

Method of Eidetic Description

What is the method of phenomenology. It appears we could say with some assurance that it is one of epoché and reduction. That is, first we suspend our philosophical and pre-philosophical prejudices regarding the existing world. There are, for instance, a host of philosophical questions which remain out of consideration for us as phenomenologists, e.g., do numbers actually exist? Is yellow a real property of things? Are universals aspects of reality, or are they simply words we use to account economically for a plurality of given phenomena? By the performance of the epoché, we put out of play the very basis by which these questions take on significance. The very existence of the world is "bracketed" for us who are practicing the epoché, i.e., who are engaged in a suspension of our natural belief in the world as a real world and of myself as a real being amidst other beings in this world. (How simple is this, though?) What is it, then, that remains for us practicing the epoché, who neither deny the being of the world of external perception as did Descartes nor unquestioningly accept the reality-status of the world in our straightforward dealings with things?

<By 'putting out of play' of all positions taken toward the already given objective world> *we gain possession of something ...* and what we (or, to speak more precisely, what I, the one who is meditating) acquire by it is my pure life with all its pure experiences and all that is purely meant in these [*seinen reinen Gemeinheiten*], the universe of phenomenon in the particular and wider sense of phenomenology.¹

What thus opens up for our investigation is a field of transcendental research into the subjective sources of objective being. However, it is far too simple to suggest that phenomenology is a solely a philosophy of consciousness. The reduction that Husserl suggests is fundamental to phenomenology cannot be thought of as a restriction to the really inherent [*reell*] moments of my conscious life. Though it is appropriate to speak of the reduction as a kind of restriction, the phenomenological reduction is not a restriction to experience *per se*.

Thus the phenomenological reduction does not signify something like the restriction of investigation to the sphere real <*reellen*> immanence, to the sphere of that which is really <*reell*> enclosed in the absolute this of the *cogitatio*. It does not signify a restriction to the sphere of the *cogitatio* generally, but rather it signifies the restriction to the sphere of *pure self-givennesses* ... not the sphere of that which is perceived but rather of what precisely is given in the sense in which it is meant – self-given in the most rigorous sense such that nothing of what is meant fails to be given.²

The method of phenomenology seems, then, to be a method which offers genuine access to the relation between cognition and its object, i.e, both to objectivity as meant in consciousness and to the sense-bestowings of this actual consciousness. Yet I want to emphasize at this stage a theme that we've been following from our first encounter with Husserl, which is all too often overshadowed in our concentration on the dazzling radicality of the phenomenological reduction. Phenomenology aspires to be philosophy as rigorous science. We saw this in the "Epilogue and in the opening pages of the *Cartesian Meditations*. Husserl makes clear now in the Fourth Meditation that phenomenology is scientific only insofar that it is an eidetics of cognition. While it might be the case, as Husserl asserts in numerous places, that "the beginning phenomenologist is bound involuntarily by the circumstance that she takes herself as her initial example."³ He does not mean to suggest, however, that our transcendental reflection is to remain restricted to our own

¹ Husserl. *Cartesian Meditations* I, modified 20 (italics mine).

² *Hua* II, 60-61.

³ Husserl. *Cartesian Meditations* IV, modified 76.

factic life (even understood in this phenomenological sense). Such a restriction would imply that the intuitions obtained in these transcendental reflections are mere self-observations of my own factic life. However, you may recall Husserl saying in the "Epilogue" that "the goal <of phenomenology> is not a factual science of the facts of this sphere of inner intuition but is a science of the essence, i.e., one which investigates the invariant, properly essential structures of a soul or a community of spiritual life, that is, according to its apriori."⁴ Since it is the case that phenomenology as science is an investigation into the essence of cognition, the method of phenomenology must not be solely an "observation" of the transcendental. The phenomenological method must – insofar as it is scientific – obtain intuitions not of this or that transcendental ego but rather of the ego in its absolute universality. Its intuitions are intuitions of essence. "We come to the methodological insight," Husserl tell us in the Fourth Meditation, "that along with the phenomenological reduction the basic form of all particular transcendental methods is eidetic intuition, indeed that both determine completely the legitimate sense of a transcendental phenomenology."⁵

The methods of reduction and eidetic intuition, therefore, make up *the* phenomenological method. For these together form a method of clarifying the essential structures and lawful genesis of intentional life. Now the manner by which this eidetic clarification is achieved, according to Husserl, is free phantasy variation. In my investigations *qua* phenomenologist, I take myself *qua* factic ego as exemplifying a pure possibility. This "I" that I take up is thus a single possibility-variant of any transcendental ego whatsoever. Phenomenology is thus, at root, a science of pure possibilities, and the subject matter of investigative research is not any particular transcendental ego but rather ego as such, the *eidōs ego*. For instance, if I am investigating perceptual consciousness, I might begin with a particular perception of mine as my starting point. The example Husserl mentions (p. 70) is a table experience. But in imagination I (*qua* phenomenological investigator) vary the object perceived and the manners by which this object is grasped and thematized in this sort of consciousness. In such a method of imaginative clarification an intuition of the essence (*Wesensanschauung*) comes into view. "Thus divested of all facticity, the universal type *perception* has become the "eidōs" *perception*, whose range makes up all ideal possible perceptions as pure conceivabilities."⁶ "Eidetic phenomenology investigates therefore the universal apriori without which the I and even a transcendental I is not 'conceivable.' Or <equivalently stated> given that any essential universality has the value of an unbreakable law, eidetic phenomenology investigates the universal essential lawfulness by which any factual assertion of the transcendental indicates its possible sense (along with the opposite, its counter-sense)."⁷ Thus, when considering the question, what is the phenomenological method?, it is most appropriate, I think, to speak of the unity of reductive and eidetic methods involved in the phenomenological description of transcendental life.

Problem of the Self-Constitution of the Transcendental Ego

a. Genetic phenomenology

i. Active and passive genesis

1. practical reason in maximally broad sense: static phenomenology

⁴ Husserl. Epilogue to *Ideas I*, 412.

⁵ Husserl. *Cartesian Meditations IV*, modified 72.

⁶ Husserl. *Cartesian Meditations IV*, modified 70.

⁷ Husserl. *Cartesian Meditations IV*, 72.

- a. Structural articulation of the constitution of 'ready-made' objects that confront us in our life
 - i. I-acts constitute new objects originarily
 - ii. "In collecting, the collection <is constituted>; in counting, the number; in dividing, the part; in predicating, the predicate or rather the predicative complex; in inferring, the inference; and so forth."⁸
 - b. We find initially in our investigation – proceeding as it does from the factually given to the universal – a world already given, culture and nature there as pre-given realities. Our aim as beginning phenomenologists has focused on bringing to light the subjective source by which these objectivities have their sense, and more broadly, as a world which is the horizon of all possible objectivities. Look now the last paragraph in §37 (on page 76) and here we see that the analyses we initiate as phenomenologist proceed along a track from what is already-given to the clarification of the manner by which these ready-made objectivities come to be instituted in the life of consciousness itself. That is to say, phenomenology begins with structural description of the relation between experience and object as meant but does not end there. Following the investigation of the synthetic course of experiences constituting the sense of transcendent objectivity as such, we are led to questions of the genesis of transcendental ego, itself.
2. Passive genesis
- a. The constitution of objectivities prior to ego activity: primal passive constitution
 - i. "Anything built by activity necessarily presupposes, as the lowest level, a passivity that gives something before hand; and when we trace anything built actively, we run into constitution by passive genesis."⁹
 - b. The universal lawful genesis of primal passive and active constitution
 - i. The ego constitutes itself in something like a history
 - 1. Eidetic laws governing passive forming of perpetually new synthesis: association
 - a. Temporality the fundamental form of a unitary ego living through its intentional performances
 - 2. Ego activity sets up a habituality in the ego
 - a. Transcendental achievements *qua* activities are performed, retained, and can be re-actualized by the ego
 - ii. "But in a unitarily possible ego not all singly possible types are compossible, and not all compossible ones are compossible in just

⁸ Husserl. *Cartesian Meditations* IV, 77.

⁹ Husserl. *Cartesian Meditations* IV, 78.

any order, at no matter what loci in that ego's own temporality. If I form some scientific theory or other, my complex ratiocinatory activity, with its rationally constituted existent, belongs to an essential type that is possible, not in every possible ego, but only in one that is "rational" in a particular sense, the same that, with the mundanization of the ego, presents itself in the essential form: man ("rational" animal). When I reduce my de facto theorizing to its eidetic type, I have varied myself too (regardless of whether I am aware of it) – not however in a wholly optional manner, but within the frame of the corresponding essential type, "rational" being. Eidetic apprehension of my (transcendentally reduced) childhood life and its possibilities of constitution produces a type, such that in its further development, but in its own nexus, the type "scientific theorizing" can occur."¹⁰

Transcendental Idealism, §40 & §41

1. The traditional problem of epistemology:

- a. "How can this business, going on wholly within the immanency of conscious life, acquire objective significance? How can evidence (*clara et distinct perceptio*) claim to be more than a characteristic of consciousness within me?"¹¹
 - i. What is the meaning of transcendence in these theories?
 1. E.g., material reductionism
 - ii. What is the meaning of immanence?
 1. Transcendental realism à la Descartes
 - a. the island of consciousness
 2. Psychological idealism à la Berkeley
 3. Kantian critical idealism
 - a. Limiting concept: the possibility of thing-in-itself
- b. Significance of the reduction
 - i. What is the sense of transcendency after the reduction?
 1. "Precisely thereby every sort of existent itself, real or ideal, becomes understandable as a "product" of transcendental subjectivity, a product constituted in just that performance."¹²
 2. The great task of phenomenology: eidetic sense-explication

¹⁰ Husserl. *Cartesian Meditations* IV, 74.

¹¹ Husserl. *Cartesian Meditations* IV, 83.

¹² Husserl. *Cartesian Meditations* IV, 85.