

PHENOMENOLOGY and SPECULATION

by HEDWIG CONRAD-MARTIUS . . pp. 116-128

HUSSERL

Today we can speak of phenomenology in a threefold sense. The first is that of Husserl, the transcendental idealist. The only area to which his type of phenomenological procedure applies is that of pure consciousness. In his opinion only pure consciousness bears the peculiar sign of absoluteness which can guarantee the science of phenomenology, because, as he says, it has need of no other thing to exist, *nulla re indiget ad existendum*. Opposite this consciousness stands the real world, *as real*. Its reality had to be enclosed in parentheses that the door might be opened to the pure consciousness-phenomenon of the world.

With this starting proposition of Husserl transcendental idealism, which had been riding high since Kant, surely reached its crest. It seems to me that to set the reality of the world in parentheses is to disturb seriously the full-phenomenon "world." For reality of being is inseparable from the essence of the world. This statement does not,

of course, answer or even broach the epistemological question whether there is such a true, namely real, world, or whether the sense-perceptible world we live in represents in fact a real world.

For Husserl, of course — and this was his great breakthrough — the world of pure consciousness, whose reality should have been put in parentheses, was no longer a mere psychological state. For him the parentheses that lead to phenomenology come in two stages — 1: the bracketing out of the reality, world, as already mentioned, so that only pure consciousness remains as thematic material; 2: a further bracketing which extracts the *eidos* from psychological facts. I consider neither this latter notion of ideation nor that of the parentheses as very happily chosen. But what Husserl had in mind was so fundamental that it can hardly be characterized adequately, for it was the step to genuine phenomenology. It was the step from merely fortuitous fact which [as far as its empirical presentation is concerned] can be as

it is but could also be otherwise, the fact which gives essence to a certain state and is inseparable from it.

I shall return to this subject but for the present let me add this much. With his first parentheses for reality, Husserl narrowed the field of phenomenology to pure consciousness. Within this narrowed field he took the decisive step of looking beyond the bare fact of a thing to its essence, and this is still fundamental. But what did he do with the world? Genuine phenomenology is to be found within pure consciousness surely, but not exclusively. The great store of data which because of their reality transcend pure consciousness were excluded. But this real world offers an inexhaustible fund of fixed realities which should be examined for their reality-based essence. This is the well-spring of that unprecedented richness which is the right of phenomenology.

HEIDEGGER

The transcendental idealistic phenomenology of Husserl is the first kind. The second is that of Heidegger, which also differs from the one I have in mind. Heidegger was a disciple of Husserl; that is unmistakable. But he set out on a path that was to lead far from transcendental idealism, in a new direction that still influences the course of history. Heidegger ceased to speak of pure consciousness. He rediscovered the real world under an aspect that was to spell the end of transcendental idealism, the aspect of the human person, or rather, of its center, "existence."

I should like to quote from an article on Heidegger which I published in 1933, whose thesis was that idealistic philosophy destroys the real being of the world. I added that Heidegger, paradoxically, carried this destruction so far that he could reach only a turning

point — had already reached a turning point. I said at the time: "As a true ontologist Heidegger starts by giving being its full due, at least at the focal point of his philosophical interest, the ego. Without exaggeration it can be said that no one else in the history of philosophy has approached the ego so directly and unidealistically, that ego whose essence is so profoundly entwined with existence. . . ." "Here being is not understood as consciousness, as in idealistic philosophy, and consciousness taken as the ultimate irresolvable. Rather the viewpoint is reversed: the ultimate "manner of existing or being" is considered to be the manner of being of the *res cogitans*, the being with ego.

In Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* existing is defined as an "understanding self on one's own being," or as "knowing one's own being." Precisely this, I think, is the deepest meaning of "reality." In my ontology of the real I had previously (1923) defined reality in a way analogous to this, but I included not only personal being or existence, as Heidegger, but all real being, all reality. And I did not intend thereby to personalize or "psychize" reality as a whole. Nothing was further from my thoughts. On the contrary, what I had in mind was that there are as many different strata of reality, basically different levels of "knowing one's own being," as there are basically different kinds of natural entities: inorganic, vegetative, animal, personal-human. What makes all these essentially different kinds really exist is precisely this "knowing oneself in one's being." That this is possible in an impersonal and even unpsychic way, as in the organic and merely vegetative kingdoms, seems to me one of the most important facts of philosophy.

This is what Heidegger encountered in the heart of reality when he defined the I-being, the personal being,

as a being "knowing itself." Not consciousness but "knowing one's own self" constitutes, according to *Sein und Zeit*, the essence of the human person. But the limitation implicit in all existentialism, varied as it may be, is here, the limitation of existence to the person, which strips all the non-personal or pre-personal world of its true character of reality. Only the ego, only man, still has existence or rather is "existence." Everything else is reduced to being "present." The degeneration of being implied in this widely-used existentialist expression of being "only present" is clear to anyone who has tasted of the essence of existentialism. What is "only present" is looked upon as objective, as standing in juxtaposition, without real, self-standing existence. At most one consorts with objects, cares for them, discards them, etc. But what about their existence? What about the existence of the whole created world sunk deep within itself?

To return to our original theme: it is clear that with the personal ego Heidegger has uprooted idealism. The personal I is no longer consciousness but existence, being with a self. The door seems open wide to a new and true ontology. It *was* opened wide. But then it was closed again, bolted and barred, by Heidegger himself, as I said at the time, more securely than transcendental idealism could have done it. For the latter never had the notion of true reality, while Heidegger had it, as did the rest of modern existentialism. But he had it only in one place, localized it in the human person. On the positive side, the philosophical insights, the true and realistic fruit of this study, that spread from philosophy into history, sociology, art, theology, are known to the specialist of the several fields in their own fashion. A whole kingdom of new phenomena rooted in the personal

being were and are being discovered. It is a true phenomenology of the human person, extended also to his meeting with other persons.

Before us stand two kinds of phenomenology, the transcendental idealistic and the existential. Grown up into their separate metaphysics, they no longer speak the same language. It did not have to be so. While they sought the *eidos* of phenomena at random, they could be understood by anyone with an eye for essences. Phenomena discovered in the consciousness maintain their own locus of essence and their own validity. Phenomena discovered in the realm of the truly existing person preserve their locus of essence and their validity. The two realms and their contents are not contradictory. If they seem to be so, it is because they were falsely conceived or essentially over-interpreted.

PHENOMENOLOGY UNALLOYED

Now what is this third kind of phenomenology toward which I have been moving? We begin by remarking that there is more to be seen round about us than pure consciousness, more than the existing human person. There is more than that which is relative to the intentionally-structured pure consciousness or to a personal existence existentially taking care of the world, shunning it, experiencing it. There is the world itself with its inner being, independent of consciousness and of the existing I.

Or is there? Can we separate human consciousness and the world? Is it not human consciousness alone that "has" this world? Or is it the personal I projecting itself in the world and with the world from which that personally projected world can no longer disengage itself? Does it not sound anti-quarian, pre-Kantian, and above all pre-existentialist, to dare to speak again of

an "absolute" world, one standing all by itself and for itself? Has not modern physics in the relativity and quantum theories in its own way pointed out the inseparability of subject and object, of the subjective data of research and observation and the objective "in self."

On the philosophical interpretation of modern physics I have ideas of my own which I believe can be thoroughly substantiated, ideas which of course do not at all disturb the data secured experimentally and mathematically. It is, in fact, just the emergence of these data that calls for new philosophical interpretation, but not in my opinion, for idealistic or existential interpretation.

To remain for the present on purely philosophical grounds: How do matters stand with the independence of being of the world from the ego and consciousness? As already indicated, such independence of being is of the essence of the real world. If the world in which we live had no independence of being but only represented a kind of Indian Maja, then it would not be a real world at all but only a simulated real world.

With this problem we look into the innermost depths of phenomenology. Is it possible that there is an essence of reality itself, subject to investigation, independently of whether or not it is realized somewhere? Is this not pure fantasy? Yet it is fundamental to Husserl's method of phenomenology that the essence of a thing can be known without the presentation of a great number of empirical cases; that a single sample case suffices. Furthermore this single example need not even be verifiable perceptibly; it can be present as a fantasy.

To illustrate knowledge of essence in a general way, I should like to begin elsewhere. Man can get along with everything there, theoretically and

practically, no matter how it is put together. The things and relationships of this world of empirical experience, psychic or physical, he perceives, knows, subjects to experiment, analyzes scientifically, etc. He can also reckon with numbers, discover new kinds of numbers, construct geometric forms, formulate and prove doctrinal statements, grasp general objects by the process of abstraction, view ideas like those of righteousness and beauty in a kind of transcendent act, bring social and legal forms into existence (for example, set up through a promise the obligation to carry out a certain future act, whether this promise be then fulfilled, or denied and forgotten). He can discover circumstances, suppose them, or cast doubt upon them, pronounce judgments or dispute them, etc. All this he can do without taking into explicit consideration the proper "*quale*," the essential "how" of all these *entia*.

TO BEING

How do we catch sight of these *qualia* of essence? First of all one must embrace the magnanimous view that everything in the world has a quota of being which is essential to it, to whatever sphere or stratum of being it may belong, be it irrational, imaginary, negative, paradoxical, even nothing, and of course being itself. All have an essential content, and this proper content gives them an ultimate essential meaning, a being-sense, a sense residing in the thing itself, with which it stands or falls independently of any human knowledge; hence the term being-sense. To see this meaning one must have a spiritual organ for the essence of things corresponding to the analogous sense of sight for colors and hearing for tone. *Eide* are seen or not seen. Furthermore, there is strictly speaking not only no philosophical knowledge but no

knowledge whatsoever that does not in some way find its ultimate determination in these essences of things. Every genuine distinction in language or idea, even when the scientist speaks for example of energy or force or mass, of life or organism, of color or light, includes at least an unconscious orientation to the essence of the thing.

We have been speaking of a being-sense or being-meaning of all data that are not injected into "things" by man but which they possess in and for themselves. For there is such a thing as an objective logos of the world and of all that is under the aspect of its being. This is truly a wonderful mystery. The world, being, all are in themselves meaning-full, charged with meaning. The ensemble of all res, all *entia*, all data, form a cosmos, a cosmos of meaning, a *cosmos noetos*. Within it everything has its determined and permanent meaning-place, even the meaningless; for ultimately everything is bound meaningfully to everything else and therefore possesses in its meaning-place an inextinguishable being. To illustrate with examples chosen at random: every singular number as well as the whole realm of numbers has a very determined and distinct sense-being-place, as have judgment, circumstance, the whole world of the logical, and the realm of values, the transcendentals such as the good, the beautiful, being, and the primary dimensions of space and time, etc.

This meaning-cosmos is of course to be distinguished from the real world, which also forms a cosmos, be it nature, supernature, subnature, be it physical or psychical, worldly, celestial, or under the earth. Nevertheless this real world, taken in its essence, can be coordinated into the meaning-cosmos, as can every thing that is according to its essence.

To work out the essence of something usually demands long and exacting philosophical labor. The eye of the spirit must be directed tirelessly on the meaning-place of the thing investigated, with perhaps a great deal of groping at first. That is phenomenology in the broad and radical sense: the search for essence. It is phenomenology without that thematic restriction which we find in transcendental idealism and existentialism. Hence we cannot assign a specifying name to this third kind, precisely because it is phenomenology pure and simple, investigation of essence without exclusion or limitation.

Thus all that is can be studied with a view to pure essence. "Essence" here is not something mystical, not a construct, not something thought out speculatively. It presents itself upon careful sounding, so to speak, of the data themselves, avoiding all construction. That this is possible is shown by the fact that it has been done. It is proved by the not inconsiderable accomplishments of phenomenology, early and modern, in every area of being and science. The proof is especially cogent to someone who has himself learned to study in such wise, or, we might say, who has allowed himself to be led to the essence of a thing by the initiated. The insight, the evidence, the understandableness, the thorough illumination that data acquire in essence-knowledge comes from the environment of that univocal meaning-place in the ensemble of meaning relationship. Recognition of essence has its verification in itself or derives it from itself.

In a precise sense we can equate investigation of essence with ontologic: onto-logic = ontology. But first the "on" (the thing that is, *ens*) must be taken in the most general sense of "there is," and secondly the "logic" here must be derived from the objec-

tive logos of existing things. The *cosmos noetos* is the logos-cosmos of all existing things with respect to essence.

ITS RELATION TO OTHER SCIENCES

How is this investigation of essence, this ontologic, related to the other sciences, to the "strict" sciences, especially natural science? If we pursue from a phenomenological viewpoint the question of what makes force to be force, energy to be energy, light to be light, matter to be matter, every modern man will be reminded of physical force, physical energy, physically visible light. Furthermore he will consider physics alone capable of handling them. What is the meaning of the study of essence in reference to such things? What can philosophy do here? Are we trying to go back to *a priori* methods of handling what the scientist has been able to set down with such univocal definition and such exact functional equations after painstaking and successful work in countless experiments and physico-mathematical calculations? Are we again conjuring up the spectre of falsifying speculation which led the ancients (especially Aristotle) until far into the middle ages, and the romantic philosophers once more, to such fundamentally false physical conclusions?

Certainly not. Who would dare do so today? First of all, when phenomenology asks about the general nature of force or of light, it looks either not at all or only by way of example to the physical realization of these things. For there are also spiritual force, force of thought, force of expression, of a symphony, of a landscape, of a proof. There is the force of God. You may object: These are all figures of speech. But is it not strange that on the one hand you try to explain the use of such a concept in the physical realm as an image transfer from psychic, and just

as often you do the opposite, explain the use of the same notion in the psychic realm as a transfer from the physical? The physicist will say that the notion of force in physical usage is only an imaginative transfer from the subjectively experienced muscular sense to a physical situation which cannot be understood in its inner self. For that matter this inner self of small moment to the physicist, if he thinks of it at all. His sole object is to set up a mathematically precise functional equation for the various force or energy relationships, for it is only through such equations that he can achieve dominion over nature in theory, and eventually in practice.

What then of psychic force and psychic energy, which as data of immediate experience are "self-given?" Now the roles are reversed, and these in turn are thought to have a derived sense and to be not really knowable scientifically — at most one might embed them in a physically definable basis. But is it not possible to inquire about the general *quale* of something like force and energy, physical or psychic or any other kind, about what they are in themselves, in the nature most proper to them?

Consider another example. Besides physical light there is also the light of understanding, there is the joy that radiates as light from the eyes, there are illuminating treatises, bright landscapes, a light of glory, a divine light. Are they mere figures of speech taken over from physical light? If we would say so, then what is the basis of the transfer? The applied usage must have an objective right, a *fundamentum in re*, a meaningful basis in the thing itself. We must add that physical light itself "is" not only an electrical wave motion arising from quantum energy jumps in the atom and appearing to

the human eye only subjectively in the guise in which we see it. It is something more: it is a univocal *quale* on the essence of which we are able to fasten our intellectual glance. In a shining joy or an enlightened understanding we are of course not dealing with electromagnetic wave motion having varied frequencies to produce different colors. Yet here as well as elsewhere light remains light and is not darkness. When is something "lightsome," when does it represent light? Through what moments of essence is something constituted in itself as light? These questions are valid and point the way to phenomenological - intological investigation that measures up to its purpose, as is shown by past achievement.

Now we come to a decisive question. What does the study of essence tell us about physical discoveries? The basic answer is very simply expressed: Light, physical, natural light, really "is" not electromagnetic wave motion arising from quantum jumps of energy. These things are physical conditions which can be treated in their functional context by exact equations, which bring physical light to natural incarnation, which in its universal essence does not differ from "light" as it is always and everywhere, as it is essentially.

It is impossible for the results of phenomenology to contradict those of natural science or vice versa. They lie on entirely different levels. Neither can the one series of investigations take the place of the other. Their essential goals and methods are completely different. Yet they need each other, remarkable as this may sound to the natural scientist, or for that matter to the specialist in any branch of science. True, natural science has no need for its own sake of aligning itself with the study of essences. It sets out to achieve

intellectual dominion over nature and it succeeds entirely by setting up functional relationships of dependence. Its success has been impressive even in those instances in which it has departed from the classical laws of physics. But when the time comes to interpret the physical data with respect to their real basis, when the physicist begins to set his wonderful findings into a mosaic, into a world picture, when he begins to philosophize — and which of the great ones does not nowadays? — then we have a different picture entirely.

Now a word or two about speculation, that thing of fear, that word at which stout hearts quail. St. Thomas Aquinas says somewhere in his *Summa Theologica* that according to a gloss of St. Augustine on Second Corinthians, speculation is derived not from *specula* (an elevated observation post) but from *speculum*, mirror. "To see something in a mirror" should mean then, to see the causes in their effects (*causa per effectum*). The similarity of the cause is reflected in the effect (*reli-cet*). Here speculation is the same as meditation. In the first derivation from "observation post" speculation means to observe exactly and carefully, to spy out. The speculator is then the observer. Therefore if someone will have nothing to do with speculation in the sense of reaching from effects immediately seen to the causes mirrored in them, he can cast his lot with the careful, vigilant, and skeptical *speculare*. (In Greek the *skeptikoi* or skeptics derive their name from *skopeo*, and this from *skopelos*, the observation post — the same interpretation, therefore.)

Both interpretations are in place. In every realistic interpretation of empirical effects we must go back to the causes, at first invisible, but we must do so with prudence, with realistic

watchfulness, keeping our feet on the ground. What is meant by realistic? It is the blending of the two functions, of which the first task is to go beyond empirical relationships to real, fully valid causes that are not included in the immediate data.

THE FIRST TASK

— To real, fully valid causes! In natural science there is no question of these, contrary opinion notwithstanding. Natural science sets up conditional relationships: if thus, then so; *post hoc*, but nothing about *propter hoc*. This surely has significance and is the perfect right of science, which holds sway over nature thereby. But in all this the real and full causal connection is never even brought into question. There is no concern about it. But philosophers are concerned about it. Gradually the natural scientists too, especially the physicists, have begun to ask philosophical questions once more, urged on by the remarkable things they have unearthed. The discussion about the assumed or disputed "a-causality" in microphysics is such a philosophical theme, and — *horribile dictu* — it is a speculative projection.

Speculation is always projection — projection into a land unknown for the present or perhaps even fundamentally unknown. "For the present" means in relation to personally known empirical facts, which could be supplemented later by facts which would confirm or unseat the speculative projection. It is "basically" unknown if it can be shown experimentally or empirically that the "unknown land" cannot in principle be transformed into something empirically determinable, at least not within the classical methods and categories of experience. This is the case with microphysical relations, but this has not prevented their being treated in the

most exact physical-mathematical fashion.

I spoke of the search for the full cause of reality. On this subject also there is an amazing blindness, brought on by a one-sided scientific education. Physicalized biology is an example. Phenomena of living development, of forming and re-forming, are never completely explained in their causes by functional relationships of dependence, no matter how exact. But the empirical biologist has before him nothing but material physical processes. To find their full causal explanation he must transcend the visible activity and go back to invisible causes. He must project speculatively. He must look through things for possible complete causality that is commensurate to the known effect not only quantitatively but also qualitatively. When he does, he will, like Driesch, come upon something like "entelechy," final causality, — and even Driesch's description is too narrow and stratified. Quantum physics has the same outlook for realistic interpretation. There must be speculative projection, a looking through to a land basically unknown when compared to the surface relationships of classical physics.

THE SECOND TASK

How can we avoid wild speculation in interpreting, mere flights of fancy? First of all, quite naturally, but not overlooking, falsifying, or ignoring the empirical data, the experimentally proved. But this is clarified by a second condition, which is missing almost entirely in present-day attempts at interpretation in natural philosophy. The projected interpretation of the given situation may not contradict the essence of the thing or situation to be interpreted. The interpreter must keep in mind the essence of the thing as well

as the empirical data to be interpreted. It is impossible, for instance, to find a basis for the living process of form building or for the life of the organism as such, no matter how much good material may be gathered, without adequate contemplation of the essence of organized life and of the living process of organization. The functional relationships worked out by the biologist — as is his perfect right — yield only a single cross-section of the matter, and that, in view of the whole, is a rather lean one. They cannot serve the whole essence. The situation in physics is identical and just as disturbing. It would be hard to say how many devious paths in interpretation — not in the science itself — have been struck and will be struck again because this view of essence is lacking and therefore the thing to be interpreted is falsified from the start. In any case this has done at least as much harm as the failure to keep in real contact with empirical data. Speculative projection needs both contacts with things, the empirical and the essential.

Furthermore I am convinced that all creative scientific work (including of course the intellectual sciences in the broad sense) is embedded in the speculative. A more or less obscure vision of the thing to be found goes on before all scientific discovery like the lode star of a final cause. The productive research worker is always gifted with a contemplation of essence that may be unconscious, or at least with an extraordinarily sure instinct for the essence of a thing. We see here that the contemplation of essence is to be distinguished clearly from speculative vision, pure research of essence from speculative research. The search for essence, with essence as goal, is exclusively in the ideal order, belonging to the cosmos of meaning. Speculative search for meaning has as its goal a connection as yet unknown or basically unknown, which must have the same kind of being (real in natural science) as the complex of facts to be interpreted. As pointed out, however, speculation fruitful in reality includes knowledge of essence.



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