

## PHENOMENOLOGY FROM THE METAPHYSICAL STANDPOINT

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Time was if you asked non-phenomenologists of almost any philosophical stripe what they thought of phenomenology, they would say, among other things, that it involved metaphysical commitments that they considered wholly unacceptable.

Indeed, schools of thought as diverse as those associated with Nietzsche, Marx, Russell, the Vienna Circle, Heidegger, Carnap, Sartre, Quine, partisans of secular political systems, and so on, all strove to shut the doors to metaphysical inquiry, —an antagonism towards metaphysics that acted on several fronts to discredit, undermine, proscribe, kill a wide range of metaphysical notions associated with the follies and excesses of idealism —whether transcendental, subjective, absolute, or religious—, associated with the names of people like Kant, Hegel, and Bradley, not to mention J. Christ.

This rush to undo metaphysics extended to every vestige of it. Earmarked for demolition were essences, universals, Ideas with a big I, senses, meanings, concepts, attributes, propositions, intensions, anything hinting of the a priori and the mind. They were condemned as fake, outmoded, irrelevant, worn out, meaningless, repulsive, inhibiting, repressive, pernicious, destructive, dangerous —as frustrating and fettering scientific progress.

Into this intellectual climate, Edmund Husserl introduced phenomenology, the science of the intentionality of the mind that taught people to go out in pursuit of the very essences, universals, Ideas, meanings, concepts, attributes, propositions that so many of his contemporaries were so busy bashing.

Here, I want to look at Husserl's conversion from psychology from the empirical standpoint to the metaphysical standpoint that went into the making of phenomenology at the end of the nineteenth century, a time that resembles our



times in some respects. I shall close with some comments about phenomenology's interaction with analytic philosophy in this regard.

### Husserl and Psychology from the Empirical Standpoint

As a student of Franz Brentano, —the author of *Psychology from the Empirical Standpoint*<sup>1</sup>—, Husserl was not at first receptive to the claims of metaphysical idealism. Brentano inculcated in his students a model of philosophy based on the exact natural sciences and trained them to despise the excesses of metaphysical idealism. Husserl recalled:

Completely under Brentano's influence in my beginnings, I developed rather late the conviction ... that the Idealistic systems... must be seen... as immature and yet of the highest value.... Entirely new and totally radical dimensions of philosophical problems are illuminated in the Idealist systems. Moreover the ultimate and highest goals of philosophy are opened up only when the philosophical method which these particular systems require is clarified and developed.<sup>2</sup>

There were ways in which Brentano's methods never came to satisfy Husserl. Once he tried to pass from the psychological connections of thinking to the logical unity of the thought-content, the unity of theory, he was unable to establish any true continuity and unity. The further he delved into his philosophical investigations into the foundations of mathematics, the more he grew troubled by doubts as to how to reconcile the objectivity of knowledge with empirical foundations for logic, and the more he saw the need to engage in general critical reflections on the essence of logic and on the relationship between the subjectivity of knowing and the objectivity of the content known.<sup>3</sup>

Husserl left dramatic descriptions of the ten years of hard, lonely work and struggling during the 1890s during which he aspired after clarity, but only encountered confusion. He felt tormented by the incredibly strange worlds of the

<sup>1</sup> Franz Brentano, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973 (1874).

<sup>2</sup> Edmund Husserl, "Recollections of Franz Brentano", in *Husserl: Shorter Works*, P. McCormick and F. Elliston (eds.), Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981, pp. 342-49. (Also translated by Linda McAlister in her *The Philosophy of Brentano*, London: Duckworth, 1976, pp. 47-55). Claire Ortiz Hill, "From Empirical Psychology to Phenomenology, Edmund Husserl on the 'Brentano Puzzle'", *The Brentano Puzzle*, Roberto Poli (ed.), Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998, pp. 151-67.

<sup>3</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, J. N. Findlay (tr.), London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970, p. 42; Edmund Husserl, *Introduction to the Logical Investigations, A Draft of a Preface to the Logical Investigations*, Eugen Fink (ed.), P. Bossert and C. Peters (trs.), The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975, pp. 34-35.

purely logical and actual consciousness that he saw opening up on all sides. The two worlds had to be interrelated and form a whole, but he did not know how to bring them together.<sup>4</sup>

He was assailed by questions. If everything purely logical is an in-itself, something ideal having nothing at all to do with acts, subjects or empirical persons belonging to actual reality, then how is symbolic thinking possible? How are objective, mathematical and logical relations constituted in subjectivity? How can the mathematical-in-itself given to the mind be valid? If scientific knowledge is completely based upon being able to abandon ourselves completely to thought that is removed from intuition, or being able to prefer such thinking over thought more fully in accord with intuition, how is rational insight possible? How does one arrive at empirically correct results? We proceed without justification, guided by a psychological mechanism, but that does not answer questions about truth, for a logically unjustified procedure can well lead to true results.<sup>5</sup>

Husserl saw himself standing before "great unsolved puzzles" concerning the very possibility of knowledge, as coming "close to the most obscure parts of the theory of knowledge", as powerfully gripped by the deepest problems. Facing riddles, puzzles and mysteries, and seeing all around him only unclear, undeveloped, ambiguous ideas, weary of all the confusion, he felt he had to risk setting out on his own.<sup>6</sup> This crisis could be thought of as the birth pangs of phenomenology.

During those years, Husserl kept company with George Cantor,<sup>7</sup> the eccentric creator of set theory, who was hard at work discovering and exploring the strange worlds of pure mathematics and actual consciousness. Cantor was at the height of his creative powers and hard at work defending the new numbers he was inventing. However psychologistic his mysterious references to inner intuition or to experiences helping produce concepts in his mind might seem, he was strictly opposed to any philosophy that located the sources of knowledge and certainty in the senses or in the supposedly pure forms of intuition of the world of presentation. He was an enemy of empiricism, psychologism, positivism, natu-

<sup>4</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Early Writings in the Philosophy of Logic and Mathematics*, Dallas Willard (tr.), Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1994, pp. 490-91.

<sup>5</sup> Husserl, *Early Writings*, pp. 37, 167-69; Husserl, *Introduction to the Logical Investigations*, pp. 21-22, 35.

<sup>6</sup> Husserl, *Early Writings*, pp. 167-69, 492-93, 497-98; Husserl, *Introduction to the Logical Investigations*, p. 17; Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, pp. 42-43.

<sup>7</sup> Malvine Husserl, "Skizze eines Lebensbildes von E. Husserl", *Husserl Studies* 5, 1988, pp. 105-25.



ralism, sensualism, skepticism, and Kantianism. He was deeply pro-idealistic. A good measure of the freedom that he felt he possessed as a mathematician came from distinguishing between an empirical treatment of numbers and Plato's ideal numbers, which by their very nature were detached from things perceptible by the senses.

In the throes of an intellectual struggle, Husserl's ideas were particularly malleable and changed considerably and definitively. He drew near the Platonic idealism that Cantor espoused and renounced the psychologism, empiricism, and naturalism that Cantor renounced.<sup>8</sup> But, Husserl's fully conscious and radical turn away from empirical psychology and his espousal of Platonism came about through his study of Hermann Lotze's logic. Husserl said that his own concepts of ideal significations and ideal contents of presentations and judgments derived from Lotze, whose interpretation of Plato's Theory of Ideas gave Husserl the key to understanding Bernhard Bolzano's ideas about propositions and truths-in-themselves, which under Brentano's influence Husserl had thought of as metaphysical abstrusities, mythical entities suspended somewhere between being and non-being.<sup>9</sup>

The late 1890s found Husserl teaching that the ideal entities so unpleasant for empiricist logic, and so consistently disregarded by it, had not been artificially devised either by himself, or by Bolzano, but were given beforehand by the meaning of the universal talk of propositions and truths indispensable in all the sciences. This indubitable fact, Husserl now stressed, must be the starting point of all logic. This talk of propositions, of true and false means something identical and atemporal. No more is meant by the ideality than that it is a matter of a kind of possible objects of knowledge, whose particular characteristics can be determined, while they are just not objects in the sense of real objects.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Claire Ortiz Hill, "Did Georg Cantor Influence Edmund Husserl?" *Synthese* 113 (October 1997), pp. 145-70 and "Abstraction and Idealization in Georg Cantor and Edmund Husserl", in *Idealization IV. Historical Studies on Abstraction and Idealization*, Poznan Studies 82, F. Coniglione, R. Poli, R. Rollinger (eds.), Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004, pp. 217-43. Both papers are anthologized in Claire Ortiz Hill and Guillermo E. Rosado Haddock, *Husserl or Frege, Meaning, Objectivity, and Mathematics*, La Salle IL: Open Court, 2000.

<sup>9</sup> Husserl, *Introduction to the Logical Investigations*, pp. 36-38, 46-49; Husserl *Early Writings*, pp. 200-03, 209; Hermann Lotze, *Logic*, New York: Garland, 1980 (reprint of B. Bosanquet's translation of his *Logik* of 1888), Chapter II.

<sup>10</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Alte und neue Logik, Vorlesung 1908/09*, Elisabeth Schuhmann (ed.), Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2003, pp. 45, 47, 241.

### A Science of Ideal Being

As regards its essential, theoretical makeup, Husserl began to teach, science is a system of ideal meanings that unite into a meaning unit. The theory of gravity, the system of analytic mechanics, the mechanical theory of heat, the theory of metric or projective geometry are all units, not of mental experiences of one person or another, or of states of mind, but units entirely made up of ideal material, of meanings. And, in this lies truth and falsehood, what science makes into an objective, supra-individual unit of validity logically grasping and dealing with a sphere of objectivity.<sup>11</sup>

Truly scientific thinking, all proving and theorizing, operates in forms that correspond to purely logical laws. Pure logic embraces all the concepts and propositions without which science would not be possible, not have any sense or validity.<sup>12</sup> While all of natural science is an a posteriori discipline grounded in experience with its actual occurrences, the world of the purely logical is a world of ideal objects, a world of "concepts". Pure logic, pure mathematics, pure arithmetic are a priori disciplines entirely grounded in conceptual essentialities. There all truth is nothing other than the analysis of essences or concepts. With them, we are just not in psychology, in any sphere of empiricism and probability.<sup>13</sup>

The empirical sciences, the natural sciences, Husserl explained to Brentano in 1905, are sciences of 'matters of fact'. The whole sphere of the genuine a priori is, though, free of all matter of fact suppositions. There, we stand not within the realm of nature, but within that of Ideas, not within the realm of empirical generalities, but within that of the ideal, apodictic, general system of laws, not within the realm of causality, but within that of rationality. Purely logical laws are laws of essence. Husserl wanted it understood that he was "far from any mystico-metaphysical exploitation of 'Ideas', ideal possibilities and such" of the kind Brentano despised.<sup>14</sup>

It is interesting to note that Husserl always saw Brentano in a very metaphysical light. "Brentano stood before his young students like a seer of eternal truths and a herald of a celestial world", Husserl recalled. Of their last meeting, he wrote: "There was a kind of radiance about him, as if he belonged no longer to this

<sup>11</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Introduction to Logic and Theory of Knowledge, Lectures 1906/07*, Claire Ortiz Hill (tr.), Dordrecht: Springer, 2008, §12.

<sup>12</sup> Husserl, *Allgemeine Erkenntnistheorie, Vorlesung 1902/03*, Elisabeth Schuhmann (ed.), Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2001, p. 47.

<sup>13</sup> Husserl, *Introduction to Logic and Theory of Knowledge, Lectures 1906/07*, §13c.

<sup>14</sup> Edmund Husserl, "Husserl and Brentano, 27. III. 1905", *Briefwechsel, Die Brentanoschule I*, Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1994, pp. 37-39.



this world, as if he lived half here and half already in that higher world... This is the way Brentano lives now always in my memory, an image from a higher world".<sup>15</sup>

And so Husserl came to teach that the ultimate meaning and source of all objectivity making it possible for thinking to reach beyond contingent, subjective, human acts and lay hold of objective being-in-itself was to be found in ideality and the ideal laws defining it.<sup>16</sup>

For example, pure arithmetic explores what is grounded in the essence of number. It has nothing at all to do with nature. It is not concerned with physical things, souls, real occurrences of a physical or mental nature, does not acquire its universal propositions by perception and empirical generalizations on the basis of the perception and the substantiation of the resulting individual judgments.

One does not state  $a+1 = 1+a$  as a hypothesis to be established as true in further experience or else inductively in keeping with the methods of the natural sciences. Rather, mathematicians start with  $a+1 = 1+a$  as something unconditionally valid and certain, for it is obviously part of the meaning of the term "cardinal number" that each thing can be increased by one. To say that a cardinal number cannot be increased amounts to being in conflict with the meaning of "cardinal number". It amounts to not knowing what one is talking about.

The number series is a world of its own kind of ideal, not real, objects. The number 2 is not an object of perception and experience. Two apples come into being and pass away, have a place and time, but if they are eaten up, the number 2 is not eaten up. The number series of pure arithmetic has not suddenly then acquired a hole, as if we were to have to count 1, 3, 4.<sup>17</sup>

### The Rediscovery of Metaphysics at the End of the Nineteenth Century

A rediscovery of metaphysics took place at the end of the nineteenth century, which had seen a positivistic revolt against idealism and Kantian inspired psychologism and a yearning for the real and the palpable that turned many in the direction of the natural world of perceptible facts and events. There was also a revolt against the various forms of positivism, empiricism, naturalism and materialism that others felt the modern age was foisting upon them. Then, still others wanted

<sup>15</sup> Husserl, "Recollections of Franz Brentano", pp. 343, 348.

<sup>16</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Allgemeine Erkenntnistheorie, Vorlesung 1902/03*, p. 200; Edmund Husserl, *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1969 (1929), § 26; Husserl, *Introduction to the Logical Investigations*, 1975, 36-38, 42-43.

<sup>17</sup> Husserl, *Introduction to Logic and Theory of Knowledge, Lectures 1906/07*, §13c.

to unite what seemed to be two contradictory worlds. They wanted a scientific metaphysics, a scientific idealism.

Lotze played a preeminent role in rehabilitating the respectability of metaphysics. Trained in medicine, he was first caught up in the naturalistic movement that sought to extend natural science and its methods over the entire realm of intelligible existence. It taught that what science could not know, could not be, took an attitude of indifference towards any unknowable, supersensuous reality, and easily evolved into materialistic philosophy that denied it.<sup>18</sup>

Lotze rebelled. He judged the basic ideas of the natural sciences to be inadequate, disconnected, and often inconsistent. His antagonism was directed toward their pretensions to deal with all the phenomena of human experience. He believed that they had nothing to say about what was most worth knowing. He wanted to show their inadequacy and that there was room and need for philosophy side by side with science.

However, Lotze's genuine respect for the methods and results of the natural sciences, as long as they confined themselves to their own domain, deepened his aversion to Idealism, which he saw as having turned its back upon the realm of facts and as having lost itself in the realm of empty thoughts.

So, Lotze combated the errors of both the naturalists and the idealists.<sup>19</sup> Henry Jones, a contemporary of Lotze, considered that he "possibly divined... that there is a close affinity between natural science and Idealism, that modern science when it understands itself is idealistic in temper and tendency...".<sup>20</sup> "It is not Idealism with its spiritual construction of the world that is at war with the inner spirit of science", Jones thought, "but the scepticism which... conceals its true nature under the names of Dualism and Agnosticism".<sup>21</sup> Jones wrote that Lotze,

restored to us possessions which Kant and his immediate followers had made insecure, and which the Materialists and the Pessimists had rendered untenable. In the service of these convictions, he... stemmed the tide of Idealism... In the same interest he has also "stayed the Bacchic dance of the Materialists", who had occupied the place left vacant by the spent Idealism. So that it is no matter for surprise that some... consider that they owe it to Lotze... that, after the reign

<sup>18</sup> Henry Jones, *A Critical Account of the Philosophy of Lotze, the Doctrine of Thought*, Glasgow: James Maclehouse and Sons, 1895, p. 28.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8, 28, 29.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*



of chaos, there is once more "a firmament in the midst of the waters, dividing the waters from the waters".<sup>22</sup>

Jones described Lotze as one who "preferred the antagonisms of reality to the hollow peace of empty consistency", who protested "on behalf of man and nature, in the whole compass of their many-sided existence, against the abstract conceptions of them.... Reality and theory were, to him, contrasted as the living and the dead. In the realm of the former he found "innumerable activities", "unfailing movements", an inexhaustible content; while the limited region of knowledge was "a solemn shadow-land of unchangeable ideas", "the imperturbable repose of universal but empty relations of thought".<sup>23</sup>

In a 1902 Paris doctoral thesis on Lotze's metaphysics, Henri Schoen<sup>24</sup> explained how Lotze inspired courage in worried and tormented consciences and communicated faith in the triumph of a spiritualistic conception of the world to young people whose confidence had been shaken by the ineffectiveness of idealism and the successes of materialism. To those impressed by positivism, Schoen explains, Lotze gave an exact method starting from observation and not a priori reasoning. He taught a generation disgusted with abstractions to start from given facts.

Schoen saw Lotze's contemporaries as having suffered from Kant's teaching that while the things in themselves were absolutely independent of space, time and of all the determinations arising from these two forms of our understanding, he nonetheless saw the cause of sensory phenomena in this transcendental world of things in themselves. For him, the world of experience was the appearance of the world in itself and only had its *raison d'être* in it. Moreover, while maintaining that behind the phenomena, existed the noumena, Kant had so categorically forbidden pure reason to specify the nature of this unknowable noumena that those following him were not illogical in ending up in absolute idealism. As Schoen saw it, this provoked a deep crisis, a "perpetual torture of the mind", that endured until Lotze found a response.<sup>25</sup>

After having been at the point of doubting the future of spiritualistic metaphysics, Schoen said that he came to understand that genuine criticism ultimately gives back more than it takes away. He expressed complete confidence in the fu-

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>24</sup> Henri Schoen, *La Métaphysique de Hermann Lotze, ou la philosophie des actions et des réactions réciproques*, Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1902, pp. 8-9, 18, 22-23.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

ture of metaphysics. It was a matter of creating a new philosophical outlook that could satisfy both the modern need for reality and concrete facts and the idealistic and mystical needs of the times. He saw his generation as being disgusted with materialism, with vague and confused aspirations and disposed to accept a metaphysics not in contradiction with its scientific views.<sup>26</sup>

In his eccentric way, Georg Cantor too was part of the post-Kantian movement to reconcile the findings of modern science with metaphysical views. His writings are filled with epistemological and metaphysical reflections aimed at explaining and justifying his novel ideas. In 1894, he confided that "in the realm of the spirit" mathematics had no longer been "the essential love of his soul" for more than twenty years. Metaphysics and theology, he "openly confessed", had taken possession of his soul.<sup>27</sup>

### The German Occult Revival

Much discourse seems to assume that the late nineteenth century could not see beyond the metaphysical dictates of a very conventional form of Christianity. So, in talking about what Husserl's contemporaries were searching for, it is important to realize that many were eagerly casting off the shackles of religion. And, once liberated, some were engaging in behavior deemed irrational, superstitious, and unsavory by scientifically minded thinkers. For, while the late nineteenth century witnessed attempts to rehabilitate the respectability of metaphysical inquiry and place it on the philosophical agenda alongside rigorous, rational, scientific thinking, there was another, more disturbing, dimension to the interest in metaphysics. Like our times, there was a rise in cults, spiritism, Satanism, the occult, magic, witchcraft, and so on. While many were hard at work destroying the superstition of religion, others were indulging in irrational, superstitious, and unsavory pursuits, something that surely fanned antagonism towards any uncritical, unscientific metaphysics, or even a fear of it.

Carl Jung once described those times as having prepared the way for crime. As he saw it, people were living in a lifeless nature bereft of gods. Enlightenment might have destroyed the spirits of nature, but it did not destroy the psychic factors corresponding to them, such as suggestibility, an uncritical attitude, fearfulness, propensity to superstition and prejudice. Even though nature is depsy-

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9, 18, 22-23.

<sup>27</sup> George Cantor, *Georg Cantor Briefe*, H. Meschkowski and W. Nilson (eds.), New York, Springer, 1991, p. 350; Hill, "Did Georg Cantor Influence Edmund Husserl?" and "Abstraction and Idealization in Georg Cantor and Edmund Husserl?"



chized, demons do not really disappear, Jung insisted. He saw the psychic conditions breeding them to be as actively at work as ever. "Just when people were congratulating themselves on having abolished all spooks, it turned out that instead of haunting the attic or old ruins, the spooks were flitting about in the heads of apparently normal Europeans. Tyrannical obsessive, intoxicating ideas and delusions were abroad everywhere, and people began to believe the most absurd things..."<sup>28</sup>

Historian Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke explains that, though modern occultism was represented by many varied forms, its function was relatively uniform. Behind the mantic systems of astrology, and palmistry, the doctrines of theosophy, the quasi-sciences of animal magnetism and hypnotism, the study of the esoteric literature of Cabalists, Rosicrucians, and alchemists, there was a strong desire to reconcile the findings of modern natural science with a religious view that could restore man to a position of centrality and dignity in the universe. Occult science stressed people's intimate and meaningful relationship with the cosmos in terms of 'revealed' correspondences between the microcosm and macrocosm, and strove to counter materialist science, with its neglect of invisible qualities respecting the spirit and the emotions. These new 'metaphysical' sciences gave individuals a holistic view of themselves and the world in which they lived that conferred a sense of participation in a total meaningful order and, through divination, a means of planning one's affairs in accordance with this order.<sup>29</sup> Cantor's unpublished correspondence shows that he was a Rosicrucian.<sup>30</sup>

### Intentionality, a Sign of Contradiction

Into this intellectual climate, Husserl introduced a science of intentionality that was suitably ambiguous because intentionality points in two directions, towards the world of subjectivity and towards the world of objects. As Husserl explained:

Brentano conducts his enquiry in the form of a two-edged separation of the two main classes of 'phenomena'... the psychical and the physical.... Of his two principal differentiations, one directly reveals the essence of psychical phenomena or acts.... In perception something is perceived, in imagination, something imagined, in a statement, something stated, in love, something loved, in hate hated.

<sup>28</sup> Carl Jung, *Jung on Evil*, Murray Stein (ed.), London: Routledge, 1995, p. 194.

<sup>29</sup> Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism, Secret Aryan Cults and their Influence on Nazi Ideology*, New York: I. B. Tauris, 1985, p. 29.

<sup>30</sup> Cantor's letter books as found in the Niedersächsische Staats-und Universitätsbibliothek Göttingen, Abteilung Handschriften und Seltene Drücke reveal this.

Brentano says that 'every mental phenomenon is characterized by what the mediaeval schoolmen called the intentional (or mental) inexistence of an object, and by what we... call the relation to a content, the direction to an object... or an immanent objectivity.'<sup>31</sup>

Husserl considered that by indicating the uniqueness of mental phenomena, Brentano blazed the way for the development of phenomenology and made it possible, but that the idea of a pure phenomenology was beyond his reach because he held fast to his ideal of a strict philosophical science based on the exact natural sciences.<sup>32</sup>

The entire approach whereby the overcoming of psychologism was phenomenologically accomplished, Husserl maintained in 1913, showed that analyses of immanent consciousness had to be seen as pure a priori analyses of essence, that it was in this way that the immense fields of the givens of consciousness as fields for ontological investigations were opened up for the first time.<sup>33</sup> In contrast, he maintained much later in *Crisis* that what was new in the *Logical Investigations* was "found not at all in the merely ontological investigations..., but rather in the subjectively directed investigations in which for the first time the *cogitata qua cogitata*, as essential moments of each conscious experience as it is given in genuine inner experience, come into their own and immediately come to dominate the whole method of intentional analysis".<sup>34</sup>

I believe that Husserl's science of intentionality had, and still has, the impact that signs of contradiction have. So it is that it produced masterpieces as diverse as Emmanuel Levinas' *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, Edith Stein's *Finite and Eternal Being* and *Science of the Cross*, and even strongly anti-metaphysical works like Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* and Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* and *Existentialism is a Humanism*.

Levinas saw phenomenology as reversing the scientific attitude that turned away from the subject for the greater glory of the object and decreed the expulsion of every so-called subjective element from the object.<sup>35</sup> In comparison,

<sup>31</sup> Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, p. 554; see Brentano, p. 88.

<sup>32</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Ideas. General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*. New York: Collier Books, 1962 (1913), p. 229; Husserl, *Introduction to the Logical Investigations*, p. 61. Hill, "From Empirical Psychology to Phenomenology Edmund Husserl on the 'Brentano Puzzle'", pp. 161-64.

<sup>33</sup> Husserl, *Introduction to the Logical Investigations*, p. 42.

<sup>34</sup> Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*. Evanston: Northwestern University, 1970, §68.

<sup>35</sup> Richard Sugarman, "Emmanuel Levinas: the Ethics of 'Face to Face' / the Religious



Sartre thought that for centuries there had not been a philosophical movement that so “plunged human beings back into the world”.<sup>36</sup> For him, the profound meaning of the discovery expressed by, “All consciousness is consciousness of something” could be grasped by imagining “a connected series of bursts that tear us out of ourselves, throw us... into the dry dust of the world, onto the plain earth, amidst things...”.<sup>37</sup>

The great mathematician David Hilbert wrote of how Husserl was a product of Brentano’s school, but had adopted an a priori method and rejected psychologism. From this theoretical stance, Hilbert explained, he befriended the speculative trend in philosophy by strengthening it enormously. For, since he had expounded a far-reaching grounding of logic and related sciences, after he came out in favor of the methods of speculative dogmatics, he deflected the criticism of sterility normally attached to its application in the exact sciences. But, Hilbert considered, the problem was solved only apparently. For, Husserl’s method was in fact psychological, and only owing to misunderstandings about its true nature was he able to post successes on the “a priori dogmatism” side of the ledger.<sup>38</sup>

The Democratic Socialist Leonard Nelson objected that even if Husserl himself remained protected from mystical degeneration by inhibitions and restraints imposed by secure connections to mathematics that he could not strip away, after his school had burned its bridges to mathematics, it was frightening to see how unrestrainedly his students fell victim to every excess of Neo-platonic mysticism.<sup>39</sup>

### Metaphysics, Theory of Knowledge and the Natural Sciences

Husserl communicated his new vision of metaphysics, theory of knowledge and the natural sciences to the new generation of students in search of a scientific metaphysics that could stand up to the challenges of the natural sciences. He told

Turn”, in *Phenomenology World-Wide*, A-T. Tymieniecka (ed.), Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2002, p. 412.

<sup>36</sup> Yvanka B. Raynova, “Jean-Paul Sartre, A Profound Revision of Husserlian Phenomenology”, in *Phenomenology World-Wide*, Tymieniecka (ed.), p. 324.

<sup>37</sup> Jean Paul Sartre, “Intentionality: A Fundamental Idea of Husserl’s Phenomenology”, *Journal of the British Society of Phenomenology* 1, 2, May 1970, pp. 4-5.

<sup>38</sup> Unpublished Extracts from Hilbert’s *Denkschrift* for Leonard Nelson, undated, found in the Niedersächsische Staats-und Universitätsbibliothek Göttingen, Abteilung Handschriften und Seltene Drücke.

<sup>39</sup> Leonard Nelson, letter of December 29, 1916 to David Hilbert found in the Niedersächsische Staats-und Universitätsbibliothek Göttingen, Abteilung Handschriften und Seltene Drücke.

them of how he saw the metaphysical needs of his time going unmet and gave this as an explanation as to why spiritism and the occult were thriving and superstition of every kind was spreading. He called for a science of metaphysics to study problems lying beyond empirical investigation and provide ultimate and deepest knowledge of reality.<sup>40</sup>

He blamed the overriding role and authoritative influence of the natural sciences for the prevailing contempt for metaphysics and its transformation into “a kind of a hobgoblin”, or its being considered a relic of scientifically backward times on a par with alchemy and astrology. As he saw it, the natural sciences had taken abundant revenge for the injustice they endured from the pseudo-scientific natural philosophy of the Romantics, but in speaking of metaphysics, natural scientists still had in mind a kind of philosophizing that was up to the old tricks of the Hegelian school.<sup>41</sup>

As Husserl told the story, after the collapse of idealistic philosophy in the mid-nineteenth century, a great awkward lull set in when the philosophical race of Titans of Romanticism, with their extravagant promises and flaunting of the requirements of rigorous science, trained to storm the Mount Olympus of philosophy with their dialectical tricks, were flung down into the dark Tartarus of dissension and unclarity, and uneasy disenchantment, even disillusionment, followed the earlier exuberance. Then sounded ever louder the call back to Kant, who had set limits on the presumptuousness of uncritical metaphysics and established the critique of knowledge as the true foundation for philosophy. With the revival of Kantianism, for which an a priori science of concepts was impossible, the word ‘metaphysics’ took on ominous overtones and people preferred not to use it.<sup>42</sup>

The extent to which the hard questions about the objectivity of knowledge raised by Kant’s work could determine one’s entire conception of being in the world was a matter of concern to Husserl,<sup>43</sup> for whom such problems could only be solved through a pure phenomenological elucidation of knowledge for which it was obvious that theory of knowledge was prior to all natural knowledge and

<sup>40</sup> See for example, Edmund Husserl, “Aus der Einleitung der Vorlesung ‘Erkenntnistheorie und Hauptpunkte der Metaphysik 1898/99’”, in Husserl, *Allgemeine Erkenntnistheorie*, pp. 225-55.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 230-33.

<sup>42</sup> Husserl, *Allgemeine Erkenntnistheorie, Vorlesung 1902/03*, pp. 9, 229, 232-33; Edmund Husserl, *Logik, Vorlesung 1902/03*, Elisabeth Schuhmann (ed.), Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2001, pp. 12-13.

<sup>43</sup> See for example, Husserl, “Aus der Einleitung der Vorlesung ‘Erkenntnistheorie und Hauptpunkte der Metaphysik 1898/99’”, in his *Allgemeine Erkenntnistheorie*, p. 232.



science and on an entirely different plane. As long as we are in the state of epistemological innocence and have not bitten the fateful apple of the tree of philosophical knowledge, then every science suits us fine, Husserl taught. But, the moment the sphinx of critique of knowledge asks its questions, all sciences, no matter how beautiful, are nothing to us. All the puzzling questions combined signify that we do not understand sciences in general. No naturally obtained scientific result is free of the worm of doubt or unclarity. Therefore, we cannot use any as a premise from which to derive the answer to these questions.<sup>44</sup>

It is certain, he argued, that the knowledge of the world provided by the natural sciences is not definitive knowledge of reality. They are merely sciences of being in the relative, provisional sense sufficient for practical orientation in the phenomenal world. Through them, we attain the practical mastery of nature, a far-reaching orienting of empirical reality, the possibility of formulating laws by which we exactly foresee, foretell and redirect the course of empirical processes, but we are not in possession of definitive, ultimate, conclusive knowledge of the essence of nature. Lack of critical insight into the meaning of fundamental concepts and principles makes it impossible to be clear about what has been ultimately achieved and so about the sense in which the results may be considered expressions of ultimate Being.<sup>45</sup>

Husserl called for a science of metaphysics to study problems lying beyond empirical investigation and provide ultimate and deepest knowledge of reality. He believed that such a science of metaphysics was possible, justifiable, and that human beings could attain knowledge of reality.<sup>46</sup> Husserl taught that the sciences were in need of metaphysical foundations, but wanted to make clear that he "meant anything but a dialectical spinning of the concrete results of these sciences out of some abstract conceptual mysticism".<sup>47</sup> He proposed to have metaphysics understood in a broad sense as radical ontology, as the radical science of Being in the absolute sense, instead of the science of Being in the empirical sense, which we think we know, but upon closer inspection at times turns out to be deceptive and an illusion.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Husserl, *Introduction to Logic and Theory of Knowledge, Lectures 1906/07*, 32c.

<sup>45</sup> Husserl, *Introduction to Logic and Theory of Knowledge, Lectures 1906/07*, §20. Husserl, *Logik, Vorlesung 1902/03*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>46</sup> Husserl, "Aus der Einleitung der Vorlesung 'Erkenntnistheorie und Hauptpunkte der Metaphysik'", pp. 232, 233, 252; Husserl, *Introduction to Logic and Theory of Knowledge, Lectures 1906/07*, §§20, 21.

<sup>47</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Logik, Vorlesung 1896*, Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2001, p. 5. Husserl, *Logik, Vorlesung 1902/03*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>48</sup> Husserl, *Introduction to Logic and Theory of Knowledge, Lectures 1906/07*, §20.

Husserl believed that it was certain that a most universal concept of what is real in general, of the particularities grounded in the essence of what is real, can and must be delineated. He reasoned that concepts like that of an individual real thing, Being for itself, or thing in the broadest sense, real property in the broadest sense, real relation, time, cause, and effect, are surely necessary thoughts concerning possible reality and require a study of the analysis of essence and of essential laws. There must therefore be, he concluded, a science of real Being as such in the most universal universality, and this a priori metaphysics would be the necessary foundation for empirically based metaphysics, which not only claims to know what lies in the idea of reality in general, but claims to know what is now actually actual.<sup>49</sup>

Wherever it is a question of reality, in life and in all empirical sciences, he explained, we apply concepts like thing, real property, real relation, state, process, coming into being and passing away, cause and effect, space and time, that seem to belong necessarily to the idea of a reality. Whether or not all these concepts are actually intrinsic to the idea of reality, there surely are such concepts, the basic categories in which what is real as such is to be understood in terms of its essence. Thus, investigations must be possible that simply reflect everything without which reality in general cannot be conceived. This is where the idea of a metaphysical a priori ontology comes in.<sup>50</sup>

Husserl saw a science of metaphysics as being so necessary for science that even natural scientists could not do without it. The empirical sciences, he taught, are not creations of a purely theoretical mind. They are not based on absolutely scrupulously laid foundations in accordance with a rigorous logical method. They are subject to principles that govern thinking and research in the natural sciences, that make them possible, and that consequently cannot be searched for by investigations into the natural sciences. Even the most highly developed, most exact natural sciences uncritically use concepts and presuppositions originating in a pre-scientific understanding of the world. In fact, as soon as they begin reflecting on the principles of their science, natural scientists fall into metaphysics, though they most certainly do not want to call it by that forbidden name.<sup>51</sup>

The realm of truth, Husserl insisted, is no disorderly hodgepodge. Truths are connected in systematic ways, governed by consistent laws and theories, and so the inquiry into truth and its exposition must be systematic. The systematic rep-

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, §21.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Husserl, *Introduction to Logic and Theory of Knowledge, Lectures 1906/07*, §20. Husserl, *Allgemeine Erkenntnistheorie, Vorlesung 1902/03*, p. 233.



resentation of knowledge must to a certain degree reflect the systematic representation grounded in the things themselves. All invention and discovery involves formal patterns without which there is no testing of given propositions and proofs, no methodical construction of new proofs, no methodical building of theories and whole systems. No blind omnipotent power has heaped together some pile of propositions P, Q, R, strung them together with a proposition S, and then organized the human mind so that the knowledge of the truth of P unfailingly must entail knowledge of S. Not blind chance, but the reason and order of governing laws reigns in argumentation.<sup>52</sup>

For Husserl, the most radical reason why the natural sciences do not provide definitive knowledge of physical and mental reality and therefore require a metaphysics as the science of absolute being is that the possibility and meaning of the objective validity of knowledge is a mystery to us. So, the ultimate meaning of any reality, which for knowledge is just what it posits as real and has determined in a given way, is also problematical for us. In spite of all of natural science, we therefore do not know what reality is and in what sense we may claim to take the results of the natural sciences as being definitive for reality. Therefore, only by theory of knowledge and critique of knowledge practiced upon the natural sciences does metaphysics become possible.<sup>53</sup>

He warned against caving into the old temptation of grounding theory of knowledge upon metaphysics and wanting to solve the radical problems of the elucidation of knowledge by metaphysical underpinnings. Drawing in premises from metaphysics means radically missing the meaning of the genuine problems of theory of knowledge. Metaphysics presupposes theory of knowledge. Therefore, it cannot undergird theory of knowledge.<sup>54</sup>

### Analytic Philosophy and the Fate of Metaphysics

So it is that Husserl came to adopt metaphysical and logical views antithetical to those adopted by Bertrand Russell, Rudolf Carnap, Willard Van Orman Quine, and other shapers of analytic philosophy who conspired to create an inhospitable climate for metaphysical thought through a transformation of logic.

Quine, for example, made exposing and bewailing any *soupçon* of connivance with metaphysics one of the principal planks of his philosophical program. He admonished philosophers to stay away from what he called curiously idealistic

<sup>52</sup> Husserl, *Logik, Vorlesung 1896*, pp. 9, 13, 16-17.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 32c.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

ontologies that repudiated material objects. He conjured up nightmare visions of the ontological crisis that would ensue were logicians to disobey and begin a retreat back into what he called "the metaphysical jungle of Aristotelian essentialism".<sup>55</sup> His anti-metaphysical convictions held sway for decades. It was long professionally necessary to philosophize within the power of them and few dared to contradict what seemed false in them.

However, metaphysics did not prove easy to kill. Metaphysical considerations are increasingly being invoked and a more hospitable environment has been created for what was vilified as metaphysical abstrusities, curious, unintelligible, mystical conceptions. It has increasingly been shown that they were not just scientifically permissible, but vital, to knowledge and science and that it was wrong-headed and impetuous to try to cleanse reasoning of them. What had been shunned and excoriated is increasingly considered to be just what is needed to provide the unity and continuity necessary to reasoning in philosophy and in science in general... to clear up reasoning, remove ambiguity and imprecision, draw fine distinctions germane and indispensable to science... the very thing needed to bring clarity, simplicity, precision, even elegance, to reasoning.<sup>56</sup>

The growing awareness that there is something about reality that cannot be manipulated at will, that for example, logic must in some sense mirror the ways in which being is structured or it will turn out illogical is surely much of what is behind the new rehabilitation of metaphysical ideas, which, in any case, has never been a matter of a return to the stifling atmosphere of nineteenth century idealism, or the excesses of irrationality, that made metaphysics seem such a hobgoblin and inspired such determination to do away with it once and for all. The French philosopher Jules Vuillemin once made the thought-provoking statement that Bertrand Russell has been considered an iconoclast but the royal road of metaphysics passes by way of such forms of destruction.<sup>57</sup> That may prove to be one of the principal lessons of twentieth century philosophy.

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<sup>55</sup> For example, Willard, Quine, "The Problem of Interpreting Modal Logic", *Journal of Symbolic Logic* 12, 2 (June 1947), pp. 43, 47; Willard Quine, *Word and Object*, Cambridge MA: M.I.T. Press, 1960; Willard Quine, *Ways of Paradox*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1976, pp. 159-76, 177-84; Claire Ortiz Hill, *Rethinking Identity and Metaphysics, On the Foundations of Analytic Philosophy*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997, Chapter 11.

<sup>56</sup> Hill, *Rethinking Identity and Metaphysics, On the Foundations of Analytic Philosophy*.

<sup>57</sup> Jules Vuillemin, *Leçons sur la première philosophie de Russell*, Paris: Colin, 1968, p. 326.