

INTRODUCTION: PHENOMENOLOGY AND PSYCHOLOGY

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The anniversary volume of this year includes a thematic issue on the relationship between phenomenology and psychology. An evaluation of the relationship between phenomenology and psychology makes us examine numerous and difficult problems. What we deal with here is to uncover the very genesis of phenomenology starting from the philosophical psychology of the 19th century, a complex process of course, which cannot however be understood without emphasizing the decisive specificity gained by phenomenology by assuming and then moving beyond the transcendental reduction. The transgression of the psychological approach of philosophical topics became thus possible thanks to the discovery of a new reflexive “territory,” marked by entirely different assumptions and means. In fact, assuming the phenomenological attitude is methodologically conditioned precisely by suspending the psychological perspective, which means that historically the genesis of phenomenology took place amid a deep crisis within psychology itself. Therefore, the initial proclivity of phenomenology coincides with the critique of the presuppositions of psychology. And yet, in this singular context giving rise to a brilliant interrogative effervescence, the relationship between phenomenology and psychology continued to be perceived as a thematic and methodological residual load, starting from which the main phenomenological thesis and hypothesis had to be weighed and critically reviewed. It became thus clear that this relationship concerns inclusively the particular way transcendental phenomenology is constituted, and moreover is reconstituted as a major philosophical project.

Nonetheless, the fact that transcendental phenomenology was formed as a reaction to 19th century psychologism did not prevent phenomenologists from returning repeatedly to the associations shared by phenomenology and psychology. After the publication of *Prolegomena of Pure Logic* (1900), which substantiates the radical distancing from the psychologism irrigating a great

part of philosophy, in his *Logical Investigations*, which appeared a year later, Husserl still defined phenomenology—the intentional structure of which he had rigorously sketched—as “descriptive psychology”. This way, the Husserlian project somehow claimed to be the direct heir of psychology in general, and of Brentano’s in particular. Despite this relentlessly claimed lineage, phenomenology could never emerge as a simple “experimental” science, as it was the case with psychology at the time. To this perspective that explores psychophysical facts as a “totality articulated on two real levels”¹, prisoner of an objectivist naturalism which phenomenology had always criticized, Husserl opposes a research of psychology that privileges its role of mediator played in order to redefine a transcendental philosophy “able to invest itself in the concrete and released from all its paradoxes”².

At the intersection of phenomenology and psychology we find therefore a challenge that depends, once more, on the leap of the phenomenological reduction, on the way it is understood and on its consequences. It is not just about the progress from empirical subjective particularism to a transcendental intersubjective horizon but also about the “constituted” phenomenon, accessible to the natural attitude, to the pure phenomenon founded in the transcendental sphere³. In and through it, our opening to the field of pure phenomenologising is decided—singularised only by the immanent temporal flux—as well as the possibility of some form of freedom of conscience which discovers, only this way, the role it plays in setting the direction of living, in conjunction with a constituted world. Husserl tackles a way of achieving the phenomenological reduction beginning—that’s right—from the psychological sphere, but which, having once entered the process of reduction itself, can reach the transcendental level⁴.

More specifically, it is about an “indirect” means of reaching the sphere of the transcendental operations, which benefits from certain propaedeutic advantages compared to the other variants of the reduction. The “Cartesian” one, for example, is released by the destruction of the world in the transcendental field.

Between the anonymity of the transcendental ego and the intersubjective–transcendental horizon on which the world is founded, the psychological means of the phenomenological reduction seems thus to provide the fragile

¹ E. Husserl, *Hua VI, Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie*. Eine Einleitung in die phänomenologische Philosophie. Ed. Walter Biemel, Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1962, § 58, p. 208.

² *Idem*, § 57, pp. 206–207.

³ E. Husserl, *Hua II, Die Idee der Phänomenologie, Fünf Vorlesungen*. Ed. Walter Biemel, Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1958, III, p. 45.

⁴ E. Husserl, *Conferences in Amsterdam (1928)*, in *Hua IX, Phänomenologische Psychologie (1925–1928) Vorlesungen Sommersemester. 1925*, Ed. W. Biemel, Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1962, § 9, p. 328.

bridge leading from the world to transcendental freedom—a bridge due to which the meaning of the world is formed—but also vice-versa, from the transcendental sphere, to a sensitive concrete world, whose necessity is thus implicitly asserted. The advantage of these means seems to consist in the fact that it can be travelled in both directions, not only to ensure the separation from the world of constituent consciousness, but also to be responsible for its embodiment, for the process of composing its meanings in a concrete horizon. It is about an important advantage in transcendental terms, as far as the solidarity (connection) of consciousness with a certain body (*Leib*) allows it to discover the world as an environment which includes it, making thus possible “the mutual understanding among the living beings belonging to a unique world”⁵. The process of attaining pure consciousness in the world is problematic precisely because it highlights the “original transcendence” that occurs between the transcendental ego and the psychophysical one. It is about a certain distinction that is at the same time a source of distortion experienced—by the others but also by itself—as a certain flowing, discernable haecceitas (*Diesheit*), as a “something,” as simple objectifying body.

The same self lives trapped in a mysterious parallelism established between a constituent life and another one emerging progressively on its thread, threatening at the same time to conceal and falsify it. The double status of psychology shapes the two functions it can assume: that of revelation and of concealment of transcendental life. Responding to the second alternative in a critique addressed to psychologism, in 1928 Husserl characterized the parallelism between pure psychology and transcendental phenomenology as a splitting (dividing) of each experienced singularity or link, each sphere being distinct, although not in the least exterior one to each other, or separated in a “natural”⁶ way. The recognition of this division allows a “positive” reconsideration of the architectural status of psychology, defined as the “stage” in which transcendental life is established by an ambiguous sensitive regime, the shades of which have to be examined with sufficient care to avoid the trap of an objectivist dualism. To the sensitive appearance existent in any form of external perception, there is thus a corresponding appearance regarding transcendental life itself and its manifestation. From its perspective, “psychological” issues represent the symptom. That is exactly why approaching and solving these matters to a level that can lead not only to the transcendental genesis of the meanings, but also to clarifying the ambiguity of its concrete manifestations, requires a certain intelligence, that phenomenology inevitably faces just to test itself.

⁵ E. Husserl, *Hua III, Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie*. Erstes Buch: Allgemeine Einführung in die reine Phänomenologie, Ed. Walter Biemel, Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976, § 53, p. 103.

⁶ E. Husserl, *Conferences in Amsterdam*, § 13, *Hua IX*, p. 342.

The realm of certainties which the Husserlian phenomenology aspires to, turns up therefore to be problematic. The unity of the constituent flux is accessible to us only by playing against a distortion game—a game of “coherent deformations”—by which the apparent meanings prevent the understanding of the process through which they have been born. This distortion induces a kind of double movement whereby any revelation of phenomenality is accompanied by it concealing, every occurrence taking place on a background of imminent disappearance. Eventually, immanence itself is reduced to imminence⁷. In this unstable phenomenal regime, consistency is ensured by the manner in which transcendental subjectivity is in congruence with the psychic human self. We can then wonder whether the latter I is not merely a “misrepresentation of the transcendental ego, an illusion”⁸. The only way to avoid such a hypothesis is to remain in a particular, “amphibolic” way of being, in which the meaning is dismissed precisely in order to be reinstated, in a certain dynamism whereby the “ambiguity” between various levels of formation is at the same time recognized and problematised. However, this quasi-architectonic regime, which is none other than that of human creativity, is itself limited by the confrontation with a form of otherness against which any self plays its own singularity “beyond” what its own activity can decide and detect.

Husserlian analyses allows the understanding of the fact that overcoming psychologism in the theory of knowledge does not lead to an area of unlimited creativity, but rather to a critical recognition of the anchoring in the world, in the concrete existence of any form of transcendental freedom. Heidegger gave to this necessity of concretising human freedom the form of a “burden” in which the genesis of those emotional tones, which nourish our fundamental ways of being, is included. The intersection of phenomenology and psychology is thus also a possible passage point between phenomenology, understood as a theory of knowledge, and ontology, keeping thus a lively attention for its anthropological and existential tones. The gap between the transcendental and psychic sphere—indiscernible outside the neutral regime typical for phenomenology—is it not really that between the genesis of meanings and the concrete force that organises, obscures or emphasizes them? Isn't their difference actually the one between a life nourishing from an inaccessible source of creativity and an energy due to which what is being created is directed in order to be lived?

This way of accentuating the Husserlian-Heideggerian challenge allows us to invest Merleau-Ponty's phrase “phenomenological unconscious” with a tension bringing out the transition from a “wild” and always new area, where any stable form disappears, to another one, where stable forms emerge, but also

⁷ Cf. M. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, Paris: Gallimard, 1964, p. 303.

⁸ Cf. P. Cabestan, *L'Être et la conscience : recherches sur la psychologie et l'ontophénoménologie sartriennes*, Bruxelles: Ousia, 2004, p. 28.

develop, an area which language inhabits and transforms⁹. The prime indiscernability of the constituent sphere appears thus to contaminate any form of discernment, though without compromising the possibility, always renewed, of a meaning figuration that surprises the established order of habits.

In 1927, Heidegger asked Husserl in his letter: “Which is the way of being of this absolute ego—in what sense is it identical with the factual (*faktisch*) ego, in what sense is it not the same?”¹⁰. The question echoes today as a challenge, still waiting for answers. This volume is a stop on the way of their perpetual search. It begins with an analysis of the relations between Husserl’s phenomenology on one hand and Brentano’s and Dilthey’s psychologies on the other. It continues with an exploration of the psychological dimension of Husserlian research—regarding both the theory of intentionality and the theory of reduction and its expansions—it goes forward, then, to the field of contemporary analyses of affectivity, pulsionality and social jams, and ends with two studies dedicated to the role of psychology in the field of theoretical research.

This curriculum, which outlines a possible landmark map of an ample issue such as the “very obscure”¹¹ one of the unity between transcendental and psychic self, is the source of some notable contemporary research, interrogating not only the phenomenological method “as such” but also some of its practical fields, such as that of psychoanalysis or of political and social theory. The practical consequences of the innovative research initiated by Husserl and Heidegger confirms not only the depth and extent of the phenomenological approach, but also the validity of its application in areas which, until recently, seemed to be reserved only to sciences, such as that of psychiatry. On the other hand, phenomenology is challenged to deal critically with its own methods and results, starting right from the research conducted at the border that separates it from psychology. Today, perhaps more than before, this critical responding is required to take an affirmative form. Starting from this thematic tension, whereby phenomenological researches are put to trial, we may expect the emergence of new forms of reflexivity, which will not cease to question phenomenology in a fertile manner.

⁹ See M. Richir, *Fragments phénoménologiques sur le langage*, Paris: Millon, 2008, p. 10 *sq.*

¹⁰ M. Heidegger, “Letter dated October 22, 1927,” in E. Husserl, *Notes sur Heidegger*, Paris: Minuit, 1993, p. 118.

¹¹ E. Husserl, *Logique formelle et logique transcendantale*, tr. fr. S. Bachelard, Paris: P.U.F., coll. Epiméthée, 1984, § 96a, p. 320.