

## Gérard Granel

### Husserl, Edmund (1859-1938)<sup>1</sup>

Edmund Husserl is quite simply the greatest philosopher to have appeared since the Greeks. This judgment, which differs from that of partisans of “Husserlian philosophy”—and despite, no less, the adversaries of it—, endures because it attains in the work of the founder of phenomenology a general signification and a historical scope which go well beyond what this work, insofar as it is also of course a certain philosophy among others, possesses in itself as “strengths” and as “weaknesses” (generally speaking as “limits” proper to an epoch, to a man and to a school). It attains, indeed, and recognizes in the work an effort to render modern humanity capable of that which no humanity since the Greeks has any longer been capable: life itself as life in and by the “philosophical,” that is to say in and by the radical responsibility with respect to the true and to being, center and source of an articulated unification of all practice and of all theory at whatever level to which they belong.

This Husserlian project regarding a human capability concerning the question of being has been taken up, but outside phenomenology, by Heidegger. And the Heideggerian posterity, in the habitual intersecting of paternal incomprehension and parricidal fidelity, in short, this succession which is itself “Greek,” altogether tragic, is probably the only one that matters. But it is certainly not the only one which has manifested itself in the public life of the spirit, which is to say in culture and in the university. Numerous, or rather innumerable, are the philosophers who owed it to Husserl to have found the means and the form, the path and the language to be *able* to be philosophers between the first World War and the ten years which followed the second. That extends from Max Scheler (*Le Formalism dans l'éthique*, 1916) to Maurice Merleau-Ponty, by way of Eugen Fink, Ludwig Landgrebe, Roman Ingarden, Emmanuel Levinas, and the first Sartre, not to mention the philosophy students who in turn read Husserl from 1930 to 1955, as one read Hegel from 1806 to 1835. Today Husserl is enduring the kind of purgatory, or imperceptible effacement rather, which affects as we know (but at a moment

---

<sup>1</sup> Article published in the *Encyclopaedia Universalis*, Paris, 1971. [Trans.— It originally appeared under the title, “Husserl the Greek, Husserl the Modern.” The text, on which this translation is based, was later published in *Traditionis traditio*, Paris, Gallimard, 1972, p. 71-92.]

and for a duration which we do not know) the greatest of works. This time of decline and of relative isolation only signifies that the cutting edge of a new reading of phenomenology is being sharpened, far from any affiliations with schools and any militant refutations, a reading which, in the dismantling of its modern sepulcher, will search piously and accurately for the contours of this “Greek” thought.

## I. FROM MATHEMATICS AND FRANZ BRENTANO TO PHENOMENOLOGY

Edmund Gustav Albrecht Husserl was born in Prossnitz (Austro-Hungary), of Adolf Abraham Husserl and of Julie Selinger, both of Jewish ascendency. After his secondary studies at the Deutsche Staatsgymnasium in Olmutz, he followed for three semesters at the University of Leipzig, in 1876-1877, courses in physics, mathematics, astronomy and philosophy. Beginning in April, 1878, he spent six semesters at the University of Berlin where, while continuing his studies in philosophy, he principally studied mathematics, with Leopold Kronecker and Karl Weierstrass as professors. In March of 1881, in Vienna, he followed the teachings of Leo Königsberger, under whose direction, on November 29, 1882, he was promoted to doctor in philosophy with a dissertation entitled *Contributions to the Theory of the Calculation of Variations (Beiträge zur Theorie der Variationsrechnung)*. During the summer semester of 1883, Husserl was an assistant to Weierstrass in Berlin; but in the 1883-1884 semester, he returned to Vienna to pursue his studies in philosophy with Franz Brentano, with whom he quickly became friends. On April 8, 1886, he converted to the Christian faith and entered the Lutheran Evangelical Church, where on August 1<sup>st</sup> of the same year he received his baptism. In October, recommended by Franz Brentano, he joined Carl Stumpf at Halle-Wittenberg University where in one year he completed his *Habilitationsschrift* with a study on the concept of number (*Über den Begriff der Zahl. Psychologische Analysen*).

On August 6, 1887, he married Malvina Steinschneider, a primary-school teacher of Jewish ascendency who had shortly before converted to Lutheranism, with whom he will have three children. On October 24, 1887, he gave his inaugural lesson at the University of Halle on the ends and the tasks of metaphysics (*Die Ziele und Aufgaben der Metaphysik*). From the summer semester of 1887 to that of 1894, he taught as privatdozent à the University of Halle, where he was named professor in a personal capacity on the 1<sup>st</sup> of August, 1894. In September of 1901, the faculty of philosophy at the University of Göttingen recruited Husserl as “professor extraordinarius,” but the same university, in May of 1905, refused him the title of “professor ordinarius,” for “lack of scientific qualification”; however, on June 28, 1906, he received the

ordinariat in a personal capacity. The first of April, 1916, he was recruited as ordinary professor by the University of Fribourg-en-Brisgau, where he became Heinrich Rickert's successor. The subject of his inaugural lesson, on May 3, 1917, was *Pure Phenomenology, its Domain of Research and its Method*. Named secret counsellor to the court by the Grand-Duke of Bade in 1917, he received the title of "doctor juris honoris causa" from the law faculty at the University of Bonn on August 3, 1919. Approached in July of 1923 by the University of Berlin to be Ernst Troeltsch's successor, he ultimately turned the honor down and became honorary professor on March 23, 1928. His successor was Martin Heidegger.

In March, 1933, Husserl was stripped of his professorship because of his Jewish ascendancy. This exclusion was at first delayed, the motive being that Husserl had given one of his sons to Germany in the first World War, but it was finally, and without appeal, renewed in 1936. Husserl died at the age of seventy-two at Fribourg-en-Brisgau.

## II. HUSSERL THE GREEK

### a) *Phenomenology's Essential Signification*

We'll begin by heeding the words from the end, those from *The Crisis of the European Sciences (Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften, 1936)*, "testament" of the thinker in which what is bequeathed is the testament itself, that is the "Alliance" from which he has always spoken, and of which he has exclusively spoken "by way of" all the themes and all the investigations of his immense work, the Alliance of Truth with Humanity:

To bring latent reason to the understanding of its own possibilities and open thereby to insight the possibility of metaphysics as a true possibility, this is the only path to getting the immense work of the realization of metaphysics, in other words of universal philosophy, underway. It is only in this way that the question can be decided of knowing whether the *Telos* which was born for European humanity with the birth of Greek philosophy: to want to be a humanity issuing from philosophical reason, and not be able to be but in this way—in the infinite movement in which reason passes from latent to manifest and the infinite tendency to self-normativity by this truth and human authenticity of its own—will have been but a historically identifiable, factual delusion, the contingent heritage of a contingent humanity, lost among completely other humanities and historicities; or whether, on the contrary, what broke out for the first

time in Greek humanity is not rather precisely that which, as entelechy, is included by essence in humanity as such.<sup>2</sup>

The wrong way of facing such a text is to mask the fear that its force of historial decision inspires in us under various “superiorities” that we feel capable of putting to use with regard to it, as with regard to Husserl’s work in its entirety. In particular, today we have all the means at our disposal not only not to consent to confound the work of *philosophy* (if we continue even, provisionally, to make use of this ancient word) with the work of the manifestation of *reason*, but also to grasp already in the “infinite” character of this work of manifestation, that is in the pure and simple “and so on, and so forth”<sup>3</sup> of an interminable enterprise, the drawback of an infinity in another, and more radical, sense, that of an original indetermination. We are also capable, raising to the clarity of knowledge the famous sentence pronounced by Kant in the obscurity of the principle of jurisdiction critique—that “truth” is but a “seductive word”—, of pressing Husserl to the wall of a notion as flat (which to boot he himself levelled to the absolute surface, which is also to say to absolute superficiality) as that of apodicticity (or of pure presence). In any event, we are, in short, much more “learned” and much “stronger” than Husserl was, because we are much more learned and much stronger than he could have been.

---

<sup>2</sup> [Trans. —Because Granel is himself the French translator of *Krisis*, and because key terms introduced from his translation of this fragment will be operative in the argument deployed in the body of the paper, it has seemed worth attempting to provide a viable English rendition of it, instead of inserting here David Carr’s translation, which I give below. Doubtless the two most significant of these terms, which will remain operative for Granel even in his later, more nuanced readings of Husserl (see notably “L’Europe de Husserl,” in *Ecrits logiques et politiques*, Paris, Galilée, 1990, p. 37-58), are “humanities” and “historicities,” to render *Menschheiten* and *Geschichtlichkeiten*. Carr, in 1970, argues against what will become Granel’s choices for rendering these words in the 1976 French publication, translating them instead as “civilisations” and “histories,” both in this passage and on most other occasions in *Crisis*. Here is Carr’s translation: “To bring latent reason to the understanding of its own possibilities and thus to bring to insight the possibility of metaphysics as a true possibility—this is the only way to put metaphysics or universal philosophy on the strenuous road to realization. It is the only way to decide whether the *telos* which was inborn in European humanity at the birth of Greek philosophy—that of humanity which seeks to exist, and is only possible, through philosophical reason, moving endlessly from latent to manifest reason and forever seeking its own norms through this, its truth and genuine human nature—whether this *telos*, then, is merely a factual, historical delusion, the accidental acquisition of merely one among many other civilisations [*Menschheiten*] and histories [*Geschichtlichkeiten*], or whether Greek humanity was not rather the first breakthrough to what is essential to humanity as such, its *entelechy*.” *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Philosophy*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1970, p. 15. Except where otherwise indicated, the translations provided of Husserl’s text are renderings of Granel’s French translation.]

<sup>3</sup> [Trans. —See “The Vienna Lecture,” in *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Philosophy*, *op. cit.*, p. 278. See also Granel’s essay, “L’Europe de Husserl,” *op. cit.*, p. 42]

For it is not a matter here of a difference between men, but of a difference between the ages of humanity, that is, between the ages to which men belong with the totality of their works and their qualities, the former defined and the latter employed within the essential limits, those of a “play [*jeu*] of the possible,” of which none are satisfactory but which no one oversteps, no natural power being able to breach them, and the very freedom of spirit confounding itself with the “playing” of this game [*le “jouer” de ce jeu*]. Indeed, neither Marx, nor Freud, nor Saussure, neither Nietzsche nor Heidegger (to make of these names the index-markers of the limits and the rules of our age and of our play, that is of the age and the play which define the “us” and the “our”) enable us to repeat the intention and the task of which Husserl lived and died. The networks of the economic, of the unconscious and of language, those of destruction and of difference, not only cannot adjoin themselves to the terminal connections of the networks of consciousness and of ideality, of construction and of presence, but furthermore undo in the undertow of their own power the initial ties of the others (their “principles,” where it recognizes already the product and the reverse side of an alternative and immemorial weaving), submerge their horizons, arrest in place the very movement of their undertakings, relegate their gods to simple statuettes. There is no more sense today in wanting to be Husserlian than in wanting to be Leibnizian or Aristotelian. It is even with the “passing” of Husserl, sometime in the fifties, that it became evident that all metaphysics, and all of metaphysics, had been swept over the horizon and that a new sky of preoccupation had spread everywhere its clear night and its unknown figure.

What is there to do other than *recognize* this situation of effacement, of pivoting around an axis which, despite all the esteem, had already hollowed out, for example around Maurice Merleau-Ponty, an immense void, even more decisive than that of the latter’s “sudden” death which seemed to have summoned him: Merleau-Ponty, thanks to whom precisely philosophy, and precisely that of Husserl, had one last time exalted us just a few years previously? When the giant wheel of a world turns, and the “victors” great or small rise with cups filled from the stream of a new language, all those who go down, whether they be small or great, living or dead, are completely dead.

Were all this to come true however—and all this is true in a *certain* manner—we will not have ceased being preceded in everything we have just said by Husserl’s text. For the age and the difference of ages, conceived as they must be precisely to bring about totality and to accomplish the irrevocable, are necessarily the age and the difference in age of “humanity,” not that of the age classes of men, nor that which brings about such and such an evolution in such and such a body of knowledge or any other practice, least of all in phenomena of fashion. All

we have said is therefore either a pretentious combination of supposed “superiorities” or else the enumeration of a certain number of indications that effectively illustrate that between Husserlian phenomenology and “us” humanity has turned a page. And it is in that precisely that Husserl precedes us, and that his concept of humanity is still too difficult for us.

b) *The Concept of Humanity and the Possibility of Philosophy.*

It remains necessary, however, if we are to comprehend this, to be able to understand the very term “humanity.” The mistake would be to believe that the concept used here by Husserl is a vague general concept (a *conceptus communis*), something like a Husserlian rendition of the famous “human nature” that the sciences (qualified as “human” precisely) have laid to rest. The difficulty comes, on the contrary, from the fact that for Husserl the concept of humanity is a singular, entirely historical, concept, which separates Humanity as *a* humanity, and its History as *a* history, from “completely other humanities and historicities.” The humanity distinguished here is clearly indicated in the text as the “Greek” humanity. What is called “Greek” is the humanity that is capable of the *possibility* of philosophy, and it is called such not only because the first humanity that revealed itself capable of this possibility was indeed the Greek people, but also because any renewal [*reprise*] of knowledge and of will-to-be-capable can only occur in an explicit and determined relation with the form and the limits of the Greek attempt. It is precisely to the extent however that modern humanity, despite the presence within it—alongside a mathematical science and a science of nature—of a whole series of metaphysical *problems* gathered together and treated in metaphysical *works* (certain of which are immense), has never shown itself capable of recovering the *possibility*, which is to say the very essence of philosophical work, that there has not yet been (and one may even add, contrary this time to the Husserlian hope, that there never will be) a *modern humanity*. Or, more precisely, modern humanity belongs to those humanities, and its history to those historicities, which are enigmatically said to be “completely other” than the “Greek” humanity and history.

In what sense “completely other”? If Greek humanity and history are the humanity and history wherein there “broke out for the first time” the “entelechy” of being-human, the other humanities are those in which being-human has remained “potential,” like a sort of infinite material resource which hasn’t found the means of development in which it would appear “having its bearing in its accomplishment.” The separation pronounced here, the same as that between the Βαρβάροι and the Ἕλληνες which forms the basis of history for Thucydides and of

politics for Aristotle, is precisely that which, lost in all the superiorities of our age with respect to philosophy, we risk no longer being able to risk, failing to understand and even to perceive it. The same goes here as for when a people no longer recognizes itself, or when a God withdraws: a bygone valor retreats into the fabulous. Just like the Founder however who separates History—the valor of λόγος—from Nature and from the Divine, and erects in order to enclose it the shelter of the Πόλις, Husserl reawakens in European humanity the *Idea* and its separation. He separates *us* from other humanities as the only people who *know* being and truth, that is who first inhabit and accomplish, and then theoretically understand and act in the very possibility of the “philosophical.” Of this decision of which he wants us once again to be capable, he writes: “by it alone will it be decided if European humanity bears within itself an absolute Idea instead of being a simple anthropological type like *China* or *India*; and decided at the same time whether the spectacle of the Europeanisation of all the foreign humanities testifies in itself to the valor of an absolute meaning, relevant to the sense of the World and not to a historical non-sense.”<sup>4</sup>

We may begrudge him this call for a capability of historical decision, pretend, for instance, to believe in some kind of ethnocentrism, malignantly mistake ourselves about the idea of Europe, worry out loud about the “old Aristotelian concept” of entelechy. These are so many ways of not seeing that “Ethnos”—the “people” invoked here—is only the people-of-being, “Europe,” the imaginary geography of this difference, “Telos,” what gives its bearing to the *non-natural* history of being-human as “World” history, in comparison with which all the humanities of the past and of today (and *within us* as well, especially as “good Europeans,” soldiers of science and of consciousness) are but the carriers from day to day of an eternal destiny which moves by civilizations as by herds *within* the World, depositing on cave walls (or galleries) the highest of arts, raising from poetic rumblings which always signal the assembly of men words of the cruelest love and of the highest wisdom, maintaining morals, wars, industries, raising also machines of the theoretical towards the sky, towards bodies, towards souls, and finally (and first of all) towards the pure ingeniousness of mathematical combinations. But without decision. An animal detained by Logos, and not a “living-being” which detains it by the ability to turn itself back upon it [*se re-volter sur lui*] as the absolutely non-natural enclosure and seat of a being-human absolutely non-animal. Such however *is* Greek

---

<sup>4</sup> [Carr’s translation: “Only then could it be decided whether European humanity bears within itself an absolute idea, rather than being merely an empirical anthropological type like “China” or “India”; it could be decided whether the spectacle of the Europeanisation of all other civilizations bears witness to the rule of an absolute meaning, one which is proper to the sense, rather than to the historical non-sense, of the world.” *Op. cit.* p. 16. —Trans.]

man, the first-born he too among the dead, utterly dead and living as dead, a ghost returned *from the World itself* amidst smiling nature who doesn't know its limit and simply disposes itself there. He, *knowing*, indisposed, omni-disposed, second Oedipus.

We may begrudge this having to recover the difference between Greek humanity and any other humanity and retreat—our spirit like the eyes of animals before fire—before the decision of being. Meanwhile, however, we will continue to *contaminate* “the foreign humanities” by the power proper to the science, to the practice, to the culture—and generally to the “mode of being”—that is European. For modern reason reposes upon a metaphysical substructure that is already elaborated (were this elaboration itself naïve) and all its products draw from there a mortal power with respect to the natural fructifications of humanities remaining outside such a decision. If we no longer have the valor, we still carry the illness. *In any case*, that is whether we want to or not, whether we know it or not, we are in the process of unifying the Earth and the peoples it carries by the infinite production of reason in its “pure” and of consciousness in its “proper.” The question is only that of knowing whether modern humanity, which “humanizes” all the others in the sense that it “modernizes” them, will itself evade for a long time yet the task of recognition, that is of the exploration and the determination of the nature and the limits of its metaphysical substructure, a task which itself implies a rediscovered power with respect to the possibility (or essence) of metaphysics as such, in other words the ability to make of being and of truth a question once again, a place of struggle and of decision. Should modern humanity fail in this way to become, in a manner unknown to the Greeks themselves, but of the same valor as them, a non-contingent humanity, it will be as a slave that European Man will suffer his destiny, and as a tyrant that he will guide that of others.

Husserl's question, *the* question which assures for his work its historical reach and its essential signification, is a question therefore about the meaning and the foundation of modernity. It is indeed certain that this question was not grasped at the beginning in the form and with the assurance with which it is formulated in the testament from which we have begun. But one may say that it too, this question, is the “entelechy” of all the “investigations”—logical, then transcendental, and finally “absolute”—in the course of which phenomenology little by little manifested itself in that of which it is “capable.” These stages however of its development, despite an undeniable unity, are very different from each other. They shall each time have to be specified therefore in the very detail of our exposition, a work in which will reappear on several occasions the essential questions that have appeared up to this point.



### III. THE “PLATONIST FOUNDATION OF LOGIC”

The question about the meaning and the foundation of modernity, in which is gathered together all the other questions of phenomenology, first arose for Husserl, at the time of the *Logische Untersuchungen* (1900), in a kind of indeterminate and precious marginality with respect to the two modern disciplines which alone could be, or pretend to be, “competent” with respect to logicity in general: “psychology” (as a branch of the modern science of nature) and the “theory of knowledge” (as a branch of the modern science of spirit). The good fortune of philosophy, which would find itself strengthened in these investigations and soon grasp its idea under the term “phenomenology,” is certainly that Husserl did not start out as a philosopher, but as a mathematician. For a second time, between 1891 (*Philosophie der Arithmetik*) and 1900 (*Logische Untersuchungen*), the Pythagorean oracle inscribed by Plato on the pediment of metaphysics: “let no one ignorant of geometry enter here,” confirmed itself.

This point of departure in a science is not to be understood in the sense of a subordination of logic to the order of the sciences, but on the contrary as the foundation of all the sciences in “logic” as their “possibility of principle.” This is what Husserl will later (in the introduction to *Formale und transzendente Logik*) call the “Platonist foundation of logic.” The reference to Plato here is essential in that it marks the radical difference in Husserlian work with respect to all modern philosophical work (and consequently demonstrates by other means the “Greek” in Husserl and his power of decision). Husserl’s thesis is indeed that “the original relationship between logic and science has undergone in modern times a remarkable reversal.”<sup>5</sup> What this signifies is that not only modern mathematics and the modern sciences of nature, but also modern metaphysics itself, *are only sciences*. By “science” one must understand here the “naïve and immediate effectuation of theoretical reason,” that is, an “effectuation” of knowledge which has cut itself off from the question of the “true” and no longer aspires to “principial” radicality in its understanding and justification of itself: which no longer aspires to the *Idea* or to *Logos*.

It is conversely in the recovery of this Platonist aspiration that Husserl recaptures at a level unknown to the moderns the possibility of philosophical decision, which he calls “logic.” “Logic,” in the *Logical Investigations*, is firstly to be understood as the adjective of *Logos*. It is in a secondary manner that these investigations owe their title to the fact that the “subject” of

---

<sup>5</sup> [Trans. —See Husserl’s introduction to *Formal and Transcendental Logic* (1929), tr. Dorian Cairns, The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1969, p. 2.]

their investigation covers indeed the ensemble of domains that connote, for us moderns, and without their unity appearing to us plainly, such a title: reflections on mathematics, reflections on formal systems in general, then generalities on the sciences and perhaps generalities also on the very notion of signification. Indeed, fundamental investigations never owe their *title* (that is their validity and their title at the same time) to their subject matter, but to their order and to the principle of this order. From this comes the fact that Husserl's gather together not only the "logical" subjects enumerated above, but also, and above all even, developments which, for us moderns, belong to disciplines unrelated to *our* "logic" and which we would put away in a back drawer where modern philosophy, as the simply naïve effectuation of reason, has put what should have been its form and which is no longer but the misunderstood generality of its subject: "general philosophy." Such is the case here with developments on the idea of pure grammar, on that of intentional content, that of categorial intuition, etc.

a) *Modern Metaphysics and Mathematics*

Two remarks must be made about this initial link between the mathematical point of departure and the reopening of a Platonist dimension of logic in the early Husserl. The first concerns the metaphysics of the moderns, several times "accused" already of consisting of a natural or naïve exercise of theoretical power. Indeed, something in this accusation risks being not at all understood, on one hand because mathematics, before being the occasion of Husserl's rediscovery of "Greek" Logos and Eidos, had already been the first science to undergo a *modern* development (between the generation of Fermat, Pascal, Descartes and that of Leibniz and Newton) bringing in its wake not only a *modern physics*, that is a mathematical physics, but furthermore the project of a *modern metaphysics* conceived as a "mathesis universalis" or as philosophy "more geometrico," hence mathematics is not in itself what would lead thought towards a "principlial radicality" of the "Greek" type, and its example—which Kant will take for this reason as the "corrupting" example par excellence of metaphysics—may even be said, on the contrary, to coerce thought to exert itself simply as a science, on a "naïve" or "natural" basis, and not to divert it from it. And, on the other hand, because philosophy itself has known (and Husserl knows it has known) of "efforts [...] tending to found [...] true logic," which is to say, precisely, the radicality of effort in which "logic precedes [...] the sciences." Such is even, for Husserl, the meaning of that "first philosophy" which is Descartes' *Meditations*. How, then, is one to understand that "phenomenology's good fortune," as we have affirmed, "is certainly that Husserl did not start out as a philosopher, but as a mathematician," and, as he himself

affirmed this time, that “the original relationship between logic and science has undergone in modern times a remarkable reversal”?

On the first point, it is certain that mathematics, no more than any other knowledge which is not that of the True or of Logos *themselves*, but which, like science, receives objects on the *averted* basis of their “already given” logicity, or of a buried eideticity, cannot guide thought in its effort at principial radicality. Moreover, it is not simply because he was a mathematician that Husserl discovered phenomenological valor. But it is indeed because he was sufficiently immersed in mathematical practice to perceive the hiatus between the determined exercise of mathematical ideality and the “psychological” or “theory of knowledge” discourses which tried to render an account of it, that he was referred to an originary “logical” base or consistency of sorts, in comparison to which the investigation of these supposedly explicative and ultimate discourses appeared on the contrary as exterior points of view, naturally or objectively situated “elsewhere” than in the mathematical thing itself: situated “in the world,” and in a real region within it cut off from any exercise of the Idea, the region of “man’s soul.” It thereby occurred to him little by little—and this is the second point—that any explanation of knowledge (and not only of mathematical knowledge) that found its point of departure in the evidence of a concept of knowledge as a certain power of the soul and which saw in the soul itself—as is indeed implied by the term in the traditional sedimentation of its meaning—the particularity proper to the natural living-being encountered in the World and called “man,” lost, amidst the consequences of this “evidence” of de facto beginnings and of real belongings, all possibility of adhering faithfully to another order and to another consecution, the order and the consecution of the “origins” (eidetic, logical—in the sense of Logos—radical, in short: phenomenological). Indeed, these origins have no more relation with the “de facto beginnings” than ἀρχή for the Greeks had a relation with γινόμενον, or, put differently, the order and the consecution of the *intentional* assets do not reduplicate and do not overlay the *real* ones, and certainly do not *originate* with them.

This reversal of the real and the ideal is precisely what the philosophy of modern times has not been capable of, which has little by little corrupted its conception (after always having obscured it) of mathematics and of logic, that of their relationship, and finally that which it has had of itself as philosophy. Hence modern philosophers, as modern “logicians,” have believed in an empire of the formal of which mathematics would only have been a province, whereas on the contrary the mathematical form of theory is the only form of treatment possible of anything which, *in a determined sense*, might be called “formal,” and this because they dispensed with efforts demanding the elaboration of an eidetic, in other words of an ontology of the formal.

And if they dispensed with them, it is certainly not the effect of some kind of theoretical laziness, but indeed that of the limits inherent to their natural conception of the theoretical: in the final analysis, the self-transparency of consciousness in the establishment of ideality, the modern myth of *rational evidence*. Hence their philosophy itself is conceived merely in the manner of a “science,” that is of a knowledge of a natural domain: the analytic of the human soul, the decomposition of its powers and the search for their articulation. If however thought is not a real or natural dimension, being not the particularity of a living-being in the world, but the absolutely non-subsisting empire of principle-idealities, then modern philosophy as a science of the soul, as a transcendental psychology, is an immense misunderstanding of the exigencies of Logos, and *everything* in it, the very concept of science, that of logic, that of philosophy as science, would have to be committed to a hazardous treatment which makes of modern metaphysics a work of pure geniality, obscure in its principles and purely proliferating in its content, liable at every instant of permitting what commands to pass under the domination of what is commanded, condemned finally to destroying itself in criticism or disgust, or worse: to no longer understanding itself at all, becoming a ruin before its own eyes, an indecipherable and abandoned monument, in the midst of which, however, modern humanity, with all its sciences and all its efficiencies, “dwells” like the bands of monkeys in the temples of Angkor.

It is thus not at all mathematics which is corruptive of modern metaphysics. It is not even mathematics, whatever role it has *fictively* played in the elaboration of the thought of Descartes or of Leibniz, which is at the origin of modern metaphysics’ conception of itself as “mathesis universalis.” For what “mathesis” signifies here, in conformity with the myth of reminiscence, but understood in a modern way (that is *psychologically* and not *logically*), is that the soul learns nothing that it does not remember. However, it is not for having followed the chariot of the gods, as in Plato, that it remembers Logos. Lacking on the contrary the “Platonist foundation of logic,” all that modern philosophy remembers, that is to say repeats, recovers, as the source of all ideality, is the self-presence of consciousness in its operation. It is only, then, on this basis that it is necessary to have a worldly model of such a transparency, and that mathematics, even while remaining the “twaddle” that the metaphysician looks down on, also becomes the model and the matrix.

#### b) *Form and Matter of Consciousness*

The second remark which is essential here concerns the *material* nature of “logic.” This logic indeed not only rediscovers a Platonist character, an eidetic radicality, in the sense that it

ceases being sought after along the lines of a “psychological” problematic, but also in this second sense that it ceases being confused with the empire of the *formal*. Husserl explains very well, in the preface to the first edition of the *Logical Investigations*, how the study of the mathematical Logos, after having led him beyond the evidence of the quantitative towards “the most general essence of mathematics” as “formal science” (and, as chapter XI of the *Prolegomena* will show, only as a science of the formal), compelled him “naturally [...] to go on from this point to more fundamental questions regarding the essence and the form of knowledge in contradistinction to its matter, and the sense of the distinction between formal (pure) and material properties, truths and laws.”<sup>6</sup>

This distinction between the form of knowledge and its matter seems, it is true, merely to repeat the traditional concept of logic, indifferent as we know to the determined object of knowledge and attaching itself only to the “laws of thought” deployed in this knowledge. But, for Husserl, it was precisely the inefficiency of this distinction between form and matter, incapable of rendering an account, even for the formal (mathematical) theories themselves, of “the *logical* unity of the *content* of thought, that is of the unity of theory,” which compelled the phenomenologist, “abandoned by logic everywhere that he expected from it clarifications on the precise questions he had to ask of it,” to abandon in his turn *this* logic founded upon the *psychological*, and not eidetic, distinction between “form” and “matter.”

Probably no turning point in the history of Western philosophy is as important as this one. This is what leads from the “Platonist foundation of logic” to the critical determination of the “metaphysics” of the moderns. By critical determination, one must understand that Husserl *exhibits* the fundamental limitation to which modern philosophy owes its effective form and its concrete history, and that it brings this limitation to light as a lack or as an essential wavering, exactly as *a determined form of indetermination* with respect to the exigencies proper to a rigorous development of Logos. The general principle of method of the rigorous development of Logos is “the general principle of any method, according to which all sense data has an original right” (*Ideas*). *All sense data*, that means that “all of individual being falling under the intuition” must be “distributed into regions of being.” Such an ontological distinction takes nothing away from the way in which the sense data, wherever it comes from and whatever it is, is given in experience. On the contrary, the irreducible “how” in the way that the sense datum shows itself (it is this “how” which is the “phenomenon” to which phenomenology owes its name) must be *collected* such as it *is* disposed. The “purely logical” studies which accomplish

---

<sup>6</sup> [*The Shorter Logical Investigations*, tr. J.N. Findlay, New York, Routledge, 2001, p. 2. —Trans.]

this collection of the a priori disposition of any being in its “how it is” are precisely those wherein one best sees that “logic” is decidedly, that is, with decision and with precision at the same time, the Husserlian adjective of Greek Logos. That is the important point to grasp *before* pursuing the study of the signification of Husserlian phenomenology along the lines of other concepts and other groupings of texts—more “famous,” however, in France at least, and more eagerly commented on—such as: intentionality, reduction(s), transcendentalism, the will to science and absoluteness. For these other conceptual and textual lines are those along which is fortified the general and ultimate ontological equivocality in which Husserl’s work is caught. Indeed, while phenomenology, having delimited for the first time the essence of modern reason as a psychological transcendental analytic, which is also to say as a formal ontology of the pseudo-region “object in general,” was on the point of rendering to thought a possibility which had been closed since the Greeks by the step-backward outside of the metaphysics of the moderns, this equivocality, the analysis of which we reserve for the final development of this exposition, adversely consists in the reversal by which phenomenology let itself be captured by the genius and the destiny of this metaphysics, of which it repeats the limitation at an ultimate degree of generality.

This fundamental equivocality of Husserl’s work, which affects even the works which pursue the questions on “logic” (*Formale und transzendente Logik*, 1929, and *Erfahrung und Urteil*, 1939, essentially), only appears, however, if one has first of all absorbed the entirely new ontological reach of the “logical” studies of the early Husserl and their own historical power, which consists in *making appear* the limitation of modern reason. If the detail of the work is accomplished in the detours of the *Logical Investigations*, and if rereading step by step the path taken by Husserl is indispensable, its general signification and its scope appear nowhere so clearly as in the first section of *Ideas*. It is here that one sees in all clarity (despite the undeniable difficulty of the analyses) that modern reason, conceiving of itself as the reason of the formal region “object in general,” in which the a priori material determination is lost, is constrained to incessantly repeat the coup de force which consists in reconstructing in the terms of *mathesis universalis*, and therefore of formal ontology, the apriorical determinations of experience which are not accessible, however, except by the collecting of their materiality in the “regional ontologies.” To want to make of modern logical formality the substitute of “Greek” logical materiality, and this in an *intrinsic* manner (that is in a pseudo-discourse-of-experience which in reality is a discourse on the fiction of an evidence-in-judgement), is to propagate a generalized eidetic misinterpretation and to condemn modern philosophy to having no other

dimension of its own than that of a “fable,” or, as Hegel already said of Leibniz, of a *novel of metaphysics*.

Husserl’s greatness is certainly to have detected, and at the same time to have pulled free a bit, this destiny of modern humanity. What is tragic about him is that the same destiny, under a generalized and imperceptible, but implacable, form, has reconstituted itself and reclosed itself upon him. For, as remains to be seen, the sepulcher of Husserl the Greek is the very monument of modernity’s accomplishment.

#### IV. HUSSERL THE MODERN

From the beginning, the dimension proper to phenomenology has remained an entirely new dimension, which is also to say unknown to itself and having to conquer the determination of its most general meaning *at the same time* that the eidetic work itself is accomplished in its concrete detail. It is precisely in this back and forth between generality and concrete accomplishment, each depending on the other, and in this effort to make the disconcerting novelty of the thought circumvent its indetermination that one perceives that theory is first of all itself a practice, that is to say an essential risk.

The notion of risk here is hardly romantic myth given that phenomenology has obviously been vanquished in the struggle it undertook to lead modern humanity from its cultural indecision (Husserl said: from its “crisis”) back to the Greek possibility of a decision concerning being. For it is the meaning already decided among moderns of being as “consciousness” or as “own-ness” (*Bewusst-sein* or *Eigen-sein*) which has diverted the course of a radical “Platonist” interrogation and made it flow definitively into its own channel. But the question is that of knowing how this situation little by little consolidated itself and what made it possible, or rather inevitable, in the very “principle” of phenomenological work.

It seems that two causes may be ascribed to this drift which will make of Husserl the Platonist (the one of *Logical Investigations*) Husserl the Cartesian (the one of *Cartesian Meditations*). One is that the access to Logos was understood from the origin as a mode of intuition, which is to say based on a model of presence, and the other is that the critique of the naivety (“naturalness”) of the philosophy of the moderns was conceived as a simple suspension (“placing in parentheses,” “reduction”) of a thesis of existence, a thesis of reality supposedly included in this philosophy, or resulting from within it as an “attitude.” This double determination, on one hand of the pathway proper to phenomenology, on the other of the precaution it must take with respect to modern metaphysics, implies that there is not an essential

link between the conception of being as presence and the psychological or logical (formal) limitations of the transcendental discourse on consciousness; and it also implies that the natural limitation of modern philosophy does not weigh on its very language *well before* constituting a “thesis” within it or an “attitude” it would have adopted and might well not have adopted. If, on the contrary, the ordination of the eidetic with ἰδέειν (with “seeing”), and therefore that of Logos with presence, in itself entails transcendental psychology and the logical (formal) powerlessness of the very language of modern philosophy, then the pathway of phenomenology is confounded from the beginning with the unperceived delineation of that of the moderns, and modern humanity’s destiny of indecision within its metaphysics must fundamentally repeat itself in phenomenology, inextricably caught up in the fragmentary struggles against the consequences and the most visible forms of this destiny in history.

The situation defined here is too difficult to grasp in its principle, and too extensively at work from the beginning to the end of phenomenology, to enable us to attempt to elaborate it in the framework of this exposition. It is possible merely to indicate certain lines of questions or of texts along which one might form for oneself a more precise idea of it. Among these lines—unequal in importance and in length—one might first mention the question of the attachment of phenomenology at its birth to the still “psychologizing” problematic of Brentano (Husserl’s master in philosophy) and the ambiguity of the principle which guides Husserl each time in what he “takes” from him and what he “leaves” him. One finds in this connection a fine exposition concerning the central notion of intentionality in R. Boehm’s study of “the Ambiguities of the Husserlian concepts of immanence and transcendence” (*Revue philosophique de la France et de l’étranger*, n° 4, 1959). Another example, concerning this time the notion of time, of the indetermination of the borrowing technique which Husserl practiced with respect to his master, is developed in G. Granel’s study of *Le Sens du temps et de la perception chez E. Husserl*.<sup>7</sup>

One must also emphasize the question of the central role played by the phenomenology of perception (from which the work of Merleau-Ponty in France moreover entirely emanates) in phenomenology’s establishment of its own *possibility*, and the relation between phenomenology and modern transcendental philosophy such as it has established itself upon the terrain of this question. The fundamental text on this subject is the second section of *Ideas*, while the studies likely to clarify it in the sense of the question posed there (that of the modern

---

<sup>7</sup> [Trans. —*Le sens du temps et de la perception chez Husserl*, Paris, Gallimard, 1968. Reissued: Mauvezin, T.E.R., 2012.]



destiny of Husserl's work) are: Paul Ricœur's preface to his translation of *Ideen I*, R. Bøhm's remarks on this translation, and the work of G. Granel, already cited.

Thirdly, let us point out that the excellent reading undertaken by Jacques Derrida of the doctrine of signification such as it is constituted in the first of the *Logical Investigations* (*La Voix et le phénomène*) is in truth the beginnings of an interpretation of the ensemble of Husserl's thought, the only one capable until now of helping us grasp the nature and the absolutely decisive reach, in the very sense we evoked above, of the question of "presence."

One may finally add, despite their more limited appearance, Roman Ingarden's remarks on the *Cartesian Meditations*, which he sent to his former master following the publication of this work where, more than in any other, phenomenological transcendental idealism in its absoluteness is affirmed.

These indications are fragmentary. They in no way aim to exclude still other pathways for recognizing how the critique of the modern limitation of philosophy blends in Husserl with the repetition of the modern project at a level of generality and of "radicality" enabling it to pass *in his eyes* for a release from the natural burden weighing on the historically achieved forms of metaphysics emanating from Descartes, while *in our eyes* it confirms on the contrary the estrangement of modern thought, even "phenomenological," from the valor that is required by a questioning of being, that is to say concerning firstly the *meaning* of being. But this, as we know, is Heidegger's question. It will never have been recognized by Husserl as "insertable" within the phenomenological project, or even as authentically "continuing" it. It is indeed Heidegger, however, who resumes, and who alone resumes, the Husserlian struggle for a *capability*, until now refused to humanity, in the decision of being (this genitive being understood in both senses). And if it were necessary to replace by a single text all those that have just been enumerated, then they should be replaced by the introduction and the first section of *Sein und Zeit*.

Translated by Richard Anker