

Phaenomenologica 245

Andrew D. Barrette

# The Origin of the Question: Phenomenological Philosophy after Edmund Husserl

 Springer

# Phaenomenologica

Series Founded by H. L. Van Breda and Published Under  
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Volume 245

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Andrew D. Barrette

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Phenomenological  
Philosophy after Edmund  
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ISSN 0079-1350 ISSN 2215-0331 (electronic)  
Phaenomenologica  
ISBN 978-3-032-13568-1 ISBN 978-3-032-13569-8 (eBook)  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-13569-8>

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*For Anthony Steinbock, who continues to  
serve as a mentor...*

*...οὐ τοι ἔπειθ' ἀλίη ὁδὸς ἔσσεται οὐδ'  
ἀτέλεστος.*

*—Homer, *Odyssey*, Book 2, from ll. 267–280.*

# Preface

Philosophy is indeed, as it has so often been said, the science of the last and highest questions.<sup>1</sup>

In this book, I take Edmund Husserl as a model and guide for a phenomenological philosophy. I take him as a model insofar as his inquiry persists throughout his life, putting even the most self-evident and long-standing matters into question, allowing only adequate evidence to fulfill his striving for answers. I take him as a guide as he reflectively explicates inquiry, elucidating its various manifestations and their criteria for success. By taking after Husserl, this work takes up an intergenerational invitation to find and to live according to the methodical demands of the questioning spirit that he uncovers and exemplifies. Indeed, there appears here, in the interpersonal and socio-historical horizon, *the origin of the question*.

Through the chapters, I aim to show *that* and *how* Husserl investigates inquiry. As there has not yet been a sustained treatment of this theme in the literature, I show *that* it is, in fact, present in his work. To do so, though, I also show *how* he treats inquiry, not only by asking his own questions, but by taking up motifs from other inquirers. This shows, in turn, how we take after his way of phenomenological inquiry in our investigation of phenomenological philosophy.

Following these aims, I expound four basic accounts of inquiry in Husserl's life-work. The first tends to focus on the *foundation* of question-expressions in intentional acts. The second, static account, coming after his so-called transcendental breakthrough, discovers the *source* of these acts as found in the immanent pure ego as it transcends itself in its *horizon* of the world. The third goes back to the *origins* of the activity, accounting for the genesis of inquiry in the subject's living in the

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<sup>1</sup> Hua Mat IX, pp. 6–7. In the following, *Husserliana: Gesammelte Werke* shall be abbreviated as Hua, Hua Mat, for the *Materialienband*, or Hua Dok, for the *Dokumente* followed by volume, section or page numbers. Translations are my own, unless otherwise noted.

world. Finally, the fourth goes back to the socio-historical *roots* of inquiry, explicating how it stems from the generative world-horizon in which it participates. With these, I sketch the structures and historicity of the very *ways* of inquiring—especially in their practical, theoretical, and phenomenological appearance—without reducing them to historical happenstance.

Indeed, I find Husserl discovers inquiry as *given* and *given across generations* with his peculiar sort of “historical-teleological” phenomenological inquiry.<sup>2</sup> This way of inquiring reveals the dimension of *generativity*—a term which is found to denote at once a process of becoming *and* a socio-historical dimension to that process which extends across generations.<sup>3</sup> By inquiring-back into generativity, Husserl discovers the generative world-horizon as a peculiar *transcendental* condition of inquiry, at once delimiting questions by referring to previous achievements and giving conditions for new and novel questions in history. In this respect, even transcendental phenomenological inquiry appears as irreducible to the individual inquirer. For, as Husserl realizes, “the phenomenologist and phenomenology itself stand in this historicity!”<sup>4</sup> Thus, phenomenology, once established, comes to be passed on as a *task* (*Aufgabe*) that is “*given over*” (*aufgegeben*) to future phenomenologists, as the German compound noun suggests—*die Aufgabe*: from *auf-* (“over” or “up to”) and *geben* (“to give”).

In this task, Erazim Kohák emphasized that Husserl directed others to “See!”<sup>5</sup> To that, I add that he also implored us to “Ask!” And these directives are given, not as *impositions*, but rather as *invitations*. They are invitations, extended across generations, to inquire-back into oneself and into the world in order to discover the very ideals according to which we and our inquiry operate. By taking up this invitation to

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Husserl (1970) pp. 3 fn. 1 and 102.

<sup>3</sup> Most significantly and substantially in Steinbock (1995).

<sup>4</sup> A phrase so emphasized by Steinbock, found at Hua XV, p. 393: “Aber der Phänomenologe und die Phänomenologie stehen selbst in dieser Geschichtlichkeit.”

<sup>5</sup> See, Kohák (1978), pp. xi–xlii. Kohák translated Husserl’s to Arnold Metzger, in Husserl (1981), p. 363, in which Husserl says, “Finally, with respect to method, perspective, and areas of work of the *Ideas*, I can say but a single word, ‘See!’ I truthfully believe that I can say it, in full awareness of my responsibility. This does not in any way preclude the possibility that much could be improved, that here and there may be and is something false in the book.”

know ourselves and to live according to the ideals of knowing and acting, phenomenological inquirers become bound together in a sort of “historical communication,” as Husserl puts it.<sup>6</sup> To do this is to philosophize together—συμφιλοσοφεῖν.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Husserl (1970), pp. 17–18: “...we must inquire back into what was originally and always sought in philosophy, what was continually sought by all the philosophers and philosophies that have communicated with one another historically; but this must include a critical consideration of what, in respect to the goals and methods [of philosophy], is ultimate, original, and genuine and which, once seen, apodictically conquers the will;” consider also Husserl (1970), p. 280: “These are the men who, not in isolation but with one another and for one another, that is, in interpersonally bound communal work, strive for and bring about *theôria* and nothing but *theôria*, whose growth and constant perfection, with the broadening of the circle of coworkers and the succession of the generations of inquirers, is finally taken up into the will with the sense of an infinite and common task.”

<sup>7</sup> I mean this as Aristotle uses it in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book IX, 1172a5. For Husserl’s uses of this term, see Hua Brief. II, pp. 78 and 253; Hua Brief. III, p. 457; Hua Brief. IV, pp. 76, 129, 187, and 484; and Hua Brief. VI, p. 239. With this point in mind, let me thank all those who helped in the long process of finishing this work. A special thank you is due to the current Director of the Husserl-Archives, Prof. Dr. Julia Jansen for permission to consult the *Nachlass*, to quote from the published and unpublished manuscripts, and to provide translations of Husserl’s writings. I am also grateful to the previous Directors, Prof. Dr. Ullrich Melle and Prof. Dr. Rudolf Bernet, for their permissions and helpful guidance.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction



Augustin: nur die Liebe macht sehend—für Wert und Ideal  
Nemo cognoscitur nisi per amicitiam.<sup>1</sup>

### 1.1 Sense of the Work as a Whole

Inquiry seems familiar enough. It is given with the questions of our practical problems, our theoretical wonder, as well as our communicative life. But do we attend to it straightaway? Not at all. We are instead captivated by the world in which we live, absorbed in our questions. Quite naturally, we take inquiry for granted, naively presuming questions will arise where they need answers. To be sure, we recognize and rely on this fact. After all, we train scientists to observe closely and we trust educators to guide rightly, so that where we have yet to inquire, we might still. But this is not yet a disengaged inquiry into inquiry itself. To that end, I pursue a *phenomenology of inquiry*.

The sense of such a task is not self-evident, of course. Even if inquiry spontaneously appears in experience, methodological reflection upon it—and so, too, the motives, results, and benefits of this reflection—does not. One could pretend to strike it out alone in their reflection, exploring how inquiry emerges, operates, and transforms. Sooner or later, though, one must face the facts of collaboration and cooperation, of inheritance and indebtedness, even within one's own inquiry. Indeed, without some understanding of these dimensions, an account of inquiry is doomed, not only to that incompleteness intrinsic to most investigations, but to an inadequacy to both the matter and the method. In other words, without attention to socio-historical horizons, an inquiry into inquiry would fall short of the task at hand.

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<sup>1</sup> Edmund Husserl, from an unpublished section of manuscript E III 10/2. The passage comes from St. Augustine, *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus*.

After all, one does not have *ways* of asking and answering sorted out all at once. Spontaneous though questions may be, inquiry develops only as one inquirer follows after others. Questions are put within and to a world that is built, in no small measure, by prior questions and answers. And these previous achievements sketch the horizons from which questions emerge and in which inquiry operates. Now, to be sure, one might ask new and novel questions. But these, too, appear from those horizons to which one's answers contribute. What is more, in these questions, one still cooperates with others insofar as one's way of asking shares, not just a personal style, but also the goal of realizing certain values and ideals. Thus, along with Anthony Steinbock's elucidation of how we take "after" others chronologically and methodologically, I add how we strive "after," or "reach up to" others that "bring us up."<sup>2</sup>

To clarify, let me mark, albeit in a provisional manner, a few ways the Husserlian phenomenologist goes "before" inquiry. In the first place, the phenomenologist suspends any position-taking in the world by way of an *ἐποχή* and performs a *phenomenological reduction* to "go back" ("reduce," in its literal sense of *re-ducere*) before matters of fact to how they appear. After disengaging with the ready world, with its developed ways of inquiring and already acquired answers, the phenomenologist can ask how matters become meaningful and valuable at all. So, in the second place, the phenomenologist may aim toward grasping *a priori*, essential structures of possible instances of, say, questions and inquiry, in an *eidetic reduction*. Still more, with these insights into the "how of givenness," the phenomenologist can give a *constitutive* account of how matters appear *as* such and so in experience while also accounting for the degrees of accordance of actual operation to ideal possibilities. Thus, for example, we can give an account of how matters appear *as* questionable while also accounting for how various possible ways of inquiry might meet or really do respond to such questionability. This also points to how the phenomenologist may also understand a lawfulness of experience from insights into givenness, rather than imposing abstract ideals onto experience or treating norms as merely relative to the one experiencing. It is possible, for example, to clarify the sense of "good questions" and "good answers" in the measure that they meet the demands given in their very appearance and operation. Thus, in the third and final place, phenomenology finds how subjects stand "before the law" which is meant for each subject. In other words, phenomenology seeks to give the possibility of a radical *self-responsibility* by *yielding the insight needed for living in accord with demands and norms of subjectivity*. Failing to do so means not living up to the laws of reason before which we are.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Although this notion may be seen throughout Steinbock's writings, it is perhaps most succinctly formulated in, Steinbock (2017), p. xii: "In *Home and Beyond: Generative Phenomenology after Husserl*, I introduced what I called 'generative phenomenology' as 'after' Husserl to mean both according to Husserl in the prepositional sense, and temporally following him, as a conjunction." It is evident, I hope, that the present work would not be possible without Anthony Steinbock's continued insights, direction, and friendship.

<sup>3</sup> Husserl (1970), p. 16; Hua VI, p. 14: "Ist es nicht sogar die der 'faulen Vernunft,' welche dem Ringen um eine Klärung der letzten Vorgegebenheiten und der von ihnen aus letztlich und wahrhaft rational vorgezeichneten Ziele und Wege *ausweicht*?" See also, Hua XXVIII, p. 339.

At the confluence of these senses of “before” and “after,” appears a clarified sense of the *ideal of presuppositionlessness* in Husserl’s phenomenological method. That ideal *does not* mean a counter-sensical negation of position: the phenomenologist does not simultaneously pretend to deny themselves any position while nevertheless taking one, as if wiping away the horizon without standing on some ground. Rather, taking up that ideal means setting as a goal a sort of critical reflection that brings to question all positions and position-takings in order to become aware of them, to understand them, and, if necessary, to replace them with ones that have more adequate evidence.<sup>4</sup> Taken in this sense, presuppositionlessness is an ideal which Husserl clarifies and exemplifies such that each phenomenological philosopher might at once take after him, stand before it, and appropriate it in their own activity.

Once again, then, Husserl does not mean for phenomenological philosophy to impose ideals and values. He himself does not claim complete authority from mundane grounds, nor does he suggest anyone should do so, as if one human person or group has an encompassing monopoly on the true, the good, and the beautiful. Nevertheless, from Husserl, there comes a *bequest* of achievements, with which we work as apprentices, trying to understand for oneself even while sharing values and ideals.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the above already begins to clarify the phrase from Augustine, found in Husserl’s manuscripts, and set as the heading of this work: “Only love makes us see—for value and ideal. No one knows except by friendship.” I take it as a complement to the more well-known Augustinian tag, taken from the *De vera Religione*, at the end of the *Cartesian Meditations*: “Do not wish to go out, but to go back within, for truth dwells in the interior man.”<sup>6</sup> Taken together, I understand that a turn inward may discover, not a *solus ipse*, but community.

With this in mind, I follow, throughout this book, a way in which “reason returns to itself,” as Husserl puts it, through the intergenerational activity of inquiry.<sup>7</sup> In so doing, I find a movement through history from *latent* reason to *patent* reason, and then to *manifest* reason. In latent reason, inquiry is *hidden* from itself, as it operates in a horizon restricted to the world relative to the subject. In patent reason, inquiry *opens* to the world *in itself* but remains also *problematic* as it lacks an adequate account of *how* this is so. In manifest reason, finally, is the reason that asks how inquiry *appears at all*, differentiating and setting in order ways of inquiry. Thus, Husserl understands phenomenological philosophy as *realizing* a possibility latent yet pressing in the earliest emergence of reason. Indeed, he eventually *inquires-back* into the appearance of phenomenology itself—undertaking, in other words, a “phenomenology of phenomenology,” as Eugen Fink, Husserl’s last assistant and collaborator, would identify it—with which he discovers that “transcendental inquiry

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<sup>4</sup> An early formulation of this in §7 of the “Introduction” to Volume II, of *Logical Investigations*; see Husserl (2001a), pp. 177–180. It also appears later, for example, in the “Principle of Principles” of §24 of *Ideas I*; see Husserl (1982), p. 44.

<sup>5</sup> For the suggestion, see Husserl (2019), p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> Husserl (1960), p. 157; see Hua I, p. 183: “*Noli foras ire in te redi, sicut Augustin, in interiore homine habitat veritas.*”

<sup>7</sup> See Hua XXXVII, p. 225; and, again, Husserl (1970), p. 339.

is itself a world-historical process insofar as it enlarges the history of the constitution of the world...”<sup>8</sup> As this work also participates in that world-historical process by inquiring into inquiry, a few more words about the history of its theme in Husserlian phenomenology may serve to motivate it.

## 1.2 Turning to Husserl

To be sure, inquiry is not a usual Husserlian theme. Despite a few articles and a surfeit of mentions in the literature of its general importance, there has not yet been a systematic, phenomenological treatment of it.<sup>9</sup> While this study aims to fill that lacuna, it is also important to note that its existence is due more to the situation surrounding Husserl’s writings than to their content and method. That much of his work was left unpublished during his lifetime is well-known. With the manuscripts accessible only to the few that could read them, the next generation of phenomenologists became torchbearers of the new science. As they taught its new way of approaching matters, they introduced their original works. This initiated a period of expansion during which phenomenological themes were set. As a result, inquiry became something of a suspiciously *un*-Husserlian theme.

On this point, the work of Martin Heidegger comes to mind. Around 1926, amid a growing personal rift, Heidegger published the first part of the monumental *Sein und Zeit* in the *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung*. This work begins, of course, not just by announcing a renewal of the question of being—the *Seinsfrage*—but also by implicitly challenging the abstract yet “foundationalist” Cartesianism that was supposed to constitute the whole of Husserl’s work. For, unlike the Cartesian absolute pure *ego* that is abstracted from any world in which and to which questions may be asked, the meaning of Heidegger’s *Dasein* is inextricably constituted by inquiry of the world and of itself, as it is, “in its very Being, that

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<sup>8</sup> Husserl (1970), p. 264. For more on this point, see Džanić (2023), especially the first chapter, “Husserl and Fink: From Philosophical Systematics to a ‘Phenomenology of Phenomenology,’” pp. 17–45. As Džanić says, in footnote 23 of that Chapter: “With regard to the phrase ‘phenomenology of phenomenology’, see [Sebastian] Luft’s remark (Left, 2002: 16). He challenges the opinion that this phrase is, at its core, a very un-Husserlian one, introduced into phenomenology by Fink. Husserl’s own use of the phrase dates from 1930 (Hua XXXIV, p. 176), and it therefore cannot be established who used it first. However, even if not in letter, the phrase is fully consistent with Husserl’s earlier discussions of a critique of a critique in spirit. In this respect, Fink’s use of the phrase in the *Sixth Meditation* is continuous with this goal.”

<sup>9</sup> One can find recent recognition of its methodological importance, for example, in the work of C. Struyker Boudier (1983), Witold Plotka (2012), and, perhaps most recently and persistently, Daniel Sobota (2020 and 2021). The work of Joel Hubick (2024) also argues for the significance of questioning in phenomenology, in general, while showing its presence in Husserl’s thought. It also appears as a theme in the early collaborations of Eugen Fink and Ludwig Landgrebe with Husserl himself. I address these throughout the work. My aim is to show the appearance and operation of inquiry at all, while setting it into relation to phenomenology as a way of inquiry.

Being is an issue for it.”<sup>10</sup> Given the apparent methodological abstraction from this concreteness, not only did Husserl have little to say about inquiry as a matter of fact, but his phenomenology *could not* say much.

The view that Husserl’s work was deficient with respect to its analysis of inquiry neither begins nor ends with Heidegger, of course. For example, two decades prior to *Sein und Zeit*, Johannes Daubert, a student and confidant of Husserl, critiqued and developed the phenomenological analyses of questions.<sup>11</sup> Later, Eugen Fink also stressed the need for making inquiry methodologically explicit. Rather than addressing these critiques and developments directly, however, I show that he took inquiry as a theme, while parsing his rich and complex reflections on how the matter appears. With this, a reasonable comparison with the work of others as well as a responsible decision which, if any, is most adequate to the matters themselves becomes possible. In truth, though, if we follow after Husserl’s sense of phenomenological philosophy as collaborative, the goal is to understand the matters rather than pit thinkers against each other.

So, through the chapters. I show Husserl’s developing investigation of inquiry. What becomes clear is that he does not understand inquiry as one-sidedly “founded” on the subject at all. Indeed, he certainly does not take the question, “Why does inquiry appear?” as adequately answered with “because the *subject* asks” or even “because the subject *can* or *might* ask.” Rather, for him, the inquiring subject is given to itself as in a questionable world. Still, one might object, all this is under the shroud of immanence, yet founded on the subject. But this objection overlooks the *correlation* of subject-world, especially as the subject stands within the generative world-horizon which gives the range and sense of questionability at all. To clarify these points, the phenomenologist inquire-back into that correlation, into the source and origins of inquiry itself.

Still, the *way* Husserl works presents a unique challenge for our investigation. He “zig-zags” through analyses, answering this or that question, only to later, after further study, realize he is either out ahead on still another question or that he had an earlier analysis somewhere in a manuscript that he himself had not yet adequately appreciated but which changes the sense of some previous answer.<sup>12</sup> And rather than merely crossing-out or throwing-away less than adequate analyses, he questions how the difference was possible and how these possibilities relate, in order to help guide others through the labyrinth. For the explorer, there are no wrong turns, only fuller maps, whereas the tourist, easily exhausted, wants direction only to the highlights and the gift shop. This is the essential benefit of following him on his explorations: being led toward fuller answers by setting them into relation to those less so. It is also true, though, there is a need for those following after to take stock of how they will approach the whole.

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<sup>10</sup> Heidegger (1962), p. 32.

<sup>11</sup> It is worth noting that Heidegger’s interest in inquiry came quite earlier, evidenced by a longer extant piece “Question and Judgement” from 1915; see, Heidegger (2000), p. 25. Also, Daubert was working on his “Question Essay” as early as 1911.

<sup>12</sup> Husserl (1970), p. 58.

The interpretive approach I take in this book thus relates to Husserl in a particular way. To explain, let me clarify by contrast. On the pages of Husserl's personal copy of Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*, there is the old Aristotelian gloss in Husserl's handwriting: "*Amicus Plato, sed magis amica veritas.*" In these faint pencil-markings, there appears, not the words of a defiant hero, but the lament of one who felt the loss of philosophical friendship. With this in mind, it makes sense that Husserl also inveighs against Heidegger's espousal of a "violence of interpretation," writing the following response: "I differentiate what they say [that is, their words] and what they [that is, the authors] ultimately aimed at and wanted to say as they said them."<sup>13</sup> I understand Husserl to mean here that, while he tries to understand another without imputing something they did not say, he nevertheless takes seriously that they also seriously strive to the truth. In fact, he accepts this as, in a way, more important than where they may have fallen short of that goal. For, taken this way, even the false-starts and apparent dead-ends give a clue to the mind at work and to the truth it seeks, which is that which you also seek. To be Plato's friend, then, means taking seriously that Plato himself is asking you to join him in seeking the truth which exceeds him. Further questions and answers—even those which would clarify or correct him—appear in the light of seeking together for the truth. Where the seeking together is dropped, then violence enters—where one only works for oneself, one sets oneself up to work against others. In contrast to this, I take Husserl's as asking others to follow along with him in order to find out together what is truly the case.<sup>14</sup> This is, in fact, how he read others and even how he read himself—and it is how I venture to read him and others.

In sum, if inquiry indeed appears in experience, it is a matter for phenomenological investigation. What is more, it is *operative* in the *doing* of phenomenology, that is, it is "at work" in it, even if it is not made an explicit theme.<sup>15</sup> Even if it is left unthematic and conceptually implicit, it is essential to the activity. So, unless we are prepared to defend that the phenomenologist asks no questions, we must face the strange circumstance that, though we have long felt the directive, "Back to the matters themselves!" we have not yet clarified *how* questioning is essential to this return. With this call, I claim, Husserl himself reestablishes the demand to bring inquiry to question. And this means, for the present inquiry, participating in an intergenerational task of philosophy.

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<sup>13</sup> In fact, Husserl marks-off this phrase in a way that, as far as I can tell, is the upper limit of emphasis in his marginalia, namely, three exclamation points and three question marks. See Husserl, (1997a), p. 453, where Husserl underlines Heidegger's phrase, "every interpretation necessarily has to use violence," putting in the margin, "!!!???".

<sup>14</sup> Thus, Husserl speaks to his teacher of the joy and peace of working with a like-minded person. See Appendix A.

<sup>15</sup> On this point, I am indebted to Eugen Fink's insights into the "*Operative Begriffe*" of Husserl's thought. I follow Fink's argument that an operative concept is one that is *at work* in the thinker's analyses even if it is not made an explicit theme of analysis; see Fink (1981).

## 1.3 Outline of the Work

This work traces Husserl's developing analysis of inquiry through five chapters.

The Chapter 1 considers Husserl's treatment of inquiry in his earlier analysis of intentionality. I begin with how question sentences fall outside classical formal logic, since they do not take a position on the truth or falsity of a state of affairs, that is, are not apophantic. Then, I show his phenomenological account of how questions, despite not having a truth-value, are meaningful. The questions, Husserl finds, emerges within the intentional life of thinking such that the expression gives voice to the intentional acts of inquiring. By founding the question expression and sentence in intentional life, Husserl places inquiry within a broader understanding of "logic" which includes the full range of thinking, thought, and said.

The Chapter 2 turns to the appearance of inquiry in the earlier formulations of Husserl's transcendental project. If the previous chapter shows how he investigates the logical problematic of meaningful sentences and expressions, this chapter shows how he discovers the pure ego as the source and the world as the horizon of inquiry. Further, there appears, in the methodological development of phenomenology, a basic distinction between transcendental phenomenological inquiry and natural inquiry. Where natural inquiry leaves the source and horizon unquestioned, transcendental phenomenological inquiry proceeds under suspension of any positing—an *ἐποχή*—in order to understand how any position taking appears at all. From this methodological development, I also consider some aspects of his analysis of practical inquiry, which serves to bring to question the limitations of a phenomenological method that does not account for the genesis of matters.

The Chapter 3 thus takes up how Husserl accounts for the emergence and operation of inquiry by going back to its origin in individual facticity. More exactly, his genetic account of inquiry discovers how it appears within a striving for determination and differentiation in the intentional life of the individual. I also bring to the fore here an important distinction between interested and disinterested inquiry, wherein the latter detaches from interests in relation to the ego in order to strive to determine and to differentiate matters in themselves and in relation to each other. This distinction is essential for understanding science and, indeed, phenomenological science, insofar as these disinterestedly inquire into the "things themselves." It also raises the question about why and how such inquiry would arise at all, which is more directly considered in the next chapters.

The Chapter 4 then considers some of Husserl's reflections on the relationship of cognizing and valuing, investigating especially how inquiry appears therein. Along with raising the question of the judgment of value, I pay special attention to Husserl's analysis of the question of the will, in which there is a deliberation about the best possible choice and what should be done. I also bring to the fore the intelligible relation of motives, in what Husserl identifies as the "Why" and "Because." By inquiring into these relations, the phenomenologist can understand the lawfulness of *reasons why*. Finally, then, I make clear a few senses of method in Husserl's thought, especially with respect to how and why they appear at all. From these points, an

understanding of phenomenological ethics as a practical science emerges, insofar as it makes clear which actions should be done and why.

The Chapter 5 reconstructs Husserl's inquiry-back into the generation of inquiry. In the first steps of this, I expound the emergence of inquiry from childhood curiosity. The original question about *why* appears within the home, in order to answer *why* the homeworld has particular meanings and *how* to navigate it practically. From this, I turn to the transformation of inquiry from within the curiosity of myth to philosophical wonder, as the latter breaks from relative truth and establishes theoretical science, the ideal of which is in determining the universal truth which is true, not just for those in this homeworld, but as true for everyone everywhere. As the instantiations of this ideal following from Greek philosophy tends to the objective pole, the correlation of the subject-world is left unquestioned. So, there arises a demand for the further inquiry of phenomenological philosophy, to which I turn next.

In a **Concluding Overview**, I provide a brief reconstruction of Husserl's account of the development of reason and inquiry (represented in the figure at the end of the main text). Especially significant, in this respect, is his eventual explication of the phenomenological inquiry-back into the emergence of sense, meaning, and value, as it makes manifest reason to itself. Indeed, it raises awareness to inquiry as essential in making the best possible world together.

Finally, in the **Appendices**, I provide translations of a few letters which give a glimpse into Husserl's personal communication about the range of inquiry. These span from the years just after his breakthrough to phenomenology to the year before the end of his life. They at once show the consistency of his mind and its development within the context of other persons.

# Chapter 2

## The Act and Intentional Essence of Inquiry



**Abstract** This chapter presents Husserl’s treatment of inquiry in his early intentionality analyses. I first show how question sentences come to fall outside classical formal logic, since they do not take a position on the truth or falsity of a state of affairs, that is, are not apophantic. Then I show the way in which Husserl gives a phenomenological account of how questions, despite not having a truth-value, are meaningful. The meaning of questions emerges within the intentional life of thinking such that the expression articulates or “gives voice to” intentional acts. The expression can be formalized, as in classical logic, but this abstracts from the intentional life to which it refers. As such, Husserl can take up inquiry within a broader understanding of “logic” that includes the full range of meaning.

**Keywords** Act phenomenology · Intentionality · Inquiry · Interiority · Logic

### 2.1 Preliminary Remarks—Toward a Logic of Question–Answer with the Transcendental Question

Too often neglected—if noticed at all—is the fundamental role of inquiry in Husserl’s work, especially surrounding the seminal *Logical Investigations*. In fact, here, he both takes it to be among a “just as important as it is difficult disputed question” and brings this apparently “inconspicuous” matter *in question*.<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, I thus clarify the problematic of inquiry in this work while elucidating it as operative in the nascent science of phenomenology. To meet these aims, I take two main steps:

1. After introducing Husserl’s understanding of classical formal logic and its exclusion of question-sentences, I explicate his breakthrough to a more adequate account of cognition via phenomenology, including the beginning analyses of the act of inquiry;

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<sup>1</sup> Hua XIX/1, §68, esp. p. 737. Findlay renders the phrase “ebenso wichtigen wie schwierigen Streitfrage” as the “most important and most difficult points at issue.” I suggest that Husserl’s use of *Streitfrage*, which Findlay glosses as “point as issue” should be taken as a point *in question* or a *disputed question*.

2. I then readdress the sense of a logic of the interior life, which also serves to highlight how the method of phenomenological inquiry itself emerges *with* these investigations.

Meeting these aims yields a preliminary understanding of the phenomenological sense of “logic,” now taken, as Husserl puts it later, in the original sense of *λόγος*—as “thinking, thought, said.”<sup>2</sup> From this sense, phenomenology accounts for the meaning of questions insofar as question expressions are founded upon inquiry which intends answers. To prepare this analysis, let me begin by presenting his earlier understanding of the appearance of philosophy in Greek culture, which helps clarify his understanding of logic and the need for renewed logical investigations.

### 2.1.1 *Classical Logic and the Place of Questions*

Husserl tends to consider the development of logic from the context of Greek philosophy. This is especially true in relation to his own attempt to recover and realize logic as a “theory of theory, ... science of the sciences.”<sup>3</sup> It is thus worthwhile to trace, in increasing detail through this book, some aspects of his account of this historical path.

About the early stage of science in Greece, Husserl notes, in an 1896 lecture given while a *Privatdozent* at University of Halle: “The skeptical attacks against the possibility of all cognition caused the building of science to falter. In order to secure the efforts of serious science, one had to make indubitable distinctions between strict cognition and sophistic semblance.”<sup>4</sup> These skeptical attacks found in claims to knowledge an insecure edifice, an uncritical belief in what counts as evidentially true. Indeed, where one natural philosopher claimed the fundamental element to be water, another claimed it was fire, still others number, mind, the indefinite, and so on, none offered an account of what justified one position to be more adequate than another. Upon detecting that lack, skeptics began to erode any claim to truth. In the midst of this, Husserl finds the appearance of a basic philosophical question—which he calls, a few years later, the “transcendental question”—namely, “How is cognition possible at all?”<sup>5</sup>

Before turning directly to the first answers to the transcendental question, let me underscore how Husserl takes skepticism, more generally, as pressing further

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<sup>2</sup> See Husserl (2001a), pp. 1–38, especially 8. Also, the later summary of the *Logical Investigations* in Husserl (1975), p. 59: “to get at the primary presuppositions of the sense of ‘logos’ and thereby of all science, and to clarify these presuppositions in specific analyses.”

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Hua XVIII, 244. And Husserl (2001b), §66b, p. 152.

<sup>4</sup> Hua Mat I, p. 304. Some of Husserl’s inspiration for this reading appears in the Q-manuscripts, the extant notes from lecture courses, especially from Franz Brentano and Carl Stumpf on the history of philosophy, as well as in his reading of Wilhelm Windelband. I find that this way of constructing the history of philosophy remains basically intact through his life, even if its interpretation develops.

<sup>5</sup> Hua Mat III, p. 82: “So how is cognition possible at all? This transcendental question continues to press in the development of philosophy.”

questions to be answered.<sup>6</sup> For him, skepticism is a motor thinking, at least insofar as it is *searching, watchful*, as the Greek word, *σκεπτικός*, suggests. Through its watchfulness, it discovers unanswered questions, unresolved issues, weak points and lacunas in reasoning. Of course, the *sophistical skeptic* no longer seeks out true reasons, seeking instead to show any reason to be merely apparent, “mere semblance,” as Husserl puts it. In any case, to skeptical probing, philosophical thinking responds.

Husserl presents, for example, two influential philosophical responses to the earlier *sophistical skepticism* in the Greek world. On the one hand, there is the exaggerated dynamism of a Heraclitus, who concedes the flux and diversity of experience even while recognizing the need for the identity of speech and truth. On the other hand, there are the Eleatics, who, in their positing of a fixed object of cognition, deny the possibility of change and so any cognition of diversity, as Parmenides did so on his “way to truth.”<sup>7</sup> Both of these struggle to answer the transcendental question about the possibility of cognition. Yet, the unresolved tension between them—between being and becoming, as it were—only fueled further skepticism about the possibility of knowing the truth at all.

Indeed, in the wake of the unresolved tension, later *sophistic skeptics* pressed on the way—seen but refused by Parmenides—of *opinion* or *δόξα*.<sup>8</sup> They engaged, not so much with speculative visions of truth, as with “everyday experience,” as Husserl puts it.<sup>9</sup> In some sense, this engagement was in line with the traditional teachers of virtue in Greek culture, those original *sophists*—the σοφοί or “wise ones.” However, this later iteration of *sophists*, without offering an answer to the now explicitly raised transcendental question, held fast to the differences in estimation and evaluation readily found amongst people. The breakthrough to theory did not end everyday, practical life, after all. So, these *sophists* strengthened their resolve by borrowing terms from theory, showing the varying positions of everyday experience to preclude any identity of speech and truth, thinking and being. To demonstrate this, such a *sophist* might say, one need only listen to the various answers that multiple people give to the same question, for example, about the meaning of “hot” and “cold” or “short” and “tall.” So, it was evident that, as Protagoras eventually

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<sup>6</sup> As he will put it later, in *Hua Mat IX*, pp. 20–21 fn. 1: “By the way, a beautiful and well-understandable teleology in the historical development shows up here. In the image one could say: The worst enemies are those who can attack from the back, so the investigating gaze must not merely be directed straight at the things, but (must) also be directed retrospectively at the consciousness, at the form and method of cognition. And indeed, the skeptical attacks of sophistry and all later skepticism of science have grown to salvation....”

<sup>7</sup> Thus, in *Hua Mat III*, p. 82 continued from above. This is reworked but essentially repeated in *Hua IX*, pp. 191–192, though here he adds the essential importance of *logos* for Heraclitus.

<sup>8</sup> A rare sighting of this use in Husserl’s early works is found at the end of the second volume of the *Logical Investigations*, which I discuss in the first subsection of the next chapter. It becomes, in his later thought, an all-important word to understand in relation to *ἐπιστήμη* or scientific knowledge.

<sup>9</sup> *Hua Mat III*, p. 81: “The theoretical consideration of the world immediately leads to contradictions with the common everyday experience. Instead of enhancing and enriching it, it seems to have to negate it.” The *seems* here is a key, as it does not really do so—but how so is a main question for us.