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NORMATIVITY, MEANING, AND THE PROMISE OF PHENOMENOLOGY

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17 Husserl's and Heidegger's Transcendental Projects

From the Natural Attitude to Functioning Intentionality

Dermot Moran

My focus in this chapter is the manner in which phenomenology properly understood operates as *transcendental* philosophy. I explore Husserl's and Heidegger's transcendental projects, taking my orientation from a certain insight of Merleau-Ponty, who, I believe, correctly identified trends in the later Husserl, to which, at that time, Husserl's own published works (1975/2001, 1995/2014, 1931/1960, 1974/1969) did not attest. In his 1959 essay, "The Philosopher and His Shadow,"¹ Merleau-Ponty addressed the complex intertwinings between the natural and the transcendental attitudes (a distinction, as Eugen Fink already observed, between two *transcendental* concepts).² Merleau-Ponty highlights the manner in which the transcendental ultimately must be embedded in the natural and return to it.³ How does this conclusion stand relative to the projects of Husserl and Heidegger? I propose to explore this question with a view to understanding precisely how phenomenology must be transcendental.

Let us recall that Husserl's transcendental turn was inaugurated by both his "discovery" of the reduction and by his related discovery of the natural attitude. The reality we take for granted, and which is explored in the natural and human sciences, is not an independent self-standing being-in-itself (*Sein an sich*), but is being revealed under an *attitude* (*Einstellung*) imbued already with *Geradehinsein* (as Fink puts it), with firm conviction of its actual existence (*Wirklichkeit*) or extantness (*Vorhandensein*), a conviction that essentially masks the constituting activity of transcendental subjectivity. In other words, what traditional ontology has studied is actually the ontology made manifest by the natural attitude and hence a relativistic ontology. In contrast, a new dimension of being is uncovered in the transcendental attitude; hence Husserl characterizes the transcendental attitude as a "breakthrough" attitude built on a certain transformation of the always ongoing natural attitude.

Allied with the discovery of the transcendental is Husserl's novel characterization of the essential nature of the objectivity that belongs to *theoria*, to the "theoretical attitude," in so far as that is built on the natural attitude, and his assessment of the dangers inherent in any naturalistic

objectivism that reifies consciousness and its intentional activities. Transcendental philosophy must always contextualize claims that are supposedly generated by the objectivist theoretical attitude. Although the theoretical certainly overcomes some of the relativities inherent in the natural attitude and gives humans a standard for objectivity, it is naïve as to its groundedness in subjectivity. Hence the transcendental attitude is needed to correct both the original natural attitude and its sophisticated outgrowth, the theoretical attitude.

Despite the centrality of the natural attitude in Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Husserl's phenomenological follower (at least from 1917 to 1927), barely ever invokes the "natural attitude" and certainly never makes it thematic, although clearly in some sense he too is an explicitly transcendental philosopher, e.g., time is the "transcendental horizon" of the question of the meaning of being in § 8 of *Being and Time* (hereafter BT). So what is the relationship between their respective considerations of phenomenology in relation to the identification and systematic disruption of the natural attitude? To highlight this problem, consider that, already in *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945),⁴ Merleau-Ponty cites Husserl as considering Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* to be primarily an exploration of the *Lebenswelt* (Merleau-Ponty 1945, lxxi, i).

Both Husserl and Heidegger began to use the term *Lebenswelt* around the same time—approximately 1917 to 1919 (in Husserl's *Ideas II* manuscripts, and in Heidegger's earliest Freiburg lectures)—so there is some truth to Husserl's observation as recorded by Merleau-Ponty (and presumably transmitted by Fink).⁵ As we know from his later writings, especially *Crisis of European Sciences*,⁶ Husserl thinks of the life-world as primarily a transcendental concept, one which has to be interrogated in a new way. Does Heidegger, in fact, have an account of the *Lebenswelt* and is it similarly accessed through transcendental methodology? To answer this, we must first get a clearer sense of what Husserl means by the "life-world" and our mode of interrogating it.

Ontology in Husserl's Late *Crisis of European Sciences*

In the *Crisis*, Husserl claims to have uncovered the life-world as a fundamental and novel phenomenon previously invisible to the sciences and to have identified it for the first time as a "universal problem" (1931/1960, § 34). Husserl aims to uncover "the pregiven world, the ontic universe [*das ontische Universum*]" (1931/1960, § 37, 142; Hua VI, 145). Indeed, there is—as Husserl himself insists—a specific and entirely new science of the life-world itself (1931/1960, § 51) that would, among other things, offer a new basis for grounding the natural and human sciences, one that shows more clearly the rootedness of theoretical science in the world of the natural attitude. Husserl is clear that the unthought norms governing the life-world have an impact on the conduct of the objective sciences.

This new life-world science requires a special *epochē*, as Husserl says in *Crisis* § 36, and would be descriptive of the life-world in its own terms, bracketing conceptions intruding from the natural and cultural sciences, and identifying the “types” (*Type*) and “levels” (*Stufe*) that characterized this world. In this sense, Husserl speaks of an “ontology of the life-world” (*Ontologie der Lebenswelt*, see 1931/1960, § 51, and Hua XXIX, 140), presumably the equivalent of the ontology of the natural attitude but without the scientific “spin” applied by the sciences, although, in the *Crisis* itself, he certainly does not give the concept the full elaboration it demands, and many commentators feel his account falls short of the necessary “thick” description of our cultural world. Concepts like “garden,” “landscape,” “domestic animal,” and “pet,” belong to the life-world. Husserl writes:

The bodies familiar to us in the life-world are actual bodies, but not bodies in the sense of physics. The same is true of causality and of spatiotemporal infinity. These categorial features of the life-world have the same names but are not concerned, so to speak, with the theoretical idealizations and the hypothetical substructions of the geometrician and the physicist (*die theoretischen Idealisierungen und hypothetischen substruktionen der Geometer und Physiker*).

(1931/1960, § 36, 139–40; Hua VI, 142–3)

Husserl believes the a priori description of the world (as provided by mathematics) can never be an account of the whole world as such (a world that includes spiritual life).

Heidegger's Critique of Husserlian Phenomenology as Missing the Meaning of Being

Heidegger claimed that Husserl's account of the life-world, while offering a revolution in ontology, misses something essential. Namely, Husserl failed to inquire into the “being of the intentional” (*Sinn des Intentionalen*) and into the “sense of being as such” (*der Sinn von Sein*). For Heidegger, Husserl's account was not ontological enough. Heidegger sees Husserl as mischaracterizing what is discoverable in the natural attitude (which for him means the world of everyday practices and projects) insofar as he characterizes it as an attitude. In his 1925 Marburg lectures on *The History of the Concept of Time*,⁷ Heidegger explains what an attitude is—it is a stance toward things, a peculiar stance that reveals things in a certain light. But then he poses a penetrating question:

Is this natural attitude perhaps only the semblance of one [*nur der Schein einer solchen*]? This kind of comportment and experience [*Verhaltens- und Erfahrungsart*] is of course rightly called an

attitude [*Einstellung*], inasmuch as it must first be derived from natural comportment, from the natural way of experience: one must so to speak “place oneself into” [*hineinstellen*] this way of considering things [and so assume an attitude toward them] in order to be able to experience in this manner. Man’s natural manner of experience [*Erfahrungsweise*], by contrast, cannot be called an attitude.

(1979/1985, § 12, 113; GA 20, 156)

For Heidegger, then, the natural attitude only *appears* to be an attitude; it is not properly a thetic attitude or stance, because it has a much deeper ground—a deeper ground that Husserl’s account mischaracterizes. Invoking some passages from *Ideas II*, Heidegger rejects the view that in the natural attitude human beings consider themselves “zoologically” as animals, or as psycho-somatic unities, a view he ascribes to Husserl. This misses the nature of human comportments and treats human beings merely as “at hand” (*vorhanden*) to which “comportments” (*Verhaltenungen*) are added as “appendages” (*Annexe*), whereas the being of the human is essentially characterized by its comportments (1979/1985, 113; GA 20, 156). Heidegger cites Husserl as saying that the personalistic attitude envelops the naturalistic attitude (1979/1985, 122; GA 20, 168), but he immediately goes on to criticize Husserl’s description of the personalistic attitude as *inspectio sui*, as Cartesian self-consciousness (cf. Husserl 1952/1989, § 54, 223; Hua IV, 212):

The personalistic attitude and experience is characterized as *inspectio sui*, as an inner inspection of itself as the ego of intentionality, the ego taken as subject of cogitations.⁸

Heidegger says the very expression reminds us of Descartes. For Heidegger, Husserl is still too naturalistic—he is still beginning the consideration of Dasein from the point of view of the physical, natural being to which a consciousness is attached, and the mode of access to the consciousness is still determined as self-inspection. Heidegger rejects Husserl’s invocation of *inspectio sui* as the manner in which the subject grasps itself, since it prioritizes the ego’s self-awareness and seems to make self-reflective consciousness the fundamental ground of subjectivity or Dasein. This, for Heidegger, is too narrow to understand the transcendence of Dasein and its role in the disclosure of Being. Heidegger’s view of human comportment is that it is deeper and more pragmatic than any kind of *Schauen*, “looking” or “inspecting,” especially of oneself. Heidegger rejects “picture book phenomenology” which is simply descriptive of things as they appear. Things reveal themselves in their manipulability in relation to tasks, contexts, and ends in view, *Bewandtnis*.⁹ Hence Husserl’s language of “attitudes” leads phenomenology astray.

Husserl's Assessment of Heidegger as an "Anthropologist" of Dasein

When Husserl finally got around to reading and annotating Heidegger's BT,¹⁰ he thought its existential analytic of Dasein in its everydayness was actually a descent into the very relativistic "anthropologism" and psychologism that Husserl had been battling against since the *Prolegomena* (1900) to the *Logical Investigations*.¹¹ Where is the truly transcendental in Heidegger? Husserl asks. Despite his references to his inquiry as transcendental philosophy and his invocation of the "fundamental constitution of human existence" (*Grundverfassung des Daseins*, Heidegger 1993/1962, 17, 52), Heidegger gives no account of how he arrives at his undeniably transcendental stance, so his hermeneutic descriptions of Dasein end up being naturalistic—despite the fact that in BT he sometimes gives the impression that, like Husserl, he is a transcendental idealist:

If what the term "idealism" says, amounts to the understanding that Being can never be explained by entities but is already that which is "transcendental" for every entity, then idealism affords the only correct possibility for a philosophical problematic. If so Aristotle was no less an idealist than Kant.

(1993/1962, 251, 208)

There is clearly some mirroring between their respective approaches, yet both want to mark the explicit differences. When Heidegger announces in BT (1993/1962, 31, 11) that the clarification of the meaning of Being is the fundamental task of "all ontology" that is not "blind and perverted from its own aim," Husserl writes in his marginal comments, "This would be a reproduction of my doctrine, if 'clarified' means constitutively-phenomenologically clarified" (Husserl 1997, 281).¹² Later he writes in the margin of BT:

Heidegger transposes or changes the constitutive-phenomenological clarification of all regions of entities and universals, of the total region of the world, into the anthropological; the whole problematic is shifted over: corresponding to the ego there is Dasein, etc. In that way everything becomes ponderously unclear, and philosophy loses its value.

(Ibid., 284)

If Heidegger presents himself as a transcendental philosopher (at least in BT), it is not clear that he arrives at this stance along the same road that Husserl proposes (i.e., bracketing the natural attitude and performing the phenomenological transcendental reductions). Heidegger

himself, for instance, almost never explicitly discusses the natural attitude (aside from his expositions of Husserl in his 1925–27 lectures in Marburg). The “natural attitude” is not mentioned once in BT, although “the theoretical attitude” does appear, when Heidegger traces it as arising from (and never ultimately departing from) “circumspensive concern with the ready-to-hand” (Heidegger 1993/1962, § 69, 408, 356). In this section Heidegger embeds the theoretical detached understanding in *Zuhandensein* (1993/1962, 409, 358), often seen as an implicit critique of Husserl.

How, then, should we assess these competing conceptions of the relationship between the natural and the transcendental attitudes—and the being capable of adopting them?

The Transition From the Natural to the Transcendental Attitude According to Husserl

Husserl has a broad range of terms for *the natural attitude* (*die natürliche Einstellung*) including the “pre-scientific” (Hua VI, 121, 152, 156) or “extra-scientific attitude,” the “natural theoretical attitude” (Husserl 1995/2014, § 50, 91; Hua III/1, 94), the “natural-naïve attitude” (Hua V, 148) and with the correlative discovery of the notion of “world” (*die Welt*), initially understood as “my natural surrounding world” (*meine natürliche Umwelt*, 1995/2014, § 28), the “intersubjective natural environment” (*die intersubjektive natürliche Umwelt*, 1995/2014, § 29), the world in which I find myself all the time and which supplies the necessary background for all intentional acts, and for all other worlds which it is possible to inhabit (e.g., the world of science, the world of mathematics, the world of religious belief, and so on), my “natural worldly life” (*natürliches Weltleben*, Husserl 1962/1970, VI 121, 152, 156), the “pregiven life of experience” (*die vorgegebene Erfahrungswelt*, *Ibid.*, VI, 120). Husserl likens this “dimension” (*Ibid.*, § 32) to a missing domain in part unknown because of the “power of historical prejudices” that dominates us all (*Ibid.*, 120; Hua VI, 122).

There are many issues that are not clear in Husserl’s discussion of the natural attitude and I cannot address them all here. One issue is the relation of the natural attitude to the theoretical outlook known as “naturalism.” Already, in his 1906/7 *Lectures on Logic and Epistemology*,¹³ Husserl refers to naturalism (and psychologism) as the “original sin” (Hua XXIV, 176), as the “sin against the Holy Spirit of philosophy” (Hua XXIV, 177). In his middle writings, beginning with “Philosophy as Rigorous Science” (1910/1911),¹⁴ naturalism is portrayed as an inevitable consequence of a certain rigidification of the “natural attitude” (*die natürliche Einstellung* 1995/2014, § 27) into what he calls the “naturalistic attitude” (see for instance 1952/1989, § 49). He writes,

It is not easy for us to overcome the primeval habit of living and thinking in the naturalistic attitude and thus of naturalistically falsifying the psychical [*so das Psychische naturalistisch zu verfälschen*].
(1911, 271; Hua XXV, 31)

The natural attitude itself is “prior to all theory” (1995/2014, § 30); it is a “natural way of thinking” (*natürliche Denkhaltung*),¹⁵ but it can lead to naturalism because it is seduced by the spirit of unquestioning, “naïve” acceptance of the world that permeates the natural attitude, leading to the “reification” (*Verdinglichung*) of the world, and its “philosophical absolutizing” (*Verabsolutierung*, 1995/2014, § 55, 129; Hua III/1, 107).¹⁶ It is noteworthy that, in the “Philosophy as Rigorous Science” essay (as often elsewhere), Husserl slips, without signaling it as a change of register, from talking about the *natural attitude* to the *naturalistic attitude* (*in naturalistischer Einstellung zu leben*, 1911, 271; Hua XXV, 31), something he also does in the related text in *Ideas II* § 49. In fact, Husserl seems to have a rather complex layered view of the relations between the “natural attitude,” the “naturalistic attitude,” and indeed what he occasionally refers to as the “nature attitude” (*die naturale Einstellung*). For our purposes, we are interested not in the inevitable descent to naturalism (akin to Heidegger’s *Verfallen* as an existentials of Dasein) but rather in the manner in which the prevailing natural attitude can be altered and disrupted, while still going on permanently in the background (as our “default” operating system, as Robert Sokolowski has put it).

The natural attitude is omnipresent but, as such, blind and unknown to itself. Thus the mature Husserl maintains that the natural attitude, despite its indispensability in everyday human life, is essentially “one-sided” (*einseitig*) and “closed” (*geschlossen*, Hua VI, 209), because it fails to recognize its own nature as an *attitude* (*Einstellung*), which—contrary to the Heideggerian interpretation above—Husserl views as much more than one psychological state among others. An attitude is an overall orientation of thinking and acting, more like a framework within which things are disclosed under an aspect. In fact, to be in the natural attitude means precisely not to recognize it as such—hence it is an attitude lived in ignorance of its own nature. It assumes it is not an attitude but a transparent access to its object-domain. It assumes it is *absolute*—that it is a direct contact with the “real world.” Hence, as Kant would have said, empirical realism is true, i.e., it is true relative to the disclosure of the natural attitude. But, as Husserl’s transcendental phenomenological analysis purports to disclose, the natural attitude itself is, despite its omnipresence and everydayness, relative to the “absolute” transcendental attitude. This transcendental attitude has a self-awareness and self-grounding character which makes it essentially different from the natural and indeed the theoretical attitudes.

The natural attitude, moreover, can only be apprehended as such through a methodically applied shift of perspective—and one that must be more than a mere shift in the ego’s mode of *inspectio sui*:

The transcendental focus which is set up through a radically consistent and conscious transcendental reduction, signifies nothing less than an altering of the whole form of life [*Lebensform*] previously practiced not only by the particular “I” and “we” but also historically by humanity as a whole; an absolute, all-embracing, and radical shift in the natural living-along of life [*eine absolute und radikale Änderung des natürlichen Dahinlebens und Hineinlebens*] and one’s natural living in a pregiven world; a change in the mode of experiencing, of thinking, and of every other kind of activity, and also in all the modes of reason. The radical undergirding [*Unterbündung*] of this sort of life and work and attitude [*Einstellung*] of all of life on the foundation of transcendental experience must by virtue of its absolute alienness [*Fremdartigkeit*] from everything to which we have been accustomed, be, like anything new, very hard to understand. And likewise with the meaning of a purely transcendental science.

(Husserl 1997, 252; Hua IX, 347–8)

The transcendental reduction is a shift in one’s form of life that allows one to grasp other attitudes—and their corresponding objectivities—as such. Hence Husserl describes it as “educational” (1952/1989, § 49 (d), 189; Hua IV, 179). Only transcendental phenomenology operating under the transcendental reduction allows us to investigate *attitudes* (and actually take them up) and understand also “the correlates constituted by them” (1952/1989, § 49 (d), 190; Hua IV, 180). The reduction makes us realize that the natural attitude is an *attitude*—and we thereby become sensitive to other attitudes.

Despite this recognition of the unique status of the transcendental attitude vis-à-vis the natural attitude, Heidegger is not convinced that Husserl has really abandoned his usual commitment to the priority of the natural, physical world of things. Thus Heidegger writes in his 1925 lectures (commenting on Husserl’s draft manuscript of *Ideas II*) that, for Husserl, “the fundamental stratum is still the naturally real [*das Naturwirkliche*] upon which the psychic is built, and upon the psychic the spiritual” (Heidegger 1979/1985, § 13, 124; GA 20, 172). Heidegger here is rejecting the original outlook of human Dasein as being oriented to nature and the real in any way—and accusing Husserl of failing to implement this understanding into his phenomenological approach. But if one recognizes that the natural attitude is itself embedded in *the personalistic attitude*, as Husserl also attests in *Ideas II* § 49, then its correlate seems to be the social, spiritual world, the world of persons, the spiritual world, *die geistige Geist* (Hua IV § 54, 144). As we have seen, this is

what Husserl in the *Crisis* will call the “life-world.” Indeed Husserl can already write in *Ideas II*, similar to the passage we quoted earlier in the *Crisis*, that our daily experience is of life-world objects, tools, implements, cultural products:

In ordinary life we have nothing whatever to do with nature-objects [*Naturobjekten*]. What we take as things are pictures, statues, gardens, houses, tables, clothes, tools, etc. They are value-objects [*Wertobjekte*] of various kinds, use-objects [*Gebrauchsobjekte*], practical objects. They are not objects which can be found in natural science [*Es sind kein naturwissenschaftlichen Objekte*].

(1952/1989, § 11, 29; Hua IV, 27)

Hence Husserl insists that the natural attitude is not to be understood as naturalistic in the sense that Heidegger suggests (Hua VI, 306).

Heidegger, as we have seen, in his 1925 Marburg lectures, gives a respectful account of Husserl's *Ideas II* on the natural and personal attitudes, but says that Husserl has mischaracterized the human everyday mode of existing as an “attitude.” It is in fact a kind of “comportment” (*Verhalten*) that is not yet attitudinalized, so to speak. But we can now recognize that this is precisely what Husserl himself is saying—hence he will call it in other contexts an *Urglaube* or *Urdoxa*, a basic belief, a fundamental and pre-conscious way of behaving and thinking. Merleau-Ponty sees that Husserl already has this understanding of the natural attitude, but Heidegger, for his own reasons, chooses to read Husserl in a less generous manner.

For Husserl, an attitude is not necessarily explicitly cognitive (as standardly used in philosophy of mind). Rather a stance is correlated to an open *horizon* of entities. There are many attitudes, e.g., the mathematical attitude, the psychological attitude, the aesthetic attitude (all attitudes Husserl explicitly mentions). These attitudes can interpenetrate or also cancel and conflict with one another. For Husserl, the natural attitude grounds the theoretical attitude of the sciences, which involves a certain set of procedures to inhibit aspects of the natural attitude (consider the Galilean stance toward “secondary” qualities, for instance, as a way of determining what is objectively real and available to theoretical inspection). The *theoretical* attitude was a great breakthrough for humanity, one that was brought about by a “few Greek eccentrics” (*ein paar griechischen Sonderlingen*)—as Husserl says in the Vienna Lecture (Husserl 1962/1970, 289; Hua VI, 336), enabling a new kind of context-transcendence and universalism and a view of human knowledge not restricted by interest and open to infinite tasks. Husserl thinks, however, that the theoretical attitude has become distorted by naturalization and its supposed “value neutrality” masks a specific approach that is not itself thematized (any more than the natural attitude can break with its own

naiveté and see itself as an attitude, as opposed to the unmediated experience of the true world). Thus, it is not the case that Husserl prioritizes the theoretical attitude (as Heidegger suggests in BT). Husserl recognizes the extraordinary power of the theoretical attitude—it has opened up the possibility of genuine scientific knowledge, of infinite tasks; it has broken with the sacred canopy of the mythological attitude that has kept some cultures limited and stagnant in history. The theoretical attitude has given birth to modern science and thereby has transformed forever human existence. On the other hand, the theoretical attitude, as is evident in the evolution of modern Galilean science, has rigidified into a naturalistic outlook. The modern discipline of psychology, for instance, treats subjectivity as a natural occurrence in the world that is amenable to objective scientific exploration. But thereby the contribution of transcendental subjectivity has been obscured and ignored. Husserl, then, thinks the theoretical attitude needs to be reined in, needs to be given a clarification through transcendental philosophy.

Husserl agrees with Heidegger, then, in viewing the theoretical attitude as not being *neutral* of concern. Rather, it is embedded in circumspective concern: “theoretical discovery ‘arises’ out of circumspective concern” (Heidegger 1993/1962, 408, 356), he writes. Indeed, generally speaking, Heidegger’s concept of understanding (*Verstehen*) sees it as a *motivated* attitude. The late Heidegger will see a natural tendency of the theoretical attitude to treat the world as “stock” or “resource” (*Bestand*) for technological exploitation. In this sense, Husserl and Heidegger do not fundamentally disagree. Heidegger wants to claim that traditional ontology approached the world as *Vorhandensein*, whereas he wants to give priority to *Zuhandensein*. But what is *Zuhandensein* unless it is the world as encountered in the primordial natural attitude? Husserl, then, is saying the same thing as Heidegger, albeit in a different linguistic and semantic medium. It was, as I have noted, Merleau-Ponty’s genius to have seen that Husserl in fact aligns with Heidegger in this regard—rather than reading him as the more stock Cartesian intellectualist found so frequently in the tradition (Hubert Dreyfus, for instance, while seeing the agreement between Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty uses the foil of a Cartesian Husserl to make his point).

Merleau-Ponty’s Reading of Husserl on Operative Intentionality

In his 1959 essay on Husserl, “The Philosopher and His Shadow,” Merleau-Ponty develops his understanding of Husserl as essentially recognizing the intertwining between the natural and the transcendental attitudes: “It is the natural attitude, by reiterating its own procedures, that seesaws in phenomenology” (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 164). Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty underscores Husserl’s claim in *Ideas II* that the transcendental attitude is in its own way “natural” (Ibid., 164—quoting *Ideas II* § 49, “in a

certain sense it is very natural but it is *not a nature-attitude* [*in gewissen Sinn sehr natürlich, aber nicht natural ist*], 1952/1989, 189; Hua IV, 180). Merleau-Ponty is rightly insistent on the need to distinguish the “theoretical attitude” (the objective attitude of the sciences) from the “philosophical attitude” (which I take to be equivalent to Husserl’s transcendental attitude, properly understood):

There is indeed an I which makes itself “indifferent,” a pure “knower,” in order to grasp all things without remainder—to spread all things out before itself—and to “objectify” and gain intellectual possession of them. This I is a purely “theoretical attitude” which seeks to “render visible the relationships which can provide knowledge of being as it comes to be.” [Hua IV, 26] But it is just this I which is not the philosopher, just this attitude which is not philosophy. It is the science of Nature, or in a deeper sense, a certain philosophy which gives birth to the natural sciences and which comes back to the pure I and to its correlative, “things simply as things” (*blosse Sachen*), stripped of every action-predicate and every value-predicate. From *Ideen II* on Husserl’s reflections escape this tête-à-tête between pure subject and pure things. They look *deeper down* for the fundamental.

(Merleau-Ponty 1964, 162–3)

Merleau-Ponty is claiming that Husserl, from *Ideen II* onward, investigates what is beneath the “pure I” and beneath “mere things” (*blosse Sachen*) and is offering an account of an a priori correlation between subjectivity and objectivity that is going on at a deeper level. The correlation between subject and object is founded on a deeper truth, Merleau-Ponty says (*Ibid.*, 163), which Merleau-Ponty calls the “pre-theoretical layer on which both of these idealizations find their relative justification and are gone beyond” (*Ibid.*, 165). Merleau-Ponty then talks of the natural attitude being enfolded in the personalistic attitude that cannot ever be naturalized. Merleau-Ponty is very accurately conveying Husserl’s analysis here—we live in the human, personal world, but this world is founded on an intentionality which is not that of a cognizing subject but lies deeper, as we shall see. In fact, Merleau-Ponty is reading Husserl as much closer to Heidegger. Indeed Merleau-Ponty recognizes that part of Husserl’s breakthrough is his recognition of the deeper layer of operative intentionality bringing him closer to Heidegger’s account of “*Verhalten*” or what Dreyfus calls “expert coping.”

Husserl’s Operative Intentionality as Discovered by Merleau-Ponty

Both Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger, as we have seen, characterize the true natural attitude as not a “tissue of judicatory and propositional acts” but as a *Weltthesis* “prior to all theses” (*Ibid.*, 163). In this case,

both Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger are actually endorsing Husserl's own view. The natural attitude involves an *Urglaube* and *Urdoxa* (Merleau-Ponty must be citing *Ideas I* § 104—neither term is found in *Ideas II*)—more ancient than any attitude or point of view. Thus Merleau-Ponty, taking his direction from Husserl's late reflections, distinguishes the primordial natural attitude from the attitude that gives rise to naturalism:

The natural attitude itself emerges unscathed from the complaint which can be made about naturalism, because it is “prior to any thesis,” because it is the mystery of a *Weltthesis* prior to all theses. It is, Husserl says in another connection, the mystery of a primordial faith and a fundamental and original opinion (*Urglaube*, *Urdoxa*) which are thus not even in principle translatable in terms of clear and distinct knowledge, and which—more ancient than any “attitude” or “point of view”—give us not a representation of the world but the world itself.

(*Ibid.*, 163)

This deeper connection cannot be fully revealed in ordinary reflection—its originary power is precisely that. Merleau-Ponty says mysteriously—but in a manner very close to Heidegger: “Reflection cannot ‘go beyond’ this opening to the world, except by making use of the powers it owes to the opening itself” (*Ibid.*, 164). It is for this reason, Husserl argues, that phenomenology must be transcendental: the *Weltthesis* prior to all theses is not accessible to everyday, natural reflection; it can only be uncovered through the transcendental reduction.

Husserl agrees, then, that the natural attitude is permeated by a “general thesis” (*Generalthesis*, *Ideas I*, § 30), an absolutely unshakeable, even apodictic, belief in the world, which he calls *Weltglaube*. He even speaks of the natural attitude as a “primordial” and “anonymous passivity” (*anonyme Urpassivität*), which means it underlies all cognitive intentionality, the intentionality of acts. Merleau-Ponty argues that—like Heidegger—this can be best understood in Husserl terms of the notion of intentionality; specifically, Husserl's notion of functioning or operative intentionality, which Hubert Dreyfus—inspired by Heidegger—calls “expert coping.”¹⁷ Merleau-Ponty sees that Husserl is struggling to make sense of the constitution of the pregiven world. In “The Philosopher and His Shadow,” Merleau-Ponty invokes the Husserlian idea of the always already there which is “pre-constituted” prior to human intentional acts. This domain of the pre-constituted is described as “those kernels of meaning around which human being and the world gravitate” (*Ibid.*, 165) and he refers to it as “an operative or latent intentionality like that which animates time, more ancient than the intentionality of human acts” (*Ibid.*, 165).

Merleau-Ponty notes the contrast between “operative” intentionality (*l'intentionnalité opérante*) and “act” intentionality or “thetic” intentionality. He writes in the Preface to the *Phenomenology of Perception*:

This is why Husserl distinguishes between act intentionality [*l'intentionnalité d'acte*], which is the intentionality of our judgements and of our voluntary decisions (and is the only intentionality discussed in the *Critique of Pure Reason*)—and operative intentionality [*l'intentionnalité opérante*] (*fungierende Intentionalität*) is the intentionality that establishes the natural and antepredicative unity of the world and of our life, the intentionality that appears in our desires, our evaluations, and our landscape more clearly than it does in objective knowledge. Operative intentionality is the one that provides the text that our various forms of knowledge attempt to translate into precise language. The relationship to the world, such as it is untiringly announces itself within us, is not something that analysis might clarify: philosophy can simply place it before our eyes and invite us to take notice.

(Merleau-Ponty 2012, lxxxii, xiii)

Merleau-Ponty talks again about this operative intentionality much later in his chapter on “Temporality,” where he identifies operative intentionality with Heidegger’s transcendence:

In Husserl’s language, beneath “act intentionality,—which is the thetic consciousness of an object, that, in intellectual memory for example, converts the “this-thing” into an idea,—we must acknowledge an “operative” intentionality (*fungierende Intentionalität*), which makes the former one possible, and is what Heidegger terms “transcendence.”

(*Ibid.*, 441; 478)

The exact concept of “operative intentionality” is, however, not actually found in Husserl in that form. Husserl’s formula is “functioning intentionality”—a reasonably rare formulation in his work. Merleau-Ponty equated this with Heidegger’s “transcendence” (his name for intentionality).¹⁸ Merleau-Ponty’s proximate source is Husserl’s *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, where the term “living . . . functioning intentionality” (*lebendig fungierende*) appears in § 94 (1974/1969, 235; XVII, 242); and it also appears in *The Internal Time Consciousness* lectures as published in the 1928 version, edited by Heidegger.¹⁹ In his Amsterdam Lectures of 1928, Husserl speaks of the world that is pregiven to us through “anonymous functioning intentionality” (Hua IX, 336), as we have seen.

“Functioning subjectivity” (*fungeriende Subjektivität*) is the later Husserl’s term (e.g., *Crisis*, § 72—but first introduced at *Crisis*, § 13 (see also Hua XXXV, 98)—to refer to the kind of anonymous, background, pre-reflective, passively experiencing subjectivity that is continuously functioning to produce the unified experience of the world as pregiven in experience. The adjective “functioning” (*fungeriend*) is relatively frequent in Husserl. He speaks of the “functioning lived body [*Leib*]” at 1931/1960, 172) and of normally functioning organs (*Ideas II*), of “functioning consciousness,” or “functioning ego” (1952/1989, Hua IV, 337). Husserl usually sees functioning as a kind of anonymous passive process that precedes and lays the ground for all the intentional activity of the ego. For Husserl, anonymous subjectivity, for example, is responsible for the flow of time, which is an absolute basis of all consciousness, and also for the enduring sense of the world’s unity and constancy—moreover, not just the constitution of this factual world, but of all possible worlds. More and more, Husserl came to emphasize the importance of this pre-conscious, passively experienced intentionality.

If one examines the sections (§§ 94–7 especially) in *Formal and Transcendental Logic* where Husserl discusses this “functioning intentionality, one finds a foreshadowing of many themes later explicated by Merleau-Ponty. For instance, Husserl writes there about “living,” “functioning intentionality”:

The living intentionality [*lebendige Intentionalität*] carries me along; it predelineates [*zeichnet vor*]; it determines me practically [*bestimmt mich praktisch*] in my whole procedure [*in meinem ganzen Verhalten*], including the procedure of my natural thinking, whether this yields being or illusion. The living intentionality does all that, even though, as actually functioning [*als lebendig fungerende*], it may be non-thematic [*unthematisch*], undisclosed [*unenthüllt*], and thus beyond my ken [*meinem Wissen entzogen*].

(1974/1969, § 94, 235; XVII, 242)

This “living intentionality” is not normally made thematic by us and runs on unnoticed in the natural attitude. It is a vital intentionality, producing not just the world of my experience but the pregiven world that it there “for us” all (Ibid., § 95). In essence, then, functioning intentionality underlies the natural attitude and makes it possible. Husserl’s later focus on functioning intentionality is not the introduction of a new kind of intentionality, then, but a clearer articulation of the intentionality already inherent in the natural attitude. It is the aim of transcendental phenomenology to uncover this life of functioning consciousness underlying the natural attitude:

Thus there arises the idea of a universal task: Instead of living in “the” world directly in the “natural attitude” and, so to speak, like

“children of this world” [*Weltkinder*]; that is, instead of living within the latently functioning life of consciousness [*in dem latent fungierenden Bewusstseinsleben zu leben*] and thereby having the world, and it alone, as our field of being—as now-existing for us (from out of perception), as past (from out of memory), as coming in the future (from out of expectation)—instead of judging and valuing this world of experience and making it the field of theoretical or practical projects—instead of all that, we attempt a universal phenomenological reflection on this entire life-process, be it pre-theoretical, theoretical or whatever [*eine universale phänomenologische Reflexion auf dieses ganze vortheoretische, theoretische und sonstige Leben*].

(Husserl 1997, 85; Hua IX, 239)²⁰

By the time we get to the fourth draft of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* article, on the basis of Heidegger's interventions, the passage has been rewritten to highlight (from a more Heideggerian perspective) that the theoretical attitude has to be *disrupted* as part of this “turning around” (*Umwendung*) of the natural attitude:

To the essential sense of the transcendental problem belongs its universality, in which it places in question the world and all the sciences investigating it. It arises within a general reversal [*Umwendung*] of that “natural attitude” in which everyday life as a whole as well as the positive sciences operate. In it <the natural attitude> the world is for us the self-evidently existing universe of realities which are continuously before us in unquestioned presence-at-hand [*Vorhandenheit*]. So this is the general field of our practical and theoretical activities [*Betätigungen*]. As soon as the theoretical interest gives up [*aufgibt*] this natural attitude and in a general turning around of our regard [*Blickwendung*] directs itself to the life of consciousness in which the “world” is for us precisely the world which is present to us we find ourselves in a new cognitive situation [*Erkenntnislage*]. Every sense which the world has for us (which we have now become aware of), both its general indeterminate sense and its meaning as determined according to real particularities, is, within the internality [*Innerlichkeit*] of our own perceiving, imagining, thinking, and valuing life-process, a conscious sense, and a sense which is formed in our subjective genesis.

(translation modified, Husserl 1997, 168; Hua IX, 288)

One can hear the influence of Heidegger here in Husserl's text—the terms *Vorhandenheit*, *Innerlichkeit* have a specifically Heideggerian resonance. The claim here is interesting—the theoretical attitude is now something that gives up the natural attitude and enters a new *Innerlichkeit* through transcendental self-exploration. To be precise, practical and theoretical interests are enfolded in the natural attitude, and the aim

of transcendental phenomenology is to reverse these interests so that the underlying subjective functions become visible.

Husserl continues this discussion of the manner transcendental phenomenology opens up a new insight into natural worldly life in the *Crisis*, where the term “functioning intentionality” makes a rare appearance. At the beginning of *Crisis* Section 59, Husserl gives an insight into how he will address the famous paradox of subjectivity:

In psychology, the natural, naïve attitude has the result that human self-objectifications [*Selbstobjektivierungen*] of transcendental intersubjectivity, which belong with essential necessity to the makeup of the constituted world pregiven to me and to us, inevitably have a horizon of transcendently functioning intentionalities [*Horizont von transzendental fungierenden Intentionalitäten*] which are not accessible to reflection, not even psychological-scientific reflection.

(1962/1970, § 59, 208; Hua VI, 212)

Again, Husserl’s point is that functioning intentionality is not accessible to everyday, natural reflection; this is key for Merleau-Ponty also. For Husserl, functioning intentionality can only be uncovered through the transcendental reduction.

Merleau-Ponty, then, grasps the essential point in the mature Husserl concerning the interweaving of the natural and transcendental attitudes and the need to uncover the hidden life of functioning intentionality. Ironically, Heidegger’s account of everyday Dasein in its comportment is precisely a version of this transcendental phenomenological approach. Heidegger therefore is wrong to claim, as he does in BT, that Husserl naively prioritized the theoretical standpoint (and perception as a mere neutral inspecting). Equally, on the other hand, Husserl is not correct to read Heidegger’s BT as purely an “anthropological” (in Husserl’s sense) account of everyday existence in the life-world. Heidegger’s approach to Dasein is, like Husserl’s approach to consciousness, through and through *transcendental*. What is missing in Heidegger, however, is precisely Husserl’s theoretical account of how one arrives at the transcendental analysis of Dasein/Bewusstsein.

For Husserl, ontologies are revealed under standpoints. Art objects are made visible in the aesthetic stance. Everyday life-world ontology is made visible through the natural-personalistic attitude attuned to life-world. However, true phenomenological ontology for Husserl requires the clarification of the constitutive conditions that makes these ontologies possible and, in this regard, Husserl is aiming at something like a fundamental ontology in Heidegger’s sense—with transcendental subjectivity responsible for generating the “sense” of Being. Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger are not wrong to emphasize passive intentionality and functioning intentionality as the legacy of the later Husserl. But this is, as Husserl would

say, “one-sided,” since the point is not to prioritize one form of intentional correlation over another, but rather to recognize the structure of intentionalities and their correlates that go to establish the constitution of both objective world and the intersubjective unity of monads, the monadology. Husserl wants finally an ontology that is *relative to attitudes* (viewpoints inherent in subjectivity) and his transcendental phenomenology is meant to tease out the relations between attitudes taken from the standpoint of the “absolute attitude” of transcendental subjectivity.

Notes

- 1 M. Merleau-Ponty 1964.
- 2 Eugen Fink 1988b.
- 3 Merleau-Ponty finds support for this in Husserl 1952/1989.
- 4 Merleau-Ponty 1945/2012.
- 5 Moran 2015b, 107–32.
- 6 E. Husserl 1962/1970.
- 7 Heidegger 1979/1985.
- 8 Heidegger: “Die personalistische Einstellung und Erfahrung wird als *inspectio sui*, als innere Betrachtung seiner selbst als des Ich der Intentionalität, des Ich als Subjekt der cogitationes bezeichnet” (Heidegger 1979/1985, 122; GA 20, 169).
- 9 See Kisiel 1995, 389ff.
- 10 Heidegger 1993/1962.
- 11 See Moran 2018.
- 12 Husserl 1997.
- 13 Husserl 1985.
- 14 Husserl 1986/2002.
- 15 Husserl 1958, 18.
- 16 See Husserl 2002, 258.
- 17 Dreyfus 1991.
- 18 See Moran 2000, 2015.
- 19 Husserl 1928.
- 20 “Es ergibt sich hier die Idee einer universalen Aufgabe : statt in der, natürlichen Einstellung” geradehin und sozusagen als Weltkinder in “die” Welt hineinzuleben, d.i. statt in dem latent fungierenden Bewusstseinsleben zu leben und dadurch die Welt und nur sie als unser Seinsfeld zu haben—als für uns jetzt daseiende (aus Wahrnehmung), als vergangene (aus Erinnerung), künftig kommende (aus Erwartung)—statt diese Erfahrungswelt zu beurteilen, zu bewerten, zum Felde theoretischer oder praktischer Entwürfe zu machen, versuchen wir eine universale phänomenologische Reflexion auf dieses ganze vortheoretische, theoretische und sonstige Leben” (Hua IX: 239).

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