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## Husserl and the Greeks

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### ABSTRACT

I document Husserl's growing interest in the foundational character of Greek philosophy for Western culture and show what is unique about Husserl's appropriation of certain Greek thinkers and concepts. Specifically, I explain Husserl's idiosyncratic appropriation of key Greek terms as original building blocks to articulate his own intuitive insights and review critically Husserl's original appropriation of the history of Greek philosophy as a way of situating his transcendental phenomenology within the Western ("European") intellectual tradition. Husserl adopted a consistent view of Greek philosophy throughout his life but deepened his engagement in later years. Initially little interested in the history of philosophy as such, he came to see the "breakthrough" into the theoretical attitude as decisive for the development of Western culture. The Skeptics' epoché is revitalized by Husserl as a permanent way of challenging the dogmatic naivete of life in the natural attitude, motivating the transformation to *theoria*.

### KEYWORDS

Husserl; Greek philosophy;  
epoché; phenomenology;  
Skeptics; *theoria*

## Introduction

Unlike Martin Heidegger or Hans-Georg Gadamer, whose thought involved detailed engagement with the history of philosophy (especially Greek philosophy), Edmund Husserl initially had little interest in or exposure to the history of philosophy, at least in his early years. Husserl was, self admittedly, an autodidact in philosophy. He took some courses at the University of Leipzig with Wilhelm Wundt (1832-1920), that, at the time, reportedly, made little impression on him. He transferred to the University Berlin, where he spent six semesters studying mathematics, attending the lectures by the mathematicians Karl Weierstrass (1815-1897), renowned for arithmetizing analysis, and Leopold Kronecker (1823-1891). He did attend philosophy lectures by Friedrich Paulsen (1846-1908) and Johann Eduard Erdmann (1805-1892)—but, once more, they made no great impression.<sup>1</sup> The mathematician Weierstrass, on the other hand, was inspirational, instilling in the young Husserl an “ethos for scientific striving”, as he later recalled (Husserl 1988, 112). Husserl later attended some philosophy courses at the University of Vienna (1884-1886) with his mentor Franz Brentano, but there were primarily courses in modern philosophy, especially Descartes, Hume, Mill, and on logic, notably

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<sup>1</sup> Kern, *Husserl und Kant*, 1.

Brentano's 1884–5 lecture course, *Die elementare Logik und die in ihr nötigen Reformen* [*Elementary Logic and its Necessary Reform*], the notes for which have now been edited by Robin Rollinger at the Franz Brentano Archiv in Graz. These lectures expand Brentano's criticisms of classical Aristotelian logic.

Most of Husserl's knowledge of classical Greek philosophy was probably gleaned during his earlier pre-university Gymnasium education at the Leopoldstädter Realgymnasium in Vienna and, later, at the Deutsches Staatsgymnasium in Olmütz (Olomouc, Czech Republic). It is often suggested that in his later writings on the history of philosophy he relied heavily on standard primers, such as Ernst Cassirer's three-volume *Das Erkenntnisproblem* (1906–1912), which covered the Renaissance and modern period, and Wilhelm Windelband's *Lehrbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie* (1912), referenced by Husserl in his *Introduction to Philosophy* lectures.<sup>2</sup>

Of course, in line with the standards of high school education at the time, Husserl had learned classical Greek and occasionally invokes Greek phrases. In articulating his own phenomenological philosophy, he appropriates Greek philosophical terms such as *eidōs*, *phainomenon*, *noēsis*, *noēma*, *epochē*, *theoria*, *praxis*, *hexis*, *doxa*, *epistēmē*, *telos*, and so on, but he is, generally speaking, using these terms to avoid confusions inherent in the corresponding German terms. He feels the Greek is more metaphysically neutral.

Husserl was initially interested, along with his contemporaries Gottlob Frege and David Hilbert, in the foundations of arithmetic. In his first book, *Philosophy of Arithmetic* (1891),<sup>3</sup> an expanded version of his Habilitation thesis, he adopted Brentano's descriptive psychology as a way of getting at the fundamental subjective acts that bring about the recognition of groups (collectivities) and their colligating in acts of numbering. This led him to an investigation of the descriptive psychology of logical acts. He had in mind mathematics as a model for science and very early recognized the Euclidian model of geometry as a guiding ideal in antiquity. Similarly, Aristotle's foundation of logic remained valid at least until Kant. Husserl thinks there was a failure of traditional logic. But his main focus, at least in his first three decades (from 1891 *Philosophy of Arithmetic* to his 1923–1924 lecture course, *First Philosophy (Erste Philosophie)*),<sup>4</sup> was on the “theory of scientific knowledge (*Wissenschaftslehre*)”, a concept which he inherited primarily from Bernard Bolzano, not in reconstructing the history of philosophy. In his middle years, Husserl gradually developed an enduring interest in Greek philosophy. In his Freiburg years, he regularly offered a course entitled *Introduction to Philosophy (Einleitung in die Philosophie)*,<sup>5</sup> which included more extensive treatment of Greek philosophers, leading up to his 1923–1924 lecture course, *First Philosophy (Erste Philosophie)*,<sup>6</sup> and also his discussion of the Greek discovery of philosophy as “genuine science” (*echte Wissenschaft*) and especially the “idea of logical science” (*Idee logischer Wissenschaft*) in his 1922–1923 *Kaizo* article “Formal Types of Culture and the Development of Humanity.”<sup>7</sup>

A particularly important influence on Husserl at this time was the four-volume *Wissenschaftslehre (Theory of Science, 1837)*<sup>8</sup> by the almost forgotten Austrian thinker

<sup>2</sup> Husserl, *Einleitung in die Philosophie*, 192.

<sup>3</sup> Husserl, *Philosophy of Arithmetic*.

<sup>4</sup> Husserl, *First Philosophy*.

<sup>5</sup> These lectures have been published as Husserl, *EdP. Vorlesungen 1922/23* and Husserl, *EdP.*

<sup>6</sup> Husserl, *FP*.

<sup>7</sup> Husserl, *Aufsätze Und Vorträge 1922–1937*, especially 73–89.

<sup>8</sup> Bolzano, 1972; Bolzano 2014.

Bernard Bolzano (1781-1848), which contained new approaches to semantics and logic, and defended the objective validity of logical meanings. Bolzano carefully distinguished between thoughts as psychic occurrences, their expression in linguistic sentences, the statements made, and the abstract propositions they stood for, “propositions-in-themselves” (*Sätze an sich*) which have existence but not actuality, thus anticipating Frege’s critique of psychologism by some fifty years.<sup>9</sup> Husserl was drawn to Bolzano’s account of pure logic as the “theory of science” *Wissenschaftslehre*; science as a coherent intermeshing system of theoretical truths; his account of “presentations” and “truths-in-themselves” (*Wahrheiten an sich*), a conception later defended in the *Prolegomena* (1900). Husserl adopted and developed Bolzano’s accounts of analyticity; logical consequence (*Abfolge*), and the distinction between the “judgement itself” (*Satz an sich*) and the act of positing or judging it, a distinction crucial for the development of pure logic distinct from psychology (Benoist 1998; 2000). In one of his *Kaizo* articles, written in 1922, Husserl even credits ancient Greek philosophy and specifically “the twin-star Socrates Plato” with originally discovering the concept of logic as a “universal theory of science” (*als universaler Wissenschaftslehre*), the science of science that is normative for science in general.<sup>10</sup>

In so far as he discussed philosophy (apart from logic), Husserl focused primarily on modern philosophy (*Philosophie der Neuzeit*), as inaugurated by Descartes and Galileo (Husserl was not alone in incorporating Galileo as inaugurating modernity, Natorp made a similar claim),<sup>11</sup> in terms of its epistemological features, understood as the breakthrough to transcendental philosophy. Indeed, this became a life-long theme, perhaps best illustrated in the *Cartesian Meditations*<sup>12</sup> and the *Crisis of European Sciences*.<sup>13</sup> The mature Husserl was seeking to situate his own transcendental phenomenology in relation to the history of philosophy. This concern to interpret phenomenology in relation to Greek philosophy was undoubtedly reinforced by his exposure to the Southwest Neo-Kantians, including relationship the classicist Paul Natorp as well as by his burgeoning companionship with Martin Heidegger, whom he met soon after he moved to Freiburg in 1916, but with whom he was in close intellectual discussion, especially from 1923 until 1929. Indeed, Heidegger, in his tribute to Husserl on the occasion of the latter’s seventieth birthday, invokes the spirit of Greek questioning in relation to Husserl as mentor. Husserl “created an entirely new space for philosophical questioning ... the philosopher enters the core of what is really at stake ... Plato knew about that and spoke of it in his Seventh Letter.”<sup>14</sup> For Heidegger, Husserl transferred his radical spirit to his students as the spark leaps from the fire.

In the remainder of this paper, I shall document Husserl’s growing interest in the foundational character of Greek philosophy for Western culture and show what is unique about Husserl’s appropriation of certain Greek thinkers and concepts. Specifically, I shall review Husserl’s idiosyncratic appropriation of key Greek terms as original building blocks to articulate his own intuitive insights and review critically Husserl’s original

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<sup>9</sup> Künne et al.

<sup>10</sup> Husserl, *AUV 1922–1937*, 83.

<sup>11</sup> Natorp, *Die logischen Grundlagen der exakten Wissenschaften*.

<sup>12</sup> Husserl, *Die Krisis der Europäischen Wissenschaften*.

<sup>13</sup> Husserl, *Crisis of European Sciences*; Husserl, *DKdEW*.

<sup>14</sup> Husserl, *Psychological and Transcendental*, 476–77.

appropriation of the history of Greek philosophy as a way of situating his transcendental phenomenological philosophy within the Western (“European”) intellectual tradition.

### From the *Logical Investigations* (1900-1901) to *Ideas I* (1913): Pursuing the *Eidos*

References to Greek philosophers (Socrates, Plato, Aristotle) are notably absent from Husserl’s *Logical Investigations* (1900/1901).<sup>15</sup> In the decade leading up to this work, Husserl had devoted his energies into logical research, reading critically the works of contemporary logicians (Mill, Boole, Bolzano, Schröder, Lotze and Frege). His focus was on foundational issues in logic and epistemology. The only discussions on the history of philosophy occurred primarily in critique of empiricist accounts of abstraction (Locke, Berkeley, Hume) and of universals. Thus, although the name “Socrates” appears fairly frequently in the *Logical Investigations*, it is not invoked to discuss Socratic philosophy but rather the name always appears as example of a proper name in sentences such as “Socrates is a man” or “Socrates is a citizen of Athens.”<sup>16</sup> It was until the late nineteen tens and early twenties that Husserl would become fascinated with the figure of Socrates as an ethical reformer, especially in his *Introduction to Philosophy* (1916–1920) and in his *First Philosophy* lectures.<sup>17</sup> Later again, in the 1930s, Husserl read Helmut Kuhn’s study of Socrates (Kuhn 1934), which he acknowledged was the first philosophy book in a long time that he had read from cover to cover.<sup>18</sup>

The name “Plato” appears more rarely in the *Logical Investigations*, but is referenced in relation to “Platonic realism”<sup>19</sup> concerning universals, where again Husserl’s main target is Locke. Thus, Husserl writes:

We may leave aside, as long disposed of, the misunderstandings of Platonic realism. But the thought-motives pressing towards a psychological realism are obviously still operative, as appears particularly in the manner in which Locke tends to be criticized.<sup>20</sup>

Husserl says that Plato attributed existence to these ideal objects, “this we no longer do.”<sup>21</sup> In fact, he will say such state of affairs “hold” (*bestehen*), i.e. they have ideal objectivity but not necessarily spatio-temporal existence.<sup>22</sup> Husserl himself he drew on Hermann Lotze for his interpretation of the Platonic ideas. Later, Paul Natorp, a friend of Husserl’s, in his *Platos Ideenlehre* (1902)<sup>23</sup> would interpret the Platonic Ideas as “laws” (*Gesetze*).

Aristotle is primarily mentioned in the *Logical Investigations* in relation to logic, the notion of syllogism, the nature of judgment and assertion, *apophansis*. Aristotle’s principle of non-contradiction is briefly discussed. Later in the *Logical Investigations*, Husserl discusses Aristotle’s treatment of syncategoremata in a discussion of non-independent parts.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, 2 volumes.

<sup>16</sup> Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, vol 1, 312.

<sup>17</sup> DeSantis. “Practical Reformer”.

<sup>18</sup> Schuhmann, *Husserl-Chronik*, 453.

<sup>19</sup> Husserl, *LI*, vol 1, 248.

<sup>20</sup> Husserl, *LI*, vol 1, 249.

<sup>21</sup> Husserl, *LI*, vol. 1, 256.

<sup>22</sup> Mulligan.

<sup>23</sup> Natorp, *Plato’s Theory of Ideas*.

<sup>24</sup> Husserl, *LI*, vol. 2, 60.

The most attention in the *Logical Investigations* to actual Greek thinkers occurs in discussion of the problem of skepticism about the possibility of genuine knowledge. Husserl writes in the *Prolegomena*:

This we know happened in those thought-stirring times when the young, budding science of the Greeks was in danger of succumbing to attacks of sophists and subjectivists, when all its future success depended on finding objective criteria of truth.<sup>25</sup>

Husserl is particularly interested in Protagorean relativism, as summarized in the claim, “man is the measure of all things” (Diels/Kranz, 80 B). Thus, in the *Prolegomena* to the *Logical Investigations*, Husserl initially discusses “subjectivism” or “relativism” in terms of Protagoras’ claim that “man is the measure of all things” (*Aller Dinge Maß ist der Mensch*).<sup>26</sup> Husserl will return to this Protagorean statement in his *Introduction to Philosophy Lectures (1916-1020)*.<sup>27</sup> Husserl then interprets relativism in more or less the manner of Protagoras in the *Prolegomena*:

The individual man is the measure of all truth’. For each man that is true which seems to *him* true, one thing to one man, and the opposite to another, if that is how he sees it. We can therefore also opt for the formula ‘All truth (and knowledge) is relative – relative to the contingently judging subject’.<sup>28</sup>

For Protagoras, all truth is relative (*Alle Wahrheit ist relative*) to the contingent subject.<sup>29</sup> Husserl takes the general view that this relativism is self-refuting and actually amounts to a “countersense” (*Widersinn*). To assert that relativism is true is to be committed to one absolute truth and hence to *assert* relativism is *eo ipso* to refute it. Husserl acknowledges that the supporter of relativism will not be dissuaded by this argument because the relativist asserts that he is merely expressing his own standpoint (Husserl 2001, vol. 1, 78). Husserl however thinks there is an inner contradiction in relativism in that it presupposes an objective standard of truth.

Husserl’s *Logical Investigations* placed a heavy emphasis on seeking the *essences* of knowledge and logic. Gradually, Husserl began to employ the Greek term *eidos* along with “essence” (*Wesen*) and, indeed, prefers to speak of *eidos* and the *eidetic*. In *Ideas I* (1913), he characterizes phenomenology as a “science of essences” (*eine Wesenswissenschaft*).<sup>30</sup> Seeking the essence of knowledge, the essence of perception, and so on, is at the heart of Husserl’s conception of phenomenology in the *Logical Investigations*. He is clearly aware of Aristotle’s discussions of *ousia*. Burt Hopkins has made a convincing case that Husserl was deeply motivated by problems in the classical Greek conception of *eidos* and especially the status of ideal objects.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, Hopkins thinks Husserl was partly misled by his naive identification of the German *Wesen* with the Greek *eidos* in *Ideas I*.<sup>32</sup> In the earlier writings Husserl is a realist about essences. As we stated earlier

<sup>25</sup> Husserl, *LI*, vol. 1, 28.

<sup>26</sup> Husserl, *LI*, vol. 1, 114.

<sup>27</sup> Husserl, *EdP*, 15.

<sup>28</sup> Husserl, *LI*, vol. 1, 77.

<sup>29</sup> In his *Introduction to Philosophy Lectures (1916-1020)*, Husserl cites the famous statement: “everything is in relation to someone: everything is relative (“Alles ist ein προς τι, alles ist relativ.”) and “for each one, each thing is as it appears to him” (“Für jedermann ist ein jedes so, wie es ihm gerade erscheint.”) and “Man is the measure of all things (“Aller Dinge Maß ist der Mensch,” Husserl, *EdP*, 15). Husserl’s Sophists are always Protagoras and Gorgias.

<sup>30</sup> Husserl, *Ideas for a Pure Phenomenology*. § 18.

<sup>31</sup> Hopkins, *Philosophy of Edmund Husserl*.

<sup>32</sup> Hopkins, *PEH*, 7.

these essences have mind-independent status and “hold” (*bestehen*), but do not have meta-physical status as actual existents, i.e. they do not have “actuality” (*Wirklichkeit*). The phenomenologist claims to be able to intuit or inspect essences in what Husserl called *Wesensschau* (literally “seeing-essence” or “essence-viewing”). The topic of grasping essences was hotly discussed in early phenomenology. Indeed Husserl would argue with the Logical Positivist Moritz Schlick on this very issue.<sup>33</sup> In this regard, Husserl is drawing deeply on the Platonic and Aristotelian discussions of *eide*.<sup>34</sup>

As Husserl developed his thinking about the intentional structure of the mental act-object, in *Ideas I* he also introduced new terminology, again borrowed from the Greeks, namely *noesis* and *noema*. In *Ideas I*, he claims that mastering the doctrine of the *noema* is “of the greatest importance for phenomenology ... decisive for the legitimate grounding of phenomenology.”<sup>35</sup> Husserl’s model is Euclidean geometry which is a pure “eidetics” in *Ideas I*: “geometry, already highly developed as pure eidetics in antiquity (and essentially in the school of Plato).”<sup>36</sup> *Ideas I* § 22 has a discussion of Platonic realism, and in fact, Husserl uses an Aristotelian expression *tode ti*, to refer to the specific thing.<sup>37</sup> Elsewhere, Husserl says that the account of the intentional object provides a “transcendental clue” to the entire multiplicity of possible *cogitationes*,<sup>38</sup> leading to a theory of the transcendental constitution of any object whatsoever. Husserl’s analysis of the *noesis* and *noema* has given rise to a huge discussion concerning the nature of the phenomenological theory of meaning and the nature of the intentional object. The *noesis* is characterized by Husserl as “the concretely complete intensive mental process” approached in such a way that its noetic components are clearly emphasized.<sup>39</sup> Husserl’s interest in the *noema* came through a reconsideration of the relation between the individual experiential act and its acts of grasping a meaning and referring to an object. Husserl is rethinking the nature of the intentional object, now under the bracketing of existence. He is in a sense meditating on the kind of relation between sense and reference that Gottlob Frege had proposed in his famous article in 1891, except that, for Husserl, working within the *epoché*, all questions regarding the true referent of an expression are excluded. He is interested, then, not in *actual* reference but only in the *act of referring* and the *intended* reference of the act. With the *noema* Husserl is positing a single complex entity which will take care of both what Frege includes under the term “sense” (*Sinn*), and the referential function of the act. The concept of *noema* can be traced to Greek logical thought, especially the Stoics, but there is no evidence that Husserl was influenced directly by the Stoics. He simply regarded the Greek terms *eidos*, *noema*, and *noesis* as less saturated with misleading philosophical presuppositions than their German equivalents and he used these Greek terms as vehicles for his intuitive insights. In that sense, this Greek-origin lexicon is really Husserl’s own.

<sup>33</sup> Livingston.

<sup>34</sup> Hopkins, “Phenomenology and Ancient Greek Philosophy”.

<sup>35</sup> Husserl, *IPP*, § 96.

<sup>36</sup> Husserl, *IPP*, 21.

<sup>37</sup> Husserl, *IPP*, 29.

<sup>38</sup> Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, § 21.

<sup>39</sup> *Ideas I*, § 96.



## Husserl's Discovery of the *Epoché* (c. 1907) as the Breakthrough Foundational Moment (*Urstiftung*) of Greek Philosophy

The Second Edition (1913) of *Logical Investigations* complemented *Ideas I* in articulating Husserl's commitment to phenomenology as seeking the *eidōs*. Husserl's next serious engagement with a specifically Greek concept was his adoption of the term *epoché*, probably introduced around 1905 in his research manuscripts. Husserl first wrote an account of the reduction in his *Seefelder Blättern* of summer 1905.<sup>40</sup> Supposedly, Husserl read Raoul Richter's *Der Skeptizismus in der Philosophie*<sup>41</sup> and Albert Gödeckemeyer's *Die Geschichte der griechischen Skeptizismus*.<sup>42</sup> Gödeckemeyer in particular uses the German transliteration "die Epoche" in relation to Sextus Empiricus.<sup>43</sup>

Husserl's *epoché* was explicitly introduced in print in *Ideas I*, but he was already discussing it in his lectures from as early as 1907. In April and May 1907, Husserl delivered five lectures at Göttingen, later published as *Die Idee der Phänomenologie (The Idea of Phenomenology)*<sup>44</sup> on the reduction as a way of moving from the psychological to the truly epistemological domain. In the second lecture he introduced the idea that the *epoché* "which the critique of knowledge must exercise - begins by placing all knowledge in question."<sup>45</sup> The *epoché*, then, is presented by Husserl as a specific entrance gate to the philosophical attitude. Performing the *epoché* breaks with the naivete of the natural attitude and allows a new attitude to be adopted that is the basis of philosophy. From 1907 to his death in 1938, Husserl radically expanded on this conception of *epoché* – until it becomes a "universal *Epoché*" that is the prerequisite for living a life that has been phenomenologically clarified.

In *Ideas I*, the *epoché* is part of a more general kind of "neutrality modification", not an explicit rejection, negation, doubting, or denying, but rather a consideration of the sense-content of a proposition but without endorsing it – specifically one withdraws one's assent. One neutralizes the ontological commitment or "belief-in-being" (*Seinsglaube*) that saturates all our beliefs in the "natural attitude" (*die natürliche Einstellung*), another novel conception introduced in his 1907 lectures and in print in *Ideas I* (1913).

Husserl borrowed his term *epoché* from the ancient Skeptics, where it means literally a "cessation". The classical Greek use of *epoché* was to suspend judgment when faced with two opposing but equally credible and plausible propositions. Husserl will always present the Platonic and Socratic effort as an attempt to defend scientific philosophy against the relativism and skepticism of the Sophists, e.g. in his 1929 *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, where Husserl refers to Plato's attempts to refute skepticism.<sup>46</sup> In another set of 1907 lectures, *Introduction to Logic and The Theory of Knowledge*, Husserl characterizes the ancient Sophists as dogmatic skeptics:

The Sophists, those first of dogmatic skeptics, were not content with doubting, though. They denied—at times in extreme pronouncements— objective reality in general and the possibility of objectively valid knowledge in general with extreme universality. And, they did

<sup>40</sup> Mohanty, 57.

<sup>41</sup> Richter.

<sup>42</sup> Gödeckemeyer; see Küng, 340; Spiegelberg and Schuhmann, 160.

<sup>43</sup> Gödeckemeyer, 239.

<sup>44</sup> Husserl, *Idea of Phenomenology*.

<sup>45</sup> Husserl, *IP*, 23.

<sup>46</sup> Husserl, *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, 1.



not just deny. They based this negation on theoretical arguments. There was obviously something absurd in such argumentation. With this very contention and the grounds for this contention, they laid claim to the objective validity of the knowledge and of every foundation for knowledge that they <contested>*in thesi*.<sup>47</sup>

As Husserl puts it in these lectures:

Everything is put out of action in the epistemological standpoint, and nothing, be it ever so highly valued within the natural sciences, may now be claimed as something preestablished, something supposedly absolutely indubitable.<sup>48</sup>

Husserl continues:

This skeptical position-taking, this absolute *epoché*, that does not recognize anything given beforehand and sets its *non liquet* as a pure refraining from judgment before all natural knowledge, is the first, fundamental piece of the epistemological method. A theory of knowledge that does not seriously begin with this *epoché* sins against the meaning of genuine epistemological problems. Any relying upon preestablished sciences, be it upon metaphysics, be it upon psychology, be it upon biology, ends up in absurdity, just as it began in absurdity.<sup>49</sup>

The ancient Skeptics recommended suspending judgement when faced with conflicting arguments, each of which appeared to carry the same weight, to be *equipollent*, that is, supported by the same degree of evidence. This left the person judging facing both alternatives with a certain “undecidability”. The Skeptic recommendation in these cases was to refrain from judgement, to practice abstention from judgement, *epoché*. As Sextus Empiricus explains in his *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*:

Suspension of intellect is a standstill of the intellect, because of which we neither reject nor accept anything.<sup>50</sup>

For the ancient Greek Pyrrhonian Skeptics, this attitude was meant to lead to tolerance and open-mindedness.<sup>51</sup> With a rather different purpose in mind (i.e. not seeking the equanimity of the ancient Skeptics), Husserl recommends his phenomenological *epoché* in order to suspend the thesis of the natural standpoint that permeates everyday life and even the sciences that are built on this naïve realist outlook. The meditating philosopher has to *bracket* certain fundamental structures in order to allow more basic objectifying acts of consciousness to become visible in themselves. Husserl used various mathematical analogies to articulate his sense of the *epoché*. Husserl often refers to the *epoché* as “bracketing” (*Einklammerung*), invoking the mathematical procedure of enclosing an expression in an equation in brackets to protect what is inside the brackets from the operations outside the brackets. Invoking another mathematical analogy, Husserl says *epoché* is like “changing the value” (*Umwertung*) in a mathematical expression (e.g. putting a minus sign in front of some formula).<sup>52</sup> Elsewhere, Husserl also talks about “switching off” (*Ausschaltung*) or “putting out of action” (*außer Aktion zu setzen*), and “putting out of play” (*außer Spiel zu setzen*). In his mature works, Husserl consistently

<sup>47</sup> Husserl, *Introduction to Logic and Theory of Knowledge*, 178.

<sup>48</sup> Husserl, *ILTK*, 184.

<sup>49</sup> Husserl, *ILTK*, 184.

<sup>50</sup> Barnes, 9.

<sup>51</sup> Barnes, 11.

<sup>52</sup> Husserl, *IPP*, § 31.

characterized the practice of *epoché* as: “abstention” (*Enthaltung*), “dislocation” from, or “unplugging” or “exclusion” (*Ausschaltung*) of the positing of the world and our normal unquestioning faith in the reality of what we experience. He speaks of “withholding”, “disregarding”, “abandoning”, all judgements which posit a world in any way as actual (*wirklich*) or as “there”, “present at hand” (*vorhanden*). But the essential feature is always to bring about an “alteration of attitude” (*Einstellungänderung*), to move away from naturalistic assumptions about the world, assumptions both deeply embedded in our everyday behaviour towards objects, and also at work in our most sophisticated natural science. This change of orientation brings about a “return” (*Rückgang*) to a transcendental standpoint, to uncover a new transcendental domain of experience.

The *epoché*, then, is part of the reduction. Husserl is always insistent that reduction provides the only genuine access to the infinite subjective domain of inner experience, and that he who misunderstands reduction is lost. Thus, he writes in his 1928 lecture “Phenomenology and Anthropology”:

But in the final analysis everything depends on the initial moment of the method, the phenomenological reduction. The reduction is the means of access to this new realm, so when one gets the meaning of the reduction wrong, then everything else also goes wrong. The temptation to misunderstandings here is simply overwhelming. For instance, it seems all too obvious to say to oneself: “I, this human being, am the one who is practicing the method of a transcendental alteration of attitude whereby one withdraws back into the pure Ego; so can this Ego be anything other than just a mere abstract stratum of this concrete human being, its purely mental being, abstracted from the body?” But clearly those who talk this way have fallen back into the naive natural attitude. Their thinking is grounded in the pre-given world rather than moving within the sphere of the *epoché*.<sup>53</sup>

In his 1923/24 lectures on *First Philosophy*, Husserl interpreted his task as redeeming in a higher sense the truth of the radical subjectivism of the skeptical tradition and doing so by way of *transcendental subjectivism*. As he insists:

Hence, the guiding idea cannot be dismissed that, no matter that the natural totality of the world with all natural-dogmatic ontic positings of the a priori and empirical sciences of the natural level of cognition remains in *Epoché* in this transcendental method, not only is no truth lost, but that all truth, but in a higher sense, is gained.<sup>54</sup>

This is what Husserl thinks will happen with all conscious acts when theirthetic world-positing character is bracketed. The natural attitude always employs a *thetic act* (German *Thesis*, from the Greek *thesis*, proposal, proposition), an act of “positing” (*Setzung*), and “position-taking” (*Stellungnahme*). Disconnecting the natural standpoint means making a conscious decision not to rely on any beliefs which involve the spatiotemporal world (*Ideas* I § 27). The aim is to “inhibit the acceptance of the objective world.”<sup>55</sup> We can never switch off this positing or thetic character of our acts but, by a free act of will, we can refuse to be drawn in the direction of the positing, and instead focus on the structure of the act and its intentional correlate, without thinking of it in terms of the existent world.

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<sup>53</sup> Husserl, *PaT*, 493.

<sup>54</sup> Husserl, *FP*, 369.

<sup>55</sup> Husserl, *CM*, 25.

Moreover, Husserl often emphasizes that the suspension of the natural attitude, like the entertaining of Cartesian methodic doubt, is based on a free act of the mind; we can freely choose to alter our standpoint. We need not be drawn by the assumption that there really exists a world independent of us, nor do we assume anything about the composition of that world, or about the relationship between mind and world. The very *positing* aspect of our intentional experiences (beliefs and desires) has to be put out of operation, though this does not mean taking up the orientation of actually doubting it or even of remaining undecided. Rather the positing undergoes a modification (*Ideas* I § 31). The core of this reduction involves isolating the very world-commitment, or positing of being, which seems to be contained in all our normal intentional experiences. Through the phenomenological reduction we strip away the actual character of the experience and grasp it as *pure phenomenon*:

Thus at this point we speak of such absolute data; even if these data are related to objective actuality via their intentions, their intrinsic character is *within* them; nothing is assumed concerning *the existence or non-existence of actuality*.<sup>56</sup>

In the *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl explains the workings of reduction as follows:

By phenomenological *epoché* I reduce my natural human Ego and psychic life – the realms of my *psychological self-experience* – to my transcendental phenomenological Ego, the realm of *transcendental-phenomenological self-experience* [*Selbsterfahrung*].<sup>57</sup>

For Husserl, then, the transformed Greek *epoché* is the central procedure for a truly scientific philosophy; he places it at the very heart of the phenomenological method in his mature works from *Ideas* I on.

### The First Philosophy Lectures of 1923–24 and Husserl’s History of Greek Philosophy

In his later years, Husserl became more interested in the historical origins of the scientific attitude – the attitude of *theoria*, of the third-person or detached spectator point of view. Especially in the *Crisis* (c. 1931–1937) manuscripts he sees it as a particular achievement of ancient Greek philosophy. He credits early Greek thinkers for making this breakthrough. He mentions Protagoras as causing a “rupture” (*Bruch*).<sup>58</sup> In his *Introduction to Philosophy* Lectures (1916–1920), he mentions the attempts to find a unified principle underlying the cosmos: for Pythagoras, the universe is number and number is order and harmony;<sup>59</sup> for Xenophanes *hen kai pan*; for Heraclitus *panta rhei* (*Alles Sein ist Werden*).<sup>60</sup> In the *Vienna Lecture* (1935), he credits “a few Greek eccentrics” (*eine Paare griechische Sonderlingen*),<sup>61</sup> meaning thereby that the early Greek philosophers were outliers from the mainstream Greek culture. Husserl contrasts the Greek “breakthrough” (*Durchbruch*) or “breaking into” (*Einbruch*) of philosophy with the mythic-poetic practical attitudes of earlier cultures, including ancient Chinese, Indian, and of

<sup>56</sup> Husserl, *IP*, 35.

<sup>57</sup> Husserl, *CM*, 26.

<sup>58</sup> Husserl, *Erste Philosophie (1923/24)*, 8.

<sup>59</sup> Husserl, *EdP*, 11.

<sup>60</sup> Husserl, *EdP*, 191. DeSantis (“PR”, 136) points out that Husserl’s text mentions Xenophon but it should read Xenophanes.

<sup>61</sup> Husserl, *CES*, 289; Husserl, *DKdEW*, 336.

course Greek cultures (see his *Kaizo* article on the formation of religious culture).<sup>62</sup> Only Greek philosophy had a breakthrough into a new universalism, a concept of science as rational logical system, with the idea of “truth in itself” as opposed to “truth-for-us” and led to the beginnings of the transcendental turn – later accomplished by Descartes and Kant. Only the ancient Greek were “creators of philosophy, i.e. science” (*Schöpfer der Philosophie, bzw. Wissenschaft*),<sup>63</sup> which for Husserl is distinct, because of its “purely theoretical interest”<sup>64</sup> from the more practically oriented knowledge-systems of ancient Babylonia, Egypt, China, etc.

Husserl’s lectures on *First Philosophy* (1923–24) offer a richer account of Plato’s idea of the founding of philosophy as genuine science (*echte Wissenschaft*), followed by a discussion of Aristotle not just in the discussion of logic but also of psychology. Husserl always follows Brentano in seeing Plato and Aristotle as giving birth to the idea of science as systematic verified knowledge, secured by “giving an account” (*logon didonai*). However, in these 1923–24 lectures, he links Socrates and Plato together “the twin-star Socrates-Plato.”<sup>65</sup> Socrates is presented as a practical ethical reformer:

Socrates’ ethical reform of life is characterized by his construal of the truly satisfying life as a life based on pure reason. Such a life is one in which human beings, through unremitting self-reflection and a radical giving of account, exercise critique—ultimate evaluating critique—on their life-goals, and then, of course, mediated through these, on their life-paths, on their means of achieving these goals.<sup>66</sup>

Socrates’ basic opposition is between “unclear opinion” (*doxa*) and “evidence”. Husserl then moves to a discussion of sophistic skepticism and the recognition of subjectivity.

The earliest philosophy of the Greeks, naively directed toward the external world [*Die erste, naiv außenweltlich gerichtete Philosophie der Griechen*], experienced a rupture in its development through sophistic skepticism [*in ihrer Entwicklung einen Bruch durch die sophistische Skepsis*]. Through sophistic argumentation, the ideas of reason in all their basic forms appeared to lose their value. The true in itself—Being, Beauty, and Good in themselves—was portrayed as a deceptive fantasy, shown, by means of impressive argumentation, to be mere supposition. This caused philosophy to lose its sense of purpose.<sup>67</sup>

The Sophists discovered subjectivity: the world as it is for me, “I alone (*ich allein, solus ipse*)”.<sup>68</sup>

Developing from Socrates’ refutation of Sophism and his defense of the idea of objectively valid knowledge, Plato further specified the idea of philosophy as absolutely justified scientific knowledge, a web of objectively valid, interconnecting truths.<sup>69</sup> Plato made the breakthrough of recognizing that reason can grasp what is, can

<sup>62</sup> Husserl, *AUV 1922–1937*, 59–63.

<sup>63</sup> Husserl, *AUV 1922–1937*, 73.

<sup>64</sup> Husserl, *AUV 1922–1937*, 78.

<sup>65</sup> Husserl, *FP*, 8. As DeSantis (“PR”) points out, Husserl was uninterested in trying to separate out the historical Socrates from the Platonic Socrates. Socrates is presented as a “reaction” (Husserl, *DKdEW*, 280; Husserl, *EdP*, 22) against the Sophist crisis of skepticism by returning to the need for evidence. In this sense, Socrates offered a “critique of reason”, primarily practical reason but extending to theoretical reason, rescuing it from the Sophist attack. Socrates sought for general definitions, securing the concept (Husserl, *EdP*, 27). Plato, however, is the true founder of science, based on the scientific method (Husserl, *EP(1923/24)*, 298).

<sup>66</sup> Husserl, *FP*, 9.

<sup>67</sup> Husserl, *FP*, 8.

<sup>68</sup> Husserl, *EdP*, 18.

<sup>69</sup> Husserl, *EdP*, 36.

apprehend being.<sup>70</sup> Plato also discovered the concept of the a priori.<sup>71</sup> Thus, for Husserl as he puts it in *Erste Philosophie*, Plato is already engaged in an *epoché* – but a new bracketing – a questioning about the possibility of philosophy as such:

With the Platonic dialectic, this beginning of a new *Epoché*, it already becomes clear that philosophy in this higher and genuine sense is only possible on the basis of fundamental preliminary investigations into the conditions of the possibility of philosophy as such.<sup>72</sup>

Plato is also the founder of the idea of social reason. Indeed, Husserl often discusses Plato's idea of the state as a realization of this social and communal reason.<sup>73</sup> Husserl sees Stoics – correctly – as elaborating logic as a science:

The Stoic logic, which further developed the great project of Aristotelian analytics, has the great merit of having for the first time explicitly worked out the necessary idea of a truly rigorous formal logic in a reasonably pure way.<sup>74</sup>

The Stoics had a specific interest in the idea of a logic of consequence or inference, and as we know, already in his *Logical Investigations*, and right through to his *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, Husserl is particularly interested in the idea of a logic of truth. Logic and geometry are formal sciences developed by Greek philosophy. Plato was influenced by the Pythagorean idea that everything is number and came to appreciate the nature of pure number, pure shapes, geometry as an a priori science.<sup>75</sup> Thus, in these *First Philosophy* lectures, Husserl has a discussion of Euclid as a Platonist.

It was the *first science* to create its basic concepts in a pure intuition of ideas and to form ideal laws, essential laws, laws that can be seen in apodictic evidence, i.e. as unconditionally valid necessities. It was the first science to lay down systematically ordered immediate essential laws and, systematically building up from these laws, in forms of pure consequence, to reveal all of the essential laws mediately contained in them. It is, accordingly, the first science to explain rationally all of the particularities and all of the actualities to be set forth in its application, giving insight into them as a priori necessities.<sup>76</sup>

Logic was traditionally a purely ontic science – concerned with concepts and propositions and their connection. It needed a subjective side that treats “accomplishing subjectivity” without psychologizing it. This leads Husserl in *First Philosophy* to a discussion of Aristotle's psychology. In his *Introduction to Philosophy* lectures (1916–1920), Husserl sees Aristotle, especially in his *Categories*, as contributing to the formal ontology of the real world – things must be understood to be in space, time, etc.,<sup>77</sup> or “real ontology”.<sup>78</sup> Husserl's engagement with Aristotle would deserve a paper of its own but it is worth noting briefly that Husserl sees Aristotle as an objectivist thinker. For Husserl, the ancient world has no knowledge of functioning, constituting subjectivity:

<sup>70</sup> DeSantis, “The Theoretical Reformer”, 236.

<sup>71</sup> Husserl, *EdP*, 28, 45.

<sup>72</sup> Husserl, *FP*, 13.

<sup>73</sup> Schuhmann, *Husserls Staatsphilosophie*; Held, “Husserl und die Griechen”.

<sup>74</sup> Husserl, *FP*, 19.

<sup>75</sup> Husserl, *EdP*, 50.

<sup>76</sup> Husserl, *FP*, 36–37.

<sup>77</sup> Husserl, *EdP*, 90.

<sup>78</sup> Husserl, *EdP*, 95, as opposed to formal ontology.

Even the teleological worldview of Aristotle is objectivist. Antiquity did not yet behold the great problem of subjectivity as functioning, achieving consciousness-subjectivity [*als fungierend leistender Bewusstseinssubjektivität*], as worldly, human subjectivity, being-in-the-world [*als Welt und in der Welt seiender menschlicher Subjektivität*], experiencing, cognizing, acting—and in this subjective achieving of ‘the’ world, obviously pregiven, accomplishing, accomplishing in streaming, manifold ‘presentations’ [*Vorstellungen*] as that in which unanimous, valuing sense ‘being world’, etc.<sup>79</sup>

In line with his discussions elsewhere, in his *First Philosophy* lectures of 1923–24, Husserl tends to equate Sophism and Skepticism, treated primarily in the figure of Protagoras and Gorgias.<sup>80</sup> Husserl finds Gorgias more interesting because more radical.<sup>81</sup> The effect of Sophistic questioning was to discover subjectivity as distinct from objectivity: the way things appear to me as opposed to how things are in themselves. Everything appears as it does to the cognizing subject. In his *First Philosophy* lectures, Husserl claims that in Skepticism

For the first time, the naïve pre-giveness of the world becomes problematic, and from thence, too, the world itself with regard to the fundamental possibility of cognizing it and with regard to the fundamental sense of its being in itself.<sup>82</sup>

Husserl’s *Erste Philosophie* then jumps from the Sceptics to Descartes and Locke. In other works, such as *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl clearly distinguishes his new method of *epoché* both from classical Greek skepticism and from Descartes’ method of doubt. He places himself more or less as the third wave of the *epoché*, after Descartes and the Sceptics.

### The Crisis Texts on the Greek Enlightenment

Husserl’s *Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* is the main text for a confrontation with the Greeks in a meditation on *doxa* and *episteme*.<sup>83</sup> The *Crisis* is also an extended meditation on the nature of philosophy itself and Husserl re-emphasizes philosophy as a practice of “wonder” (he uses the Greek word *θαυμάζειν*).<sup>84</sup> Reason, *logos*, and systematic theoretical “objective” science are the enduring legacy of the Greek philosophical tradition. The “twin-star” of Socrates and Plato saved reason by their demand for evidence, for definition, and systematic logical reasoning. But Husserl sees a crisis in modernity due to the fact that the European Enlightenment, from which contemporary Western culture springs, had too narrow a conception of reason.<sup>85</sup> There is need to return to the “genuine” sense of rationality as an ideal originally inaugurated by Greek philosophy in order to restore the true ideal of reason:

<sup>79</sup> Husserl, *AUV 1922–1937*, 228, my translation.

<sup>80</sup> Husserl, *EdP*, 12.

<sup>81</sup> Husserl, *EdP*, 16.

<sup>82</sup> Husserl, *FP*, 62.

<sup>83</sup> Held 1988. Husserl does not address the issue of whether the appearance/reality, opinion/knowledge (*doxa/episteme*) distinction was already known in ancient Indian and Chinese thought. He always attributes this breakthrough distinction to the Greeks and specifically the Sophists.

<sup>84</sup> Husserl, *DKdEW*, 331.

<sup>85</sup> Husserl, *CES*, 290. It would be interesting to trace how Husserl anticipated and possibly influenced the critiques of Enlightenment found in the Frankfurt School.

Rationality, in that high and genuine sense of which alone we are speaking, the primordial [urtümlich] Greek sense which in the classical period of Greek philosophy had become an ideal, still requires, to be sure, much clarification and self-reflection; but it is called in its mature form to guide [our] development.<sup>86</sup>

As he had already outlined in his 1934 Prague lecture “On the Present Task of Philosophy” (*Über die gegenwärtige Aufgabe der Philosophie*), written for the Eighth International Congress of Philosophy to which he was invited but did not attend, it is Greek philosophy that created the idea of Europe as a “spiritual, self-enclosed, unified living form” (*als einer geistigen, in sich geschlossen und einheitlich lebendigen Gestalt*) rather than as a purely geographically defined concept (*als einen bloss geographischen Begriff*).<sup>87</sup> This theme is repeated the following year in the “Vienna Lecture” where he states that the name “Europe” refers to “the unity of a spiritual life, activity, creation, with all its ends, interests, cares and endeavours, with its products of purposeful activity, institutions, organizations.”<sup>88</sup> In Husserl’s Prague lectures, delivered in 1935, Alfred Schütz, who attended, later recalled that, at a separate invited seminar, Husserl talked of the importance of the Greek breakthrough in philosophy and the emergence of the purely theoretical attitude, themes Husserl had been developing since the twenties.<sup>89</sup> In the late nineteen thirties Husserl frequently reflected on the “ingress” (*Einbruch*),<sup>90</sup> or “breakthrough” (*Durchbruch*) into philosophy and the life of reason in ancient Greece. According to Husserl, this spiritual Europe has a birth place in ancient Greece and specifically in a new form of cultural life (*eine neuartige Kulturgestalt*)<sup>91</sup> ushered in by a “few Greek eccentrics” who singlehandedly developed “a new sort of attitude”<sup>92</sup>—the theoretical attitude—towards life and the surrounding world, thereby inaugurated philosophy, and, with it, science:

Correctly translated, in the original sense, this [philosophy] means nothing other than universal science, science of the universe, of the all-encompassing unity of all that is. Soon, the interest in the All, and thus the question of the all-encompassing becoming and being in becoming, begins to particularize itself according to the general forms and regions of being, and thus philosophy, the one science, branches out into many particular sciences.<sup>93</sup>

The early Greeks thought of the cosmos as a unity that was intrinsically rationally ordered. The concept of the one “world in itself” began to be opposed to all “world representations” (*Weltvorstellungen*).<sup>94</sup> For him, “Europe” signifies the commitment to rational life as first established in the “breakthrough” (*Durchbruch*) of ancient Greek philosophy by the labours of a “few Greek eccentrics,”<sup>95</sup> such as Thales.<sup>96</sup> In his *Vienna Lecture*, Husserl is reflecting on the nature of philosophy’s origin and formation from the Greeks to the modern period (Descartes to Kant). For him, the “primal establishment” (*Urstiftung*) of

<sup>86</sup> Husserl, *CES*, 290.

<sup>87</sup> Husserl, *AUV 1922–1937*, 207.

<sup>88</sup> Husserl, *CES*, 273.

<sup>89</sup> Van Breda & Taminiaux, 88.

<sup>90</sup> Husserl, *CES*, 283, Carr translates it as “outbreak”; Husserl, *DKdEW*, 330.

<sup>91</sup> Husserl, *DKdEW*, 333.

<sup>92</sup> Husserl, *CES*, 276; Husserl, *DKdEW*, 321.

<sup>93</sup> Husserl, *CES*, 276; Husserl, *DKdEW*, 321.

<sup>94</sup> Husserl, *DKdEW*, 340.

<sup>95</sup> Husserl, *CES*, 289; Husserl, *DKdEW*, 336.

<sup>96</sup> Husserl, *DKdEW*, 332.



philosophy is at the same time, the primal establishment of European humanity.<sup>97</sup> Husserl, in a manner similar to Heidegger, thinks of “origin” (*Ursprung*) in terms of a process of origination on for which he uses the term “primal instituting” (*Urstiftung*), which Aron Gurwitsch translates as “institutive inception”.<sup>98</sup> In the *Crisis* Husserl also speaks of the “final” or “ultimate institution” (*Endstiftung*) – setting up the ultimate goal for humanity. Husserl writes:

Spiritual Europe has a birthplace. By this I mean not a geographical birthplace, in one land, though this is also true, but rather a spiritual birthplace in a nation or in individual men and human groups of this nation. It is the ancient Greek nation in the seventh and sixth centuries B.C. Here there arises a *new sort of attitude* of individuals toward their surrounding world. And its consequence is the breakthrough of a completely new sort of spiritual structure, rapidly growing into a systematically self-enclosed cultural form; the Greeks called it *philosophy*.<sup>99</sup>

Husserl believes that ancient Greek philosophy made an extraordinary breakthrough with its discoveries of the unity of being, its permeation by the *logos*, the infinite, and the pure theoretical attitude, an attitude that, eventually, with Galileo, unleashed the extraordinary power of modern mathematical science. No other culture which defined itself in terms of finite ends was capable of making this breakthrough to knowledge understood as “infinite tasks”. The fact that it happened in the West is part of the facticity of history. This theoretical attitude, Husserl insists, is unique to the Greeks:

But only in the Greeks do we have a universal (“cosmological”) life-interest in the essentially new form of a purely “theoretical” attitude, and this as a communal form in which this interest works itself out for internal reasons, being the corresponding, essentially new [community] of philosophers, of scientists (mathematicians, astronomers, etc.).<sup>100</sup>

Husserl does not deny that the Greeks were influenced by the Egyptians, Babylonians, and other ancient cultures. Other cultures have their wisdom and their forms of cosmology. But only the Greeks forged the unique theoretical attitude (*Theoria*) overcoming the religious-mythological attitudes prevalent in other cultures.

Sharply distinguished from this universal but mythical-practical attitude is the “theoretical” attitude, which is not practical in any sense used so far, the attitude of *θανυμάζειν*, to which the great figures of the first culminating period of Greek philosophy, Plato and Aristotle, traced the origin of philosophy. Man becomes gripped by the passion of a world-view and world-knowledge [*Weltbetrachtung und Welterkenntnis*] that turns away from all practical interests and, within the closed sphere of its cognitive activity, in the times devoted to it, strives for and achieves nothing but pure *theoria*. In other words, man becomes a nonparticipating spectator, surveyor of the world [*zum unbeteiligten Zuschauer, Überschauder der Welt*]; he becomes a philosopher ...<sup>101</sup>

Of course, Husserl’s conception of the singular and self-enclosed life-world of the Greeks that gave birth to science has been vigorously challenged by others. In this paper, I simply want to demonstrate the increasing depth and intensity of Husserl’s commitment to the *Einbruch* of Greek philosophy as a decisive shift or transformation for all humanity.

<sup>97</sup> Husserl, *CES*, 12.

<sup>98</sup> Gurwitsch, 386.

<sup>99</sup> Husserl, *CES*, 276.

<sup>100</sup> Husserl, *CES*, 280; Husserl, *DKdEW*, 326.

<sup>101</sup> Husserl, *CES*, 285; Husserl, *DKdEW*, 331.

The Greeks, for Husserl, effected an *epoché* that transformed universally human existence and gave birth to *theoria* and the concept of the world-in-itself. Modern human existence stands, through science, in the “horizon of the infinities” (*Horizont der Unendlichkeiten*).<sup>102</sup>

### Final Years: The Poetical History (*Dichtung der Geschichte*) of Philosophy

In his last works, in some very moving passages, where Husserl is reflecting on the very ideal of philosophy as a rigorous science that he has affirmed all his life, he asserts that the “dream is over” (*der Traum ist ausgeträumt*),<sup>103</sup> in the sense that systematic philosophy has been threatened by the existentialist impulse to construct a worldview (*Weltanschauung*) that is essentially an individual accomplishment. In a previous *Beilage*, he had asked why philosophy needs the history of philosophy,<sup>104</sup> and he goes on to recognize that the story of philosophy needs narrativity and an interpretative relation to its past, if it is to understand its mission and “unitary *telos*.”<sup>105</sup> Each one has to understand his present and future in relation to the projected past. In this sense, Husserl defends a poetical interpretation or “poeticizing” (*Dichtung*) of the history of philosophy that can be usefully compared to that developed by Gadamer’s hermeneutics in *Truth and Method* (1960).<sup>106</sup> The mature Husserl, while rarely invoking the term “hermeneutics”, is seeking some way, thinking along with Dilthey, of making sense of the flowing stream of life and of human historicity (*Geschichtlichkeit*) that is at the same time life sedimented in traditions. We live inside larger cultural narratives and these narratives make sense for us in a way that may not align with “objective” history. We need therefore to understand how we can find motivations from our own interpretations of historicity. This allows us to make creative use of the “unhistorical” or “untrue Plato”, as Husserl puts it. Thinkers and poets selectively make of a historical figure for their own purposed.<sup>107</sup> This leads Husserl to introduce, in a fascinating *Beilage* (supplementary text) to the *Crisis*, written in summer 1935, a very late notion of *die Dichtung der Geschichte der Philosophie*, the “poeticizing of history”.<sup>108</sup> Each of us is involved in responding to our own version of the tradition, what motivates and inspires us is “in part made by himself, and in part taken over.”<sup>109</sup> Just as a poet reactivates and revivifies the tradition of poetry by writing poems, perhaps consciously or unconsciously influenced by the poet’s selective reading of earlier poets, similarly, the philosopher inserts himself or herself selectively and creatively into the philosophical tradition and how they allow themselves to be oriented by it. We belong to a tradition and, in that respect, share its *telos*. Husserl writes perceptively:

*Every philosopher “takes something from the history” of past philosophers [Jeder Philosoph “entnimmt aus der Geschichte” vergangener Philosophen], from past philosophical writings —just as he has at his disposal, from the present philosophical environment, the works that have most recently been added and put in circulation, takes up those that have just*

<sup>102</sup> Husserl, *DKdEW*, 509.

<sup>103</sup> Husserl, *CES*, 389; Husserl, *DKdEW*, 508.

<sup>104</sup> Husserl, *DKdEW*, 495.

<sup>105</sup> Husserl, *CES*, 395.

<sup>106</sup> Moran, “Gadamer and Husserl on Horizon”.

<sup>107</sup> Husserl, *CES*, 394; Husserl, *DKdEW*, 512.

<sup>108</sup> Husserl, *CES*, 395; Husserl, *DKdEW*, 513.

<sup>109</sup> Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences*, 395; Husserl, *DKdEW*, 513.

appeared, and, what is possible only in the case [of the present], makes more or less use of the possibility of entering into a personal exchange of ideas with still living fellow philosophers.<sup>110</sup>

We selectively appropriate what counts for us as *the* tradition and, furthermore, this critical appropriation is unending. But, Husserl warns, history is not a “warehouse” (*Vorrats-schau*) containing a ready-made set of philosophers, texts and doctrines, rather each entity (proper name, thesis, text) is a “bearer of significations” (*Träger von Bedeutungen*).<sup>111</sup> Traditionally, philosophers read texts not critically with a “concern for scientific history” but allowing themselves to be motivated by the ideas as one interprets them oneself, to the extent of even calling oneself a Platonist (without having read all the works of Plato).<sup>112</sup> One has read perhaps only new books about Plato, current translations, and so on, but one can still identify with being a Platonist. Husserl thinks that, even in the contemporary era of scientific history (*Historie*) of philosophy, the poetic-style interpretation (*Dichtung*) of philosophy by the philosopher still has a place. In truth, the “self-thinker” (*Selbstdenker*) accepts the manner of accessing the philosophy of the past as “spiritual inheritance” (*geistige Erbschaft*).<sup>113</sup> The philosopher has entered into the philosophical tradition that becomes a “spiritual sediment” (*als geistiger Niederschlag*) that continues to motivate.<sup>114</sup> Husserl is reflecting on the interpretative dynamics in play in historical understanding. Philosophy as ultimate science will have to incorporate its own *Auseinandersetzung* with the history of philosophy.

Husserl develops a similar line of thought in a fragment written in November 1934, entitled “The History of Philosophy in Connection with Historical Science and Culture,”<sup>115</sup> in which he says that the formulating history of philosophy is not like a “novel” (*Roman*) but rather an “interpretation” (*Interpretation*). He writes:

I read my Plato, construct for myself a meaningful uniform philosophy of “my” Plato, and this construction becomes powerful in my philosophizing life. I don’t care in at least about a philological divide between genuine and fake writings, let alone about philologically correct texts, so, in a word, not seriously about a construction of the historically real Plato. “My” Plato would also finally remain for me, if all [his] writings were suppressed. Everyone works the past in this manner, even the contemporary philosopher, [it works] on me as one power determining my philosophical life, as of my “poetizing” [*Dichtung*], regardless of the question of how far my interpretation corresponds or not with the historical-factual truth.<sup>116</sup>

For Husserl, it is equally an interpretative matter whether the philosopher (*Selbstdenker*) is orienting him or herself on the basis of an unscientific or scientific understanding of the history (he gives the example of establishing the historical Socrates from the various Platonic and other accounts).<sup>117</sup> The philosopher, then, works with a certain “fiction” (*Dichtung*), perhaps in a manner similar to the way the thinkers seeking the *eidōs* uses eidetic variation, exploiting possibilities rather than being limited to actualities. In this late view, it

<sup>110</sup> Husserl, *CES*, 392; Husserl, *DKdEW*, 511.

<sup>111</sup> Husserl, *CES*, 392–93; Husserl, *DKdEW*, 511.

<sup>112</sup> Husserl, *CES*, 393; Husserl, *DKdEW*, 511–12.

<sup>113</sup> Husserl, *CES*, 394; Husserl, *DKdEW*, 512.

<sup>114</sup> Husserl, *CES*, 395; Husserl, *DKdEW*, 513.

<sup>115</sup> Husserl, *Die Lebenswelt*, 47ff.

<sup>116</sup> Husserl, *DL*, 49, my translation.

<sup>117</sup> Husserl, *DL*, 48.

is clear how far Husserl situates himself from the quest for philological exactness in establishing the history of philosophy.

## Conclusion

In his last years, i.e. the Thirties, in part reacting to the growing popularity of the existential “irrationalism” of Heidegger and Scheler, Husserl comes to the realization that philosophy as science must confront the history of philosophy itself but not simply by basing itself on that history as factual science. Moreover, philosophy cannot simply take over unquestioned an established concept of history (*Historie*) as a discipline. Rather the task of the philosopher as autonomous thinker (*Selbstdenker*) is to identify and appropriate for oneself the goal (*telos*) and the inbuilt teleological movement of each tradition in one’s own way. Tradition is incorporated as a web of motivations and rationalizations. This is a fascinating meditation on how philosophy as rigorous science comes to address its own history, its own origins and foundational myths and its own way of integrating itself into the march of human existence.

Husserl’s late meditations on history led him to turn again and again to philosophy’s Greek origins, to Plato and Aristotle on the ideal of *episteme* that transcends mere *doxa*, to the search for the *eidos*, to the renewal of the Skeptical practice of *epoché*, and to the return to the origin, or “*arche*” in order to find the *telos*.

Phenomenologists are more familiar with Martin Heidegger’s engagement with Greek philosophy, but Husserl’s own engagement is especially illuminating for his philosophy. Initially little interested in the history of philosophy, Husserl, nevertheless, had a specific and quite original conception of the evolution of Greek and Modern philosophy (unlike his mentor Franz Brentano, Husserl skipped over the Middle Ages). In late years Husserl credited Greek philosophy for the “breakthrough” into the theoretical attitude that was decisive for the development of Western scientific culture as an open-ended infinite set of tasks not limited or restricted to a specific cosmological outlook or life-world. This breakthrough, according to Husserl’s story, occurs already with the “eccentric” early Greek thinkers (e.g. Thales), who sought a unified principle that underlies the cosmos. The skeptical Sophists challenged the legitimacy of this “proto-theoretical” attempt, and Plato’s response to them brings forth the ideal of genuine philosophy as scientific knowledge, *episteme*. The Skeptics’ *epoché* was reinterpreted and revitalized by Husserl (also inspired by but distinguished from the Cartesian skeptical approach) as a permanent way of challenging the dogmatic naivete of life in the “natural attitude” and motivating the transformation to *theoria*, or the theoretical attitude of the disinterested spectator, which is essential both to modern science and to a genuine transcendental philosophy.

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