Limits of Thought and Husserl's Phenomenology

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Abstract

In this thesis I develop an account of the nature of limits of thought in terms of Husserl's phenomenology. I do this by exploring in terms of Husserl's phenomenology various ways thought-limits are encountered. Chapter One employs Husserl's analyses of meaning and intentionality to clarify the limits of conception and of questioning that emerge in wonder at the existence of the world. Chapter Two undertakes a critique of Husserl's refutation of psychologism in logic in order to clarify limits encountered in reflection on the possibility of knowledge and how Husserl's phenomenology proposes to overcome these limits. Chapter Three turns to Husserl's own encounter with intellectual limits in his phenomenology of time-consciousness. Here I show how some of the limits explored in the first two chapters re-emerge on a transcendental level and argue that time-consciousness marks the limit to Husserl's phenomenology in the sense that it frustrates cognitive desire. In this way the thesis shows how Husserl's phenomenology both clarifies and itself illustrates an ineliminable desire in reason to exceed its limits, even when these limits are recognized.

Cette thèse développe un compte-rendu de la nature des limites de la pensée en explorant dans les termes de la phénoménologie de Husserl différentes façons qui limitent la pensée. Le premier chapitre explore à travers les analyses de Husserl quant à la signification et l'intentionalité, les limites de la conception et du questionnement qui émergent en émerveillement devant l'existence du monde. Le second chapitre propose une critique de la réfutation de Husserl au sujet du psychologisme en logique en vue de clarifier les limites rencontrées dans la réflection sur la possibilité du savoir et comment la phénoménologie propose de passer outre à ces limites. Le troisième chapitre s'intéresse à la rencontre même de Husserl avec les limites intellectuelles de sa phénoménologie de la conscience du temps. Ici je démontre comment certaines des limites explorées dans les deux premiers chapitres émergent de nouveau à un niveau transcendantal et j'argumente à l'effet que le concept de conscience du temps marque la limite de la phénoménologie de Husserl dans le sens que cela apporte une frustration au désir cognitif. De cette façon, la thèse démontre comment la phénoménologie de Husserl clarifie et illustre par la même occasion un désir permanent dans la raison de surpasser ses limites, même quand ces limites sont reconnues.

Acknowledgements

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations for Husserl's works are employed throughout the text. In citations of works that have been translated into English, the English pagination is listed first, followed by the German.

APS *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis: Lectures on Transcendental Logic*. Translated by Anthony J. Steinbock. Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2001. [*Analysen zur passiven Synthesis: Aus Vorlesungs- und Forschungsmanuskripten, 1918-1926*. Husserliana XI, ed. Margot Fleischer. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966.]

CR *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*. Translated by David Carr. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970. [*Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendentale Phänomenologie: Eine Einleitung in die phänomenologische Philosophie*. Husserliana VI, ed. Walter Biemel. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1954.]

EJ *Experience and Judgment.* Translated by James S. Churchill and Karl Ameriks. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973. [*Erfahrung und Urteil: Untersuchungen zur Genealogie der Logik*. Edited by Ludwig Landgrebe. Prague: Academia Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1939.]

EP *Erste Philosophie*. Edited by Rudolf Boehm. (*Husserliana* VII, VIII). Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1959.

ID *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy. First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*. Translated by F. Kersten. Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1983. [*Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie, Erstes Buch: Allgemeine Einführung in die reine Phänomenologie*. Halle a. d. S.: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1913.]

IP *The Idea of Phenomenology*. Translated by William P. Alston and George Nakhnikian. Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1990. [*Die Idee der Phänomenologie.* Husserliana II, ed. Walter Biemel. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1950.]

LI *Logical Investigations*. Translated by J.N. Findlay. London: Routledge, 2001. [*Logische Untersuchungen*, 2d ed. Halle a. d. S.: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1913, 1921.]

PCIT *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time (1893-1917)*. Translated by John Brough. Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1991. [*Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewußtseins (1893-1917).* Husserliana X, ed. Rudolf Boehm. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966.]

Introduction

This study is motivated by the idea, familiar to us especially from Kant, that reason is defined both by certain inherent limits and by desire for insight into what exceeds these limits. What makes this idea so fascinating is that both aspects of reason are regarded as necessary. Thus the limits in question stem not from contingent features of reason, but instead from certain essential structures that determine what reason is. This means that insight into what lies beyond such limits is precluded in principle; it remains out of reach regardless of how far knowledge progresses or to what extent cognitive methods or powers are improved. Yet desire for insight into what lies beyond these limits is also regarded as necessary insofar as it too is essential to reason. Hence while such desire cannot be fulfilled, neither can it be eliminated, not even once the impossibility of its satisfaction is recognized. The result is an ineliminable tension or restlessness at the limits of thought: once these limits are recognized, the desire to understand is forced to contend with the recognition of mystery.

Husserl's phenomenology is not readily associated with such a picture of reason—Husserl's project, unlike Kant's, would not be aptly described as an "envisagement of limits."[1] When the problem of a limit of reason does emerge in Husserl's thinking, it emerges most clearly in the form of a false limit stemming from naturalistic misunderstandings of subjectivity, and hence as a limit that phenomenology overcomes. In this sense phenomenology is not a matter of delineating limits, but instead, as Fink remarks, of freeing us from them.[2] In the first two chapters I explore

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[1] Paul Ricoeur, *Husserl: An Analysis of His Phenomenology*, trans. Edward G. Ballard and Lester E. Embree (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967), 186.

[2] Eugen Fink, "Husserl's Phenomenology and Contemporary Criticism," trans. R.O. Elveton, *The Phenomenology of Husserl: Selected Critical Readings*, ed. Elveton (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1970):

how Husserl's phenomenology offers to overcome limits encountered not only in reflection on the possibility of knowledge, but also in reflection on the puzzling fact of the existence of the world. But as I will show in the third and final chapter, Husserl's project ultimately encounters its own limits, limits that, remarkably enough, stem from the same dynamic it clarifies with regard to the limits it overcomes. Thus the overall goal of this study is to show how Husserl's phenomenology both clarifies and itself illustrates the sense in which reason involves an ineliminable restlessness vis-à-vis its limits.

The first chapter is also the most adventurous; in it I employ Husserl's phenomenology to clarify the experience of the contingency of the world and two limits that emerge from this experience. The first is the limit of what can be conceived. Struck by the fact that the world exists, I am moved to ask why there is not rather nothing, but if I actually attempt to conceive of there being nothing at all, it seems that what turns up is always in some sense something. By clarifying the inconceivability of nothing in terms of Husserl's analyses of meaning and intentionality, Chapter One will also clarify the nature of inconceivability more generally.

The second limit that emerges from the experience of the world's contingency concerns meaningful or fruitful questioning. Various philosophers have argued that the question of why there is anything at all is not legitimate, a position with the remarkable consequence that philosophy either dissolves or is not suited to answer what seems to be one of its deepest questions. Chapter One goes some way in defending the legitimacy of the something/thing question by analysing how the question originates in wonder at the existence of the world. This analysis will also serve to introduce the distinction between

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objectivating and non-objectivating consciousness as the basic concept in my Husserlian account of thought-limits.

The second chapter explores territory more familiar to Husserl scholarship, namely the limits that emerge in epistemological reflection on principles of logic and on the possibility of knowledge. Through a close critique of Husserl's refutation of psychologism in the *Prolegomena* to the *Logical Investigations*, I argue that, contrary to psychologism's claim that our status as objects in the world poses an insurmountable limit to the attempt to know it, Husserl shows that the very project of knowledge establishes limits that reveal psychologism to be incoherent. In this way a factual limit of cognition is shown to be false by recognizing a normative limit that, as I will explain, could be called a limit of sense. As I will explain, for Husserl the tendency to transgress this latter limit stems from the tendency of consciousness to self-objectivation, a tendency which in turn stems from the basic objectivating tendency described in Chapter One.

The third and final chapter turns to the limits of Husserl's phenomenology itself, examining how it comes to encounter them in its investigations of time. Here the limit of conception examined in Chapter One will re-emerge, revealing interesting parallels between the idea of nothing in connection with the metaphysical origin of the world and Husserl's idea of an absolute consciousness in connection with its phenomenological one. With regard to the question of whether and in what sense the origin of time marks the limits of phenomenological analysis, I will argue that while this origin is not phenomenologically inaccessible, neither is it accessible in a way that satisfies cognitive desire. An important consequence of this is the re-emergence of the limit of sense

discussed in Chapter Two: we will see that, as in the case of psychologism, Husserl's phenomenology involves a fundamental tendency to transgress a limit subjectivity implicitly sets for itself.

Chapter One: Why Not Nothing?

"--Then be the matter as it may, let us move on from here so that the most absurd thing of all doesn't happen to us.
--Which is?
--If *nothing* holds us back, and we suffer delays!
--This is ridiculous, and yet somehow I see that it can happen…."—Augustine, *The Teacher*[3]

1.1 Introduction

Wittgenstein in his "Lecture on Ethics" describes an experience that may be familiar to many: filled with wonder at the existence of the world, he is struck by the thought of "how extraordinary [it is] that anything should exist."[4] Yet according to Wittgenstein it is, strictly speaking, nonsense to say "I wonder at the existence of the world." To say that one wonders at something makes sense only if it is possible to conceive of the object of wonder as being other than it is. Since the non-existence of the world cannot be imagined, wonder at its existence cannot be meaningfully expressed.[5]

Wittgenstein's lecture illustrates how wonder at existence raises questions regarding two kinds of intellectual limit. The first kind pertains to what can be conceived. Amazed by the fact that things exist, I am led to the idea of total non-existence, but the attempt to carry this thought through encounters frustration; it seems that, however I might try to think of *nothing*, I always find myself in some sense thinking of *something*. In this way wonder leads to an encounter with the limits of conception, raising the question of in what sense, if any, it is inconceivable for there to be nothing at all.

In contrast with the limit of conception, which is a factual limit, or a limit to what we can do, the second kind of limit illustrated by Wittgenstein's lecture is a normative

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[3] *Against the Academicians and The Teacher*, trans. Peter King (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995), 99.
[4] "Wittgenstein's Lecture on Ethics," *Philosophical Review* 74 (1965): 8.
[5] Ibid., 8-9.

limit defining what we are permitted to do. Wittgenstein's position that wonder motivates utterances that violate the proper use of "wonder" is an example of the view that wonder at existence leads us to violate certain normative limits governing language or inquiry. Paul Edwards offers another example of this view, arguing that the question arising in wonder of why there is something rather than nothing is illegitimate because, by including everything in the *explanandum* and leaving nothing to function as an *explanans*, it violates a requirement for any well-formed "why" question.[6] For Henri Bergson, as we will see, the something/nothing question is illegitimate because it involves a misapplication of negation. Two other views worth mentioning are the Kantian position that to seek a ground for the whole requires employing the categories of the understanding beyond their proper application to the field of intuition, and the view of logical positivism that the something/nothing question, by requiring an answer that is not empirically verifiable in the appropriate way, violates the conditions of meaningful discourse.[7] From various perspectives then, wonder, by motivating a desire to grasp a reason for the existence of the world, has the remarkable effect of propelling thought not only to the limits of conception but also beyond the limits of meaningful or fruitful questioning.

This chapter attempts to clarify issues pertaining to both types of limit by means of phenomenological reflection. In the first part I draw on Husserl's accounts of meaning and intentionality in order to clarify the sense in which nothing is inconceivable and how it is that we can nevertheless talk meaningfully about it. In the second part I employ

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[6] Paul Edwards, "Why," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edwards, Vol. 8, (New York: MacMillan, 1967), 300-301.

[7] Arthur Witherall discusses all of these views, with the notable exception of Bergson's, in his overview of what he calls "deflationary" approaches to the something/nothing question. *The Problem of Existence* (Brookfield, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing, 2002), 19-52.

Husserl's concept of the world as horizon to show that the something/nothing question is a misleading, albeit natural, expression of wonder at existence. This analysis will not only serve to defend the legitimacy of the question against the critique of Bergson, but will also offer a first glimpse into objectivating consciousness as the source of encounters with limits. The chapter concludes by considering the significance of ontological wonder for Husserl's phenomenology.

1.2 The Inconceivability of Nothing

1.2.1 Three Senses of "Nothing"

Talk of "nothing" is ambiguous. In order to clarify things from the outset, three senses of "nothing" should be distinguished. The most basic distinction here is illustrated by an episode from Book Nine of the *Odyssey*. Odysseus and his companions find themselves prisoners of the cyclops Polyphemos; in order to escape, Odysseus first falsely identifies himself:

> Cyclops, you ask me for the name I am known by…. Noman is my name. Noman is what my mother and father and all my friends call me.

Later, drunk on the wine Odysseus had offered him, Polyphemos falls asleep. Odysseus and his friends drive a stake into the cyclop's eye; awakened by his cries of agony, other cyclops gather outside the cave:

> Polyphemos, why this shouting in such distress in the middle of the immortal night—robbing us of our sleep? Is any man stealing your flocks and driving them off? Is any man trying to kill you through cunning or superior strength?

Polyphemos answers:

> No my friends, no superior strength. Noman is trying to kill me through his cunning.

Their response:

> Well, if you are alone and no man is overpowering you, you must have a sickness sent by great Zeus, and that cannot be helped. No, you should pray to your father, lord Poseidon.

Recounting the tale, Odysseus boasts about his cleverness:

> So they spoke as they went away, and the heart within me laughed to see how my splendid know-how with the name had fooled them.[8]

I will call the two senses of "Noman" in Homer's pun the quantificational and the referential. In its quantificational sense, "Noman" is used to say that the number of men satisfying a certain description is zero. This is of course the sense in which the other cyclops take "Noman"; for them, "Noman is trying to kill me" is a concise way of saying "It is not the case that there is a man trying to kill me." Unfortunately for Polyphemos, he has been duped by Odysseus into using "Noman" in a referential sense, i.e. as a referring term. The unusualness of using it in this sense prevents him from making himself understood.

Philosophical and theological discourse often deviates from the usual, quantificational sense of "nothing" in the same way, but with the important advantage that both speaker and audience recognize the deviation. In the sentence "God created the world out of nothing," for example, "nothing" is used to refer, as is shown by the fact that the quantificational analysis fails to capture the sentence's meaning. Analysed quantificationally, the sentence means that there is no *x* such that God created the world out of *x*. This analysis fails since it makes the sentence consistent with the claim that the world has always existed, which is part of what the sentence denies.[9]

In addition to the distinction between the quantificational and referential senses of

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[8] Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Martin Hammond (London: Duckworth, 2000), 90-91. A rich store of puns playing on different senses of "nothing" can be found in Renaissance literature. In Jean Passerat's "Nihil," for example, we learn that nothing is richer than precious stones and gold, that nothing is finer than adament, that nothing is sacred in war, and so on. Rosalie L. Colie cites this poem in Chapter Seven her *Paradoxica Epidemica* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), which offers a detailed study of the tradition of "nihil" poems and the place of "nothing" in Renaissance literature more generally.

[9] Graham Priest, *Beyond the Limits of Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 241. Priest also gives the example "Heidegger and Hegel both talked about nothing, but they made different claims about it."

"nothing," there is a further distinction to be made with regard to the latter. In its most obvious sense, it refers to a counterfactual situation in which there is not anything. This is the sense of "nothing" in the question of why there is something rather than nothing, a sense often expressed by "nothingness."[10] But "nothing" can also be used in the sense of "no-thing," in which case it refers to a reality that, as fundamentally different from and in some sense the origin of the entities making up the world, does not admit of a distinction between non-relational properties and that to which these properties belong. An example of nothing in the sense of no-thing is Heidegger's *Nichts*. When Heidegger states that "das Nichts nichtet," he uses "Nichts" to indicate that which is different from all beings and in virtue of which they appear. [11] As that in virtue of which beings appear in terms of object/inherent property, *das Nichts* itself does not have this structure. In focusing on the conceivability of nothing, this chapter is primarily concerned with the first referential sense of "nothing," though, as we shall see, what makes nothing inconceivable makes a no-thing inconceivable as well.

1.2.2 Three Problems Stemming from the Apparent Inconceivability of Nothing

The reason why nothing seems inconceivable is clear: it seems that, however one might try to frame a thought of it, one always ends up thinking of *something*. If I try to imagine nothing, I find that what I imagine is a void or empty space rather than nothing at

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[10] Peter Van Inwagen points out that someone who asks the something/nothing question would not be satisfied with the answer that abstract objects such as the number 510 exist necessarily. He concludes that what people want to know in asking the question is why there are concrete entities such as physical objects, minds, and events rather than the "bleak state of affairs" in which there are only abstract entities. "Why Is There Anything At All?" *Aristotelian Society Supplements* 70 (1996): 95-96. For Van Inwagen then, the sense of "nothing" in the something/nothing question is not the non-existence of absolutely everything. However, even if Van Inwagen is right that his version of the question captures what people *would* ask if they heeded a distinction between abstract and concrete entities, normally the something/nothing question is not posed with such a distinction in mind, so that normally what is contrasted with the fact that something exists is total non-existence.

[11] Martin Heidegger, "What is Metaphysics?" trans. David Farrell Krell in *Basic Writings*, ed. Krell (Harper: San Francisco, 1993), 103.

all. Bergson proposes arriving at an experience of nothing by blocking out awareness of all sensation. He discovers that awareness of sensations of external objects gives way not to a void, but to awareness of inner sensations, such as sensations of the surface and interior of one's own body. If I push on and attempt to block out awareness of these sensations as well, it is once again not a void that emerges, but more being, this time in the form of my own act of annulling sensation. If I succeed in blocking out awareness of this act, it is only at the expense of becoming aware of a second-order act, and so on *ad infinitum*.[12]

Trying to think of nothing in a more abstract way runs into the same basic problem. One could, for example, follow some philosophers in the analytic tradition by construing nothing as the empty possible world. But such a world is, like empty space, still in some sense something. One might instead construe nothing as a certain state of affairs, namely the state of affairs in which there are no states of affairs. But, in addition to being contradictory, such a state of affairs would also still seem to be a positive reality. It seems then that any attempt to think of nothing must fail since, as Heidegger puts it, it "deprives itself of its own object."[13] Whether this is the case, and, if so, why it happens, is the main problem raised by the question of whether nothing can be thought.

If nothing indeed cannot be thought, a second problem arises, which is how it is that we can nevertheless talk about it. It seems reasonable to think that in discussing something we have what we are talking about "in mind," i.e. that we conceive of it in some sense. As I will explain, this is indeed Husserl's position. If Husserl is right, then conceiving in this sense must be distinguished from the conceiving that eludes us

[12] Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell. (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 1998), 278.
[13] Heidegger, "What is Metaphysics?" 96.

whenever we find nothing transformed into something. Without such a distinction, all anti-conceivability arguments, and not just arguments against the conceivability of nothing, turn out to be self-refuting, since merely to say that something is inconceivable is to betray the fact that one has already conceived of it.

Another way to render anti-conceivability arguments self-refuting is on the basis of what Graham Priest calls 'the conception schema': for any *c*, to conceive of *c* as being something is to conceive of *c*.[14] This is plausible, as when one thinks that Kant is the greatest German philosopher, for example, it seems clear that one is thinking of Kant. But the schema becomes problematic when the property in question is inconceivability, since in that case to conceive that something is inconceivable is already to conceive of it. Whether the conception schema is true is the third problem that arises in connection with the inconceivability of nothing.

1.2.3 Object-Theories of Intentionality and Nothing as Something

I begin with the central problem: must any attempt to conceive of nothing fail insofar as it inevitably results in a thought of something? There are two senses in which a thought can be said to be of something, and so two senses in which attempts to think of nothing can be said to fail. First, a thought's being of something could mean that the object of the thought exists. In this sense, the inconceivability of nothing means that any purported thought of the non-existence of everything is really a thought of an existent. Alternately, a thought's being of something could mean merely that the object of the thought is taken to have certain properties. In this case nothing is inconceivable insofar as the non-existence of everything, and hence of everything that can have a nature, must itself be thought of as having a nature. In this section I will consider a view of

[14] Priest, *Beyond the Limits of Thought*, 62.

intentionality that renders nothing inconceivable in the first sense.

The intentionality of an experience, or its character of being of or about something, seems to be a relation between an experiencing subject and the objects of his or her thoughts, feelings, desires, volitions and so on. But whereas ordinarily the obtaining of a relation requires that all of its relata exist, intentional relations obtain regardless of whether their objects exist. Thus while both Heidegger and his hut must exist in order for Heidegger to be inside it, one can pray to a god regardless of whether there really is such a thing. Following Smith and McIntyre, I will call this the "existence-independence" of intentional relations.[15] There seem to be only two possibilities for explaining existence-independence: either claim that intentionality is a special kind of relation, one that does not require the existence of all its relata, or claim that intentional relations have objects of a special kind, objects that exist whenever an intentional experience does. Again following Smith and McIntyre, I will call theories that opt for the latter strategy "object-theories" of intentionality.[16]

If the objects of intentional experiences are not, or at least often are not, actual, in what sense do they exist? The most obvious answer for an object-theory is that they have mental existence—they somehow exist "in the mind." If intentionality is a matter of being related to mental objects, it follows that nothing cannot be conceived. Nothing, as the non-existence of all objects, is not supposed to be an object, let alone an existing object. But if anything intentionally experienced is, on the other hand, an existing object, there can be no intentional experience of nothing. The argument can also be presented in the form of a *reductio*: Suppose it were possible to conceive of nothing.

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[15] David Woodruff Smith and Ronald McIntyre, *Husserl and Intentionality: A Study of Mind, Meaning and Language* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1982), 11.
[16] Smith and McIntyre, 41.

Then it would be possible for nothing to exist mentally. But it is not possible for nothing to exist in any way, since then it would be something. Therefore the assumption that nothing is conceivable is false.[17]

This argument is unlikely to convince because of the extreme implausibility of the idea that intentionality is a matter of being related to mentally existing objects. Clearly to say that an object exists "in the mind" is to speak metaphorically; one does not mean that the mind is a sort of cavern that the object literally occupies. One way to unpack the notion of mental existence is as the idea that the object of an experience is a part of it. As parts of experiences, mental objects cannot have many of the properties of non-mental objects. Whereas a mental object can endure only as long as the experience of which it is a part, presumably there are other objects that endure beyond experiences of them. And unlike physical objects, a mental object, as part of a non-spatial entity, can neither be spatial nor have any properties requiring spatiality. The peculiarity of mental objects makes it clear that they would very rarely themselves be the objects of experience;

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[17] Arguably, a similar argument is found in Parmenides. In the second fragment of "On Nature," the goddess presents the youth with two possible paths for inquiry. Following David Gallop's translation, the first is "that [*it*] *is*, and that [*it*] *cannot not be*"; the second is "that [*it*] *is not* and that [*it*] *needs must not be*." (Gallop's translation, 55) Gallop takes the "it" to mean "what is there for speaking and thinking of" and "be" to be used in the sense of existence, so that according to the first path what can be thought and expressed exists and must exist, and according to the second what can be thought and expressed does not exist and must not exist. The goddess rejects the second path as "wholly unlearnable" since it is impossible to know or to point out that which is not. *Parmenides of Elea:* Fragments. *A Text and Translation with an Introduction by David Gallop* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 55.

According to Gallop, what Parmenides means is that thoughts or utterances about what one takes to be non-existent are self-contradictory, since the very act of referring to such an object presupposes its existence. (8) From Gallop's reading of Parmenides the inconceivability of nothing directly follows: were nothing conceivable, then nothing, since referred to, would exist, but this is absurd.

Since the fragments of Parmenides are so difficult to interpret, Gallop's interpretation, like any other, is controversial. The breadth of the range of interpretations of the second fragment alone can be gleaned from Tarán's survey of the literature. Like Gallop, many commentators supply the "is" with a subject, but opinions vary on what the subject is: what exists, everything that exists, truth, the right path of inquiry itself, or, as Gallop maintains, what can be thought and spoken about. Other commentators argue that the verb requires no subject. This is the position of Tarán, who argues that Parmenides begins not with a claim about what exists, but rather with the concept of existence. Leonardo Tarán, *Parmenides: A Text with Translation, Commentary, and Critical Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 33-37.

instead they would somehow function as representations of the latter. Appealing to mental existence to explain the existence-independence of intentionality thus leads to positing a mental representation between an experience and its object. In the case of a veridical experience, both the mental representation and the object represented exist; when experiences are not veridical, there is only the representation.

There are many obvious problems with this picture. For one, it raises the metaphysical problem of how a mental object is related to its transcendent counterpart and indeed whether such counterparts exist at all, so that the theory threatens to collapse into solipsism. It also raises the epistemological problem of whether and how mental objects can accurately represent transcendent ones, especially given their radical dissimilarity. There is also the peculiar problem of whether the objects of action are also mental. It would seem that they are, since presumably one deals with the same objects that one perceives. But the notion that the people in one's life are screened behind certain mental doubles is bizarre. Almost as bizarre is the alternative, that one deals with objects immediately but is only mediately conscious of them. As Brentano remarks, "It is paradoxical in the extreme to say that a man promises to marry an *ens rationis* and fulfils his promise by marrying a real person."[18] The notion of mental existence turns out to be untenable; the existence-independence of intentionality and the inconceivability of

[18] Letter to Oskar Kraus dated September 14, 1909 and quoted by Kraus in "Introduction to the 1924 Edition by Oskar Kraus," in Franz Brentano, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, ed. Kraus, trans. Antos C. Rancurello, D.B. Terrell and Linda L. McAlister (New York: Routledge, 1973), 385.
Husserl offers two further arguments against object-theories. One is that it leads to an infinite regress: if all objects are given via representations, then the representations must themselves be given via representations, and so on *ad infinitum*. *LI* II, 126/II(1), 423; *ID*, 219/186. This argument could of course be met by appealing to Husserl's own position that mental phenomena are given immediately. The other argument is that object-theories render all consciousness representational when in fact grasping one object as a representation of another pertains only to certain types of experience. *LI* II, 125/II(1), 422; *ID*, 92-93/79, 219/186. But the object-theorist is not claiming that mental objects are *experienced* as representations; he is saying rather that mental objects *are* representations. To anticipate terms from Chapter Two, whereas Husserl is describing intentionality from the inside, the object-theorist is describing it from the outside.

nothing require another explanation.

1.2.4 Nothing as Something on Husserl's Treatment of Intentionality

Earlier I presented a dilemma for explaining the existence-independence of intentional relations: either posit special objects that exist whenever an intentional experience does, or maintain that intentionality is a special relation that does not require the existence of all of its relata. Husserl avoids this dilemma by denying its presupposition that intentionality essentially involves a relation between a subject and the objects of her experiences at all. This presupposition reflects our natural understanding of ourselves as bodily beings existing in the midst of other bodies in the spatio-temporal world. In light of this understanding, intentionality is naturally regarded as one more innerworldly relation, albeit a mental one: just as being inside or outside of a building is a two-term relation, so too is thinking about it. But in conceiving of intentionality in this way, one neglects to attend to the intentionality of one's own experiences, or to the way things are actually given. As Husserl writes in the *Investigations*, "In *natural reflection*, in fact, it is not the single act which appears, but the ego as one pole of the relation in question, while the other pole is the object."[19] Language both expresses and reinforces the natural tendency to regard intentionality as an innerworldly relation, as the normal form of sentences expressing intentional experiences is 'subject/mental verb/object'—we say "I remember the party well," "They're watching TV," and so on.

In the *Investigations* Husserl runs counter to this tendency by analysing intentional experiences in their own right while adopting an attitude of neutrality with regard to whether or not their objects exist. This method yields the insight that intentionality is an "an inward peculiarity of certain experiences," i.e. that intentionality

[19] *LI* II, 100/II(1), 376. See also *CR*, 236/238.

is an inherent property of such experiences, and not one they have in virtue of a relation to something else.[20] Husserl writes:

> I have an idea of the god Jupiter: this means that I have a certain presentative experience, the presentation-of-the-god Jupiter is realized in my consciousness. This intentional experience may be dismembered as one chooses in descriptive analysis, but the god Jupiter naturally will not be found in it. The 'immanent', 'mental object' is not therefore part of the descriptive or real make-up of the experience, it is in truth not really immanent or mental. But it also does not exist extra-mentally, it does not exist at all. This does not prevent our-idea-of-the-god-Jupiter from being actual, a particular sort of experience or particular mode of mindedness, such that he who experiences it may rightly say that the mythical king of the gods is present to him, concerning whom there are such and such stories.[21]

The existence-independence of intentionality is not merely apparent; it does not conceal a relation to a mental object. Instead, intentionality really is existence-independent, and it is so because, as Husserl indicates with hyphenated expressions like "presentation-of-the-god Jupiter," it belongs to experiences intrinsically. There is thus no need to posit mental objects to account for intentional experiences of things that do not exist.

It should be noted that Husserl's concept of intentionality in the *Investigations* as an intrinsic feature of mental acts is consistent with the idea that intentionality sometimes involves an innerworldly relation. Husserl merely denies that such a relation is essential. That leprechauns exist neither mentally nor extra-mentally does not make imagining or hallucinating one any less intentional, but if leprechauns actually do exist, and if I should happen to see one, then in having an intentional experience of a leprechaun I am *also* brought into a relation with it. Thus the difference between hallucinating a leprechaun and actually seeing one is not that in the latter case there is an actual object in addition to some special object of a kind that makes experiences intentional. The difference is rather that in the latter case the intentional object actually exists. Hence it is a mistake to

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[20] *LI* II, 96/II(1), 368.
[21] *LI* II, 99/II(1), 373. See also *ID*, 73/64, 76/66.

distinguish between the intentional object of an experience and its actual object—the two are always identical.[22] It also turns out to be inaccurate to say that intentional relations are existence-independent. One should instead say that intentionality only sometimes involves a relation.

In *Ideas* Husserl reiterates the view that intentionality is intrinsic to experiences and that hence it is not essentially an innerworldly relation, be it a relation between a mental and an extra-mental entity or between two mental ones: in speaking of the intentionality of an experience, "…it should be well heeded that *here we are not speaking of a relation between some* psychological occurrence—called a mental process—and another real factual existence—called an object—nor of a *psychological connection* taking place *in Objective actuality* between the one and the other. Rather we are speaking of mental processes purely with respect to their essence…"[23] Importantly, however, Husserl makes this claim from within the natural attitude; as we shall see shortly, the properly phenomenological attitude reveals that intentionality is essentially relational in its transcendental dimension. For now the important point is that once intentionality is understood as intrinsic to consciousness rather than as something consciousness has in virtue of a relation to something else, it becomes clear that the trouble with conceiving of nothing is not that all thoughts must have some sort of existing object. Conceiving of nothing, like conceiving of an object that does not exist, requires an intentional experience that does not relate to anything at all, and Husserl clarifies how this is possible. Hence to think of nothing is not to transform it into something in the sense of entering into a mental relation with an existent. It is, however, to transform it

[22] *LI* II, 127/II(1), 425; *ID*, 219/186.
[23] *ID*, 73/64.

into something in the sense of taking it *as* something. I now turn to a more detailed discussion of Husserl's concept of the noema to show how this is so.

As Sokolowski points out, understanding Husserl's concept of the noema requires appreciating the nature of phenomenological analysis.[24] This, in turn, requires understanding his concept of attitude. In general terms, an attitude can be described as a stance one takes towards things in accordance with a concern.[25] Attitudes, as opposed to occurrent episodes such as thoughts, feelings, and perceptions, are not intentional acts. Instead they help determine the kinds of acts that occur as well as the kinds of objects given in these acts. In *Ideas* this is illustrated with reference to the "arithmetical attitude" of a mathematician. This attitude is motivated by a concern to understand numbers and their laws, and it makes possible certain acts of mathematical cognition as well as the emergence of a corresponding realm or "world" of pure numbers, a realm of ideal entities inaccessible from outside of the arithmetical attitude.[26] The arithmetical attitude is an instance of the more general "theoretical attitude" in which one approaches things solely out of a concern to understand them. This attitude is disinterested in the sense that things are approached without regard for their usefulness; such an approach allows for the development of cognitive techniques and for the emergence of beings and laws that would have remained hidden had the practical attitude never been interrupted. An important instance of the practical attitude is what Husserl calls the "religious/mythical" attitude. This attitude is practical insofar as it is motivated by a concern for success or well-being, and it makes possible certain religious acts (e.g. acts of worship or sacrifice)

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[24] Robert Sokolowski, "Intentional Analysis and the Noema," *Dialectica* 38, nos. 2-4 (1984): 127-128.
[25] I use "concern" to express what Husserl calls "interest" in the sense of occupying oneself with something, as opposed to the sense of merely being explicitly aware of something. *EP* II, 102.
[26] *ID*, 54/51.

corresponding to a realm of divine beings or of sacred objects.[27] A last range of attitudes worth mentioning are those adopted according to the demands of a vocation.[28] The work of a therapist or of a journalist, for example, involves taking up a certain attitude of emotional objectivity, the former with regard to a patient in order to improve his well-being, the latter with regard to an event in order to report it accurately.

Key to the development of Husserl's phenomenology is his identification of a fundamental attitude which, as the basic attitude of human life, is operative in all the more specific attitudes proper to particular activities. This is the natural attitude. As a constant attitude at work in all others, its object of concern is extremely general: it is the world understood as the totality of what there is, a totality that surrounds us and to which we belong.[29] In our concern with the world, we tacitly presuppose its existence. This means that while we do not deny the existence of the world, neither do we affirm it, since in tacitly positing something the question of whether or not it exists does not arise. In this sense our belief while in the natural attitude in the existence of the world is "protodoxic."[30] The world around us is simply "there," prior to any reflection on whether it is "*really* there."

This protodoxic concern with the surrounding world is natural in the sense that it is an attitude we simply find ourselves in from the beginning of our conscious life. Like birth, death, or corporeity, it is one of the basic conditions under which we live and thus is not an attitude one takes up voluntarily. The voluntary adoption of an attitude amounts merely to a modification of the natural attitude, which was always already in effect.

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[27] "Vienna Lecture" in *CR*, 284/330.
[28] *CR,* 136/139.
[29] *ID*, 56/52.
[30] *ID*, 252/216-217; *EJ*, 29/23.

Correspondingly, whatever the realm of objects one might concern oneself with in shifting from one attitude to another, one's concern remains with the world insofar as the objects of any realm are always given as part of the world. Thus the priest who adopts a religious attitude in performing a rite does not thereby leave the natural attitude. He continues to take for granted the existence of the surrounding world, so that his interest in the objects used in the rite is an interest in objects taken as part of the world, even as they are taken as objects relating one to a world beyond. For all the differences there may be between one attitude and another, in shifting between them the natural attitude remains "undisturbed."[31]

What makes the natural attitude so significant for phenomenology is that in our constant interest in what is in the world, we do not attend to how the world is given. Since how things are given, in particular how they are given truly in acts of cognition, is Husserl's central concern, his phenomenology requires liberation from the natural attitude. The phenomenological reduction is Husserl's method for achieving this. The reduction is a radical realization of our ability to disengage ourselves from a belief or attitude. Such disengagement is a second-order consciousness, i.e. a consciousness in which one attends to one's consciousness of an object, as opposed to first-order consciousness, in which one simply attends to an object. What distinguishes the second-order consciousness involved in disengagement from other kinds of second-order consciousness is that in it I take up a new position towards the object of the consciousness attended to.[32] For example, suppose I have reason to believe that my memory, say as a result of a neurological disorder, is such that I routinely remember

[31] *ID*, 55/51.
[32] *EP* II, 95.

things that did not in fact happen. Then I might remember a conversation at the same time as I do not believe that it occurred. Here I have a second-order consciousness in that I attend to my first-order remembering, and this second-order consciousness is disengaged in that whereas my first-order remembering posits the conversation, my second-order consciousness denies it.[33] Another example of disengaged consciousness is that of a recovering alcoholic who must be wary of his desire to drink: whereas in his first-order consciousness he regards alcohol as desirable, in his second-order consciousness of his desire he does not. A third example comes from the history of philosophy; it is that of the skeptic who holds that no claim about the way things are is more rationally justified than any other.[34] *Qua* philosopher, the skeptic enjoys an attitude of equipose or *epoché* towards all claims about the nature of reality; but *qua* human being desiring to get along in everyday life, he is bound to accept some claims over others. His skepticism thus requires him to disengage himself from his everyday attitude towards the world. All three of these examples illustrate that in disengagement the position of the consciousness attended to is not annulled, but instead "remains alive."[35] Thus disengagement involves a certain doubling of the self: the position of my reflected consciousness remains in play, but in my reflecting consciousness I no longer "go along with it"—the reflected consciousness is "reduced" or "bracketed."

To perform the phenomenological reduction or *epoché* is to disengage oneself from one's constant, natural belief in the existence of the world. While first-order consciousness continues to posit the world and hence remains in the natural attitude, the second-order, disengaged consciousness attends to the first order-consciousness in its

[33] *EP* II, 94.
[34] *EP* II, 93.
[35] *ID*, 60/55.

positing without itself participating in it, thereby adopting the non-natural, phenomenological attitude. In this way the reduction involves neither denial nor even doubt that there is a spatio-temporal actuality containing oneself and others. Instead one takes the stance of a disinterested spectator towards one's believing that there is. This reduction is radical in three senses. First, in contrast with reductions of particular beliefs about this or that object, the phenomenological reduction applies to *all* one's beliefs insofar as every belief posits the world as being such and such a way. Even the skeptical *epoché* falls short of this universality; while it reduces all one's beliefs about an objective world, in presupposing a distinction between appearance and reality it leaves untouched the positing of the world and hence remains in the natural attitude. As a reduction of all beliefs, the phenomenological reduction is also radical in the correlative sense that it pertains not merely to this or that object or type of object, but to the world as a whole. The fact that this world includes oneself yields the third sense in which the reduction is radical. Whereas other reductions double the self merely with regard to a position it takes, in the phenomenological reduction the self is also doubled with regard to its mode of being: whereas in the reflected consciousness the self understands itself as innerworldly, in the reflecting consciousness the self, by refraining from positing itself as a part of the world, is given to itself as transcendental.[36] In other words, consciousness emerges not merely as one more process within the world, but as a process of a different order in virtue of which the world is given.

This self-doubling raises fascinating questions about the nature of the self, but what is important for present purposes is the way objects are given in light of the emergence of the transcendental realm. Whereas in the reduced, first-order

[36] Fink, "Husserl's Philosophy and Contemporary Criticism," 115.

consciousness objects are regarded in their own right and posited as part of the actual world, in reducing, phenomenological consciousness objects are given merely as components of first-order consciousness—they are given as *noemata*. Husserl illustrates the emergence of objects as noemata in the case of perceiving a blossoming apple tree. In the natural attitude, I regard the tree in its own right. Taking it as existing in the surrounding spatio-temporal world, I describe it to others, find it pleasant to look at, desire to pluck an apple from it, and so on. Effecting the reduction, I disengage myself from all such position-taking towards the tree. Now what emerges for my regard is consciousness-of-the-tree. The tree, with all of its characteristics, has not disappeared, but whereas before I regarded it in its own right, now it is given merely as the objective dimension of my phenomenologically reduced perception.[37] In other words, whereas before I straightforwardly perceived a tree, I now regard something that remains identical throughout a variety of transcendentally reduced experiences. Husserl underscores this difference by remarking that whereas a tree can burn, a tree-as-perceived, or a tree regarded as a noema, cannot.[38] From the perspective of the natural attitude, a tree is given as a material object, and moreover as a combustible one. From the perspective of phenomenologically reduced consciousness, on the other hand, a tree-as-perceived is given as a peculiar aspect of an intentional consciousness; as such, it is not given as material and hence not as the sort of thing that can burn.[39]

Clarifying the inconceivability of nothing requires examining the composition of the noema more closely. Here three kinds of features can be distinguished. One kind encompasses the features an object is experienced as having in virtue of the kind of

[37] *ID*, 215-216/183, 220/187.
[38] *ID*, 216/184.
[39] *CR*, 242/245.

experience in question. Thus the object of a perception is experienced as something perceived, the object of a wish as something wished for, etc. Husserl calls this aspect of the noema the object's "mode of givenness."[40] A second kind of feature essential to the noema pertains to the modality the object is experienced as having. Like a mode of givenness, this aspect of the noema reflects an attitude the subject takes towards the object. When one takes an object to be actual, for example, it appears as actual; when one doubts its actuality, denies it, or deems it likely, the object will correspondingly be experienced as dubious, non-actual, or as likely. Husserl calls the modal element of the noema the object's "being-modality."[41] The third kind of essential noematic feature comprises those features that are experienced as belonging to the object itself, i.e. those features that are not functions of any attitude one takes towards it. These features constitute the noema's "sense" (*Sinn*).[42]

The complex of features comprising a sense is united insofar as each feature appears as belonging to one and the same object. This object, though distinguishable from its features, is inseparable from them—it is a bare X that functions as their point of unity.[43] In the perception of the blossoming apple tree, for example, the tree is given as that which is a tree, is blossoming, and which has the wealth of features that can be gleaned by regarding it from different perspectives, reading about trees of its species, and so on. Now, all intentional experiences, as directed towards an object, have a noema, and all noemata involve a sense in which the object is given.[44] Intentional analysis of attempts to think of nothing show that they are no exception. Since nothing, as the non-

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[40] *ID*, 244/209.
[41] *ID*, 251/215.
[42] *ID*, 244/208, 309/267.
[43] *ID*, 313/270-271.
[44] *ID*, 217/185, 315/272, 322/278.

existence of everything, leaves nothing that could have any properties, we might try to think of it as that which neither exists nor has properties.[45] This means thinking of a pure "it," or having a thought in which the noema has an X but no sense. But since there is nothing more to a noematic X than its unifying the elements of a sense, this is impossible in principle. In Husserl's words, "No 'sense' without the '*something*' and, again, without '*determining content*.'"[46] This impossibility is confirmed when we consider the result of the attempt to think of a pure, non-existent "it": what we get is not nothing, but an *indeterminate something*. It is indeterminate not in the sense that its properties are unspecified, but in the sense that for any property *p*, the object is not *p*. But such indeterminacy is paradoxical, since it is itself a property; in other words, the indeterminate something has the property of having no properties. This paradox arises because of the structure of the noema. In order to think of nothing, one must think of an X determined in such and such a way. In other words, nothing must be identified; it must be intended *as* something.

Indeterminacy characterizes what is thought under both of the referential senses of "nothing." But whereas the idea of a no-thing concerns a reality fundamentally different from and in some sense responsible for all else, the idea of nothing concerns a situation or state of affairs, namely the situation of there not being anything—nothing*ness*. This means that nothing, as indeterminate, is also *empty*. For Husserl, intentional acts that have situations as their objects are made up of acts intending the objects composing the situation. The whole act cannot exist without the component

[45] As Max Scheler describes it, it is here a matter of thinking of "the conjunction of non-existence and the not-being anything, in downright unity and simplicity." *On the Eternal in Man*, trans. Bernard Noble (London: SCM Press, 1960), 269.
[46] *ID*, 315/272.

acts—in the language of Husserl's mereology, the whole act is "founded" on them.[47] I could not see that a knife is on the table, for example, if I did not see the knife and I if I did not see the table.[48] This noetic structure is reflected in the noema, where the situation appears as a complex object founded on the component objects.[49]

Nothingness is an existential situation, that is, it is a situation that concerns the existence of objects rather than their properties and relations. What the noema of a thought of nothingness looks like depends on how one thinks of the opposite situation, the situation of there being something. One way to think of it involves taking existence as a first-order property, or a property of objects themselves. In this case the thought of the positive existential situation will have the same structure as a thought of any situation involving an object and its properties. Just as conceiving that Heidegger is short is founded on thinking of Heidegger and thinking of his shortness, so conceiving that something exists is founded on an indefinite thought of an object and thinking of its property of existing. Now, conceiving that nothing exists cannot have such a structure, since it is not a thought of some object, nothing, that has the property of existing, but rather a thought of there not being anything. In the absence of anything to function as the object of a founding thought, the situation is thought directly. Nothingness thus appears as a situation that has no components—it appears as an empty situation. This is one sense in which nothing is an *empty something*.

Another way of thinking of the situation of there being something involves taking existence as the second-order property of having an instance. On this view of existence, for an object to exist is for the complex of properties that make up what it is to be

[47] *LI* II, 25/II(1), 261.
[48] *LI* II, 114/II(1), 402.
[49] *ID*, 284/246-247.

instantiated. This leads to two ways of thinking of the positive existential situation and hence to two ways of thinking of its opposite. First, there being something could be conceived as the situation in which some property-complex has the property of being instantiated. In this case, the thought of the positive existential situation is again founded on an indefinite thought of a property-bearer and a thought of a property it has, so that once again nothingness will appear as an empty situation. But the positive existential situation can also be conceived not with reference to a property-complex but instead with reference to the set of instantiating entities. That is, for there to be something means that this set is not empty—it contains at least one thing. Conversely, for there not to be anything means that the set is empty. Here nothingness does not appear as an empty situation, since the situation has a set and its emptiness as its components. Instead, nothingness appears as an empty set, which is an empty something of a different sort.

So far I have argued that the structure of the noema is such that nothing must be objectivated, i.e. thought of as an *x* having properties. Nothing thus appears as an indeterminate, empty something. Now, one might push on and attempt to think of nothing as the non-being of everything including this something. The result is an indeterminate, empty something of a higher order, namely the situation in which there is neither the original something nor anything else. With the negation of each indeterminate and empty something of the *n*th order, one encounters a new one of the order $n + 1$, so that the attempt to think of nothing launches an infinite regress of objectivations.

It is worth emphasizing that our inability to arrive at a thought of nothing does not stem from some contingent feature of our minds. To draw an analogy from Husserl's philosophy of arithmetic, the inconceivability of absolute nothingness is like our inability

to enumerate at a glance a group of one hundred objects—though we cannot do it, there may be more powerful minds that can.[50] But this ignores that the inconceivability of nothingness stems not from an accidental feature of thinking as it occurs in humans but from intentionality as such. In whatever type of mind an intentional act occurs, an X bearing certain properties will be experienced, so that any mind trying to conceive of nothingness will encounter the frustration I have described. The thought of nothingness is more like a clear intuition of a group of infinitely many things. Both are essentially impossible; the first because thinking must render its object something, the second because intuition must render its object limited.[51]

1.2.5 The Inconceivability of Nothing and the Fregean Interpretation of the Noema

The account of the noema presented above represents one side in an important controversy in Husserl scholarship. In identifying the noema as the object phenomenologically regarded, my account of the noema agrees with those of Sokolowski and Drummond. On Sokolowski's reading the noema "is the objective correlate of an intentional act or state, but it is this objective correlate as contemplated from the phenomenological point of view."[52] Similarly Drummond: "[the noema is] that abstract moment of the intentional correlation which is the intended objectivity abstractly considered precisely as it is intended, in its significance for us."[53] Opposed to this conception of the noema is the Fregean interpretation proposed by Føllesdal and developed by Smith and McIntyre. According to it, the noema, like a Fregean sense, is

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[50] Husserl places the limit for such "authentic" representations of number (or for what philosophers of mathematics have come to call "subitizing") at around twelve. *Philosophy of Arithmetic*, trans. Dallas Willard (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2003), 202/192.
[51] *Philosophy of Arithmetic*, 231-234/219-222.
[52] Sokolowski, "Intentional Analysis and the Noema," 128.
[53] John Drummond, "De-Ontologizing the Noema," *Edmund Husserl: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers*, ed. Rudolf Bernet, Donn Welton and Gina Zavota (New York: Routledge, 2005): vol. 4, 300.

an ideal entity distinct from the object that mediates reference to it.[54] The Fregean conception of the noema is worth examining, both because it confirms the above account of the inconceivability of nothing from a different angle and because explaining where it goes wrong further clarifies the nature of the phenomenological reduction.

Smith and MacIntyre understand Husserl's concept of the noema in *Ideas* as a refinement of his concept of intentional content in the *Logical Investigations*.[55] There Husserl distinguishes the content or "matter" of an act from its object. Whereas the object of an act is what the experiencing subject is directed towards, the matter of an act is what the subject takes the object to be. For example, the thought of Heidegger as the author of *Being and Time* and the thought of Heidegger as the rector of Freiburg in 1933 have the same object but different matters. Both thoughts have Heidegger as their object, but they present him in different ways. Further, it is only in virtue of its matter that an act has an object, since in order to identify an object, one must have criteria for identifying it—one must take the object to have certain characteristics. Different acts can have the same matters; e.g. in understanding the name "Heidegger," we can both think of the author of *Being and Time*. Our two thoughts have the same matter insofar as each matter is an instance of one and the same ideal meaning.[56] Thus for Husserl meanings are ideal entities—ideal "ways of thinking of things"—that mediate reference to an object in the matters of real acts of meaning.

On the basis of this theory of meaning, and on the basis of Husserl's description in *Ideas* of the noematic sense, and sometimes of the noema as a whole, as a *Sinn*, Smith

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[54] Dagfinn Føllesdal, "Husserl's Notion of Noema," *The Journal of Philosophy* 66 (20) (1969): 681, 682, 684.
[55] Smith and MacIntyre, 108, 119, 121.
[56] *LI* II, 124/II(1), 420.

and MacIntyre identify the noema as an ideal meaning that mediates reference to an object.[57] But since for Husserl the noema is an objective dimension of an act taken in its own right, noemata, unlike the meanings of the *Investigations*, are not ideal entities instantiated in a real (*reell*) component of the act. Instead the noema is itself a component of the act, though one which, as ideal, is not amongst its real (*reell*) components. Thus noemata form a peculiar class of ideal objects, distinguished from abstract universals such as redness and roundness by the fact that they are not instantiated in real things.[58] But like the meanings of the *Investigations*, noemata mediate reference to objects. They do this through the structure of X/determining content described above. Since the noema mediates reference to an object distinct from itself, the noematic X is not a property-substrate regarded from the transcendental perspective, but rather corresponds to the real, mind-transcendent object. In summary then, according to Smith and MacIntyre "the meanings that words express are themselves the noemata of the various intentional experiences that underlie the use of words. And as expressed in language, meanings or noemata are what give language its "referential" character: they prescribe objects of reference…."[59]

Before criticizing this interpretation, it should be noted that on it too nothing is inconceivable, and for essentially the same reason as on the competing account. If all thoughts involve reference to their objects via ideal noemata, then the thought of nothing can only pick out its object through such mediation. As in the case of understanding any expression, in understanding "nothing" an act seeks out an object by means of ascribing

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[57] Smith and MacIntyre, 159,161. Bernet makes the important point that in *Ideas* Husserl introduces the noema as a *Sinn* "in a very extended signification." "Husserls Begriff der Noema," *Edmund Husserl: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers*: vol. 4, 271; *ID*, 214/182.
[58] Smith and MacIntyre, 124.
[59] Ibid., xvi.

properties to it.[60] Nothing is thereby transformed into something; *nothing* becomes *nothingness*.

The basic error in the Fregean interpretation of the noema is its understanding of the reduction. For Smith and MacIntyre a reduction in general is a "*methodological* device for 'reducing', or narrowing down, the scope of one's inquiry" by disallowing appeal to beliefs of a certain type.[61] The phenomenological reduction delimits the scope of phenomenological inquiry in three steps. The first is a psychological reduction; here one disallows oneself from making or using the assumption that there is a real world to which our experiences are related. This psychological reduction allows us to direct our attention away from objects and to our experiences and to ourselves as experiencing subjects.[62] Having thus delimited consciousness as a realm of inquiry from the world that transcends it, one now performs the next step, the transcendental reduction. In this reduction we disallow appeal to the belief that we exist as a part of the world as well as to beliefs about the nature of the ego, e.g. beliefs derived from Freudian psychoanalysis or from a physicalist theory of the mind.[63] This frees the phenomenologist from assumptions about the ego, allowing her to describe consciousness just as it is given, in terms that are "ontologically neutral."[64] The third step is the eidetic reduction, in which we focus on the essences or types of the structures of particular experiences.[65] Thus for Smith and MacIntyre the phenomenological reduction is a "special kind of inner reflection," and phenomenology is "the study of *experiences* as a subject has them," a study of "the inner life of *consciousness*," as opposed to the world external to

[60] Ibid., 195.
[61] Ibid., 95.
[62] Ibid., 96, 102.
[63] Ibid., 97-98, 102.
[64] Ibid., 99.
[65] Ibid., 100, 102.

consciousness.[66]

The account of the reduction offered by Smith and MacIntyre reflects the primacy of the *Logical Investigations* in their interpretation of Husserl's phenomenology. In this work Husserl indeed understands phenomenology as an eidetic description of mental acts understood in contradistinction to transcendent objects, a description that proceeds free of all presuppositions about the nature and existence of the world and of consciousness as a part of the world.[67] But with Husserl's subsequent development of the concept of the natural attitude, the method of the *Investigations* comes to be revealed as deficient in that it remains captive to that attitude. It remains captive insofar as abstaining from making use of belief in one's existence as a part of the world is not yet to disengage oneself from the attitude underlying such belief. Thus even as I ensure that the propositions in my analysis of experience do not depend for their justification on the proposition that the world exists or that my experiences exist as part of it, my fundamental understanding of myself as an innerworldly being remains undisturbed. While it is true that the phenomenological reduction involves abstaining from the use of beliefs about the world, such abstention is not all there is to the reduction, but is instead, as Husserl emphasizes, the result of a fundamental transformation in *attitude*, one that reveals the world as the correlate of transcendental subjectivity.[68] Thus phenomenology is concerned with experiences not in their mundane significance as a realm within the world—an immanent,

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[66] Ibid., 94, 160.
[67] *LI* I, 177-179/II(1), 19-22.
[68] Thus Husserl writes in the following well-known passage: "Perhaps it will even become manifest that the total phenomenological attitude and the epoché belonging to it are destined in essence to effect, at first, a complete personal transformation, comparable in the beginning to a religious conversion, which then, however, over and above this, bears within itself the significance of the greatest existential transformation which is assigned as a task to mankind as such." *CR*, 137/140. For Smith and MacIntyre such passages are merely "overzealous." "Intentionality via Intensions," in *Edmund Husserl: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers*, vol. 4, 187, note 30.

mental realm distinct from a transcendent, physical realm—but rather in their transcendental significance as that in virtue of which the world is given in the first place.

However, because Husserl's mature, transcendental phenomenology and phenomenology as understood by Smith and MacIntyre both analyze consciousness—the one from a transcendental perspective, the other from a perspective that remains in the natural attitude—Husserl's analyses of the noema can be taken up by the latter. Husserl himself remarks:

> Obviously the perceptual sense also belongs to the phenomenologically unreduced perception (perception in the sense of psychology). Thus one can make clear here at the same time how the phenomenological reduction can acquire for psychologists the useful methodic function of fixing the noematic sense by sharply distinguishing it from the object simpliciter, and recognizing it as something belonging inseparably to the psychological essence of the intentive mental process.[69]

What Husserl says here of the noema with regard to the psychological study of perception is also applicable to a natural-attitude theory of meaning. Following Fink, we can distinguish between transcendental and psychological concepts of the noema: whereas the transcendental noema is the object regarded in light of the reduction, the psychological noema pertains to an intentional experience regarded in the natural attitude. It is the meaning through which a distinct, transcendent object is referred to.[70] While the interpretation of Husserl's phenomenology developed by Smith and MacIntyre fails to capture it in its mature, transcendental form, it at least shows how richly a psychological conception of the noema can be developed.

1.2.6 Talk of the Inconceivable

So far I have tried to clarify the inconceivability of nothing in terms of Husserl's treatment of intentionality. I now turn to the second problem raised in section 1.2.2,

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[69] *ID*, 217/184.
[70] Fink, "Husserl's Philosophy and Contemporary Criticism," 124-125.

which is how to reconcile a thing's inconceivability with our ability to talk about it. This is an obvious difficulty for any theory of meaning that is, like Husserl's, mentalistic. For Husserl, to understand an expression is to have a thought, and meanings are entities related to thoughts. This raises the question of what kind of thought is at work in understanding expressions corresponding to inconceivable objects. If such thoughts are of the objects, then the objects turn out to be conceivable after all, and it seems any argument against a thing's conceivability must be self-refuting. My Husserlian account of the inconceivability of nothing, for example, would presuppose its conceivability with its constant use of "nothing."

Suppose, on the other hand, that the thoughts that constitute understanding expressions for inconceivable objects are not of these objects, but of other objects. Hence in the case of understanding "nothing" one is really thinking of something. But this raises two problems. First, how is it possible so completely to misidentify the object of one's own thinking? It seems that if we know anything, we know what it is we are thinking about. Second, even if such mistakes are possible, how can they be recognized without thinking of the object that had previously been eluding us? That is, it seems that thinking that an object has not been conceived or that it is inconceivable is already to conceive of it. This raises the more general question of the truth of the conception schema, or the claim that for any *c*, to conceive that *c* has any property *p* is to conceive of *c*.

The first step towards resolving these problems is to distinguish between narrow and broad senses of conceiving. Understood broadly, conceiving includes both forming an image of something and thinking of something abstractly, or without an image.

Understood more narrowly, conceiving means only the latter, and hence is distinct from imagining. A good example of the narrow sense of conceiving occurs in Descartes' sixth meditation when he argues that although he cannot imagine a chiliagon, he can nevertheless conceive of one.[71] Probably no one—no human being, at least—can imagine a figure such that each of its one thousand sides is distinguished. This does not prevent us from talking about chiliagons, and hence from conceiving of them. We can conceive of a chiliagon in the sense that we can be intentionally directed towards it without experiencing it as present in any way—neither as actually present, as in perception, nor as if it were present, as in imagination or memory. In Husserl's terms, acts of conceiving are "empty" while acts of other types have varying degrees of "fullness."

What I am calling acts of conceiving in the narrow sense are what Husserl identifies as "signitive" acts, or acts in virtue of which expressions are meaningful. On Husserl's analysis to understand an expression is to be intentionally directed towards its referent on the basis of perceiving verbal or written signs.[72] The reason for identifying the acts involved here as empty is that although understanding an expression is often accompanied by perceiving or imagining its referent, neither type of experience can be that in virtue of which expressions refer. This is because images and percepts vary in relation to understanding the same expression, and vice versa. To use Husserl's example, in understanding the words "There flies a blackbird!" one can have any number of perspectives on the bird and hence any number of different percepts. Conversely, any one of those percepts can be expressed in numerous utterances, such as "That is black!",

[71] René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), 48.
[72] *LI* I, 193-194/II(1), 39-42; *ID*, 294/256.

"That is a black bird!", "There it soars!", and so on.[73] The same goes for any images one might have in connection with understanding an expression. Further, one often understands expressions without perceiving or imagining their referents at all.[74] Thus meaning must reside in a special class of intentional experiences distinguished by their emptiness, or by the absence of their object.

The class of such empty, signitive acts, or acts of conceiving in the narrow sense, admits of a further distinction between what I will call strong and weak senses of conceiving. In the weak sense, to conceive of something is simply to understand an expression for it, i.e. to perform an act of meaning with the expression's referent as its object. Thus any grammatically well-formed expression corresponds to a weakly conceivable object, since any such expression can be understood. As the class of what can be meant, the class of the weakly conceivable is vast: "Anything, everything can be objectified as a thing meant, i.e. can become an intentional object."[75] Round squares and purple numbers are both conceivable in the weak sense since "round square" and "purple number" do not violate any syntactical rule. "Square round" and "number purple," on the other hand, are not syntactically correct; as such they are expressions that do not yield acts of meaning and hence to which no intentional object corresponds.

Strongly conceivable objects form a sub-class of weakly conceivable ones. They are objects that cannot only be meant, but which can also be meant *consistently*. What this means can be explained with reference either to intentional acts or to their objects. With reference to the latter, a strongly conceivable object is one for which the various determinations assigned to it in the noema can co-determine one object at the same time.

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[73] *LI* II, 195/II(2), 14.
[74] *LI* II, 195/II(2), 15
[75] *LI* II, 60/II(1), 314.

Thus a round square is inconceivable in the strong sense since nothing can simultaneously be both round and a square. Explained with reference to acts, a strongly conceivable object is one that could be given intuitively. That is, it is one that could be perceived or imagined, and hence given with some degree of fullness. If this is possible, then the empty act of conceiving is capable of "fulfillment"—it is possible for someone to have a non-empty intentional experience with the same noema and to experience this identity. Thus the Eiffel Tower is strongly conceivable; having read somewhere that it was built by Eiffel for the World's Fair, I can later find myself standing in front of it and recognize it as just that structure. A purple number, on the other hand, is inconceivable in the strong sense since no number can be intuitively given as purple. It should be emphasized that the impossibility of an intuitive act means impossibility not merely for the human mind, but impossibility for any mind whatsoever. This means that the impossibility of an intuitive experience of an object and the impossibility of the object's existence are logically equivalent; each entails the other.[76]

Corresponding to the distinction between weakly and strongly conceivable objects is a distinction pertaining to the intelligibility of linguistic expressions. In the language of the Sixth Investigation, anything that is not even conceivable in the weak sense is marked by an expression that is senseless (*sinnlos*). Corresponding to that which is conceivable in the weak sense but not in the strong are expressions that are counter-

[76] Because Husserl's account of fulfillment is given in the Sixth Investigation, before the development of the concept of the noema, fulfillment is described in terms not of noemata but instead of act-matters: in fulfillment one experiences the identity of the matter of an empty act with the matter of an intuition. Thus in strongly conceiving of an object, corresponding to the empty act "…there *exists in specie a complete intuition whose matter is identical with its own*." *LI* II, 250/II(2), 102-103. Since fulfillment is essentially the experienced identity of the intentional content of an empty and a non-empty act, whether this content is conceived as an act-matter or as a noema does not alter the essence of fulfillment.

sensical (*widersinnig*).[77] The distinction between strong and weak conceivability can be further explained in terms of Husserl's distinction between active and passive reading, writing and speaking. When we use language passively, we understand words without explicating (*verdeutlichen*) the complexes of meaning they express. That is, we weakly conceive of objects determined in the ways described, but we do not make the effort of verifying for ourselves that the objects are really possible—we do not bother to verify that the description "makes sense," i.e. that it is not counter-sensical, or that its referent can be strongly conceived. Sokolowski aptly describes such passive use of language "thoughtless."[78] In using language actively or thoughtfully, on the other hand, we do make this effort, but in doing so it is possible to make mistakes. Something can seem strongly conceivable when in fact it is not; there can be an inconsistency in the object that goes unnoticed. Part of the work of philosophy is to scrutinize ideas for consistency, as, for example, philosophers of religion do in asking whether the traditional concept of God as a perfect being is actually coherent.[79]

With the distinction between weak and strong senses of conceiving in hand, we are now in a position to reconcile a thing's inconceivability with our ability to talk about it. Since "nothing" or "total non-existence" are well-formed expressions, nothing is conceivable in the weak sense. But it is strong conceivability that is at issue in asking whether nothing is, as we might say, *really* conceivable. Thus it does not follow from

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[77] *LI* II, 67/II(1), 326-327.
[78] Sokolowski, *Presence and Absence: A Philosophical Investigation of Language and Being* (Bloomingston: Indiana University Press, 1978), xv.
[79] It should be remarked that mindfulness of the consistency of concepts and statements is only part of the active use of words. It also involves the obviously important issue of whether statements are true. Husserl points to reading the newspaper and uncritically accepting its contents as "the news" as an example of passive reading with regard to truth. "The Origin of Geometry" in *CR*, 364/374. He gives an example of passive reading with regard to consistency in the case of someone who, inclined to accept what an author says because of his authority, does not object even to the statement "This color plus one makes three." *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, trans. Dorion Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969), 215-216.

our ability to have something "in mind" when talking about it that is self-contradictory to deny its inconceivability.

The distinction between weak and strong senses of conceiving also saves inconceivability claims from the contradiction generated by the conception schema, i.e. that to conceive that *c* is inconceivable is to conceive of *c*. Husserl's account of propositional acts offers *prima facie* support for the schema. In order to be conscious of a state of affairs, one must be conscious of its components; categorial acts are founded on simple ones. Perceiving that a knife is on the table, for example, requires perceiving the knife and perceiving the table.[80] It seems that, similarly, conceiving that *c* is inconceivable requires conceiving of *c*.

Given the two senses of conceiving, there are four ways of understanding what it is to conceive that *c* is inconceivable. Using the idea of nothing as our example, they are:

(1) Weakly conceiving that nothing is weakly inconceivable, i.e. understanding "'nothing' cannot be understood."

(2) Strongly conceiving that nothing is weakly inconceivable, i.e. grasping the consistency of the incomprehensibility of 'nothing.'

(3) Weakly conceiving that nothing is strongly inconceivable, i.e. understanding "nothing is not a consistent object."

(4) Strongly conceiving that nothing is strongly inconceivable, i.e. grasping the consistency of its being inconsistent.

In none of these cases does conceiving of the inconceivability of nothing presuppose that nothing is conceived. No such contradiction arises in the first case since understanding the claim that an expression cannot be understood does not require understanding that expression. This is clear with regard to senseless expressions such as "running swam." To understand that "running swam" is incomprehensible does not require understanding

[80] *LI* II, 114/II(1), 402.

"running swam"; all that is required is identifying a written sign as the subject of predication. In the case of "nothing," we do understand the expression, so that the claim that "nothing" cannot be understood is false. But it is not self-refuting. In seeing this, we have in fact carried out (2)—we have just thought through what it is to understand that an expression is incomprehensible, and have found that this is consistent. (2) is itself consistent since at no point is it necessary to understand an expression in order to confirm that it is incomprehensible.

In the case of (3), understanding the claim that nothing is not a consistent object does require understanding "nothing." But there is no contradiction here since merely understanding the claim, or weakly conceiving that nothing is not a consistent object, does not require the further act of grasping its consistency. And just as to confirm the coherence of (1) is to execute (2), so to confirm the coherence of (3) is to execute (4). (4) is also coherent since confirming that something is inconsistent requires only that it be meant, not that it be grasped as consistent.

The conception schema turns out to be false. One reason it might be initially plausible is the notion that in conceiving of something the object stands "before the mind," so that conceiving, like perceiving, would involve the presence of the object.[81] Conceiving that something is inconceivable would be as absurd as seeing an object exhibiting its invisibility. But acts of conceiving are empty; the object is not present at all. Another reason for the initial plausibility of the schema is that statements that something is inconceivable have an expression for that thing as their subject, which strongly suggests that they express a thought involving that thing as its object. But as the

[81] Priest in fact suggests that this notion is behind the conception schema when he writes that to conceive of an object is to "single it out before the mind." *Beyond the Limits of Thought*, 66.

above analysis shows, statements of inconceivability in fact express thoughts involving thoughts of *expressions* or *meanings* corresponding to the thing in question. In this way the falsehood of the conception schema does not count against Husserl's analysis of propositional acts as founded on simple acts.

The last two of the three problems stemming from the apparent inconceivability of nothingness have now been resolved. By drawing on Husserl's theory of meaning in order to distinguish a weak from a strong sense of conceivability, the conception schema is revealed to be false, and talk of nothing is revealed to be consistent with its inconceivability.[82]

1.3 Ontological Wonder and the Question of Why There is Anything at All

Having examined the nature of the conceptual limit posed by the idea of nothing, I now turn to the second issue of limit raised in the introduction to this chapter, which is

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[82] The distinction between weak and strong senses of conceiving can be used to clarify an interesting attempt by Anselm to resolve the paradox that if "nothing" signifies, then it signifies nothing, in which case it does not signify after all. (For Anselm it is important to resolve this paradox in order to explain how talking about evil is consistent with the doctrine of evil as a privation of being.) Anselm distinguishes two senses of signification. An expression can signify its object by directly bringing it to mind, in which case it signifies "by establishing," or it can signify its object by means of bringing to mind what it is not, in which case it signifies "by removing." As equivalent to "not-something," "nothing" signifies by removing—it signifies its object by means of bringing to mind its opposite, something. But since everything is something, the remotive signification does not leave anything to serve as a proper referent. It is not contradictory to claim that "nothing" signifies and that it signifies nothing since while it does signify something by removing, it does not signify anything by establishing. *The Fall of the Devil*, in *Anselm of Canterbury*, ed. and trans. Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson, vol. 2 (Toronto: Edwin Mellen Press, 1976), 148-149.

However, by claiming that "nothing" refers to everything remotively Anselm has so far conceded that "nothing" has no proper referent. Anselm's solution is to argue that what "nothing" properly signifies is not something but, as the absence of all "somethings," merely an "as-if something" (*quasi aliquid*). (150) On Anselm's complete account then, "nothing," by remotively referring to something, establishes reference to a quasi-something. Thus the claim that "nothing" signifies its proper object is not equivalent to the claim that it does not signify anything.

In terms of my account of conceiving, "nothing" signifies remotively insofar as it is merely understood or insofar as its referent is weakly conceived. Here one understands that what is meant is "not-something." To attempt to follow through with the signification is to attempt to strongly conceive of the referent, and doing this yields a thought of what Anselm calls a "quasi-something." Insofar as Anselm's "quasi-something" is given as an *x* with the determination 'absence of what is something,' it is still itself a something. Thus Anselm's attempt to show how "nothing" can refer without referring to something ultimately fails.

whether, as various philosophers have maintained, the question of why there is not nothing violates a normative limit defining legitimate inquiry. Obviously a comprehensive treatment of this issue would be far too great a task to attempt here, as this would require engaging with the theories of meaning or of human understanding that underlie some important cases for such a limit, e.g. the philosophy of Kant or of logical positivism. Instead I will focus on the case made by Bergson in Chapter Four of *Creative Evolution*. What makes Bergson's arguments especially relevant in the present context is that he attempts to derive the illegitimacy of the something/nothing question from the inconceivability of nothing. In this section I will contest this derivation by analysing how the something/nothing question arises in wonder in existence. The analysis will show that, contrary to Bergson, the fact that nothing cannot be conceived does not mean that the question of why there is not nothing is incoherent. The analysis will also provide us with our first occasion to witness the restlessness at the limits of thought revealed by Husserl's phenomenology, i.e. the restlessness engendered by the objectivating tendency of consciousness.

According to Bergson, the something/nothing question springs from a sense not only that there is an alternative to there being something but also that this alternative is somehow the more natural one. The fact that things exist thus appears as a "conquest over nought," a conquest either that was achieved at some point in the past or that has kept nothing at bay for all eternity.[83] How nothing is overcome, or how it is that anything exists, then seems to demand an explanation. Bergson attempts to show that no such explanation is required since the idea that beings overcome nothing is mistaken. Bergson's overall aim is to eliminate the demand for an explanation for the existence of

[83] Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 276.

the *élan vital*, thereby freeing one to be satisfied with intuiting the *élan* as the ultimate goal of philosophy.[84]

Two strategies can be discerned in Bergson's attempt to deflate the something/nothing question. The first is to show that the idea of nothing is contradictory. Bergson attempts to do this by analysing the concepts of absence and of non-existence. His basic contention is that each concept always involves reference to a positive reality—to think of something as absent is to think of something else as present, and to think of something as non-existent is to think of something else as existent. Thus the idea of *everything* as absent or as non-existent is absurd.[85] This means in turn that the question of why there is something rather than nothing does not really express what it purports to express, namely a thought contrasting the fact that there is something with a counterfactual nothing. As Bergson puts it, "the idea of an annihilation of everything presents the same character as that of a square circle: it is not an idea, it is only a word."[86] Once we understand this, we see that thought can confront only beings and are no longer motivated to ask why anything should exist—the problem dissolves.

The possibility of discerning a second strategy in Bergson's text stems from an ambiguity in his account of the something/nothing question as arising from the idea that beings overcome nothing. On the first strategy, the contrast between there being something and there being nothing is taken as a contrast between an actual situation and a counterfactual one—the idea is that nothing either somehow ceased to be actual at some point in the past or has always been precluded from becoming actual. Here nothing is held in abeyance as a possibility. But Bergson's talk of beings overcoming nothing could

[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid., 281-286.
[86] Ibid., 280-281.

also be taken to mean that nothing is in some sense actual, even as things exist. Here nothing could be understood as a void or receptacle for beings.[87] Beings overcome nothing in the sense that it prevents nothing from, as it were, taking over. This reading is reinforced by Bergson's description of the motivation for the something/nothing question as the idea that "the full is an embroidery on the canvas of the void."[88]

If the overcoming of nothing is understood in this way, the analysis of negation Bergson undertakes after his arguments concerning absence and non-existence constitutes a second strategy in his attempt to deflate the something/nothing question. Bergson argues that the meaning of a negative proposition is not that a negative fact obtains, but rather that a judgment is mistaken. Thus "the table is not white" refers not to any negative fact of the table's not being white, but instead to the positive fact that the judgment that the table is white is wrong.[89] By referring to a judgment in this way, the negative proposition also indicates the need to substitute a correct judgment for the one being denied, though without specifying what the correct judgment is. In this way the negative proposition also indicates a further, unspecified positive fact.[90] Once we understand that there are no negative facts corresponding to negative propositions, we see there are no "nothings" in reality, and hence that there is no nothing, no void that existing things fill in. Once again the something/nothing question is revealed to be senseless, so that once again we are no longer motivated to ask it.

There are several problems with Bergson's analyses of negation, absence and

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[87] Richard M. Gale, "Bergson's Analysis of the Concept of Nothing," *The Modern Schoolman* 51 (1974): 270.
[88] Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 276.
[89] Ibid., 287-288.
[90] Ibid., 289.

non-existence, but I will forego discussing them here.[91] Instead I will focus on whether, as Bergson maintains, the inconceivability of nothing means that the something/nothing question is senseless. But first it is worth first considering the possibility that rather than disposing of the something/nothing question, the inconceivability of nothing actually provides an answer to it: one might think that given the inconceivability of the alternative to there being something, it follows that it is necessary that there be something. The question of why there is something rather than nothing would turn out to be as easily resolvable as the question of why squares have four sides. In both cases we would have to do with a truth whose necessity is demonstrated by the inconceivability of its not obtaining. In Husserlian terms, the necessity of there being something would be confirmed by the method of imaginary variation: however one might alter the total world-situation in imagination, one always finds oneself imagining something, even if only an empty something. Hence total non-being is impossible.

But there is an important difference between the inconceivability of nothingness and that of an inconsistent object such as a round square. Like a round square, nothing is not a consistent object, and hence both a round square and nothingness are strongly inconceivable. But unlike a round square, nothing is not an object at all. That is, although nothing is not consistent, neither is it *inconsistent*; as a non-object, the concept of consistency does not apply. Therefore if the impossibility of nothing is to be derived from its inconsistency, it cannot be from any inconsistency it would have as an object. Whereas the inconceivability of an inconsistent object lies in the nature of the *object*, the inconceivability of a non-object lies, as we saw in section 1.2.4, in the nature of *thought*.

[91] For some of these problems, see Gale's article, cited above, as well as Jacques Maritain, *Bergsonian Philosophy and Thomism*, trans. Mabelle L. Andison and J. Gordon Andison (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), 84-92.

This peculiarity is reflected on the side of intuitive fulfillment: whereas both the empty thought of nothing and the empty thought of a round square are unfulfillable, they are so for different reasons. While the thought of a round square is unfulfillable because a round square is contradictory, the thought of nothing is unfulfillable not because of any contradiction in it, but rather because the non-existence of everything means the non-existence of any fulfilling perception.

At this point the question arises of whether nothing might not be possible regardless of its inconceivability. Perhaps the idea of nothing is similar to the idea of one's own extinction: I cannot imagine "what it would be like" not to exist; similarly, I cannot conceive of what would result from the total annihilation of everything there is. But closer scrutiny of the idea that nothing might be possible reveals a problem. If nothing were possible, then it would be possible for it to be actual. But if nothing were actual, it would *be*—it would no longer be nothing, or total non-being.[92] Thus although nothingness is not impossible in the sense of internal inconsistency, it is impossible insofar as it involves nothing that could be actualized. Nothing means that nothing is actual—not even nothing itself.

Does it not finally follow then that there must be something, that it is necessary that something exist? With this question one who stands in awe at the existence of the world finds himself in a perplexing situation. On the one hand, nothing, as a non-object, is inconceivable, and since it precludes its own actuality, it is impossible. It would seem then that it is necessary that there be something. On the other hand, that there is something still seems contingent, so that the question why there is not nothing remains as

[92] This reflects the status of protodoxic positing as the basic mode of all consciousness; all doxic attitudes are modifications of it. Thus to be possible means possibly to exist, to be likely means likely to exist, and so on. *ID*, 251/215-216.

compelling as ever. This tension stems not from any obstinacy or confusion on the part of the person who wonders, but instead from the nature of wonder itself.

Earlier I described the natural attitude as the everyday frame of mind in which we tacitly posit the world and interest ourselves with what we encounter in it. In order to clarify the nature of wonder at existence, it is necessary to examine this tacit positing of the world more closely. Here we encounter the distinction between objectivating and non-objectivating consciousness. In objectivating consciousness something is given as a substrate of determinations; such consciousness, in other words, confers upon its correlate "the most primitive categorial form, 'this.'"[93] Thus objectivating consciousness could also be described as consciousness of ipseity.[94] The noema, with its structure of noematic X/determining content, is a function of objectivating consciousness, as is the frustration experienced in trying to think of nothing. In non-objectivating consciousness, on the other hand, the correlate is not given as a "this." In the kind of non-objectivating consciousness pertinent to the issue of thought-limits, the correlate is rather a field or dimension in which every "this" is given.[95] What this means is best explained by means

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[93] Robert Jordan, "Intentionality in General," *Research in Phenomenology* 4 (1974): 10.

[94] Bernet, "An Intentionality Without Subject or Object?" trans. Michael Newman, *Man and World* 27 (1994): 232.

[95] The concept of non-objectivating consciousness also occurs in Husserl's analyses of feelings. In the *Investigations* Husserl considers whether all feelings are intentional: in addition to feelings in which an object is given as having a certain value—e.g. pleasant, admirable, or ugly—are there also feelings in which this does not occur? Moods might be feelings of this kind: while a joyful mood, for example, makes objects given as having certain positive values, it could be argued that it does this only insofar as it is fundamentally not a consciousness of objects, but is instead an affective colouration of the field in which objects are given. In joy things are "as if bathed in a rosy gleam" or "pleasingly painted." *LI* II, 110/II(1), 394. (Cited in Bernet, "An Intentionality Without Subject or Object?": 254, note 14.)

The concept of non-objectivating consciousness is also found in Husserl's later analyses of intentional feelings. While an act of feeling is necessary in order for an object to be given as having a certain value, this act is not objectivating in its own right. The objectivating components of valuative consciousness are instead an underlying act that makes available the object that evokes the feeling, as well as an act of judgment in which the value-character corresponding to the feeling is predicated of the object. In this way feelings are non-selfsufficient, non-objectivating components of an overall objectivating, valuative consciousness. Ullrich Melle, "Objektivierende und nicht-objecktivierende Akte," in *Husserl-Aufgabe und Husserl-Forschung*, ed. Samuel Ijsseling (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1999), 36.

of an example.

Presently I am sitting in a cafe at a busy intersection. Looking out the window, I fix my gaze on a car as it turns the corner. As I watch it turn the corner, it is given as *a* car, i.e. as something that remains identical throughout a multiplicity of changing appearances. While focused on the car, I am also marginally aware of a host of other things in the background of my perceptual field: the street beneath the car, people waiting to cross the street, the storefront behind them, music playing in the café, and so on. These too are given as objects, or as unities underlying a multiplicity of appearances. Thus everything given in my perceptual field is given through objectivating consciousness.[96]

Each of these perceived things is tacitly posited; that is, they are given not only as objects, but as existing objects, and they are given as existing without any reflection on my part. As we saw earlier, this means that while I do not deny their existence, neither do I affirm it, since in tacitly positing an object the question of whether or not it exists does not arise. Upon reflection I see that this positing is not groundless: each object is posited based on its presence and on the consistency of its appearances, both internally and with respect to the things around it. As consistently present, each thing makes, as it were, a claim for existence; in the tacit positing of the natural attitude, this claim is accepted automatically, without further ado.

Of course what I tacitly posit is not limited to the realm of things within my

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[96] The point that objectivating consciousness includes both explicit and implicit consciousness of an object is worth emphasizing, since objectivating consciousness is easily conflated with the former. That objectivating consciousness includes both is made clear by Husserl's account in *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis* of objectivation as something that occurs across both active and passive consciousness, i.e. in consciousness in which the ego, attending to an object, brings out its various properties, and in consciousness in which an object, while there for the ego, is not attended to. *APS*, 277-280/Hua XXXI, 5-8. In both cases an object, a substrate of determinations, is given, with the difference that in one case the determinations are explicated. To attend to something is not to make a non-object into an object; instead it is to make an object into a theme. *APS*, 548/Hua XXXI, 87.

perceptual field; the contents of this field are given as making up only a small portion of what there is.[97] Thus the pigeon that suddenly appears and alights on a building across the street is given to me merely as coming into presence, and not also as coming into existence. It emerges from a realm of absent entities. Some of these entities are within my perceptual range, such as the tables and chairs behind me and the ceiling above. But the vast majority lie beyond this range; to perceive them, I have to move. Some of these things are familiar to me; I know that the street to my left leads downtown and then to the port, and that beyond that, on the other side of the river, lies a train station. From there I could travel into regions with which I am not familiar; in thinking of them, what I tacitly posit is much less definite than what I posit in the café. Out there are towns and countryside, people and places of certain familiar kinds but the details of which are unknown to me. What I tacitly posit then is a realm of entities extending from what is present out to what is absent; I can single out entities from within this realm and represent them to myself with varying degrees of determinacy, according to how familiar I am with them.

This realm is posited as unique: there is only one such realm: it is "the world." It is only in philosophical or scientific theorizing that the idea arises of there being plural worlds, or of spatio/temporal systems not spatially or temporally related to each other. As unique, the world is also posited as all-encompassing; everything actual is a part of it, including myself. This unique, all-encompassing world is also posited as infinite in the sense that it is not posited as having a limit; for any entity out there that I might represent to myself, I can ask what lies beyond. In other words, the mental operation of representing "something further" can be repeated indefinitely.

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[97] *CR*, 162/165.

A remarkable feature of the world as a single, all-encompassing, infinite whole is that although most of the things within it are absent, the world itself is in some sense present. Thus the positing the world is not merely a matter of *believing* that there is a unified realm of things beyond what is present. I believe in the existence of many things, but unlike, say, my belief that the Taj Mahal exists, in the case of my belief in the world the object of belief is itself present—the world is actually "there." But the way in which it is there is peculiar. While it is constantly given along with objects, it is not itself given as an object—consciousness of the world is non-objectivating. Thus although the world is always there for me, what I perceive, think about, deal with or otherwise attend to is not the world, but the people and things within it. And while anything I take to be actual is given as "in the world," it is not given as a *piece* of the world, i.e. the world is given neither as a single super-object nor as a total aggregate of objects.

The way in which the world is in fact given can be clarified by noting a key difference between how it and individual entities are posited. As noted above, the positing of particular entities occurs in response to their presence. As long as the entity presents itself consistently, it is posited automatically, without any explicit judgment. But the presence of an entity does not motivate the positing of the world as a whole. The world has already been posited and will continue to be posited even if it turns out that the positing of this or that particular individual was mistaken. Particular entities are posited as part of an actual world that is "pre-given" or posited in advance.[98] As presupposed in the positing of particular entities, the positing of a single, all-encompassing, infinite world prescribes the most general terms for how entities can be given, thereby giving experience a certain trustworthiness: no matter what I might encounter, I know in

[98] *EJ*, 30/24; *CR*, 142/145.

advance that it will either be a spatial/temporal individual or else, in the case of ideal entities, make its appearance on the basis of such an individual. Even more generally, I know in advance that anything I encounter will be "something," i.e. a substrate bearing certain determinations.[99] Thus two levels of protodoxic activity can be distinguished in the natural attitude: protodoxic belief in the existence of present entities and a more fundamental positing of the world. Given this latter positing, any posited entity fills in, as it were, an indefinite, spatial/temporal field posited in advance. As Klaus Held puts it, the world functions as "the *ground* upon which we, in a way, place all objects."[100] In this sense the world is given not as an object, but as the *horizon* for all objects.[101] It is the single, all-encompassing, pre-given field towards which all our acts are directed and in terms of which any object is given.[102]

It should be emphasized that non-objectivating consciousness of the world is not an act, i.e. it is not an episode within the stream of experience. Instead it occurs constantly, throughout waking life.[103] It is on account of this constant, tacit positing of the world that every posited object is given as belonging to the world, or that "in the world" pertains to any posited object regarded as a noema.[104] In other words, the positing of the world means that anything given as existing is given as in the world, and vice versa.

Having examined more fully consciousness of the world in the natural attitude, we can now turn directly to wonder at existence and its expression in the

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[99] *EJ*, 37/34.
[100] Klaus Held, "Husserl's Phenomenological Method," trans. Lanei Rodemeyer, in *The New Husserl*, ed. Donn Welton (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 19.
[101] *CR*, 143/146; *EP* II, 52.
[102] *CR*, 144-146/146-148.
[103] *ID*, 57/53.
[104] *CR*, 251/255.

something/nothing question. With the thematic consciousness of existence that occurs in such wonder, there also arises a pronounced consciousness of the world as a whole. Prior to wonder, my interest lies in this or that particular thing or state of affairs—a traffic light as I wait to cross the street, what I will do later, that the weather is beautiful for this time of year, etc. More precisely, I am interested in *what* particular entities are; tacitly positing them as part of the world, I simply take *that* they exist for granted. But then suddenly I am struck by the sheer existence of something around me: a tree or a bench stands out to me in its simple, mute, and enigmatic being-there. What is wondrous here is not the existence of this particular tree or bench—there is nothing unusual or unexpected in coming across such things—but existence in general or as such. Struck by existence, any particular existent as just as wondrous as any other, from the most exotic creature in the depths of the ocean to a pebble in the street. With the shift in interest from the "what" of a particular to the "that" of any particular, there arises an unusual consciousness of totality. Existence reveals itself as "everywhere": it belongs not only to what I can presently perceive, but to whatever is "out there," beyond my perceptual field, no matter how far away. This "everywhere" pertains to my temporal horizon as well: everything there has been has had existence, and everything there will be will have it as well. In wonder at existence, the tautology that every existent exists is experienced as a palpable, remarkable fact. In this way such wonder involves a heightened sense of the spatio-temporal depth that characterizes all experience. Whereas previously the tacitly posited, infinite, all-encompassing world was there for me unremarkably, functioning merely as the field for what affects me, now I am drawn to the horizon itself.[105]

[105] A vivid description of how a thematic consciousness of existence brings with it a thematic consciousness of world is found in Sartre's *Nausea*. For Antoine Roquentin, the main character of the

Here we arrive at the decisive point for how wonder at existence gets expressed. As the horizon first affects me, it is still experienced as the field or realm in terms of which objects are given, and not as an object itself. But insofar as the horizon affects me, it attracts my regard, and I want to get it properly into view—I want to *identify* it, and this requires objectivation. Thus my affective, non-objectivating consciousness of totality passes over into an abstract, objectivating consciousness in which I regard the whole as the totality of existing things. With this my wonder attains a certain completion: beginning from the presence of a particular to the apprehension of existence as such, and from there to a heightened sense of the world as a whole, I now stand in awe of the fact that the unimaginably vast totality of beings exists. Thus in wonder "the world comes loose from its anchoring in our subjective condition, within which it was able to wholly retain its unthematized self-evidence" and emerges as a grand, enigmatic object.[106]

This movement involves an important shift in regard: whereas originally it was *existence* that emerged as wondrous—and not merely the existence of this or that particular entity—now what captivates me is the *existence of the whole*. At this stage existence as such tends to be displaced as the focus of my regard by the existence of the

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novel, existence emerges not as wondrous, but as horrible; nevertheless, his experience illustrates my description of wonder insofar as in both cases existence becomes thematic. Existence suddenly emerges for Roquentin while he is sitting in a park and gazing at the root of a chestnut tree: "And then all of a sudden, there it was, clear as day: existence had suddenly unveiled itself. It had lost the harmless look of an abstract category: it was the very paste of things, this root was kneaded into existence." In this sudden, explicit consciousness of existence, Roquentin is no longer interested in the features of particular things: "…the root, the park gates, the bench, the sparse grass, all that had vanished: the diversity of things, their individuality, were only an appearance, a veneer. This veneer had melted, leaving soft, monstrous masses, all in disorder—naked, in a frightful, obscene nakedness." Then there arises for Roquentin an explicit consciousness of world: "Mounting up, mounting up as high as the sky, spilling over, filling everything with its gelatinous slither, and I could see depths upon depths of it reaching far beyond the limits of the garden, the houses, and Bouville, as far as the eye could reach. I was no longer in Bouville, I was nowhere, I was floating…. I was not surprised, I knew it was the World, the naked World suddenly revealing itself…." *Nausea*, trans. Lloyd Alexander (New York: New Direction, 1964), 127, 134.

[106] Klaus Held, "Wonder, Time, and Idealization: On the Greek Beginning of Philosophy," trans. Sean Kirkland, *Epoché* 9, no. 2 (2005): 189.

world-totality—the "what" reasserts itself at the expense of the "that." In this way existence tends to conceal itself in revealing the totality of what is. The question that now arises is: Why does this whole exist? Why not rather nothing? Having objectivated the world, I now contrast two existential situations: the actual situation in which the world-totality exists and a counter-factual situation in which it does not. But, as we have seen, with this my objectivating consciousness encounters a limit. Its requirement that nothing be a substrate precludes it from reaching its goal of total non-existence. The best I can do is the thought of an empty something—nothing*ness*. Moreover, as we have also seen, nothing cannot be actual. Thus at the same time as the existence of the world strikes me as contingent, I also find myself compelled to admit that nevertheless there is no alternative.[107]

The analysis of wonder developed above clarifies this tension by revealing that what is necessary and what strikes me as contingent are not in fact the same. In wonder what strikes me as contingent is existence as such, the sheer being-actual of things. This leads to the objectivating thought of the world as a totality and to the question of why a totality of beings exists rather than no beings at all. But in this question existence, rather than being contrasted with an alternative, is instead presupposed. Having lost sight of existence as such in the objectivation of the world as a totality, this presupposition goes unheeded. Existence is presupposed insofar as the alternative to a totality of beings

[107] Sartre's description in *Nausea* of horror at existence illustrates this tension as well. Roquentin experiences existence as contingent: "The essential thing is contingency. I mean that one cannot define existence as necessity. To exist is simply *to be there*…. no necessary being can explain existence: contingency is not a delusion, a probability which can be dissipated; it is the absolute, consequently, the perfect free gift. All is free, this park, this city and myself." Yet he also realizes that there can be no alternative to existence, since if there were nothingness, it would *be* nothingness: "That was what worried me: of course there was no *reason* for this flowing larva to exist. *But it was impossible* for it not to exist. It was unthinkable: to imagine nothingness you had to be there already…. this nothingness had not come *before* existence, it was an existence like any other and appeared after many others." *Nausea*, trans. Alexander, 131, 133.

existing is thought as a situation or state of affairs. Thus what is contrasted is the actual situation in which *there is* something with a counterfactual situation in which *there is* not anything. But a contrast of existence with its opposite requires that the subject of the contrast be the "there is" itself. The alternative to this is wholly negative; as a total annulment, it does not mean the negation of something and the substitution of something new.[108] In other words, the alternative to existence is not a situation at all—the alternative to the "there is" is not "there is not" but rather "not there is." Thus whereas what is experienced in wonder as contingent is existence as such, what is necessary is that existence be the existence of *something*. Put another way, whereas what strikes me as contingent is that there *is* something, what is necessary is that there is *something*. The acknowledgement that existence cannot occur without an existent is consistent with wonder that existence occurs at all.

The analysis carried out so far reveals that the question of why there is something rather than nothing is ambiguous as an expression of wonder at existence. On account of the tendency in wonder to objectivate the world, in its most natural sense the question contrasts the fact that there is something with a situation in which there is not anything—it asks why there is something rather than *nothingness*. In other words, the question asks why there is a non-empty world rather than an empty one. But if one does not lose sight of existence as such in the emergence of the world, the question has a different sense: why existence rather than not? While there is a strong tendency to attempt to represent this "not" as a counterfactual situation, this tendency will be resisted if we understand the question clearly and hold fast to its meaning. This will allow us to admit that while there *is* no alternative to the existence of the world, it does not follow that existence is

[108] G. Kahl Furthmann, *Das Problem des Nicht* (Meisenheim am Glan: A. Hain, 1968), 260.

necessary, since it is just this "is" that is in question.

The clarification of the something/nothing question as a question about existence as such shows that Bergson is wrong to infer the illegitimacy of the something/nothing question from the inconceivability of nothing. As we have seen, for Bergson the question arises from a sense that non-existence has a certain priority over existence. Once we recognize the incoherence of the idea of nothing, we are freed from this illusion and no longer motivated to ask why anything should exist. Now, it may be that the something/nothing question does sometimes arise as Bergson describes, so that the inconceivability of nothing would be sufficient to dispose of the question for some. Even so, the inconceivability of nothing does not dispose of the question when motivated by an apprehension of existence. This apprehension does not presuppose a notion of nothing; instead, the notion of nothing is derived from it as the negation of existence.[109]

1.4 Ontological Wonder and Husserl's Phenomenology

A Husserlian analysis of the question of why anything exists, as an analysis of a metaphysical question posed in the natural attitude, involves a notable tension. At the same time as the method of reduction clarifies the sense and philosophical significance of the question, its revelation of a transcendental dimension can also displace the existence of the world as the primary object of philosophical wonder. Once the world simply

[109] Maritain also points this out, arguing that whereas the genuine idea of nothing is simply negation applied to the idea of being, Bergson erroneously treats the idea of nothing as having a content of its own, over and against the idea of being. *Bergsonian Philosophy and Thomism*, 88-89.

The idea that the something/nothing question is motivated by the notion that nothing is somehow prior to being may at least partly explain why, as P.L. Heath observes, the something/nothing question is "either the deepest conundrum in metaphysics or the most childish, and though many must have felt the force of it at one time or another, it is equally common to conclude, on reflection, that it is no question at all." *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2d ed., ed. Donald Borchert, vol. 6 (Detroit: Thomson Gale/Macmillan, 2006), 658. Regarded as an expression of an apprehension of existence, the question can seem deep; regarded merely as an expression of the idea that nothing is somehow prior to being, it can seem naïve or simple-minded.

accepted in the natural attitude comes to be seen as given in virtue of transcendental subjectivity, the most basic enigma is no longer the fact of the world, but rather the fact of its constitution. In other words, the most basic enigma is no longer *existence*, but *meaning*. With this the something/nothing question can come to be asked in a new register: why does constitution occur rather than not? [110] In this concluding section I will briefly consider some interesting parallels between these two versions of the question as well as to what extent the wonder that motivates the former might also motivate the transcendental perspective that makes possible the latter.

In this chapter I have treated the something/nothing question as contrasting the existence of the world with total non-existence, but the question can also be understood in terms of the idea of *order*: Why is there a world (a *cosmos*), rather than chaos? Historically this latter version of the question is prior to the former; in Husserl's terms, whereas the order/chaos question expresses the "religious/mythical" attitude of ancient creation myths, the existence/non-existence question expresses what could be called the "religious/theoretical attitude" of metaphysical theology. The transcendental question of why world-constitution occurs admits of both versions as well: one can ask either simply why there is transcendental subjectivity at all or why subjectivity constitutes an ordered world rather than chaos. The latter question emerges in a limited form when Husserl expresses wonder at the fact that transcendental subjectivity constitutes a world that admits of scientific investigation. The discovery of exact laws of nature reveals a "marvelous teleology" at work in subjectivity, one that provides a rational motivation for

[110] As Husserl writes, "… the transition to pure consciousness by the method of transcendental reduction leads necessarily to the question about the ground for the now-emerging factualness of the corresponding constitutive consciousness." *ID*, 134/111.

positing God as the telos towards which subjectivity strives.[111]

The transcendental version of the chaos/order question emerges in more radical terms when Husserl points out the contingency of the fact that experience is such that a universe of objects can be posited at all. In order for an object to be posited as that which persists through a multiplicity of appearances, the appearances must have a certain harmony. In the perception of a cat as it walks across a room, for example, each appearance varies only slightly from the last with regard to shape and colour. Were the continuous sequence of cat-appearances suddenly to give way to, say, a cluster of flashing lights, my earlier belief in the existence of the cat would be thrown into doubt. If *all* appearances were suddenly to give way to such wild changes from moment to moment, there would no longer be grounds for positing anything. My experience of a world of stable objects persisting through multiplicities of appearances would collapse into a dizzying throng of sensory information.[112]

Such a scenario involves nothing both in the sense of non-existence and in the sense of chaos. The dissolution of experience would give me reason to think that the world I had hitherto taken for granted had never really existed—I would now have to cope with the terrifying possibility that there is nothing "out there" beyond my consciousness, indeed that there is no "out there" at all. Furthermore, the chaotic flux of sensory information would itself be nothing to the extent that unity is dissolved. In *Ideas* Husserl envisions the flux as exhibiting "crude unity-formations" such as patches of

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[111] *ID*, 134/110.
[112] *ID*, 109-110/91; *EP* II, 51-54. In the former text, the dissolution of experience is imagined in order to show that consciousness has a different mode of being than physical objects; in the latter, it is imagined in order to show that belief in the existence of the world is not indubitable.

colour or enduring sounds.[113] But at the limit of dissolution even such hyletic unities would be dissolved. Thus as the harmony of experience dissolves I would also face the terrifying possibility of nothing as absolute chaos, which, by removing anything for me to be conscious of, represents a sort of phenomenological death. But nothing in the sense of absolute chaos poses the same conceptual limit as nothing in the sense of absolute non-existence: in both cases thought deprives itself of anything it can identify.

One of the problems posed by Husserl's fundamental distinction between the natural and phenomenological attitudes is how to account for the emergence of the wonders of transcendental subjectivity. If life in the natural attitude involves a constant interest in entities within the world—an interest so deeply engrained that no philosopher prior to Husserl saw it clearly—what can serve as the motivation for breaking out of the natural attitude and achieving the transcendental standpoint? Ontological wonder might seem to be a plausible candidate in light of some striking similarities it shares with the reduction. Both involve a "thematic consciousness of the world which breaks through the normality of straightforward living."[114] In wonder at existence, as we have seen, there occurs a thematic consciousness of the world as a whole. In the reduction, the world is disclosed as a phenomenon constituted in transcendental subjectivity. Both stand in contrast with our everyday concern with innerworldly entities in which the world itself goes unheeded. Another noteworthy parallel between ontological wonder and the reduction is that both mark a permanent enrichment of experience. Husserl states that once one has experienced the transcendental perspective, life in the natural attitude has forever lost its old naivety. The discovery of the reduction allows one to recognize for

[113] *ID*, 110/91.
[114] *CR*, 144/147.

the first time that one's everyday approach to reality is *an attitude*, i.e. that another approach, another attitude is possible. With this new possibility in hand, "my psychic life is now enriched."[115] The discovery of the reduction also enriches my inner life in the sense that I now understand that certain things which I formerly took for granted—for example perception, the passage of time, my physicality—are in fact quite extraordinary. Something similar happens in the case of ontological wonder with regard to existence: whereas ordinarily the fact that things exist is, as something constantly presupposed, entirely unremarkable, once one has undergone ontological wonder one understands that this is in fact an extraordinary mystery. In their discovery of the commonplace as enigmatic, ontological wonder and the reduction also both inaugurate distinctive philosophical endeavours. Wonder, as we have seen, motivates metaphysical inquiry into what it is for a thing to exist. The reduction, in addition to opening up all sorts of phenomenological problems, also introduces the metaphysical question of the ground for transcendental subjectivity. Thus both endeavours are concerned with whether basic facts—in the one case existence, in the other subjectivity—are simply brute facts or whether they admit of rational explanation.

But the similarities between ontological wonder and the reduction should not be allowed to overshadow an important difference between them, which is that while ontological wonder constitutes an important break *within* the natural attitude, it is not such as to lead one out of it. By allowing the world to emerge in its bare facticity, wonder can engender various attitudes that are non-practical in the sense that in them things are regarded without an interest in their usefulness. One such attitude is the theoretical attitude of the philosopher who pursues the metaphysical questions about

[115] *CR*, 210/214.

existence that wonder opens up. In contrast with the theorist who asks whether there is a ground for existence, for religious consciousness wonder can be an experience of such a ground, so that wonder can engender a religious attitude. Ontological wonder can also inspire a desire to capture the facticity of things in art, thereby engendering an aesthetic attitude. In each case one is captivated by the existence of things and hence remains oblivious to how they are posited—in each case one remains in the natural attitude, shut off from the transcendental dimension. Indeed, captivation with existence would even seem to reinforce the self-concealment of transcendental subjectivity. Thus while the philosophical and religious responses to ontological wonder have involved seeking a transcendent origin of the world, the idea of a phenomenological origin has remained foreign.[116] In the end then, wonder at existence, for all its philosophical significance, does not help reveal what for Husserl is the true "wonder of all wonders," human subjectivity.[117] What makes our subjectivity so wondrous will emerge in conjunction with

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[116] Fink, "Husserl's Philosophy and Contemporary Criticism," 96-97.

[117] "The wonder of all wonders is pure Ego and pure consciousness…," *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, Third Book: Phenomenology and the Foundations of the Sciences*, trans. Ted E. Klein and William E. Pohl (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1980), 64/75. Citing this passage, Spiegelberg observes that "the central mystery was to Husserl not Being as such, but the fact that there is such a thing as a being that is aware of its own being and of other beings." *The Phenomenological Movement: A Historical Introduction* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1965), 81.

I should mention that Mark Kingwell offers a view of the significance of wonder in Husserl's phenomenology different than my own. Kingwell sees an account of wonder in the *Crisis* and the Vienna Lecture. Especially significant for Kingwell is the latter's mention of *thaumazein* as the origin of the theoretical attitude in ancient Greece: since *thaumazein* makes possible the theoretical attitude, which in turn makes possible philosophy, which in turn makes it possible for humanity to be responsible for itself, wonder is a central notion for Husserl's philosophical project. "Husserl's Sense of Wonder," *The Philosophical Forum* 31, no. 1 (2000): 90-91. On the basis of the historical significance of *thaumazein* Kingwell offers the conjecture that wonder also has the important function of opening up the field of meaning for the individual phenomenologist: "What is wonderful, Husserl suggests, is not simply the oak leaf I look at, making me wonder why there is not nothing, for this feeling soon ceases. *What is also wonderful is this experience of wondering itself, and myself as the person in whom astonishment before the world is felt*. Wonder invites not only investigation of the world, but also reflection on the subject who experiences it, and on the experience itself." "Husserl's Sense of Wonder," *The Philosophical Forum* 31, no. 1 (2000): 89.

While it is true that *thaumazein* has a significant role in Husserl's history of philosophy, it should be noted that in the Vienna Lecture he describes it not as astonishment at existence but rather as astonishment at the beliefs of a foreign culture. Such astonishment gives rise to the distinction between the world as

the examination over the next two chapters of the thought-limits it poses.

represented and the world as it really is, which in turn motivates the pursuit of objective truth. ("Vienna Lecture" in *CR*, 285-286/332) And while it might be true that wonder at existence can lead to wonder at experience, the question remains of what motivates a *transcendental* investigation of experience.

Chapter Two: Psychologism, Phenomenology and the Limits of Reason

"Only when the spirit returns from its naïve external orientation to itself, and remains with itself and purely with itself, can it be sufficient unto itself."—Husserl, "The Vienna Lecture"[118]

2.1 Introduction

The last chapter provided our first examples of how an objectivating tendency leads to an encounter with limits of thought. We saw first how in wonder at existence the attempt to objectivate an alternative leads to an encounter with the limits of conception. We then saw how this attempt also results in the expression of ontological wonder as the question of why one situation obtains rather than another, instead of as a question about existence as such—an expression that can in turn lead to the view that the question of why anything exists at all violates the limits of legitimate questioning. This chapter examines an encounter with limits that occurs in reflection on the possibility of knowledge, an encounter which for Husserl is of much more immediate concern. This encounter occurs when knowledge is considered in light of what Husserl calls "the paradox of human subjectivity": our double status as "subjects for the world" and "objects in the world."[119] Husserl's phenomenology, with its basic aim of clarifying the possibility of knowledge, must contend with a natural conclusion from this paradox, which is that, contrary to what we initially assumed, knowledge is not possible after all.

Such is the view of psychologism in logic, which Husserl attacks at length in the *Prolegomena* to the *Logical Investigations*. Husserl's debate with psychologism is essentially a debate about the limits of reason: against psychologism, which derives cognitive limits from the subject's implication in the objective order, Husserl argues that the sense of seeking to know this order implicitly establishes limits to how reason is to be

[118] In *CR*, 297/345-346.
[119] *CR*, 178/182.

understood, limits that psychologism fails to recognize. In this chapter I analyze Husserl's case against psychologism in the *Prolegomena* and argue that while this text fails to show that psychologism is logically inconsistent, it contains the seeds of a demonstration that psychologism is inconsistent in a different, more fundamental sense. Fleshing out this demonstration reveals how the objectivating tendency that leads to encounters with limits in ontological wonder is also behind the encounter with epistemological limits that occurs in psychologism.

2.2 The Enigma of Knowledge

In striving to understand the world around us we tend to take for granted that things can be given as they are "in themselves," failing to appreciate that this is in fact enigmatic—indeed for Husserl it is the "enigma of all enigmas."[120] This enigma becomes especially striking in light of the achievements of mathematics and natural science: "Is there in the history of the world anything more worthy of philosophical wonder than the discovery of infinite totalities of truth…? Is it not almost a miracle, what was actually accomplished and continued to grow?"[121]

The first thing to do in examining the conflict between Husserl's phenomenology and psychologism is to lay out more fully what is so problematic about the possibility of knowledge. Husserl understands knowledge as justified true belief and justification as internal: a belief counts as knowledge if and only if the state of affairs believed to obtain actually obtains and the believer grasps with insight that it obtains.[122] The problem then is not merely how it is possible for us to have true beliefs about the world, but rather how

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[120] *CR*, 13/12, 165/168. See also *ID***,** 123/102; *Logik und allgemeine Wissenschaftstheorie: Vorlesungen 1917/18*, Husserliana XXX, ed. Ursula Panzer (The Hague: Kluwer, 1995), 329.
[121] *CR*, 66/67-68.
[122] *LI* I, 17-18/I, 12-13.

it is possible for things actually to present themselves to us as they really are, thereby providing true beliefs with justification.

The enigmatic character of this possibility emerges when we reflect on the transcendence of objects over and against knowing consciousness. The object transcends consciousness both in the sense that it is not a component of consciousness and in the sense that there is more to the object than the features it offers to consciousness at any one time.[123] The first sense of transcendence gives rise to the question of how what is not a component of consciousness can appear through what is—how is it that consciousness is both a flux of acts and sensory information as well as an opening onto the world? From the second sense of transcendence there arises the question of how the single object can be given through a multiplicity of appearances.

That transcendent objects do show through the realm of immanence and through appearances can become doubtful when we consider that our cognitive and perceptual systems belong to the same causal order as their objects. My perception of a tree, for example, is the neural effect of electromagnetic waves stimulating my optic nerves. Since the actual tree is amongst the causes of my perception, it must be distinguished from the content of the perception. The content of perception is never the external object itself, but merely a representation of it. Thus whereas prior to epistemological reflection we experience perception as directly presenting things themselves, reflection on perception in light of our innerworldly status leads us to the conclusion that we have immediate access only to representations. This raises the possibility of a mismatch between representations and reality as well as the more extreme possibility that there is no reality beyond our representations at all. In light of these possibilities, there arise the

[123] *IP*, 27-28/35.

familiar philosophical problems of showing that there is an external world and that our minds have epistemic access to it.[124]

When we widen the scope of our reflections and consider the causal origins of our cognitive systems, knowledge can also seem improbable. Husserl writes:

> Thoughts of a biological order intrude. We are reminded of the modern theory of evolution, according to which man has evolved in the struggle for existence and by natural selection, and with him his intellect too has evolved naturally and along with his intellect all of its characteristic forms…. Cognition is, after all, only *human cognition*, bound up with *human intellectual forms*, and unfit to reach the very nature of things, to reach the things in themselves.[125]

Thomas Nagel expresses the same idea nearly a century later:

> How is it possible that creatures like ourselves, supplied with the contingent capacities of a biological species whose very existence seems to be radically accidental, should have access to universally valid methods of objective thought?[126]

In response to this question one might well ask why the contingency of the human mind should give reason to doubt that it can achieve knowledge. It is indeed a contingent fact that we can know the world, but the contingency of a fact is not reason to doubt it. (It is a contingent fact that I am writing a thesis on Husserl, but of course this is no reason to doubt that I am.) The move from noting the contingency of knowledge to doubting its possibility would seem to involve a hidden premise, namely that the principles governing the emergence of human rationality are such that the possibility of knowledge, or at least the possibility of rigorous, scientific knowledge, is unlikely. It seems unlikely when our cognitive systems are viewed as the result of a process of natural selection, i.e. a process in which the traits that persist from generation to generation in the individuals of a species are determined according to whether they aid in that species' survival, and not according to whether they aid in achieving knowledge. Hence what makes the

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[124] *IP*, 15, 16/20.
[125] *IP*, 16-17/21.
[126] Thomas Nagel, *The Last Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 4.

contingency of the human mind count against the possibility of knowledge would seem to be the idea that it is unlikely that the features best suited to survival are also those best-suited to achieve our scientific aspirations. Whereas reflection on the causal implication of our cognitive systems merely reveals the conceivability of the mind's being closed off from reality, reflection on the biological origins of these systems can seem to provide a positive reason for thinking that reality really is beyond our cognitive reach. Whether the biological origins of the mind really do speak against the possibility of knowledge is, of course, debatable. For now it is enough to have shown why reflection on our innerworldly status shakes the pre-epistemological assumption of the possibility of knowledge, or how "the unproblematic manner in which the object of cognition is given to natural thought to be cognized now becomes an enigma."[127]

2.3 The Refutation of Psychologism in the *Prolegomena* to the *Logical Investigations*

Husserl claims that doubts about the possibility of knowledge derived from the contingency of our cognitive systems are confused and absurd.[128] In his critique of psychologism in the *Prolegomena* to the *Investigations* we find his most extensive argument for this. Psychologism in logic has been defined in various ways. Husserl describes it as the claim that the theoretical foundations of normative logic lie in psychology—a description that requires some unpacking.[129] Normative logic states how one ought to reason; expressed normatively, *modus ponens* states that if one believes both that $P \supset Q$ and that P, one ought to believe that Q. On Husserl's analysis of normative justification, any normative claim is justified by a non-normative claim that what is

[127] *IP*, 15/20.
[128] *IP*, 17/21.
[129] *LI* I, 40/I, 51; "A Reply to a Critic of My Refutation of Logical Psychologism" in *Husserl: Shorter Works*, ed. Peter McCormick and Frederick A. Elliston (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981): 152; "On the Psychological Grounding of Logic," in *Husserl: Shorter Works*: 146.

prescribed bears a certain property and by a basic norm that defines this property as good.[130] For example, the normative claim that a person ought to be kind might be justified by the non-normative claim that kindness promotes peace and by the basic norm that peace is good. In the case of normative logic, the basic norm identifies validity as what is good; at issue between psychologism and its opponents is what the justifying non-normative propositions are about.

For psychologism, they are about reasoning as it actually occurs. The theoretical justification for the normative expression of *modus ponens* is that, as a matter of fact, people normally infer Q from $P \supset Q$ and P. Thus the justification for claims about how one ought to reason is to be sought through empirical investigation of how people do reason—logic as a theoretical discipline belongs to psychology. Against this view, Husserl maintains that normative logic finds its justification not in claims about reasoning, but in claims about propositions. Thus the theoretical justification for the normative expression of *modus ponens* is that any proposition P and any proposition $P \supset Q$ together entail any proposition Q. The theoretical claims justifying the claims of normative logic belong not to psychology, but to an *a priori* science of logic.[131]

Husserl's description of psychologism captures a version of it that I will call the "identity thesis": rules of inference, once formulated in non-normative terms, state psychological laws, i.e. they describe regularities amongst mental events. Logic is thus a sub-discipline of psychology.[132] As empirical laws, rules of inference are justified by

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[130] *LI* I, 34/I, 41.

[131] Husserl's conception of psychologism explains why he rejects a standard objection to psychologism, which is that an "ought" cannot be derived from an "is"—how we ought to reason cannot be derived from how we in fact do reason. *LI* I, 43/I, 54. On Husserl's view how we ought to reason is grounded in facts; the question is what kind of facts these are.

[132] John Stuart Mill, *An Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy* in *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, Vol. 9, ed. J.M. Robson (London and Toronto: Routledge and University of Toronto Press,

past experience and revisable in the light of future experience—should a significant number of minds cease to infer Q from $P \supset Q$ and P, there would be good reason to scratch *modus ponens* from a list of basic rules of inference.[133] Husserl locates psychologism in the form of the identity thesis in the logical writings of several prominent 19th century philosophers. It emerges in John Stuart Mill's *Logic* when Mill describes the principle of non-contradiction as the psychological law that it is impossible to affirm and to deny the same thing simultaneously.[134] Gerardus Heymans, Christoph Sigwart and F.A. Lange offer the same interpretation, though Lange also understands the principle of non-contradiction as describing a natural, unconscious process in which contradictory beliefs are eliminated.[135]

Although he most often describes psychologism in terms of the identity thesis, some of Husserl's arguments in the *Prolegomena* also apply to a second version of psychologism which I will call the "dependency thesis." This position does not identify rules of inference with psychological laws; instead it maintains that rules of inference hold in virtue of psychological laws.[136] On one version of the dependency thesis, rules of

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1979), 359; Theodor Lipps, *Grundzüge der Logik* (Hamburg and Leipzig: Verlag von Leopold Voss, 1893), 1-2.

[133] Dallas Willard captures the identity thesis well in his definition of psychologism as the claim that the laws of logic "are essentially about, and draw their evidence from, the examination of the particular conceivings, assertings, and inferrings of particular persons." *Logic and the Objectivity of Knowledge* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1984), 149. Other authors who describe psychologism in terms of the identity thesis are Susan Haack, *Philosophy of Logics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 238; Rudolf Bernet, Iso Kern and Eduard Marbach, *An Introduction to Husserlian Phenomenology* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 30; Gordon P. Baker, *Wittgenstein, Frege, and the Vienna Circle* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), 171-2; Richard R. Brockhaus, "Realism and Psychologism in 19th Century Logic" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 51 (1991): 494; Richards, "Boole and Mill: Differing Perspectives on Logical Psychologism," *History and Philosophy of Logic* 1 (1980): 20.

[134] Mill, *A System of Logic* in *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 7, 277-278. *LI* I, 56-58/I, 78-81.

[135] Gerardus Heymans, *Die Gesetze und Elemente des wissenschaftlichen Denkens* (Leipzig: Barth, 1905), sections 19-20. *LI* I, 61/I, 86-87. F.A. Lange, *Logische Studien* (Leipzig: Verlag von Julius Baedeker, 1894), 27. *LI* I, 65/I, 94. Christoph Sigwart, *Logik* Vol. I (Tübingen: Verlag von J.C.B. Mohr, 1904), 394. *LI* I, 67/I, 97-98. For Sigwart the law of contradiction, in addition to being a law of nature, is also a normative law.

[136] Jack Meiland rightly identifies this claim as a distinct form of psychologism, stating that psychologism

inference are about the contents of mental events, and not, as the identity thesis holds, about these events themselves. However, this view must deny Husserl's view of thought-contents as instances of ideal meanings having ideal logical relations. Instead, thought-contents can only be mental entities in some sense.[137] In the case of a valid inference, the move from one content to another involves a certain experience of certainty. But whereas for Husserl such certainty is to be explained with reference to the *a priori* validity of a rule of inference, this version of the dependency thesis reverses the order of explanation, holding that the validity of an inference rule consists in the fact that it is experienced as binding.

A second version of the dependency thesis denies that logical norms are derived from the study of any sort of being at all. Logic is neither about mental acts nor mental contents, nor is it about a "third realm" of ideal entities. Instead it is purely normative; rules of inference are simply norms used to evaluate reasoning. As Pascal Engel presents

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need not be understood as the claim that logical laws describe how the mind works, since it can also be understood as the claim that logical laws describe consequences of the way the mind works. But Meiland also mistakenly claims that Husserl's arguments against psychologism apply only to the first interpretation. "Psychologism in Logic: Husserl's Critique" in *Inquiry* 19 (1976): 335.

[137] Robert Hanna captures this version of the dependency thesis under the label of "strong logical psychologism," according to which propositions stating valid rules of inference are proper parts of human minds and only exist insofar as they are thought by such minds. "Logical Cognition: Husserl's Prolegomena and the Truth in Psychologism," in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 53, no.2 (1993): 254, 255. John Skorupski distinguishes this version of the dependency thesis from the identity thesis when he defines psychologism as the claim either that "laws of logic are simply psychological laws concerning our mental processes" or that "'meanings' are mental entities, and… 'judgments' assert relationships among these entities." "Mill on Language and Logic" *The Cambridge Companion to Mill*, 46-47. Donn Welton captures both versions of psychologism when he describes it as "the theory that attempts to reduce all semantic and syntactic organization to the mental contents and operations of empirical subjects." *The Other Husserl: The Horizons of Transcendental Phenomenology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 260. James Mensch does the same in defining psychologism as "the attempt to explain the necessity of knowledge, not via an appeal to the object, but rather through an appeal to the psychological connections by which we grasp the object." *The Problem of Being in Husserl's* Logical Investigations (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981), 12.

Other authors capture both these versions of psychologism in less precise terms, defining psychologism as the thesis that logic is dependent on psychology. They include David M. Godden, "Psychologism in the Logic of John Stuart Mill," *History and Philosophy of Logic* 26 (2005): 116); G.L. Pandit, "Two Concepts of Psychologism," *Philosophical Studies* 22, (1971): 86; J.N. Mohanty, "The Concept of 'Psychologism' in Frege and Husserl" *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 30, no. 3 (1997): 274.

the position, logic "does not state any truth about the world, but it sets the norms of truth."[138] But although logical norms are not *justified* by non-normative claims, they can still be *explained* in non-normative terms. One might, as we have seen, explain the validity of inference-rules in terms of evolutionary theory, arguing that norms best suited to propagation become established in the human species through a process of natural selection.[139] This is a biological version of the general line of thought that, given the fact that thinking and language are instruments humans use to secure well-being, the forms of inference we count as valid are those that have proven successful in dealing with each other and with the world.[140]

Having distinguished the identity and dependency theses as distinct versions of psychologism, psychologism can now be generally defined as the claim that rules of inference are valid in virtue of contingent features of those for whom they are valid.[141] It follows that rules of inference themselves hold only contingently. As Benno Erdmann maintains, logical laws are necessarily true only in the sense that they govern human thinking in its present condition; given the contingency of this condition, they are not necessarily true in the sense of being true under any circumstances whatsoever.[142]

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[138] Pascal Engel, *The Norm of Truth* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991): 320. M.A. Notturno captures this version of the dependency thesis as well as the identity thesis when he describes psychologism as the claim that "…logical norms are either based upon empirical observations or are entirely without foundation." *Objectivity, Rationality and the Third Realm: Justification and the Grounds of Psychologism* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1985), 15.

[139] Robert Nozick develops such a view in Chapter Four of his *The Nature of Rationality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

[140] Ernst Nagel, "Logic Without Ontology" in *Readings in Philosophical Analysis*, ed. Herbert Feigl and Wilfrid Sellars (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1949), 204; Friedrich Waismann, "The Relevance of Psychology to Logic" in *Readings in Philosophical Analysis*, 218.

[141] John Wild also captures psychologism in this broadest sense when he defines as psychologistic any position that regards "reason as dependent in some way upon something non-rational in character." "Husserl's Critique of Psychologism: Its Historic Roots and Contemporary Relevance" in *Philosophical Essays in Memory of Edmund Husserl*, ed. Marvin Farber (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1940), 20.

[142] Benno Erdmann, *Logik* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1892), 378.

With its assertion of the contingency of logical principles, psychologism poses limits to reason that would stand in the way of Husserl's philosophical project. For Husserl a genuine science is one that can justify its own methods and principles; in the case of rules of inference, justification is furnished by rational insight into their self-evidence. For psychologism, any experience of an inference rule as self-evident is merely a matter of confronting principles which, as a result of circumstances beyond our control, happen to compel our assent. Hence as opposed to Husserl's demand that theory be grounded by insight into the objective validity of its governing principles, psychologism means that practices of providing rational grounds are ultimately groundless in the sense that the standards governing them do not themselves admit of rational justification. Our epistemic practices are, as Gordon Bearn puts it, a "groundless ground."[143]

Psychologism further undermines Husserl's project by entailing the relativity of truth. What counts as a mistake in reasoning will vary in accordance with which forms of inference count as valid. Thus if, as all three versions of psychologism maintain, the validity of a form of inference depends on contingent features of those for whom it is valid, then which propositions are true also depends on such facts. Any proposition true for thinkers of one mental constitution and so governed by one set of logical principles could be false under the different logical principles of thinkers of a different mental constitution.

A peculiar consequence of this relativization of logic is that rules of inference function as limits to reason in a negative sense. In one sense rules of inference have a

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[143] Gordon C.F. Bearn, "The Horizon of Reason," *Relativism: Interpretation and Confrontation*, ed. Michael Krausz (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 226.

limiting function regardless of whether or not they are understood psychologistically. They are limits not in the factual sense of defining what *can* be thought, but rather in a normative sense of defining how one *ought* to think in order to be rational or in order to achieve truth. But, at least for the most part, such limits are not experienced as negative constraints upon one's thinking; that is, they are not experienced as standing in the way of cognition. Instead thinking usually proceeds in accordance with them as a matter of course, and when a logical mistake is pointed out, one welcomes the correction as a means of getting one's thinking back on track.

Interpreted psychologistically, however, rules of inference can come to be regarded as negative constraints on thinking. Justification is naturally understood as the mark of truth as correspondence: the greater the degree of justification, the greater the likelihood of truth, and where justification reaches the level of self-evidence, one can be certain to have discovered something about what there is. Psychologism means that this understanding is naïve; the valid derivation of a claim provides no guarantee that it is true in the sense of capturing the reality that transcends our thinking and that causes us to think in accordance with the logical principles that we do. It further entails that the question of whether or not our rules of inference are reliable means for grasping the reality responsible for them is undecideable. Any argument purporting to decide the issue one way or the other must proceed in accordance with these rules, so that the most any such argument can show is that its conclusion holds *for us*. Thus for one who aspires to objective knowledge, psychologism means that, contrary to what we naturally assume, the logical principles governing the pursuit of knowledge frustrate this pursuit rather than enable its success.

In this way psychologism entails the skeptical claim that knowledge of the way things are is impossible. At the root of psychologism's skeptical view of reason is the paradox of human subjectivity. As subjects for the world, we can seek to know it, trusting that reason is suited for the task. But given our status as objects in the world—specifically, given our implication in its causal order—psychologism concludes that we are closed off from its true nature, forever unable to transcend the cognitive limit imposed on us by the world we seek to know.

2.3.1 Husserl's First Set of Arguments: The Identity Thesis is False

Husserl's attempt in the *Prolegomena* to secure reason against the threat of psychologism divides into two main sets of arguments. The first set, which makes up Chapter Four, applies only to the identity thesis since it attempts to show that logical and psychological laws are essentially different. The second set of arguments are found in Chapter Seven; as attempts to show the absurdity of truth relativism, these arguments apply to both the identity and the dependency thesis. In this section I will examine Husserl's first set of arguments.

At first glance, the identity thesis may seem plausible. Rules of inference concern thinking, or sequences of mental events; since mental life is the province of psychology, rules of inference must be psychological laws.[144] When such sequences are logically correct, the resulting judgments bear a certain quality of necessity, at least under normal circumstances. This experience of necessity is also a mental phenomenon. Logic would

[144] Lipps, *Grundzüge der Logik*, 1-2.

thus seem to be an empirical science of the mind; its principles would tell us which kinds of thought sequences are experienced as binding.[145]

This line of thinking becomes problematic once we recognize a crucial ambiguity in such terms as "inference," "judgment" and "thought." While they can indeed refer to mental events, they can also refer to the contents of such events; that is, they can refer to what one thinks or judges, as opposed to the thinking or judging itself.[146] Against the identity thesis, Husserl argues that logic is concerned with thoughts and judgments solely in the latter sense. He supports this claim by appealing to three differences between logical and psychological laws: whereas psychological laws are vague, require inductive justification and entail that there are mental events, logical laws are exact, self-evident, and do not entail that there are such events. Adherents of psychologism fail to see that "a consistent psychologism would force one to interpret logical laws in a manner quite alien to their true sense."[147] I will examine each of these three features in turn, starting with vagueness.

For Husserl a vague law is one that describes relations of co-existence and succession between events that hold usually or for the most part.[148] Insofar as psychology succeeds only in describing regularities in mental life that usually obtain, the laws of psychology are vague in this sense.[149] If rules of valid inference are psychological laws, they must be vague, so that logic tells us merely that judgments of a

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[145] Theodor Elsenhans, "Das Verhältnis der Logik zur Psychologie," *Zeitschrift für Philosophie und philosophishe Kritik* 109 (1897): 201-202.
[146] *LI* I, 108-109/I, 168-169; *LI* I, 111-112/I, 173-175.
[147] *LI* I, 51/I, 70.
[148] *LI* I, 46/I, 61; *LI* I, 97/I, 149.
[149] It should be emphasized that when Husserl claims that psychological laws are vague, he is referring to the laws formulated in the science of psychology, and not to laws that actually obtain in reality. Moritz Schlick wrongly takes Husserl to be referring to the latter when he objects that all empirical laws are exact and that any vagueness is due to our insufficient knowledge of them. *Allgemeine Erkenntnislehre* (Berlin: Springer, 1918), 128.

certain form are valid more often than not. Now, it is plausible that psychological laws stating that certain acts of judgment are accompanied by a feeling of certainty are vague, since under abnormal conditions, such as when the subject is drowsy or under the influence of drugs, the feeling might be absent. But we know that logical laws hold without exception. This shows that, contrary to the identity thesis, rules of inference pertain not to mental events, but to their contents.

It could be objected that even if one grants Husserl the vagueness of the laws of the introspective, associationist psychology of his time, other psychologies formulate exact laws.[150] And even if exact psychological laws have never yet been formulated, it does not follow that the formulation of such laws is impossible. Husserl himself considers the objection that psychological laws are exact; rather than trying to refute it, he argues that even were the objection granted, the identity thesis would still fail on account of the different ways statements of logical and of psychological law are justified.[151]

The second feature distinguishing psychological from logical laws is that only the former concern real entities, or entities that have temporal properties. Psychological laws concern the real in two ways: first insofar as propositions stating psychological laws are about real entities and second insofar as they, like all statements of empirical law, imply that such entities exist. Propositions stating psychological laws are about real entities since such propositions have the following form: It is an empirical fact that in

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[150] Dale Jacquette, "Psychologism the Philosophical Shibboleth" in *Philosophy, Psychology, and Psychologism: Critical and Historical Readings on the Psychological Turn in Philosophy*, ed. Dale Jacquette (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2003), 10; Jerrold J. Katz, *Language and Other Abstract Objects* (Totawa, N.J. : Rowman and Littlefield, 1981), 175.
[151] *LI* I, 47/I, 62.

circumstances *C*, event *A* always follows upon event *B*.[152] As statements of empirical law, they imply the existence of real entities insofar as we can justify them only by induction from propositions stating facts of experience. Inductive justification implies real existence since if the justifying propositions are to function as evidence, they must be true, that is, the facts they report must actually obtain. Thus Newton's law of gravity implies that physical objects exist insofar as it is justified by the claim that our experience so far renders it highly probable that this law holds.[153] Logical laws, on the other hand, do not concern real entities in either way. They are not about real entities since they make no mention of them; *modus ponens*, for example, says nothing about mental acts, stating merely that for any propositions *P* and *Q*, if *P* is true and if *P* entails *Q*, then *Q* is also true.[154] And since logical laws, as self-evident, are not inferred from statements of empirical fact, neither do they imply the existence of anything real in their justification. Since logical laws, unlike psychological laws, do not concern mental events, once again the identity thesis is shown to be false.

With regard to the claim that logical laws are not *about* real entities, presumably a defender of the identity thesis is well aware that common formulations of logical laws do not mention anything psychological; part of her position then is that such formulations are naïve or inaccurate expressions of what are in fact psychological laws. The burden of the argument thus falls to the claim that logical laws cannot be psychological because they do not imply the existence of anything real in their justification. This in turn depends on the claim that whereas psychological laws are inductively justified, logical

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[152] *LI* I, 51/I, 70.
[153] *LI* I, 52/I, 72.
[154] *LI* I, 52/I, 71.

laws are not. Like his argument from vagueness then, Husserl's second argument comes to rest on his position that logical and psychological laws are justified differently.

We thus arrive at the core of Husserl's refutation of the identity thesis, which is the claim that rules of inference, unlike psychological laws, are not justified inductively. On Husserl's view they require no such justification since their truth is self-evident. For Husserl a self-evident proposition is one for which a corresponding state of affairs can be directly intuited. To experience self-evidence is to intuit the same state of affairs that one merely thinks of through a proposition and to recognize their identity.[155] Husserl calls this experience "insight." Our cognitive situation does not allow for insight into the truth of propositions stating empirical laws; their truth must remain for us a matter of greater or lesser probability in the light of the available evidence. If psychologism were correct, we could not have insight into the truth of propositions stating rules of valid inference, since such propositions would state empirical laws. But we do have insight into the truth of such propositions, which once again reflects the fact that logical laws concern mental contents, not mental events.

The advocate of the identity thesis can counter that the self-evidence of a logical/psychological law in fact reflects an implicit process of induction. Mill states this view in the context of a discussion of how we come to recognize the principle of contradiction:

> I consider it to be, like other axioms, one of our first and most familiar generalizations from experience. The original foundation of it I take to be, that Belief and Disbelief are two different mental states, excluding one another. This we know by the simplest observation of our own minds. And if we carry our observation outwards, we also find that light and darkness, sound and silence, motion and quiescence, equality and inequality, preceding and following, succession and simultaneousness, any positive phenomenon whatever and its negative, are distinct phenomena, pointedly contrasted, and

[155] *LI* I, 121/I, 190-191. A standard notion of self-evidence, according to which the truth of a proposition can be grasped without inference from other propositions, can be derived from Husserl's notion.

> the one always absent where the other is present. I consider the maxim in question to be a generalization from all these facts.[156]

Understood in terms of the identity thesis, the law of contradiction is a psychological law stating that it is impossible to affirm and to deny something simultaneously. Knowledge of this law is arrived at inductively; each time we affirm something we are aware that its denial is absent, and as this experience recurs without exception, we develop the conviction that one can never affirm and deny something at the same time. The self-evidence of the law of contradiction, like that of any basic logical law, consists in a certain feeling of conviction one experiences when confronted with it. As the result of an implicit process of induction, the experience of self-evidence is not itself sufficient to justify a logical law but instead indicates its inductive grounds. A formal justification of a logical law would have to show that the implicit inductive inference is reasonable through an extensive empirical investigation.[157]

A striking result of this story of how logical laws come to be recognized is that in the absence of such a formal justification, the logical rules in terms of which inquiry proceeds are less justified than many of the empirical discoveries they make possible. This is surprising, even unsettling, but it is readily explained on the grounds that, on account of their efficacity, there has been no widespread call for basic logical laws to be justified. A more serious problem for the account is how to explain the fact that logic has traditionally formulated logical laws without reference to mental states. In order to speak

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[156] Mill, *A System of Logic* in *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 7, 277-278.

[157] An empirical justification of logical laws may seem circular since the justification would have to appeal to the very laws it sets out to justify. One response to this objection is to distinguish premise circularity, in which the conclusion to be justified appears as a premise in the justification, from rule circularity in which the conclusion to be justified merely functions as a rule governing the justification. (Husserl calls this latter type of circularity "reflective." *LI* I, 107/I, 166.) One could then argue that only premise circularity is vicious, and that since the inductive justification of logical laws is only reflectively circular, it is a valid procedure. It could also be argued that the inductive justification of principles of deductive inference escapes circularity altogether since these principles are not employed in the justification.

of a generalization from experience, the subject of the general belief must be the same as the subject of experience—e.g. one forms the belief that the sun rises each morning having seen *the sun* rise in the morning. Thus if logical laws were really generalizations from experience of one's own mental states, they would naturally be formulated as claims about mental states. Yet logical laws have traditionally been formulated without reference to mental states, which is decisive evidence that knowledge of logical laws is not gained through generalization from experience.

Some critics of Husserl's anti-psychologism have objected that his case against the identity thesis begs the question. Husserl proceeds from the assumption that psychological laws have certain necessary features; if logical laws were psychological, they too would have these features, but they do not. But why should it be granted that all psychological laws are as Husserl describes them? The identity thesis can be understood as claiming that logical laws are psychological laws of a special kind, i.e. self-evident ones. By assuming that there are no such psychological laws, Husserl begs the question against the identity thesis.[158]

The circularity objection carries weight only if sense can be made of the idea of a self-evident psychological law. As Husserl explains, the idea would be that while mental contents have no being independently of mental acts, we can abstract contents and their logical form from acts. This allows us to grasp psychological laws at a glance, without induction.[159] But this theory does not demonstrate the possibility of self-evident psychological laws since the laws grasped in this way are not psychological at all. The

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[158] Schlick, "Das Wesen der Wahrheit nach der modernen Logik," *Vierteljahrsschrift für wissenschaftliche Philosophie und Soziologie* 34 (1910): 409-410; Jacquette, "Psychologism the Philosophical Shibboleth," 11.

[159] *LI* I, 54/I, 74-75.

laws grasped through the abstraction of mental contents concern logical relations between these contents, not causal relations between the acts of which they are part. Presumably the fact that these relations are experienced as valid is to be explained psychologically, so that the theory supports the dependency thesis rather than the identity thesis. In the absence of a counter-example to Husserl's assumption that inductive justification is essential to psychological laws, the charge of circularity does not save the identity thesis from Husserl's refutation.

2.3.2 Husserl's Second Set of Arguments: Truth Relativism is Absurd

The identity thesis is the most radical version of psychologism, and also the least plausible. (Stephen Toulmin calls it "primitive psychologism.")[160] It seems to arise from overlooking the distinction between the act and the content of thought. The greater plausibility of the dependency thesis, as well as the contemporary relevance of naturalism in epistemology, make Husserl's second set of arguments against psychologism more interesting than the first. Husserl notes that psychologism of any form entails relativism about truth; he thus offers six *reductio* arguments for the absurdity of such relativism, and hence for the absurdity of psychologism as well.[161] The arguments run as follows:

(1) To claim that truth is relative is to land oneself in what could be called a performative contradiction: the content of the assertion that truth is relative contradicts claims

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[160] *The Uses of Argument* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 86.

[161] It is worth noting that the relativism entailed by psychologism is not equivalent to Protagorean relativism, according to which the relative truth of a proposition consists in its being believed. Following Gail Soffer, we should distinguish between two forms of relativism: subjectivism, which is the thesis that what seems true to a subject is true for that subject, and non-subjectivism, the thesis that what is true for a subject is determined by other contingent features of the subject. *Husserl and the Question of Relativism* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1991), 5. Psychologism entails non-subjectivism, so that, contrary to the subjectivism of Protagoras, people can be mistaken in their beliefs. Thus someone who has two contradictory beliefs must be mistaken about at least one of them, and this in accordance with a logical standard the validity of which is determined by the nature of her own mind.

presupposed in making any assertion whatsoever. Husserl illustrates this inconsistency with reference to the law of contradiction, though in principle the same argument could be rehearsed with any basic logical law. His argument runs as follows. Truth relativism entails that the same proposition can be both true and false.[162] But the principle of contradiction is part of the concept of truth—part of what it means for a proposition to be true is that its negation is false. In his use of the word "true," then, the relativist is implicitly committed to the claim that the same proposition cannot be both true and false. Therefore the relativity of truth cannot be affirmed without contradiction.

A natural way to object to this argument is to claim that the principle of contradiction defines truth merely for us, it being possible that there are other species for whom truth is not defined by this principle. Husserl responds that since the principle of contradiction is essential to what we mean by "truth," the objection rests on an equivocation: while the relativist purports to be making a claim about truth, he is no longer talking about truth at all when he claim that the same proposition can be both true and false.[163] If the relativist uses "truth" in its proper sense, he contradicts himself; if he uses "truth" in some other sense, he abandons his claim that truth is relative.

(2) The next three arguments attempt to show that truth relativism is self-contradictory insofar as it must implicitly assume the objectivity of the truth that the minds to which truth is relative exist.[164] According to one argument, if truth is relative to minds, then so is what is the case. Thus if the truth of the proposition that we exist depends on facts

[162] This could happen in two ways: the same proposition could be true for one species and false for another, or there could be a species for whom the principle of contradiction does not hold, so that for it the same proposition can be both true and false.
[163] *LI* I, 80/I, 117-118.
[164] *LI* I, 87/I, 132.

about ourselves, then the fact that we exist depends on facts about ourselves. In other words, the human species has brought itself into existence, which is absurd.[165]

(3) On the second argument, truth relativism entails that it is possible for there to be a species for whom the proposition that it exists is false. Since the relativity of truth entails the relativity of what is the case, it is possible for the fact that a species does not exist to obtain in virtue of facts about this very species. In other words, it is possible for a species not to exist because it exists—but this is absurd.[166] In order to avoid these absurdities, the relativist must contradict her own position and maintain the absolute truth of claims regarding the existence of the minds to which truth is said to be relative.

(4) The next argument derives a problematic conclusion not from truth relativism alone, but rather from the conjunction, which Husserl attributes to psychologism, of truth relativism with the idea that the nature of the knowing mind is wholly determined by the reality it knows. If truth is relative to mental constitution, then the truth of propositions about reality depends on certain facts about our minds. Since the relativity of truth entails the relativity of what is, this means that facts about reality obtain in virtue of these mental facts. But if the nature of the knowing mind is wholly determined by the reality it knows, then these mental facts also obtain in virtue of the facts they cause. Thus each set of facts is explained in terms of the other, so that neither one is really explained at all. "We are playing a pretty game: man evolves from the world and the world from man; God creates man and man God."[167]

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[165] *LI* I, 81/I, 120.
[166] *LI* I, 80-81/I, 120.
[167] *LI* I, 81/I, 121.

(5) Husserl's fifth argument begins by claiming that since ideal states of affairs cannot be causally explained, and since relativism explains a proposition's being true as the effect of certain mental facts, relativism is committed to the claim that propositions are real, that is, that they are real parts of mental acts that have no being apart from these acts.[168] Now, if this were so, then whenever there is no act of thinking a proposition *p*, that proposition would not exist. But since the existence of a corresponding proposition is necessary for the existence of every state of affairs, this means that whenever there is no act of thinking *p*, the state of affairs corresponding to *p* does not exist either. The result is that facts now obtain and now cease to obtain in accordance with mental life. This rather surprising doctrine reveals itself to be contradictory when one considers propositions stating psychological laws, which on a nominalist view of propositions are laws governing the genesis and cessation of propositions. Given the inseparability of being and truth, propositions stating psychological laws must exist for as long as these laws hold—they must exist even when they are not thought. But if propositions are real, they can only exist when they are thought. Thus the claim that propositions are real and dependent parts of mental acts entails that certain propositions simultaneously exist and do not exist.[169]

(6) The final argument begins with the observation that if truth is relative to minds, then if there were no minds, there would be no truth. Now, the antecedent of the latter conditional statement represents a logical possibility, since there is no contradiction in the thought of the non-existence of all minds. But its consequent is absurd, since it amounts

[168] *LI* I, 80/I, 119.
[169] *LI* I, 55/I, 76-77.

to the claim that there would be a truth that there is no truth. Since the conditional statement derives an incoherent consequent from a coherent antecedent, it is absurd. Since the absurd conditional statement follows from truth relativism, truth relativism must be absurd as well.[170]

The fundamental problem with all of these arguments is that they assume claims about truth it seems that psychologism can consistently reject. These claims are: (1) that the validity of our inference-rules is essential to truth, (2) that truth essentially involves correspondence between propositions and reality, and (3) that truth and being are inseparable. A defender of psychologism can deny all three claims by understanding truth not with reference to an objective order transcending inquiry but instead solely with reference to inquiry itself. One way to do this is to understand a true proposition as one that would be justified for an ideal epistemic subject. It is not necessary here to specify exactly what such ideality would involve; presumably it would include possessing all the relevant information and making no mistakes in reasoning. Such a conception of truth preserves the crucial distinction between a claim's being justified and its being true: at any moment in the history of a community's pursuit of truth, it remains a question whether the claims justified in terms of its epistemic norms would be justified for its ideal subject, and thus inquiry is forever driven forward in its attempt to approximate to the greatest degree possible its epistemic ideal.[171] Understanding truth in this way, a defender of truth relativism can grant that even if Husserl's claims about truth capture one sense of truth, they do not apply to truth as he understands it, which is the only sense

[170] *LI* I, 80/I, 119-120.
[171] This notion of truth is inspired by Hilary Putnam's discussion of truth as "ideal rational acceptability" in *Reason, Truth and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 49-50.

in which he holds truth to be relative. This becomes clear when we consider how the relativist can respond to each of Husserl's arguments:

(1) The first argument assumes that the validity of our rules of inference forms part of the essence of truth. But with regard to truth as ideal rational acceptability, this is simply not the case. While truth in this sense certainly involves the validity of rules of inference, it need not involve the validity of those rules that happen to hold *for us*. A true proposition can be defined relativistically as one that would be rationally justified for the ideal subject of a particular epistemic system. The rules of inference that hold within a system are contingent upon facts about its members; logic formulates the rules of valid inference that happen to hold given facts about ourselves. By defining truth in this way, the relativist does not equivocate on the sense of "truth" when he claims that the same proposition can be both true and false; instead he redefines truth in such a way that our logical principles become contingent features of truth rather than necessary ones.

(2)-(4) These arguments all depend on the assumption that truth consists in a correspondence between propositions and states of affairs. Only if truth is understood as correspondence does the relativity of truth entail the relativity of what there is, with its attendant absurdities. But since psychologism relativizes truth only with reference to an ideal epistemic subject, its relativization of truth does not entail the relativity of being.

(5) The fifth and sixth arguments depend on the assumption that truth and being are inseparable, or that for any state of affairs *A* there is necessarily a proposition stating that *A*. But psychologism already rejects this with its denial of the existence of ideal, mind-

independent propositions. The non-existence of a proposition does not entail the non-existence of a corresponding state of affairs any more than the destruction of a photograph entails the destruction of what it depicts. Thus psychological laws obtain regardless of whether there are propositions stating them, so that psychologism does not entail that such propositions both exist and do not exist during times when they are not thought.

(6) The assertion that there is no truth is self-contradictory only if the assertion is included in the world it is about. When one asserts that there *is* no truth, the assertion is both actual and about the actual world, which results in the contradiction that there is a truth that there are no truths. But the situation is different when one asserts that there *would be* no truth in a world without minds. In this case, while the assertion is actual, it is not about the actual world, but rather about a possible one. The assertion is not that in this possible world there is a truth that there are no truths. Rather it is simply that there are no truths in this possible world, where this truth belongs not to it, but to the actual world. To put the point another way, the relativist's claim is not that it is possible for it to be true that there is no truth, but rather that it is true that it is possible for there to be no truth. This only seems impossible if one assumes that truth and being are inseparable, so that there would have to be a true proposition corresponding to the absence of truth. By denying their inseparability, psychologism can maintain the coherence of the idea of a world without truth and thus of truth relativism as well.

In summary, the *Prolegomena*'s fundamental objection to the dependency thesis is that it fails to appreciate the nature of truth. A defender of the thesis can escape each

of Husserl's *reductio* arguments by repudiating their underlying conception of truth. Thus in order to show that psychologism's relativization of truth is incoherent, Husserl must demonstrate that truth cannot be understood *only* in terms of justification since truth is essentially as he describes it.

2.3.3 Truth Relativism as Counter-Sense

In the last chapter (section 1.2.6) I noted Husserl's distinction between senseless (*sinnlos*) and counter-sensical (*widersinnig*) expressions: whereas the former yield no act of meaning, the latter yield acts of meaning with non-consistent objects. There is also an important distinction to be made with regard to counter-sense in its own right. Counter-sense can pertain to expressions, concepts, propositions, and sets of propositions taken in abstraction from the activities of the subjects who employ them. In this sense a concept of something as having incompatible determinations (e.g. as being both round and square) is counter-sensical, as is any theory that entails both *p* and not-*p*. In such cases the contradiction lies solely within what is thought or asserted. Henceforth I will call this kind of counter-sense "logical inconsistency," reserving "counter-sense" for a second kind of inconsistency, namely that which occurs whenever a concept or proposition is inconsistent with the sense of the activity in which it arises. An example of something Husserl considers to be counter-sense is the idea, indicated above in section 2.2, that physics concerns a realm of entities distinct from the objects of everyday experience and which cause our perceptions of these objects. While there is no logical inconsistency in the idea of such an "unknown cause of appearances," it is, according to Husserl, counter-sensical to understand it as the subject-matter of physics. Physicists attempt to explain the behaviour of objects given in the surrounding world, e.g. the motion of heavenly

bodies or of a pebble skipping across the surface of a lake. In explaining such phenomena, worldly objects come to be determined in ways foreign to everyday perception, e.g. as composed of particles detectable only by highly sophisticated machines. Counter-sense arises when the object as determined in physics is taken to be distinct from the everyday object one had set out to explain. Physics is then taken to be about a true, unperceivable world that causes the everyday world to appear through its effects on our perceptual systems. But this is counter to the true sense of physics as more richly determining the objects given in everyday perception. It is an idea that can only arise by failing to appreciate what actually occurs in physical explanation.[172]

When Husserl argues in the *Prolegomena* that truth relativism is absurd, it seems that he is arguing that truth relativism is logically inconsistent. This impression arises from the fact that he does not contrast truth relativism with the activity of inquiry in which it arises. Instead, remaining at an abstract level, Husserl claims that truth relativism is inconsistent with the essence of truth. But without further justification, this claim seems like a mere assertion. In order to justify the conception of truth Husserl advances against truth relativism, it is not sufficient, as Gail Soffer points out, to argue that truth is in fact commonly understood as Husserl describes it. One problem is that it is questionable that truth really is commonly understood in Husserl's terms, especially in a culture in which relativism is popular.[173] But the main problem is that, even if it happens to be the case that people do understand truth in this way, it would remain to be shown that this understanding captures a single, essential meaning of truth, and one that rules out relativism. To assume the validity of a concept of truth based simply on the fact

[172] *ID*, 120-122/99-102.
[173] Soffer, *Husserl and the Question of Relativism*, 14.

that people have this concept would itself be psychologistic insofar as it would be to derive validity from empirical fact.[174]

In order to adequately justify his conception of truth, and thereby adequately ground his case against truth relativism, Husserl must show that it captures the sense that truth has in actual cognition, both in everyday life and in theoretical activity. By doing this, he will have shown that truth-relativism is counter-sensical, i.e. that truth relativism is at odds with the sense truth has in the thinking that gives rise to it. This, however, is a task for phenomenology proper, and not for a prolegomena. It is carried out in the Sixth Investigation's analyses of meaning-fulfillment, and later in the *Crisis*, where, in contrast with the static phenomenological analysis of the *Investigations*, Husserl undertakes a genetic account of how the concept of truth arises with the establishment of the idea of science. Thus it would be a mistake to conclude from the insufficiency of Husserl's *reductio* arguments against truth relativism that the *Prolegomena* is a failed attempt to show that truth relativism is logically inconsistent. It is rather part of a larger project in which truth relativism is shown to be counter-sensical.

Nevertheless, the basic counter-sense of truth relativism does emerge in the *Prolegomena* in connection with argument (4) above. According to that argument, relativism is absurd since it claims both that the nature of the mind is determined by what there is and vice versa. In order to avoid the result that the nature of the mind is relative to itself, the relativist must admit that claims regarding truth-determining mental facts are true absolutely. Thus "the relativization of truth presupposes the objective being of the point to which things are relative," which Husserl argues renders truth-relativism

[174] Ibid.

contradictory.[175] But since psychologism relativizes truth only with reference to an ideal epistemic subject, it seems perfectly coherent to maintain the objectivity of the facts to which truth is relative. Although claims regarding these facts are indeed relatively true insofar as their rational acceptability is concerned, they are *also* objectively true insofar as they correspond to reality. Given these two senses of truth, we can see that objective and relative truth are not incompatible.[176]

However, the problem with the relativist's position lies not in the compatibility of relative and objective truth, but rather in the very appeal to objectivity. As we have seen, psychologism means that our inference-rules hold only contingently and hence that we cannot determine whether to justify a claim is to show that it captures the way things are. Yet psychologism assumes that certain claims do capture the way things are, namely claims about that to which inference-rules are relative. These are, after all, claims regarding features the mind has as part of an objective order. The basic incoherence of psychologism is that it calls into question reason's claim to be disclosive of reality only by presupposing it. In other words, in deriving from the mind's causal implication in reality the possibility that it cannot know reality, one holds that knowledge might not be possible at the same time as one implicitly holds that it is.[177] One fares no better by

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[175] *LI* I, 87/I, 132.

[176] Meiland points out the compatibility of objective and relative truth, but he proposes that objective truth be understood as a two-term relation of correspondence and relative truth as a three-term relation of correspondence-for, i.e. what it means for a claim to be relatively true is that it corresponds to reality for some person or group. "Concepts of Relative Truth," *The Monist* 60 (1977): 571, 572. But as Harvey Siegel argues, on such a conception the relative truth of *p* means either merely that *p* is believed or that reality, and not just truth, is relative. "Relativism, Truth, and Incoherence," *Synthese* 68, no. 2 (1986): 234-235, 238. On the first interpretation the compatibility of relative and objective truth amounts to the rather uninteresting claim that the same proposition can be both true and believed; on the second interpretation there is no longer room for objective truth.

[177] William Vallicella puts the point well: "The relativist is claiming that there is no disinterested perspective from which nonrelative truth could be obtained. But how did he arrive at this conclusion? By adopting the disinterested perspective of *theoria*…. But if the relativist is right, such a perspective is impossible. It follows that the relativist can never establish the truth of his own position. For to do that he

repudiating the assumption that knowledge is possible and holding that all claims, including claims about the mind's implication in reality, can be true only relatively. This move runs into a problem often pointed out, which is that since relativity is always relativity *to* something, either truth relativism must admit the objective truth of claims describing that to which truth is relative, or fall victim to a regress that is vicious insofar as it becomes impossible to identify that to which truth is relative.[178] Psychologism is thus forced to affirm the objective truth of claims about the mind's place in reality. Now, as noted earlier, one could consistently hold that these claims are true both objectively and relatively, and that other claims are true only in the relative sense. But this would be arbitrary, since if reason is able to achieve objectivity with regard to one realm of being, there is no reason to suppose that that it does not also achieve it with regard to others.

It turns out then that psychologism cannot coherently deny the objectivity of truth. At the root of the incoherence of a psychologistic relativism is an implicit understanding of inquiry that stems from the natural attitude. In the natural attitude, we understand ourselves as existing in the midst of a world that is what it is regardless of whether it happens to be experienced by us. Inquiry is thus naturally understood as a matter of discovering the nature of the totality of mind-independent objects, and truth as some sort of correspondence between these objects and our thoughts or statements. Following Putnam, I will call this understanding of inquiry the "externalist perspective."[179] On the externalist perspective, cognition is understood as Husserl describes it in *The Idea of*

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would have to occupy the very vantage point which his theory says does not exist." "Relativism, Truth, and the Symmetry Thesis," *The Monist* 67, no. 3 (1984): 461.

[178] Soffer, *Husserl and the Question of Relativism*, 9.

[179] Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, 49.

Phenomenology: "cognition is essentially *cognition of what objectively is*…."[180] Psychologism reflects the externalist perspective insofar as it conceives of reason as arising within a mind-independent order; accordingly, it understands the cognition achieved through empirical research as revealing the nature of the mind as part of this order. Having done this, it cannot coherently proceed to deny the objective validity of cognition.

Psychologism's implicit externalist perspective also means that it is in fact committed to the conception of truth Husserl advances in the *Prolegomena*. If truth is understood as correspondence, then in justifying a claim—in trying to show that it is true—it is implicitly understood that one is not only trying to show that it should be believed, but also that it represents how things are. Hence on the externalist perspective correspondence to reality is essential to what it means for it to be true, so that truth cannot coherently be defined solely in terms of justification. Also essential is the validity of our rules of inference, since it is just these rules that determine what is justified and hence which enable cognition of what there is. Thus two of the three claims upon which Husserl's *reductio* arguments depend are grounded not merely in their supposedly widespread acceptance, but in a basic conception of what it means to theorize. (The third claim, that there is a proposition for every state of affairs, will come to be rejected in Husserl's later conception of ideal entities as achievements of subjectivity rather than as subsisting independently of subjectivity.) To conceive of truth only in terms of justification while continuing to theorize from the externalist perspective is to fail to appreciate what this perspective commits one to. At bottom the incoherence of psychologism is that, having implicitly assumed the externalist perspective and its

[180] *IP*, 15/19.

concomitant concepts of truth and cognition, it nevertheless attempts to do without these very concepts.

After several twists and turns, we are now finally in a position to see what Husserl accomplishes in his refutation of psychologism in the *Prolegomena*. While on the surface it seems that his arguments against the dependency thesis fail insofar as they depend on mere assertions about truth, a careful examination of what Husserl identifies as the basic contradiction of truth relativism reveals these assertions to be grounded in an understanding of inquiry that psychologism presupposes. Thus the psychologistic logician is in the end forced to admit that his doctrine fails to respect the meaning of truth and that it does in fact lead to absurdity. The cognitive limits psychologism would derive from the mind's immanence in nature cannot be coherently established since psychologism is rooted in the assumption that no such limits apply.

By pointing to the basic counter-sense of psychologism, and of truth relativism more generally, the *Prolegomena* reveals a peculiar tension in the externalist perspective of the natural attitude: at the same time as this perspective motivates doubt about the possibility of knowledge, it precludes itself from coherently denying it. It motivates doubt about the possibility of knowledge with the rise of what Husserl in the *Crisis* calls "objectivism," the attempt to understand subjectivity wholly in objective terms, i.e. as fully reducible to the features it has as part of the objective order.[181] As applied to reason, objectivism can be aptly described in Thomas Nagel's terms as the attempt to regard reason wholly "from the outside."[182] Regarded from the outside, reason is a contingent product of a world represented in perception. This raises doubts both about

[181] *CR*, 68/70.
[182] Nagel, *The Last Word*, 13.

whether perception represents the world accurately and about whether reason is suited to achieve truth. Yet "from the inside," i.e. in acts of cognition undisturbed by epistemological questions, reason is experienced as achieving truth in revealing the nature of an objective, mind-independent order. That it does so is part of the meaning of inquiry as understood from the externalist perspective. The inconsistency of psychologism reveals that the view of reason from the inside limits what can coherently be claimed about it from the outside: in order to proceed coherently, the externalist project must reject from the outset any position that would deny the possibility of knowledge. Yet it is the externalist project itself that yields such positions in failing to recognize its own meaning—the inner logic of the externalist project is such that it tends to transgress the very limit it establishes for itself.

Examining this tendency towards counter-sense more closely reveals the same basic objectivating tendency we saw at work earlier in ontological wonder. In wonder at existence there is a tendency to seize upon an alternative to existence as a "this," a tendency Husserl identifies as definitive of consciousness—"the entire life of consciousness," Husserl writes, is "a progressive objectivating."[183] In Husserl's analyses of how things are constituted prior to being explicitly attended to, this objectivating arises as a response to being affected—consciousness is, as it were, drawn outwards towards what is given.[184] Theory, as a higher level of objectivation, persists in this outward orientation, so that the transcendental dimension in terms of which things are given remains hidden. This allows subjectivity to interpret itself as wholly innerworldly and to fall into the epistemological confusion we described earlier. In this way the objectivating

[183] *APS*, 279/Hua XXXI, 7.
[184] *APS*, 280/Hua XXXI, 7-8.

tendency of consciousness, as a tendency drawn outwards, away from the transcendental dimension, is also a tendency towards objectivism.

2.4 From the Refutation of Psychologism to a Phenomenological Elucidation of Knowledge

The fact that the first major work in Husserl's phenomenology is prefaced by a refutation of psychologism illustrates that for Husserl demonstrating the absurdity of truth relativism is both necessary and sufficient for clearing the way for phenomenology. Once the "game of logical arguments and refutations" involved in disputes about psychologism and relativism is out of the way, Husserl turns straightaway to the "the things themselves," i.e. to the essential task of clarifying how subjectivity achieves insight into the world.[185] But as Mensch observes, there is something odd in Husserl's move from a demonstration that the possibility of knowledge cannot be coherently denied to the question of how knowledge is possible.[186] What makes this move seem odd is the idea that while it is one thing to show what is demanded by an understanding of inquiry, it is quite another to show how things stand in the reality in which inquiry takes place. Granted that the possibility of knowledge cannot coherently be questioned on the basis of the results of inquiry, could it not still be the case that we are related to reality in such a way that we do not really have epistemic access to it? Truth would lie beyond the limits of reason, including this truth itself.[187] In light of this possibility, one might grant the incoherence of denying the objectivity of knowledge but abstain from affirming it, i.e.

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[185] *CR*, 181/185; see also "Vienna Lecture" in *CR*, 296/344.
[186] Mensch, *The Question of Being in Husserl's* Logical Investigations, 9.
[187] David Carr expresses essentially the same thought while discussing Rorty's argument for the coherence of the notion of alternative conceptual schemes (or of what I have called "internal relativism"): Rorty "manages to articulate the doubt that always lingers at the conclusion of *a priori* arguments like those presented by Husserl and Davidson: in order to flesh out our conception of alternative conceptual frameworks, or indeed to say or do anything whatever, *we* have to appeal to concepts in such a way that *we* assume their universal validity. But does this make it so?" Carr, "Phenomenology and Relativism," in *Interpreting Husserl*, 27.

one might either adopt a position of neutrality towards the question of the possibility of knowledge or merely *suppose* that knowledge is possible. Either option is a way of respecting reason's demand for consistency while remaining mindful of its possible limitations. And in either case the question of how knowledge is possible does not arise; at best, one might ask what *would* have to be the case *were* knowledge really possible.

By recognizing that the possibility of knowledge cannot coherently be denied from within the externalist perspective, this view liberates the externalist project from the worry that its discoveries count against its possibility. The view recognizes the impossibility of viewing reason wholly from the outside, i.e. of assessing reason's claim to disclose reality without presupposing it. But it leaves the externalist project haunted by the possibility that the denial that knowledge is possible, although incapable of demonstration, might nevertheless be correct. Although we cannot view our reason wholly from the outside, perhaps someone in a position to do so would see that it closes us off from the true nature of things.

If the idea of reality as an unknowable cause of appearances is motivated by the results of inquiry, e.g. neurological research on perception, it can be rejected as involving the same counter-sense exposed above in the case of psychologism: the idea that we might not be able to know reality is derived on the basis of presupposing that we can. But the conception of reality as an unknowable cause of appearances could also be motivated in a Cartesian manner. Testing one's beliefs for certainty, one can discover that it is conceivable that we are related to reality in such a way that we do not have epistemic access to it, e.g. that experiences are fed into our minds by an evil genius.

For Husserl an adequate response to this worry is only to be found in phenomenology proper. It is worth noting, however, that it is not to be found in the phenomenology of the *Investigations*. There Husserl's method involves adopting a position of neutrality with regard to whether there is a reality beyond consciousness and which causes experiences. Experiences are simply to be analyzed without presupposing anything not demonstrable in intuition.[188] But this leaves it an open question whether the experiences of cognition analysed in phenomenology really involve the givenness of the object, and are not rather experiences of representations caused by something that cannot be given directly.

With the development of the method of reduction, Husserl's phenomenology has the means to reject as counter-sensical the conception of reality as an unknowable cause of appearances. In light of the reduction, Husserl can argue against this idea in the same way that he argues against realism in *Ideas I*. Like realism, the idea of an unknowable cause of appearances regards subjectivity as occurring in virtue of the reality it strives to know—the being of subjectivity is dependent upon the being of the world, and not vice versa. While this is true with regard to consciousness *qua* innerworldly event—the consciousness studied by empirical psychology—it is not true with regard to consciousness *qua* transcendental. With the discovery of the latter via the reduction, the world reveals itself as a complex of sense accomplished by transcendental subjectivity. Without the transcendental accomplishments disclosed by the reduction, no world would be given, so that the being of the world is dependent on the being of subjectivity. For Husserl the "absolutizing" of the object that occurs in the idea of an unknowable cause of appearances is counter-sensical in the same sense as the interpretation of physics

[188] *LI* I, 177/II(1), 19.

discussed earlier: in both cases, one forms what are in themselves logically consistent interpretations of a phenomenon while neglecting the subjective dimension in which the phenomenon is achieved.[189] Thus although there is a lacuna in Husserl's move from demonstrating the incoherence of psychologism to posing the question of how knowledge is possible, this lacuna is necessary insofar as one must actually enter into phenomenology in order to secure the possibility of knowledge against Cartesian doubt.

2.5 The Enigma of Knowledge Revisited

This chapter has unfolded a dialectic of limits. On the basis of our status as innerworldly objects psychologism relativizes truth, thereby limiting our attempt to know the world for which we are also subjects. In the *Prolegomena* Husserl points to the fundamental problem with psychologism, which is that in posing such a limit the externalist project falls into counter-sense by transgressing the very limit it implicitly establishes for itself—psychologism is bound by its own understanding of inquiry not to deny the "unbounded range of objective reason."[190] Yet to show this is not yet to banish the thought of the object as limiting inquiry by functioning as an unknowable cause of appearances; for this phenomenology's disclosure of transcendental subjectivity is required. Once the object is revealed to be the correlate of transcendental subjectivity, it is robbed of its power to throw the project of science into doubt. In this way the transcendental perspective overcomes the epistemological limit the object poses for the natural attitude.

In overcoming this limit, the transcendental perspective also resolves the enigma knowledge poses for the natural attitude. The problems of whether reality matches

[189] *ID*, 128-130/106-108.
[190] *LI* I, 223/II(1), 90.

representations and of the seeming unlikelihood of creatures capable of knowledge arising through natural selection both presuppose that the givenness of the world is causally dependent on something else. By revealing subjectivity in its transcendental dimension, the reduction reveals a dimension of subjectivity which, rather than being causally implicated in the object, is instead that in virtue of which things are given as causally related in the first place. Thus Husserl's phenomenology resolves the enigma of knowledge by exposing and correcting the self-understanding on which it is based.

Yet, as with regard to the question of why there is something rather than nothing, transcendental reflection with regard to the questions of whether and how knowledge is possible reveals enigmas on a new level. In the case of the something/nothing question, the existence of the world gives way to the being of transcendental subjectivity as the most fundamental fact. In the case of the questions of whether and how knowledge is possible, the enigma is no longer the emergence of knowing creatures through blind natural forces, but rather the constitution of the world, in particular transcendental subjectivity's constitution of itself as innerworldly human beings. In both cases, wonder at something given comes to be supplanted by wonder at the transcendental dimension in which things are given. The next chapter explores the enigma at the heart of this dimension—time. Here we will see Husserl struggling with a limit-situation remarkably similar to the one he exposes in connection with psychologism.

Chapter Three: Limits of Thought at the Origin of Time

"…ultimately, the actual success of a transcendental philosophy… depends upon self-reflective clarity carried to its limits."—*CR*, 153

3.1 Introduction

In the previous two chapters, Husserl's phenomenology has been brought to bear on encounters with thought-limits that arise in the natural attitude. We have seen how both in wonder at existence and in reflection on the possibility of knowledge the encounter with limits stems from a basic objectivating tendency of consciousness. In this final chapter I turn to how this tendency leads to an encounter with limits in Husserl's phenomenology itself. More specifically, I examine the limits Husserl encounters in the analyses of time-consciousness contained in *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time* (*PCIT*).

The chapter is divided into four main stages. The first lays out the theory of time-constitution Husserl develops in *PCIT* and explains how his investigations into the ultimate origin of time lead him to the notion of a non-object. In the second stage I show how the origin's status as a non-object makes it only obliquely available to reflection and places it beyond the limits of conception—the origin of time turns out to be inconceivable in the same sense as nothing. Next I evaluate some interpretations of Husserl's notion of the origin of time as an absolute consciousness in light of these results. Finally, in the fourth stage I consider the challenge the origin of time poses to Husserl's phenomenology and argue that although it is not, as Derrida would have it, inaccessible to phenomenological cognition, it nevertheless exceeds the limits of phenomenology insofar as it cannot be given in a way that would satisfy cognitive desire. Husserl's phenomenology thus finds itself in the predicament of being driven beyond limits even

once these limits are recognized.

3.2 *PCIT* and the Problem of the Origin of Time

PCIT is a difficult work, not only on account of its subject matter but also because of its complex origins. The text integrates part of a lecture course Husserl gave at Göttingen in the winter semester of 1904/1905 with various sketches he wrote on time-consciousness between 1893 and 1917. The original lecture course was entitled "Important Points from the Phenomenology and Theory of Knowledge"; its fourth and final part was entitled "On the Phenomenology of Time." In 1917 Edith Stein, then Husserl's assistant at Freiburg, compiled a text based on the 1905 lecture course manuscript and a number of manuscripts between 1901 and 1917. Although both parts of the text incorporate material from across this period, the first part is entitled "The Lectures on the Consciousness of Internal Time from the Year 1905," and the second is entitled "Addenda and Supplements to the Analysis of Time-Consciousness from the Years 1905-1910." This text was published under the direction of Heidegger in 1928 in the *Yearbook for Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* and again in 1966 as part of Volume X of the Husserliana series, a volume edited by Rudolf Boehm and entitled *Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins (1893-1917).* Boehm provided dates for the sections comprising Stein's text and also supplied a chronologically ordered set of supplementary texts that reveal the development of Husserl's thinking on time.[191] *PCIT* is John Brough's translation of Boehm's work.

In the second section of *PCIT*, Husserl states that a phenomenological

[191] The supplementary texts included in Husserliana X also appear alone in a volume edited by Bernet. He re-organizes them into four groups, adjusting the dates for texts 18, 36-39, and 49-50. *Texte zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins (1893-1917)*, ed. Bernet (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1985).

investigation of time aims to uncover time's origin.[192] In this context the origin of time does not mean how time first came into existence, nor does it mean how humans or animals come to be aware of time in the course of their development. Instead, Husserl's question of the origin of time seeks to uncover the operations of subjectivity in virtue of which objects are given as temporal. More specifically, it seeks to explain how objects are given as past, present and future (or as members of McTaggart's A-series) as well as how they are given as before and after one another in a single temporal order (or as members of McTaggart's B-series).

This project is phenomenologically important for at least two reasons. One is that without an account of the constitution of time phenomenology is essentially incomplete. This is because the constitution of past, present and future is a necessary condition for any object to appear at all. As we saw in the first chapter, an object for Husserl is a noematic *x*, a unity-in-difference. Such a unity is essentially something that *persists*: in the case of spatial objects, it is that which maintains its identity through a series of adumbrations; in the case of non-spatial objects (tones or feelings, for example), it is that which maintains its identity through a series of phases. For Husserl even the constitution of ideal or non-temporal objects such as redness or the number three requires the constitution of a persisting unity, since on his view ideal objects cannot be given apart from a real exemplar. Hence the constitution of time is a necessary condition for the constitution of any object whatsoever.[193] Temporality is, as Sokolowski describes it, "the ultimate source of all the achievements of subjectivity," and therefore something for

[192] *PCIT*, 9/9.
[193] *APS*, 170/125, 174/128.

which phenomenology must provide an account.[194]

A second reason for the importance of accounting for the origin of time concerns the very possibility of phenomenology. Discussing the difficulties of phenomenological analysis at the outset of the *Investigations*, Husserl writes:

> A much discussed difficulty—one which seems to threaten in principle all possible immanent description of mental acts or indeed all phenomenological treatment of essences—lies in the fact that when we pass over from naively performed acts to an attitude of reflection, or when we perform acts proper to such reflection, our former acts necessarily undergo change. How can we rightly assess the nature and extent of such change? How indeed can we know anything whatever about it, whether as a fact or as a necessity of essence?[195]

The problem Husserl alludes to here stems from the hiddenness of the present vis-à-vis reflection. Phenomenological reflection aims to understand acts as they originally occur, or as they first come into being in the present. But original consciousness necessarily eludes reflection, since in reflection what is originally occurring is always the reflecting act itself, and not the act being reflected upon. In order to be reflected upon, any actual act must necessarily become past, even if only just past. The question then arises of whether this transition is all there is to the change undergone by the act to be analysed. If not, the change may be substantial enough to preclude the essence of the original act from being grasped in reflection, in which case phenomenology would be impossible. In order to secure phenomenology from this skeptical possibility, an account must be given of how acts are constituted in such a way as to be accessible to reflection. Hence the phenomenological inquiry into the origin of time concerns not only the constitution of the temporality of objects, but also the constitution of the subjectivity through which these objects are given. It is the latter concern that leads Husserl to the idea of a non-object,

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[194] Robert Sokolowski, "Immanent Constitution in Husserl's Lectures on Time," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 24, no. 4 (1964): 532.
[195] *LI* I, 171/II(1), 10.

but in order to explain how, it is first necessary to outline his account of temporal object constitution.

3.3 The Constitution of Temporal Objects

3.3.1 Husserl's Schematic Theory of Perception

Husserl's account of how temporal objects are constituted is a key element in his overall theory of perception; in order to understand the former, it is well to begin with the latter. In line with the tradition of British empiricism, Husserl distinguishes sense-data, or, as he comes to call them, "hyletic" data, as an element of perception. Hyletic data are what remains to the content of perceptual consciousness if we abstract away recognition of an object—abstracting from the recognition of objects in one's visual field, for example, we are left with a two-dimensional patchwork of colours.[196] Unlike some other theories of perception that posit sense data, Husserl's theory does not involve the claim that they are all that is really perceived, a reality beyond them being merely inferred or instinctively posited. On Husserl's view, hyletic data are normally not objects of perception at all, either as objects of attention or as objects in the background of a perceptual field. Instead hyletic data serve as a necessary condition for the perception of an object. A perceptual object appears in virtue of hyletic data being grasped, interpreted, or apprehended (*aufgefasst*). Since the data are normally not themselves explicitly regarded, this apprehension is not a matter of first attending to the data and then determining what object one is faced with. Instead, the data help make an object appear by being spontaneously taken up into a consciousness concerned not with its own sensations but rather with a world beyond itself. In being taken up or apprehended,

[196] *PCIT*, 5/5.

hyletic data become "ensouled" or bestowed with meaning such that objects appear.[197] In seeing a tree, for example, parts of a two-dimensional field of visual data are taken up into sense-bestowing activity with the result that green leaves appear.

Husserl's distinction between hyletic data and perceptual objects can be further clarified in ontological terms. Hyletic data are a part of the perceiving consciousness, i.e. they are a distinguishable element of the appearing of an object. In this sense both hyletic data and the apprehension of this data are immanent. The perceptual object, on the other hand, is not a part of the perceiving consciousness, and in this sense the object is transcendent. The sole exception to this rule occurs when one focuses attention on perceiving itself, in which case the object of perception is immanent.

Corresponding to the ontological difference between hyletic data and perceptual objects is an important difference in modes of givenness. Consciousness of perceptual objects is objectivating; that is, the object is given as standing over and against the subject, distinct from the subject's consciousness of it. The sense-data and apprehensions in virtue of which the object is given, on the other hand, are not themselves given as objects, though neither do they fall into total oblivion. There is rather a certain marginal, non-objectivating awareness of them.[198] This distinction between explicit and implicit modes of awareness will prove crucial in Husserl's analyses of absolute consciousness.

Husserl's threefold schema of hyletic data, apprehension, and object yields two levels for intentional analysis. The first level is the constitution of transcendent objects. The second level, which Husserl does not initially recognize, is the constitution of the hyletic data through which these objects appear. Each level involves a distinct sense of

[197] *LI* II, 103-105/II(1), 381-384.
[198] *LI* II, 105/II(1), 385.

intentionality. The first level concerns intentionality in its most familiar sense, namely consciousness of or directedness towards an object. Mental acts that are intentional in this sense are subject to the will to a significant extent: I can decide where to direct my attention, I can try to remember or imagine something, and so on. The second, and more obscure, level of constitution involves what Merleau-Ponty, following Fink, calls "operative intentionality."[199] Intentionality in this sense is the spontaneous, anonymous formation of hyletic data as well as all other immanent entities. This intentional activity is non-voluntary since without it there could be no consciousness of objects or even of oneself, let alone a consciousness of choice. It is at this second level, the heart of subjectivity, that Husserl will come to locate the constitution of temporality.

3.3.2 Primal Impression, Retention and Protention

An initial difficulty regarding the constitution of temporal objects is whether or not such objects are perceived. It certainly seems that they are—it seems clear that I hear the chirping of birds outside my window, for example, or that I see the swaying of a tree in the wind. But more careful reflection on the meaning of perception calls this into question. What distinguishes perception from other modes of consciousness such as remembering and imagining is that its object is experienced as itself present; as Husserl sometimes puts it, the object is given "in person."[200] It is tempting to think that since in ordinary usage "past" means to exist no longer and "future" means to not yet exist, to experience something as past or future means to experience it as *not* existing and hence as not itself given. Only when something is experienced as now is it possible to

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[199] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), 486; Fink, "Das Problem der Phänomenologie Edmund Husserls" in *Studien zur Phänomenologie 1930-1939* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966), 219.
[200] *LI* I, 299/II(1), 201.

experience it as given in person. Everyday talk of hearing and seeing temporally extended objects thus turns out to be imprecise. Consciousness of a temporal object is not purely perceptual, but is instead composed of a perceptual awareness of a now-phase combined with representational consciousness of past phases. If consciousness of a temporal object involves awareness of future phases, this awareness must be representational as well.

One finds this limitation of perception to the now in Brentano's theory of time-consciousness. According to Brentano, consciousness of a temporal object occurs through an "original association" of perception and phantasy: each now-phase is initially perceived and then continuously reproduced in phantasy in such a way that it appears as more and more past. Here we have a case of "productive phantasy," or of phantasy that adds something new to what was originally given, namely the feature of having-been.[201]

Husserl makes two basic objections to Brentano's theory, each of which will be decisive in the development of his own account of time-consciousness. One is that temporality is not a matter of *what* an object is, but of *how* it is given. Brentano treats becoming-past as the addition of a new feature to the content of consciousness: productive phantasy adds the feature of pastness to what has fallen out of perception. But this raises the question of the temporal mode in which this new content is given. In perception it was given as present. Since productive phantasy merely changes what the content is, it remains to be explained how that content undergoes a temporal modification. One is left to presume, as Husserl does, that in productive phantasy the content continues to be given as present, which leads to the contradiction that productive

[201] *PCIT*, 12/12, 14/13.

phantasy makes something appear as present and as past simultaneously.[202] To avoid this consequence, the appearance of temporal change must be treated not as a change in content but rather as a change in how that content is given.

The second basic objection Husserl makes to Brentano's theory is that the distinction between productive and ordinary phantasy needs to be clarified.[203] "Phantasy" normally refers to a consciousness in which an object is given as non-actual, either through memory, in which the object is given as something that *was* actual, or through imagination, in which the object is given *as if* it were actual. Clearly phantasy in the sense of memory is the one best-suited to describe time-consciousness, but the kind of memory operative here needs to be distinguished from memory in its usual sense. In its usual sense, memory re-presents what is no longer present to consciousness. In the consciousness of a temporal object, on the other hand, just past phases somehow remain present to consciousness. They do not have to be recalled since they are in some sense still "there." The nature of this consciousness remains to be clarified.

Both problems with Brentano's theory can be overcome by abandoning the idea that only the present phase of a temporal object is really perceived. That this idea is untenable in its own right becomes evident when we consider what exactly is supposed to be perceived here. As Husserl points out against Meinong, the idea of an unextended now-point is a mathematical abstraction: whereas one can conceive of an unextended moment as the ideal limit of a series of ever-decreasing lengths of time, a length of zero can never in fact be reached.[204] Hence anything actually perceived must have temporal extension, which in turn means that perception cannot be limited to the now. A

[202] *PCIT*, 18/18.
[203] *PCIT,* 17/16.
[204] *PCIT*, 232/225, 234/227.

fundamental and innovative move in Husserl's thinking on time-consciousness is to recognize this and to posit a threefold operation at work *within* perception corresponding to the three dimensions of the perceived temporal object. To phases in the immediate future there corresponds what Husserl calls protention; to the now-phase, primal impression; and to phases in the immediate past, retention.

Initially Husserl thought of these three operations as unique kinds of apprehension. In addition to the apprehension of hyletic data that yields the appearance of an object with its non-temporal features, retention, primal impression and protention would be apprehensions responsible for its temporal ones.[205] Thus in addition to the apprehension of visual data that yields the appearance of something as a tree, retention, primal impression and protention would together apprehend the data to yield the appearance of the tree as something persisting.

The basic problem with this "schematic" theory of time-consciousness concerns how it is that hyletic data are available for the temporal apprehensions. Either these data exist or, no longer existing or about to exist, they are made available for apprehension through retention and protention. If the schematic theory is not to presuppose the constitutive activity it is supposed to explain, it must assume that the data exist. And herein lies the problem Husserl comes to see as fatal to the theory: since existence is confined to the now, all of the apprehended data must be simultaneous.[206] But if this were so, there seems to be no reason why the data should be apprehended by retention or protention rather than only by primal impression—that is, why should a simultaneously existing set of data found the appearing of a succession rather than a co-existence? The

[205] *PCIT*, 41/39, 237/229, 240/233.
[206] *PCIT*, 335/323.

schematic theory fails to explain why a melody should appear through the apprehension of auditory sense data rather than an instantaneous burst of sounds. This problem is a symptom of the fact that in the schematic theory Husserl has not yet completely overcome what John Brough calls the "prejudice of the now," or the idea that only what is strictly present in time can be immediately present to consciousness.[207] The theory seems to overcome the prejudice insofar as it holds that past and future phases of an object are genuinely perceived. But the prejudice is still at work insofar as this temporal extension of the field of immediacy requires an actual, strictly present content in order to occur. It is only with Husserl's later, non-schematic concept of the three operations of time-consciousness that the prejudice is overcome.

This new concept first emerges together with a new view of sensation. Husserl had initially considered sensation to be non-intentional; that is, sensation was taken to be a mental occurrence that does not admit of a distinction between appearing and what appears. There was no distinction to be made within sensation between sensing and what is sensed. Sensation was thus conceived as a mere "having," a brute occurrence that provides the material for constituting activity without itself requiring constitution.[208] A close examination of the temporality of sensation leads Husserl to abandon this doctrine. In Sketch 39 of the Supplements to *PCIT*, written in early 1907 and entitled "Time and Perception," Husserl analyses the sensation underlying the perception of a violin being played.

This is the hearing of a pure tone, or of a tone taken in abstraction from its

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[207] John Brough, "Presence and Absence in Husserl's Phenomenology of Time-Consciousness," in *Phenomenology, Interpretation, and Community*, ed. Lenore Langsdorf, Stephen H. Watson and E. Marya Bower (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996), 9.
[208] *LI* II, 85/II(1), 352.

transcendent significance as something caused by the occurrence in the external world of a bow running across strings. Now, the tone is an immanent object, or part of a mental process. As part of the mental process, each present phase of the tone ceases to exist along with the present phase of the process. Yet the tone endures—past phases of it remain present even though they no longer exist. With each new, actual moment of the tone, the previous, no longer actual moment does not disappear, but becomes modified such that it is present as just past. The presence in consciousness of a phase of sense-data outstrips its existence.[209] Husserl interprets this to mean that constitution already occurs at the level of sensation. Phases of the tone remain present even after they cease to exist because the original phase is retained. With each new now of a sense-datum, each previous now undergoes a retentional modification and hence appears as more distantly past. Thus rather than viewing retention as one kind of perceptual apprehension, Husserl now conceives it as part of sensing, a more basic level of constitution that makes sense-data available for apprehension in the first place. Whereas on the schematic theory retention acts on hyletic data already available to consciousness, on this view retention is required for there to be such data at all. By locating retention, primal impression and protention at the level of sensing rather than at the level of perceptual apprehension, Husserl no longer views them as operating upon actual, present material, but instead are now conceived as the elements of constituting activity by which presence exceeds actuality. Here Husserl finally overcomes the prejudice of the now.

It remains to examine the three operations of time-constitution more closely. The first point to be emphasized is that neither retention, primal impression nor protention are intentional experiences. By furnishing a continuum of hyletic phases for synthesis, the

[209] *PCIT*, 291/280-281.

three operations make possible the cognition of an object. And as we shall see shortly, the three operations also make possible the appearance of an intentional experience to itself. Hence rather than being intentional experiences in their own right, retention, primal impression and protention are each an essential part of any intentional experience.

However, as Brough points out against Seebohm, Diemer and Sokolowski, they are not *temporal* parts of an experience.[210] That is, with regard to any phase of consciousness, primal impression is not to be understood as occurring after protention and before retention. Instead, any given phase of an act is retentive, impressional and protentive. The three dimensions of time-consciousness are parts of an act in the sense that each is a distinguishable aspect of intentional activity, or an aspect of how objects are brought to appearance. Each is thus best thought of adverbially: acts have their objects retentionally, impressionally and protentionally.

It follows from what has been said so far that memory and retention, though both concerned with the past, are fundamentally different. As a kind of intentional experience, memory presupposes retention as an essential element in the original constitution of what is remembered.[211] The originary role of retention vis-à-vis memory means that there are further significant differences between the two. One is that whereas one can voluntarily remember something, retention always occurs passively or involuntarily.[212] The ability to direct one's attention to something in the past presupposes the original, automatic

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[210] Brough, "The Emergence of an Absolute Consciousness in Husserl's Early Writings on Time-Consciousness," *Continental Philosophy Review* 5, no. 3 (1972): 302, 315-316.
[211] This difference between retention and memory is obscured by Husserl's original term for the immediate consciousness of the past, "primary memory." Husserl seems to have introduced the new term "retention" in Text 50 of part B of *PCIT*, a text Bernet determines to have been written between September 1909 and the end of 1911. "Einleitung," *Texte zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewußtseins (1893-1917),* xviii.
[212] *EJ*, 110/122.

constitution of identity.[213] A second important difference is that unlike memory, retention does not allow for error. Retention cannot misrepresent what was once present since it is part of what makes something present in the first place.

Another distinguishing mark of retention is that it operates in a transitive manner. That is, as any hyletic phase ceases to be actual, the phase first appears as retained, then the phase as it appeared in the original retention is retained, then the phase as it appeared in this second retention is retained, and so on. If p represents the content of a primal impression and *R* represents the retentional modification of this content, we get the following series: p, *R*(p), *R*(*R*(p)), *R*(*R*(*R*(p)))…. Without this transitivity, retention would merely yield a single continuum that increases in length—each phase would simply be added to a series whose mode of givenness would remain unchanged. But by operating transitively, each retention modifies a whole continuum, so that retention yields a continuum of continua.[214] This means that not only does the series of phases appear as *lengthening*, but also as *sinking* into the past. In principle the retentional continuum can continue indefinitely—one can imagine a consciousness aware of its whole life as a single, immediately given temporal object.[215] But for us the series is finite; at a certain

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[213] It should be noted that Husserl does assign memory a crucial role in time-constitution. While the original awareness of an object as temporally unfolding does not require memory, awareness of things as belonging to a single temporal order does. According to Husserl we are aware of a single, all-encompassing time in virtue of our awareness of being able to reproduce what has elapsed. Because we can reproduce what exceeds the reach of retention, we are aware of a temporal order extending indefinitely beyond the realm of what is immediately given. *PCIT*, 114/109. See also *APS*, 614/326.

[214] *PCIT*, 116/111.

[215] James Mensch, commenting on Augustine, makes an interesting point in this connection. On Mensch's reading of Augustine's concept of eternity, eternity means the co-presence to the mind of all moments of time. This means that retention, by making the immediate past co-present with the now, allows us constantly to experience "little fragments of eternity." *After Modernity: Husserlian Reflections on a Philosophical Tradition* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996), 33. On this view, to have infinite retention and, in the other direction, infinite (and fully determinate) protention, is precisely what it would mean to be conscious of eternity. One problem with such a conception of eternity is that it is counter-intuitive: while all of time would be present in the sense of being immediately given, it would not be present in the sense of being *now*—one would still experience things arising from the future and receding into the past. A more

point the original impression ceases to be retained and becomes absent.

The aspect of time-constitution that continuously furnishes new contents for retentional modification is primal impression. It is the source or origin of the multiplicity of phases through which a temporal object appears.[216] As opposed to retention, which continuously modifies each phase, in primal impression the new phase is not yet modified.[217] This new, unmodified phase is, as Husserl emphasizes, an ideal limit to the continuum of retentionally modified phases.[218] As a continuum, the series of phases given through retention is infinitely divisible, so that any segment of a phase, no matter how closely it borders the limit of primal impression, contains a retentionally modified element. Thus no phase is given through primal impression alone, but rather each new phase always contains a retained element.

Protention is also at work in the emergence of each new phase, though it is not easy to see exactly how—of the three dimensions of time-consciousness, protention is probably the one most difficult to understand. It is also largely neglected in Husserl's writings on time prior to the Bernau Manuscripts of 1917, where it finally receives serious attention. Insofar as protention concerns future phases and retention past phases, there is a certain symmetry between the two. It might be tempting to think that this symmetry extends to their manner of operation: whereas retention modifies phases such that they are given as more and more past, protention would modify phases such that they

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serious problem is that the idea of a consciousness with infinite retention and protention is counter-sensical. Since retention and protention are what make an object perceived, the idea of such a consciousness amounts to the idea of the perception of an infinite whole. But, as I remarked at the end of section 1.2.4, this is impossible. Perceiving *something* requires that it be identified; in the case of perceiving an infinite whole, identification can never be achieved as there will always remain more to be incorporated into the object.

[216] *PCIT*, 106/100.

[217] *PCIT*, 70/67.

[218] *PCIT*, 35/33, 41/40, 42/40, 70/67, 105/99.

are given as less and less future. Protention would be a "turned-around, forward-directed" retention.[219] But unlike retention, protention cannot be a modification of any actual phase, since it is only in primal impression that anything actual first arises. Instead, protention is a certain anticipation of future phases, though just as retention differs from memory in not being a full-fledged intentional act, so protention differs from expectation. Protention is not an act of expectation, but a more fundamental, automatic anticipation that makes acts possible by contributing to the original constitution of identity.

The content of this anticipation involves degrees of determinacy. At its most indeterminate level, the content of protention is a phase regarded merely as coming, or as about to emerge as now.[220] This is protention at its most pure, i.e. protention with content that is not motivated by past experience. The constant and automatic anticipation of a "new now" is not formed on the basis that new nows have arisen so far, but is instead an *a priori* orientation towards the future that makes possible anticipation based on past experience. But Husserl also describes protention as having various degrees of more determinate content as well.[221] The degree of determinacy would seem to depend on past experience. While hearing a child randomly banging keys on a piano, for example, future phases may be protended merely as piano tones; while hearing a familiar piano sonata, on the other hand, future phases may be protended also as having a determinate pitch. Without going into the issue here, it is worth remarking that this raises the question of how the higher-order constitution of full-fledged objects can, as Dieter Lohmar puts it,

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[219] Shaun Gallagher, *The Inordinance of Time* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998), 67. Husserl suggests this notion of protention in *Ideas* when he calls it "the precise counterpart" of retention and "the counter-direction of continuous changes." *ID*, 175/145, 195/164.
[220] *PCIT*, 54/52.
[221] *PCIT*, 55/53, 58/56.

"sink down" and influence the protentive dimension of the original constitution of identity.[222]

3.4 The Reflexivity of Constitution

3.4.1 Is Time-Consciousness Temporal?

So far the constitution of temporality has been described as a threefold activity occurring at the basement of consciousness, that is, at the level where hyletic data are constituted. The protentional and retentional aspects of this activity allow immediacy to exceed actuality, so that, contrary to Brentano's limitation of immediacy to the now, "to be conscious at all is to be in past, present and future 'at once.'"[223] But for Husserl consciousness is always in some sense reflexive, a view which further complicates his account of time-consciousness and forces him to introduce a non-object into the analysis.

Before entering into the problems self-consciousness introduces, it is worth asking why Husserl maintains that the appearing of anything always also appears. The reason is that it is a desideratum for his overall philosophical project. Husserl's aim is to make subjectivity, especially with regard to its epistemic achievements, appear to itself in full clarity. Only then is genuine science achieved, since science demands not merely a true, justified account of reality, but also insight into how it is that our rational activities can disclose the way things are in the first place.[224] For Husserl such insight is to be gained through phenomenological reflection. But reflection can only make explicit what is already implicit; if the constituting activity reflection seeks to grasp is not already, however obscurely, subject to awareness, it can never be seized upon and analysed.

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[222] Dieter Lohmar, "What Does Protention 'Protend'?" *Philosophy Today* 46 (2002): 162.
[223] David Carr, "The Future Perfect: Temporality and Priority in Husserl, Heidegger and Dilthey" in *Interpreting Husserl: Critical and Comparative Studies* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), 201.
[224] *EP* I, 13.

Hence the threefold constituting activity of time-consciousness must itself be constituted. This raises two questions. First, is the constitution of time itself temporal? Is the constitution of time itself something to be accounted for by the theory of time constitution? Second, is the constitution of time constituted by a further level of constitution, or is it somehow constituted by itself? Neither alternative seems appealing: the first invites an infinite regress, and the second seems inexplicable.

With regard to the first question, it is interesting to note that Husserl's initial response was an unambiguous yes—the temporality of time-consciousness is obvious.[225] This position seems correct, as even prior to reflection one has a sense of oneself as elapsing simultaneously with the world. Reflection confirms the temporality of consciousness: when we reflect on the experience of hearing an airplane passing overhead, for example, we see that the progression of its sound corresponds to a progression in hearing it. As the sound begins, I hear a plane approaching; then, as the sound reaches its highest intensity, I hear the plane directly overhead; finally, as the sound fades, I hear the plane retreating into the distance.

Yet, as Lotze argues, there is compelling reason to deny the temporality of time-consciousness:

> If the idea of the later *b* in fact merely followed on that of the earlier *a*, then a change of ideas would indeed take place, but there would still be no idea of this change. There would be a lapse of time, but not an appearance of such change to any one. In order [for there to be] a comparison in which *b* shall be known as the later it is necessary in turn that the two presentations of *a* and *b* should be objects, throughout simultaneous, of a relating knowledge, which, itself completely indivisible, holds them together in a single indivisible act.[226]

Lotze here expresses the intuitive notion that if time-consciousness were temporal, then

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[225] *PCIT*, 24/22, 230/222.

[226] Hermann Lotze, *Metaphysic in Three Books: Ontology, Cosmology, and Psychology*, trans. Bernard Bosanquet (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1887), 346-347. Husserl presents this argument at *PCIT*, 21/19.

as each phase of consciousness became past and ceased to exist, the corresponding phase of the object would disappear from view.[227] Thus if hearing the plane passing overhead were temporal, only the momentary sound corresponding to the momentary actual phase of consciousness could be heard, with the result that instead of hearing a plane passing, again and again I would momentarily hear a sound. But since we are aware of temporal objects, consciousness of them must have no temporal extension. Consciousness must instead present a temporal object all at once.

This argument rests on the plausible assumption that only a consciousness that presently exists can make anything appear. But with this assumption consciousness is implicitly taken to be part of the world it constitutes; that is, consciousness is taken to have the same temporal relations to objects as objects have to each other. Thus an existing consciousness must, like an existing object, exist *now*, or simultaneously with the now-phase of objects. But one can grant that only an existing consciousness can constitute something without making the further claim that this consciousness exists simultaneously with the now-phase of objects. This can be done by granting consciousness a transcendental status in relation to its objects: while a transcendental consciousness must certainly exist in order to constitute temporal objects, it would be a mistake to locate it within the temporal order it constitutes. To do so would be to fail to appreciate its transcendental status.

At the time of his initial rejection of Lotze's view that time-consciousness must be atemporal, Husserl had not yet arrived at his transcendental conception of consciousness. Whether and in what sense such a consciousness is temporal is, as we shall see, a difficult problem. This problem having not yet arisen, Husserl confidently

[227] *PCIT*, 21/20.

asserts the temporality of time-consciousness based on the fact that consciousness appears as temporal in reflection.[228] But here what appears is a constituted consciousness, which leaves unresolved the temporal status of consciousness as *constituting*. It is only when Husserl considers self-consciousness more carefully that he will discover that the temporality of time-consciousness is far from evident after all.

3.4.2 The Self-Constitution of an Absolute Consciousness

Three basic alternatives offer themselves with regard to the question of whether every appearing of an object itself also appears. One is to deny it, thereby positing an "unconscious consciousness," that is, a consciousness that is not itself an object of consciousness. As explained above, this is an option Husserl rejects.[229] But this immediately invites an infinite regress in which every consciousness of the *n*th order is given through a consciousness of the order $n + 1$. Such a regress is unacceptable both because it is unexplanatory and because no such regress is given—though I *can* turn my regard towards my consciousness, and then to my regarding, and so on, the object of my awareness is not actually given through an in infinite series of reflections. This leaves only the third alternative, which is that there is a consciousness that appears not through any further consciousness, but through itself. This is the alternative Brentano opts for with his claim that every intentional experience has, in addition to its primary object, itself as a secondary object.[230] Although Husserl does not acknowledge it, his own theory of self-consciousness relies on the same distinction, though Husserl develops it much

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[228] *PCIT*, 24/22.
[229] It is worth mentioning that Husserl does consider this option in *PCIT*, 394/382**.**
[230] Franz Brentano, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, trans. Antos C. Rancurello, D.B. Terrell and Linda L. McAlister (New York: Routledge, 1973) , 128.

more elaborately and in terms of time.[231]

Husserl's basic claim is that at the deepest level of constitution there occurs a retentional/impressional/protentional constitution not only of hyletic data, but—"as shocking (when not initially even absurd) as it may seem"—of this constituting activity itself.[232] This claim needs to be distinguished from another of Husserl's claims pertaining to self-consciousness, which is that the threefold operation that constitutes hyletic data also constitutes intentional experiences. Wishing for something, for example, is a temporal occurrence, and here too past phases remain in the field of presence after they have ceased to exist.[233] Thus Husserl's claim is that in addition to constituting hyletic data and acts, the threefold operation of time-consciousness also constitutes itself. It is thus an absolute consciousness, or a consciousness requiring no additional consciousness for its constitution. Husserl calls this absolute consciousness a "flow." The self-constitution of the flow occurs through a unique kind of intentionality Husserl calls *Längsintentionalität*, a term Brough translates as "horizontal intentionality." What makes this intentionality peculiar and difficult to fathom is that it is non-objectivating. That is, the constitution of time does not appear to itself as an object, i.e. as an identity through difference. It is only through the objectivating activity of *Querintentionalität*, which Brough translates as "transverse intentionality," that objects appear.[234]

Brough's translation of *Längsintentionalität* as "horizontal intentionality" reflects

[231] Kortooms, 153.
[232] *PCIT*, 84/80.
[233] *PCIT*, 112/107.
[234] *PCIT*, 87/83.

Husserl's conception of the flow as a linear continuum.[235] Each phase of this continuum "transversely" constitutes a temporal object through primal impression, retention and protention of the object's phases. The continuum constitutes itself "horizontally" by retaining its own post-actual phases and by protending pre-actual ones. Like the retention of phases of a temporal object, the self-retention of absolute consciousness functions transitively: because each phase retains the most immediate post-actual phase, each phase retains a series of phases.[236]

Husserl identifies the self-constituting activity of the absolute flow as the ultimate origin of time in the sense that it is what makes possible the constitution of objects as temporal. What makes it possible for object-phases that are no longer actual to remain in the field of presence is that the appearing of these phases is retained. Horizontal intentionality thus has a certain explanatory priority over transverse intentionality. However, this priority does not mean that horizontal intentionality could occur apart from its transverse counterpart. The two intentionalities are inseparable elements of a single activity of constitution; they are "interwoven… like two sides of the same thing."[237] With the notion of a horizontal dimension to time-constitution, Husserl is able to acknowledge a regress involved in self-consciousness while rendering this regress innocuous by, as it were, turning it sideways. Instead of a vertical regress of levels of consciousness, there is a horizontal regress within a single level.

3.5 The Origin of Time and the Limits of Reflection

In addition to accounting for a total self-consciousness, Husserl's theory of self-constitution also responds to the skeptical challenge to reflection that threatens the

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[235] *PCIT*, 121/117.
[236] *PCIT*, 85/81, 122/118.
[237] *PCIT*, 87/83.

possibility of phenomenology. When we reflect on consciousness of an object, consciousness is given as having already been underway prior to being reflected upon.[238] This raises the question of whether reflection misrepresents consciousness as it was originally occurring. Husserl responds by first pointing out that doubt is legitimate only when what is posited exceeds what is given.[239] But because consciousness retains itself, consciousness that is no longer actual is nevertheless still immediately given, so that reflection can seize upon consciousness as it originally occurs. Thus phenomenological reflection does not posit more than what is given and is therefore immune to doubt. "All the objections that have been raised against the method of reflection are explained on the basis of ignorance of the essential constitution of consciousness."[240]

One problem with this argument is that it seems to be circular. Presumably the claim that consciousness retains itself is justified by what is given to reflection, but it is just the reliability of reflection that is in doubt. To argue for the reliability of reflection based on what is given to reflection is to presuppose what one is trying to show. Before addressing this problem, however, I would like first to consider whether Husserl's theory of self-constitution can be phenomenologically justified at all. Is the theory verified by what is intuitively given in reflection? Or is it rather the case that Husserl's theory of an absolute consciousness is a mere construction? It may be a good construction in the sense that it is inferred as the best explanation for what is actually given, but even so it would violate the first rule of Husserl's phenomenological method, which is to accept as valid only what is intuitively given itself. In theorizing about an absolute consciousness, perhaps Husserl is guilty of the same sort of "mythologizing" he criticizes in Kant's

[238] *ID*, 175/145.
[239] *PCIT*, 363/352.
[240] *PCIT*, 124/120.

philosophy.[241]

Reason to think that this is indeed the case arises when we try to compare Husserl's account of absolute consciousness with the phenomenological evidence. Presently there is a fan on my desk emitting a steady hum. Turning my attention to this sound, I can simply note characteristics of the sound, such as that it is steady, that its intensity oscillates slightly and at regular intervals, and so on. Shifting into an attitude of phenomenological reflection, I can also focus on how the sound is given, noting, for example, that as each new phase of the sound appears as now, the previous phase does not disappear, but appears as just past and as continuous with the now-phase. The appearing of the sound is given as simultaneous with the sound that appears; corresponding to each new phase of the sound is a phase of the appearing of the whole sound.[242]

In order to verify Husserl's theory of the self-constitution of consciousness, it would be natural to scrutinize the appearing of the sound, asking if each phase of the appearing retains the previous one. But unfortunately this is the wrong place to look. In reflecting on the appearing of the sound, I am aware that I am reflecting. In other words, I am aware that the appearing of the sound is itself appearing. This means that the appearing of the sound is not the constituting consciousness at issue in Husserl's theory of self-constitution; instead, it is already constituted by this consciousness. Whereas the appearing of the sound is consciousness as *act*, what we are after is consciousness as *flow*. How can we get this latter consciousness into our reflective regard? Husserl himself struggles with this problem:

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[241] *CR,* 114-115/116.
[242] *PCIT*, 117/112.

> Every temporal appearance, after phenomenological reduction, dissolves into such a flow. But I cannot perceive in turn the consciousness itself into which all this is dissolved. For this new percept would again be something temporal that points back to a constituting consciousness of a similar sort, and so *in infinitum*.[243]

This continually frustrated attempt to get constituting consciousness into view results not from any lack of phenomenological acuity, but rather from the fact that objectivation is essentially a dyadic, non-reflexive relation.

It seems then that, as a matter of principle, constituting consciousness lies beyond the limits of reflection. Without the possibility of a reflective intuition of constituting consciousness, the question arises of whether it can be known at all. Yet for Husserl the question is not *whether* constituting consciousness can be known, but rather how it in fact is known: "How do I come to know about the constituting flow?"[244] This is reminiscent of Husserl's approach to knowledge. Husserl's leading question is not whether knowledge is possible, but rather how it is possible. For Husserl an answer to the latter question is essential for genuine science. The issue of knowledge is significant here since understanding the constituting flow would be the crowning achievement in Husserl's transcendental account of the possibility of knowledge. As the ultimate origin of the constituted world, the activity of the constituting flow is what first makes it possible for the subject to transcend itself in grasping the object. Thus the ultimate success of Husserl's project depends on the possibility of a phenomenological account of constituting activity, or of the elusive consciousness at work in phenomenological analysis.

Of course it is one thing to require something to be true and another to show that it is so. Does the impossibility of seizing upon constituting activity in reflection mean

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[243] *PCIT*, 116/111.
[244] *PCIT*, 116/111.

that any account of this activity cannot be phenomenologically verified? The first thing to note here is that the impossibility of seizing upon constituting activity in reflection is in fact *entailed* by Husserl's theory of self-constitution. On this theory, awareness of the constituting flow is non-objectivating. Since reflection objectivates, any reflective awareness is *ipso facto* not awareness of the flow. The question then becomes: does Husserl's theory of self-constitution entail its own unverifiability?

We can see that it does not by more carefully considering what occurs when we try to grasp constituting activity in reflection. Here we can distinguish (1) the initial recognition of reflected consciousness as different from constituting consciousness, (2) a shifting of reflective regard, and (3) the recognition of what consequently appears as different from what we intended to grasp.[245] With regard to (1), how do we recognize that the consciousness grasped in reflection is different from the second-order consciousness that makes it appear? It is not a matter of inference, as if reflected consciousness were first given without reference to its own appearing in a further consciousness and then were given as such after the thought that anything that appears must do so in virtue of an appearing. Nor does reflected consciousness merely *indicate* its own appearing in a further consciousness; that is, it is not that reflected consciousness, on the basis of past association, brings to mind a further consciousness that is absent. Instead, both reflected consciousness and its own appearing are given; both are "there." What appears and its appearing are given together as inseparable elements of consciousness. But, as Husserl claims, they are not given in the same way. When I reflect on consciousness, it is given as an object, as an identity that persists through a continuum of phases. Its own appearing in a further consciousness, on the other hand, is

[245] *PCIT*, 132/129.

not given as an object. This means that although constituting activity is given in a marginal way, it is not given as a marginal object, i.e. as something in the background of the field of what appears.[246]

In this way the appearing of the sound manifests itself as different from its own appearing. This difference has a dynamic character. As the appearing of the sound persists, it continues to show itself as appearing, and hence as different from a further consciousness—the difference is maintained. In other words, reflected consciousness appears not merely as different from its appearing, but as "differentiated" from it.[247]

But if constituting activity is not given as an object, what is it given as? This question leads to an impasse, since not to be given as an object means not to be given as *anything*. But is this not incoherent? How can something be given such that *something* is not given? I will pursue the issue of coherence a little later on, for now sticking to phenomenological description. The difference between objectivated consciousness and non-objectivated consciousness can aptly be described as a difference between what changes in the life of consciousness and that which abides.[248] On the one hand, consciousness is continually new: again and again new episodes, new appearings, arise and sink into the past. On the other hand, there is a field of presence that never sinks into the past. It remains present, but not in the same way that a constituted object remains present if we hold it in view. "Abiding" is meant to capture the peculiar presence of the field of presence. The idea of the now as a window through which moments pass attests to awareness of a difference between this abiding field and the flux of experiences. But

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[246] *PCIT*, 133/129-130.
[247] *PCIT*, 132/129.
[248] Brough, "The Emergence of an Absolute Consciousness in Husserl's Early Writings on Time-Consciousness," 316.

one must be wary of the expression "field of presence," since, as a noun phrase, it might mislead one into taking constituting activity as a sort of thing, and hence as something objectivated. What talk of a field of presence is meant to point out is rather non-objectivated, constituting activity, and the abiding character of this activity pertains to its manner. That is, constituting activity makes things appear retentionally, impressionally and protentionally, so that no matter what appears, it always appears as not-yet, then as now, and finally as no-longer.[249]

So far we have considered the first of the three moments involved in attempting to seize upon constituting activity in reflection. Analysis of the second moment, the focusing of one's regard away from consciousness that appears and towards its own appearing, introduces the problem of the temporality of constituting activity. The consciousness I reflect upon appears as happening now—the appearing of the sound appears as presently unfolding simultaneously with the sound.[250] But where is the appearing of the appearing? In order to bring it into my reflective regard, it must be sought at some point in the temporal field of what is given to this regard. Certainly it is not to be found in the past, nor is it to be found in the future. Instead it too seems to be happening now. Thus in order to seize upon it in reflection, I shift my regard away from the appearing of the sound and towards the formerly non-objectivated second-order appearing, which I take to be found in a previously hidden, non-objectivated now. In turning my regard to this previously hidden now, I take it as more genuinely now, or as closer to the actual present, than the appearing of the sound. Thus the appearing of the sound is no longer taken to be now, but instead comes to be regarded as just past in

[249] *PCIT*, 118/114.
[250] *PCIT*, 117-118/113.

relation to the consciousness I seek to grasp.[251] This leads us to the third moment of the process, in which I recognize that what my reflection settles upon is not what I sought, since here again objectivating awareness of reflected consciousness is accompanied by non-objectivating awareness of its appearing. Indeed the whole movement of reflection from the first-order to the second-order appearing was accompanied by a non-objectivating awareness of this very movement.

There are two main ways to interpret what occurs here. On what I will call the one-dimensional theory of consciousness, consciousness is a continuous series of phases that unfolds in the same time as its objects. Because the difference between reflecting and reflected consciousness requires that there be a temporal interval between them, short of this interval phases of reflecting consciousness are inaccessible to reflection and can only appear in a non-objectivating way. Once this interval is reached, consciousness becomes available to reflection. On this one dimensional picture, the limit of reflection—the impossibility of reflectively seizing upon reflecting—results from the fact that reflection must occur *after* what it reflects upon. Yet there is a sense in which the limit of reflection is porous: although reflecting consciousness cannot be reflected upon as it occurs, it does emerge for a new, subsequent act of reflection. In this way what lies beyond the limit of reflection continually crosses over into the scope of reflection.

A two-dimensional theory of consciousness interprets things differently. The basic idea of such a theory is that constituting does not belong to the same temporal order as what is constituted. On one version of this view, constituting consciousness always has an act-character; that is, it is at one time a perceiving, at another an imagining, and so on. Thus when reflection occurs constituting consciousness is a reflecting, and this

[251] *ID*, 175/145.

reflecting is aware of itself in a non-objectivating way. But since constituting activity does not occur within the constituted order, what is reflected upon is not past in relation to reflecting, and neither is it simultaneous. However, there is an important complication here: only the *actual* moment of constituting activity is excluded from the constituted order. Once a moment of this activity is no longer actual, it is given to the actual moment as simultaneous with what has been constituted. In this sense constituting activity continually "inserts itself" into time.[252] On this version of the two-dimensional picture, the limit of reflection results not from a temporal difference between reflecting and reflected consciousness, but rather from an ontological one. Hence although here too reflecting consciousness continually emerges into the scope of reflection from beyond the limit, this is a passage from a non-time into time, rather than from present to past.

On a second version of the two-dimensional view, the actual moment of constituting activity consists of two aspects, one which belongs to the constituted temporal order and one which does not. Whereas the former aspect has an act-character, the latter is simply a non-objectivating awareness of the former aspect as well as of itself. Thus when reflection occurs, constituting consciousness is both a presently occurring reflecting and an awareness of the reflecting that occurs beyond the constituted temporal order. On this view, constituting consciousness traverses the limit of reflection both temporally and ontologically: the aspect of constituting activity occurring now becomes available to reflection by becoming past, and the aspect occurring on the level of flow becomes available by appearing as simultaneous with a corresponding act.

In the next section I will explain why Husserl is committed to the first version of the two dimensional view. For now I want to point out that non-objectivating awareness

[252] *PCIT*, 124/120.

allows for access to consciousness in the midst of its constituting activity—the limit of reflection is not a limit for consciousness. Of course this access must always be oblique: constituting activity can only be given along with what is constituted, and it can only be given in a uniquely marginal way. Non-objectivating awareness of constituting activity also promises a way out of the circularity of Husserl's response to the skeptical challenge to reflection. The claim that consciousness makes itself available to reflection by retaining itself would be justified not by the content of a reflection but rather by non-objectivating self-awareness. Thus Husserl can appeal to self-retention to secure the reliability of reflection without presupposing this very reliability. But even if non-objectivating awareness makes constituting activity accessible, the question remains of whether Husserl's theory of the self-constitution of this activity is accurate. Attempting to answer this question leads to an encounter with the thought-limit explored in Chapter One, the limit of conception.

3.6 The Origin of Time and the Limits of Conception

The idea that constituting activity constitutes itself through self-retention entails that this activity occurs serially. Constitution occurs as a continuous series, each actual phase of which retains phases that are no longer actual. But when we attempt to verify this claim phenomenologically, a problem immediately arises: because constituting activity is given without being objectivated, nothing appears that could belong to such a series. For consciousness originally to appear to itself in a non-objectivating manner means that it is given as a non-object—in more playful terms, it appears as a no-thing, a reality to which the inherent-property/substratum distinction does not apply. As a non-object, constituting activity is of course not given as a temporal object. Temporal objects

can appear in two ways: as something that persists through change or constancy, or as the change or constancy itself.[253] In aging, for example, one can identify not only the person who grows older, but also the process of growing old—one can fear or welcome aging, see it manifest itself more or less rapidly, and divide it into stages. Thus constituting activity is originally given neither as something that persists through time nor as something filling time. But it would seem that to be given as a serial activity constituting consciousness would have to be given as a temporal object of the latter kind.

There is thus an inner tension in Husserl's conception of constituting activity as a serial non-object. Given the exploratory nature of *PCIT*, it is worth emphasizing that Husserl indeed maintains the seriality and the non-objectivity of constituting activity together; it is not that he thinks of it as serial at some times and as a non-object at others. This is shown clearly in the following passages:

> Phases of experience and continuous series of phases exist in the flow. But such a phase is nothing that persists, any more than a continuous series of such phases is.[254]

> Now if we consider the *constituting* phenomena in comparison with the phenomena just discussed, we find a *flow*, and each phase of this flow is a *continuity of adumbrations*. But as a matter of principle, no phase of this flow can be expanded into a continuous succession; and therefore the flow cannot be conceived as so transformed that this phase would be extended in identity with itself. Quite to the contrary, we necessarily find a flow of continuous "change"; and this change has the absurd character that it flows precisely as it flows and can flow neither "faster" nor "slower." If that is the case, then any object that changes is missing here; and since "something" runs its course in every process, no process is in question. There is nothing here that changes, and for that reason it also makes no sense to speak of something that endures. It is therefore nonsensical to want to find something here that remains unchanged for even an instant during the course of its duration.[255]

In both passages Husserl begins with the claim that the absolute flow consists of a series of phases, or that constitution occurs serially. And in both passages Husserl goes on to

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[253] *PCIT*, 380/369.
[254] *PCIT*, 118/113.
[255] *PCIT*, 78/74. This passage is a condensed version of a train of thought found in Supplementary Text No. 54, 379-381/368-370.

state that it is not a temporal object. Since a non-object is not something that persists, no phase of the flow can persist. And since a non-object is not a change or process, no phase of the flow can be expanded or extended—that is, no phase can fill time. This means that unlike a constituted temporal series, in which each member has a duration—even if infinitesimally short—the members of the constituting series have no duration whatsoever. The turnover of constituting phases into and out of actuality is what could be called a pure change, that is, a change without anything that changes. Since a rate of change is determined by the number of events that occur over a given time, and since the phases of the flow occupy no time, the rate of the flow's pure change, as Husserl notes, can neither be sped up nor slowed down. This suggests, as McLure observes, that the flow does have a rate of change.[256] But even this must be denied, since without duration there can be no question of how many events occur in a given duration.

Husserl's conception of the origin of time seems to be inconsistent. On the one hand, it functions serially; on the other, it is a non-object, and so involves nothing that could be serially related. A way out of this dilemma is provided by the one-dimensional theory of consciousness. The dilemma depends on assuming that constituting activity *really is* a non-object, and hence that it is a dimension of consciousness distinct from the series of immanent objects. As Sokolowski puts it, "The experiencing of inner objects (sensed qualities and acts) is not itself an inner object. It stands outside the flow of inner objects…. It is not a member of their series."[257] Sokolowski draws this conclusion from the fact that the constituting flow is the "frame" for inner objects, or that in virtue of

[256] McLure, 127.
[257] Sokolowski, *Husserlian Meditations* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 133.

which they are given.[258] However, this inference does not hold, since, as Mensch points out, phenomenological analyses of time-consciousness are open to different ontological interpretations.[259] Thus the fact that constituting consciousness does not appear as a member of a series it is in the midst of constituting does not mean that it is not, as the one-dimensional theory holds, in fact a member.

Thus interpreted, constituting consciousness is a temporal series, but on account of the temporal interval required for reflective self-awareness, it is a series that must appear to itself as a non-object within this interval. The dilemma between seriality and non-objectivity is solved by reducing the latter to mere appearance. But this solution is unavailable to Husserl since for him consciousness cannot wholly be one more process unfolding in objective time. If it were, it would not have the ontological priority needed to secure the possibility of knowledge. Rather than belonging to a pre-existing temporal order, consciousness must constitute it, i.e. it must be that in virtue of which there is an objective temporal order at all. Objects can present themselves as they truly are because an object is nothing more than a constituted unity, as opposed to being a hidden cause acting on consciousness in a shared, objective time.

Hence Husserl is committed to a two-dimensional theory of consciousness; he cannot resolve the tension between the seriality and non-objectivity of constituting consciousness by abandoning the latter. His basic epistemological orientation also precludes resolving the tension by abandoning the former. For Husserl genuine science requires that the subject gain insight into itself as the constituting origin of the world. An important aspect of the notion of a subject, and one that can be traced back to Locke, is

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[258] Sokolowski, 134.
[259] Mensch, *After Modernity*, 10.

the idea of the mind as a stream of experiences.[260] Hence if the origin of the world lies in subjectivity, it must lie in some sort of a series. Furthermore, for Husserl the constituting origin of things must be a *self-conscious* subject. As explained earlier, Husserl is able to maintain a total self-consciousness without falling into a vicious regress by appealing to a non-objectivating, horizontal intentionality. Since such an intentionality functions serially, Husserl requires the seriality of constituting activity in order to maintain its self-presence.[261]

Without the option of giving up either the seriality of constitution or its non-objectivity, Husserl is, as it were, stuck with both. Now, it might be thought that the idea of a serial non-object is simply a contradiction: as serial, the origin of time consists of serially related objects or unities; as a non-object, it does not consist of objects or unities. Husserl's remark that "the change is not a change" enforces the impression that we are dealing with a contradiction here.[262] But contradiction is avoided since "change" is equivocal in this context: constituting activity is a change in a peculiar sense proper to its non-objectivity, and it is not a change in the usual sense, i.e. as a change of something. Similarly, constituting activity is temporal, but not in the usual sense of involving relations of succession and simultaneity. Instead it is temporal in a sense proper to its non-objectivity—it is "quasi-temporal."[263] The seriality of constituting activity does not contradict its non-objectivity, since it is not seriality in any ordinary sense, i.e. it does not involve temporal relations between objects.

The air of contradiction that surrounds Husserl's notion of the origin of time as a

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[260] Gallagher, *The Inordinance of Time*, 8.
[261] One indication of the difficulty of Husserl's position is that, when considered in related to constituted objects, constituting activity must also be described as a "being-all-at-once" (*Zugleich*). *PCIT*, 117/112. We saw this earlier in section 3.3.2 with regard to retention, protention and primal impression.
[262] *PCIT*, 381/370.
[263] *PCIT*, 393/381.

serial non-object results from the fact that any description of a non-object runs counter to the objectivating nature of language. Because language picks out entities as this or that, any attempt to describe a non-object must use terms in a non-literal way. This is the challenge Husserl expresses when, faced with the task of describing constituting activity, he remarks that "for all this, we lack names."[264] Husserl responds to the challenge by using metaphor—as he emphasizes, his description of constituting activity as a "flow" is a metaphorical one.[265] Indeed it must be a metaphor, since any positive description of the nature of constituting activity cannot be true literally. Were such a description literally true, then the non-object would have the properties the description ascribes to it, in which case it would have to be an object. This is significant for the theory of metaphor since it means that any metaphor true of a non-object is one irreducible to literal language. Thus if the flow-metaphor succeeds in revealing the nature of absolute consciousness, it supports the position that metaphor is cognitively significant, as opposed to being merely a stylistic ornament.[266]

How then how does the flow-metaphor work? It is perhaps natural to take the metaphor as pointing out a similarity between constituting activity and something that *flows by*, a river being the most obvious example. Observed from a point on its shore, each phase of a river steadily approaches, arrives at a point fixed by the observer's gaze, and then recedes into the distance. Similarly, each phase of absolute consciousness would be protentionally experienced as becoming less and less future, then as actual

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[264] *PCIT*, 79/75. It is interesting to compare Husserl's predicament in describing absolute consciousness with Anselm's predicament in referring to nothing. In both cases, the objectivating nature of intentionality is such as to bring to mind something other than what the speaker intends. In Husserl's case, absolute consciousness resists description since it lacks the object/inherent property structure essential to the noema. In the cases of Augustine and Anselm, the very meaningfulness of "non-being" entails that, contrary to the speaker's intention, it motivates the thought of an entity.

[265] *PCIT*, 79/75.

[266] McLure, 116.

through a primal self-impression, and then would be retentionally experienced as becoming more and more past. Such an understanding of the metaphor is mistaken, however, since it mistakes the constituted dimension of consciousness for the constituting one. While constituted consciousness, the series of immanent objects, is made up of temporal phases that are experienced as passing from future to past through the present, constituting activity is not. It does not pass, but is rather that in virtue of which temporal objects pass. The true meaning of the flow-metaphor is revealed by considering how it does this.

Although constituting consciousness is a perpetual flux, the fact that each new phase repeats the same threefold operation gives to the flux a constancy of function. That is, absolute consciousness is always a primal impression of a now-phase of an immanent object, a retention of a series of past phases of the object, and a protention of future phases. (As self-constituting, it is always also a retention of its own post-actual phases and a protention of pre-actual ones.) The result of this constancy of function is the experience of an abiding form in the passage of immanent objects: new phases constantly arrive, but since each one arrives and passes away in the same manner, one experiences a field of presence with an unchanging threefold structure.[267] In this way absolute consciousness produces a sameness of form through its production of constant difference, and herein lies the true meaning of the flow-metaphor. Rather than portraying absolute consciousness as something that flows by, the metaphor is meant to portray absolute consciousness as a *flowing*.[268] The image of a fountain captures the metaphor more vividly than does the image of a river: again and again water is sent arching up and

[267] *PCIT*, 118/114.
[268] McClure, 123.

splashes back down, and because the water is always expelled in the same manner—that is, with the same pressure and in the same direction—the fountain exhibits a constant form. Like the flowing of a fountain, absolute consciousness produces a stable form by producing new moments in an unchanging manner.

But there is also a crucial difference between the flowing of a fountain and the constituting activity of absolute consciousness, which is that only the former is a temporal process. Whereas the flowing of a fountain is a constituted temporal object, the activity of absolute consciousness is not an object. Its phases have no duration and do not succeed each other in time. Thus although the flow-metaphor directs attention to what constituting activity *does*, it cannot in principle enable cognition of what this activity *is*. In other words, the metaphor of flow can only reveal the relational properties of constituting activity, as opposed to any intrinsic ones. This of course is no shortcoming of the metaphor, since, as a non-object, the flow has no intrinsic properties. It is a constituting of temporal objects and of itself, with nothing over and above the constituting that could be identified as that which constitutes. Thus the nature of the flow is exhausted by its relations; its self-constitution is a matter of relations without relata.

In the first chapter we saw that the non-existence of the world is inconceivable in the sense that it is a thought precluded by the object/property structure of the noema. Now we are in a position to appreciate that, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, Husserl's idea of constituting activity as a serial non-object is, taken on its own, inconceivable in the same sense. That is, although the flow can be conceived in relation to constituted objects—i.e. as that which constitutes them—it cannot be conceived in isolation, since there is nothing in it that can be identified. We thus find ourselves in a remarkable

situation vis-à-vis the constituting flow: unlike the non-existence of the world, which is an inconceivable counter-factual, here we have something inconceivable that is not only actual, but that is responsible for the consciousness of all actuality. What's more, on Husserl's view this inconceivable actuality appears to itself, so that subjectivity involves an element of which we are aware but which nevertheless cannot be grasped.

Husserl acknowledges that the constituting flow is only conceivable in relation to what it constitutes when he remarks that it can only be described "in conformity with what is constituted."[269] The flow offers no *thing*, no object to be described. But as that which constitutes temporal objects, it can be described as having a corresponding structure—to each phase of the constituted object, there corresponds a retentional/impressional/protentional "phase" of the flow. Since the flow is not a temporal object, this correspondence is not temporal. Moments of the flow do not occur simultaneously with what it constitutes; instead each moment "belongs to" a phase of what is constituted.[270]

The inconceivability of the flow apart from what it constitutes is also revealed by Husserl's negative descriptions of it: it is *not* a change, not a process, not something in immanent time.[271] Even the positive description of absolute consciousness as "quasi-temporal" boils down to a negative notion. For what does "quasi-temporal" really mean?[272] It means first that absolute consciousness is *not* temporal in the same way that constituted objects are. That is, unlike constituted objects, constituting phases are not temporally extended and hence are not related in terms of before and after. But without

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[269] *PCIT*, 79/75.
[270] *PCIT*, 382/370-371.
[271] *PCIT,* 78/74, 117/112, 381/370.
[272] Gallagher, 67.

the possibility of being so related, what is left to the notion of a serial activity? "Quasi-temporal" thus does not tell us what absolute consciousness is, but instead *poses a challenge for thought*, namely the challenge of conceiving of a temporal series that involves no duration, or, more generally, of conceiving of something that is not an object. And as I argued in the first chapter, Husserl himself helps to show why this is impossible. Like Anselm's "quasi-something" then, Husserl's positive descriptions of an absolute, constituting consciousness as quasi-temporal and as a flow dissolve upon analysis into gestures towards the inconceivable. In Anselm's case, this is nothing; in Husserl's, it is the origin of time.

3.7 The Interpretations of Brough and Zahavi

Above I argued that the one-dimensional theory of consciousness, as realist, is inconsistent with Husserl's idealist theory of knowledge. It remains to be shown which version of the two-dimensional theory is the best interpretation of Husserl's thought in *PCIT*. This question coincides with a central issue in the literature on *PCIT*, which is whether Husserl's distinction between immanent temporal objects and a self-constituting absolute flow amounts to an ontological distinction between two levels of consciousness. Brough and Zahavi offer what seem to be competing answers: on Brough's reading of Husserl, the absolute flow and the series of immanent objects are two distinct strata, whereas for Zahavi they are merely different ways in which a single stratum appears to itself. In this section will argue that both Brough and Zahavi confuse the claim that consciousness has two distinct ontological dimensions with the claim that such a distinction applies to *constituting* consciousness alone. Recognizing this confusion reveals the truth in both interpretations: while Brough is right in taking act and flow as

distinct ontological dimensions, Zahavi is right in maintaining the first version of the two dimensional theory, according to which there is no distinction within constituting activity between act and flow.

Brough takes time-consciousness to consist of two distinct layers or strata. One stratum consists of immanent objects, i.e. hyletic data and acts. Here temporal predicates can straightforwardly be applied: hyletic data and acts, like the objects they make appear, endure and succeed one another. With the discovery that hyletic data and acts are themselves constituted, Husserl is led to posit as a second stratum the flow of absolute consciousness. This stratum constitutes itself through horizontal intentionality and constitutes the stratum of immanent objects through transverse intentionality.[273] Although this second and ultimate stratum of constitution is a continuum of phases, temporal predicates cannot straightforwardly be applied to it. This is because it is a stream that does not itself appear in the immanent stream of objects that it constitutes. Hence whereas an act can be now, past or future, a phase of the flow can only be described as actual, post-actual or not-yet-actual.[274] Hence for Brough any experience admits of a threefold distinction: the object intended (e.g. the barking of a dog), the act of intending the object (hearing the barking), and the flow through which both object and act appear. If, while hearing the dog barking, I shift my focus to my hearing, what eludes my objectivating regard is (1) the present act of reflecting on my hearing, and (2) an ultimate dimension of flow through which I am aware of this act.

Brough offers both textual and phenomenological evidence for his interpretation. As textual evidence, he cites Husserl's distinction between three different levels of

[273] Brough, "The Emergence of an Absolute Consciousness in Husserl's Early Writings on Time Consciousness," 318-319.
[274] Ibid., 323.

experience: the things belonging to objective time, the immanent unities of pre-objective time, and the time-constituting flow.[275] According to Brough, the fact that Husserl describes transverse intentionality as "vertical" also indicates that the absolute flow belongs to a different dimension than the acts it intends.[276] As phenomenological evidence, Brough appeals to a distinction between awareness of one's consciousness as changing and awareness of it as abiding: "there is a kind of fissure between my acts, my sensory experiences, and so on, and the marginal awareness of them that I continually possess. Perhaps this gap is best represented by the implicitly recognized *abiding* character of the life of consciousness itself over against the implicitly recognized *transitory* character of any one act of consciousness or state of mind."[277] As explained earlier, what abides is the form of the flow, or the way immanent objects are given. Brough takes this abiding structure to pertain to a level of constitution distinct from acts.

One objection to Brough's picture of time-consciousness comes from J. Claude Evans. Evans, who assumes Brough's interpretation in his argument that absolute consciousness is a fiction, writes:

> [Brough's interpretation] would mean that to retend the past phase of an event in the world would be *to retend the just-past primal impression of the just-past perceiving of the just past phase of the event*. The retending phase of the absolute flow would "look through" the retended phase of the flow to the retended past phase of the perceiving and in turn through it to the past phase of the event.[278]

As Evans sees it, if there really were an absolute consciousness, one would normally be focused on one's experience of the world, rather than on the world itself. In virtue of the self-retention of the flow, I would "look" at my hearing of the dog barking, and would

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[275] Ibid., 314.
[276] Ibid., 318-319.
[277] Ibid., 316.
[278] J. Claude Evans, "The Myth of Absolute Consciousness," *Crises in Continental Philosophy*, ed. Arleen B. Dallery, Charles E. Scott and P. Holley Roberts (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990): 40.

only be aware of the barking "in turn," i.e. the latter would only appear to me obliquely. But normally things are the other way around: I am focused on the barking, and am only aware of my hearing in a marginal way. Evans diagnoses the problem as a "prejudice in favour of immanence," which leads Husserl to turn "one's intentional experience of the world into one's awareness of oneself as experiencing the world, rather than viewing one's self-awareness as being marginal to one's experience of the world."[279]

But Evans' objection is weak. He seems to claim that the existence of an absolute consciousness beyond the level of acts would mean that acts are always explicitly regarded. But from Husserl's claim that the flow, through its self-constitution, *constitutes* both acts and their objects, this does not follow. The range of constituted objects extends well beyond the range of objects of attention, so that Husserl can consistently maintain both that acts are constituted and that normally one has only a marginal awareness of them.

Zahavi provides a much stronger argument against the phenomenological accuracy of Brough's interpretation. If Brough were right, Zahavi reasons, we should be able to discern the following in reflecting on the perception of a black billiard ball:

> (1) the black billiard ball is given as a transcendent object; (2) the act of reflection is prereflectively given as an inner object; (3) the act of perception is reflectively given as an inner object; and finally (4) the flow for whom all of these objects are given also reveals itself in a fundamental *shining*. Reflection should consequently present us with a threefold self-awareness with one transcendent object and two inner objects.[280]

But, as Zahavi observes, this is not what we find. The act of reflection is not prereflectively given as an inner object, nor can it be. It is only in reflection that an act is given as an inner object, i.e. as a distinct unity. Prior to reflection, one's own

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[279] Evans, 40.
[280] Zahavi, *Self-Awareness and Alterity: A Phenomenological Investigation* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1999), 70.

consciousness is given as a single flow, unarticulated into distinct episodes. Hence the falsity of (2) brings with it the collapse of the distinction between (2) and (4). In reflecting on the perception of a black billiard ball, we find only the ball given as a transcendent object, the act of perception reflectively given as an inner object, and a prereflectively given flow.[281]

Zahavi is right that consciousness of an object is not itself prereflectively given as an object. If it were, it would have to be through a marginal kind of awareness, and, as Zahavi points out, Brough indeed does describe prereflective awareness of inner objects as marginal.[282] Presumably then inner objects would be given in the same way as background objects: in admiring a painting in a gallery, for example, I would be marginally aware not only of external objects—a security guard in the corner, a conversation in the next room, traffic outside—but also of an inner object, my act of admiring the painting. Zahavi rejects this view by citing a passage from Husserl in which prereflective self-awareness and marginal object-awareness are sharply distinguished. In this passage Husserl points out that background objects and the consciousness through which they are given belong to different dimensions: whereas the former are constituted, the latter is constituting.[283] The mere fact that both are potential objects of attention does not warrant lumping them together as background objects.

In addition to being phenomenologically inaccurate, Brough's positing of a second level in constitution is superfluous. As both Zahavi and Evans point out, it would

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[281] Ibid., 71.
[282] Ibid., 71; Brough, 304.
[283] Zahavi, 61-62. Husserl states in the cited passage: "Das attentionale Bewußtseins des Hintergrunds und das Bewußtsein als bloßes Erlebtseins ist ganz zu scheiden." *Einleitung in die Logik und Erkenntnistheorie: Vorlesungen 1906/07*. Husserliana XXIV, ed. Ullrich Melle (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1985), 252. He makes the same claim in *PCIT*: "The distinction between what is specifically noticed and what is not noticed about the object is something totally different from the distinction on the "subjective side," that is, from the paying-attention itself in its steps." *PCIT*, 133/129.

be simpler and more elegant to locate horizontal intentionality at the level of acts rather than at an additional level.[284] Doing this reduces constituting consciousness to a single level that horizontally constitutes itself as it transversely constitutes objects. But what then to make of the distinction between immanent objects and the absolute flow? On Zahavi's single-stratum picture of time-consciousness, the distinction is not ontological but merely concerns different ways a single stream can appear to itself: "the absolute flow of experiencing and the constituted stream of reflectively thematized acts are not two separate flows, but simply two different manifestations of one and the same flow."[285] Consciousness appears to itself as a flow—that is, as opposed to appearing as a temporal object—in its pre-reflective, non-objectivating self-awareness.[286] It can only appear to itself as an act in reflection, since "reflection presupposes the constitution of a temporal horizon."[287] In other words, a phase of consciousness must traverse a certain interval in order to be available to reflection.

Zahavi's picture nicely accounts for the experience of abiding pointed out by Brough: each new phase of the single stream appears and disappears in the same way, i.e. in terms of protention and retention. But where Zahavi runs into problems is in his conception of the temporality of time-consciousness. It is clear that for Zahavi constituting consciousness is temporal: "consciousness is inherently temporal and it is as temporal that it is prereflectively aware of itself."[288] But it would be "potentially misleading and naturalizing" to think of this temporality as a matter of a succession of

[284] Zahavi, 70; Evans, 38.
[285] Ibid., 75.
[286] Ibid., 71, 79.
[287] Ibid., 79.
[288] Ibid., 82.

temporally extended phases.[289] It would be misleading since for Zahavi constituting consciousness is not "in time" or "intratemporal."[290] In other words, constituting consciousness does not belong to the nexus of temporal relations to which constituted objects belong. To think otherwise would indeed be naturalistic in the sense that consciousness would be thoroughly located in an objective time that exists independently of it.

But Zahavi's picture becomes unclear with his claim that constituting and constituted consciousness are different manifestations of a single flow. Constituted consciousness, or consciousness as it appears in reflection, appears as in time—it appears as a temporal sequence of experiences simultaneous with experienced objects. But if the reflecting, constituting consciousness is not in time, there is an important sense in which its manifestation in reflection is also a *concealment*. In constituting the world, consciousness constitutes itself as a part of the world. As Husserl writes, "The I is also inserted into [objective time], and not only the I's body but also its 'psychic experiences.'"[291] Indeed, the fact that consciousness constitutes itself as belonging to objective time is a major obstacle to phenomenological reflection, since it naturally gives rise to the belief that consciousness is wholly a part of the world.

It might be tempting to think that the appearance of consciousness as in objective time is an illusion—on the one hand, we would have consciousness as it really is, which is not in time; on the other hand, we would have consciousness as it merely appears to itself, which is in time. But this would be a mistake, since in Husserl's view what it means for something to be real or really to exist is just that it will continue to appear in a

[289] Ibid., 82.
[290] Ibid., 82.
[291] *PCIT*, 124/120.

harmonious way, i.e. what the object will appear as will be consistent with what it has appeared as so far. This means that as long as consciousness continues to appear to itself as in time, we are justified in saying that it really is in time. Thus there is an ontological distinction to be made within consciousness between constituting consciousness, which is a "flow" that has no location in objective time, and constituted consciousness, which does.

The upshot of all of this is that Zahavi and Brough are both correct in important respects. Zahavi correctly maintains that constitution occurs through a single level only, and Brough correctly discerns an ontological distinction between constituted acts and a constituting flow. Where each goes wrong is in failing to distinguish sharply between consciousness as a whole, which has both constituting and constituted dimensions, and consciousness merely as constituting. Thus Brough, while correctly identifying the two dimensions of consciousness, mistakenly carries the distinction into constituting consciousness alone, with the result that transcendent objects would be constituted by an act, which in turn would be constituted by a flow. Zahavi makes the same error but in the opposite direction: after showing that constitution occurs through a single level only, he fails to make clear that consciousness as a whole involves two levels.

With this clarification in hand, we can see that the textual evidence that supports Zahavi's interpretation and that which supports Brough's is in fact consistent. Husserl's talk of two distinct levels within consciousness is simply a distinction between its constituted and constituting dimensions. Any description of transverse intentionality as "vertical" refers primarily to the relation between constituting consciousness and a transcendent object. When the constituted object is an act, the relation is vertical only in

a limited sense: in seizing upon a past phase, reflection lifts the phase out, so to speak, from the horizontal plane of consciousness in order to give it a place in the sequence of objects.

Other passages in *PCIT* seem to speak against Brough's interpretation and in favour of Zahavi's. Such passages are those in which Husserl describes acts or intentional experiences as flows, as in the following:

> We must note, in addition, that when we speak of the "perceptual act" and say that it is the point of genuine perceiving to which a continuous series of "retentions" is attached, we have not described thereby any unities in immanent time, but just moments of the flow.[292]

And then, a few lines later:

> The judging always has the character of the flow. Consequently, what we called "act" or "intentional experience" in the *Logical Investigations* is in every instance a flow in which a unity becomes constituted in immanent time (the judgment, the wish, etc), a unity that has its immanent duration and that may progress more or less rapidly.[293]

In the first passage, Husserl quite clearly identifies acts as elements of the flow, rather than as a level distinct from the flow. But this is not inconsistent with the claim that there are two dimensions of consciousness, since in this context Husserl is describing only constituting consciousness. The second passage is more challenging, since it seems to be contradictory: while Husserl again identifies intentional experiences as elements of the flow, he also states that they are unities constituted in the flow. But the contradiction is only apparent since whereas the first claim pertains to constituting consciousness only, the second claim pertains to consciousness as a whole.

A second important shortcoming in the interpretations of Brough and Zahavi is that they understate the significance of the inconceivability of the flow. Brough glosses

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[292] *PCIT*, 79/75.

[293] *PCIT*, 80/76. See also Appendix VIII : "…the primal-experience series, which is a series of intentional experiences, consciousness of…" (120/116); "Each phase is an intentional experience" (121/117); "…the experience-flow as the flow of intentional experiences." (121/117)

over the problem when he writes that "the absolute flow may be viewed in terms of a passage of phases or slices, one of which will be actual while the others will be post-actual."[294] Brough uses the terms "actual" and "post-actual" rather than "present" and "past" because the latter terms properly apply only to temporal objects, which the flow is not. But like the term "quasi-temporal," Brough's language here says nothing positive about the flow, but only that it is not temporal, and not an object. Hence like "quasi-temporal," "post-actual" poses the impossible task of conceiving of a non-object.

Zahavi also glosses over the inconceivability problem:

> Consciousness is inherently temporal, and it is as temporal that it is prereflectively aware of itself. Thus, although the field of experiencing neither has a temporal location nor a temporal extension, and although it does not last and never becomes past, it is not a static supratemporal principle, but a living pulse (*Lebenspuls*) with a certain temporal density and articulation and variable width…."[295]

Here too what seems like description is in fact a gesture towards the inconceivable. Constituting consciousness is supposed to be temporal, but not in the sense that any object is. To say that it has a certain density, articulation and width is to pose the problem of conceiving of a temporality that involves no duration, no before and after. But such a non-object, like any non-object, is inconceivable—in the strong sense of "conceive," that is.

3.8 The Origin of Time and the Limits of Husserl's Phenomenology

3.8.1 Derrida's Critique

As is well-known, Derrida argues that, contrary to Husserl's intentions, the analyses of time-constitution in *PCIT* reveal that immediate self-presence is impossible. What is given to the phenomenological gaze is always a trace of something more original that is irretrievably absent. Now, if the origin of time cannot be made present, it cannot

[294] Brough, 318.
[295] Zahavi, 82.

be intuited, which in turn means that it cannot be known. Hence on Derrida's reading of *PCIT*, Husserl's attempt to achieve certainty with regard to the constituting activity of consciousness ultimately yields the result that such certainty is impossible. In this and the following two sections I will argue that while Husserl's analyses of time-constitution indeed problematize his project, they do so by showing the impossibility not of an immediate self-presence, but rather of an immediate *objectivating* self-presence. Since this does not preclude an intuition of the origin of time, the origin is not, as Derrida claims, phenomenologically inaccessible. However, because this accessibility is not cognitively fulfilling, it remains true that the origin of time poses an important limit for phenomenological analysis.

Derrida characterizes retention as a "non-perception" in the sense that it manifests what is not actual, or what has just been. This in contrast to primal impression, the content of which is actual, or now. But, as Derrida observes, for Husserl primal impression cannot make anything appear on its own; only together with retention is this possible.[296] Retention retrieves or repeats the content of primal impression. Derrida concludes that what is present to consciousness is never what is actual, but rather what has fallen out of actuality and been retrieved by retention. Thus what appears as present is always a trace of a more original presence that can never be given. There is an alterity or difference at the heart of consciousness that is inaccessible to the phenomenological gaze since it is presupposed by anything that appears to this gaze. This inaccessible alterity applies to the constituting flow as well; only non-actual, retained phases of the

[296] Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, trans. David B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 64.

flow can be present to consciousness.[297] The present moment of the flow must always function in secret, only appearing "post-factually."[298]

According to Derrida, Husserl resists acknowledging this result, since it undermines his requirement that consciousness be immediately present to itself. Thus he is at pains to establish an essential difference between retention and memory—whereas the former is constitutive of perception, or consciousness of what is actual, the latter merely re-presents what is no longer actual. Hence only memory allows for error and uncertainty. But since retention is a retrieval of what has been lost to consciousness, in reality the difference between memory and retention is merely a matter of different ways of re-presenting what has been lost. Husserl's text offers a glimpse of this in the remark that if perception is taken in the strict sense of consciousness of what is now, then retention is a non-perception.[299]

One response to Derrida's critique is provided by Zahavi, who argues that awareness of a retained phase as past presupposes awareness of a present phase as present—if consciousness were not immediately aware of itself in the now, awareness of itself as past would be inexplicable.[300] But presumably Derrida would deny that all retained phases are *given* as past. He seems to hold that phases closest to the actual now *are* past, and yet are given as present. The pastness of what is present to consciousness is not phenomenologically given, but follows from pursuing the logical consequences of Husserl's concept of the content of primal impression as a limit to a retentional continuum that cannot be given without this continuum.

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[297] Ibid., 66
[298] Bernet, "'Is the Present Ever Present?' Phenomenology and the Metaphysics of Presence," *Research in Phenomenology* 12 (1982): 110.
[299] Derrida, 65; *PCIT*, 41/39.
[300] Zahavi, *Self-Awareness and Alterity*, 85.

The real problem in Derrida's argument is, as Byers points out, his interpretation of retention as repetition. The content of primal impression is a mere "phase," i.e. it is not itself an identity-in-difference, but is rather an element of a continuum through which such an identity can be given. As Husserl remarks, "Above all, we will have to insist that a phase is conceivable only as a phase, without the possibility of extension."[301] Since primal impression on its own does not yield an identity or unity, it does not provide anything that could be repeated.[302] Only together with the retentional *modification* of original phases—as opposed to their repetition—can primal impression yield an identity. In Byers' words: "Retention is not repetition of an already constituted identity but rather a dynamic moment in yielding identity-in-constitution."[303] It is only in memory that such an already constituted identity can be repeated.

Contrary to Derrida then, self-presence is not precluded by the fact that primal impression cannot function apart from retention. All the same, it remains hard to see how any actual moment of the constituting flow could appear to itself. Is it not the case that any appearing requires a difference between a subject and an object? The notion of a non-objectivating appearing means that the answer is no. Since in its original self-presence appearing is not an object, it is not present as something at one end of an appearing-relation, or as something differentiated from a further appearing.

As non-objectivated, the presence of consciousness does not presuppose a more original absence, and in this sense Husserl's analyses of time-constitution secure their "metaphysical" aspiration for self-presence. However, although appearing can appear immediately because it is not an object, for that same reason it seems it cannot be

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[301] *PCIT*, 35/33.
[302] Damian Byers, *Intentionality and Transcendence* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), 175.
[303] Ibid., 177.

cognized, i.e. what it is cannot be identified since it is not a "what" at all. This seems as devastating for Husserl's project as would be the impossibility of self-presence of any kind. What makes the self-presence of the origin of time important for Husserl is that it must be present in order to be *known*. Cognition occurs whenever something is given in intuition as it is meant in empty intention and when this coincidence is experienced. But it seems that the origin of time cannot be meant in a way suited for cognition. Since it is not an object, it cannot be identified *as* something in a corresponding intuition. If the self-presence of the origin of time is not sufficient to allow for its cognition, this presence is not enough to save Husserl's project. Derrida would be right that Husserl's analyses of time undermine his project, even if he is wrong about how this occurs.

3.8.2 The Origin of Time as Idea

If the origin of time is to be not only present but also known, what is needed is a non-objectivating intuition. Joaquim Siles i Borràs points out that in *Ideas* Husserl finds just such an intuition at work in the intuition of rules, in particular in the intuition of rules governing the appearance of physical things.[304] Perception of physical things is essentially inadequate in the sense that no single perception can present a thing in all of its determinations—new determinations can always be brought to intuitive givenness by looking at the object from a different angle, turning it over, approaching it or receding from it, looking at it through a magnifying lens, and so on. As a thing shows itself from different perspectives, I grasp that the series of its appearances is infinite. Thus the inadequacy of the perception of physical things pertains not just to single perceptions but also to any series of perceptions: no matter how exhaustively I examine an object, it will

[304] Joaquim Siles i Borràs, *The Ethics of Husserl's Phenomenology* (London: Continuum, 2010), 144.

always have new appearances to offer.[305] However, this infinity does not undermine my cognition of the object since I know that the thing cannot offer just *any* appearance. To grasp what kind of a thing shows itself from different perspectives is to grasp rules governing the sequence of its appearances.[306] Thus in grasping the perceived thing as a physical object, I grasp that any new appearance must present the object as spatially extended; in grasping it more specifically as spherical, I grasp that any new appearance of its surface must present it as curved. And although the physical object cannot ever come to be perfectly given, i.e. to have presented itself in all its determinations, the grasping of rules governing infinite series of appearances makes it possible to grasp the *idea* of its perfect givenness. This is the idea of the infinite, rule-governed series of appearances in its totality. Since such a totality cannot ever be achieved, "idea" is meant here in the Kantian sense of a regulative ideal: the idea of perfect givenness is a cognitive goal we endlessly approach and that endlessly motivates further investigation of things. For Husserl the grasping both of rules for a thing's appearances and of the idea of its perfect givenness are cases of intuitive consciousness—the rule and the idea are not emptily posited, but are instead actually given. In both cases there occurs a unique kind of "intellectual seeing."[307]

The intriguing claim made by Siles i Borràs is that it is precisely this kind of intuition that provides cognitive access to the origin of time. He finds support for this position in *Ideas* §83, entitled "Seizing Upon the Unitary Stream of Mental Processes as 'Idea.'" Here Husserl writes:

When the pure regard of the Ego reaches any mental process by reflecting and, more

[305] *ID*, 358/312.
[306] *ID*, 341/296, 361/314-315.
[307] *ID*, 342-343/298.

> particularly, by seizing upon it perceptually, the possibility then exists of the regard turning toward other mental processes *as far as* this concatenation reaches. But by essential necessity this whole concatenation is *never* given or to be given by a single pure regard. In spite of this, it also can be seized upon intuitively in a *certain*, albeit essentially different way; <the whole can be seized upon> in the fashion of "*limitlessness in the progression*" of intuitions of the immanent going from the fixed mental process to new mental processes.... In the continuous progression from seizing-upon to seizing-upon, in a certain way, I said, we now seize upon the *stream of mental processes as a unity*. We do not seize upon it as we do a single mental process but rather in the manner of an *idea in the Kantian sense*. It is not something posited or affirmed by chance; it is instead an absolutely indubitable givenness.[308]

As with physical things, one's own stream of consciousness cannot be perceived as a whole. But in both cases there occurs an intuition of a rule governing an infinite series, which allows for the intuition of the *idea* of the series as a whole. In the case of one's own stream of consciousness, the rule is that for any segment seized upon in reflection, another segment can be seized upon that is either more past or more future. Intuiting this rule makes it possible to intuit the idea of the stream as an infinite totality of segments. Siles i Borràs identifies the intuition of this idea with the intuition of the origin of time:

> When the Idea is rendered in its own insight, then no-thing appears but the condition of possibility of any appearance whatever. *To 'see' the Idea is to 'see' the regulating limits of all appearing* without any-thing appearing at all. *To see the idea is to see the limits that frame seeing itself.* What this means is that to see the Idea is to 'see' the invisible stream itself, the primordial *ego* or pre-phenomenal subjectivity, the sun that shows without showing.[309]

The major problem with the interpretation of Siles i Borràs is his identification of the stream of mental processes with absolute consciousness, or what he here calls "pre-phenomenal subjectivity." As we have seen, they are different: whereas the stream of mental processes is consciousness in its constituted and innerworldly dimension, absolute consciousness is consciousness in its constituting and transcendental dimension. That

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[308] *ID*, 197/166.

[309] Siles i Borràs, 148. Lilian Alweiss also claims that the absolute flow is given as an idea, though with little elaboration. In contrast with Siles i Borràs, for Alweiss the intuitability of the flow as idea is not sufficient to make the flow given in a way adequate for Husserl's project. Alweiss, *The World Unclaimed* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003), 68-72.

Ideas §83 concerns the former is already evident from its straightforward description of the stream as a concatenation of mental *processes*; were Husserl here describing the absolute flow, we would expect him to note that any such description must be metaphorical. Of course one could respond that Husserl glosses over this difficulty since, as he makes clear, in *Ideas* he avoids an in-depth analysis of time-consciousness in order to avoid over-complicating his presentation of phenomenology.[310] But examining the context of §83 reveals that it is the absolute flow itself, and not merely the problem of describing it, that is left out of the scope of the analyses of time in *Ideas*. In §81 Husserl states that temporality pertains not only to experiences taken singly, but is also "a necessary form combining mental processes with mental processes."[311] He goes on to describe this form in two senses, though without explicitly distinguishing them. The first is the form of a temporal continuum; every experience is given as having experiences that have occurred before it and that will occur after it.[312] The second is the form of how experiences, and the continuum of experiences more generally, are given: every experience comes to be given through impressional phases that continually undergo retentional modification.[313] In this way while the objects that are given change, the way they are given persists.[314] But what about consciousness of the way objects are given? Is the appearing of a temporal object itself given as temporal? Husserl does not raise the question, and this is where the absolute flow would enter into the discussion.[315]

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[310] *ID*, 193/162-163.
[311] *ID*, 194/163.
[312] *ID*, 194/163.
[313] *ID*, 194-195/164.
[314] *ID*, 195/164.
[315] Further evidence that the stream discussed in *Ideas* is not the absolute flow is found in the *Bernau Manuscripts*: "Zu den Ureigenheiten des Bewusstseins (als ursprünglichsten Ichlebens, in dem sich die Transzendenzerlebnisse als Einheiten der phänomenologischen Zeit konstituieren, von denen allein in den *Ideen* gesprochen wurde) gehört…" *Die Bernauer Manuskripte über das Zeitbewußtsein (1917/18)*.

However, although *Ideas* §83 does not straightforwardly provide a solution to the problem of intuiting the absolute flow, all is not lost, since the concept of an idea pertains to time-consciousness in another way. As Klaus Held shows, in reflection I know not only that there will always be a further moment along the immanent stream to be seized upon, but also that any moment seized upon will always be given through the same absolute dimension.[316] Each time the original flow eludes my reflective grasp, I am conscious of having missed one and the same flow. In contrast with the rule of "always something further" that is intuited in reflecting upon the immanent stream, here the intuited rule is "always belonging to the origin." Thus whereas in reflection on the immanent stream I intuit the idea of the whole of immanent, constituted time, in grasping the identity of the origin I intuit the idea of the whole of constituting activity. Whereas the former is the idea of the whole temporal *stretch* of my life, the latter is the idea of its whole constituting *event*. As Held points out, while this primordial event is nowhere along the immanent stream, it is everywhere in the sense that all moments of the stream belong to it. In this sense the origin of time is "omnitemporal" (*allzeitlich*).[317] Of course this event can be described as a whole only metaphorically, since it is not a temporal object and hence is not a whole in the same sense as are constituted events such as a whole party or a whole month. The whole of the origin of time is not a whole of any*thing*, but can be described as a whole only in the sense that it is the singular source corresponding to the whole of immanent time—as in the description of the origin as a flow, in describing the origin as a whole we describe it "in accordance with what is constituted."

Husserliana XXXIII, ed. Rudolf Bernet and Dieter Lohmar (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2001, 269.
[316] Klaus Held, *Lebendige Gegenwart* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966), 126-127.
[317] Ibid., 128-130.

3.8.3 Desire for the Origin

The possibility of intuiting the idea of the origin of time as an omnitemporal constituting event means that the origin of time is not only present, but also knowable. Contrary to Derrida then, Husserl's analyses of time-constitution do not show that the ultimate level of constituting activity lies beyond the reach of the phenomenological gaze. However, this is not to say that the givenness of the origin of time is wholly unproblematic, since its peculiar status as a non-object establishes an important limit for phenomenological analysis insofar as it frustrates cognitive desire. As Bernet shows, Husserl's account in Investigation VI of truth as fulfillment both indicates the essential role of desire in cognition and clarifies exactly what this desire is for. Husserl indicates that the intuitive fulfillment of an empty intention is at the same time the satisfaction of cognitive desire when he writes:

> …an intention aims at its object, is as it were desirous of it (*nach ihm gleichsam begehrend langt*)…[318]
>
> [In dynamic fulfilment] we have a first stage of mere thought (of pure conception or mere signification), a meaning-intention wholly unsatisfied (*unbefriedigt*), to which a second stage of more or less adequate fulfilment is added, where thoughts repose as if satisfied (*ruhen gleichsam befriedigt*) in the sight of their object…[319]
>
> The signitive intention is rather lacking (*ein Manko bei den signitiven*) in every sort of fulness…[320]

The essential role of desire in cognition later emerges more clearly in *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis*:

> …there is still something more that belongs to the opposition, intention/fulfillment, and

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[318] *LI* II, 232/II(2), 74.
[319] *LI* II, 207/II(2), 34.
[320] *LI* II, 233/II(2), 77. The following passage is also striking: "[the object] calls out to us, as it were: 'There is still more to see here, turn me so you can see all my sides, let your gaze run through me, draw closer to me, open me up, divide me up; keep on looking me over again and again, turning me to see all sides. You will get to know me like this, all that I am, all my surface qualities, all my inner sensible qualities,' etc." *APS*, 41/10. This passage is cited by Daniel Dwyer in "A Phenomenology of Cognitive Desire," *Idealistic Studies* 36, no. 1 (2006): 52.

> to the idea of confirmation than what had been expressly mentioned up until now…. [Now] this comes to the fore as belonging to a confirming intention: This directedness is tendentious, and as a tendency, as a striving, it is from the very beginning "driving at" a satisfaction. This satisfaction is only possible… in a synthesis that brings the presented object to self-givenness. And it does it in such a way that the satisfaction is merely a relative one and leaves a remainder of dissatisfaction so long as the intuition still contains indeterminacy or mere filling.[321]

This passage also indicates an important distinction within cognitive desire between desire in the sense of an act or episode within the life of consciousness and desire in the sense of an underlying tendency driving consciousness.[322] Particular desires to know something are manifestations of a more fundamental drive for things to be given.

With regard to the aim of cognitive desire, Husserl's account of truth yields a threefold distinction: the desire to be right, the desire for the presence of the object, and the desire for truth.[323] As the experience of an agreement between an empty intention and fulfilling intuition, in cognition an empty intention is proven correct or right, and it is proven to be so through the presence of its object. Since both aspects are essential to cognition, it is essential to cognitive desire that one desires both to be right and for the object to be present. But since presence and rightness are merely necessary conditions for the experience of cognition, the desires for each are merely subordinate moments in cognitive desire, the overall aim of which is, as Bernet puts it, "the advent of truth."[324] That is, the correctness of one's thought and the presence of the object are desired only insofar as each is necessary for the thing to reveal itself as it really is. Cognitive desire thus involves both self-assertion and openness: the former insofar as one desires to be right and to make the object present; the latter insofar as truth requires letting the object speak for itself and hence a willingness to adjust one's beliefs accordingly.

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[321] *APS*, 126-127/83.
[322] *APS*, 129/85.
[323] Bernet, "Desiring to Know Through Intuition," 157.
[324] Ibid., 156-157.

Distinguishing between the three moments of cognitive desire allows us to see that the origin of time frustrates this desire insofar as it must leave unsatisfied the desire for the presence of an *object*. As this is an essential component of cognitive desire, it is not fully satisfying to know merely *that* the world is constituted in consciousness; one further desires to understand how. In intuiting the idea of the origin of time as a whole, one intuits that the omnitemporal event occurs. But an intuition of *what* this event is, i.e. of how it unfolds, is impossible, as the origin of time, in making possible the intuition of objects, always functions from behind the objectivating purview of reflection. Since the origin of time lies beyond the limits of objectivation, complete insight into how the world is constituted is not possible. Thus the problem the origin of time poses for phenomenology is not that it does not show itself, but rather that it does not show itself in a completely satisfying way. As in the case of desiring further to know an object that is present, the desire to know the origin involves the experience of "conceptual poverty" with regard to what it seeks to comprehend.[325] But unlike cases involving the presence of an object, here conceptual poverty is experienced not in relation to the richness of a thing's determinations, but rather in relation to that which, as a no-thing, does not admit of being determined. In the intuition of the idea of the origin as a whole, *something* is always lacking.

Yet even as cognitive desire finds itself dissatisfied in the face of the constant retreat of the origin from an objectivating regard, it can achieve a significant measure of satisfaction in understanding the necessity of this retreat. Husserl's analyses of time-consciousness culminate not in a blind experience of limit, i.e. an experience of frustration in the face of a limit that is not understood, but instead in an experience of

[325] Ibid., 158.

limit that enjoys self-reflective clarity. In this way the desire for truth can be satisfied even as the desire for presence is not—one can "knowingly desire to let things be."[326] The degree to which insight into the origin of time as beyond the limits of objectivating intuition is frustrating or satisfying depends on the degree to which the latter desire is kept in check as subordinate to the former.

In closing, I would like to point out noteworthy parallels between the situation of phenomenology vis-à-vis the origin of time and that of the natural attitude vis-à-vis the possibility of knowledge. In both cases, subjectivity, in desiring to understand itself, tries to make itself present as an object, with the important difference that whereas in the former case this simply means identifying what it is, in the latter it also means locating itself amongst the universe of objects. But in both cases one seeks to make an object out of the dimension in which objects are given, and in both cases this attempt is characterized by phenomenological naivety. In the case of skepticism regarding the possibility of knowledge, the attempt to regard oneself wholly from the outside naively neglects the meaning of truth. In the case of striving to grasp the origin of time, one sets out in ignorance of the fact that what one seeks to comprehend is not a "what" at all. In both cases, phenomenological investigation reveals that one had been attempting to gain a perspective on oneself that constituting activity does not permit. Finally, in both cases the clarification of the limits subjectivity implicitly establishes for itself is not sufficient to put to rest the desire to go beyond them. The desire to get outside of oneself and to make oneself wholly present as an object—whether as an immanent temporal object in the phenomenological attitude or as an innerworldly one in the natural attitude—remains,

[326] John C. McCarthy, "Some Preliminary Remarks on 'Cognitive Interest' in Husserlian Phenomenology," *Husserl Studies* 11 (1994-95): 136.

so that the experience of self-reflective clarity is also an experience of restlessness at the limit.

Conclusion: *Rätsel*

In this study I have sought to clarify certain facets of Husserl's thought at the same time as clarifying limits encountered in thinking about three basic realities: the existence of the world, its knowability, and the passage of time. Husserl sometime refers to the latter two as *Rätsel* or "enigmas," by which he usually means simply something that resists being understood.[327] In this sense existence certainly counts as an enigma as well. One way of regarding an enigma, and the way characteristic of the theoretical attitude, is as a *problem*. Here the enigma is taken as posing the task of making it intelligible; setting out on this task involves an implicit faith in the disclosive power of reason and in the rational structure of the phenomenon. But the attempt to resolve the enigma can lead to an experience of intellectual limit. When this happens, and when the limit is accepted as such, the enigma is also a *Rätsel* in the sense of being a *mystery*, i.e. something that lies beyond an intellectual limit and that hence must remain incomprehensible in principle. In the case of the enigma of the existence of the world, whereas Bergson tries to show that it is not a genuine problem, Wittgenstein tries to show that it is a mystery. In the case of the enigma of knowledge, whereas psychologism renders it a mystery, Husserl regards it as a problem and shows that to regard it as a mystery on psychologistic grounds is to fall into counter-sense. Finally, in the case of the enigma of the constitution of time, Husserl struggles with the discovery that the origin of time must remain a mystery insofar at it cannot be captured in an objectivating regard.

This struggle illustrates Husserl's commitment to approaching all enigmas as

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[327] Passages in which Husserl describes knowledge as an enigma include *PCIT*, 360/349; *CR*, 13/12; *IP*, 48/60; *Logik und allgemeine Wissenschaftstheorie*, 330; *Logische Untersuchungen: Ergänzungsband, Erster Teil*, Husserliana XX/I, ed. Ulrich Melle (The Hague: Kluwer, 2002), 296. Passages in which time is described as an enigma include *PCIT*, 286/276 and *ID*, 193-194/163.

problems, a commitment that also comes out well in the following passages:

> The wonder of all wonders is pure Ego and pure consciousness: and precisely this wonder vanishes as soon as the light of phenomenology falls upon it and subjects it to eidetic analysis. The wonder vanishes insofar as it transforms into an entire science with an abundance of difficult scientific problems. The wonder is something incomprehensible, while the problematic in the form of a scientific problem is something comprehensible; it is the uncomprehended that in the solution of problems turns out to be comprehensible and comprehended for reason.[328]

> Genuine epistemology clarifies, and something clarified is something that has become understandable and has been understood. Thus it is the complete opposite of a 'wonder.'[329]

In both passages Husserl designates as a "wonder" what I have called a mystery. The enigma of how the world can disclose itself to consciousness is not a mystery, but a problem, and it is a problem that can be solved by phenomenology.

Phenomenology's approach to the problem of knowledge is characterized by regarding knowledge as a *Rätsel* in yet another sense, namely in the sense of being a *riddle*.

> The medusas are only dangerous to one who already believes in them and fears them. Here riddles may initially remain, but they are still riddles—an insoluble riddle is a counter-sense.[330]

Cairns records Husserl as making the same point in conversation:

> Insight into the nature of phenomenology, constitution, fills us with wonder, yet not vulgar wonder, since we have insight. The phenomenological problems present themselves as riddles, but it is the essence of a riddle to have the clue to its answer *in itself*. No *impossible* riddles."[331]

In a riddle something is conceptualized in a true but unusual way; riddles contain their

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[328] *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, Third Book*, 64/75 (trans. modified).
[329] Entwurf 324, cited in Theodore de Boer, *The Development of Husserl's Thought*, trans. Theodore Plantinga (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978), 401.
[330] "Die Medusen sind nur dem gefährlich, der an sie im voraus glaubt und sie fürchtet. Es mögen hier zunächst Rätsel übrig bleiben, aber es sind eben Rätsel, unlosbare Rätsel sind Widersinn." *EP* II, 442.
[331] *Conversations with Husserl and Fink*, edited by the Husserl-Archives in Louvain (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), 16. On knowledge as a riddle, see also *Logik und allgemeine Wissenschaftstheorie*, 335.

own solutions in the sense that solving a riddle requires thinking of things in its terms.[332] Solving a riddle, in other words, requires seeing things differently. The reduction effects a radically new way of seeing things, thereby providing the key to understanding the riddle of how knowledge is possible. To a certain extent, the existence of the world also turns out to be a riddle that admits of phenomenological resolution. In contrast with the natural attitude, in particular the mythical/religious or metaphysical/religious attitudes, for which the origin of the world lies in a transcendent dimension, for the phenomenological attitude it lies in a transcendental one.[333] Thus whereas in the ontological wonder of the natural attitude existence is given as a secret the object withholds, in the phenomenological attitude existence is revealed as part of the object's meaning—to be given as existent is to be posited on the basis of harmoniously appearing.[334] As in the case of knowledge, what is enigmatic and concealed for the natural attitude discloses itself in the transcendental dimension revealed in the phenomenological attitude.

But this dimension contains its own enigmas. As we have seen, one is why a world, in particular a mathematically ordered one, is constituted at all. Thus the enigma of the existence of the world is supplanted by the enigma of the fact of transcendental subjectivity, so that ontological wonder is not extinguished, but merely redirected. In addition to the enigma of *why* the world is constituted, there is also the enigma of *how* this constitution occurs at its most ultimate level, i.e. the enigma of the constitution of time. This enigma does not admit of being treated as a riddle since there is no right way

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[332] In his guide for translating Husserl, Cairns recommends that "Rätsel" be translated as "enigma" and *not* as "riddle." *Guide for Translating Husserl* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), 92. The above passage from *EP*, however, shows that "enigma" is not always the best translation.
[333] Fink, "Husserl's Philosophy and Contemporary Criticism," 95-96.
[334] *ID*, 340-341/296.

of seeing it, i.e. no way of bringing it before the phenomenological gaze in order to be analyzed. While one can intuit that time is constituted in a singular origin, one cannot intuit what this origin is, so that ultimately the enigma of the constitution of the world in transcendental subjectivity is one that does not admit of resolution—it is a mystery.

In Husserlian terms, a mystery can be further defined as something that can only be thought in an empty way. Discussing the nature of evidence, Husserl writes:

> If one enters into evidence-consciousness and thereby makes clear to oneself what it actually is, namely consciousness of something as itself given… then one sees that obviously while such consciousness accordingly solves enigmas, it cannot itself contain any further enigmas. All that is enigmatic, all that is problematic, lies on the side of mere meaning-intention.[335]

Enigmas persist as long as what is at issue is merely thought and is not also intuited. Once intuition occurs, the phenomenon can be conceptualized in accordance with the way it shows itself, allowing its enigmatic character to be resolved. Where intuition is impossible, what the phenomenon is must remain a matter of empty meaning-intention, so that the enigma becomes entrenched as a mystery. For the natural attitude, knowledge can seem to be a mystery insofar as the mind, having immediate access only to its own representations, cannot intuit a fit between a representation and a mind-transcendent object. Existence is a mystery insofar as it, as the "that" of actual objects, is not itself an object and hence offers no "what" to be intuited. In the phenomenological attitude the same problem emerges with regard to the origin of time. Here too we run up against that which cannot be intuited as an object, so that any notion of what it is must remain a matter of empty meaning-intention.

This parallel between existence and temporalization is significant because it

[335] "Vertieft man sich in das Evidenzbewusstsein and macht man sich daran klar, was es eigentlich ist, nämlich selbstgebendes Bewusstsein… so sieht man, dass selbstverständlich derart selbstgebendes Bewusstsein zwar Rätsel lösen, aber nicht selbst mehr Rätsel enthalten kann. Alles Rätselhafte, alles Problematische liegt auf seiten des blossen Meinens." *Logik und allgemeine Wissenschafstheorie*, 326-327.

indicates that Husserl's phenomenology, rather than resolving the basic enigmas of the existence of the world and of its givenness to innerworldly creatures, instead recasts them in terms of time. Husserl's transcendental pursuit of self-reflective clarity culminates in the discovery that total self-understanding exceeds the capacities of objectivation and in the disclosure of the *Rätsel* of temporalization as a mystery. With this the phenomenologist finds herself in the predicament of harbouring an ineliminable desire for what lies beyond a necessary limit. In this way Husserl's phenomenology not only clarifies but also illustrates what Kierkegaard calls "the ultimate paradox of thought": "to want to discover something that thought itself cannot think."[336]

[336] *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, ed. Howard V. Hong, Edna H. Hong and Gregor Malantschuk (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967-78), vol. 2, F37.

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