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# From Being to Givenness and Back: Some Remarks on the Meaning of Transcendental Idealism in Kant and Husserl

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# From Being to Givenness and Back: Some Remarks on the Meaning of Transcendental Idealism in Kant and Husserl

By Sebastian Luft

*This paper takes a fresh look at a classical theme in philosophical scholarship, the meaning of transcendental idealism, by contrasting Kant's and Husserl's versions of it. I present Kant's transcendental idealism as a theory distinguishing between the world as in-itself and as given to the experiencing human being. This reconstruction provides the backdrop for Husserl's transcendental phenomenology as a brand of transcendental idealism expanding on Kant: through the phenomenological reduction Husserl universalizes Kant's transcendental philosophy to an eidetic science of subjectivity. He thereby furnishes a new sense of transcendental philosophy, rephrases the quid iuris question, and provides a new conception of the thing-in-itself. What needs to be clarified is not exclusively the possibility of a priori cognition but, to start at a much lower level, the validity of objects that give themselves in experience. The thing-in-itself is not an unknowable object, but the idea of the object in all possible appearances experienced at once. In spite of these changes Husserl remains committed to the basic sense of Kant's Copernican Turn. I end with some comments on how both Kant and Husserl view the relation between theoretical and moral philosophy.*

Kant's oeuvre contains gold in rich abundance. But one must break it and melt it in the fire of radical critique in order to bring out this content. (Husserl – from a manuscript from ca. 1917<sup>1</sup>)

Essentially, already the phenomenological reduction, correctly conceived, implies the marching route to transcendental idealism, just as phenomenology in its entirety is nothing other than the first rigorous scientific form of this idealism. (Husserl – from the lecture 'Erste Philosophie', 1923/4<sup>2</sup>)

## Introduction

In a letter to Cassirer written in 1925, Husserl reflects on his philosophical journey. Influenced in his early development by his teacher Brentano and his school, he was initially 'adverse to Kant' and 'unreceptive to the genuine sense of Kant's philosophy'. After forging his method of the phenomenological reduction, however, 'I had to realize that this science further developing in me encompassed, in an entirely distinct method, the entire Kantian problematic ... and that it confirmed Kant's main results in rigorous scientific founding and in their limitation.'<sup>3</sup>

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Like many philosophers who succeeded Kant, the mature Husserl both recognized Kant's towering genius and saw himself in the tradition of Kantian philosophizing, though he never wanted to become a member of a school. Instead he intended, in his way, to wrest the true kernel from Kant's philosophy, even if this meant reading him against the grain and 'understanding the author better than he understood himself'.<sup>4</sup> As the date of the letter quoted above shows, it was very late in his career that Husserl realized that he was furthering the true intentions of Kant's thought. Indeed, in *Ideas*, Book I, dating from 1913, he explicitly conceived of his phenomenology as a form of *transcendental* philosophy with a reference to Kant's critical philosophy.<sup>5</sup> He espoused, even embraced, the Kantian concept of transcendental idealism and utilized this term frequently to describe his philosophy, though he pointed out that his *phenomenological* idealism was different from all traditional idealisms.<sup>6</sup> *Husserl's* transcendental idealism, like Kant's, allegedly solves all one-sided -isms through a new method, with the difference that Husserl believed that he was finally *doing* it instead of merely announcing it.<sup>7</sup>

In what sense is Husserl's phenomenology a transcendental idealism? Indeed, such a notion seems curious when we look back at the founder of this doctrine, for Husserl rejected what was precisely the main tenet of *Kant's* transcendental idealism, i.e., the distinction between thing-in-itself and appearance, as 'mythology'.<sup>8</sup> Instead, the manner in which Husserl conceived of his phenomenology as transcendental was by grounding all knowledge and, more broadly, all experience of being in constituting, meaning-bestowing subjectivity. *This* was the sense – the correlational a priori – in which Husserl believed that his phenomenology could be interpreted as transcendental idealism: that all being receives its meaning in meaning-bestowing acts of transcendental subjectivity. So from the standpoint of phenomenology, a distinction between a *thing-in-itself*, to which we have no access and about which we can know nothing, and its *appearance*, of which we have experience and knowledge through our cognitive apparatus, makes no sense. With his distinction, Kant might have opened the door to a 'science of appearances', phenomenology,<sup>9</sup> but the very distinction is a mythical construction. The 'gold' in Kant's genius was the Copernican Turn back to subjectivity. In this endeavour, Husserl saw Kant acknowledging Descartes's turn to the *ego cogito* and expanding upon this ingenious first beginning.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, Kant's philosophy presented to Husserl the ideal of *scientific* philosophy, i.e., philosophy as a metaphysics that would henceforth emerge as science, as 'rigorous science' grounded in human lived-experience of the world. This is the sense in which elements of Kant's philosophy can be adopted and others shunned. Only in this way is the promise of

Kant's Copernican Revolution fulfilled.

So much for *Husserl's* interpretation of Kant and his own self-interpretation vis-à-vis the Sage of Königsberg. But it is of more than just exegetical interest to ask whether Husserl was really correct in this assessment of the Kantian project and the concept of transcendental idealism. I would like to argue that Husserl's rejection of Kant's notion of transcendental idealism rests on a misinterpretation of the true meaning of this doctrine. Presenting Kant's achievement in a new light will do more than rectifying an erroneous – and, if true, absurd – interpretation of his transcendental idealism. My main aim is to show that a more plausible reconstruction of Kant's type of idealism will also give us deeper insight into a genuine *phenomenological* sense of transcendental idealism that is not so far from Kant's own, though with some significant advances over Kant. *Kant's* transcendental idealism can, in turn, help clarify *Husserl's* version thereof. A reconstruction of Husserl's phenomenology as transcendental idealism stemming from the Kantian approach is helpful for understanding the Husserlian project, and is the *only* way to understand the mature Husserl's transcendental standpoint.

First I will show how Kant's concept of transcendental idealism is a much more interesting and promising project than it first appears to be. With this reading of Kant stemming from a certain tradition in Kant scholarship, I will then turn to Husserl and reassess the latter's project as it appears in this light. Only from this perspective will the transcendental-phenomenological reduction and its real intention become understandable. Finally, I will present the 'new' shape of transcendental idealism and transcendental philosophy as it appears in the mature Husserl. One way in which Husserl moves beyond Kant's metaphysical outlook is in framing phenomenology as a rigorous science of appearances, in other words, an eidetic science of being as it is *given* (to an, and in fact *any*, experiencing agent). Yet, the real force of Husserl's phenomenology is a novel concept of being as *validity*. Husserl's version of transcendental idealism shows us a path to the true *being* of the world, rather than leaving us stuck with an irritating duality between thing-in-itself and appearance.

I will conclude with some remarks on Kant's and Husserl's views on the relation between theoretical and practical reason, suggesting that Husserl ultimately aligns himself with the systematic scope of Kant's transcendental philosophy as it makes a transition from knowledge to action. Kant's entire system is geared towards reason's practical application and has an elaborate moral philosophy in the transcendental vein, as a result of revealing reason's limits. Husserl, too, attempts to show a transition from cognition to action, stemming from his

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interpretation of being as validity, thereby underpinning Kant's practical postulates on a deeper level. It is Kant's emphasis on practical reason which Husserl acknowledges, while interpreting the practical import of reason slightly differently. Husserl, though merely making meagre gestures towards ethics (at least following this idealistic approach<sup>11</sup>), thereby remains ever more forcefully in the framework of Kantian philosophy.<sup>12</sup>

## I From Being to Givenness: Kant's Copernican Revolution

In order to understand Kant's ground-breaking Copernican Revolution, it helps to distinguish two moments of the overall argument which correspond to the two steps in which Kant introduces it in the Transcendental Aesthetic and the Analytic. The two steps in the argument together make one sustained argument for transcendental idealism.<sup>13</sup> Let us recall the overall point of Kant's revolution, which he introduces as an experiment:

Hence let us try whether we do not get farther with the problems of metaphysics by assuming that the objects must conform to our cognition, which would agree better with the requested possibility of an *a priori* cognition of them, which is to establish something about objects before they are given to us. This would be just like the first thoughts of Copernicus...<sup>14</sup>

The point of the experiment is to inquire into what happens to the question of metaphysics – true cognition of being – when we turn the tables and assume not that it is *our* cognitive apparatus that conforms to *objects*, but rather that it is the *objects* that must conform to *us* if we want to have any knowledge (*Kenntnis*) and even cognition (*Wissen*) of them. But in order to talk about real cognition (*a priori*), we must *first* assume that objects are *given* to us. Being is only knowable as given. Objects can only be known to us if we can have *experience* of them, if they are *Gegen-stände*, if they appear to us, stand over against us. Hence, the way we can have experience of objects is as *appearances*, but not as they 'really' are. We know nothing of objects as things-in-themselves. This basic distinction marks Kant's notion of transcendental idealism: we can have no experience and knowledge of things-in-themselves, but only of things as they appear to us; it is our subjective make-up that enables things to be given as appearances. But Kant goes one step further: our way of experiencing objects is *to us* the only way the things are. Hence it is *we* who 'put' something 'into' the objects, and beyond that, things-in-themselves are in no way constituted in this way outside our experience.<sup>15</sup> Things-in-themselves *have in themselves* no epistemic conditions; epistemic conditions exist only *for* epistemic agents.<sup>16</sup>

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What is this shift about? The move to subjectivity is surely in the Cartesian tradition, but there is more at stake here. Allison has portrayed this move as one from the ‘theocentric’ to the ‘anthropocentric’ model of cognition.<sup>17</sup> What is the theocentric model? Its claim is that we *can* (ideally, once we have attained a God-like perspective) have direct access to things, i.e., to things as they really are. The human standpoint, from which we experience things, is irrelevant with respect to the cognition of things. We have direct access to things, and the way we experience them is how they really are. In other words, the *perspective* on things does not count. We see the world as any agent – God, humans, Mars creatures – from their standpoint would cognize the world. The Kantian shift is thus to take *this perspective* seriously, more precisely, to see it as *constitutive* for the experience of things. Moreover, let us assume that the standpoint actually does something *to* the object. This is not a manipulation of its ‘true’ being. But a standpoint on something has a certain perspective. What is seen shows a certain *aspect*; from a perspective objects show themselves as *appearances*. This is what the move to an anthropocentric model of cognition is about: it is a consideration of the specific human standpoint on things, as opposed to a view that the standpoint on things does not matter.<sup>18</sup>

This, then, is how Kant’s Copernican Revolution must be understood, as a two-standpoint theory. In Allison’s words: ‘[T]he distinction between appearances and things in themselves refers primarily to two distinct ways in which things (empirical objects) can be “considered”: either in relation to the subjective conditions of human sensibility (space and time), and thus as they “appear”, or independently of those conditions, and thus as they are “in themselves”.’<sup>19</sup> Yet, one has to be more precise: things-in-themselves ‘considered’ (thought) as they are in themselves means considered as they are *not experienced* by any subject. Any subject that has experience has a standpoint *in order to* have experience. Hence things-in-themselves are objects that are *not experienced*. The realist claim is that we are able to have access to objects without experience. To Kant, this is absurd. So the true distinction between objects and things-in-themselves is about considering the object as given from a perspective, and the object ‘*given without a perspective* (‘*only cognized*’). The two-standpoint theory is really about the distinction ‘*with or without a standpoint*’. Kant also calls the thing-in-itself a *noumenon*<sup>20</sup> – it is a mere *Verstandeswesen*; we can *think* it, but we cannot know what *experience* of it would be like. As subjects, we must have experience to have knowledge of objects. Things can be *given* to us only in experience.<sup>21</sup> God does not need a perspective from which to experience things, but we cannot know what God-like knowledge is like.

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In this move to an *anthropocentric* model of cognition, Kant proposes to investigate the world *as it is given from a perspective*, and this perspective is, for us, the *human standpoint*, the only one we know of (though we can conceive that other creatures have theirs). Hence, Kant introduces a radically *finite* perspective to human cognition, as Heidegger has rightly pointed out,<sup>22</sup> insofar as a standpoint puts limitations on experience: I cannot simultaneously see an object from the front and from the back. God's bird's-eye view can 'do' this, but this is not *experience* in the way we know it. Heidegger is completely wrong, however, if this means that therefore our *cognition* is finite. For, the point of Kant's entire critical project is precisely to justify the belief that *despite* our subjective perspective on things, we *can* have objective, a priori cognition. As a priori, it is a-perspectival. Cognition exists, as *human* cognition, but it *is* a priori cognition. This leads us to the next step in which Kant unfolds this notion of transcendental idealism.

The first step was the Copernican Turn itself, from the object of experience to the experience of objects. More precisely, objects appear in space and time, but as appearances for us: space and time are our manner of experiencing objects. This is the factum that is established in the Transcendental Aesthetics and addresses the *quid facti*-question. The factum from which Kant begins his enterprise is that objects *are* experienced as existing in space and time as our forms of intuition. Yet, this is still not enough to establish a 'thick' sense of experience, for experience to Kant is more than just intuition.<sup>23</sup> For, although intuition is all we have in order to establish *givenness*, we do also have *a priori cognition* of objects when we do science (modelled on Newtonian physics). The crucial question of the *Critique* is: *How is this possible?* For cognition exists! The question is not just about the possibility of synthetic judgments a priori, but 'How are we *justified* in making these judgments?' This is the *quid iuris*-question addressed in the Transcendental Deduction. The positive impact of the first *Critique* is justifying how for us, as human beings with standpoints, it is possible to have a priori cognition. We are justified in making this claim because, although we have a finite perspective *qua experiencing observers*, we do have access to pure concepts *qua rational creatures*. The problem that then remains to be solved is how to connect our rational and our empirical nature. Kant answers this question in the notoriously obscure Schematism chapter, the success of which we will need to leave undecided here.

When these two aspects are put together, the achievements of Kant's Copernican Revolution and the doctrine of transcendental idealism are

- (a) to move from a theocentric to an anthropocentric model, i.e., to introduce the aspect of *perspective* into our specifically human cognition, and
- (b) to establish the legitimacy of a priori cognition *in spite of our necessary perspectivity*.

Kant wants to acknowledge the limitations of the human standpoint<sup>24</sup> while finding a way to justify what to him was a fact, namely, that we have access to universal truth.<sup>25</sup>

For the purposes of section II, (a) is of greater interest, though we will address (b) in section III. Concerning Kant's influence on Husserl, we can assert that Kant was really the first to frame the concept of being as being-given, as appearing. Appearing is the 'noematic' side of Kant's Copernican Turn to the experiencing agent; appearing-of and givenness-to are two sides of the same coin. Correlatively, being, as we can experience it, must be being given from a certain perspective and is, for us, nothing other than being given; it is *phaenomenon*. In this sense, Kant can be said to be the first phenomenologist. His doctrine of the thing-in-itself is less 'mythical' than Husserl *himself* thought, if we frame transcendental idealism as a doctrine that introduces the idea of perspective to experience, as opposed to a self-contradictory 'view from nowhere', i.e., a perspective without a perspective.

## **II From Givenness to Givenness-as-Such: Husserl's Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction**

This brief reconstruction of Kant's transcendental idealism had the purpose of connecting Husserl with the Kantian project. I will now present Husserl's transcendental idealism with a focus on the following two aspects: Kant's anthropocentric model of cognition and the *quid iuris*-issue. I will deal with anthropocentrism in this section, and the *quid iuris* in the next.

Husserl himself acknowledged that the transcendental-phenomenological reduction is his way of rephrasing the Copernican Revolution.<sup>26</sup> So I will first reconstruct the reduction in the light of what was said about Kant, which will give us an interesting perspective on Husserl's original advancement over Kant.

The first move into transcendental phenomenology occurs when Husserl introduces the epochē, the bracketing of the natural attitude. This putting-in-suspension gives rise to a turn towards the subjective acts in which the world is experienced *in* the natural attitude. The natural attitude is oblivious to these subjective acts. In the natural attitude we experience the world as

existing independently of us. The natural attitude's epistemology can be characterized as empirical realism: in the natural attitude, we think that the world exists *independently of anybody experiencing it*. It takes the being of the world for granted. Hence the 'general thesis' of the natural attitude, 'the world exists', with 'existing' meaning simply that it exists as in-itself.<sup>27</sup> What Kant presented as two epistemic positions – transcendental idealism and empirical realism – becomes, in Husserl, *mapped onto* the relation between the natural and the philosophical standpoint. In this shift of attitude, Husserl's *Fundamental Reflection* exposes the theory-ladenness of the natural attitude. So we see Husserl already operating within the Kantian framework when he introduces the reduction. Natural and philosophical *attitude*, as he calls them, are two standpoints on the same thing: the world. But the natural attitude is really no attitude at all; for if 'it' were to be asked to clarify its opinion of the world, it would respond: the world is; the fact that it might be given and only in this way experienced is irrelevant. This implicit epistemology is naïve.<sup>28</sup> The *naïveté* is comparable to Kant's empirical realism, which considers the world 'independently of those conditions' in which the world is experienced. The natural attitude does not deny these conditions; it is simply oblivious to them.

How does the philosophical attitude, then, view the world? It sees it in the Copernican 'style' after the epistemic claims of the natural attitude have been suspended: the world is only world *for us*, insofar as it is experienced. The reduction 'reduces' being to being-given and the world to a phenomenon, a universal sphere of givenness. Being-given is correlated to the agent that experiences this givenness, the world-experiencing subject that, as *experiencing* the world, cannot at the same time be *part* of it. This is the famous paradox of subjectivity: the subject is at the same time a subject that experiences the world and an object in the world, depending on the viewpoint. The paradox can only be reflectively clarified when one understands that it arises from two different views on the same 'thing', the subject.<sup>29</sup> It is as paradoxical as a *trompe l'œil* in that one cannot 'see' both items that the picture displays – Freud's head, the women – at once, though one knows that they both are 'there'. Once one takes the philosophical standpoint, this experiencing agent comes into view. As the paradigm of intentionality underlying this concept of subjectivity implies, the subject is always intentionally related to something experienced its experience is always experience-of. In the sense that Husserl already stands in the Copernican mindset, so, too, does Kant already have an implicit notion of intentionality when shifting from thing-in-itself to appearance as appearance-for the human subject.<sup>30</sup>

With respect to the subject's experiences, all being is only experienced when given, and

this is the only way in which it can be spoken of by the subject that is, *qua* experiencing, intentionally related. Thus, 'intentionality' implies the relatedness between being and experiencing agent. Being is *relative to* the experiencing subject. This experiencing subject is, hence, the '*absolute*' as that to which all being is relative. This is merely another way of phrasing the basic idea of transcendental idealism: being can only be experienced from a perspective, and hence is relative to the perspective from where it is experienced or from where it shows itself as appearing. That to which being appears is absolute being, which is not an 'absolute' standpoint. What is absolute is the existence of a reference point from which being is experienced. Every being that appears, appears *to* this experiencing being and is, for us, the only being we can experience. It is an affirmation of transcendental idealism when Husserl writes (in 1908!): 'There is only a being-in-itself outside absolute being; it is that which comes to be given through real and possible consciousness of being-in-itself (of things, of nature etc.).... It belongs to the essence of being to be-able-to-be-given.'<sup>31</sup>

Yet, Husserl does not stop here. For, while he does distinguish being for us vis-à-vis being-in-itself, he insists that it belongs to being's *essence* to be experienced. He uses the term *being-as-such*, which cannot but be being-given. As he writes, 'To the essence of *all being* belongs a relation to consciousness.'<sup>32</sup> How can Husserl say that, if this is not meant to be another form of anthropomorphism? To recall the Kantian shift from the theocentric to the anthropocentric model of cognition, why does Husserl not simply stop where Kant stopped, limiting himself to our specific human standpoint? The motive for rejecting the anthropocentric model goes back to the original impetus of Husserl's philosophizing: to stop at the human standpoint would be a form of *psychologism*: the thesis of the relativity of all being would again be relative to the *human* subject! The statement 'To the essence of all being belongs a relation to consciousness' is an ideal statement, not pertaining to any particular consciousness.

One might object that, for all we know, creatures on Mars *could* have direct access to objects, without any relation through givenness. But this is absurd! *If* Martians have experience, and if this experience is mediated through sensibility, then they also can only have experience of appearances. As Husserl famously says, even God, if he had experience – that is, if God had some form of sensibility – could only see the object as given in profiles.<sup>33</sup> Thus, Kant was right to frame being as givenness, but he reduced this statement to givenness for us humans, thereby relativizing it. Hence the anthropocentric model leads to a relativism or subjectivism.

This, then, is the advance that Husserl's transcendental reduction introduces over the Copernican Turn: Husserl is not talking about a concrete (human) subject in *this* world, but

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about consciousness-as-such, which has intentional experiences and something given *in* these experiences. In Husserl's terminology, Kant performs a *phenomenological* reduction and a turn to the subject, and maybe one could even speak of a *transcendental* reduction in Kant's focus on the *subjective forms* of intuition, but there is no *eidetic* reduction which moves from the *human* subject to *subjectivity-as-such*. Only this move can attain a truly scientific philosophy, which has to be about *vérités de raison*, not *de fait*. This is what Kant, too, wanted; but *vérités de raison* cannot be bound to, and relative to, any specific factual creature, such as the human being. Husserl's phenomenology in its transcendental-*eidetic* shape is a doctrine of experience-as-such, consciousness-as-such, and, correlatively, appearance-as-such. Phenomenology is not about the specific *human* manner of experiencing; rather, the human experience is only one possible manner in which a concrete subjectivity experiences world.

Husserl's phenomenology provides, hence, an eidetics of experience-as-such, of being-as-such being given *to* a subject-as-such.<sup>34</sup> Husserl *radicalizes* Kant's anthropocentric model by lifting it to the eidetic level – 'rigorous' science – in considering *consciousness-as-such*. I shall term this a move from an anthropocentric to a *noocentric* concept of cognition (Greek *nous*), as moving from human consciousness to *consciousness-as-such*, whereby 'consciousness' is shorthand for perspectivalness with its two foci: being as givenness and experiencing agent as having a standpoint. These are encompassed in Husserl's term 'transcendental subjectivity'.<sup>35</sup> Kant was right to emphasize the perspectivalness of the experiencing agent, and correlatively the status of being as givenness, but stopped short of *universalizing* this insight into an eidetics of experience.

But is such an abstraction to consciousness-as-such possible? One might object that it is *we* who say this. Indeed; but what we experience is all we have to go on, but it is from here – and only here – that we can begin eidetic variation, i.e., abstraction from our personal standpoint. However, Husserl's point of abstraction is *not* to move *away* from a standpoint. The generalization that Husserl enacts is not one from standpoint to *no* standpoint, but from *our* standpoint to *standpoint-as-such*. And that this is possible is proven by mathematical abstraction: to speak of being as givenness, to say that being is experienced and hence is perspectival, is just as ideal a judgment as when in geometry we abstract from a triangle in the sand to the ideal triangle. The drawn triangle can give rise to geometrical insights – eidetic claims – without their being bound to our forms of intuiting it. In other words, our human standpoint does not bar us from making eidetic claims. And the eidetic claim here is that being, when experienced, can only be given to an agent with a standpoint, a 'consciousness'. Given

*Kant's* insistence on the a priori status of pure geometry, Kant did not have to limit himself to our specific human experience in the Transcendental Aesthetic. He would only have had to insist upon the specifically human standpoint as the necessary starting point for a philosophical inquiry. While Husserl would agree that a standpoint imposes a limitation, it was too much of a limitation on Kant's part *not* to include the idea of limitation on the *ideal* level. The noocentric account, too, includes this general notion of limitation, without sacrificing the status of *ideality*.

Hence, the transcendental-eidetic reduction universalizes Kant's Transcendental Aesthetics: if being exists, it can be known only through experience – or through being's necessary relatedness – and experience presupposes a standpoint; hence being can only be known as given. It is nonsensical to speak of a being *outside* being given, because it, too, would presuppose experience without that which is *constitutive* of experience: a standpoint. This holds universally; it is the *essence* of external perception and gives a new meaning to the idealist doctrine of *esse est percipi*.<sup>36</sup> This move from an anthropocentric model of cognition to a noocentric model entails, thus, a reformulation of the *quid facti*. The factum is not that human cognition exists, but that *experience-as-such exists*. This is the factum whose conditions of possibility transcendental philosophy must clarify.

The question arising, then, is what bearing this noocentric model of cognition has on the question of a priori truths that we, according to Kant, are justified in having, in synthetic judgments a priori. Is not Husserl's transcendental idealism a *new* form of subjectivism, based entirely on experience? Where does a priori cognition, which is crucial to Kant, come into the picture? Let us see how Husserl avoids this subjectivistic consequence, which would go against the grain of his philosophy, and how he reconciles his conception of knowledge.

### **III From Givenness Back to Being: Being as Valid Meaning and the Question of the *An-sich***

To Husserl, Kant still remains within the strictures of rationalism by positing a distinction between two stems of cognition – sensibility and understanding – that have no relation (known to us<sup>37</sup>) to one another. Given this distinction, it is, in Kant, only the understanding that can, through the use of categories, produce cognition. We can see now how Husserl's 'universal noocentrism' undercuts this very distinction by framing the notion 'object of experience' in the broad sense of anything that can be *given* – be it to 'external' or 'inner' experience – phenomenologically, an artificial distinction. The phenomenological concept of *experience* denotes anything that shows itself in (its own forms of) evidence, but also only in the manners

and boundaries in which it can show itself – this is the ‘principle of all principles’.<sup>38</sup>

Phenomenology’s gaze, hence, encompasses *anything* that gives itself, with its two-sided structure (givenness-to and appearance-of). We *always* ‘gaze’, internally or externally. Any distinction within the notion of ‘givenness’ might refer to different types of givenness (perception, memory, phantasizing, etc.), but it is in principle *all givenness (to an agent)*.

Transcendental phenomenology is in this sense ‘subjectivism’, if this means that Husserl is proposing a science of experience. But what kind of cognition can such a subjectivism produce? How do we get from subjective experience to objective knowledge? To address this issue, we must ask what concept of being as givenness Husserl’s phenomenology proposes. What precisely is *givenness*? Answering these questions will let us see how Husserl’s philosophy relates to the *quid iuris*-question and the question of a priori cognition. Certainly, a universal noocentrism cannot be a sell-out of rigorous scientific philosophy, though it entails a modification of Kant’s original view on a priori cognition.

The phrase ‘being as givenness’ is still an entirely formal concept. *What* is the given *given as*? The answer is that the object, the *x*, is given *as something*. There is no mediation or interpretation necessary in order to experience something *as something*. What I see is a car, and I hear a noise (the rattling of the muffler). The object is given immediately with a *meaning*;<sup>39</sup> what is experienced is in one way or another given with a specific *validity (Geltung)*. *Es gilt* can be translated as ‘it holds’, and can also have the sense ‘it holds meaning’. This meaning is not a fixed entity. Rather, it depends on the standpoint that I occupy and can vary and change altogether.<sup>40</sup> The object is seen as an ‘independent’ thing in the natural attitude, but as relational from the philosophical standpoint, i.e., as it *gives* itself, and this ‘giving’ is always accompanied by meaning. Hence, I can see a tree as a source of shade, a provider of produce, an object of sublime beauty – or ‘just’ a ‘natural object’. The object is experienced, given as *meaningful*. It has, in Husserl’s terminology, a *noematic sense* that is valid for me. Things in the world *make sense*.<sup>41</sup> This sense, however, is given to an object by subjects who have bestowed this meaning upon it – not necessarily I myself, but other subjects before me, a (group of) subject(s). To see this object here as a wine glass is *already* a perception of a very complex meaningful object, i.e., of something as a container for potable liquid, with an aesthetic quality. But in any event I can say that the object, *as a meaningful thing in my surroundings*, has received this sense through (somebody’s) meaning-bestowing acts. That is what we do when we experience: we experience something *as something* with a certain meaning. It is not a ‘raw’ thing-in-itself

that *then* receives meaning; what is heard *is the sound of a car, the meowing of a cat*, etc.

The meaning-bestowing on things in their givenness Husserl calls *constitution*. We, and subjects as such, are *constituting* when experiencing, which is not a construction or production. Things in their givenness constitute *themselves* in our experience, and as meaningful they have a certain validity for us.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, this validity of something like a cultural object, a wine glass, is already very complex and presupposes an enormous number of simpler constitutive acts. Since acts are all we have to go on in our knowledge of this object, we can glean the type of work that the phenomenologist is to carry out: her task is to give an account of the full constitution of objects *in their noematic sense* in every possible layer, sphere, and dimension. This can be carried out empirically – as by a cultural historian – but Husserl’s goal is a transcendental-philosophical account, asking ‘How is it possible?’ This marks the genetic dimension of Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology: starting from the simplest acts in which an object becomes constituted – experienced *as something with a meaning* – the task is to give a description of experience of objects on all levels. Concerning external objects, one would begin by describing the kinaesthetic interactions with it: the eye movements, touching it, seeing the front, anticipating the appearance of the back. This is what Husserl carries out in great detail in his genetic logic, which might also be called a universal noocentric account of experience by an embodied agent<sup>43</sup> as meaning-bestowing on a multitude of levels, beginning from the simplest and proceeding to the most complex ones, such as social, intersubjective acts, in which intersubjective agreement is achieved.<sup>44</sup> This is not cultural anthropology, but a transcendental account of how consciousness-as-such bestows meaning in different ways and in different complexities.

Thus, according to the noocentric account, consciousness-as-such is generally meaning-bestowing in its experiencing. What is experienced is always something that has meaning. But the specific noematic sense of the experienced *x* is not fixed. The meaning depends on the perspective and changes accordingly. But there is no normativity or dominance of one meaning over others. Depending on the perspective it can be seen as this or that (container of liquid, aesthetic object). It would be absurd to say that one would be ‘better’ than the other. They are simply different noematic meanings depending on the standpoint one wishes to take. Even the standpoint of the scientist, while striving at objectivity, *remains* a standpoint.<sup>45</sup> Objectivity is in itself something constituted. This will have consequences for the very idea of objectivity.

The meaning within a specific perspective is always unfolding and expanding, and will never be fully revealed. The object will always disclose more aspects that enhance the meaning of the thing in its validity for me. But more experience of the thing does not necessarily continue to enhance the *specific* noematic sense. It does not have to 'keep going'. The sense can 'explode', can turn out to be non-sense; the validity can be annulled. I may think that I am certain that the object I see every day is a house, until one day I discover that it is a stage prop with no back. This discovery happens through some new experience that bestows new permutations of meaning. But in this case, the noematic sense *itself* is annulled; it is simply not what I expected it to be. But this can always happen. The meaning is only meaning *as long as* ..., 'until further notice'. Yet, through the striking-through of a certain noematic sense, *automatically and immediately* a new one will arise: it is not a house, it is a stage prop – it is *x*, then non-*x*, which is immediately *y*. While the meaning-bestowing will always continue, it can be interrupted and annulled, but it immediately gives rise to a new meaning. It is always a meaning *of something*, the experience of which can change, but will always be experience in its constituting dynamic process.

In Husserl's words, experience is always only *presumptive*, is always only *for the time being*, and always has to affirm itself; the thing experienced has meaning only insofar as it has not been contradicted by new experience, something which is *always possible*. Thus, while the meaning can always change (the specific *vérité de fait*), this in itself is an eidetic law of experience (a *vérité de raison*), which is immutable. Hence, the general law is: All experience is contingent in constituting validity. Even the meaning of the world itself as a meaningful universe is only presumptively true and can always turn out to be a chaos, from which a new meaning arises. There can be no guarantee that the meaning that things have for us can change and be annulled. But a new validity will always arise. Experience is in this sense always *holistic and meaning-generating*, while the meaning is constantly subject to affirmation (*Bewährung*).

After these analyses we can return to Kant's *quid iuris*-question and assess Husserl's reformulation of it. Kant's *quid iuris* presupposes the distinction between the two stems of cognition and clarifies why we are justified in making a priori judgments when applying categories to experience. The a priori judgments that Kant has in mind are scientific judgments, i.e., a priori judgments about the world as it is experienced scientifically. The *quid iuris*-question presupposes that we indeed *have*, as *factum*, truths of 'necessary and universal' dignity. *Husserl's* point is: when it comes to experience and judgments based on this experience, there *can be* no a priori judgments (universal and necessary). It *is* universally and necessarily the

case that all judgments about something experienced are *presumptive*, which does not question their truth, but all truth about experienced being is only truth *at this point in time* and can always be annulled. Truth with respect to objects of experience – not eidetic laws of experience itself – can be objective, but only *for the time being*, with the possibility that it will be modified or annulled, yielding new truth. Thus, the *quid iuris*-question, to Husserl, cannot be taken to be asking about the a priori that Kant had in mind – the synthetic a priori. Husserl's notion of a priori is *dynamic*. The only thing we can say with unchanging certainty with respect to objects of experience is that all experience about worldly things is presumptive; the cognition of them is ever changing. Scientific judgments about them make a claim to objectivity, which is perfectly legitimate if one understands objectivity as in principle fallible.<sup>46</sup>

Husserl hence transforms the question of *quid iuris* into that of *quid valoris*. The claim to the legitimacy of making objective judgments about objects of experience is not in itself rejected. Instead, this question turns out to be already situated on a higher level of experience and becomes *underpinned* by the question concerning the *validity* of objects as they give themselves in experience, *prior* to cognitive claims being made about them. The legitimacy of making such claims must be grounded in experience itself. The transcendental question, then, must be phrased as follows: How are we justified in experiencing objects as having a certain *validity*, which is *validity for us*? The general answer is: through meaning-bestowing acts from transcendental subjectivity. *This* is the factum, being as givenness to an experiencing subject as *validity*; the how possible-question is hence not about the legitimate category application to experienced objects, but about the how of givenness and meaning-bestowing on *each* specific level of experience, all the way up to experience where truth claims are constituted. Kant's *quid iuris*-question *presupposes* not only that we have objects *given* but that we experience them *with a certain validity*, which need not be *scientific* validity. Regarding types of validity, scientific validity is no 'better' than aesthetic, commonsensical, or religious, etc. validity.

Kant was right about the *constitution* of synthetic judgments a priori, i.e., as a matter of synthesis enacted by a part of the subject, the understanding, which is to Husserl a mental capacity not all that different from other subjective 'accomplishments'. Moreover, Kant had a mathematical concept of a priori, which means that his analysis is located on a very high level of experience, the discourse of science. Accordingly, what Kant meant by 'objects of experience' is those of the scientist, not the objects in the life-world, which are constituted as well, albeit on lower levels of constitution.<sup>47</sup> Husserl writes, with reference to Kant's *quid iuris*-question: 'The transcendental question as to the essence, the meaning of every right [*Recht*, Latin *ius*] ...

metamorphoses into the question whether and to what extent [this right] is *valid*, can be valid. This pertains comprehensively to all positive *world*-cognition and thereby in fact to *all* positive sciences.<sup>48</sup> Here Husserl is placing Kant's question in the genetic perspective. Kant is not 'wrong', but starts 'too high up', presupposing the meaning of 'right' and *its* constitution. The legitimacy of category application in a priori synthetic judgments presupposes this same ability on much simpler levels of discourse and, in terms of our complex life in the world, is a far too limited account of experiencing things as meaningful. The *life-world* is experienced as meaningful, and scientific ('objective') meaning is just one of many types of meaning. This in no way mitigates the legitimacy and importance of science, but emphasizes the need to see it in a layered account of the constitution of the life-world from simplest to most complex experiences. In terms of the *Crisis*, Kant is guilty of the forgetfulness of the life-world.

Finally, what does this interpretation of being as validity say about the status of the *An-sich* of objects? Husserl obviously rejects the notion that there is a thing-in-itself *behind* the appearance. Yet, appearances are, of course, appearances *of the thing*; the noematic sense is the sense of the object as it is intended to be (as house, as prop). All of these senses are 'true' in their own right, as we said, and there can always be new noematic senses, new perspectives. And the specific noematic sense itself is never exhausted; I can always find more aspects of the thing. But these are aspects *of the thing*, not a mere appearance with a true object behind it. It is the real thing that we experience, *despite* its givenness in profiles. There is thus a positive way of retaining a sense of thing-in-itself, as an *idea* of all aspects, all noematic senses with all their profiles and perspectives, *experienced at once*.<sup>49</sup> It is a Kantian (regulative) idea. As it lies in infinity, the thing's experiences are never exhausted, but we *experience the thing*. We are immediately in touch with it in the way that it appears to us in a specific attitude as noematic sense with a certain validity. This is a sense that can always be struck through and a new sense can be given. We *are* immediately in touch with the *An-sich* of the thing, though *through* the specific noematic sense, which is not a 'filter', but a way of experiencing through a perspective, and we can occupy only one perspective at one point in time. Thing-in-itself and thing-as-experienced (noematic sense) differ not as two different viewpoints on the same thing, or as two different considerations. They are, rather, distinguished *within* the philosophical consideration. The difference concerns the object as experienced *now*, at point  $t_1$ , and the (idea of the) object experienced at *all* points in time, all of which would only show *appearances*, but appearances of the *real thing 'in the flesh'*.

In sum, Husserl has given us a new sense of transcendental philosophy. Kant's original

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idea was to introduce a perspective on our experiencing; this is the first and most basic sense of transcendental idealism. Thereby, however, Kant's view remained anthropocentric. To Husserl, Kant's philosophy cannot really be a *science* of subjectivity, only a transcendental metaphysics of the human mind, construed in pure formality. Husserl expands the range of subjectivity towards subjectivity-as-such, bringing philosophy to the level of 'rigorous science'. One result of this universal noocentric discipline is the expansion of the scope of experience as the mode in which givenness is received (constituted), undercutting Kant's two-stems doctrine. The science of experience as such starts on a much more primitive level. Kant's understanding of experience was the cognizing experience of the scientist; Husserl's concept of experience is the everyday experience in the life-world, from which higher-order types of experience, such as scientific experience, arise. The life-world is the world experienced from the standpoint of the natural attitude, from which the transcendental questioning-back must begin as an inquiry into the conditions of possibility of this validity. Where for Kant the transcendental question was about legitimate category application to sensible objects, it is, in Husserl, firstly about meaning application to being, thereby creating ('constituting') meaning with validity. In every experience, we experience meaning that can always turn out to be false, but there always *will* be valid meaning. Husserl's transcendental question concerns the *quid valoris*.

Finally, whereas Kant saw an unbridgeable gap between objects as given and the thing-in-itself, which we cannot know, Husserl has brought us back to the thing-in-itself. It is the thing-in-itself as a limit idea lying in infinity, to which we, however, have direct access through our experience, which is always from a certain perspective and always only presumptive. His conception is thus closely connected to modern philosophy of science, which sees all truth with respect to experienced objects as provisional and in principle falsifiable.<sup>50</sup> In all of this, Husserl has furthered certain insights already present in Kant and made significant headway himself. Kant had an ingenious insight in the form of the Copernican Turn that intrigued many thinkers who succeeded him, including Husserl. Regarding the basic insight of transcendental idealism, being as givenness, Husserl is in complete agreement with Kant. He only forcefully brings home the point that this move, instead of taking us away from the world as thing-in-itself to some speculative realm, is the grand path, the *only* path, to the *world itself* and is the only way to account for it philosophically. Such an account must *begin* with experience on the most basic level up to scientific judgment, in which objective truth claims become articulated. Husserl thus reconstructs philosophically what was the very starting point for Kant's entire endeavour: the synthetic a priori itself.

## Conclusion: From Being to Action: Kant's and Husserl's Practical Postulates

I have tried to reconstruct a trajectory from Kant's project to Husserl's by showing that the Kantian move from the theocentric to the anthropocentric model of cognition becomes radicalized in Husserl's noocentric model of experience. The question of cognition in Husserl becomes more deeply founded in that of experience, i.e., the question of a priori truths about experienced objects becomes reframed as that of their validity for the experiencing agent, ultimately for a community of interacting agents. This community is that from which scientific judgments, among other achievements – works of art, buildings, poetry, television shows – are generated. The validity of objects in their noematic sense is a Kantian idea. This introduces a new notion of transcendental idealism that salvages Kant's original impulse, while breaking with Kant's rationalist paradigm of the synthetic a priori.

But let us take a look back at Kant's systematic scope. While it is the *positive* function of his philosophy to carve out a new sense of metaphysics, a realm in which we can rightfully lay claim to a priori truths, this is only one aspect of his project. The other, negative, function is to *delimit* the boundaries of knowledge, thereby 'making room for faith'.<sup>51</sup> This faith is that in mankind's progress to gain access to the Kingdom of Ends, the realm of freedom. Thus, the entire project of delimiting theoretical reason was to make space for *practical* reason, to show how the limits of *thinking* lead to the possibility of *action*. The entire purpose of Kant's critique was to demonstrate the noumenal character of freedom and the practical necessity of attempting to realize it precisely through the intrinsic limitations of theoretical reason. Given this apparent imbalance between theoretical and practical reason in Kant, one is compelled to ask if one can find anything similar in Husserl's 'system'.

Husserl saw this connection between cognitive Is and moral Ought. His statement concerning his relation to Kant in the letter to Cassirer ends rather cryptically. Listing a number of problems remaining unsolved in Kant's philosophy, he concludes: 'To these belong the problems of facticity as such, those of "irrationality", which ... can only be addressed in an expanded method of the Kantian postulates. The latter are perhaps the greatest of all Kantian discoveries.'<sup>52</sup>

As Kern has pointed out, the postulates that Husserl is talking about here are Kant's postulates of practical reason.<sup>53</sup> This suggestion can be supported by a manuscript from the same period, entitled 'Kant's Doctrine of Postulates',<sup>54</sup> in which Husserl illuminates the above passage. Human life, he muses, when viewed 'in transcendental introspection', can always end in chaos and absurdity, and certainly will end in death. 'The whole world will end, my people,

with its entire value system of European culture and ultimately every world culture.’<sup>55</sup> Further, with respect to the fact that a culture has been established with its abiding structure and continual meaning-bestowal, the question of *its* validity and its necessity arise as well. What happens when we consider the final goal of the world as we know it? Is this necessary? Indeed it isn’t – it is just as presumptive as anything else, a merely contingent fact. This gives rise to the next question: ‘What if the course of passive and active constitution and thus a subjective life in the form of a human lived-body in relation to its constituted surroundings were an “accident” – and if the conditions of the possibility of a continuing valuable life ... were only contingent and only partially and temporarily fulfilled?’<sup>56</sup> The answer is, ‘it may well be the case’; there is no reason to believe that the course of our history, or any history, has any internal connection to a transcendent and necessary truth to which it approximates itself. As Husserl says, alluding to Kant, nothing in this world, which I know through experience, can make me believe with necessity that it all makes *any* sense. It could all be illusion and idle and futile attempts.

In view of this possibility, there are only two alternatives. One result could be utter negation and a life in ‘constant despair’, which excludes action, in a sort of Schopenhauerian resignation.<sup>57</sup> The other alternative is ‘affirmation’ of a world that *is* meaningful and replete, not with an illusory meaning, but with fulfilled, real sense. Whence does ‘affirmation’ derive its force? This sense, since we cannot *know* that it in fact exists, can only be hoped for and demanded in the form of a *moral Ought*. This unconditioned Ought, Husserl asserts, is found in the Kantian Categorical Imperative as an absolute demand to action. Given this Ought, Husserl concludes: ‘Such a demand can only have meaning if I live; and if I live for it fully and absolutely, then I also believe, even if perhaps I am not clarifying this for myself, precisely because this belief is necessarily co-given [with this demand]. But when I reflect [upon these matters] I see: one [the belief] is impossible without the other [the demand]. If, however, I believe and become conscious of this belief, and enact it from this practical source *freely*, then it gives meaning to the world and to my life, gives the joyful confidence that nothing is in vain and all is for the good.’<sup>58</sup>

What Husserl seems to say in this enigmatic passage is that viewing (cognitively!) the world as a meaningful whole is *in itself* a moral Ought. While the insight into the presumptive nature of our world *could* lead to despair, it can also lead to an absolute affirmation in form of the demand stemming from the moral Ought, in which meaning is created through my belief in the moral law. It is, hence, the belief in a thoroughly and truly meaningful world that can save

me from the existential despair into which I could fall given Husserl's transcendental idealism, according to which all cognition, and my entire culture, is only presumptive and potentially falsifiable. So it seems that Husserl needs the hope for a meaningful world more desperately than anybody else! Given the potentially bleak outlook on the meaninglessness of the world, one needs to feel the *moral* demand to fill this potential void.

The interesting Husserlian point, vis-à-vis Kant, would be: Kant believes in the certainty of *some* a priori cognition, but thereby acknowledges the *limits* of cognition, relegating these limitations to the hope that we can help in creating a better world through *action*. We *ought* to act, as we can understand from the moral law in us. But the success of practical action is always uncertain, prone to error and mistake. Kant's move is from *limited* certainty to *boundless* hope, for we cannot know what this Kingdom of Ends would be like. It is a noumenon. Thus, Kant's transcendental idealism extends into the ethical realm as well, and necessarily so, as the limiting part of the critique of reason is the gateway to action. For *Husserl*, from the essential uncertainty of theoretical cognition follows precisely the morally *prescribed* certainty that the world has meaning *because* I know that I can attempt to realize this meaning through practical action. The certainty we are talking about, then, is not *cognitive* certainty, but 'joyful confidence that all is for the good'. It is a certainty restored based on the rejection of Kant's notion of a priori cognition. This follows from Husserl's transcendental idealism: the world is meaningful if we choose to *perceive* it as meaningful, if we wish to *give* it a sense and decide to act accordingly. We are the authors of this optimism concerning human capabilities. And only this optimism, for which there is no other reason than the moral demand, gives us *any* incentive to act at all. Hence we can only *act* morally in a world *after* the theoretical insight that the world *ought* to make sense. Husserl's notion of Ought is thereby theoretical, not practical; it is first and foremost a theoretical insight that must then be acted on practically. But when we act, we realize theoretically that we cannot *avoid* acting in a way that is meaning-bestowing *while* the meaning we bestow can always turn out to be wrong. Morality's demand, hence, *begins* already on the level of meaning-constitution. We cannot *help* but try to come up with a *valid* meaning and implement it actively. The success of both – meaning-bestowal and realization – must forever remain doubtful, but creating such a final vision is a regulative idea that can fill us with hope, while we are active in this creation. Joy occurs in the creative process itself, though disappointment always looms.<sup>59</sup>

In the end, Husserl's phenomenology is a solid affirmation of the Kantian postulates, which can be summarized essentially as: what cannot be thought, must be done. This is the

only way in which we can hope to get any closure in a world that is never perfect, but contains meaning; a meaning it receives through us, and only through us – though we can always fail, but also must never despair. Not to despair *in itself* is a moral demand. In this light, Husserl has remained a ‘true Kantian’ in the best sense as both a firm and an ‘idealistic’ (in the everyday sense of the word) believer in the human capacity to create a better world, with the realistic sense that we can always fail. The positive as well as the negative aspects of Kant’s *Critique* are thereby satisfied in equal measure.<sup>60</sup>

## Notes

1. *Husserliana* (*Hua*) XXV, 206. All translations from the German, unless otherwise noted, are by the author.
2. *Hua* VIII, 181.
3. *Hua-Dok.* III/V, 4; the letter is dated 3 April 1925.

The Kant–Husserl relationship has been a mainstay of both Kant and Husserl scholarship and has attracted a fair amount of attention lately, no doubt because of new publications in the *Husserliana* that shed new light on the character of Husserl’s *transcendental* phenomenology. For some recent interesting comparative monographs, see Lohmar, 1998 and Paimann, 2002. The first and exhaustive study is by Kern, 1964. Welton, 2000, though more a detailed account of *genetic* phenomenology, touches upon Husserl’s relation to Kant in Ch. 6.

Newer *Husserliana* volumes featuring texts that deal with ‘transcendental issues’ are *Hua* XXXII, *Natur und Geist*, lectures from 1927 that show Husserl wrestling with issues from the South-West German School of neo-Kantianism; *Hua* XXXIII, *The Bernau Lectures on Time-Consciousness*, the much-awaited texts from the ‘middle’ phase of Husserl’s analysis of time-consciousness; *Hua* XXXIV, *On the Phenomenological Reduction*, which compiles texts from the late 1920s and 1930s; *Hua* XXXV, *Introduction to Philosophy*, lectures from 1922/3 in which Husserl carries out an attempt of phenomenological ultimate foundationalism (*Letztbegründung*), and finally *Hua* XXXVI, *Transcendental Idealism*; it is that volume that is especially interesting here, because it shows the genesis of Husserl’s notion of transcendental idealism (going back to 1908!) and also because of a peculiar ‘proof’ that Husserl provides there.

4. *Critique of Pure Reason* (cited as *KrV* with ‘A’ or ‘B’ before the page number referring to the first or second edition respectively), B370.

5. See *Hua* III/1, 133f.: 'It becomes evident that Kant's spiritual gaze lay on this field [i.e., transcendental subjectivity], although he was not capable of claiming it and understanding it as a working field of a genuine, rigorous eidetic science. Thus, e.g., the transcendental deduction of the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* actually already stands on phenomenological grounds; but Kant misinterprets this ground as psychological and thereby loses it again.'

6. See the *Epilogue* to *Ideas I* from 1930, where he writes, with reference to transcendental idealism introduced in *Ideas I* from 1913, that he has 'nothing to revoke' (*Hua* V, 151). On the 'realism' of phenomenological idealism, see *Hua* V, 152f. The way Husserl portrays his idealism here is as a wedge between traditional realism and idealism, which stand opposed to each other in a sort of dialectical opposition.

One might recall the dispute over the index to *Ideas I*, which was first compiled by Gerda Walther, a student of Husserl's in Göttingen, i.e., from the early 'realist' period of phenomenology, adverse to idealism (of any sort). In 1918 she provided this index, in which she created two sub-entries on 'phenomenological idealism', one listing passages where Husserl supposedly speaks 'contra' idealism, others where he is 'pro' idealism. Husserl was not happy with this division and had his new assistant, Ludwig Landgrebe, work on a new index in 1928, in which this distinction was omitted and replaced by the sole entry 'phenomenological idealism'. This index was then printed in the third edition of 1928. See Schuhmann, 1973: pp. 189–92 for a detailed account of this episode.

7. As Welton rightly says, in his analysis of Husserl's method of the transcendental reduction, 'perhaps we can simply say that for him the analysis *is* the method' (Welton, 2000: p. 289, my italics).

8. See *Hua* VII, 235 (from 1924), and earlier, *Hua* XXXVI, 66 (from 1908).

9. It should be pointed out that Kant himself speaks of a phenomenology in the framework of his *Metaphysical Grounding of Natural Science*; it is the last of the four principles of natural science (the first three being phoronomy, dynamics, and mechanics). This has almost nothing to do with the Husserlian sense of the word. For the sense in which Kant's first *Critique* can be construed as a 'transcendental phenomenology' see Allison's interesting essay, where he construes Kant in a Husserlian fashion (Allison, 1975), drawing parallels between the two projects. It is not too far-fetched to say that his defence of Kant's transcendental idealism in his seminal study *Kant's Transcendental Idealism* (Allison, 1983) is already a response to critics such as Husserl. In my reading of Husserl's

phenomenological idealism, Husserl is not so much criticizing Kant as developing what he considers to be the correct insights. Allison acknowledges as much when he calls Husserl's criticisms those that are 'raised against Kant *from within* a transcendental perspective' (Allison, 1983: p. 331, my italics).

10. There are two historical accounts where Husserl tells this story in similar fashion: first in the lecture *Erste Philosophie* (*Hua* VII, here esp. 63–70, 191–9) and then later in the *Crisis* (*Hua* VI, 74–104).

11. One would be wrong to claim that Husserl has nothing to say about moral philosophy. Particularly in his lectures on ethics from the 1920s (*Hua* XXXVII) and the *Kaizo* articles from the same period (*Hua* XXVII), he develops an elaborate account of the moral person and the moral community. These reflections, however, are detached from the context in which he discusses phenomenology as transcendental idealism.

12. The only real practical considerations Husserl has in the framework of his transcendental phenomenology could be described as ethics of scientific conduct – the role of the scientist in her activities and henceforth in her role as 'functionary of mankind'. Hence, Funke's attempt to establish a 'primacy of practical over theoretical reason' in Husserl merely manages to talk about an individual's self-reflection as a scientist or a philosopher and is, therefore, not very convincing as establishing a universal ethics in Husserl similar to Kant's (see Funke, 1984: esp. p. 28). See the conclusion below on Husserl's reflections on Kant's practical postulates.

13. I thus follow the line of interpretation of authors such as Allison, Ameriks, Prauss, Pippin, Gardner, and others, whose basic understanding of the Kantian project in the first *Critique* is that it presents one long and gradually unfolding argument for transcendental idealism; see Gardner's summary of this reading in Gardner, 1999: pp. xiif.

14. *KrV*, Bxvi.

15. See *KrV*, Bxix, where Kant elaborates on the 'altered method of our way of thinking, namely that we can cognize of things *a priori* only what we ourselves have put into them'.

16. Thus, the so-called 'third alternative', according to which things-in-themselves might, for all we know, be constituted as existing in space and time (which are by definition exclusively our forms of intuition), is impossible. This would be the position of transcendental realism, which Kant clearly rejects, because the point of transcendental idealism is that it considers the *epistemic conditions* under which things are experienceable for *us*. On the

third, 'Trendelenburg' alternative, see Gardner, 1999: pp. 107–11.

17. Allison, 1983: p. 14.

18. This standpoint has not died out but has been revived – or preserved, however one chooses to look at it – in modern science with the label 'naturalism'. This is Thomas Nagel's critique of modern science in striving for what he calls a 'view from nowhere'. It is the explicit attempt to rid oneself of a perspective in order to have 'real', 'objective' truth. Nagel's point is slightly different: while he does see it as an ideal to strive for 'objectivity', like Husserl he sees it as an ideal limit. His critique turns on applying this ideal to subjectivity in reducing the experience to brain synapses etc. It is this attempt that is not only wrong-headed but absurd to Nagel, as it reduces consciousness to objective 'facts' that are 'there' without viewpoint.

19. Allison, 1983: p. 8.

20. See B306: '[I]f we call certain objects, as appearances, beings of sense (*phaenomena*), because we distinguish the way in which we intuit them from their constitution in itself, then it already follows from our concept that to these we as it were oppose, as objects thought merely through the understanding, either other objects conceived in accordance with the latter constitution, even though we do not intuit it in them, or else other possible things, which are not objects of our senses at all [!], and call these beings of understanding (*noumena*).'

21. See *KrV*, Bxx, where Kant speaks about 'things insofar as we are acquainted with them [*sofern wir sie kennen*] (*insofar as they are given to us*)' (my italics).

22. See, e.g., Heidegger, 1997: p. 153.

23. See *KrV*, B59f., where Kant distinguishes between intuition (*Anschauung*) and experience (*Erfahrung*), the latter of which has veridical value. It is also the final passage of the Transcendental Aesthetic, before he moves on to the Transcendental Logic, where experience in the 'thick' sense (as providing material for a priori cognition) is elaborated.

24. See Langton, 1998, who calls this 'Kantian humility' and devotes a study to the notion. Her point, however, is that Kant's epistemological conception of a priori cognition is not Kant's main point. Her reconstruction of Kant's distinction contends, rather, that what Kant means by the distinction between appearances and things-in-themselves is that we cannot have any knowledge of 'intrinsic properties' of things, but only in the manner in which they affect us (see Langton, 1998: pp. 205f.). What strikes me as curious, despite this compelling analysis, is that she rejects the notion of idealism for this standpoint. She seems

to understand the term 'idealism' in a rather Platonic-Berkeleyian sense. I think that it makes perfect sense to accept her analysis and still see Kant's philosophical standpoint as 'transcendental idealism', which is compatible with empirical realism (see *KrV*, A370: the transcendental idealist is a 'dualist').

25. I am focusing here on the *positive* aspect of the *Critique*, not the negative, delineating part of the *Dialectics*, which arguably is equally important to Kant. See the conclusion of this paper for the negative aspect of Kant's project.

26. See *Hua* VII, 254, *Hua* VI, 100f. and 103f., and, more pointedly, *Hua* XXXIV, 55, where he speaks of 'the *Copernican* Turn, enacted in its radical form in the phenomenological reduction'. See also Moran, 2004 for a discussion of Husserl's notion of transcendental idealism.

27. *Hua* III/1, 60; see also *Hua* VIII, 36ff. See also the lucid reconstruction in Held, 2003: pp. 17–21.

28. See *Hua* XXXIV, 14n.: 'The world as universe is in the natural attitude in general no theme; therefore it is properly speaking no *attitude*. The world is pregiven; it is the region of all natural attitudes in the actual thematic sense.'

29. See Carr, 2003: p. 196, who sums up his analysis of this paradox as follows: 'We must conclude ... by accepting what Husserl calls the paradox of subjectivity: that we are both subjects for the world and objects in the world. The transcendental tradition introduces us to this radical opposition and provides us with new means for getting beyond it. It gives us two descriptions of the self which are equally necessary and essentially incompatible. According to my account, neither of these forms of self-consciousness takes precedence over the other. From the perspective of each, the other appears somehow bizarre, unreal. From that of the natural attitude, the transcendental subject seems artificial, contrived, a mere fiction. From that of the transcendental attitude, the world as a whole, and my empirical self within it, looms as "phenomenon", its reality placed in suspension.' To be sure, the 'intentionality' in Kant extends not only to intuition but to the pure concepts of the understanding as well, in that they have to be *schematized* in order to become applicable to objects of intuition. The true sense of 'transcendental' in Kant, thus, is not so much that of condition of possibility in general, but that of the condition of the possibility of the categories' capacity for being applied to the intuition that we as contingent agents are capable of having. Thus, the story to be told for Martians would be completely different – and could only be told by Martians (but only if they are endowed with reason)! Also, we would not be able to

understand their story.

30. Another way of phrasing this, from the 'opposite' angle, would be to say that the thesis of transcendental idealism is already a prototype of the theory of intentionality. This is what Carr has in mind when he speaks of the 'transcendental tradition', in which he includes, as its inceptor, Kant (Carr, 2003: pp. 181ff.).

31. *Hua XXXVI*, 32. We can leave aside here the distinction between real and possible consciousness, which becomes instrumental in the concrete 'proof' for transcendental idealism that Husserl develops in some of the texts in that volume. For an analysis of this proof, and an alternative version of transcendental idealism that follows from this, see Bernet, 2004.

32. *Hua XXXVI*, 36; my italics.

33. *Hua III/1*, 351 is the *locus classicus*: 'Hence it becomes clear that something like spatial objectivity is intuitable not only for us but also for God – as the ideal representative of absolute knowledge – only through appearances, in which [this objectivity] is given and must be given "perspectivally" in numerous but ordered manners changing and thereby in changing "orientations".'

34. De Palma's attempt to refute the idea that Husserl's phenomenology is a transcendental idealism but instead must be construed as an 'eidetic empiricism' (De Palma, 2005: p. 200) is therefore completely misguided: eidetic empiricism would just be a different title for what Husserl is doing in his *eidetic science of transcendental subjectivity*. That means that De Palma's error lies in trying to sever the transcendental and the empirical in Husserl's method: this would be to miss the entire point of Husserl's transcendental *phenomeno*-logy.

35. It is clear in this light why to Husserl embodiment belongs necessarily to transcendental subjectivity, which would be completely nonsensical to Kant's notion of 'transcendental'. The issue of embodiment will be taken up again very briefly in section III below.

36. See *Hua XI*, 16ff. See also the analysis of Husserl's transcendental idealism by Woodruff Smith who proposes that 'transcendental idealism be renamed "intentional perspectivism" and developed as a many-aspect monism coupled with a theory of intentionality via noemata.... If Husserl himself took the plunge into idealism, we need not join him. He has shown the way to the *Ding an sich*' (Woodruff Smith, 1995: p. 384). I agree with Woodruff Smith's interpretation, which is much more sophisticated than my rather

schematic account above. My only contention would be that Husserl can already be construed as professing an ‘intentional perspectivism’, albeit without the consequences Woodruff Smith is trying to work out from this assessment, and I would add my hope that he will overcome his objection to the term ‘transcendental idealism’. It seems to me that he is just replacing Husserl’s ‘-ism’ with another one. And to add one last suspicion, I feel that he still might not have grasped the radicality of Husserl’s point and that he lapses back into a naïve Kantian (not Kant’s own!) position when he writes: ‘The position [of perspectivism] would be that while the *being* of natural objects does not depend on the being of consciousness, their *being known or intended does*’ (p. 384). Husserl’s idealistic point is that one cannot distinguish between the two *without* lapsing into a naïve idealism that separates being from the notion of givenness – the standpoint of the natural attitude thus.

37. As Kant famously remarks in the B Introduction, the two stems of cognition ‘perhaps spring from a common, yet to us unknown root’ (B29).

38. *Hua* III/1, 51.

39. Crowell has called the realm of phenomenology, in analogy to Sellars’ idea of the ‘space of reasons’, the ‘space of meaning’. See Crowell, 2001, esp. the Introduction, pp. 3–19.

40. One could object to this whole analysis that Husserl is oriented at a spatial concept of perception here, and indeed the history of the concept of ‘attitude’ (*Einstellung*) comes from the experimental psychology of the nineteenth century, when it was mainly used with respect to perception; and, moreover, the examples above are mostly concerned with objects of external perception. However, the same holds with respect to other objects of experience in the broad sense. One can have different attitudes to the war in Iraq or the drugs scandal in professional sport. This, I venture to say, is where Gadamer’s hermeneutical philosophy took its cue with its notion of different horizons and the prospect of ‘fusing’ them.

41. Mohanty, too, makes a connection between the noematic sense and the meaning of transcendental idealism: see Mohanty, 1996: p. 29. In his analysis, the shift from thing to noematic sense *is* precisely the sense of Husserl’s transcendental idealism. The above analysis concurs with Mohanty’s brief assertion, though it expands upon it significantly.

42. I leave aside here the question of *optimality*, in which a thing is given as optimal in a certain way of experiencing it. For instance, the plant lover will be completely happy when she has a certain aesthetic experience of a flower garden that ‘fully’ pleases her, while

the botanist will not stop but merely starts here with his experience. Cf. *Hua* IX, 120–3, and *Hua* XI, 23f. Of course, the optimum will only be relative as well the plant lover can begin to refine her knowledge and feel dissatisfied with her current level of knowledge about plants, etc. This would lead into a ‘genetic’ account of the constitution of science from life-worldly experience of the sort that Husserl provides in §9 of the *Crisis* or his famous text on the ‘Origin of Geometry’ (*Hua* VI, 365–86).

43. Concerning the question as to the role of embodiment for the subject’s experience, as condition of possibility of experience of external objects, and the role of the lived-body in relation to the problem of transcendental idealism (and inter-subjectivity!), see *Hua* XXXVI, 151ff.

44. For a reconstruction of Husserl’s phenomenology of intersubjectivity and its development in social-political thought (Apel, Habermas), see the concise analysis by Zahavi, 1996.

45. See *Hua* IX, 121.

46. On the dynamic a priori, which was conceived by the neo-Kantians (Hermann Cohen, Heinrich Rickert, and others) precisely in their interaction with contemporary science, see Ameriks, 2006. This dynamization ‘can be understood as having developed a rigorous new kind of Kantian program that uncovers principles that are *a priori* in the significant framework within a particular era’ (Ameriks, 2006: p. 296). The problem with this approach is, to Ameriks, ‘that it has tended to lose touch with Kant’s concerns with ordinary experience, which clearly interested him as much as any particular scientific developments, and which can remain constant throughout scientific change. Edmund Husserl’s later work moved in this broadly Kantian direction’ (p. 296). What is interesting about Ameriks’ observation is that Husserl, in my reading, intends to straddle both issues that Ameriks identifies precisely through a genetic perspective: objective-scientific claims arise *out of* life-worldly experience. Science arrives at a ‘crisis’ once it no longer sees this connection, just as life-worldly concerns cannot ignore the scientific import and importance for today’s world (e.g., through technology). So Husserl’s attempt (at least) is intended to appreciate these two aspects of Kant’s system as well.

47. See *Hua* XI, 125f., where Husserl charges Kant with attending only to ‘the higher-lying problem of the constitution of a spatio-worldly object’ and not the lower problems of ‘primitive’ object-constitution. This argument, according to which Kant – and the entire idealistic tradition – started ‘too high up’, is an often-repeated critique of Husserl’s.

48. *Hua* VII, 271.

49. See *Hua* XXXVI, 191–4, and *Hua* III/1, 301–4.

50. Mohanty also makes this point: see Mohanty, 1996: p. 20.

51. See *KrV*, Bxxx.

52. *Hua-Dok.* III/V, 6.

53. As Kern says, correctly though rather casually: ‘It seems that Husserl did not wish to go beyond the factual existence of the phenomenon of world constitution in transcendental (intersubjective) consciousness purely on the basis of theoretical reason; but instead he sought to ground metaphysics, like Kant, through the postulates of practical reason’ (Kern, 1964: p. 302). As Kern indicates, spelling out this idea would lead to a type of ‘phenomenological metaphysics’. The relevant Husserlian texts on such a metaphysics remain unpublished, but an edition of them is planned.

54. *Hua* VIII, 354f. (dating from 1923, less than two years, hence, prior to Husserl’s letter to Cassirer: see n. 3 above). Given all this, he asks, ‘*Is this bearable?*’ Indeed, to an ‘idealistic’ thinker such as Husserl, such a pessimistic view is itself a moral failure! Cf. what Kant says about the virtue of optimism (*Frohsinn*) in his *Metaphysik der Sitten*: it is not a moral demand or an imperative, but rather a prescribed ‘attitude’ accompanying the moral person (p. 626).

55. *Hua* VIII, 354.

56. *Hua* VIII, 354f.

57. It is pure speculation whether Husserl had Schopenhauer in mind here, of course, though it may be pointed out that Husserl knew Schopenhauer’s work very early on. Husserl’s earliest lectures from 1892 were on Schopenhauer’s *World as Will and Representation*. Schuhmann has explored this connection – the little that one can make out about it, since Husserl’s lecture manuscripts from this time are lost – in Schuhmann, 1988: pp. 33–5 and, in relation to Husserl and Indian thought, in Schuhmann, 2004: pp. 137ff. While I cannot agree with Schuhmann that Husserl’s concept of transcendental idealism is inspired by Schopenhauer (see Schuhmann, 1988: p. 33), I find the connection with Buddhist thought intriguing. Concerning the Buddhist ideal of resignation and letting go, in the latter article Schuhmann reconstructs Husserl’s later thought (from the 1920s and 1930s) on these matters and highlights the fact that Husserl himself made a connection between the method of the reduction and Buddhist thought. The result is the same as in his encounter with Kant in the context above: while one could presume that the reduction is

equally a move from action to mere contemplation, its true task is to work out philosophy as rigorous science – to become *active* in this manner. Thus, while the *attitude* of the phenomenologist might be akin to Buddhism, the latter does not get to work actively. Schuhmann writes: ‘Buddhism did not [according to Husserl] establish itself as transcendental; this label had to be attached to it by Husserl and from the outside. Thus Buddhism was a philosophy *malgré lui*, it did not work out the idea which in fact, and in fact alone (but not in essence), was hidden in it [sc., rigorous science]’ (Schuhmann, 2004: p. 159).

58. *Hua*, 355.

59. In this sense I cannot agree with Höffe, who places Husserl amongst others (Peirce, the early Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Russell) who merely emphasize the positive intent of Kant’s critique (legitimization) and follow Kant exclusively in this manner, while ignoring the negative part (limitation). They ‘fall prey to an optimism concerning reason that is alien to the *Critique* and remind one more of a fundamentalism of Descartes and German Idealism than of Kant’ (Höffe, 2004: p. 332). Given what I say above, it is clear that the limiting function of a critique of reason is present in Husserl as well, though of a different type from Kant’s. Husserl’s optimism concerning reason is more a spiteful reaction to the crisis of reason in the twentieth century than the expression of unalloyed confidence.

60. Shorter versions of this paper were delivered in Castilian at the University of Barcelona in June 2006 and in English at the International Husserl Circle Meeting in Prague in April 2007. I thank all the participants in the discussions for their helpful input and their questions, especially Francesc Perenya Blasi, Robert Dostal, Thomas Nenon and George Heffernan. I would also acknowledge the receipt of interesting questions and suggestions from other readers of the full version: Andrew Cutrofello, Dermot Moran, Sebastian Kaufmann, Thane Naberhaus, Henning Peucker, and Michael Ystad. Michael Ystad also read this text for grammar and style; special thanks go out to him.

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