

TRANSCENDENTAL HISTORY

Søren Gosvig Olesen

Translated by David D. Possen



Transcendental History

Also by Søren Gosvig Olesen

LA PHILOSOPHIE DANS LE TEXTE (1982)

WISSEN UND PHÄNOMEN (1997)

Transcendental History

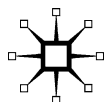
Søren Gosvig Olesen

University of Copenhagen, Denmark

Translation by:

David D. Possen, USA

palgrave
macmillan



© Søren Gosvig Olesen 2013

Part II first published in Italian by Mimesis Edizioni 2011

Part III first published in Danish by Museum Tusculanum Press 2000

Translation © David D. Possen 2013

Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2013 978-1-137-27777-0

All rights reserved. No reproduction, copy or transmission of this publication may be made without written permission.

No portion of this publication may be reproduced, copied or transmitted save with written permission or in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, or under the terms of any licence permitting limited copying issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency, Saffron House, 6–10 Kirby Street, London EC1N 8TS.

Any person who does any unauthorized act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

The authors have asserted their rights to be identified as the authors of this work in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

English translation first published 2013 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

Palgrave Macmillan in the UK is an imprint of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

Palgrave® and Macmillan® are registered trademarks in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe and other countries.

ISBN 978-1-349-44737-4 ISBN 978-1-137-27778-7 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/9781137277787

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
22 21 20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	vi
 Part I Three Lessons in Thinking about History	
1 Husserl and the History of Reason	3
2 Heidegger and the History of Being	18
3 Merleau-Ponty and History Deconstructed	32
 Part II The History of the Subject	
1 The Call of the Subject	51
2 The Heyday of the Subject	62
3 The Shipwreck of the Subject	76
4 The History of the Subject	88
 Part III Transcendental History	
1 A Preliminary Concept of History	103
2 A Philosophical Concept of History	109
3 Transcendental Logic as a Project	130
4 Necessary Truth	139
5 Tautology	148
6 The Incarnation of the Truth	160
7 Technology and History	173
Summary	181
<i>Bibliography</i>	183
<i>Index nominum</i>	193
<i>Index rerum</i>	195

Preface

Thus there is no longer any actual philosophizing that would not be historical. The separation between systematic philosophy and historical presentation is essentially incorrect.

– Yorck von Wartenburg, in an 11 February 1884 letter to Wilhelm Dilthey, as cited by Heidegger in *Being and Time*, §77¹

Why speak of “transcendental” history? I use “transcendental” to distinguish the sense of history at issue here from empirical history. This distinction relies on the traditional opposition between the empirical and the transcendental in European philosophy. Yet it is fair to ask: is not this opposition an outmoded one? Is not the word “transcendental” burdened by old-fashioned connotations? Why do I not speak instead of speculative, ontological, or even deconstructive history?

To explain my choice of terms, I should first provide some background. *Transcendental History* came to life in the course of my daily activity at the University of Copenhagen, where I have taught philosophy for 20 years. It was in my capacity as a teacher of philosophy that I witnessed, in 2005, the creation of a new discipline within my department, a discipline called Continental Philosophy. In truth, I was more than a witness to this event. I protested it vociferously.

Is it not incongruous, I asked, for a department of philosophy in continental Europe to characterize the philosophical approaches typical of continental Europe as so distinctive that they ought to constitute a separate branch of philosophy, or even a discipline unto themselves? Would not such a taxonomic maneuver be better suited to an American or British philosophy department? Would not introducing such a discipline merely escalate the old but still unofficial feud between “analytic” and “continental” philosophy, hardening it into a formal schism within philosophy? Finally, would not this change have the effect of relegating all of the department’s other research areas to

¹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, tr. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962) 453–454 [*Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1972) 402: *Darum weiter giebt es kein wirkliches Philosophieren, welches nicht historisch wäre. Die Trennung zwischen systematischer Philosophie und historischer Darstellung ist dem Wesen nach unrichtig*].

the “analytic” domain, and so contribute still further to the hegemony of analytic philosophy in Scandinavia?

In raising these worries, I found myself in an odd position. I was protesting the establishment of a new discipline, Continental Philosophy, not at all on account of that proposed discipline’s projected content – which was to include many of the texts and thinkers with which my own research is centrally occupied – but rather because the idea was to isolate that content from now on as “continental,” rather than to permit it (as, in my view, both the “analytic” and “continental” approaches should be permitted) to continue permeating all of the other traditional branches of philosophy, such as metaphysics, ethics, or logic.

Soon my position grew stranger still. Just after I lost the debate within my department about establishing the new discipline, it emerged – ironically enough – that I was to be the faculty member charged with supervising it. Here I paused to take stock. Up to this point my teaching had ranged across the history of philosophy, from the ancients to the present. It was true that I had taken my degrees in France, where I had been lucky enough to have Gérard Granel as my mentor. It was also true that I had translated Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida and Agamben into Danish, my native language. But I had never before regarded the material that I had worked with, either as a student or as a translator, as belonging to a peculiar *type* of philosophy, let alone a type called “continental.” I regarded it simply as philosophy. What is more: while it is true that I am an admirer of the thinkers I have just listed, I am also an admirer of Austin and Kripke. Are not those two also representatives of philosophy, full stop?

When I first assumed formal responsibility for the discipline of “Continental Philosophy” at Copenhagen, my starting task was to ask what should be regarded as the distinguishing mark of the philosophy typical of the European continent – and to consider what philosophy as a whole can learn from that kind of philosophy. These questions were, in the first instance, eminently practical: if Continental Philosophy was to be a discipline, it would need a unified, clearly demarcated subject-matter.

But is such a demarcation even possible? Is there in fact any firm connection – let alone any unity – to be found among schools of thought as widely divergent as existentialism, phenomenology, the Frankfurt School, hermeneutics, and deconstruction? Certainly there is no ready-made category into which all of these schools fit. The term “continental philosophy” will hardly do, for though analytic philosophy has indeed defined itself as “analytic,” “continental philosophy”

has never defined itself as “continental.” Historically, the term “continental” grew widespread only in the wake of analytic philosophers’ self-identification as occupied with the “analysis” of language, which they regarded as fundamental to the philosophical enterprise. (The decisive criterion was not the actual centrality of linguistic analysis to a thinker’s work – for if so, then a host of older thinkers, such as Augustine or Anselm, would count as analytic philosophers too – but the notion that the philosophical enterprise is centrally constituted by linguistic analysis.) In this early twentieth-century context, “continental philosophers” emerged as a mere placeholder for “the others.” The term “continental” had significance, at most, as a geographical designator.

Today, however, there is more to say. After some reflection on my experience teaching these “continental” texts, I came to the view that there is in fact a determinate mode of philosophizing that can be associated with the European continent – though it is not definable in terms of any of the particular twentieth-century schools of thought listed above. The definition that is needed must be sought earlier in philosophy’s history. It is a definition that underlies the activity of all of the twentieth-century streams of continental thought, but which cannot be said to play as significant a role in the analytic tradition of Anglo-American philosophy.

In seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophy we find a gap between continental and British philosophy that corresponds roughly to the divide between rationalism and empiricism. Today it is widely acknowledged that the latter divide was less stark than it once appeared. On certain decisive points, in fact, there was no essential difference between the two schools. Most fundamentally, both empiricists and rationalists asserted a basic split between the realms of matters of fact and relations of ideas, as in Hume, or between *vérités de fait* and *vérités de raison*, as in Leibniz. To be sure, there were important differences in how empiricists and rationalists respectively motivated these shared distinctions, but in the long run, it was this fundamental split shared by rationalists and empiricists, rather than the differences between rationalists and empiricists, that provoked nothing less than the great crisis that led Kant to critical philosophy.

At the close of the eighteenth century and the start of the nineteenth, philosophy defined itself as transcendental philosophy (with Kant) and speculative philosophy (with Hegel). According to Hegel, every philosophical proposition is to be understood as speculative, whereas propositions that are not philosophical are to be understood as merely empirical. In philosophy, therefore, empirical objections do not qualify

as genuine objections. For they overlook the fact that the empirical can only be understood by means of a process of reflecting on the empirical itself – which cannot itself be understood purely empirically. (Thus, for example, the fact that there are irrational human beings cannot be cited as a genuine objection to the definition of man as a rational being. On the contrary, the fact at issue is an observation that can only be made in light of the definition in question.) Similarly, in his “Transcendental Deduction of the Categories of Human Understanding,” Kant dismisses as merely psychological the empiricists’ efforts to deduce the same. Kant’s empiricist predecessors and contemporaries sought an account of how knowledge becomes possible in practice; but such an account cannot itself establish that that possibility will persist into the future. To deduce the conditions of the possibility of knowledge, Kant insists, one must reason not simply from what knowledge requires in practice, but from what knowledge requires in principle (though of course the latter can only be found in conjunction with the former). For both Kant and Hegel, the decisive condition lies neither in what precedes knowledge nor in what follows it, but rather in the movement from before knowing happens to after knowledge has been attained. Knowledge *is* precisely this movement.

Thus it is that with Kant (and with Hegel) we find a decisive fissure in philosophy’s development. The same split that divides Kant’s precritical writings from his critical philosophy can also be detected in the gap between the philosophical methods typical of the British Isles and those typical of continental European thinkers. In the former sphere, the sharp distinction between the empirical and the rational was maintained unabated; in the latter sphere, philosophy’s main concern came to be with the connections and transitions between the two. In fact, as continental thinkers focused ever more closely on the *processual* quality of knowledge, it became increasingly clear that philosophy would need not only to abandon its traditional distinctions between the ideal and the factual, or between the rational and the empirical, but ultimately to dispense with all of the fixed stances on which it had traditionally depended. In time, even the distinction between *historical* and *systematic* thinking would itself prove to be untenable.

This is of course not to say that all “continental” philosophers are in agreement with Kant and Hegel. I do wish to point out, on the other hand, that even today, when so-called continental philosophers defend their approaches to philosophy against “analytic” naysayers, they sometimes reach back to the distinction between critical and precritical philosophy introduced by Kant. A recent example is Derrida’s use

of “pre-critical” in his 1990 counteroffensive against the objections of John R. Searle.² But there are also further, more wide-ranging consequences to consider.

In the Anglo-American philosophical community, one often finds extraordinary expertise in Kant and Hegel on the part of historians of philosophy who do their work in isolation from – albeit in peaceful coexistence with – their systematician colleagues. This division goes unremarked, as though it were a wholly logical division of labor. The unfortunate result of this separation is that the historians’ work in transcendental and speculative thinking is kept from having any real impact on current developments in systematic philosophy (for one now merely “knows about” those philosophical approaches³). This phenomenon ultimately encourages unproductive characterizations of the difference between analytic and continental philosophy, particularly on the part of analytic philosophers who confine themselves to the historical matters of fact and never confront the deeper philosophical incompatibilities at issue.⁴ A common result is that attempts to unite analytic and continental philosophy, as for example in what are called “philosophy of mind” and “the cognitive sciences,” take forms that are even less congenial to continental thought than is existing analytic work.⁵

It is for these reasons, finally, that I do not hesitate to use the good old word “transcendental” in my analysis of the philosophical concept

² See Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc.*, tr. Samuel Weber et al. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988) 66; [*Limited Inc.* (Paris: Galilée, 1990) 127].

³ Another method is to relegate such knowledge and its representatives to the Departments of Literature, German, or French, in order to be able to argue at a later point that this knowledge cannot be considered genuine philosophy *because* it is only to be found in the Departments of Literature, German, or French. For an example of this, see Barry Smith et al., “Revisiting the Derrida Affair with Barry Smith,” *Sophia* 38 (1999) 2: 142–169.

⁴ Peter Simons, in “Whose Fault? The Origins and Evitability of the Analytic-Continental Rift,” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 9 (2001) 3: 295–311, attempts to explain the divide between continental and analytic philosophy in terms of such events as the two World Wars. Michael Friedman, in *A Parting of the Ways. Carnap, Cassirer and Heidegger* (Chicago: Open Court, 2000) offers a detailed summary of the disagreements among these three philosophers stemming from the 1929 Davos colloquium. But this proceeds from the incorrect assumption that up until that point, the figures in question were still speaking the same philosophical language.

⁵ On this point see Chapter 1 of Miguel de Beistegui, *The New Heidegger* (London: Continuum, 2001), and §2 of Martin Häggglund, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

of history. As I see it, the question that will be this book's focus – "How are we to conceive of the origin of human knowledge in a way that is not, in the end, merely psychological?" – cannot be posed without appealing to the philosophical genres (transcendental and, later, speculative philosophy) within which it first arose. Indeed, this question may well be regarded as *the* question of transcendental and speculative philosophy.

Yet here one clarification is in order. Despite my readiness to return to the old philosophical genre designations "transcendental" and "speculative," I should make clear that my aim is not to revisit those genres' historical beginnings. What I seek to do, instead, is to examine those genres' fundamental premises to the degree to which they persist in the very philosophical movements that one might conceive of as post-transcendental and post-speculative, such as phenomenology, hermeneutics, and deconstruction.

* * *

In what sense, then, is "history" a problem for transcendental philosophy? In what sense can we speak of "transcendental history"? In what follows, it will emerge that even when we oppose transcendental history to empirical history, "transcendental history" can bear not one but many meanings. Just as it does when used in its empirical sense, "history" enjoys an extensive semantic plurality when it is used in its transcendental sense.

To begin with, history can be understood transcendently in a simple epistemological sense as referring to the transition from a "before" to an "after." Such a transition cannot itself be understood except insofar as the "before" and the "after" are related to one another, for it is only in terms of that relation that they are a "before" and an "after." This implies that the relation between the "before" and the "after" is not a mere *temporal* relation. For time does not automatically relate to itself (and so generate such a relation). Nor does time become self-relating by virtue of an eternal being's relating to it. Rather, time becomes self-relating exactly insofar as a *temporal* being relates to it. This *being who is time*, but who in relating to time is not merely time, is *human* being.

Because human cognition proceeds as it does inasmuch as human beings exist in the way they do, we may further develop the notion of transcendental history to its full ontological sense, namely, as referring to *human existence*. Human being is not "merely" time, since it *relates* to time. The identity of human being is established through difference: human being is not simply subsistent any more than its relation to

time is something that simply subsists. That is to say: human being is not historical from the outset. Human being is historical by virtue of becoming historical. To that extent it may be said generally that history, in its ontological sense, refers to the transition from nature to history, to the transition from subsistence to existence.

We may thus discover that a whole range of philosophical problems actually reflects the distinction between transcendental and empirical history. Identity depends on difference, as has just been remarked, but by the same token difference depends on identity: none of the parts are what they are except by virtue of the transition from the one to the other. Similarly, variations do not exist except in relation to an invariance, which in turn exists only in relation to the variations. A is not equal to A except insofar as it is *equated* with A; A is only *as* A insofar there is movement from A to A-as-A, from *ens* to *ens qua ens*. In this same way, human being must also be understood as *repeated*, and is human only insofar as there is such a repetition. Only in this way does history repeat itself – and it repeats itself in this way as long as human beings exist. There can be no “end of history” before the end of human existence.

History, in the transcendental sense elaborated and subcategorized here, is so fundamental to human knowing that we forget it continually. The goal of the present book is to examine and, if possible, overcome this forgetfulness. I will do so by way of considering certain problematic topics in human knowledge, topics whose importance few will question – logic, truth, science, and technology – and also by focusing on the points in philosophy’s own history where the possibility of transcendental history has disclosed itself. It will thereby become evident that the philosophical work that is developed here, and which is here characterized as the most philosophical activity on the European continent, is in continual dialogue with tradition.

More specifically, I will observe that the expression “transcendental history” is found in the work of a number of prominent philosophers, such as Jacques Derrida (in his *Introduction to Husserl’s Origin of Geometry*) and Giorgio Agamben (in *Infancy and History*). The point here is not that the phrase itself has already been used in philosophy, but that certain philosophers, aware of the need for such a term, have long distinguished between history in its empirical sense and another, somehow different, sense of history.

We may observe a similar distinction of this kind in, for example, Heidegger’s talk of “historicality” or “ontological history” rather than mere history. Gadamer speaks of “inner” historicality; and

in Merleau-Ponty one finds such terms as “proto-history” or, more peculiarly, “vertical history.” Later in this book, I will also consider the use of the concept “history” by certain philosophers of science, notably Alexandre Koyré and Gaston Bachelard, who regarded the history of science as normative for the practice of science.

Heidegger’s expression “historicality” [*Geschichtlichkeit*] dates back to Hegel. For this reason among others, those two thinkers are often classed together as *the* “philosophers of history.” Yet Heidegger and Hegel are not the only such thinkers. The philosophical problem of history in fact has its home in a line of development that stretches from Hegel and Kant back to Leibniz and Descartes. It is a problem that has smoldered in the philosophical tradition for centuries – ever since the idea first arose that *the human subject* could serve as the kind of foundation that had previously been sought only in eternity, or in the divine.

* * *

Part I of this book, “Three Lessons in Historical Thinking,” examines the philosophical notion of history that has been developed in various ways by Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty. As I here explain, this notion not only has distinguished itself from the common conception of history, but also has gradually superseded other putative definitions of the transcendental, such as language, intersubjectivity, life-world, and human finitude.

Part II, “The History of the Subject,” consists of a series of lectures delivered in Spring 2007 – in Danish at the University of Copenhagen, and in Italian at the University of Turin – and then repeated in English at the University of Warwick in Spring 2009. The aim of these lectures is to illustrate how the philosophical notion of history has differentiated itself from the notion of the subject, and indeed has come to *replace* it in the course of the ongoing effort to constitute the subject itself. An Italian version of Part II was published in 2011 by Mimesis Edizioni.

Part III, “Transcendental History,” appeared as an independent volume in Danish in 2000, published by Museum Tusculanum Press. It construes transcendental history as a philosophical enterprise analogue to transcendental logic – though as a possible enterprise rather than an established one. Nevertheless, it may be said that transcendental history already has, in one sense, been established: for it has indeed become an issue in the course of philosophy’s history.

In my discussions I will refer frequently to primary texts in German, French, and Italian. While I will rely at certain points on existing

English translations of those texts, at other times I will take pains to avoid infelicitous neologisms. In general, I will adhere to a principle that I have used myself in translating philosophical texts into my mother tongue, which is never to introduce new jargon unless the original author has done so. There will thus be no talk here of “swaying” or “enowning.” What makes a thinker like Heidegger difficult is not his invention of new terms – in fact, he invents very few – but his peculiar way of making use of the German language that he found available to him. In translating Heidegger, what is needed is not a new, hermetic body of terminology, but imagination in the use of the English language. For this I have of course had to rely on David Possen, my English translator.

I would like to thank Hans Fink and Thomas Schwarz Wentzer, Associate Professors at the University of Aarhus, and Jørgen Hass, Associate Professor at the University of Odense, for their dedication in perusing and commenting on the original manuscript of *Transcendental History*. I further acknowledge the generous grant of translation rights to Parts II and III by Mimesis Edizioni and Museum Tusculanum Press, respectively. Finally, special thanks are due to my English translator. David Possen has not merely brought my writings to life in proper English, but has been an invaluable support, with his unfailing energy and enthusiasm, as I have worked to develop this text into the finished book that here lies before you.

For the claims set forth here, as well as for all mistakes or gaps in the text, I of course remain solely responsible.

Part I

Three Lessons in Thinking about History

1

Husserl and the History of Reason

It is in the text known as “The Origin of Geometry,” published as Appendix VI to *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*,¹ that the problem of history comes to the fore in Edmund Husserl’s writings. Husserl there states: “As will become evident here, at first in connection with one example, our investigations are *historical in an unaccustomed sense*.”² This claim raises several questions. First: what is the “unaccustomed sense” in which history here presents itself? Second, and more fundamentally: what are the implications for Husserl’s philosophy of this admission that it must confront the problem of history?

Those familiar with Husserl’s conception of science will recognize immediately that the above talk of history does not betoken a descent into relativism. For the issue here is not that of determining scientific knowledge – the object of Husserl’s critical gaze in *The Crisis* – as relative to time and place. The issue is not one of “factual” or actual history, of history in an empirical or chronological sense. This is made clear by Husserl’s own testimony (albeit not from this same Appendix VI to *The Crisis* but from the previous one, Appendix V – which, however, is also appended to §9a, and also dates from 1936). There Husserl writes that the “radical problem” of science’s historical possibility is concerned

¹ Husserl, “The Origin of Geometry,” tr. David Carr, in *Edmund Husserl’s ‘Origin of Geometry’: An Introduction* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1989) 155–180; also translated in *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, tr. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970) 353–378 [“Ursprung der Geometrie,” in *Husserliana VI: Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Philosophie*, ed. Walter Biemel (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1954) 365–386].

² Husserl, “The Origin of Geometry,” 157 [365].

“not only” with its “historical-factual origin with regard to time and place,” but *also* with “its original meaningfulness [*Sinnhaftigkeit*], and thus with the refashioning of its original sense.”³

The question, then, is how we are to understand history as anything other than “factual” or actual. Shall we ascribe to “factual” history some sense in which it transcends its actual course and becomes more or less independent of it? Shall we retain the word *history* when speaking of history in this sense?

Jacques Derrida has proposed using the word *proto-history* – which is, incidentally, a borrowing from Merleau-Ponty. Other proposals have included *arche-history* and *transcendental history*. Yet the choice of any designation other than simply *history* might lead us to forget that, for a philosopher of Husserl’s bent, the problem of history does not concern history of any kind other than the history we actually have. Rather, it indeed concerns our actual history, albeit as “actual” in a strong sense. Husserl’s resistance to using designations other than simply *history* when speaking of the problem of history is already visible in our citation from Appendix V. We certainly should attend, he writes, to factual history, but we should attend to it “*not only*” as factual.

The development of this argument in Merleau-Ponty and beyond represents only one line of discussion of this Husserlian (and not-merely-Husserlian) problem. Another potentially fruitful line is one that reaches from Alexandre Koyré to Gaston Bachelard, both of whom regarded the history of science and the theory of science as two sides of the same coin. Koyré and Bachelard, too, involved history in the philosophical elucidation of the foundations of science in a way that clearly avoided relativism. This makes their concept of history just as “unaccustomed” as the one that Husserl proposes. As Bachelard puts it: “To sum up my thinking, I would say I think that the history of science cannot be empirical history.”⁴ Koyré and Bachelard indeed propose a variety of designations for non-empirical history: *histoire sanctionnée*, *histoire jugée*, *mémoire rationnelle*, *itinerarium mentis in aeternitatem*, etc. Yet I will not take up this terminology here. It is my wish, instead, to discuss the problem of history as it concerns history *tout court*.

In what follows, therefore, the topic of discussion will be Husserl’s own determination of the philosophical problem of history rather than the contributions made by his followers. For the problem itself is so important as to constitute a task for philosophy in general. It is

³ Husserl, *The Crisis*, 347 [360].

⁴ Gaston Bachelard, “L’actualité de l’histoire des sciences,” in *L’engagement rationaliste* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1972) 137–152, p. 146.

philosophy itself – philosophy as is known from tradition, as well as from today's institutions – to which the problem of history appears *unaccustomed*.

* * *

Although the problem of history is only explicitly mentioned in the last phase of Husserl's work, we can trace his discussion of the theme back to his early days. Indeed, a manuscript that served as the basis of one of Husserl's first courses as a teacher of philosophy bears a close thematic relation to "The Origin of Geometry." The title of this course, offered in 1887, was "Historical Survey of the Philosophy of Mathematics" [*Geschichtlicher Überblick über die Philosophie der Mathematik*]. A noteworthy passage in this manuscript reads as follows: "Of course, no formal knowledge [*kunstwissenschaftliche Erkenntnis*] can be attained unless sciences exist that allow one to see what knowledge is really about."⁵ In a manuscript written only slightly later, "Varia operativa" (1890), the same consideration is articulated almost as a thesis: "Not all deducing can be formal."⁶ The basis of this near-thesis runs as follows: "If no material [*sachliches*] judging and deducing were given, no formal judging or deducing would be given either."⁷

As is clear from Husserl's emphasis on material [*sachliche*] knowledge, we here encounter the line of development in his work that will later lead to his determination of the relation between "fact" and "essence," and between "the science of fact" (Husserl's term for *any* actual branch of science) and the "science of essence" (or eidetics, i.e., the establishment of the research field proper to a branch of science). That is to say: we here meet the line of development that will culminate in the first chapter of Husserl's *Ideas*, vol. I (henceforth "*Ideas I*"). In that chapter, Husserl analyzes the relation of "the science of fact" to "the science of essence" as a *double dependence*. First, any science of fact must respect the principles "treated by formal logic," and so must enter "into a relation with the complex of formal-ontological disciplines."⁸ Second,

⁵ Husserl, "Geschichtlicher Überblick über die Philosophie der Mathematik," in *Husserliana XXI: Studien zur Arithmetik und Geometrie*, ed. Ingeborg Strohmeier (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1983) 229.

⁶ Husserl, "Varia operativa," in *Husserliana XXI*, 11.

⁷ Husserl, "Varia operativa," in *Husserliana XXI*, 11.

⁸ Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and a Phenomenological Philosophy*, vol. I, tr. Fred Kersten (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998) 18 [*Husserliana III*, vol. 1 of *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie*, ed. Walter Biemel (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1950) 23].

every “matter of fact includes a *material* essential composition.”⁹ All sciences of fact “must be grounded on the regional ontologies which are relevant to them and not merely on the pure logic common to all sciences.”¹⁰ A regional (or material) ontology is the basis of each particular science, just as formal ontology is their common foundation. The two sets of presuppositions meet at only one point: in the very concept of “region”.

With this concept Husserl refers to a formal feature that is characteristic of every science of fact. Namely, by its very essence, the science will be limited in range by the particular field that it concerns, i.e., by its object. The concept of region is thus the formal-ontological notion of the material-ontological condition that obtains in every science, namely, that the objects with which its research deals will always be subordinate to a particular species [*Gattung*]. As a general term, therefore, “region” designates what Husserl also terms “the object in general.” In 1913, in the context of *Ideas I*, Husserl does point out that the “empty form” – the region of the object, of the “something in general” [*etwas überhaupt*] – can only with reluctance [*mit Vorsicht*] be called a region.¹¹ Only material ontologies are “ontologies ‘proper’ [*eigentliche*].”¹² In sum, formal logic is dependent on material logic, and, in a mirror of that relationship (to borrow a phrase of Roman Ingarden’s), formal ontology is dependent on material ontology.

Now, when we examine the concept of region in light of the development of Husserl’s philosophy, we discover that this concept marks the culmination of a series of investigations into the “proper” [*eigentliche*] regions of science. Before completing *Ideas I*, Husserl had been engaged in elaborating the regions of number (*On the Concept of Number*, 1887); arithmetic (*Philosophy of Arithmetic*, 1891); and logic (*Logical Investigations*, 1900–1901) or, in his preferred parlance, “the logical” [*das Logische*]. In Husserl’s terms, we might capture the gist of these investigations by saying that they were concerned with nothing other than the *objects* of the various sciences, albeit “not only” in the manner in which the various sciences themselves regard their objects. That is to say, the object of an eidetic science is the same as the object of the corresponding matter-of-fact science. But the eidetic science treats that object *in sensu eminenti*: e.g., the number *as* number; arithmetic *as* arithmetic; the logical *as* logical.

⁹ Husserl, *Ideas I*, 18 [23].

¹⁰ Husserl, *Ideas I*, 32 [39].

¹¹ Husserl, *Ideas I*, 21 [26].

¹² Husserl, *Ideas I*, 21 [26].

It is perhaps not surprising that, on this point, Husserl's early critics misunderstood his relation to the *foundation* (in tradition's sense) of the scientific fields that he was examining. Wilhelm Wundt, for example, complained that the positive content of Husserl's *Logical Investigations* amounted to nothing more than assuring its reader "that $A = A$ is really valid" [*daß wirklich $A = A$*].¹³ Similarly, Paul Natorp remarked that the argument of the *Logical Investigations* is reminiscent of "explaining *idem per idem*" [*als erkläre man idem per idem*].¹⁴ In retrospect, such readings turn out to be not to the point, since they fail to attend to Husserl's literal program: he states openly that the aim of his *Logical Investigations* is not to explain but to elucidate or make explicit. Science, Husserl writes, is not in need of explanation (*Erklärung*); what it needs is "only a phenomenological *elucidation* [*Aufklärung*] of meaning, thinking, and knowing."¹⁵ Put more broadly, phenomenology does not aim at a foundation. It seeks an *elucidation of the bases* of the sciences. Thus the theory of number – to take just one of Husserl's examples – cannot truly lay claim to the status of science until its basis, number as such, has been elucidated eidetically. In this sense, then, eidetics is the "doctrine of essence" and *Wesenserschauung*.

To elucidate an object is to seek its *essence*. This does not mean that the elucidation is concerned with anything "other" than the object; it does mean that the question of the object's reality or unreality is wholly irrelevant to the task of elucidation. This may be illustrated with another example of Husserl's: that of the musical tone.

If one tone differs from another, then it must be either lower or higher than the other. This relation is an essential one to musical tones; it cannot be otherwise. To be sure, some particular tones must first exist before knowledge of this essential feature of tones can emerge. But that does not make this essential knowledge dependent on the specific givenness of those particular tones. As Husserl writes: "In a consideration of essence, perception and imaginative representation are entirely equivalent – the same essence can be seen in both... That the perceived tone together with its intensity, its quality, etc., exists in a certain sense, while the tone in imagination, that is, the imagined tone, *does not*

¹³ Husserl, *Ideas* I, 346n1 [335n1].

¹⁴ Cited in Elmar Holenstein, "Editor's Introduction" to *Husserliana* XVIII, vol. 1 of *Logische Untersuchungen* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1975) xlvii.

¹⁵ Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, tr. J. N. Findlay, vol. 2 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970) 316 [*Husserliana* XIX, vol. 2 of *Logische Untersuchungen* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1984) 729]