother-earth«:

But if it forgets its own »mother-earth«, its own actual genetic foundation, it will never be able to constitute a world which will satisfy experience. In that case the phenomenological quest for certainty must rest content with the pale shadow of reality, depending upon a hypostatized *logos* in an ethereal absolute consciousness. (Farber 1935, p. 387)

It was Helmut Kuhn, a scholar specializing in Socrates and ancient Greek philosophy, who published the one enthusiastic review of the French edition of the *Méditations cartésiennes* in 1933 in *Kant Studien*. Husserl's words to Kuhn could not be more revealing of what he thought of the text of the review: »In your incredible review of my French *Méditations cartésiennes*, you have come close to a comprehension of the sense of my phenomenology in a way that had hardly happened in Germany before« (Husserl 1994a, p. 238).⁶ The review is a very accurate resume of the trajectory of the text, and Kuhn pays a great deal of attention to the function of the »meditating ego« at the beginning of the *Méditations* (Kuhn 1933, p. 209). The »person« who meditates dissolves (*Auslöschen*) his or her own individual contingency (*individuellen Zufälligkeit*) in the »very sense of the act of meditating«: »The concrete situation of self-reflection and the expectation of co-accomplishment is subject to the ›practical idea« of being—to the idea of an infinite work of theoretical determination« (Kuhn 1933, p. 210).⁷ As far as I understand his reading of Husserl's philosophy in the *Cartesian Meditations*—notably, with regard to the idea of a »meditating« ego—Kuhn is interested in the specific conception of »being« that develops out of it. The *Selbstbesinnung* of a subject that finds itself part of a harmony of monads (Kuhn 1933, p. 214) results in the practical conception of »being« as

⁶ »In Ihrer überraschenden Rezension meiner französischen ›*Méditations Cartésiennes*« haben Sie sich einem Verständnis des Sinnes meiner Phänomenologie soweit angenähert, wie es bisher in Deutschland kaum geschehen war.«

⁷ »Die konkrete Situation der Selbstbesinnung und der Zumutung des Mitvollzugs unterstellt sich der ›praktischen Idee« des Seins—der Idee einer unendlichen Arbeit theoretischer Bestimmung.«

what is theoretically determinable *in infinitum*. Now that this is Kuhn's stance on the *Meditations* should not come as a surprise. If the review came out in 1933, it is in 1934 that also his book *Sokrates* was published.⁸ In this work, proceeding in a way similar to what he had done in his Husserl review, Kuhn asks the question of the idea of »being« that emerges out of Socrates' *Daseinsform* and the Delphic Γνώθι σεαυτόν (Kuhn 1934, pp. 30–31). If in the case of Husserl the expression »practical idea« of being« had been used, here Kuhn says that for Socrates, »being« means *Zweckbestimmtheit* and *Seinsvollendung* (Kuhn 1934, p. 30). Rather than a form of »idealism« in which »being« means the same as (and nothing more than) *being-thought* (as both Maritain and Stout had affirmed)—or in which existence is confused with its meaning (Farber)—for Kuhn, Husserl's phenomenology entails a form of teleological-practical ontology, with »being« meaning what can be *determined* by our (theoretical) practices.

* * *

I originally planned the present volume with the firm conviction that the *Cartesian Meditations* is a text yet to be fully investigated in its richness and complexity (beyond the importance to be attributed to this or that specific and individual theme). This should also explain the decision to divide the volume into three major sections. As was already the case with the original conference, the first part (Ch. 1-6) is dedicated to a close-up discussion of the *Meditations*. It could therefore be regarded as a »commentary«—but only on the condition that we give the term »commentary« a broad sense. In fact, no specific protocol has been imposed on the authors—and each one of them has been completely free to choose and determine the *form* that her or his commentary and discussion would have. For example, whereas some of these chapters textually follow, step by step, the way in which Husserl himself *de facto* unfolds and presents his arguments, there are also chapters in which this is not the case. They do not so much focus on the factual structure of the relevant *Meditations*, but rather tackle the concepts and the problems discussed in them

⁸ See Gaiser 1960 for a discussion of the historical context in which Kuhn's book appeared and of the differences between the two editions (1934 and 1959). That Husserl highly appreciated Kuhn's book on Socrates can be inferred from what he writes to Ingarden; see Husserl 1968, pp. 89, 97.

directly and more systematically.⁹ However, the second part (Ch. 7-14) has a different structure, since it has a different goal. The ambition here is to investigate the reception of the text, therefore of the idea of phenomenology it contains, by paying particular attention to some of the main protagonists of post-Husserlian phenomenology. Here too, no specific protocol has been imposed upon the authors due to the great variety of the philosophers covered (from Eugen Fink to Emmanuel Levinas, from Maurice Merleau-Ponty to Hans Kelsen and Ludwig Landgrebe, from Jan Patočka to Roman Ingarden and Paul Ricoeur) and their very different modes of approaching the *Meditations* in particular as well as Husserl's philosophy in general. Finally, the last part (Ch. 15-20) of the volume presents the reader with an even broader ambition, i.e., the ambition to use the *Cartesian Meditations* as a springboard in order to assess some more general themes connected to Husserl's overall phenomenology and phenomenological philosophy, and their relevance for contemporary discussions and debates. The unity of this last section should be sought not so much in the content as instead in the very intention that animates the contributions. In fact, if the chapters included in first part of the volume are *systematically* united by the text itself of the *Cartesian Meditations* they all comment upon (= *systematic unity*), all the texts of the second section share the same ambition, that of exploring the historical legacy of the *Meditations* and the problems they address (= *historical unity*). Unlike the first two parts, the chapters included in the third section may leave on the reader an impression of inconsistency and lack of systematic unity. In truth, not only are they all guided by the same (critical) ambition of (more or less directly) employing the *Meditations* to address issues and questions that move beyond their horizon (= *critical unity*); they are all rooted in the text itself of the *Meditations* and in some of the main problems and concepts contained therein: the problem of evidence (Chapter 15) and the question of the phenomenological foundation (Chapter 16) (corresponding to *Meditations* I, II and III); the method

⁹ The reason why Chapter 1 (*Introduction and First Cartesian Meditation: Husserl on the Threefold Significance of Descartes' Meditationen*) is longer than the others is that it comments upon two different—yet connected texts: the *Introduction* to the *Cartesian Meditations* and the *First Cartesian Meditation*, and in so doing it tackles the problem of the general »Cartesianism« of Husserl's phenomenology. The chapter is hence meant to be an introduction to Husserl's reading of Descartes' own *Meditationes* and the sense the latter have for the phenomenological project.

of self-variation (Chapter 17), and the overall problem of the sense of Husserl's own idealism (Chapter 18) (corresponding to *Meditation IV*); the meaning of the expression »first philosophy« (Chapter 19) and the thorny issue of the relation between first philosophy and metaphysics (Chapter 20) (corresponding to *Meditation V*). The order of the chapters follows and mirrors the formal structure of Husserl's text, and the overall result of the section is crucial in one specific respect: albeit to different degrees, all the chapters show how rich the conceptual toolbox forged and presented by Husserl in the *Cartesian Meditations* still is. They all show the extent to which the importance of this text (even of the too infamous doctrine of transcendental idealism) cannot be reduced to the just the (too) famous problem of the constitution of the transcendental inter-subjectivity (as was too often the case during the last century and still nowadays).

Thus although the volume is dedicated to the *Cartesian Meditations*, it does not simply limit its focus to them: its aspiration is to offer a multi-faceted perspective that takes the *Cartesian Meditations* as a point of departure in order to inscribe them within a progressively larger (phenomenological and philosophical) picture. In effect, this is a single perspective, yet it is a not a unitary one. It is a perspective that is made up of different perspectives, for each one of the chapters (in particular those included in the first part) is a most direct expression of a certain individual manner of understanding Husserl's phenomenology; the problems around which it revolves; and the solutions it provides for these problems. The present volume is accordingly a choral enterprise in which many voices and tones intertwine, but do not cover one another up.

* * *

I would like to conclude this brief introduction by first thanking all the authors for their patience, since the preparation of the book eventually took longer than expected: »Superbia, invidia e avarizia sono / le tre faville c'hanno i cuori accesi« (Dante, *Inferno*, VI, 74–75).

A special thanks goes to Klára Choulíková, the librarian at the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies of Charles University, without whose constant help our work would never be possible. I am also very grateful to Elizabeth (Betsy) Behnke for her fantastic work of editing. I would like to also thank Claudia Serban for how she took care of the review process, and the two reviewers for the helpful comments, remarks and suggestions. Last but not least,

the present volume is dedicated to the memory of Ronald Bruzina (1936–2019), who more than any other interpreter has contributed in a profound way to the comprehension of the meaning of the project of the *Cartesian Meditations* for Husserl's philosophy as a whole. But the reason for dedicating this book to him is also very personal: he was one of the members of my Ph.D. defense committee back in Rome in 2013. I still retain a fond memory of the time we spent together on that as well as on many other occasions.¹⁰

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Claudio Majolino

Introduction and First Cartesian Meditation: Husserl on the Threefold Significance of Descartes' *Meditationes*

1. Introduction

The present study is intended as a broad commentary on the *Introduction* and the *1st Cartesian Meditations* (henceforth *CM*), and revolves around the Husserlian claim according to which Descartes's *Meditationes* have a threefold significance: an *everlasting significance* (Husserl 1973a, p. 44/2); a *significance for the present* (Husserl 1973a, p. 47/5–6) a *significance for phenomenology* (Husserl 1973a, 43/1). After a first section, introducing a preliminary set of key concepts and distinctions (§ 2), I will examine the everlasting (§ 3), the present (§ 4) and the phenomenological significance of the *Meditationes* (§ 5). I will conclude with some remarks on a revealing analogy used by Husserl to illustrate Descartes's overall relationship to philosophy (§ 6).

2. Preliminary distinctions

2.1. The «motif» and the «content»

Cartesian Meditations—the grammatical form of the title chosen by Husserl bears already a felicitous ambiguity as it indicates, at the same time, what the book intends *to do*, and what it is *about*. It suggests that Husserl is planning to carry out some «meditations» in the wake of the ones previously carried out by Descartes in his *magnus opus*. In this first sense, the noun «meditations» indicates the *kind* or the *genre* of intellectual exercise Husserl intends to realize, while the adjective «Cartesian» specifies its *difference* or *distinctive style* with respect to

similar endeavours. But the title also implies Husserl's willingness to take the outcomes of Descartes's meditations as an object of scrutiny. The noun »meditations« now stands as the name of the book in which such outcomes are delivered, i.e. the *Meditationes de Prima philosophia*, while the adjective »Cartesian« simply relates the name of its author.

The importance of this ambiguity should not to be overlooked. In fact, the *Introduction* and *1st CM* unfold in two different, yet tightly related, directions.

- (1) According to the first direction, the »Cartesian meditations« are a »model« (Husserl 1973a, p. 44/2) of which Husserl provides a *repetition* and a *variation*.
- (2) According to the second, Descartes's *Meditationes* expound a »doctrine« of which Husserl's transcendental phenomenology spelled out in the *Meditationen* represents a *critical transformation* and *new formation* (Husserl 1973a, p. 47–8/5–6).

Husserl is thus *reiterating in a different way* something that Descartes did before him (= a meditation according to a certain style) and, at the same time, *criticizing* the theoretical consequences that Descartes drew from such meditations and delivered in a rather influential book (= the *Meditationes*). More specifically, *CM* aim at repeating and varying certain »motifs« which appear in Descartes's *magnus opus*, while critically rejecting a great part of its »doctrinal content.« Transcendental phenomenology is thus a »new cartesianism« *transformed in its motifs and critically scrutinized in its contents* (Husserl 1973a, p. 43/1).

2.2. The repetition and variation of the »motif«

The first cartesian motif that Husserl intends to repeat and vary is that of the »meditation of the beginning philosopher«. Husserl presents himself as willing to do *again* what Descartes did *already*, and what every genuine philosopher *has always done* and *should always do*, at least once in his or her life. Such fundamental gesture rests on the conjunction of the following traits:

- (a) the self-withdrawal, i.e. the return to the philosophizing subject;
- (b) the preliminary rejection of all pre-given knowledge;
- (c) the reliance on the sole authority of what strikes as evident and insightful.

This is precisely what Descartes did: he »withdraws in himself,« »tears down« all scientific pre-existing knowledge that he has been accepting so far,« and tries to »build it anew« on the sole firm basis of the *clare et distincte percipere* (Husserl 1973a, p. 44/2).

The *Introduction to CM* explains that Descartes's distinctive gesture occurs on »two significant layers« (Husserl 1973a, p. 44/2). The first layer includes:

- (a) ⁱThe »return« to the philosophizing ego as a »personal ego«;
- (b) ⁱThe »destruction« of every given »scientific knowledge«;
- (c) ⁱThe »reliance« on what strikes *me* as »evident« and indisputably true, considered as the starting point to re-establish what has been preliminarily suspended.

With respect to this first layer, the novelty introduced by Descartes is in the fact of having not only *thematized* a fundamental gesture already accomplished by Socrates or Augustin, but also *turned it into the methodic process* to be followed by »everyone who seriously want to become a philosopher« (Husserl 1973a, p. 44/2). In Descartes's hands the general cluster (a) (b) (c) turns into the response to the following question: *how should one begin philosophizing? Is there a methodic way by means of which I, as a personal ego, could become a mindful and effective beginner in philosophy?* Thanks to this preliminary variation, Descartes turned philosophy into a »personal affair« of the beginning philosopher. Stripped out from its original ethical context, the Socratic »absolute poverty« of knowledge becomes a methodic step to reach that »absolutely sure beginning« from which a personal subject can only begin in order to hold a truly »insightful« and not merely »blind« grasp of a transmitted set of truths (Husserl 1973a, p. 44/3).

But Husserl also identifies a second variation, occurring at a deeper layer, consisting in:

- (a) ⁱⁱThe »return« to a philosophizing ego which is no longer a personal subject but the »solipsistic« (Husserl 1973a, p. 45/3) »pure ego of the pure cogitationes« (Husserl 1973a, p. 46/4);

- (b) ⁱⁱThe »destruction« is not limited to every given »scientific knowledge« but extends to every given »natural knowledge«, including the belief in the existence of the world itself;
- (c) ⁱⁱThe reliance on the absolute apodictic evidence of the ego cogito as the starting point to re-establish the existence of the entire world whose existence has been previously suspended because of its lack of evidence (Husserl 1973a, p. 45/3).

This triple shift—from (a)ⁱ (b)ⁱ (c)ⁱ to (a)ⁱⁱ (b)ⁱⁱ (c)ⁱⁱ—shows a second novelty of the Cartesian variation. The cluster (a) (b) (c) now appears as the answer to a new and different question, i.e. *how can philosophy reach its ultimate goals? Is there a methodic way by means of which philosophy could mindfully and effectively live up to its true ambitions?* Through his second deeper-layer variation Descartes is praised for having endowed »genuine« philosophy with a »radical« method to reach its ultimate »ends.« By way of a »methodical critique of the certainty embedded in the natural life of experience and thought« philosophy has to go as far as to destroy »the being of the world« (Husserl 1973a, p. 45/3) and uncover that »reduced« ego whose »existence is absolutely indubitable« and whose »pure inwardness can include an objective outwardness« (Husserl 1973a, p. 45/3 modified).

2.3. The critique of the »doctrinal content«.

Such distinctive style of meditation, characterized by the repetition and two-layers variation of the traditional motive of the »subjective turn« of philosophy (Husserl 1973a, p. 44/2), has been factually delivered in a book called *Meditationes de prima philosophia in qua dei existentia et animae immortalitas demonstratur*, originally published in Latin in 1641 and translated into French in 1647 with the title *Méditations métaphysiques*. In this book, a man, called René Descartes, had both *displayed a philosophical gesture* and *argued in favour of a philosophical theory* (whose content could be critically examined, accepted or rejected by future generations of philosophers).

The doctrinal content of the theory Husserl alludes to is entirely related to the deeper layer of the cartesian motif and concerns the ways in which the *Meditationes* explain:

- (a) The status of the »ego cogito« (which emerges after the self-withdrawal) as

- a. A »*substantia cogitans*, the separate *mens sive anima*« (Husserl 1973a, p. 63/24);
 - b. A »solipsistic« ego (Husserl 1973a, p. 45/3);
 - c. A »psychological ego« with its »mental phenomena in the sense of psychology« (Husserl 1973a, p. 64–55/25–26);
 - d. A »piece of the world« and, more specifically, the only »piece of the world of which one cannot doubt« (Husserl 1973a, p. 64/25);
- (b) The status of the »cogitatum« and the nature of the »inclusion« of the exteriority of the world within the interiority of the »cogitationes« (which remain after the destruction of the natural belief), i.e. as
- a. »[M]ental components of the psycho-physical man«;
 - b. »[P]iece[s] of my ego to be found in my conscious life as a really inherent part of it« (Husserl 1973a, p. 65/26);
- (c) The outward path to »secure« the external world out of the apodictic evidence of the »ego cogito cogitata« (which brings us back to the »reconstruction« of that which has been previously destroyed), i.e. as,
- a. The deductive path moving, *more geometrico*, from an apodictic axiom (the »pure ego«) to a demonstrated theorem (the »the rest of the world«);
 - b. The causal path leading from the existence of the pure ego to the existence of the world (Husserl 1973a, p. 63/24).

This doctrine provides a distinctive *interpretation* of the deeper-layer of the Cartesian motif: it »begins« with the ego cogito, and methodically proceeds as if such being *were the first and necessary premise of a scientific syllogism*, i.e. following a deductive-causal path which, drawing from the ego cogito's immanent principles, leads *immediately* »to God's existence and veracity« and *mediately* »to the Objective Nature, to the duality of finite substances, i.e. to the objective field of metaphysics and positive sciences, and finally to these disciplines themselves« (Husserl 1973a, p. 45/3, modified).

2.4. Insightfulness and tradition

The fact that the *Meditationes* are a book—the only philosophical book ever explicitly discussed *qua* book by Husserl—is all but irrelevant. As

Husserl explains in the *Origin of geometry*, it is only insofar as they are delivered in a written form that the intentional achievements of a truth-oriented conscious activity are set to be historically transmitted, handed over from one generation to another, replicated, discussed, used as a basis for further demonstrations or meditations and give rise to a »tradition« (Husserl 1976, pp. 365–386/353–378). The same applies to Descartes's *Meditationes* which appear as the factual inscription in the history of humanity of, both, a distinctive variety of meditation and the theory it gives rise to.

In the *Origin of geometry* Husserl also explains that all tradition complies to the passive laws of historical transmission and sedimentation—and this also holds for the »Cartesian tradition.« The »Cartesian« motifs and the »Cartesian« doctrines can thus be historically transmitted in various ways. They can be:

- a) *Followed insightfully*, i.e. repeated or varied, accepted or rejected, developed and even modified, always in keeping with the full awareness of their original meaning and theoretical goals;
- b) *Followed blindly*, i.e. reiterated or addressed mechanically, as it were, in a way such that neither repetition nor critical assessment are accompanied with the awareness of their original meaning; or
- c) *Left unfollowed*, i.e. either forgotten or turned into something utterly ineffective.

It is Husserl's contention that, at the end of the 1920s, in the very moment in which he is writing *CM*, the motifs of the *Meditationes* are either *blindly* repeated or simply *forgotten*; the same holds for their doctrinal contents, which are either *uncritically* accepted or rejected, or merely *ignored*. In 1929, the new Cartesian beginning is already part of an almost three century old tradition, taken for granted and somehow limited to its factual-historical value.

Now, if transcendental phenomenology is a »new Cartesianism« it is not because it *somehow* follows what Descartes did or said in his *magnus opus*, but rather because it does so *insightfully*. And it is precisely because of his trust to have insightfully repeated and varied both layers of the Cartesian motif *shown* in the *Meditationes* that Husserl also believes to be entitled to »reject nearly everything of their well-known doctrinal content« and discard most of what this book says (Husserl 1973a, p. 43/1). Husserl's Descartes strives to realize a certain *idea* of philosophy, and he strives to do so by performing

a two layers transformation of a traditional conceptual cluster of the subjective turn of philosophy—an *idea* shared by Husserl too.

2.5. The »motif« and the »motive«

The careful readers of *CM* have certainly noticed the somehow ambiguous way in which Husserl employs the German word »*Motive*«, which means both »motif« (i.e., distinctive theme, trait, pattern) and »motive« (i.e., aim, intention, reason). In the *Introduction* and the *1st CM* the two meanings often merge. For instance, the first-layer *motif* of the »return to the philosophizing ego« (to repeat and varyate) depends on the *motives* (to pursue) which drive the beginner in philosophy into the activity of philosophizing. In fact, it is precisely because the beginner *aims at* becoming a »genuine« philosopher that he or she decides to destroy every pre-given scientific knowledge and turn towards his or her own personal ego. And it is also because philosophy has a »guiding goal idea« (Husserl 1973a, p. 50/9) and a »final end« that it ends up being committed by the deeper-layer motif to the »radical« destruction of the pre-given world and the self-withdrawal to the pure ego cogito (Husserl 1973a, p. 48/7). Finally, if in his doctrine Descartes interprets the ego cogito as a psychological substance and reconstructs the world in a deductive-causal way, it is always because he still believes—wrongly—to be following the same »leading idea.«

The »motive« or »the guiding idea« lurking behind all these achievements is nothing but the *idea of science* aiming at:

- 1) »[T]he realization of a science that should be grounded in radical genuineness«;
- 2) The realization of »a universal science« (Husserl 1973a, p. 48/7 modified).

It is indeed Husserl's claim that, according to its own teleological idea, every »genuine philosophy«—not just Descartes's—ultimately aims at being as firmly grounded as possible in its principles (and therefore necessary in its claims) and as comprehensive as possible in its scope (and therefore universal in its extension). It is only in this way that philosophy could finally provide a »radical foundation« for each and every particular science; and turn itself into a self-grounded and all-encompassing science, bringing together all particular sciences.

2.6. The »idea« of science and the »factual« sciences

Since the radical foundation of a universal science is only an »idea,« its presence cannot be established, let alone verified or disproved, on a merely factual basis (Husserl 1973a, p. 50/9). Husserl is indeed adamant to admit that philosophy has never *factually* achieved the goal of turning itself into an absolutely self-grounded science; that one should not self-confidently assume that such goal will be *factually* reached one day (Husserl 1973a, p. 49/8). Thus, by stating that absolute foundation is the »goal-idea« of every science, of every genuine philosophy and, ultimately, of Descartes's *Meditationes*, Husserl is not making a factual claim about science as a cultural fact (Husserl 1973a, p. 50/9) but a normative claim about what belongs to the very idea of science (Husserl 1973a, p. 49/8).

This normative claim could be unpacked by singling out the three intentional components—two theoretical and one practical-axiological—proper to each and every »scientific striving or doing« (Husserl 1973a, p. 50/9). The first theoretical component consists in the mere activity of judging. Noetically speaking, a judgment is a categorial act by way of which one »means« or »claims« that something »is such and such.« Correlatively, that which is judged is nothing but a state of affair which is meant or claimed to be such and such—under the assumption that the judgment at stake is true or correct. The second theoretical component consists in the activity of *grounding*, which leads to the concept of evidence. Grounding a judgment is tantamount to accounting for (*Ausweisung*) the truth of its claims. In some cases, the truth of a judgment is accounted for only *mediately*, i.e. by tracing it back to the truth of some other judgments. In other cases, the grounding is *immediate*, since the judgments show themselves as »adjusted to« their correlative states of affairs only because the latter are present in themselves, and, correlatively, the judging subject has the innermost awareness of such evident self-showing. The third practical-axiological component consists in the *striving for grounded judgments* (Husserl 1973a, p. 50/10). And here lies precisely the distinctive »intention« (*Intention*) of the scientific striving:

The scientist intends, not merely to judge, but to ground his judgments. Stated more precisely: He intends to let no judgment be accepted by himself or others as *scientific knowledge*, unless he has grounded it perfectly and can therefore justify it completely at any time by a freely actualizable return to his repeatable act of grounding. De facto that

may never go beyond being a mere pretension; at all events, the claim involves an ideal goal. (Husserl 1973a, p. 51/11, modified)

The intention to go *all the way through* in the process of »genuine grounding« and at least the tendency to look for the *best and most perfect way* to account for/manifest the truth of a judgment, are embedded in the normative structure of every scientific doing. Husserl can thus finally conclude that

the Cartesian idea of a science and ultimately of a universal science which is absolutely grounded and justified, is none other than the idea that constantly furnishes guidance in all sciences and in their striving toward universality, whatever may be the situation with respect to its factual realization. (Husserl 1973a, p. 2/11 modified)

The crucial point is that the normative force of such idea of science is not drawn »from without«, as it were, i.e. from the success of this or that given science. Genuine and radical philosophy is not »scientific« because it borrows the protocols of positive sciences, but rather because it shares with the latter, »from within«, *the inner teleology of judgment itself*, which is an essentially necessary component of every scientific endeavour. Conflating this *subjectively grounded idea of scientific philosophy* with the *objective view of a philosophy mimicking mathematics or physics* entails, at the same time, the end of philosophy and the misery of sciences. The »critical« assessment of the doctrinal content of the *Meditationes* is meant to establish if and to what extent Descartes stayed clear from such conflation (see § 5.7).

3. The »everlasting significance.« Descartes and the beginning of philosophy

3.1. On the manifold beginnings of philosophy

CM present the »new beginning« of the *Meditationes* as a series of »transformations and novel formations« of traditional concepts and methods of philosophy. Thus, if one wants to know more about the »everlasting significance« of such ground-breaking event, one has to refer to Husserl's lectures on the history of philosophy and its manifold beginnings to which the CM implicitly refer.