

## Phenomenology and Pseudo Phenomenology: Five Idols Whose Time is Up

7<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Phenomenology Roundtable  
Marquette University June 15-17, 2007

Burt C. Hopkins  
*Seattle University*

### Introduction

It is a testament to the enduring vitality of phenomenology as a scientific method and philosophical movement that some one hundred years after being founded by Edmund Husserl the answer to the question what phenomenology is remains unanswered. This is not an accident. From its inception to its final articulation, Husserl positioned both the method and cognitive intention of his phenomenology in direct opposition to what he characterized as “traditional” metaphysics. By the latter, he understood cognitive claims about transcendent reality that bypass what for him is the *sine qua non* for all epistemological warrant, the originary evidence inseparable from the legitimization of the knowing subject’s most basic concepts and principles. On Husserl’s view only the testimony of conceptually unmediated experience can provide this legitimization and only phenomenology can elicit this kind of testimony from experience.

Providing such legitimization is the task that Husserl sets for both phenomenology’s method and the phenomenological philosophy that grows out of this method. This task is as immense as it is monumental. The objects belonging to every possible region of being, these regions of being themselves (including the materially empty region of being characterized as any object whatever), and the phenomenological being of the subjectivity and world that ultimately makes “possible” these objectivities and regions of being, all stand in need of being legitimated on Husserl’s view. For phenomenological reasons, both the process and results of the legitimization envisaged by Husserl are an intrinsically non-conceptual affair. This is the case for the simple

reason that the concepts proper to traditional metaphysics exclude in principle access to the phenomenological being (and its essential structures) that alone is capable of legitimizing what stands in need of legitimization. Because of this, Husserl's method and the cognition it strives after will forever elude, in principle, being reduced to or otherwise conceptualized as a what in the metaphysical sense.

It is, however, of course no secret that Husserl's own knowledge of traditional metaphysics and philosophy generally was very limited. Indeed, his characterization of the traditional metaphysics to which his phenomenology stands opposed is strong evidence of this. For instance, the radically different metaphysics of Plato and Aristotle and the traditions they inspired can only be characterized according to Husserl's formulation of metaphysics by disregarding their historically proper philosophical context and projecting back into them certain specifically modern philosophical preoccupations. The suspicion that these latter may be properly characterized as the real target of Husserl's differentiation of phenomenology from metaphysics receives credence from the following consideration: from the beginning to the end of his thought the total formalization of cognition that characterizes the modern project of a *mathesis universalis* is *the* problem that Husserl's phenomenology sought to overcome. The formalization of knowledge is that which, on the one hand, allows cognitive claims to be made regarding transcendent objects without having to provide an originary legitimization of the basic concepts and principles that make such claims possible. On the other hand, it is precisely the task of restoring to knowledge the integrity that is shattered with its formalization that is behind Husserl's formulation of phenomenology as a rigorous science of the pre-conceptual primal sources of the knowledge, objectivity, and therewith being of all that is.

By extending the scope of the traditional metaphysics to which Husserl's phenomenology is opposed beyond that of the moderns, and thus beyond Husserl's self-understanding of its

opposition vis-à-vis traditional philosophy, a second sense in which his phenomenology is positioned against metaphysics becomes manifest. If by metaphysics is understood the highest sciences of Greek antiquity, Plato's dialectic and Aristotle's first philosophy, both phenomenology's method and its philosophy stand opposed to these sciences in the sense that they reflect them as the origin of their innermost possibilities. As will become apparent in the discussion to follow, this state of affairs is radically different than the claim made by some that Husserl's phenomenology somehow "completes" or otherwise represents the "end" of metaphysics. It is my intention to show that Husserl's phenomenology does no such thing. Rather than complete or finish anything, Husserl's phenomenology, in both its most basic conception and in every possible execution of its project, remains fundamentally incomplete. It is my thesis that this characteristic is both its greatest virtue and the fundamental criterion that permits genuine from pseudo phenomenology to be distinguished.

#### §1. The Fundamental Principles of Phenomenology

Husserl's phenomenological method is rooted in two fundamental principles that are as irreducible as they are inseparable: phenomenological reflection and essential seeing. To the former Husserl assigns the function of securing access to phenomenological being and to the latter the function of finding and articulating its structure. These principles are irreducible in the sense of their fundamental difference: phenomenological reflection secures originary, legitimizing evidence and essential seeing finds and articulates its structure. They are inseparable in the sense that both original evidence and its articulated essential structure are indispensable conditions for phenomenological cognition.

The most basic principle of Husserl's phenomenological philosophy is intentionality, the irreducible correlation between (1) awareness and (2) that which appears in awareness. On the one hand, this term designates the originary source of all experience and cognition, in the precise

sense of the accomplishments proper to the soul that yield the pre-conceptual horizon for all knowledge and the original givenness of every possible object of knowledge. On the other hand, this term designates the mode of being of the phenomenological method itself, again in the precise sense that it is the fundamentally intentional character of phenomenological reflection that permits phenomenological cognition of originary evidence and the finding and articulation of its structure.

§2. Psychologism and the Phenomenological Problem of Accounting  
for the Static and Genetic Possibility of Ideas

Husserl initially formulated his phenomenology in response to problems presented by 19<sup>th</sup> century epistemology. The first of these concerned saving the phenomena proper to the ideal structures that characterize human knowledge. Such phenomena were in need of saving because the new science of psychology was endeavoring to explain the origin of ideas as the result of the development of the human mind with all its contingencies. This explanation entailed a “natural” account of the ultimate validity of logical and mathematical propositions, wherein any “idea” is understood to be deduced from previous experiences wherein it is supposed to originate. Husserl showed in his *Logical Investigations* that the insuperable problem with this kind of account is that it reduces the ideality characteristic of logical, mathematical, and scientific propositions to a development in the time of nature, and, therefore, it in effect confuses the ideal concept’s validity at every time with a legend’s historical development within time. More precisely, the psychological explanation of ideas fails to distinguish the “same” from the “other” and therefore commits the most basic offence against thought: contradiction. The same in this case being the identity of ideas, the other being historical development. The failure to distinguish the same and the other in this sense and the confusion to which it gives rise is how, of course, Husserl definitively came to characterize psychologism.

Characterizing psychologism is one thing. Overcoming it another. Husserl's radical critique of psychologism gives rise to two specifically phenomenological problems, neither one of which implies the simple opposition between unchanging "abstract" ideas and changing "empirical" experience. The first is how, in the face of the recognition of the transient nature of the acts of thought, to legitimize epistemically the atemporal validity of ideas that is the fundamental supposition of the propositions of mathematics and logic. The second is how to account for the origin in thought of these ideas' epistemically legitimized validity. The first phenomenological problem concerns the problem of the "possibility" of the "ideality" proper to ideas, of their atemporal validity. This problem comes forward any time the atemporal validity that is inseparable from the intrinsic meaning of the propositions belonging to ideal knowledge is challenged by skeptical doctrines like psychologism. The second problem comes forward once the initial possibility of the ideality of ideas has been established, and concerns their possibility in a deeper sense, namely, the possibility of the "origination" of their possibilities as idealities.

### §3. The "Static-Genetic" Idol of Phenomenology

The conflation of these two related but different possibilities gives rise to the first idol of phenomenology I want to discuss whose time is up, because it commits the second most basic offence against thought: inconsistency. The idol in question concerns the matter of interpretation and may be characterized as the idol of two different phenomenologies, "static" and "genetic." It first identifies Husserl's phenomenological method with the problem of establishing the possibility of the ideality proper to ideas, and, using Husserl's own word, it characterizes this method and therefore the phenomenology that results from it as "static." It then identifies Husserl's method with the problem of establishing the possibility of these ideas' origin, and, again using Husserl's own word, characterizes this method and the phenomenology that follows from it as "genetic." In articulating two distinct phenomenological methods, the static and the

genetic, this interpretation is under the illusion that it is following Husserl's own critical self-interpretation; to wit, that the original, static formulation of phenomenology is limited by presuppositions that can only be superceded by a genetic phenomenology.

Like all idols, there is the semblance of truth in what this interpretation presents. Husserl undeniably distinguishes the phenomenological problem of accounting for the static possibility of ideality from the phenomenological problem of accounting for the genesis of its possibility as a static possibility. In so doing, however, he does not distinguish two distinct kinds or ways of "doing" phenomenology, but rather designates two aspects to the phenomenological problem of epistemically legitimizing human knowledge. The idol of two different phenomenologies, static and genetic (hereafter, the "static-genetic" idol), only imperfectly recognizes this distinction, as it mistakes the same, namely, the unity of phenomenology, for the other, namely, two phenomenologies. Thus, in contrast to contradiction, the inconsistency manifest in the static-genetic idol distinguishes the same and the other, only, however, notwithstanding this distinction, to wind up mistaking the same (phenomenology) for the other (two different kinds of phenomenology).

#### §4. The Idol of Husserl's "Essentialism"

Husserl's method for legitimizing the possibility of ideality is essential seeing, which he initially characterized as a process for finding and bringing to evidence the invariant meaning formations that are presupposed by the ideality of mathematical and logical knowledge and, eventually, which he expanded to include the finding and articulation of the invariant structures presupposed by both the meaning and experience of all objectivities and regions of being (including the phenomenological being of the world and the mundane and transcendental being of subjectivity). This process involves the comparison (and, eventually, the imaginative variation) of arbitrarily "granted as given" exemplars of whatever ideality, meaning, or

experience is being interrogated with regard to its essence, a process that leads to the discovery of the latter as that which presents the invariant limit of the variation. The reaching of a limit is “guided” by the “clue” provided by that which is under interrogation, because the choice of an arbitrary exemplar of something is itself already guided by the recognition of the exemplar *as* something, e.g., a category, a spatial thing, a temporal experience, etc. That which is recognized in this manner guides the comparison and variation of the arbitrary exemplars and, in so doing, permits the discovery and bringing to evidence of the invariant structure that is responsible for the presenting itself as what it is that is proper to each exemplar in the manifold of exemplars generated by comparison and variation. This evidence is immediate, in the sense that the “seeing” of an invariant is conceptually unmediated: the guiding clue that leads to its finding is not a concept under which fall exemplars but a prefiguring “style” whose prehension functions as the criterion for what can and cannot be recognized as an exemplar of whatever it is that is under investigation. It is precisely that which appears as the invariant “running through” (and therefore structuring) what, under the guidance provided by the prefiguring style, shows up as the limit beyond which the exemplar being varied can no longer be recognized *as* what it is, that Husserl designates as the essence.

The foundation of essential seeing in the experience that grants as given the original exemplar precludes as appropriate the philosophical interpretation of this method as either a modality of speculative metaphysics or empirical induction. The immediate, non-conceptual seeing or “intuition” of the essence is therefore neither a species of intellectual intuition nor of inductive reasoning. Once the limit of a manifold of exemplars is reached, in the sense of the finding of the invariant that is inseparable from each member of the already generated manifold—*as well as of any future member of it*—being what it is, the structure in question loses its dependency on an already given exemplary manifold and exhibits, as such, a “factically” pure essence. In order to

designate the apriority of this structure, Husserl rehabilitates the Greek term “*eidos*.” The claim made by some today that Husserl’s concern with essences and *eide* represents a point of overlap between phenomenological and traditional philosophy, such that what is distinctive in his phenomenology may be considered without addressing this concern,<sup>1</sup> is the second idol whose time is up that I want to call attention to. This idol is based on the failure to distinguish the phenomenological finding and apprehension of an essence, which is both founded in experience and presentative of it in an evidential apprehension that is unmediated by concepts, from an unspecified traditional philosophical preoccupation with essences. To the extent that the latter is ontological or metaphysical, in the precise sense that essences are appealed to both independently of founding experience and without evidential legitimization, the association, let alone identification, of Husserl’s putative “essentialism” with the ontological and metaphysical preoccupation with essences, is based upon the fundamental mistake of confusing the other with the same. Such a mistake does not, in principle, distinguish the same (Husserl’s finding and articulating of essences) and the other (ontological and metaphysical claims about essences) and is therefore a self-contradiction. The idol characterized by this mistake will hereafter be referred to as the idol of Husserl’s “essentialism.”

#### §5. The Idol of “Internalism”

The finding and articulation of essences for Husserl takes place exclusively in “acts” of phenomenological reflection. There are two fundamental characteristics of this kind of reflection that distinguish it from empirical introspection (inner-perception) and metaphysical apperception.

One, what is reflected in phenomenological reflection and therefore in some sense “within” the regard of such reflection is not an “inner” object in the sense of an object whose interiority is

---

<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, most recently, Dan Zahavi, *Husserl’s Phenomenology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press,

determined on the basis of the putative ontological opposition between inner and outer objects. The interiority of the “inner” object in empirical introspection, however, is determined precisely by such an opposition, in the sense that its defining characteristic as inner perception is maintained to be the effect of the inner being of the object of its perception, the internal nature of which is only intelligible in contradistinction to the “external” being of the object that effects its perception as outer perception. In contrast, the interiority of the reflected content proper to phenomenological reflection is determined by its methodical “immanence” to the intentional regard of such reflection, in the sense that this regard is restricted (by the phenomenological principle of principles and the phenomenological epoché and reduction that regulate this principle) to attending to that which appears to it precisely as it so appears. The methodical immanence characteristic of phenomenological reflection is therefore capable of reflecting perceptions directed *both* toward something inner and something outer, because the “phenomenological” mark of the latter is not ontological but phenomenal, in the precise sense of distinguishing essential features that are found in the reflected phenomena and articulated in essential seeing.

Two, unlike the reflection characterized by metaphysical apperception, in which the specifically reflective moment of reflection is a function of the finite mind’s “mirroring” of the eternal principles of being, phenomenological reflection does not express and therefore does not represent the content it reflects. And, moreover, in phenomenological reflection this content itself does not manifest any temporal designations. On the one hand, phenomenological reflection is not reflective in the metaphorical sense of the projection from the mind of a ray of light that then bends back upon itself in the guise of a reflected image of the timeless whole of which it is a transient part. Rather, the reflective moment of phenomenological reflection brings

to explicit awareness aspects of the soul's inexplicit awareness that present themselves to this explicit awareness in the phenomenological mode of the "already there." That is, what comes to explicit awareness following the "act" of phenomenological reflection is the soul's own awareness of both itself and of something other than itself. Both this self-awareness and the awareness of something other present themselves as already there, ready to be perceived, prior to their coming before the explicit awareness of phenomenological reflection. The priority of the modality of this "already there" is not temporal; it is neither something that happens before (in an order of succession) its being grasped in phenomenological reflection nor something that occurs in every moment of time. As the phenomenal "how" that characterizes the way that that which is grasped in phenomenological reflection appears in its being grasped, the "already there" of the reflected content of such reflection characterizes the mode of presentation that is inseparable from the insuperable horizon within which all phenomena, including time, appear.

Husserl's phenomenology borrows the term "thematization" from psychology to characterize the peculiar character of the explicit awareness of awareness proper to the grasping of that which is reflected in phenomenological reflection. This term is meant to convey descriptively the nature of the experience in which an awareness already going on but not actively attended to is raised to a level of saliency by coming within the ambit of an awareness that is both attentive to itself and to that which appears to and therefore in this attentiveness. There is manifestly nothing conceptual in the nature of this experience. Thematization, as the coming to explicit awareness of awareness, is neither the grasping of something that falls under a concept nor the grasping of something that is itself conceptual. That which appears in thematization in the mode of the "already there" may, of course, be either itself something that falls under a concept or be a concept itself. But from this it does not follow that the apprehension qua thematization characteristic of phenomenological reflection is itself anything conceptual.

The mistaking of the interiority proper to the methodical immanence that characterizes phenomenological reflection with the inwardness of inner perception gives rise to the most resilient and pernicious of all the idols phenomenology whose time is up, the idol of “internalism.” The mistake responsible for this idol is neither the failure to distinguish the same and the other nor their inconsistent distinction that leads to confusing the other with the same, but the taking of the same for the other. The same, inner-perception, is taken for the other, phenomenological reflection, without any awareness that the other is other and therefore not the same.

This idol is therefore, properly speaking, not really a mistake but a mode of self-deception. As such, it arises in a mode of awareness that is unaware that what it thinks it knows it does not know. This mode of awareness is responsible for the idol’s resilience. What makes it so pernicious is the tendency for its deficiency as a mode of awareness to become associated with the “concept” of reflection. Once this occurs, the idol of internalism immediately splinters into a multiplicity of sub-idols, the leading ones of which are the idols of “pre- and non-reflective consciousness,” the idol of “non-reflective reflexive awareness,” the idol of “the most original givenness,” etc. What each of these idols has in common is that they are sub-species of the idol of internalism and its conflation of what is properly an objectively irreducible mode of awareness with an object. When the “interiority” of the explicit awareness characteristic of phenomenological reflection is, nevertheless, taken as determined by the internal nature of the object of its awareness, the association of its awareness with a concept follows “logically.” That is, in the place of the “already there” mode of the inexplicit awareness’ appearance “in” the interiority of phenomenological reflection’s explicit awareness—which is the sine qua non of phenomenological cognition—the idol of internalism places, unawares, the “concept” of reflection as internal perception. Thus, rather than investigate that which appears to reflection in

the mode of the already there, internalism investigates the “logic” of the relationship between the concepts of reflective and pre- or non-reflective consciousness. This logic is articulated as follows: If reflective consciousness presupposes the thematic grasping of its object, then it must stand opposed to a pre-thematic consciousness, non-reflective consciousness; because reflection must “objectify” its object with its thematic apprehension, pre- and non-reflective consciousness must be the more original consciousness and therefore the phenomenologically more privileged phenomenon; Husserl’s phenomenology, by dint of its reflective character, is therefore unsuited (or, only poorly suited) to investigate the pre- and non-reflective consciousness of the most original givenness of phenomena.

Once this logic replaces the conceptually irreducible mode of being of phenomenological reflection, dialectical games and arguments assume the guise of phenomenological investigations. Arguments over whether it is possible for consciousness to be reflexively aware of itself independent of acts of self-reflection, arguments that purport to establish ever more “pre” or “non” reflective dimensions of passive experience (the “concept” of consciousness, because of its “thematic” character, having been rejected as too “theoretical” to capture the most original givenness of phenomena), etc., all have the following in common: the very distinctions they invoke, e.g., the distinction between “pre” reflective and reflective consciousness, between reflective and reflexive consciousness, between active and passive experience, presuppose a mode of awareness that is attentive to their terms without being identical with or otherwise reducible to either term. Hence the distinction between reflective and pre-reflective consciousness points to a mode of awareness that is capable of rendering both manifest without itself being exhausted by either term of this distinction, that is, by either reflective or pre-reflective consciousness. Such a mode of awareness, of course, is precisely what is made evident in phenomenological reflection with its attentiveness to the phenomenological mode of the

“already there” of that which it grasps as appearing before its regard. For instance, the “pre” of pre-reflective consciousness is something that, as a phenomenon, appears to phenomenological reflection in the mode of the “already there,” prior to its being explicitly thematized. What is missed by all the sub species idols of internalism is the non-conceptual and non-objective status of this “pre” and, therefore, its designation of a conceptually and objectively irreducible awareness of awareness.

§6. The Idol of the “Meaning of Being Overall as Presence”

The essential structure of both the inexplicit awareness that is thematized by phenomenological reflection and the explicit awareness that effects this thematization is intentionality. This structure is found in an essential seeing that compares and then varies exemplars of any awareness whatever, and establishes the limit of the manifold exemplars yielded in this manner in the *eidōs* of the a priori correlation between the conscious “intending” of an object and the object itself as an “intentional” object, that is, as an object whose scope and limits are defined by what makes its appearance “in” both the intending of consciousness and in the “how” characteristic of its manner of appearance. To each “moment” of the a priori intentional correlation, in turn, essential seeing also finds and articulates an *eidōs*. The *eidōs* of conscious intending is established as the temporal unity proper to the manifold “modifications” undergone by consciousness following the appearing to it of an intentional object. These modifications manifest the temporality proper to consciousness, a temporality that is “immanent” in the precise sense that it reproduces the intentional genesis of the intentional object’s appearance as an object to consciousness. In any consciousness of an intentional object, the object originally appears in the mode of immediate “presence.” The immediate “presentation” of the object’s presence manifests, as its limit, the “retention” of its presence in the mode of the just-having-been-experienced of the appearance of the object’s presence. The *eidōs* proper to the presence of the

intentional object, as one and the same (invariant) object, is manifest as the persistence of its “prominence” throughout successive modes of retentional modifications. There is also a limit beyond which the prominence of an object exceeds its intentional presence, namely, the general substratum of consciousness toward which the successive modes of retentional consciousness flow. When this limit is reached, the intentional object is no longer present to consciousness.

Having passed beyond the purview of intentional consciousness into the general substratum of consciousness, however, the intentional object does not cease to exist. It remains somehow there, “in” consciousness, but sedimented, beyond the ambit of intentional consciousness and therefore, in some sense, “forgotten.” The evidence for this is overwhelming. Acts of consciousness are always possible that, however imperfectly, are able to “re-awaken” the “past history” of the “original presentation” of an intentional object, such that it is “re-presented.” The intentional object’s presence to consciousness, therefore, is manifestly identical with neither its phenomenological being nor its phenomenological mode of being. On the one hand, the phenomenological being of the intentional object transcends its presence to consciousness as an intentional object. The reawakening, in acts of phenomenological “recollection,” of objects whose prominence has receded into the general substratum of consciousness, bears ample witness to this. On the other hand, the phenomenological mode of this being is inseparable from the intentionality of the past history of its original presentation to consciousness. That is, just as there is a limit beyond which the prominence of the intentional object recedes into the general substratum of consciousness, so, too, there is the limit of the original presentation of the object to consciousness. The limit of the object’s original presentation is manifest in the “pointing back” to ultimate, non-syntactical cores of meaning that characterize the “hidden intentional implications” of the object as the accomplishments of intentionality. These non-syntactical cores of meaning, in turn, point back to their origination in an original presentation to consciousness.

The task of tracing back to its origins “the necessary meaning-history (*Sinnesgeschichte*)” proper to an intentional object is one with the task of establishing “genetically” the possibility of the intentional object’s ideality, that is, the depth possibility of its “static” unity as an invariant in the transience that is characteristic of the acts of thought. Not only does the interpretative failure that defines the “static-genetic” idol of phenomenology go awry precisely here, with its failure to keep distinct the static possibility that establishes an intentional object’s ideality as an invariant from the genetic possibility that reveals the origin of its categorial constituents, but so, too, does another idol whose time is up, the idol of “the meaning of being overall as presence.” Like the “static-genetic” idol, this idol attributes Husserl’s phenomenological preoccupation with the immanent essence of the intentional object to its Cartesianism. However, unlike that idol, which finds an “other” Husserl and therefore another Husserlian phenomenology in the phenomenology of genesis, the idol of “the meaning of being overall as presence” seeks to break with Husserl’s phenomenology on two critical points.

One point is ontological. Husserl’s preoccupation with the *eide* of phenomena, including time, is taken as a signal that the meaning of being overall that guides his investigations has its basis in a derivative mode of time, namely, the present. Being as presence is the mantra of this idol, and its critical claim is that rather than establish in a truly originary way the meaning of being overall, Husserl’s phenomenology is guided by its unquestioning pre-understanding of being’s meaning as what is exemplified in the being present of an object to the cognitive intentionality of the subject. This cognitive intentionality, in turn, is determined by the copula of predicative judgment, the “is,” wherein it is precisely the coming to presence of the category (*eidos*) in the fulfillment of the “positing” proper to the apophantic logos, the proposition, and not any “real” predicate, that composes the phenomenon of the being’s meaning.

The other point is methodological. The meaning of being overall cannot be interrogated by a method that relies on reflection, because the immanence characteristic of the intentional relation of the reflected to the act of reflection is already determined in its mode of being as presence. Guided by various “formal indications” that the meaning of being overall is not originally presence, phenomenology must recast its method in a manner that permits its true phenomenon, the meaning of being overall, to be called into question and therefore investigated. Such a recasting must therefore be hermeneutical, in the sense of the deliberate interpretative unfolding of a phenomenon that, in contrast to the presence of an object, proximally and for the most part does not present itself and therefore appear. In order to get at the meaning of being overall, then, ontology must become phenomenology, must seek out the showing itself from itself of this meaning. Because, however, what does show itself proximally and for the most part are beings in their presence, the hermeneutical method of phenomenology must do “violence” to the ordinary way in which the phenomenon of being shows itself, must “win” from this phenomenon the original self-showing of that which makes possible the derivative self-showing of beings in their presence.

There are two fundamental reasons why the idol of the “meaning of being overall as presence” is an idol whose time is up. One, presence is not the dominant meaning of being in Husserl’s phenomenology. The intrinsic possibility of an intentional object is not only inseparable from its sedimented history, but this sedimented history is also inseparable from the intentional history of its original presentation to consciousness. Neither the reactivation of this sedimented history in recollection nor the investigation of its intentional history is guided by the presupposition that the being of the intentional object under investigation is exhausted or otherwise determined by its enduring “prominence” to consciousness’ intentional regard, as the idol of the “meaning of being overall as presence” has it. Moreover, the positing of being in the predicative judgment is neither

the only “site” wherein being appears as a phenomenon for Husserl nor the most privileged one. Being is also posited in the collective judgment and both, the copulative and the collective positing of what is, are modes of being whose meaning is founded in the more original being of the life world and accomplishments of intentionality’s most original being, transcendental subjectivity. Two, the hermeneutical method’s “project” of uncovering the showing itself from itself of the original meaning of being overall is guided by two suppositions that its method, in principle, is incapable of accounting for. The first concerns the supposition that being itself has a meaning overall, that beyond the meaning of the being of this or that being, or even the whole of beings, *being itself* has a meaning. (The point here is not that this supposition is necessarily false, but only that it is something that the hermeneutic method is incapable of establishing because it functions as its method’s point of departure. To wit, that that which the *Auslegung* of its method ultimately uncovers is the *Verstehen* of the meaning of being overall, and therewith its disclosure.) The second supposition is that the showing itself from itself of this meaning is something that occurs when the “formal concept” of the phenomenon is “deformalized.” (Again, the point here is not that this supposition is necessarily false, but only that the hermeneutical method is, in principle, unable to establish its truth. To do so the method would have to ground its guiding *transcendental* assumption that *Auslegung* is capable of rendering the structure and content of *Verstehen* transparent, which it is patently incapable of doing, given that its founding methodical “principle” is the circularity and therefore, potentially at least, transparency of *Auslegung* itself. That is, its founding principle presupposes what it would itself have to establish in order to justify itself “scientifically.”<sup>2</sup>)

---

<sup>2</sup> Heidegger, of course, was well aware of this when he distinguished (in the Introduction to *Being and Time*) the “preliminary concept” of phenomenology and its task of establishing the existential analytic of Dasein, from the “idea of phenomenology,” which was to establish the existential concept of science and therewith the truth of the structural hermeneutical claims advanced in the existential analytic. This distinction generally, and the methodical impact on his conception of phenomenology of his abandonment of the project of establishing the idea of phenomenology in particular, has not been given the attention it deserves in the literature. To the extent that

§7. The Idol of the “End of Metaphysics”

What makes these two reasons for the time being up of the idol of the “meaning of being overall as presence” compelling is also what makes Husserlian phenomenology contemporary after more than a century, and, indeed, still more contemporary today than all the idols enumerated so far that have claimed that banner for their own. These reasons are compelling because of the fundamentally non-systematic character of Husserlian phenomenology. As originally formulated by Husserl, transcendental phenomenology rests on two great methodical pillars: phenomenological reflection and essential seeing. Irreducible and inseparable, these pillars can never be systematized in the sense of being unified under a single concept or architectonic. The awareness of awareness and, with this, the quick of thought and its perduring object thematized in phenomenological reflection can never be subordinated or reduced to that which essential seeing uncovers as its invariant, and not just because the one is of a nature to remain constant and the other of a nature to move. The very movement of the thought that finds and describes the *eide* of that which shows up in reflection (the phenomena of phenomenology), the recollection that awakens the sedimented history of the phenomenological being of the object in question (the genesis of the possibility of this being), and, finally, the intentional history of the original presentation of the being in question that is uncovered from its possibility, all defy being brought together to form a whole, a σύστημα, now and for all time. The phenomenon of intentionality, which manifests both the being of the subject matter of phenomenology and mode of being of its method, not only cannot accomplish something like this, but it is precisely the step-by-step uncovering of the intrinsic possibility of the intentionality itself of any phenomenon (and the results of this uncovering) that provides the lasting testament to this very impossibility.

---

Gadamer’s hermeneutical philosophy appropriates Heidegger’s methodically hermeneutical considerations without addressing Heidegger’s own provisional understanding of their scientificity, and this extent is considerable, Gadamer’s own hermeneutics is based upon this second supposition.

This impossibility most forcefully manifests itself when the investigation of the intentional history of phenomenology itself faces its own origin in the two highest sciences of Greek philosophy, Plato's dialectics and Aristotle's first philosophy. Husserl's phenomenology stands opposed to these sciences in the following manner: the legitimization of the possibility proper to the intentional history that is inseparable from the objects investigated by phenomenology, the *eide*, points to a limit that is beyond the sedimented past history of phenomenology itself, namely, it points to the actual history of philosophy. That is, the phenomenology of phenomenology that Husserl recognized in his late writings is necessary in order to ground fully phenomenology itself as a mode of philosophical cognition, can only be realized when the necessity of an essential connection between the intentional history of the original presentation of the intentional objects of its cognition and the actual history of thought is recognized. Husserl himself came close to this recognition when, in his last great work (the *Crisis*-texts), he both glimpsed the historicity that is inseparable from the origin of the a priori objects of natural scientific cognition and proposed the method of a "historical reflection" as the means of investigating this origin. Husserl's own, fragmentary investigations of this historicity, however, fell short of legitimizing either the formalized symbolic cognition that defines the mathesis universalis of modern mathematics or the ideal cognition characteristic of Euclidean geometry. They fell short, in other words, of "deformalizing" the concepts and cognition that are the most basic suppositions of modern mathematical physics by tracing them, and the ideal concepts they presuppose, back to their origin in the pre-scientific life world.

Despite this shortcoming, Husserl's *Crisis*-texts nevertheless adumbrate the methodical protocols necessary to deformalize cognition and therewith to legitimize the knowing subject's most basic concepts and principles from the originary evidence that alone can provide such legitimization. The first protocol concerns the "zig-zag" movement of phenomenological

historical reflection. From the “zig” of the philosophical crisis of the present, namely, the loss of the integrity of ἐπιστήμη that is inseparable from its formalization, the “zag” of reflection moves toward the ideal meanings presupposed and thus “sedimented” by this formalization. From the “zig” of these meanings, in turn, the “zag” of reflection then moves toward the intentional accomplishments that are inseparable from the possibility of these idealities. Husserl’s own account of these accomplishments in the fragmentary investigation “On the Origin of Geometry” and in the main text of the *Crisis*, however, are unsatisfactory, and not just because they are fragmentary. As Derrida has pointed out more forcefully than anyone else, Husserl’s attempts in the *Crisis*-texts to legitimize the origin proper to the ideality of the ideal in the “passage to the limit” that characterizes the finding and grasping of an essence in essential seeing cannot help but end in aporia. They do so because the possibility of the style that prefigures the variation of the exemplary manifold that yields as its limit the *eidōs* remains unaccounted for in Husserl’s methodology. The origin of this style, of the “as what” that permits the initial exemplar to be singled out, remains a presupposition of both the finding and grasping of the invariance wherein its *eidōs* becomes manifest.

But the conclusion that Derrida draws from this aporia, that phenomenology therefore remains in principle incapable of investigating the origin of the being of the ideality of the ideal because it remains the ineluctable supposition of its eidetic method, and that an ultimate consequence of this supposition is that phenomenology at once remains and terminates metaphysics, gives rise to a final idol whose time I want to suggest is up, the idol of the “end of metaphysics.” Unlike all the other idols I have called attention to, this one does not have its basis in the failure either to distinguish or to distinguish consistently the most basic structural suppositions of thought, but in what only very hesitantly and qualifiedly must be characterized as a failure of epistemic nerve in the proximity of the ἰδέα τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ. The origin of the ideality of the ideal, of that which makes

phenomenology's essential seeing possible, concerns not only the problem of establishing the possibility of the style that guides its cognition, but also, the origin of the "motivation" to secure such cognition in the first place. For the Husserl of the *Crisis* this motivation is decidedly not epistemological but ethical. The second methodical protocol necessary to deformalize cognition adumbrates this motivation in its account of the ethical character of the radical self-responsibility of the phenomenological philosopher, a responsibility that is borne of the failure of the highest science of contemporary man, mathematical physics, to address, let alone attempt to provide an answer to, the question of the best way to live. Husserl's dream on the eve of the nightmare of the second world war of a rational ethics secured once and for all by phenomenology's "apodictic" methodology, strikes us today, of course, as ludicrous. But this was a dream dreamt in the shadow of reason's formalization, the very thing Husserl himself, perhaps more than any 20<sup>th</sup> century philosopher, was struggling to overcome. By way of a conclusion, I want to suggest that behind the motivation for this dream is the shadow cast by something much more daemonic than knowledge's formalization, namely, the shadow whose origin is found not in the dissociation of the highest science from the good but precisely in the recognition that the "condition of possibility" of the being proper to the ideality of the ideal lies not in the ideal's epistemic nature but in the proximity of this nature to the idea of the good. Both of the highest sciences of Greek philosophy, dialectics and first philosophy, remain unintelligible without the recognition of this proximity. But they also remain unintelligible with this recognition, as least so long as the vantage of this recognition is informed by the conceptual level of knowledge's formalization. That the idol of the "end of metaphysics" is borne of something more than the shying away from the unintelligibility of this possibility, namely, from the possibility that it may not be, after all, so unintelligible, and that the two protocols adumbrated in Husserl's final methodical reflections point in the direction of reawakening once again this most serious of all

metaphysical possibilities, stands as the final testament of phenomenology's fundamental opposition to metaphysics.