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Husserl's Phenomenology from Its Founding and Construction to Its Evaluation: A Historical, Analytical, and Critical Reading

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Abstract

This philosophical article examines Husserlian phenomenology by tracing its historical context and following its conceptual and critical development. It reviews the circumstances surrounding the emergence of phenomenology as an epistemological endeavor aimed at overcoming the crisis of European sciences and the dominance of psychologism, with the objective of reconstructing philosophy as a "rigorous science" grounded in absolute certainty. The article also details the methodological foundations of Husserl's project, beginning with phenomenological suspension (epoché), proceeding through transcendental reduction and intentionality as an essential property of consciousness, and culminating in the concept of the "lifeworld" as the source of lived experience. On the critical side, the article examines the limits of Husserlian foundations by considering the principal objections raised by his contemporaries and later critics. Particular attention is given to the problem of solipsism and the difficulty of establishing intersubjectivity within individual consciousness, alongside the hermeneutical and existential critiques developed by Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty concerning the priority of Being and the bodily condition, as well as Jacques Derrida's deconstructive critique of Husserl's reliance on the "metaphysics of presence" and immediate living intuition.

Keywords: phenomenology; intentionality; transcendental reduction; critique; existentialism; deconstruction.



Introduction

Phenomenology is one of the most important philosophical revolutions that shaped contemporary thought in the twentieth century. It did not remain merely a closed philosophical doctrine; rather, it presented itself as a method and a new perspective for re-establishing human knowledge as a whole. The project of the German philosopher Edmund Husserl emerged at a historical moment marked by a profound crisis in European thought, a crisis characterized by the dominance of positivism and psychologism, which reduced philosophy and the sciences to empirical observations and changing psychological laws. This led to the emptying of knowledge of its transcendental dimension and to the abstraction of human beings from their existential and lived meaning.

In response to this conceptual deterioration, Husserl raised his famous call to “return to the things themselves.” This does not mean a return to superficial empiricism; rather, it constitutes a rigorous invitation to examine how objects appear to immediate human consciousness before they are appropriated by abstract theory and presuppositions. Through this principle, Husserl sought to transform philosophy into a rigorous science possessing its own foundations and capable of providing the other sciences with a basis characterized by certainty and absolute rigor.

Phenomenology is founded on overcoming the traditional opposition between “subject” and “object” established by Cartesianism through the pivotal concept of intentionality, together with complex methodological procedures such as the epoché (suspension of judgment) and transcendental reduction. Yet this ambitious project of constructing an absolute philosophy of consciousness did not escape criticism. Its critics regarded it as a concealed reproduction of Cartesian and Kantian idealism and as a retreat into individual consciousness that neglects the bodily, historical, existential, and linguistic conditions of human beings.

On this basis, the article seeks to answer the following philosophical problem:

How did Edmund Husserl succeed in establishing phenomenology as a “rigorous science” distinct from empirical and psychological tendencies? What procedural concepts did he employ to reconstruct the relationship between consciousness and the world? And did Husserlian phenomenology succeed in achieving its transcendental objectives, or did it fall into the traps of idealism and solipsism, as argued by its existentialist and deconstructive critics?

1. The Linguistic, Historical, and Semantic Context of Phenomenology:

A. The Conceptual Foundations of Phenomenology:

Etymologically, the term “phenomenology” is composed of two words: “phenomenon” and “logos,” literally meaning the science of phenomena. In its Greek origin, according to Heidegger,

"phenomenon" conveys the meaning of disclosure and appearance; it also refers to that which becomes manifest or comes to presence within something. It denotes that which shows itself. A phenomenon is therefore everything that can appear and come into the light; when it appears and manifests itself, it does so in a particular way and according to a specific form. It thus constitutes a concealed appearance. As for "logos," Heidegger understands it as speech or discourse whose function is to reveal what is being spoken about and enable it to become manifest. Logos, therefore, is discourse that allows what is discussed to disclose itself and become accessible. In its composite sense, phenomenology consequently means allowing Being to show itself from itself. The method is therefore descriptive: it describes, discloses, and brings to appearance rather than proving. To practice phenomenology is to help something appear and enable it to express itself so that it can be apprehended. In this sense, the "phenomenon" is that which withdraws and remains concealed because it does not reveal itself spontaneously, making it vulnerable to oblivion and neglect. The phenomenological method therefore responds to the demand to disclose what is hidden in its essence that which has withdrawn, been forgotten, or concealed (Makhlouf, 2013, pp. 25–26).

The term phenomenology occupies an important place in the history of philosophy. Its early traces can be found in Johann Heinrich Lambert's essay "Phenomenology or Transcendental Optics," included in his *New Organon, or Thoughts on the Investigation and Designation of Truth and Its Distinction from Error and Illusion* (1764). In this essay, phenomenology is presented as a doctrine of appearance (*Die Lehre des Scheins*), through an attempt to avoid appearance understood as possible falsity and illusion in order to reach truth. Accordingly, optics discovers the laws of perspective that enable us to determine the true nature of an object from its visible appearance (Slimani, 2023, p. 587).

The term subsequently became increasingly common in philosophical research while retaining an empirical or sensory connotation, as illustrated by Kant's famous distinction between the noumenon, that is, things in themselves, and the phenomenon, that is, appearance governed by experience and sensation. Kant denied that reason could know the thing in itself. A few years later, Hegel entitled his important work *Phenomenology of Spirit*, in which he analyzes the development of Spirit, or universal reason, throughout history. Away from the ordinary sensory meaning of the term, phenomenology acquires here a new, reflective significance. For Hegel, phenomenology is the experience through which consciousness apprehends the dialectical path followed by consciousness itself in order to reach the Absolute. This occurs through successive moments: consciousness as knowledge of the external object, consciousness as knowledge of itself, and finally knowledge of Spirit. *Phenomenology of Spirit* thus becomes the final apprehension of this dialectical development toward the Absolute. The term later appeared in entirely new usages, including that of the Kantian

philosopher Nicolai Hartmann (1882–1950), whose ethical orientation led him to argue that the phenomenology of moral consciousness should, as far as possible, provide a complete inventory of the facts of moral consciousness known through experience, study their relations, and investigate deductively the principles to which they can be reduced (Lalande, 2001, p. 974).

B. Husserl's Philosophy and Its Phenomenological Development:

Understanding and interpreting Husserl's phenomenology remains an urgent task for researchers in philosophy. During his lifetime, Husserl published only a small portion of his studies and research. Beginning in 1950, the series of his complete works began to appear under the title *Husserliana*, including both the works he published during his lifetime and a large body of previously unpublished writings. Although approximately thirty volumes have so far been published, this remains a small number compared with the enormous quantity of manuscripts Husserl left behind. Their publication has contributed to clarifying many aspects of Husserl's thought and concepts and to forming a more comprehensive picture of his philosophy.

Husserl understands phenomenology as a philosophical method, and every method is determined by the goal it seeks to achieve. Husserl's objective is expressed in the title of one of his most important works, published in 1911: *Philosophy as a Rigorous Science*. In this way, Husserl returns to the equation established since Aristotle between philosophy and science, an equation that had been abandoned after Hegel. Through this definition of philosophy, Husserl opposed two prevailing conceptions. The first held that philosophy no longer had a subject of its own after the emergence and independence of the modern sciences, leaving philosophy only the task of writing its own history. The second reduced philosophy to a worldview expressing the spirit of the age in which it emerged. Although such a worldview may help us understand the dominant spirit of an age, it cannot legitimately aspire to truth and scientific validity. A philosophy that merely expresses the spirit of its time remains relative and cannot claim validity beyond its historical conditions (Makhlouf, 2013, p. 34).

At the same time, Husserl's definition of philosophy as a rigorous science differs from two other conceptions circulating at the time. One reduced philosophy to a mere theory of science, restricting its task to extracting the implicit theory underlying scientific practice; the other called for philosophy to adapt itself to the methods of modern science. In contrast, Husserl sought to establish philosophy as rigorous knowledge radically liberated from all opinions and presuppositions. He remained committed to this definition throughout his life and continually sought ways of translating it into concrete form, whether in his systematic works or in detailed studies of particular problems (Husserl, *La philosophie comme science rigoureuse*, 1989, p. 107).

Husserl's conception of phenomenology passed through three stages. In the first, he was concerned with problems of logic and mathematics. The second was the stage of descriptive psychology, during which phenomenology could function as a purely descriptive science. The third was the stage of transcendental phenomenology, in which Husserl attempted to make phenomenology a first philosophy. The aim of first philosophy represented the highest degree of maturity reached by transcendental phenomenology: to be valid once and for all. This Husserlian aspiration was rooted in a context in which philosophy was divided between a scientific positivist tendency that approached things empirically and a rationalist tendency. This led Husserl to subject these philosophies to radical critique, because he believed that all of them contained elements of falsity. Phenomenology thus became the science of critique, the critique of reason in its theoretical, normative, practical, and other forms. In *Logical Investigations*, he defines phenomenology as a neutral science of inquiry from which the various sciences emerge; in *Philosophy as a Rigorous Science*, he describes it as the science of true beginnings or origins. A science concerned with what is radical must itself be radical in every respect, including its method of inquiry; it is a method confined to describing the phenomenon, that is, describing what is given (Marif, 2021, p. 211).

Starting from the principle of givenness, phenomenology studies what manifests itself and what appears in the phenomenon. It thus functions as a philosophy of origins based almost entirely on one of its most important principles: the intuition of pure givenness and the necessity of turning toward, or returning to, the thing itself. This principle became a point of reference for phenomenologists seeking to establish their own distinctive phenomenologies. The rule of directing oneself toward the things themselves is therefore the first and fundamental rule of the phenomenological method. Here, "thing" means the given that which appears before consciousness and the given is the phenomenon, that which is manifest to consciousness. The given is connected with the idea of givenness, or modes of givenness. In order to attend to modes of givenness, the phenomenologist must suspend belief in the existence of the world and its objects, placing everything in question. This suspension of commitment to the world and objects is what Husserl calls the *epoché*. Phenomenology thus becomes an inquiry into the modes in which phenomena are given, that is, the ways in which they come to consciousness. Consequently, an important point becomes clear: the object of phenomenology is not phenomena understood simply as things standing before us, but the way in which those things appear to us. Phenomenology asks what makes a phenomenon a phenomenon (Marif, 2021, p. 212).

2. Steps of the Phenomenological Method:

The first step of the phenomenological method is the *epoché*. Husserl borrowed the concept of *epoché* from ancient skepticism to designate the methodological procedure through which

phenomenology moves from the natural attitude to the transcendental philosophical attitude. Yet epoché differs from skepticism in the classical philosophical sense. It is a methodological and procedural step that neither establishes nor denies knowledge; rather, it suspends judgment concerning the phenomena and objects given to us in the world, placing them "in brackets" until their essence and truth become manifest within the horizon of the subject (Lakhal, 2016, p. 284).

In Husserl's epistemology, the epoché does not stop at suspending judgments concerning the psychological knowing subject; it extends to all inherited knowledge and ready-made judgments transmitted by history. Husserl states that the new philosophers carry out the epoché as a change of attitude beginning from the natural attitude of human existence, not for accidental reasons but for essential ones. When knowledge adopts the phenomenological dimension through epoché, absolute and ready-made judgments contained in dogmatic and doctrinaire sciences are suspended so that they can be subjected to phenomenological inquiry and their essence disclosed. Through epoché, the philosopher becomes liberated from the strongest, most comprehensive, and most concealed internal constraint: the pre-givenness of the world. In this liberation, the comprehensive correlation between the world itself and consciousness of the world is discovered, because the world is given to us as a set of things and phenomena knowable by the subject; consciousness consequently frees things and objects from their merely unexamined existence by making them present for consciousness (Lakhal, 2016, p. 285).

At the stage of epoché, the phenomenological method does not yet reach what is required for establishing possible transcendental knowledge. Knowledge is not achieved merely by stopping at phenomenological critique and suspending judgments concerning historical opinions and positions or the phenomena given in the act of knowing. Epoché does not automatically provide the phenomenologist with a transcendental field of inquiry already constituted as a new project. The world remains the sole field of pre-given spontaneities. The phenomenological method therefore needs to demonstrate its effectiveness through a stage of construction and foundation, for epoché is the step that prepares the way for this task (Husserl, 2008, p. 640).

Phenomenological reduction is the second step. It is the foundation and principal support of the phenomenological method and constitutes the essential condition for eliminating assumptions and theories sedimented in consciousness and knowledge through the inheritance of intellectual traditions. Phenomenological reduction suspends judgments associated with previous beliefs and opinions that accept the reality of the external world. This is the genuine meaning of phenomenological suspension: it redirects consciousness toward itself, changes the direction of its gaze, and lifts the veil that had concealed the ego from itself. When we speak of phenomenology,

we are therefore repeatedly led to the idea of "bracketing." For Husserl, bracketing the objective world does not place the philosopher before absolute nothingness (Saidi, 2019, p. 13).

Suspension of judgment is the radical method through which I apprehend myself as a pure ego together with the accompanying life of pure consciousness, a life in which the entire objective world exists for me. When we "return to the things themselves," phenomenology becomes a descriptive method: it begins with a radical attitude in which interpretations and prevailing ideas are suspended and the things themselves are described as they appear through epoché. Phenomenological reduction is accomplished together with epoché and moves from the natural attitude toward consciousness (Lakhal, 2016).

Types of Reduction:

Eidetic reduction: this consists in reducing the accidental properties of acts of consciousness and their objects, insofar as they are correlated, to essential determinations for which the accidental properties are merely replaceable examples. Eidetic reduction requires setting aside particular facts in favor of the universality of essences. It is necessary because, according to Husserl, phenomenological inquiry is concerned not with individual beings or relations but with essences and essential necessities. Husserl states that in every theoretical investigation, whatever the type of knowledge involved, reduction must be carried out (Saidi, 2019, p. 14).

Phenomenological or transcendental reduction: this means reducing objects to their modes of givenness, allowing objects to be studied in correlation with the subjective modes through which they are given. Objects, viewed as correlates of subjective modes of givenness, are what Husserl calls phenomena. Phenomena are the foundation of phenomenology, which literally means the science of phenomena. This procedure makes it possible to apprehend the world as a phenomenon manifest within immanent consciousness, after removing contingent accretions and impurities and moving beyond the merely factual world.

Reduction may diminish the world in its accidental empirical reality, but it certainly enriches it within the life of consciousness. It differs in meaning from skepticism because phenomenological reduction brackets the existential validity of the objective world, whether external or psychological. What remains is the phenomenological transcendental ego and the field of transcendental phenomenological inner experience. It proceeds through two stages (Saidi, 2019, p. 15):

- Historical suspension of judgment: setting aside the various philosophical doctrines as though they did not exist, since phenomenology turns toward the things themselves.
- Suspension of opinions derived from everyday life or science and concentration on the given thing.

Intersubjective reduction: following his lectures in Göttingen, Husserl proposed expanding reduction on the basis of two important considerations. First, he rejected the continuation of Cartesian reduction because he believed that phenomenological reduction still retained elements of Cartesian doubt. Second, he proposed opening and extending reduction so that it becomes intersubjective reduction, encompassing both the ego and the other. The Cartesian path produces an egological position, and suspending the world and the facts associated with things and others reveals the danger that phenomenology could become an egocentric form of thought. Intersubjective reduction should therefore modify the limitations of transcendental reduction by proposing another way of apprehending realities other than my own existence. It expands the horizon of transcendental reduction and reveals the intersubjective objective world. Awareness of other subjects requires a mode of apprehension different from awareness of oneself. Through phenomenological reduction, once belief in external things is suspended, any kind of theoretical, axiological, or practical consciousness can become an object of inquiry. Objective facts can then be explored as correlates of consciousness, while inquiry is restricted to the phenomena: what are they, and how are they given?

After this procedure, what remains? According to Husserl, once all objective facts have been methodically excluded, what remains are the phenomena of experience—the phenomena of the world as apprehended reflectively and absolutely. The components of consciousness remain at the center of inquiry and are involved in the constitution of the world (Saidi, 2019, p. 16).

Intentionality constitutes the third step of the phenomenological method. Husserl derived intentionality from Brentano, who had in turn borrowed the concept from scholastic philosophy. Brentano regarded intentionality as the essential feature of psychic phenomena that enables us to distinguish them. In general, intentionality means that every consciousness is consciousness of something. In contrast with earlier philosophies and even with pre-philosophical conceptions, the phenomenological method differs in that the subject, as the foundation of knowledge, cannot contain empty consciousness devoid of content. Nor is consciousness merely a bearer of innate ideas, as in Descartes, or a structure of a priori categories, as in Kant. Rather, it is consciousness directed toward objects and phenomena, because knowledge is ultimately knowledge of these objects and phenomena themselves, and there is no knowledge without them (Lakhal, 2016, p. 285).

For Husserl, intentionality is closely linked to the correlation between an act of consciousness and its object. Consciousness is not a neutral container waiting to be filled; rather, it consists of acts whose character is determined by the kind of object toward which they are directed and which can appear to consciousness only through appropriate modes of givenness. An intentional act, whether perception, memory, moral judgment, imagination, love, hatred, desire, practical decision, or evaluation, is a lived experience that relates itself to an object in a particular way. In *Ideas I*, Husserl

uses the term noesis for the act of consciousness and noema for the object of consciousness. Intentional consciousness thus carries within itself its relation to its object, providing a basis for overcoming the subject–object dualism that dominated modern philosophy (Husserl, 1995, p. 315).

Husserl observes that we are confronted with a science whose broad scope his contemporaries had not yet fully grasped. It is not a science of psychology. It is a science of the phenomena of consciousness, in contrast to natural psychology. The content of phenomenology as a method of knowledge therefore differs from psychological knowledge, because psychology remains at the level of the psychic, that is, as a science of mental states and their changes. Psychology studies empirical consciousness, whereas phenomenology studies “pure” consciousness from the phenomenological standpoint. Consciousness in the phenomenological sense is a science of the phenomena of consciousness that manifest themselves in their intentional relation to objects of knowledge. The term phenomenon has a dual meaning because of the essential correlation between appearance and that which appears. Phenomenon primarily denotes what appears, while it can also refer to appearing itself.

Cognitive lived experiences are, by their nature, intentional: they intend something and relate in one way or another to an object. The act of relating to an object belongs to the experience, whereas the object itself does not. The object can appear and have a particular mode of givenness, without being actually contained as a real component within the cognitive phenomenon or existing there as a thought. Clarifying the essence of knowledge and raising the essential correlations belonging to it to the level of self-givenness is the path through which the essence of knowledge is investigated. The effectiveness of the phenomenological method in knowledge is guaranteed by understanding knowledge as a constitution: it is not directly given in phenomena, nor is it hidden a priori within the subject. Knowledge of essences is the ultimate goal of phenomenological method (Lakhal, 2016, p. 286).

What distinguishes Husserl’s conception of intentionality is his view that consciousness lives through reference and dependence upon original modes of givenness, which philosophical tradition calls evidence. If consciousness did not contain an awareness of reference and possess the capacity to fulfill what it intends through non-original modes of givenness, it would have no intentional object. For there to be consciousness of something, consciousness must know its capacity to make that thing appear in an intuitive way. Consciousness’s intention toward an object is therefore not merely a behavioral relation to something; it contains an orientation toward original givenness. In all its forms, consciousness finds fulfillment in the intuitive possession of the object. The character of conscious achievements depends not on contingent empirical data but on the essence of objects, that is, on the general determination of their types. There are therefore kinds of objects or regions of

Being, Husserl argues, distinguished according to their essences, which can be given in original intuition. On the principle of correlation, there is a correspondence between the essence of the object and the essence of the intentional act directed toward it. Their correlation is therefore a priori. Phenomenology seeks to formulate general and necessary essential laws determining the structure of acts of consciousness and the regions of Being in which they appear (Makhlouf, 2013, p. 39).

After carrying out epoché, phenomenological reduction, and intentionality, the remaining task for phenomenological philosophy is to explain how consciousness comes to believe in the existence of objects transcending it how it moves beyond its internal sphere and attributes independent existence to objects in the world. Constitution is the task that accomplishes this. After consciousness becomes present to itself and epoché is performed, consciousness becomes consciousness of essences and provides the basis for individual ego knowledge and intersubjective knowledge (Lakhal, 2016, p. 288).

Phenomenological consciousness appears to be knowledge of phenomena, but it does not stop at their properties as empirical and sensory philosophy does. Rather, it searches beyond phenomena for essences disclosed and constituted by the subject within the structure of intentional consciousness. The phenomenological method is therefore a critique of knowledge, and phenomenology is a general theory of essence that includes the essence of knowledge. Husserlian phenomenology is not merely knowledge of objects; it is knowledge of essences. Essence, in the phenomenological sense, differs from metaphysical definitions because the essence reached phenomenologically is the completed form of knowledge of phenomena as they appear in the process of consciousness to the knowing subject (Lakhal, 2016, p. 289).

Consciousness opens itself to intentionality as concrete lived experience. The subject experiences this as transcendental consciousness realized in the cogito through intentionality. The world gives itself to consciousness, which gives it meaning after intention has moved from the subject toward the object. As a result of reduction, the direction is reversed from object to subject and essence is realized within immanence. Authentic consciousness is completed in the transcendental subject, which no longer remains merely at the level of the intended object but reaches the intention of consciousness itself. Its content is linked to what is concrete and lived; after phenomenological reduction, the world is deprived of its merely factual character and becomes an immanent phenomenon of consciousness in the phenomenological sense (Lakhal, 2016, p. 289).

3. Critical Examination of Husserl's Phenomenology:

A. Heidegger's Ontology and the Critical Development of Phenomenology:

Heidegger was an attentive reader of Edmund Husserl's writings and closely followed the historical context in which his teacher's phenomenology developed. Yet this did not prevent him from questioning the extent to which Husserlian phenomenology could preserve its fundamental principle: turning toward "the things themselves" as they appear to us. Heidegger argued that Husserl at times acted in a non-phenomenological manner because he did not fully adhere to the principle that gives the things themselves the right to speak. Husserl undoubtedly provided phenomenology with new tools and avenues for understanding the phenomena of the world around us. Heidegger, however, developed a different vision of the world, one that revealed meanings not previously brought to light by Husserl, including the thesis that the reality of Being precedes consciousness and knowledge. Heidegger adopted much from Husserl, but his originality lay in employing phenomenological tools within a different context and for different purposes. For this reason, phenomenology cannot simply be regarded as a method established by Husserl for Heidegger to use in reaching a predetermined goal. Rather, Heidegger developed his own distinctive conception and use of phenomenology, thereby transforming it radically in both conception and task (Oniba, 2017, p. 4).

This transformation is evident in Heidegger's conception of phenomenology as a way of seeking a hermeneutic understanding of Dasein first and of Being thereafter. In his early writings, he repeatedly stated that phenomenology still required an initial inquiry capable of revealing the relations between what is called phenomenon and what is meant by phenomenology. He emphasized that the terms phenomenon and phenomenological require further clarification insofar as they serve as methodological guiding threads (Oniba, 2017, p. 5).

For Husserl, the term phenomenon refers to everything that appears or manifests itself before consciousness, particularly in terms of how it appears. Beginning with the immediate given enables us to understand how the world is constituted and acquires meaning for consciousness, so that it can be apprehended directly without mediation. This led Heidegger to reconsider the fundamental discoveries of Husserlian phenomenology and push them to their furthest consequences, making phenomenology a principal avenue for raising the question of Being in general and the Being of Dasein in particular, while returning it to its Greek philosophical roots and bringing it increasingly close to an ontological task.

The German word *Phänomen*, Heidegger argues, derives from the Greek *phainomenon*, meaning that which appears as what manifests and reveals itself from itself and requires no external agent to make it appear. A phenomenon is therefore the way something is present objectively, particularly the distinctive way in which an object becomes present from itself. Yet what appears can also appear deceptively and contrary to its truth. Heidegger sought to resolve this problem in *Being and Time*,

especially in section 7, devoted to the phenomenological method. He observes that the concept of phenomenon had departed from its original meaning and acquired a procedural function in the history of the sciences. It consequently remained, in his view, distant from the possibilities appropriate to the study of Dasein, remaining tied to the conception of entities as they are encountered within the natural sciences, where experience makes entities appear without attending to their invisible characteristics or hidden forces (Oniba, 2017, p. 6).

Heidegger did not neglect any stage in the early development of phenomenology as a method of inquiry and did not hesitate to offer a sharp critique of Husserlian phenomenology. He questioned the objectivity of a method that described itself as descriptive psychology and asked in what sense objectivity could be discussed when many of its topics were derived from logic rather than from phenomenology itself.

Through his early writings, which were published only long after *Being and Time*, Heidegger sought to show that the phenomenological method introduced by his teacher Husserl and subsequently employed by many phenomenologists had not yet provided a genuinely new method of philosophical inquiry capable of responding to the problems raised by its historical age. If philosophy is a child of its age, it must remain attached to the concerns of Dasein and engage with them. Heidegger therefore developed his own conception of phenomenological inquiry in later writings so that phenomenology could perform the tasks expected of it. His conception does not imply that he abandoned Husserl's method. He repeatedly acknowledged Husserl's importance while arguing that Husserl's understanding of phenomenology and its task was not radical enough: it did not penetrate to the root of things because it remained committed to the idea that pure consciousness constitutes the world. Thus phenomenology remained in the position of a neutral spectator before the things encountered in the world, whereas Husserl's pure consciousness constituted its central theme. With Heidegger, phenomenology subsequently underwent a major transformation in both its central theme and its methodological employment (Oniba, 2017, p. 8).

As noted above, Husserlian phenomenology relies on pure reflection because it is a science of pure consciousness. Since this is so, it does not permit external elements to enter the analysis. The suspension of judgment therefore extends to every material existence and to everything bodily, including the existence of my own body as the body of the perceiving subject. What remains is absolute consciousness, the transcendental ego that stands outside the world (Gadamer, 2005, p. 134).

Consequently, the only thing that does not submit to phenomenological reduction is pure consciousness. It is the starting point of analysis and also its ultimate outcome. This consciousness does not belong to the world because its mode of existence differs from that of objects. Jean

Grondin draws attention to the consequence of this position: when epoché encompasses all material objects, including the human body as a material object, what remains before the intellect is pure phenomenon, that is, the totality of meanings or essences intuited by pure consciousness. This gives Husserlian phenomenology a form of absolute idealism.

It can therefore be argued that Heidegger criticizes Husserl precisely for granting ontological priority to the subject at the expense of the world. Although Husserl recognized that this criticism risked reducing phenomenology to subjectivism and attempted to correct it by restoring confidence in the natural attitude, which presupposes the existence of the world, he nevertheless failed to escape the trap of subjectivity because he made the world dependent on the subject and its pure consciousness. He consequently did not reach Heidegger's thesis that Being is understood through Being itself and that our experience of Being precedes our ideas about it; the meaning we attribute to Being is formed through direct experience (Bourhia, 2025, p. 190).

The same criticism can be observed in Gadamer, regarded as a major heir to the phenomenological hermeneutics initiated by Heidegger. In his principal work *Truth and Method*, Gadamer places Husserl's position within the context of Heidegger's critique and emphasizes the priority of Being, or the world, over conscious subjectivity in Heidegger's thought. Under the influence of his discussion of Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927), Husserl himself came to recognize that even in the complete suspension of judgment, the world nevertheless remains constituted as something pre-given. He acknowledged that he had not sufficiently appreciated the phenomenon of the world and subsequently replaced the concept of consciousness with that of the lifeworld (Bourhia, 2025, p. 191).

B. Merleau-Ponty: From the Description of the Phenomena of Consciousness to the Description of the Phenomena of Being (the Body) :

Merleau-Ponty's conception of the body enabled phenomenology to move from subjectivity toward realism. The objective was to rebuild the bridges between subject and object, an objective that Husserl's transcendental phenomenology had been unable to achieve because intentionality remained connected to pure consciousness. For Merleau-Ponty, intentionality is rooted in the body. This is expressed in his claim that I am not in front of my body; I am within my body, or rather, I am my body. This allows consciousness to escape its closure upon itself and become integrated into the world through the body: the lived body is in the world just as the heart is within the body. A new conception of being-in-the-world therefore emerges, namely embodied existence. This conception provides solutions to several philosophical problems, especially the epistemological relationship between subject and object. Neither pole has priority over the other because the body is simultaneously subject and object. Embodied existence also addresses the longstanding mind-body problem. Merleau-Ponty's notion of vertical existence provides a solution to this problem by

expressing the unity of mind and body without granting priority to either the spiritual or material dimension. This transcends many traditional oppositions and produces a new conception of the human being as neither merely spirit nor merely matter, but as their unity (Ben Sebaa, 2011, pp. 360–361).

The principal objective behind Husserl's establishment of transcendental phenomenology was to solve the epistemological problems raised in Western thought. Husserl found support in certain modern philosophical ideas, especially the notion of the knowing subject or thinking ego, which is the foundation of knowledge and existence. Yet the transcendental ego becomes, in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, a bodily ego that restores our actual presence before consciousness as well as our presence before the world. What makes phenomenology phenomenological is therefore the study of the appearance of the existence of consciousness rather than the assumption of its prior existence. The concept of embodied existence offers a new way of addressing the problem of knowledge: knowledge is no longer tied to the priority of consciousness; rather, the body becomes our means of knowing (Ben Sebaa, 2011, p. 361).

In some of his works, especially *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, Husserl focused on what he called the lifeworld, a world containing all our knowledge and experiences. He asks why we should not make the lifeworld in which we all live and which is our world a comprehensive object of inquiry rather than limiting ourselves to our particular aims and concerns. Although the founder of phenomenology did not provide a fully explicit answer to this question, Merleau-Ponty was able to discover in the lifeworld dimensions Husserl had not fully developed. For Merleau-Ponty, ontology establishes concepts that take the place of transcendental subjectivity and the subject-object division. Analyses of perception, nature, life, body, and language enable us to enter the lifeworld and the "wild Being" that is embodied existence (Ben Sebaa, 2011, p. 362).

The transition from Husserlian to Merleau-Pontian phenomenology reveals a transformation in the formulation of phenomenological problems: from the knowing subject to the knowing body. This transformation produces new consequences concerning the relation of the self to itself, to other selves, and consequently to the world. The subject becomes embodied among other embodied subjects. Phenomenology therefore moves from describing the phenomena of consciousness to describing the phenomena of existence in the world as embodied existence. The body becomes an object of phenomenological reflection after having remained marginalized for a long period, from Plato through the Church and Descartes to Husserl. François Dagognet notes that philosophy neglected the body for a long time and that religious thought struggled to understand it, often viewing it as a source of pleasure and sin and consequently turning philosophers toward the soul.

and “states of consciousness.” Later, this negative view of the body changed as philosophers such as Nietzsche and existentialists including Jaspers, Foucault, and Sartre turned their attention to it (Ben Sebaa, 2011, p. 362).

C. Jacques Derrida and the Rejection of the Reduction of Phenomenology to Language:

In many of his writings and interviews, Derrida acknowledged Husserl’s influence on him. He stated that nothing he did would have been possible without the phenomenological orientation, without practicing phenomenological and transcendental reduction, and without concern for the meaning of the phenomenon. For Derrida, Husserl taught him a technique, a method, and a discipline, and even when he believed that certain Husserlian assumptions needed to be questioned, he attempted to do so while remaining faithful to the phenomenological method (Derrida, 2000, p. 73).

The fundamental point of disagreement between Derrida and Husserl concerns the philosophical nature of language and the determination of its role and function in producing meaning. Although the object of inquiry was common to Derrida and Husserl—the nature of language—their approaches differed according to the strategy adopted by each. Derrida investigated language from the standpoint of Western metaphysics and the privileging of voice and speech, whereas Husserl approached language through his phenomenological method, which directs attention toward linguistic structures as relational forms and distinctive phenomena involved in the constitution of human existence. Derrida described Husserl’s treatment of language as an external relation, visible in the relation between sign and meaning and between signifier and signified. Within phenomenology, the sign performs the function of expressing meaning and representing the signified. According to Derrida, this reduction of writing within phenomenology contributes to reducing the externality of the sign and creates what is known as phonocentrism. He argues that Saussure, following a traditional path associated with Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, Hegel, and Husserl, expelled writing from linguistics and therefore from language and speech, treating it as an external, dangerous, and simultaneously useless representational phenomenon. Deconstruction, by contrast, maintains that there is no outside of the text and assigns writing an enormous and open-ended role that exceeds the classical project. Derrida therefore develops the concept of grammatology, which destabilizes the concepts and scientific rules involved in the construction of theological texts and also challenges logocentrism and phonocentrism. He argues that grammatology both establishes science and frees it from its limits, requiring it to operate freely and rigorously within its own writing (Saidi, 2019, pp. 24–25).

This orientation toward language expresses a transcendental illusion subject to change across languages and cultures. Western metaphysics elevated the value of speech and diminished the value

of writing. This is precisely why deconstruction became important within Western thought: it sought to restore writing to its marginalized position (Saidi, 2019, pp. 24–25).

In general, Derrida argues that phenomenological discourse remains caught within the framework of the metaphysics of presence, which tirelessly seeks to derive difference. Husserl's project, in Derrida's view, restricts language to a secondary layer of experience and, upon examination, reveals the phonocentrism characteristic of metaphysics. If language contributes to the constitution of ideal objects, it does so through phonetic writing, which fixes, records, and embodies an already prepared utterance. Husserl's conception of the present self or pure presence therefore precedes language. Language, according to Derrida, is not grounded solely in psychological, biological, or cultural bases but also depends upon a priori foundations, and Husserl did not succeed in separating it from ordinary language. At the same time, language takes the form of a material body: although expression requires speech, not everything contained in speech can be expressed through speech. Speech contains indication, and language is a signifying act with physical existence. Derrida therefore argues that Husserl gives priority to meaning over the sign and treats the sign as an empty intentionality. The phenomenological thesis is that the linguistic system of our experience provides the structures and orientations necessary for clarity, structures that are independent of the conceptual forms of our thought and of the linguistic patterns underlying them (Saidi, 2019, p. 51).

Conclusion:

At the conclusion of this historical, analytical, and critical reading of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology, it becomes clear that this ambitious philosophical project was not merely a passing epistemological theory but a radical attempt to re-establish philosophy as a "rigorous science" grounded in absolute certainty in response to the crisis of European thought. Through procedural concepts such as intentionality, epoché, and transcendental reduction, Husserl succeeded in moving beyond the traditional Cartesian dualism between subject and object and opened a new horizon for understanding the relationship between consciousness and the world. He emphasized that consciousness is not an empty container but intentionality directed toward things and giving them meaning through their modes of appearance. Yet this transcendental foundation, despite its strength and value, contained weaknesses revealed by later critical interpretations.

Heidegger showed that by granting ontological priority to pure consciousness, Husserl neglected the question of Being itself and fell into subjectivism, making the world merely dependent upon the activity of consciousness. This is inconsistent with the fundamental phenomenological principle of "returning to the things themselves." Merleau-Ponty, for his part, demonstrated that the body, as an existential condition and active perceiver, remained marginalized in Husserl's thought and proposed an alternative based on "embodied existence," thereby reformulating the relationship between

subject, world, and others and achieving a unity of mind and body that transcendental idealism had failed to accomplish. Derrida went further by deconstructing Husserl's logic and exposing the dominance of the "metaphysics of presence" and phonocentrism in the conception of the phenomenon, which contributed to marginalizing language and writing as fundamental conditions for the formation of meaning.

Finally, Husserlian phenomenology, despite failing to attain the absolute ideality and complete certainty it sought, succeeded in transforming the course of modern philosophy and opened the way to major philosophical projects such as existentialism, hermeneutics, and deconstruction. Its true value therefore does not lie in being a closed system of thought but in being a living method of questioning and a permanent critical instrument for reconsidering our relationship with the world, the other, language, and the body. This philosophy unsettled the certainties of its age and reopened the question of human existence, leaving a fertile legacy that continues to nourish philosophical and critical thought to the present day.

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