

53 Quine, ‘Relativism and Absolutism’, p. 295.


55 Quine, *Things and Things*, p. 22.

56 See *Word and Object*, §§7–10.


58 See, for an emphasis on the circularity; Quine, ‘Natural Kinds’.

59 Quine, ‘Reply to Jaakko Hintikka’.

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3 Making sense

Husserl’s phenomenology
as transcendental idealism

Dermot Moran

Uncovering absolute consciousness

As is well known, Edmund Husserl’s philosophy underwent a transcendental turning a few years after the publication of his ‘ground-breaking’ *Logische Untersuchungen* (1900–01), according to which phenomenology – originally understood as descriptive psychology – was reconceptualized as a pure, *a priori*, transcendental discipline and eventually as the way into transcendental philosophy. The discovery of the *epoché* and the reduction (in his research manuscripts of 1903, but first treated publicly in his 1906–7 lectures *Einklugung in die Logik und Erkennnistheorie*) enabled him to bring a new clarity to a problematic that he originally conceived of as an epistemological problem, namely, the constitution of objectivity in, by and for subjectivity. This problematic had emerged first in modern philosophy but had hitherto been misconstrued; phenomenology would provide a new mode of access to this problematic. The reduction allowed Husserl to gain a clearer conception of the *object as perceived, thought, or consciously grasped*, which from around 1908 he termed *noema* and which is to be contrasted with the object that is thought. It was a short step to consider consciousness in an entirely new light, no longer as a part (*Bestandstück*) of nature, but as a set of pure noetic acts with their own distinct essences. Transcendental phenomenology is a descriptive eidetic science, reached through the *epoché* and in the performance of the reduction, ‘the most fundamental of all methods’ in philosophy. It took Husserl somewhat longer to recognize the need to locate these noetic acts in the transcendental ego. In his mature philosophy Husserl is a fully fledged transcendental idealist: all meaning and being are conceived as productions or accomplishments of transcendental subjectivity, and transcendental subjectivity itself must be conceived not as some ‘dead’ identity pole but as living, communalized spirit, a notion Husserl never succeeded in articulating with clarity.

The absolute primacy of pure transcendental consciousness became central to Husserl’s philosophy. His central insight is that transcendental philosophy is ‘absolute’, self-justifying knowledge, positioned to ask the most radical questions even about its own essential possibility and validity. Moreover, his attempt to found transcendental philosophy is one with his project of philosophy as a rigorous science. Transcendental phenomenology expressed both the essence of
phenomenology and the essence of all genuine philosophy. He himself understood transcendental phenomenology primarily as a reflective, descriptive philosophical approach, albeit one that requires a particular attitude, a specifically adopted stance. He came to the view that even \textit{a priori} sciences such as mathematics were in a sense 'positive sciences', proceeding in 'transcendental naiveté', and suffering periodic crises of foundation from which only transcendental phenomenology could rescue them. True philosophy can never remain within what Husserl calls 'naive' standpoints (within what Plato called \textit{doxa}) and is inevitably committed to becoming true knowledge (\textit{epistème}), an insight requiring the transcendentally turn.

Husserl first set out his new idealist position in print – although not named as such (he speaks of 'pure' or 'transcendental' consciousness) – in \textit{Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book} (1913), where it is introduced as a way of doing justice to Descartes’ \textit{Meditations},\footnote{Descartes’ Meditations} and thus as realizing the true essence of the modern philosophical tradition. He did not employ the term 'transcendental idealism' (\textit{transzendentaler Idealismus}) until around 1915, but thereafter it is explicitly embraced, as in his \textit{Eichte Lektüre} of 1917-18.\footnote{Husserl's \textit{Eichte Lektüre} of 1917-18} Nevertheless, it is clear, in \textit{Ideas I}, that phenomenology as an eidetic science radically distinct from all empirical sciences\footnote{Husserl asserts the absolute existence of consciousness as a self-delimited, self-contained sphere with a 'peculiar ownership' entirely distinct from all factual nature.} must be reconceived in transcendental terms if it is not to be misunderstood in a naturalistic way. \textit{Ideas I} introduces pure consciousness understood as 'a new region of being never before delimited in its own peculiarly',\footnote{Husserl distinguishes himself from Kant, who could not free himself from the grip of ‘psychologism and anthropologism’}. and 'the all of absolute being [\textit{das All des absoluten Seins}]'.\footnote{Husserl says, such questions are 'perversely posed'.\footnote{It is not the existence of the perceived that is in question for Husserl but the essence of perception or cognition and the essence of the perceived thing or the cognized thing as such. As he will later say in the \textit{Crisis}: 'The point is not to secure objectivity but to understand it.'\footnote{In this sense, Husserl agrees with Kant that a ‘transcendental’ inquiry is one which seeks ‘conditions of possibility’. In Husserl's case, this is to be understood as the conditions of the possibility of all formations of \textit{Sinn} (\textit{Sinn}) of \textit{Bedeutung} (\textit{Bedeutung}), and indeed how the world as such comes to be given as something sensible. Moreover, conditions of possibility refer to \textit{sinnre}}

To complicate the picture somewhat, Husserl, after he moved to Göttingen, began intensively to engage with Kant in his lectures and seminars. Thus, for example, in his 1907 \textit{Die Idee der Phänomenologie} (\textit{The Idea of Phenomenology}) lectures,\footnote{Kant did not arrive at the ultimate intent of the distinction that must be made here. For it is not a matter of merely subjectively valid judgements, the validity of which is limited to the empirical subject, and objectively valid judgements in the sense of being valid for every subject in general. For we have excluded the empirical subject and transcendental apperception, consciousness as such, will soon acquire for us a wholly different sense, one that is not mysterious at all.}\footnote{Similarly, in his \textit{Ding und Raum} lectures of 1907,\footnote{Similarly, in his \textit{Ding und Raum} lectures of 1907} he denies that he is posing the problematic of the constitution of objectivity in terms of Kant's question (in his famous ‘Letter to Markus Herz’ of 1772), how subjective representations reach outside themselves to gain knowledge of the object.\footnote{To pose the question in this way is already to surrender to representationalism. As Husserl says, such questions are ‘perversely posed’.\footnote{It is not the existence of the perceived that is in question for Husserl but the essence of perception or cognition and the essence of the perceived thing or the cognized thing as such. As he will later say in the \textit{Crisis}: 'The point is not to secure objectivity but to understand it.'\footnote{In this sense, Husserl agrees with Kant that a ‘transcendental’ inquiry is one which seeks ‘conditions of possibility’. In Husserl's case, this is to be understood as the conditions of the possibility of all formations of \textit{Sinn} (\textit{Sinn}) of \textit{Bedeutung} (\textit{Bedeutung}), and indeed how the world as such comes to be given as something sensible. Moreover, conditions of possibility refer to \textit{sinnre}}}

Kant's initial beginnings by offering a clarified and scientifically grounded sense of the \textit{a priori} understood as essence. What was not entirely clear to Husserl when these words were written in 1907 was that the analysis of the eidetic was merely the first step on the way to the transcendental. In his later years, and even as he reworked the \textit{Investigations} for the Second Edition of 1913, Husserl would reinterpret the 'breakthrough' of the \textit{Investigations} as a breakthrough into transcendental phenomenology, although he had not realized it at the time. As he would later write in \textit{Crisis} of the \textit{European Sciences}:

\begin{quote}
The first breakthrough of this universal a priori of correlation between experienced object and manners of givenness (which occurred during work on my \textit{Logical Investigations} around 1898) affected me so deeply that my whole subsequent life-work has been dominated by the task of systematically elaborating on this a priori of correlation.\footnote{At least as far as Husserl himself is concerned, he was always reaching towards transcendental philosophy, although specific problems concerning the nature of transcendental subjectivity [understood both as monadic egoogy and as intersubjective community of monads] emerged only after Husserl wrote \textit{Ideas I} (he sketches his first account of the constitution of subjects and spirit in \textit{Ideas II}),\footnote{and as he struggled with the issue of the relation between nature and spirit, Husserl's engagement with spirit (\textit{Geist}) led him to a new accommodation with Dilthey and with the tradition of German critical and absolute Idealism.}

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\end{quote}
Husserl's trenchant commitment to transcendental idealism was hugely problematic for his immediate disciples and protégés (Stein, Scheler, Heidegger, Ingarden), who saw it as an unresolved dogmatic element in his thinking, a metaphysical residue, a legacy of German philosophy (specifically Neo-Kantianism) in his day. In order to defend Husserl, some more recent commentators, invoking the presuppositionless starting point and bracketing procedures, claim that Husserl's idealism is actually a purely phenomenological stance without metaphysical commitment.  

I do not agree. Although Husserl did not see himself as engaging in any arbitrary or speculative metaphysics, nevertheless his commitment to idealism is genuine, deep and more radical than that of Kant or Descartes. Husserl himself saw it as a necessary consequence of his attempt to get to the things themselves (die Sache selbst). Moreover, as a deeply religious thinker, it was precisely this idealism that informs his religious sense. Transcendental idealism even provides the only basis for conceiving of God, given the absurdity of thinking of Him as an item in the factual world. A quarter of a century later in Crisis of European Sciences he could still declare: 

As scientists, can we content ourselves with the view that God created the world and human beings within it ... The enigma of the creation and that of God himself are essential component parts of positive religion. For the philosopher, however, this, and also the juxtaposition "subjectivity in the world as object" and at the same time "conscious subject for the world" contain a necessary theoretical question, that of understanding how this is possible.  

Thus, the Husserlian transcendental idealism expresses the inner sense of what religion presents naively.

Not only did Husserl never stop being a transcendental idealist, he actually felt that the transcendental standpoint itself required constant radicalization and purification to prevent falling back into the natural attitude. Thus, in Erste Philosophie, he even speaks of "transcendental unicity", that is, accepting that all knowledge has subjective origins but misinterpreting the nature of this originating. Similarly, one must be on guard against transcendental psychologism, which assumes the results of transcendental investigation of consciousness are psychological results. 

Through the 1920s and 1930s Husserl became increasingly wide-reaching, even baroque, in his conception of the transcendental. He speaks not only of the transcendental ego but of transcendental experience, of transcendental life, of a transcendental past and future, transcendental rationality and even transcendental irrationality, and so on. Thus Husserl writes in his draft Encyclopedia Britannica article:

The transcendental reduction opens up, in fact, a completely new kind of experience that can be systematically pursued: transcendental experience. Through the transcendental reduction, absolute subjectivity, which functions everywhere in hiddenness, is brought to light along with its whole transcendental life, in whose intentional syntheses all real and ideal objects, with their positive existential validity, are constituted. The transcendental reduction yields the thematic field of an absolute phenomenological science, called the transcendental science because it encompasses within itself all transcendental or rational-theoretical inquiries. 

The transcendental domain is infinite, but also it is living, that is, it grows and accrues dimensions which become sedimented in it. Transcendental philosophy is not true just of this world but of all possible worlds. Ultimately, a full account of the essence of pure consciousness must extend into a complete a priori documentation of the possible forms of transcendental life, not just its actual forms but everything which can be 'predelineated' regarding its essence. These include, bizarrely, the transcendental life of plants, animals, and all possible a priori forms of subjectivity and intersubjectivity. In so doing, he was fully aware of extending the concept of the transcendental beyond anything envisaged in previous philosophy — not just charting the authentic essence of inexhaustible transcendental life, but also offering a critique of transcendental experience. Thus, Husserl believes it is itself a transcendental problem whether something like a solipsistic transcendental ego is itself possible. For Husserl, moreover, transcendental subjectivity must be 'communicative' and hence intersubjective, though the precise manner of its relation to other possible or actual subjects was never settled by him, nor was the issue as to whether it can assume novel forms or whether it can merely instantiate elements predelineated in its essence. In other words, in what sense can transcendental subjectivity be genuinely living and historical? 

The road to transcendental idealism 

Already in his early Göttingen lecture courses of 1902-3, Husserl repudiated Brentanian descriptive psychology, understood as underpinning empirical psychology, as the correct model for exploring the newly discovered domain of the essential a priori correlations between subjectivity and objectivity. Specifically, he was dissatisfied with the inextricable naturalism of descriptive psychology, essentially of a piece with the scientific and naturalistic turn exemplified by the modern philosophical tradition. In the First Edition of the Investigations he had not understood that no naturalistic conceived psychology could ever appreciate the epistemic achievement of consciousness. In his 1910-11 essay Philosophy as a Rigorous Science, he explains that the rejection of psychology in the Investigations needed to be followed by a rejection of the 'naturalisation of consciousness' itself. The descriptive psychological approach inherited from Brentano and Stumpf and expressed in the First Edition of the Investigations had failed to recognize the domain of pure consciousness, which he now characterizes as a self-delimited, self-contained, 'absolute' sphere with a 'peculiar ownership' entirely distinct from all factual, empirical nature. Thenceforth he maintained
that consciousness cannot be understood beginning from a sensualism, whereby it is seen as containing a sensuous matter provided from without.34 Rather, the essence of consciousness — and indeed of soul, spirit and reason — has to be understood as meaning production, making sense.35 Already in Philosophy as a Rigorous Science, Husserl was claiming that the domain of consciousness (understood as spirit) cannot be understood in terms of causation, time, space and other attributes of nature, but has an essence and form of its own.36,37

In his mature philosophy, phenomenology is explicated specifically as opposed to all forms of naturalism. Already in the Investigations, Husserl had lamented that his was an age obsessed by the natural sciences and by psychology. Psychologism and naturalism are two ever present — and even natural — orientations of the mind, which distort the true nature of consciousness and the realm of cognition. By the time of Ideas I Husserl is speaking of the ‘philosophical poverty’ of the worldview founded in natural science.38 and emphasizing that transcendental research into consciousness is not a form of research into nature [Naturforschung]. This anti-naturalism led him to see his affinity with Neo-Kantianism. Thus, in a letter dated 20 December 1915, addressed to the leading Neo-Kantian Heinrich Rickert, Husserl had commented that he found himself in alliance with German Idealism against the common enemy: ‘the naturalism of our time’.39

Husserl’s attempts to penetrate the complexities of time consciousness, and the recognition that consciousness cannot be treated simply as belonging to world time but has an immanent temporal organization in its own right, appear to have been the catalyst for his transcendental turn. But his increasing interest in the history of philosophy also played a significant if underappreciated role. Thus, in his 1906–7 lectures, he also began to recognize the role of scepticism in propelling the ‘natural thinker’ into the transcendental mode and thereby opens up a new awareness of consciousness as a sphere of cogitations having ‘absolute givenness’.40

It is worth noting, however, that refuting scepticism is not the main motivation for Husserl’s adopting the transcendental attitude; rather, his real motivation is to do justice to the essence of conscious experience in its objectifying, sense-constituting nature, and in terms of its own unique structure which no natural process comes close to having [leading Husserl to make the surprising claim in Philosophy as a Rigorous Science, for instance, that consciousness has no real parts and is not in causal interaction with things of the world]. Reflecting on these meaning-giving formations of consciousness, Husserl became convinced that consciousness has a kind of absolute existence not dependent on the existence of objects, whereas objects are always dependent on some consciousness. Consciousness is absolute; all other being is relative to consciousness. Recognizing the ineliminable role of consciousness in the constitution of all objecthood, however, does not turn objects into mere semblances, as he stresses in a text from 1908.41 Being constituted does not mean not fully real. Transcendental idealism is also an empirical realism, and Husserl is not in any way attaching a doubtful or illusory status to the objects in the world. It is rather the sense (Sinn) of world that is forever altered by the transcendental approach. Moreover, Husserl endorses transcendental philosophy’s opposition to scepticism and especially to Hume’s mitigated scepticism:

The genuine transcendental philosophy ... is not like the Humean and neither overtly nor covertly a sceptical decomposition of the world cognition and of the world itself into fictions, that is to say, in modern terms, a philosophy of As-If. Least of all is it a ‘dissolution’ [Aufhebung] of the world into ‘merely subjective appearances,’ which in some still sensible sense would have something to do with illusion. It does not occur to transcendental philosophy to dispute the world of experience in the least ... 42

It is worth bearing these claims in mind when we have to interpret his notorious thought experiment of the ‘annihilation of the world’ in Ideas I, and elsewhere (for example, Erste Philosophie), and to which we shall return.

Husserl’s transcendental idealism became thematic, and indeed systematic, in his lecture courses of the 1920s in Freiburg, especially Erste Philosophie. Here, for the first time, he worked out his conception of transcendental philosophy through a ‘critical history of ideas’. In Cartesian Meditations, originally delivered as lectures in Paris in 1929, he announces: ‘phenomenology is eo ipso “transcendental idealism”, though in a fundamentally and essentially new sense’.43 Here he affirms that this idealism is not the product of arguments against realism, but emerges rather from close investigations of constituting consciousness in all its possible modalities. Thus he asserts: ‘The proof of this idealism is therefore phenomenology itself. Only someone who misunderstands either the deepest sense of intentional method, or that of transcendental reduction, or perhaps both, can attempt to separate phenomenology from transcendental idealism.’44

Despite a new emphasis on the life-world (Lebenswelt) and its a priori structures in the 1930s, Husserl continued to affirm his idealism up to his last writings, focusing explicitly on history and culture as manifestations of spirit.45 Thus in his 1935 Vienna Lecture he writes:

It is my conviction that intentional phenomenology has made of the spirit qua spirit for the first time a field of systematic experience and science and has thus brought about the total reorientation [Umstellung] of the task of knowledge. The universality of the absolute spirit surrounds everything that exists with an absolute historicity, to which nature as a spiritual structure is subordinated. Intentional phenomenology, and specifically transcendental phenomenology, was first to see the light through its point of departure and its methods. Only through it do we understand, and from the most profound reasons, what naturalistic objectivism is and understand in particular that psychology, because of its naturalism, has to miss entirely the accomplishment, the radical and genuine problem of the life of the spirit.46

Transcendental phenomenology is now the science that grasps in a fundamental way the meaning of the accomplishment of spiritual life in all its forms, that is, what
makes rational human intersubjective life possible as such. Moreover, as Husserl claims (in Hegelian manner but without invoking Hegel): ‘The spirit, and indeed only the spirit, exists in itself and for itself, is self-sufficient [eigenständig]; and in its self-sufficiency, and only in this way, it can be treated truly rationally, truly and from the ground up scientifically.’

Transcendental experience and transcendental life

Husserl’s turn to the transcendental aimed precisely to open up this remarkable ‘new sphere of being’ (eine neue Seinsphäre),18 which is also a sphere of ‘pure subjective living’ (rein subjektives Leben).19 The transcendental domain is a domain of living spirit. As Husserl makes clear, the essence of this spirit is its free, teleological activity (what Kant misleadingly calls spontaneity) and the transcendental uncovering of this realm must recognize the operation of teleological reasonings and motivations. Moreover, the transcendental domain is also a domain of genetic constitution. Humans move from children to adults and gain new convictions, habits and attitudes. Others become sedimented and obscured. But all together belong to the transcendental genesis of the transcendental ego (and outwards to the community and to intersubjective life). Although he presents it first as an ideology, he also shows it to be a realm of intersubjectivity, a realm of spirit. It is, for Husserl, borrowing from Leibniz, a community of monads. The sphere of the transcendental is the sphere of life itself, but not life construed in a biological or naturalistic way, but life as ego-centred consciousness with its emotional, practical and rational motivations, interconnections and achievements. It is for this reason that the domain of the transcendental is also a domain of experience.

Defining Husserl’s transcendental idealism

Husserl’s unswerving and indeed deepening commitment to transcendental philosophy has a number of distinguishing features. First of all, the transcendental domain must be uncovered by a specific method – either by the Cartesian way or some other way,20 but in every case it is explored by intuition. The transcendental emerges only through adopting a new and ‘unnatural’ attitude. When we consider our consciousness in all its forms and interconnections, actual and possible, we are already living in the transcendental attitude.21 we are considering pure consciousness ‘as the absolutely self-contained realm of purely subjective being ... with its purely immanent interconnections, abilities, sense-structures’.22 We have consciousness ‘taking charge’ of itself intuitively.

Transcendental reflection must be distinguished from natural reflection (which itself has been misconstrued by philosophers such as Locke). As natural reflecting beings we discover our empirical subjectivity, as humans among humans. Transcendental reflection leading to the transcendental self has to break with the structures governing natural reflection. Reflection is characterized by ‘ego-splitting’ whereby one self is brought into view but the self viewing it retreats into anonymity and indeed unconsciousness.23 Each act of reflection can itself be reflected on, this belongs to the very essence of reflection. As usual, in considering complicated forms of self-reflection Husserl begins with the self-awareness in perception. All reflection is modelled on this self-perception – the original form of all reflection – and self-recollection is the primary variant of this self-perception.24 The key point is that natural reflection is still intertwined with the Selbstsachlichkeit, the belief in the world, whereas transcendental reflection neutralizes this belief.25 Moreover, transcendental reflection is a practice that must be sustained against all temptations to relapse into the natural attitude. Transcendental philosophy, then, cuts the Gordian knot that ties our reflection to the world.

What transcendental reflection reveals is a new domain of meanings, senses, noemata, correlated to ideal conscious forms, according to a priori laws of essence. As Husserl’s former student and close critic Roman Ingarden wrote: ‘the fundamental thesis of “transcendental idealism” is obtained: what is real is nothing but a constituted noematic unity (individual) of a specific kind of sense which in its being and quality [Sosein] results from a set of experiences of a special kind and is quite impossible without them.’26 Every unity of meaning, every sense, depends essentially on its relation to consciousness. Husserl even concludes Ideas II by claiming that nature itself is always relative – relative to an absolute, namely, spirit.27 As Roman Ingarden formulates Husserl’s position:

The existence of what is perceived (of the perceived as such) is nothing ‘in itself’ but only something ‘for somebody,’ for the experiencing ego. ‘Streichen wir das seine Bewusstsein, so streichen wir die Welt’ (‘If we exclude pure consciousness then we exclude the world’) is the famous thesis of Husserlian transcendental idealism which he was already constantly repeating in lectures during his Göttingen period.28

Husserl himself would proclaim in 1924:

With the Ideas the deepest sense of the Cartesian turn of modern philosophy is, I dare to say, revealed, and the necessity of an absolutely self-contained eidetic science of pure consciousness in general is cogently demonstrated – that is, however, in relation to all correlations grounded in the essence of consciousness, to its possible really immanent moments and to its noemata and objectivities intentionally-ideally determined therein.29

I shall have more to say about the meaning of the a priori correlation between noes (ph). Proper to the phenomenological and, as belonging to the ego, to the transcendental domain, I want first to analyze in more detail another feature of Husserl’s transcendental idealism, namely, the manner in which he understood it to be the inevitable outcome of the progress of modern philosophy and also the essential core of all true philosophy (the true first philosophy – the ‘philos-
ophy of the beginning'). In fact, Husserl, in a manner increasingly close to Hegel, believes that transcendental philosophy takes up and completes all previous philosophy; it embraces and redeems the entire philosophical tradition.69

Against Kant and Hegel, however, Husserl claims that transcendental philosophy is not the outcome of any speculative philosophical synthesis, but rather involves an uncovering of a realm of direct experience.70 In that sense, it is not a philosophical position at all. Transcendental reflection opens up a new realm of experience – transcendental experience (transzendentale Erfahrung), in itself an infinite and self-contained realm of self-related consciousness. This sharply distinguishes his conception from that of Kant or indeed any of his predecessors. Husserl is not a subjective or psychological idealism nor a Kantian idealism, 'which believes it can keep open, at least as a limiting concept, the possibility of a world of things in themselves'.71 Rather, Husserl insists his is a new and radical idealism of a fundamentally different kind. It does not derive from speculative argumentation but from a consideration of the kinds of constitution involved in various entities – whether they be in nature, culture or world.

The historical discovery of transcendental philosophy

Transcendental philosophy is not a spontaneous acquisition but emerged historically, and had to be discovered. Modern philosophy exhibits a 'steady direction of development towards transcendental philosophy'.72 In the course of his kritische Ideengeschichte,73 Husserl explicates his conception of the emergence of transcendental philosophy through original and bold readings not only of Descartes, but also of Leibniz, Berkeley and Hume. Up to Husserl's time, however, it still had not achieved pure self-consciousness as to its nature and purpose, as the Passive Synthesis lectures attest.74 Descartes is the 'epoch-making awakeners of the transcendental problematic',75 'a precursor of transcendental philosophy',76 in whom is first found the 'seed' (die Keim) of transcendental philosophy,77 specifically in his application of the method of doubt,78 which first made visible transcendental subjectivity as a unified self. Descartes – like Moses – saw the 'promised land', but did not set foot there. Husserl therefore must rethink Descartes' founding insights and recover their true meaning – a meaning to which Descartes himself had been blind, since he effectively restored a 'new dogmatism'.79 For Husserl, the originally Platonic ideal of philosophical science, and the ideal of all genuine philosophy, is first put into action by Descartes. To rethink it radically is the essence of the 'new Cartesianism' Husserl speaks of in his Paris Lectures.80

Husserl characterizes his discovery of meaning-constituting consciousness at the heart of seemingly natural experience as an essential development of the transcendental turn in modern philosophy, in contrast with the naturalism of Locke.81 Locke, who legitimately founded modern psychology, had a quest for origins that he completely misinterpreted and thus lost all possibility of transcendental viewing. Berkeley, on the other hand, though trapped in naturalism, at least recognized the possibility of a purely immanent theory and made the first systematic attempt to provide a theory of the constitution of the world by the human knower.82 As a committed sensualist, however, Berkeley could not grasp the distinction between the diverse modes of appearing and the identical object that appears in and through them.83 Hume, too, is a transcendental philosopher for Husserl,84 since he understands the objectivity of the world to be a product of subjective achievements. On the other hand, Hume's appeals to concepts like 'custom', 'human nature', 'sense organs', which imply transcendence of their own,85 show the essential contradiction in Hume's own stance.

But more than any other philosopher, Husserl felt the need to return again and again to Descartes. The nature of the Cartesian project and Cartesian doubt have, of course, been a matter of complex debate among specialists. Husserl's view of Descartes is distinctive (though possibly influenced by Loize's discussion of Descartes in his Loge, Bk III, ch. iii, par. 323),86 and indeed also evolved considerably in the course of his career. Unfortunately, I do not have space here to elaborate Husserl's very interesting and provocative reading of Descartes, except to state that Husserl seems to take five items specifically from him: the idea of a radical reform of philosophy; the principle of presuppositionlessness; idea of putting into suspense all world-affirming judgements; evidence as the criterion for truth; and the idea of scientific knowledge as absolutely justified knowledge,87 whereby one accords validity only to that which is given with apodictic evidence.88 But, finally, Husserl's interpretation radically transforms the Cartesian project, showing that the supposed results of the Cartesian foundation of objective knowledge burst apart at the seams.89

As early as the Logical Investigations, Husserl had been captivated by Descartes' project of securing science on the basis of evident cognitions, cognitions given 'clearly and distinctly' (claram et distinctam), the project of founding all deductions in intuitions. Indeed, he often invokes Descartes' twin criteria of truth, namely, 'clarity and distinctness' (Klarheit und Deutlichkeit),90 in our concepts. Central to the Cartesian way, then, will be the account of evidence, but we shall not discuss that problematic notion here. In his 1906–7 lectures Introduction to Logic and the Theory of Knowledge, Husserl expands on Descartes' sceptical method, and, while recognizing the similarity between Descartes' global doubts and his own method of putting everything into suspension, he recognizes the difference of intention between them.91 Motivated both as a philosopher and as a scientist, Descartes wanted to identify a first principle upon which to build a demonstrative science more geometrica, whereas in the performance of Husserl's epoché the existing sciences are neither augmented nor diminished, but rather achieve clarification of sense. Moreover, Husserl sees it as the fundamental error of rationalism that it took mathematics as the model of philosophy, whereas one must distinguish the scientific spirit from the spirit of philosophical critique.92 For Husserl, Descartes enters the way of doubt or suspension of belief in a purely voluntary manner. Anyone can voluntarily direct his or her doubt at any belief whatsoever. Whereas there are certain texts in which Descartes emphasizes the need for cogent reasons for doubting (and indeed he supplies reasons for doubting in the 'First Meditation', for example), Husserl thinks a new beginning will not
even assume the binding character of reasoning and logic.\textsuperscript{15} Descartes' purpose and procedures for the universal doubt are different from Husserl's.

Needless to say, Husserl offers many particular (and not always consistent) interpretations of Descartes' 'putting into question' (\textit{In-Frage-Stellen}) of the external world over the course of his career: In his \textit{Meditations} Descartes' 'hypothetical doubt' takes the form of a worry about the \textit{genius malignus}, which puts in question the very existence of the world and even the existence of the inquirer in the most radical way, such that it is entirely possible for the Cartesian inquirer that the world itself is an illusion and does not exist. Husserl always argues that it is countersensical to attempt to deny the world from the phenomenological \textit{epoche} from the Cartesian at precisely this point.\textsuperscript{16} Descartes' is a dogmatic scepticism - the denial of the existence of the world - rather than a Pyrrhonian scepticism which remains uncommitted. Husserl always argues that it is countersensical to attempt to deny the world from within the world. Husserl himself wants a rather different conclusion to be drawn from the \textit{epoche}. We should suspend belief in the world, and instead of naively accepting it we can give it the status of 'acceptance phenomenom'.\textsuperscript{17} What must be effected is 'a certain amount of putting',\textsuperscript{18} The putting remains what it is, yet it is effectively corralled or put into brackets.

I now enter a world where the factual and contingent drops away and I experience the world and my own conscious acts as a set of correlations between intentions and their fulfilling senses. Descartes' key insight that all sciences gain their validity with reference to self-knowledge and the experience of the 'ego cogito, ego sum' is interpreted by Husserl, in his later years at least (as he puts it in the \textit{Amsterdam Lectures} as:

\begin{quote}
Every real thing, and ultimately the whole world as it exists for us in such and such a way, only exists as an actual or possible \textit{evidence} of our own \textit{cognition}, as a possible experiential context of our own experience; and in dealing with the content of our own life of thought and knowing, the best case being in myself, one may assume our own \textit{(intersubjective) operations} for testing and proving as the pre-eminent form of evidentially grounded truth. Thus, for us, true being is a name for products of actual and possible cognitive operations, an accomplishment of cognition \textit{[Erlebnisleis­ tung]}\textsuperscript{19}.
\end{quote}

Husserl is clear that the bracketing of the existence-positing aspect of our conscious acts is one of the most effective ways of arriving at the domain of transcendental 'self experience' (\textit{Selbstverfertigung}), but it must never be construed as bringing our naturally existing, psychological self (\textit{zum}) into view.\textsuperscript{20} While the domain of individual self is the 'phenomenological residuum'\textsuperscript{21} left over, this must be understood as the pure or transcendental not the empirical, natural ego.

Despite Husserl's life-long engagement with the Cartesian way, he nevertheless recognized its inherent problems, especially the difficulty of moving from its fundamentally ego-centred stance to uncover the realm of transcendental \textit{inter-subjectivity}.\textsuperscript{22} In the \textit{Crisis} he would concede that the Cartesian way to transcendental subjectivity was too abrupt in that it brought one into the transcendent realm too quickly, and in fact the reflection on the life-world is meant to remedy defects in the Cartesian way. In fact, it is puzzling how the Cartesian method of reduction leads one to constituting subjectivity at all. While it is clear that one arrives at noetic-noematic correlations with their ethic character inhibited, how does one progress to view these as accomplishments, and specifically of an ego, unless one has already succumbed to the Cartesian claim that the \textit{epoche} leads one to the ego cogito? It seems Husserl requires the Cartesian way to gain sight of a constituting ego, and hence its prominence in his writings. But, even as he was developing the Cartesian way in the 1920s, he was also exploring another way, through a radical meditation on the achievement of Kant (but always aware of the limitations of his formal concept of the ego as an identity pole) and of German Idealism (specifically Fichte).

\section*{Radicalizing Kant's achievement and the encounter with Fichte}

While Husserl grasped the importance of Descartes right from the beginning, it was some years before he recognized his affinity with Kant. Paul Natorp may be credited with awakening Husserl from the anti-Kantian suspicions earlier inculcated in him by Brentano, who portrayed Kant as the beginning of the demise of scientific philosophy and as opening the paths to scepticism, subjectivism and ultimate irrationality. But Natorp, himself following Hermann Cohen,\textsuperscript{53} had shown Husserl a way of interpreting the Kantian \textit{a priori} stripped of subjectivism and 'anthropologism', distancing the notion of the \textit{a priori} from the more suspect naturalistic notion of the innate.

Husserl had wrestled with Kant since the beginning of his career, criticizing the latter's account of numbers in \textit{Philosophy of Arithmetic} (1811). In the \textit{Prolegomena} he acknowledged Kant's importance and endorses the latter's distinction between pure and applied logic, while rejecting Kant's restriction of logic to the Aristotelian syllogistic.\textsuperscript{24} Already in the First Edition of the \textit{Prolegomena}, he echoes Kant's characterization of his transcendental philosophy as the inquiry into the conditions that make objective knowledge possible: 'We are plainly concerned with a quite necessary generalization of the question as to the "conditions of the possibility of experience" [\textit{Beschreibung der Möglichkeit einer Erfahrung}].\textsuperscript{25}

However, Husserl believes this search for ideal conditions of experience must be given a far stricter determination than Kant had done. He first of all jettisons all searching into psychological conditions of the real causal kind, conditions which determine how humans approach knowledge. He is interested in \textit{ideal} conditions, which again he distinguishes into two kinds - the \textit{noetic} and the \textit{logical}. Noetic conditions concern the subjective elements that must be in place for any kind of 'thinking being' - truths must be grasped as truths, and as consequences of other truths, and so on. These are different from the logically objective conditions that concern the laws governing the truths themselves, which hold independently of our grasping them. But Husserl also wants a stricter determi-
It was Fichte who put Kant's philosophy on a secure footing by genuinely uniting theory and practice and ridding it of obscure 'things in themselves'. For Husserl, 'Kant's results are the points of departure for Fichte'. Kant had maintained that the transcendental things in themselves affect our sensibility even if we cannot know anything about them. Fichte sweeps this away as a remnant of dogmatism, and also Kant's assumption that sensibility must be passively stimulated from without before it can be active. For Fichte, human subjectivity is itself the primal action that brings the experience of world into being: 'The Fichtean I is the self-poising action (sich selbst setzende Tathandlung) out of which in infinite succession ever new actions arise'. Moreover, these actions are teleological or goal-oriented, and thus 'to write the history of the I, of the absolute intelligence, is therefore to write the history of the necessary teleology in which the world as phenomenal comes to progressive creation, comes to creation in this intelligence'. In humans, the absolute I splits itself, and philosophy consists in grasping the world as the product of this self-splitting ego. Fichte's particular genius is to see the moral dimension of this idealism. The aim of the self-development of the ego is a moral world order, which is the guiding ideal of reason itself. Husserl, himself, looking to a universal moral community beyond any narrow national self-interest, cites Fichte's hope for a 'total rebirth of humanity'. Moreover, human self-understanding is the self-revelation of God.

Similar to his embrace of Fichte in 1917, in his address to Freiburg University in celebration of Kant on 1 May 1924, Husserl stressed the 'obvious essential relationship' between his phenomenology and the transcendental philosophy of Kant, and the 'inexorable necessity' that led him to transcendental philosophy. Kant offered an entirely new vision and new approach in philosophy, even the idea of it had never previously been articulated. Kant thereby set a task that remains 'the most exuberant of all scientific tasks for mankind', the 'greatest of all theoretical tasks that could be given to modern humanity'. Husserl's unique and deeply original transcendental philosophy must attempt a radicalization of the truth hidden in Kant. This involves a sharpened sense of the a priori (including the defence of the material a priori) and a recognition that Husserl assumed that the form of the world was more or less as given in Newton's physics, whereas Husserl himself recognized the crucial role of the life-world (Lebenswelt). Nevertheless, Kant was only the 'preshaper of scientific transcendental philosophy', since he left it half submerged in mythical concepts (Husserl has no time for Kant's thing-in-itself, the doctrine of intuitus archeptv, the mythology of transcendental apperception, etc.). Kant did have a genuinely profound sense of the fundamental nature of synthesis and was carrying out genuine intentional analyses. Indeed, Brentano's failure was precisely his inability to connect intentionality with synthesis. Kant, then, offers Husserl a new way of entering into the nature of intentional life as a system of syntheses, either passively or actively carried out by the ego. Moreover, with Kant, Husserl held time to be the deepest form of synthesis.

So far in this chapter I have been charting the historical genesis of transcendental philosophy in Husserl's own development and in the modern philosophical tradition from Descartes to Kant and Fichte, as Husserl reads that tradition. I shall now turn to examine in more detail the manner in which the transcendental attitude emerges out of the normal 'natural' attitude. When Husserl simply presents the problematic of the emergence of the transcendental attitude, he begins with a discussion of our natural, practical or theoretical, world-view.
of the world. The ‘correlate’ of the natural attitude is the world,116 which itself is a limit idea, an ‘idea lying at infinity’.117 It is the idea of a correlate of the sense-bestowing functions of conscious life.

All activities of consciousness, including all scientific activity, indeed all knowledge, initially take place within the natural attitude.118 In Erste Phanomenologie, Husserl writes:

The natural attitude is the form in which the total life of humanity is realized in running its natural, practical course. It was the only form from millennium to millennium, until out of science and philosophy there developed unique motivations for a revolution.119

Everything is originally a part of this natural world, including living things, animals, humans, communities and cultural items and establishments of every kind, including scientific theories themselves.120

We live naively in this world, swimming with the flow of its givens that have the character of being ‘on hand’ (vorhanben) and ‘actual’ (wirklich).121 The natural attitude itself pervades all our consciousness but is not articulated; it is ‘unthetic, unthought, unpredicatable’. It is always ‘on hand’ and yet in a sense indeterminate.

Reflecting on the manner in which all natural activity operates with a general stance, Husserl becomes aware of the phenomenon of the connectedness (Zusammenhang) of all experience, the ‘pre-given’ experience of a ‘world’.122 Traditional philosophy and sciences have offered a description of this indeterminate, and thus could not be thought’.123 But, in line with his growing recognition of the different layers of the reduction, he realizes that the overthrow of the natural attitude provides access to transcendental experience and to the recognition that the whole sense of the world in itself and all its validities are cognitive accomplishments, productions or achievements (Erkenntnistheilungen) and for human subjectivity.124 The reduction is supposed to make transparent how consciousness constitutes itself all worldly transcendencies, all objecthood. This is Kant’s breakthrough: to have grasped the world as the outcome of syntheses and constitution. Its sense and its being are products of transcendental subjectivity. As Husserl says, ‘there is phenomenological correlation-research, which explores the possible world and its ontic structures [as a world of possible experience] with regard to the possible bestowal of sense and the establishment of being, without which that world equally could not be thought’.125

Husserl’s modes of reduction may be considered as different ways of bringing the transcendental into view and of allowing us to inhabit this domain, to really live in it. To retain the properly transcendental attitude, to stay within its space of reasons, as it were, one has to maintain vigilance against the relapse into naturalism, which is the sin of ‘transcendental psychologism’, against which Husserl regularly warned. Phenomenology carried out as a kind of pure psychology must be distinguished from a properly transcendental phenomenology.126 The same insights occur in both sciences but their meaning changes in transcendental phenomenology. But no psychology – not even a pure psychology – can found transcendental philosophy as such. Nevertheless, in Ideen I §76 Husserl acknowledges that every discovery of transcendental phenomenology can be reinterpreted as an eidetic-psychological finding, and he continued to emphasize the strict parallelism between the natural and the transcendental. In other words, there is an essential parallelism between transcendental phenomenology and pure psychology (it is clear that the Cartesian regress to the cogito brings both the empirical ego and the transcendental ego into view, but the transcendental ego requires an additional change of attitude, one which puts in suspension the ‘general thesis’ of the world).

As Husserl says in Erste Phanomenologie, there can be only one method for transcendental philosophy: to ‘study cognizing life itself in its own essence achievements [das erkennende Leben selbst in seinen eigenen Wesenleistungen]’,127 and this within a wider study of consciousness itself and how it constitutes objective senses and true senses. For Husserl, it is important to understand that the reduction does not
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involve paring away of a portion of the real, but an abandonment from reality understood as actuality, which leaves in place all conscious enactments and their products, but simply now presented to the theoretical onlooker.

It is in *Ideas I* that Husserl first declared in print that the phenomenological reduction may properly be characterized as transcendental:

The characterization of the phenomenological reduction and, likewise, of the pure sphere of mental processes as 'transcendental' rests precisely on the fact that we discover in this reduction an absolute sphere of stuffs and noetic forms [eine absolute Sphäre von Stoffen und noetischen Formen] whose determinately structured combinations possess, according to immanent eidetic necessity, the marvellous consciousness of something determinate and determinable, given thus and so, which is something over and against consciousness itself, something fundamentally other, non-really inherent [irreelle], transcendental; the characterization of mental processes as 'transcendental' further rests on the fact that this is the primal source [die Unquelle] in which is found the only conceivable solution of those deepest problems of cognition concerning the essence and possibility of an objectively valid knowledge of something transcendent.136

Husserl places the emphasis on explaining how the miracle of the appearance of objectivity within subjectivity is brought about. How can the forms of consciousness come together according to necessary laws to generate objectivity as something other, transcendent and non-immanent in consciousness?

In *Ideas I* the new transcendental appreciation of consciousness is marked by the self-evidence of the inmanent perception or of one's consciousness of one's own stream of mental processes. He understands the Cartesian cogito as showing that every conscious experience contains the essential possibility of its being reflected on in a way that confirms its actual occurrence in an irrefragable manner. As Husserl puts it: 'To each stream of mental processes and to each Ego, as Ego, there belongs the essential possibility of acquiring this evidence; each bears in itself, as an essential possibility, the guarantee of its absolute existence [eine absolutes Dasein].137 As Husserl confirms further down in the same paragraph, any conscious process is 'originarily and absolutely given' not only in respect of its essence but also of its existence. Of course, Husserl emphasizes how limited is the evidence which is given by such 'immanent' seizing of one's own processes. One cannot, for example, infer from the existence of the processes themselves that they are components of a real human being (as Husserl himself noted in a marginal entry).

In *Erste Philosophie* Part Two, Husserl further recognizes the difference between recognizing the irremovability of the self and its experience from any thought of the world and, on the other hand, the kind of transcendental self-awareness which results precisely from the critique of this mundane self-experience and which is entirely incapable of being thought away.138 This requires moving beyond the 'human I' (das Menschen-Ich)139 to discover myself as subject for the whole world. Even if I were to try to think away the existence of the world and of my mundane human self, I would still discover myself as there: 'I would be and would remain someone whose being is not touched by any nothingness affecting the world [Weltnichtigkeit], someone who can never be annihilated in a so-called epistemological annihilation [erkennnistkritische Vernichtung] of my body and of all the world.140 Husserl even says, allowing himself the use of religious language (inadmissible at this stage in strict science), one could think of this as a kind of survival like that of an angel or a pure soul. There is a sharp differentiation to be made between my mundane and transcendental self-experience.

In contrast to this apodictic self-givenness of immanent experiences, Husserl claims that it is an eidetic law that physical existence is never required as necessary by the givenness to consciousness of anything physical. The transcendental physical is by its essential nature always contingent.141 The self-givenness of immanent conscious processes, on the other hand, is entirely different and is absolutely given. It belongs, Husserl says, to 'a sphere of absolute positioning [eine absolute Positionierung]' of the primal source of consciousness.142 Against the backdrop of this contingent posited world is the positing ego that is necessary and absolute. There is what Husserl calls an 'essential detachability [prinzipielle Ablosbarkeit] of the whole natural world from the domains of consciousness'.143 Husserl presents the 'detachability' or one-sided separability of the world from consciousness as the discovery implicit in the Cartesian cogito. The essence of the transcendental world is such that it has meaning only in essential interconnection with consciousness – and not just possible consciousness but actual consciousness. It was this claim that led to his explicit adoption of transcendental idealism, especially in *Ideas I* §47, and which Husserl maintains for the rest of his life. In his *Fichte Lectures* he had criticized Kant for still retaining this mythical view of transcendent things in themselves affecting our sensibility, as if subjectivity needed a stimulus to awaken it from its original passivity; whereas, for Husserl, as for Fichte, consciousness has an original activity. As Husserl explicitly confirms in the *Crisis*, he is against any 'absolutization' of the world which would treat it as a thing 'in itself' independent of our consciousness and knowledge of it.

One of Husserl's most notorious claims in *Ideas I* §49 is that we can think the very 'annihilation of the world' [Weltnichtigung] without thereby being able to think of the disappearance of consciousness. This claim is also repeated several times in *Ideas II*:

If we think of monadic subjects and their streams of consciousness, or rather, if we think of the thinkable minimum of self-consciousness, then a monadic consciousness, one that would have no 'world' at all given to it, could indeed be thought, – and thus a monadic consciousness without regularities in the course of sensations, without motivated possibilities in the apprehensions of things.144

It is even conceivable that there might be no empirical consciousness at all, no world, but still absolute consciousness would be what it is.145 Husserl says in *Erste Philosophie* Part Two that the characterisation of mental processes as 'transcendental' rests precisely on the fact that we discover in this reduction an absolute sphere of stuffs and noetic forms [eine absolute Sphäre von Stoffen und noetischen Formen] whose determinately structured combinations possess, according to immanent eidetic necessity, the marvellous consciousness of something determinate and determinable, given thus and so, which is something over and against consciousness itself, something fundamentally other, non-really inherent [irreelle], transcendental; the characterization of mental processes as 'transcendental' further rests on the fact that this is the primal source [die Unquelle] in which is found the only conceivable solution of those deepest problems of cognition concerning the essence and possibility of an objectively valid knowledge of something transcendent.136

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Philosophie that even if God were to create an entirely illusory world (Scheinwelt) with us in it, we would still be true subjects of this world.  

This is a very clearly articulated transcendental idealism, which gives absolute priority to consciousness. Consciousness, and specifically my consciousness (all consciousness is characterized by mineness and thus is first person in an irreducible sense), cannot be thought away. But the consciousness referred to here is pure transcendental consciousness, not that of my natural self. Nevertheless, it is one of the mysteries of transcendental consciousness that it is only manifest in its mundane form. We shall now turn to this complicated but important aspect of Husserl’s idealism.

The notion of world and of the Mundanization of the ego

For Husserl, there is a world essentially connected with every possible act of consciousness. The natural world has unlimited temporal and spatial horizons stretching in all directions. Furthermore, any actual experience points beyond itself to other possible experiences, which in turn point to other experiences and so on. But the actual existence of this world, for Husserl, an irrational, contingent fact. There is no necessity governing the fact that the world is the way it is and not some other way. Yet, it is necessary that the transcendental ego be instantiated in some world, in some body; and so on. Although the ego is the source of all meaning in its absolute nature, it is also an eidetic necessity that the ego be individualized as this or that person and that the ego be included in a factual world – ‘mundanized’ in Husserl’s terminology. Even the inquiry into the possibility of a purely solipsistic consciousness outside all community is itself one of the transcendental problems.

Questions arise how consciousness is able to effect its singularization and also how it achieves its intersubjective and communicative aspects. Part of the complexity of the problem is that the individual instantiated ego requires communization through contact with other egos. From early in his Göttingen years, and expressed in Ideas I §33, for instance, Husserl recognizes that the world contains other conscious organisms, the domain of psycho-physical nature as he terms it. Who can deny that other animals and humans have conscious streams like us? The question is, how are such streams constituted? How can there be such streams as events within the world and yet the the domain of consciousness be a self-enclosed region? How can purely immanent consciousness relinquish its immanence and take on transcendence in the form of corporeality? Consciousness must first be inserted into the world through a concrete body. Only thus can it apprehend or understand other consciousnesses through their bodies. Husserl spent a great deal of his time asking these questions. He attempted to resolve them within the Cartesian mode (for example, in the ‘Fifth Cartesian Meditation’), but also, as in the Crisis, by ‘reducing’ or distilling the essence of transcendental life by a transformed inspection of the communal life-world. Neither procedure of reduction was successfully carried through and, as

Husserl says, many times, here we stand before a great mystery. Husserl sums up this mystery or paradox, in Crisis §§33, as the question how we can be both subjects for the world and objects in the world? Finally, in reflecting on the transcendental ego in its intersubjective pluralized life, are we not thinking of it naively as a set of human beings? But precisely this is excluded in the epoché. In the transcendental attitude, we must understand each human being from the reverse point of view – as a ‘self-objectivation’ (Selbstobjektivation) of the transcendental I, the ‘absolute ego’.

Conclusion: from conditions of possibility to absolute idealism

To summarize, Husserl’s idealism is primarily concerned with the inability to conceive of an object independent of a subject and to think of the object as constituted out of activities and structures of consciousness according to predetermined laws. As he says in Ideas I §§49-50, there is absolutely no sense to the notion of “thing in itself”. What we think of as this first reality is in fact always second: ‘The being which is first for us is second in itself; i.e., it is what it is only in “relation” to the first.’

First reality is absolute consciousness. Nevertheless, Husserl, who was both familiar with and deeply impressed by Berkeley, as we know from the second of his Logical Investigations, always denied that he was advocating a subjective or Berkeleyan idealism, since such idealism involves an ‘absolutizing’ of the world. Husserl believes he has determined the correct sense of world and consciousness and that subjective idealism is a distortion of these senses, actually turns the sense of world into a countersense (Widersinn). There is no question of the world being ‘swallowed up’ (vzechling) in the subject. The world only has the sense of something that has received its ‘sense bestowal’ (Sinngebung) from consciousness but it is objective nonetheless. Kant was the first to articulate this insight, but his version still requires purification. The next step is to grasp how the subject can both constitute itself and the world and also be a contingently occurring object within the world, among a plurality of other objectivations of transcendental egos. This, for Husserl, is the deepest problem of transcendental philosophy.

Husserl’s final dream is a universal account of the pure possible forms of transcendental life itself, combining the discoveries of monadic and intersubjective transcendental life. This would include both possible and actual realizations of transcendental subjectivity, their truths and falsities, in all their structural interconnections. Moreover, there is not just the present of my transcendental life, but a transcendental past and future. Transcendental philosophy becomes the systematic self-development (Selbstentfaltung) and self-theorizing (Selbsttheorisierung) of transcendental subjectivity, and the path to the realization of absolute, justified truth. It seems that Husserl has progressed to a kind of transcendental absolute idealism.

In this chapter I have tried to show that Husserl’s concept of transcendental philosophy is extraordinarily radical, broad and original. Initially introduced
through the Cartesian suspension of the natural, it is also conceived by Husserl as a radicalizing of the Kantian attempt to specify the a priori conditions for the possibility of knowledge. Moreover, in a manner not dissimilar to Hegel, Husserl sees his own work as an Aufhebung of the essence of modern philosophy. Finally, transcendental phenomenology must document the possible essential forms of transcendental subjectivity and intersubjectivity, and the relation between absolute consciousness and the objectification of spirit in history. Of course, such a huge and complex set of tasks calls out for stringent criticism. The first step, and the one to which I have restricted myself here, is to understand the full range of Husserl’s phenomenology as transcendental philosophy.

Notes


7 I am grateful to Robin Rollinger, currently editing E. Husserl, Texte zum transcendentalen Idealismus (1908–1915), forthcoming from Kluwer, for this information. Rollinger stresses that at this time (c. 1915) Husserl uses the term to refer to the thesis that real objects cannot exist without an actual (as opposed to possible) consciousness. In Cartesian Meditations (for bibliographic details see note 26 below) transcendental idealism is understood as the claim that all objects are correlated to consciousness.

8 Husserl, Ideen I, §8.

9 Husserl, Ideen I, §33, p. 63; Husserlana, vol. III/1, §8g.

10 Husserl, Ideen I, §51.


14 Husserl frequently comments on Kant’s ‘Letter to Her’; see, for example, his ‘Phänomenologie und Erkenntnistaxtik’ (1917), in E. Husserl, Aufsätze und Verlage...
Husserl, Idées I, §51.


Indeed, the point of the life-world is that it cannot only be identified and understood as such from the transcendental perspective. It is precisely to free oneself of the presuppositions of the life-world that one embarks on the transcendental reduction.


Husserl, Crisis, p. 297; Husserleana, vol. VI, §54.


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lecture series was delivered on 8–17 November 1917, and repeated on 14–16 January 1918 and 6–9 November 1918, just before the armistice.

103 Husserl, Husserlana, vol. XXV, 269.
104 Husserl, Husserlana, vol. XXV, 274.
111 Husserl, Crisis, §32.
121 Husserl, Ideas I, §50.
123 I owe this point to Marcus Brainard.
126 Husserl, Crisis, §41.
127 Husserl, Cartesian Meditations, §2.
128 Husserl, Crisis, §39.
136 Husserl, Ideas I, §97, p. 239; Husserlana, vol. III/1, 204.
140 Husserl, Erste Philosophie (1923/24), Zweiter Teil, Husserlana, vol. VIII, 73, my translation.
141 Husserl, Ideas I, §46, p. 102; Husserlana, vol. III/1, 86.
142 Husserl, Ideas I, §46, p. 102; Husserlana, vol. III/1, 86.
146 Husserl, Erste Philosophie (1923/24), Zweiter Teil, Husserlana, vol. VIII, 73.
147 Husserl, Ideas I, §47.
148 Husserl, Ideas I, §47.