

Self-Knowledge

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 A HISTORY

Self-Knowledge

Self-Knowledge

SELF-KNOWLEDGE

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OXFORD PHILOSOPHICAL CONCEPTS

Edited by **URSULA RENZ**

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Husserl's Phenomenology and the Project of Transcendental Self-Knowledge

Dermot Moran

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The Delphic motto, "Know thyself!" has gained a new signification. Positive science is a science lost in the world (*Wissenschaft in der Weltverlorenheit*). I must lose the world by *epoché*, in order to regain it by a universal self-examination (*in universaler Selbstbesinnung*). "Noli foras ire," says Augustine, "in te redit in interiore homine habitat veritas."

EDMUND HUSSERL, *Cartesian Meditations*¹

For Edmund Husserl, philosophy is first and foremost a science of subjectivity, or specifically, of subjectivity understood as "sense constituting" (meaning forming),² rather than what he characterizes as "the science of objective subjectivity, the subjectivity of men and other animals, a subjectivity that is part of the world."³ For the mature Husserl, however, knowing what subjectivity is yields not just knowledge but

1 Trans. Dorion Cairns (Hague: Nijhoff, 1950), sec. 65, 157. Quotations from English translations are followed by section number and page number as well as by references to the critical edition of Husserl's works, *Husserliana: Gesammelte Werke* (Dordrecht: Springer, 1956–). Hereafter cited as *Hua*. Thus the reference here is *Cartesian Meditations*, sec. 64, 157. Hereafter cited as *CM*. Cf. *Hua*, 1:183.

2 According to Husserl, conscious life knits (synthesizes) itself into a coherent unity and intentionally invests with meaning and designates as some kind of being all its objects, including giving sense to the overall context ("horizon") of its world. For Husserl's discussions of *Abbau* and *Rekonstruktion*, cf. *Hua*, 8:356.

3 *CM*, sec. 13, 30. Cf. *Hua*, 1:68.

self-knowledge in a very special sense. Self-knowledge, thus, is the central goal of Husserl's phenomenology, although interpreted in his own peculiar way. Self-knowledge, for Husserl, is not to be conceived in terms of the subject's direct, immediate, noninferential awareness of his or her own mental states, as in most versions of contemporary analytic philosophy of mind. It means, at the very least, to know that one *is* a self, to know what kind of developmental and temporal being a self is (and how the self spans its temporality), and, crucially, to know the a priori conditions governing the meaning-constitution of all there is, including the self itself, other selves, and the intersubjective objective world as a whole.

Thus Husserl regards self-knowledge as an imperative, for both theoretical insight and practical wisdom. On the theoretical side, it is vital to recognize that true knowledge of the self cannot be attained in the natural attitude, but demands a very particular *transcendental* approach. As he writes in the first draft (1927) of his *Encyclopaedia Britannica* article on phenomenology:

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.⁴

Phenomenological self-knowledge, in the Husserlian conception, first and foremost involves gaining a detached intellectual appreciation (purified of all naturalistic presuppositions) of the self and its constituting activities; but knowing oneself in such a radical way is also *transformative* for any life. That's why transcendental self-knowledge may be seen as offering an *ethical* vision for human life. Self-knowledge

⁴ Edmund Husserl, "Phenomenology [Draft A]," in *Psychological and Transcendental Phenomenology and the Confrontation with Heidegger (1927–31)*, trans. Thomas Sheehan and Richard E. Palmer, *Collected Works*, vol. 6 (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1997), 98. Cf. *Hua*, 9:250.

is necessary for ethical “self-renewal,” as Husserl puts it in his *Kaizo* articles titled “Renewal” written in 1923–24.⁵ Self-knowledge enables humans to free themselves from the prejudices of daily living and allows them to be motivated by grounded rational motives, realizing the ideal of what Husserl calls “genuine humanity” (*echtes Menschentum*).⁶

As a result of this self-knowledge, Husserl believes, one can live a fully rational life since one’s motives have been clarified and one has come to adopt the most rational of motives. I become self-responsible in the deepest and most radical sense, not just responsible *for* myself but responsible or answerable *to* myself. For Husserl, living with self-knowledge is living a “life of ultimate responsibility,”⁷ since it is only through self-knowledge that we learn to explicate the true sense of our culture, its guiding values and norms.

In what follows I shall discuss Husserl’s views on self-knowledge in three steps. First I offer a brief exposition of the Socratic and, what amounts to the same thing, the Cartesian heritage underlying his phenomenology. I shall then give an overview of Husserl’s philosophical development. In particular, I shall focus on two peculiarities. Considering the conception of the “self” or “ego,” I shall discuss the increasing attention Husserl pays to the function of the I in the constitution of all meaning. Second, I shall point out how, in his mature writing, Husserl comes to distinguishing between natural and transcendental self-reflection. Third, I shall discuss the value of Husserl’s concept of *epoche*, that is, suspension of belief commitments, for self-knowledge. Generally, one can say that, for Husserl, it is due to the insight gained by the exercise of the *epoche* that phenomenology

5 Cf. *Hua* 27:23. Husserl wrote several articles for a Japanese journal called *Kaizo*. Only the first article, “Renewal as an Individual-Ethical Problem,” was published. Cf. Edmund Husserl, *Shorter Works*, trans. and ed. Frederick Elliston and Peter McCormick (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 326–34. Cf. *Hua*, 27:3–13.

6 Edmund Husserl, *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, trans. Dorion Cairns (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1969), 5. Hereafter cited as *FTL*. Cf. *Hua*, 17:9.

7 *FTL*, 5. Cf. *Hua*, 17:9.

can be understood as a particular way of acquiring philosophical self-knowledge or of obeying the imperative to know oneself.

13.1. THE SOCRATIC AND CARTESIAN HERITAGE OF HUSSERL'S PHENOMENOLOGY

Husserl regards his form of self-knowledge as the most ultimate that can be gained in philosophy. It will raise life to a new level. He praises Socrates for having made the original breakthrough to self-aware, transcendental life. Socrates proposed a reform of life, away from blind, absorbed living in unclarity⁸ and toward a life of reflective self-evidencing, a genuine life of reason.⁹ Husserl allied this Socratic breakthrough to Descartes' return to selfhood. Husserl often describes phenomenology as a "new Cartesianism": "We can say also that a radical and universal continuation of Cartesian meditations, or (equivalently) a universal self-knowledge, is philosophy itself and encompasses all self-accountable science."¹⁰

For Husserl, the Cartesian cogito is the anchor point of the whole of phenomenology. He accepts the basic truth of the cogito—I have the direct, immediate, incorrigible, apodictic, necessary truth that "I exist." This truth cannot be canceled out; it is *undurchstreichbar*.¹¹ I experience my "living present"; I cannot doubt that I exist—I cannot even imagine myself not existing because the imagined self that does not exist will not be I but another.

While Husserl credits both Socrates and Descartes with developing philosophy's interest in self-knowledge, he himself claims to be the first to have methodically uncovered and explored an infinite domain of self-experience. He is even willing to call his philosophy a kind of

8 Cf. *Hua*, 7:10.

9 Cf. *Hua*, 7:12.

10 *CM*, sec. 64, 156 (translation modified by Dermot Moran). Cf. *Hua*, 1:182–83.

11 *Hua*, 14:152.

universal egology¹² although, in his mature writings, he writes that transcendental subjectivity always implies or is involved in a “nexus” of transcendental intersubjectivity, and hence that one can be oneself only in relation to “being-with-others” (*Mitsein, Miteinandersein*).¹³

Self-knowledge requires minimally that one’s mental states or lived experiences can be reflectively apprehended. Husserl maintains it is an essential law that every mental experience can be brought to reflective apprehension.¹⁴ Husserl furthermore lays heavy emphasis on the apodictic character of one’s immediate direct presence of oneself, although he believes there is much more to be apprehended here.

Phenomenology, for Husserl, is preeminently a systematic science of first-personal experience, although he rarely uses the precise terminology of the “first person.” The first person also participates in second- and third-personal stances; the self is in part constituted through intersubjective involvements with others (the “I-you relation”). There is also a first-person plural, and, as we shall see, Husserl thinks that the Cartesian *ego cogito* should strictly speaking by interpreted as a “we think.”¹⁵

Once one recognizes the necessary truth of the cogito, one enters immediately and without warning into a new domain of experience—“transcendental self-experience,”¹⁶ an “infinite realm of being of a new kind,”¹⁷ a domain that can be intuitively explicated once one adopts the correct approach. I begin from the apodictic experience of the “I am” in the flowing present and also apprehend the intentional structure of the “I think” as an I-thinking-a-thought, *ego-cogitatio-cogitatum*. Around this immediate core of intuitive givenness are clustered “horizontal” experiences, of the past and future, possibility and actuality, of

12 Cf. *CM*, sec. 13, 30. Cf. *Hua*, 1:69, sec. 21, 53; 1:89.

13 Cf. *Hua*, 6:260, 15:267.

14 Cf. Edmund Husserl, *Ideas for a Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy. First Book: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2014), sec. 38, 66. Hereafter cited as *Ideas I*. Cf. *Hua*, 1:67.

15 *Hua*, 8:316.

16 *CM*, sec. 9, 22. Cf. *Hua*, 1:62.

17 *CM*, sec. 12, 27. Cf. *Hua*, 1:66.

“intentional implication” that are, Husserl maintains, also “apodictically experienceable.”¹⁸ The manner in which the self structures its temporal presence can be explored and likewise its manner of giving something the value of actuality, possibility, and so on.

Husserl is quite aware that the cogito is a performative act that discloses the I in its self-presence. Furthermore, this I or ego needs to be de-constructed carefully in a reflection that goes beyond natural reflection, which is, for Husserl, always inhibited by a commitment to “belief in being,” *Seinsglaube*. The exploration of the true nature of the ego requires “transcendental reflection” so that its horizons, syntheses, passivities, habitualities, and lawful essential structure can be understood.

Natural reflection, for Husserl, is trapped in a kind of innate “naturalism”; it remains very much human reflection saturated with anthropological and psychological prejudices. It is hard therefore to access the conscious egoic life of the self in its original purity. Borrowing a technique from the ancient skeptics and modifying Descartes’ radical doubt, Husserl proposes a new method of transcendental epoche—bracketing of belief in being, abstaining from all belief commitments—adopting the standpoint of what Husserl will call the “disinterested” or “detached” transcendental spectator. He says in his Amsterdam Lectures of 1929:

A mere reflection on consciousness does not yet yield the mental in purity and in its own essentiality. Rather, we must in addition abstain from that believing in being (*Seins-Glaubens*) by virtue of which we accept the world in the natural life of consciousness and our reflecting on it; as phenomenologists, we are not permitted to go along with this (and in further consequence, indeed, we must abstain from every position-taking of any kind toward the world naively accepted by us). As phenomenologists we must be as it were

¹⁸ *CM*, sec. 12, 28. Cf. *Hua*, 1:67.

non-participating onlookers at the life of consciousness, which can only in this way become the pure theme of our experiencing.”¹⁹

In his works, Husserl takes it for granted that transcendental self-knowledge is a necessary, vital acquisition of humankind, but to show that this is so, he will have to go beyond the mere essential description of transcendental life and show why it must be carried out by those seeking to live rational lives. Husserl’s entire philosophical focus, therefore, may be said to be on the practice of “self-awareness,” “self-apperception,”²⁰ or “self-knowledge,”²¹ and the living of a life of rational “self-responsibility”²² (*Selbstverantwortlichkeit*).²³ But how this is to be understood changes between his earlier and later works.

13.2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF HUSSERL’S PHENOMENOLOGY OF EGO AND SELFHOOD

While Husserl was always interested in conscious subjectivity and its sense-making, he initially was not interested in the “I” or ego-self as such. He originally identified phenomenology with descriptive psychology (with its practice of “inner perception”), as developed by his former teacher Franz Brentano (1838–1917) both in *Psychology from the Empirical Standpoint* (1874)²⁴ and in his lectures *Descriptive Psychology* (1887–91).²⁵ Brentano conceived his descriptive psychology (“psychognosy”) as a

19 Edmund Husserl, “Amsterdam Lectures,” in *Psychological and Transcendental Phenomenology*, 222. Cf. *Hua*, 9:307.

20 *CM*, sec. 45, 99. Cf. *Hua*, 1:130.

21 *Ibid.*, sec. 64, 156. Cf. *Hua*, 1:182.

22 Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. David Carr (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970). Hereafter cited as *Crisis*.

23 *Hua*, 6:272.

24 Franz Brentano, *Psychology from the Empirical Standpoint*, trans. Antos C. Rancurello, D. B. Terrell, and Linda McAlister (London: Routledge, 1995). Cf. Franz Brentano, *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt*, 2 vols, ed. Oskar Kraus (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2013).

25 Franz Brentano, *Descriptive Psychology*, trans. Benito Müller (London: Routledge, 1995). Cf. Franz Brentano, *Deskriptive Psychologie*, ed. Roderick M. Chisholm and W. Baumgartner (Hamburg: Meiner, 1982).

science that “acquaints us with the objects of our own self.”²⁶ Insofar as descriptive psychology was concerned with self-knowledge, Brentano was satisfied simply with the immediate evident truth that was gained in inner perception of one’s psychic states. The aim was to describe the essential makeup of conscious experiences, excluding attention to the ego.

According to the mature Husserl, despite his recognition of intentionality, Brentano never came to grasp it as a “complex of performances,”²⁷ achievements of “sense-giving” subjectivity. Everything and every person—including the very idea of an objective reality called “nature” and indeed even God—is “for me what he is, in consequence of my own achievement of consciousness.”²⁸ Husserl claims in his *Crisis of European Sciences* to have recognized this “universal a priori of correlation between experienced object and manners of givenness”²⁹ already in 1898 while writing the *Logical Investigations*.

Initially, in the first edition of the *Logical Investigations*,³⁰ Husserl asserted (in Humean manner) that he could not find the “I” in the stream of experiences. He also rejected the neo-Kantian Paul Natorp’s (1854–1924) account of “consciousness”³¹ as a “primitive center of relations”: “I must frankly confess, however, that I am quite unable to find this primitive, necessary centre of relations. The only thing I can take note of and therefore perceive, are the empirical ego and its empirical relations to its own experiences.”³²

At this time Husserl thought of the empirical, psychological ego more or less as an object appearing in consciousness. He writes:

Objection may be raised to our previous assertion that the ego appears to itself, enjoys a consciousness and, in particular, a

26 Brentano, *Descriptive Psychology*, 78. Cf. *Deskriptive Psychologie*, 76.

27 *FTL*, sec. 97, 245. Cf. *Hua*, 17:252.

28 *FTL*, sec. 99, 251. Cf. *Hua*, 17:258.

29 Husserl, *Crisis*, sec. 48, 166n. Cf. *Hua* 6:169 n. 1.

30 Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, trans. John Findlay, ed. Dermot Moran, 2 vols. (New York: Routledge, 2001).

31 Cf. Paul Natorp, *Einleitung in die Psychologie nach kritischer Methode* (Freiburg: Mohr, 1888).

32 *LU*, Fifth Investigation, sec. 8, II, 92. Cf. *Hua*, 19.1:374.

perception of itself. Self-perception of the empirical ego is, however, a daily business, which involves no difficulty for understanding. We perceive the ego, just as we perceive an external thing.³³

By the time of his next major publication, *Ideas* (1913),³⁴ however, and the revised second edition of the *Logical Investigations* (1913), Husserl came to agree with Kant that the “I think” must accompany all experiences. He writes:

The pure ego lives itself out in a particular sense in every current cogito, yet all background experiences belong to it as well and it belongs to them. All of them, by virtue of belonging to the one stream of experience (*Erlebnisstrom*) that is mine, must be capable of being converted into current *cogitationes* or of being included in them immanently. In Kantian language: “The ‘I think’ must be able to accompany all my representations.”³⁵

The ego belongs to every experience, but, contrary to what Natorp claimed, it can be grasped in a special way:

It pertains in general to the essence of every cogito that a new cogito of the kind called by us “Ego-reflection” is in principle possible, one that grasps, on the basis of the earlier cogito. . . . the pure subject of that earlier cogito. It consequently pertains . . . to the essence of the pure Ego that it be able to grasp itself as what it is and in the way it functions, and thus make itself into an object. Therefore it is in no way correct to assert that the pure Ego is a subject that can never become an Object.³⁶

33 *LU*, Fifth Investigation, sec. 8, II, 93. Cf. *Hua*, 375.

34 Husserl, *Ideas I*.

35 *Ideas I*, sec. 57, 105. Cf. *Hua*, 3:1123.

36 Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, Second Book*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and Andre Schuwer (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1989), sec. 23, 107. Hereafter cited as *Ideas II*. Cf. *Hua*, 4:101.

From 1913 onward, Husserl adopts the neo-Kantian term “pure ego,” for example, in the second edition of the *Logical Investigations*, where he speaks of “the pure ego” (*das reine Ich*),³⁷ which he had originally dismissed as an unnecessary postulate for the unification of consciousness.³⁸ But Husserl is beginning to formulate new distinctions and to claim that besides the empirical ego, there must be postulated a “pure” ego and then a transcendental ego. He thenceforth attempts to chart the contribution of the sense-constituting self to all experience.

From now on, Husserl's phenomenology is no longer a descriptive psychology of individual mental episodes as in the Brentano school,³⁹ but involves a specific, sustained, methodological reflection on the unified “stream of conscious life” (*Bewusstseinsstrom*), a radical “sense explication” of “self-experience.” Thus the transcendental ego is the only true source of all “meaning and being.”⁴⁰ The positive sciences, the sciences of the world, have lost this sense of the manner in which all meaning is constituted by human intentional activities and passivities, since they study what they regard as (to invoke Hilary Putnam's phrase) a “ready-made” world. So a return to the sources of the self is a return to the origins of meaning formation, of original sense-making.

Husserl came to regard the self as much more than just a formal “ego pole” that unifies experiences. It is capable of acquiring habits, characteristics, a “style” of its own. Husserl recognizes that ego is not fixed but has a history: “The ego constitutes itself *for itself* in, so to speak, the unity of a history.”⁴¹ The self is conditioned by psychophysical

37 Husserl, *LU*, Fifth Investigation, sec. 5 and sec. 8.

38 Cf. *LU*, Fifth Investigation, sec. 8, II, 549n. Cf. *Hua*, 19.1:374n.

39 Cf. Liliana Albertazzi, Massimo Libardi, and Roberto Poli, eds., *The School of Franz Brentano* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1996).

40 *CM*, sec. 41, 84. Cf. *Hua*, 1:117.

41 *CM*, sec. 37, 75. Cf. *Hua*, 109.

restrictions, but it also accumulates sedimented traits, characteristics, capacities, powers, and habits. Husserl writes:

Habits are necessarily formed, just as much with regard to originally instinctive behavior . . . as with regard to free behavior. To yield to a drive establishes the drive to yield: habitually. Likewise, to let oneself be determined by a value-motive and to resist a drive establishes a tendency (a “drive”) to let oneself be determined once again by such a value-motive . . . and to resist these drives.⁴²

Coming to awareness of how our habitual selves are formed allows us to raise this process up to a more rational form of self-development.

13.3. TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL SELF-EXPERIENCE THROUGH THE EPOCHE

Radical self-reflection, for the mature Husserl, involves a deliberate stepping back (for which he uses the Greek term *epoché*) from one’s involvement in the ongoing flow of life, a “suspension” or “bracketing” of one’s cognitive stances or “position takings,” an unplugging of normal “belief in being” (*Seinsglaube*) that saturates everyday conscious life. This allows the self-mediator to scrutinize, comprehend, evaluate, and eventually embrace or discard his commitments on the basis of a transparent rationality and a deep comprehension of the workings of spirit.⁴³

In his mature writings after *Ideas*, Husserl understands the aim of philosophy itself to be to seek self-knowledge in an “absolute” sense, understanding, that is, that self has an absolute ontological primacy. Once he comes to recognize the pure ego, he becomes an explorer of

42 *Ideas II*, sec. 59, 267 (translation modified by Dermot Moran). Cf. *Hua*, 4:255.

43 Cf. Thomas Nenon, “Freedom, Responsibility and Self-Awareness in Husserl,” *New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Research II* (2002): 1–21.

its infinite depths.⁴⁴ He discusses not just the active, waking, thinking ego, the cogito in the full sense, but also passive states, the passive knitting together of experiences in perception (passive synthesis), as well as exploring altered or varied states of self, for example, the sleeping, fantasizing, or dreaming ego, the ego of the child, the ego of the mature adult, as well as the ego in its collective intentional engagements with other egos. But behind all these different modalities of the ego are the absolute ego and the pure ego, which led Husserl finally into alignment with the German idealist tradition (most notably Fichte, on whom he lectured in 1917).

For Husserl, the self has many layers or strata, ranging from the most primitive unity to be found in the synthesized temporal stream of experience that binds the self together, through the levels of the "ego" driven by wants, desires, and instincts, the ego of habits and capacities, right up to the fully autonomous freely acting rational agent acting as a person in a world of persons. The self is necessarily embodied in a particular time, place, and physical condition, but it also can develop into a freely acting person that cannot be simply identified with its body. Husserl writes: "The spirit, the human being as a member of the personal human world does not have a place the way things do."⁴⁵

And later, he adds:

In original genesis, the personal Ego constitutes itself not only as a person determined by *drives*, from the very outset and incessantly driven by original "instincts" and passively submitting to them, but *also as a higher, autonomous, freely acting* Ego, in particular one guided

44 Husserl uses the term "the ego" (*das Ego*) or the "I" (*Ich*) both for the first-person "empirical ego" (*Logical Investigations*), or "psychological" ego (cf. *CM*, sec. 11, 25; cf. *Hua*, 1:64), which is the subject of experiences, and provides identity across experiences, and for what he terms the "pure" (cf. *Ideas I*, sec. 57, 105; *Hua*, 3:1:109; sec. 80, 154. *Hua*, 3:1:161) or the "transcendental" ego (*das transzendentale Ego*, cf. *CM*, sec. 11, 26; *Hua*, 1:65). Husserl stresses the infinity of the ego self-experience at *CM*, sec. 12, 27. Cf. *Hua*, 1:66.

45 *Ideas II*, 215. Cf. *Hua*, 4:204.

by *rational motives*, and not one that is merely dragged along and unfree.⁴⁶

For Husserl these drives are never purely instinctual; they are configured by the attitudes we take toward them. Our drives are humanized by being adopted or rejected by the self. One is rarely just hungry for food *as such*, but hungry for a specific meal, a certain taste, a cup *of coffee*, and so on. Our drives emerge into consciousness with a certain prefigured sense configuration.

For Husserl, there is a kind of immediate prereflective awareness of any experience that is an essential element of consciousness as such. To be conscious is to be aware. This is an eidetic truth. In this sense, all consciousness is egoic or self-centered. But this self-awareness is minimal, not yet the fully conscious ego. In *Ideas II*, the posthumously published second book of *Ideas*,⁴⁷ Husserl says that the reflecting self presupposes an “unreflected consciousness.”⁴⁸ In reflection, I come to know “how I ‘comport’ myself under different subjective circumstances” and can enter into the “intertwining of the motivations of my cogito.”⁴⁹ This allows me to understand not only what motivations actually affect me and how they affect me, I come to learn about my character. I have my “peculiarities, my way of moving, of doing things, my individual evaluations, my own way of preferring, my temptations.”⁵⁰

As we have seen, Husserl’s account of self-knowledge has to be understood as twofold: life is lived in both the natural and the transcendental attitudes. In his mature work, he prefers to distinguish between natural life directed to the world in the natural attitude, and the experience of the ego as a transcendental “disinterested onlooker”

46 *Ideas II*, sec. 59, 267. Cf. *Hua*, 255.

47 *Ideas I*.

48 *Ideas II*, sec. 58, 259. Cf. *Hua*, 4:248.

49 *Ideas II*, sec. 58, 260. Cf. *Hua*, 4:248.

50 *Ideas II*, sec. 59, 266. Cf. *Hua*, 4:254.

(*unbeteiligter Zuschauer, uninteressierter Zuschauer*)⁵¹ on experience. Indeed, it is one of the chief contributions of Husserl's transcendental philosophy that he thinks of the transcendental domain not just as a set of a priori formal laws and structures, but as a living dynamic *life* of sense constitution that can be lived through consciously, a domain of "transcendental experience" (a conception foreign to Kant).

Husserl maintains that in everyday natural experience—which he characterizes as naive, straightforward, natural life—we are turned outward toward the world and the various objects of our interests. Natural reflection is saturated with prejudices and prejudgments—especially those from the "psychophysical domain." It is precisely natural thinking that has, for instance, confused logic with psychology. Husserl writes about self-knowledge and self-reflection in the natural attitude:

In the course of observing something, *I* perceive it; likewise in remembering, *I* am often "pre-occupied" (*beschäftigt*) with something; in fictionalizing phantasy, *I* closely follow goings-on in the imagined world, in a quasi-observation of them. Or *I* reflect, *I* draw inferences; *I* retract a judgment, occasionally "refraining" from judgment altogether. *I* consummate a state of being pleased or displeased, *I* am joyful or sad, *I* wish, or *I* want and act; or *I* also "refrain" from the joy, the wish, the willing and action. In all such acts, *I* am there with them, *currently* (*aktuell*) with them. In reflecting, *I* construe myself as a human being with them.⁵²

For Husserl, on the other hand, *transcendental* self-knowledge is knowledge gained from the standpoint of the transcendental spectator. It presumes that human consciousness has the capacity freely to alter the course or direction of its interest, indeed modify its own

⁵¹ Cf. *Hua*, 6:340 and 242.

⁵² *Ideas I*, sec. 80, 154. Cf. *Hua*, 3:1:179.

intentional directedness in natural life, split its interest, as it were, and come to contemplate its own sense-making activities.

In *Cartesian Meditations* Husserl makes clear that the way I access my “pure” ego—elsewhere called transcendental subjectivity—is through the epoche. It is in the epoche that all “human” assumptions are dropped and I experience myself as a performing and validating subject who is constituting the world in its “sense and validity” (*Sinn und Geltung*). Husserl writes:

The epoché can also be said to be the radical and universal method by which I apprehend myself purely: as Ego, and with my own pure conscious life, in and by which the entire Objective world exists for me and is precisely as it is for me. . . . Descartes, as we know, indicated all that by the name *cogito*. The world is for me absolutely nothing else but the world existing for and accepted by me in such a conscious cogito. It gets its whole sense, universal and specific, and its acceptance as existing, exclusively from such *cogitationes*.⁵³

The meditating subject can no longer consider itself as the natural ego, a being entirely caught up on the world. As Husserl insists in the *Cartesian Meditations*, this transcendental ego is not any “little butt-end of the world”⁵⁴ (*ein kleines Endchen der Welt*)⁵⁵ that has been left behind as the last item to survive the transcendental reduction. As Husserl will insist, it is only the epoche that makes possible entrance into the life of the transcendental ego: “First the transcendental *epoché* and reduction releases transcendental subjectivity from its self-concealment (*Selbstverborgenheit*) and raises it up to a new position, that of transcendental self-consciousness.”⁵⁶

⁵³ *CM*, sec. 8, 21. Cf. *Hua*, 1:60.

⁵⁴ *CM*, sec. 10, 24 (translation modified by Dermot Moran).

⁵⁵ *Hua*, 1:63.

⁵⁶ Cf. *Hua*, 34:399 (translated by Dermot Moran).

Furthermore, Husserl insists, it necessarily belongs to the transcendental ego that it should be embodied and “enworlded” (*Mundanisierung; Verweltlichung des Ichs*). There is a tendency in Husserl to think of this transcendental ego as constituting space and time through its own time consciousness. At times he speaks of the transcendental ego as timeless and living forever. But elsewhere he insists on the strict parallelism between the transcendental ego and the natural ego. One must assume therefore that events like birth and death have a *transcendental* as well as a natural significance, and indeed this is precisely how Husserl approaches the matter in his later reflections on life and death.⁵⁷

The main kind of direct awareness one has of oneself is an experience of primal presence. When I look for myself, I always find myself and there is no gap between the ego that is looking and the ego that is apprehended in the temporal present. Other forms of self-reflection, however, for example, memory, operate with what Husserl calls a “splitting of the ego” (*Ichspaltung*) and some kind of self-distantiation. When one apprehends oneself in an act of remembering, implicit in the remembering is the recognition that the current remembering self is not the same as the earlier self that is the target of the memory. At the same time the memory includes the specific sense that remembering self and remembered self are states of the same person. This is an example of the peculiar nature of the self-alienation and self-identification that Husserl sees as central to the life of the self. The self already has within itself an openness to what is other, or “not self.” He writes in *Ideas II*: “The Ego posits the non-Ego and comports itself towards it; the Ego unceasingly constitutes its ‘over and against,’ and in this process it is motivated and always motivated anew, and not arbitrarily but as exercising “*self-preservation*.”⁵⁸

57 Cf., e.g., Edmund Husserl, “Grenzprobleme der Phänomenologie. Analysen des Unbewusstseins und der Instinkte. Metaphysik. Späte Ethik. Texte aus dem Nachlass (1908–1937),” in *Hua*, vol. 42.

58 *Ideas II*, sec. 58, 265. Cf. *Hua*, 4:253.

This leads Husserl to generalize the problem of the self-knowledge: to meditate on oneself is not just to reach the “I,” but to recognize what an ego is—to have essential insight into the nature of the ego and its relation to whatever is “not ego.” This relies on the notion that there is a sense of an I that is always present in experience—including controversially in sleeping or unconscious states. The cogito that is present to itself can establish well-motivated connections with earlier states of itself and also with future possible states. Husserl writes in this context:

Let us here point out only what is most important, the most general aspect of the ego’s form, namely, the peculiar temporalization by which it becomes an enduring ego, constituting itself in its time-modalities: the same ego, now actually present, is in a sense, in every past that belongs to it, another—i.e., as that which was and thus is not now—and yet, in the continuity of its time it is one and the same, which is and was and has its future before it. The ego which is present now, thus temporalized, has contact with its past ego, even though the latter is precisely no longer present: it can have a dialogue with it and criticize it, as it can others.⁵⁹

Furthermore, it belongs to the self to have the role of constituting all other egos in their subjective egoic character. For Husserl, as for Descartes, to grasp oneself is at the same time to grasp the essence of what self is, and this allows one to at least understand the possibility of other selves in what Husserl speaks of as the “open plurality” of egos. He writes:

[The problem is] to understand how my transcendental ego, the primitive basis for everything that I accept as existent, can constitute within himself another transcendental ego, and then too an

⁵⁹ Husserl, *Crisis*, sec. 50, 172. Cf. *Hua*, 6:175.

open plurality of other egos —“other” egos absolutely inaccessible to my ego in their original being, and yet cognizable (for me) as existing and as being thus and so.⁶⁰

Husserl acknowledges that the manner in which my self can “recognize” other selves is problematic since it cannot be the case that I simply counterpose myself with them. But rather than leading him to give up the assumption that transcendental self-knowledge provides us with knowledge of others, his recognition of the “entwinement” between my current and past states of self as well as those between myself and others leads him to his significant concept of *Ineinandersein*, living in and through one’s relations with others in a chain of mutual intentional implication that in the end is responsible for the experience of both the objective world and the cultural community.

To conclude, the classic interpretation of the Delphic injunction to know oneself is that it is a stipulation for each of us to know our own measure, our own limits, not to overreach oneself, but to remember that one is human and not immortal or a god. Moreover, it is assumed that to know oneself as limited is to know oneself as finite and fallible. Husserl, who reads the Delphic injunction as calling for a phenomenological self-inquiry, draws another conclusion. Through the practice of the *epoche* the radical self-investigator can break through the limitations of her empirical human nature and recover her transcendental life in which she can be motivated by reasons, subject to norms and capable of rationally evaluating evidences. She becomes free, Husserl believes, to identify and choose enduring guiding values. Husserl writes that the self can come to orient itself by choosing its values:

The I as subject of conscience is the I of the entire life as I of remaining values; values that remain meaningful for the whole of the

60 *FTL*, sec. 96, 239–40. Cf. *Hua*, 17:246.

further life and that are, in retrospect, considered as universally meaningful and, in some cases, as enduringly valid.⁶¹

When human beings come to self-knowledge, they free themselves from living along blindly in the flow of natural life, and suspend their belief commitments in order to truly identify their motivations and become self-responsible, identifying the sustaining values to live by. The greatest achievement of human self-reflection, moreover, is that it has allowed humans to assume the universal point of view and to detach themselves from specific interests. This, for Husserl, is the philosophical life, the life of second-order reasons, the life motivated by rationality and grounded evidences, what Husserl will call “life in apodicticity”⁶² (*Leben in der Apodiktizität*).⁶³

61 This citation, taken from unpublished manuscript A V 21/84b, is to be found in Hanne Jacobs, “Towards a Phenomenological Account of Personal Identity,” in *Philosophy, Phenomenology, Sciences: Essays in Commemoration of Edmund Husserl*, ed. Carlo Ierna, Hanne Jacobs, and Filip Mattens (Dordrecht: Springer, 2010), 333–61.

62 Husserl, *Crisis*, sec. 73, 340.

63 Husserl, *Hua*, 6:275.