

1-1-2004

“Real-Idealism”: An Unorthodox Husserlian Response to the Question of Transcendental Idealism

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Introduction

Current philosophical endeavors can be categorized as attempts that either do or do not endorse a strong notion of subjectivity. While those who reject a concept of subjectivity altogether might be called “realists,” the ones on the other side cannot, however, always be grasped under the traditional counter-title of “idealists.” This also has historical reasons. Some philosophers in the “analytic” tradition of philosophy have attacked a “reductionism” of the subject to physical states of affairs and have emphasized the irreducibility of the “first person perspective.” Yet, while this is a critique leveled at their own tradition, they would by no means call themselves “idealists.” After all, analytic philosophy was originally motivated by a realistic impulse opposed to traditional “idealistic,” or “metaphysical” paradigms.¹ On the other side, in the so-called “continental” tradition, it is almost taken for granted that a strong concept of subjectivity, conceived as transcendental, be connected with some sort of idealism. This does not mean, however, that “idealism” is always a positive term (-isms always carry at least in part a negative connotation). It is dismissed by those who think the “self” that necessitates the step towards idealism is but one of the many fictions of modernity that should be “deconstructed.” Likewise, for most analytic philosophers, an idealism of whichever sort seems equally unacceptable. In both cases, this has to do, in part, with a rather naïve conception of idealism, such as a belief that the world exists only insofar as subjectivity exists—as a “dogmatic” or “subjective idealism” thus—without asking if there are other forms of idealism possible. Apart from those who take no issue with idealism and feel committed to one of its historical forms, one rarely asks whether idealism can be a systematic and plausible philosophical position of its own—instead of merely another traditional figure of thought that has come upon us throughout the history of philosophy, a doctrine that some accept, others don’t, because “anything goes” in the age of Postmodernity. Generally, one can say without much protest: “Idealism” has either become obsolete or fallen in disrepute.

In both cases, idealism seems to be linked to a certain “metaphysics of the subject,” a “speculative” position that has the air of dated discussions. Thus, both parties seem to concur in their assessment of idealism in *this* sense, which I want to call a “strong” idealism that seems easily dismissible. That the world be somehow “produced” by an agent “outside” of the world, that it is nothing but a product of our thought—what could be more implausible? One does not consider that there is also another version of it possible, what I will call a “weak” idealism. What I mean with “weak” is that its “metaphysical claim” is much more modest; however, it will prove to be more acceptable by those who oppose its stronger form. As we shall see, what it claims is rather simple. It should even be acceptable by so-called “realists.” Yet, I still believe it can be considered “transcendental,” although in a very elementary sense—namely, that there is *an essential relation between mind and world* and that it is philosophy’s task to clarify how

¹ For a reconstruction of the history of analytic philosophy, cf. M. Dummett, *Origins of Analytic Philosophy*, Cambridge, Mass. 1994, who traces analytic philosophy’s origins back to Frege’s *Grundlagen der Arithmetik* of 1884, cf. *ibid.*, esp. ch. 2, pp. 4 ff. However, he qualifies his narrative by insisting on the title “Origins” and not “the” origins.

experience of world is possible.² It is my claim that idealism in general is motivated by wanting to do justice philosophically to a fundamental human insight, one that guides enlightened, common sense and practical wisdom as well. Contrary to how it is sometimes conceived, idealism is also about understanding the other in her own standpoint and her interdependence from me. I want to show how Husserl's conception of idealism in fact implies these elements. His phenomenology of the life-world is the working-out of this idealism.

I will first distinguish weak and strong versions of idealism. "Strong idealism" I understand as having a necessary link to subjectivity, whereas "weak idealism" does not necessitate this link. For an example of a weak idealism, I will consider the position of Thomas Nagel—against his own intentions. I am choosing Nagel because I think he has much in common with Husserl; moreover, his conceptual tools will allow us to discern a similar type of idealism in Husserl. I will then investigate this weak idealism in Husserl that can be termed, following Schelling, a "Real-Idealism." With the methodological *caveat* to read this type of idealism as "weak," I think it is perfectly acceptable to speak of Husserl's transcendental idealism as such a "Real-Idealism." In his weak idealism, Husserl goes *beyond* Nagel in that he attempts to reconcile the two fundamental perspectives, the first and the third, on the world. "Idealism" is neither something to be feared nor easily dismissed, but is motivated by an elementary insight that has found its expression in such a heavy philosophical term *as well as* in Nagel's talk of "perspectives." I believe that this type of idealism can be held without committing to Husserl's transcendental theory of constitution, though one can retain the term "transcendental" in a "downsized" way.³ In fact, I am merely using Husserl to make a systematic argument in favor of transcendental idealism.

² Although McDowell does not use the word "transcendental," he emphasizes the importance of the (Kantian) "how possible?" question. It is this weak sense of "transcendental" that I feel close to here, although establishing the sheer connection between mind and world is even more fundamental to ascertaining how this is possible. Cf. *Mind and World*, Cambridge (Mass.), 1996, pp. xxiii f. (from the "new introduction"). In the end, however, McDowell considers Kant's transcendental turn more a reaction to a problematic philosophical issue rather than a tenable philosophical position. Kant's philosophy is (in McDowell's Wittgensteinian reading) more a therapy to a philosophical ailment rather than a true remedy. It is even more surprising, however, that he endorses a "domesticated version" of absolute idealism. I will talk about this later in the text.

³ I should like to add at this point that I think that most critiques of Husserl's transcendental idealism are misled by both a naïve understanding of idealism and a self-misunderstanding of the critic's own position. Not only is Husserl's idealism different from most other traditional idealisms; moreover, those who criticize Husserl's idealism have for the most part a crude conception of it. For a standard critique of phenomenology as idealism, cf. David W. Smith, "Mohanty's Logic of Phenomenology. The Transcendental," in: *Philosophy Today* 46:5 (2002), pp. 186-204, esp. pp. 197 f. On p. 197, Smith writes: "We might well say [concerning Husserl's theory] that things in the world are 'made' meaningful insofar as they are intended through meanings. And meanings enter the world only in consciousness, on the basic Husserlian model. Yet that does not mean the world is given structure—essence or *eidōs*—by meanings in consciousness: the world is not made to have structure or form because meanings in consciousness depict it. So talk of 'idealism,' even 'transcendental idealism,' is ultimately misleading in the Husserlian theory of intentionality." The point I am trying to make is that Husserl's transcendental idealism does nowhere claim to *give* the world structure. The world is *constituted* by—and that means: the world constitutes *itself in*—transcendental subjectivity, and this is an insight attained the transcendental attitude. The natural attitude, which has its equal right, does not claim this. Transcendental phenomenology does not make a claim concerning the *being* of the world—this would be dogmatic and is excluded by the *epoché*—it merely talks about the world from the radical first person perspective. Furthermore, what Smith here means with "idealism" is but a very naïve rendering of such a theory, and I do not know of any philosopher who would be so primitive as to subscribe to it. For an in-depth treatment of Husserl's transcendental idealism, cf. Herman Philipse, "Transcendental Idealism," in: *The Cambridge Companion to Husserl*, ed. by B. Smith/D. W. Smith, Cambridge 1995, pp. 239-322. Philipse emphasizes the continuity in Husserl's development of the concept of the life-world and shows its traces already in the *Logical Investigations*. Indeed, the life-world is the world as it is given in the radical first person perspective and as such a direct "consequence" of Husserl's doctrine of idealism. Philipse's reading very much confirms my reading.

I. Stronger and Weaker Idealisms. Thomas Nagel as a “Weak Idealist”

Looking at the history of Western philosophy, it is difficult to discern a philosopher who could be said to hold a “strong” idealism, such as the one that is oftentimes, and perhaps unfairly, attributed to Berkeley.⁴ It is perhaps more fruitful to speak of *stronger* and *weaker* idealisms as versions of the claim that there is some type of *relation between being and thought*. Indeed, idealism is usually said to stem from Parmenides: “For the same thing is for thinking and for being.”⁵ Many idealisms acknowledge this connection to Parmenides.⁶ Looked at closely, however, the original “*tò gàr autò...*” states an *identity* between thinking and being: that which is thought—is; and that which is—is or at least *can be* thought. Being is being thought: *esse est percipi*. This can be called a strong idealism because it states that there can be nothing *outside* of thinking. Being and Thought are co-extensive. It is a monistic world view as both are conceived as one and the same.

Indeed, one can only speak of idealism properly with realism as its opposite standpoint. The at first sight counter-intuitive position according to which there is a necessary relation between thought and being presupposes the intuitive standpoint, stated simply as: the world exists. Whereas idealism posits a relation between reality and thought, realism states the *independence* of thought and world; there is no *privileged* position of thought *vis-à-vis* the world. Modern idealism, starting with Descartes, however, is marked by privileging thought *over* being: Even if the whole world is a delusion engendered by an evil genius, the fact that I can doubt and therefore think is *fundamentum inconcussum*. *Cogito, ergo sum*, regardless of the world’s existence.⁷ Reality, hence realism, is in principle dubitable. Idealism is superior to realism. The question of idealism’s superiority, however, only becomes *problematic* when one considers that there are different *ways* of relating thought and being. This is the way *Kant* approached the problem, by pointing out different *types* of idealism.⁸ There is skeptical idealism that doubts that the world has any existence outside of our experience. It leaves open the option that world might exist independently of our thinking. And there can even be a more radical version, namely dogmatic idealism that *denies* that the world has any reality outside of its being experienced: *esse* is *only percipi* and nothing else.

⁴ Berkeley is in fact Husserl’s prime example when he emphasizes that his own idealism is “different.” Cf., e.g., Husserliana (Hua.) V, pp. 149-155 and Hua. VI, pp. 88 f. In most passages throughout his work, where Husserl mentions Berkeley, it is in this context of attributing to him a “paradox idealism” (ibid., p. 88). The *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* (ed. by Ritter, vol. 4) lists a plethora of entries that have the combination with idealism (cf. ibid., pp. 30-46). This is to show how many philosophical positions can be identified with this term. Thus, above I am merely employing a very specific notion of idealism and I by no means claim to be exhaustive. And probably a close reading of Berkeley would reveal his purported view, that the world is “created” by the subject, as unfounded or superficial.

⁵ Quoted after the translation by R. D. McKirahan, Jr., from *A Presocratics Reader. Selected Fragments and Testimonia*, ed. P. Curd, Indianapolis/Cambridge 1996.

⁶ This is, e.g., how Hegel understands Parmenides. Citing this quotation, Hegel continues: “With Parmenides, actual philosophizing begins. The ascent into the sphere of the ideal is to be seen herein.” (Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, I, Frankfurt 1986, p. 290). Husserl reads Parmenides in this sense as well, as a proto-form of Plato’s doctrine of the ideas and Plato’s idea of a philosophical science as a science of subjectivity. Cf. Hua. VII, pp. 315 ff.

⁷ In his great account of European modern philosophy, Cassirer used this focus on thought over being as the angle from which to view modern philosophy as a whole as “modern idealism.” Cf. his four-volume *The Problem of Knowledge*, esp. vol. I (*Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der neueren Zeit*, I, Darmstadt 1994, cf. the passage introducing Descartes as “founder of idealism,” ibid., pp. 439 ff.).

⁸ Cf. his discussion of idealism in the paralogism chapter of the first *Critique* (A-edition).

Opposed to this stands Kant's novel *transcendental* idealism. It is connected to his *phainomenon-noumenon* distinction. Transcendental idealism is a methodological standpoint. The idealist knows that what he experiences are not things in themselves but their appearances, insofar as they are given intuitively, i.e., through space and time, and cognized by the understanding.⁹ The transcendental idealist claims nothing about reality as such, outside of it being experienced, but only *insofar as it is experienced*. He makes no dogmatic claim about the nature of reality as such but only about its appearing. The term "transcendental" is used in opposition to "dogmatic." In phenomenological terms, this idealist practices "epoché" with regard to the world-as-such and instead focuses on the world as the totality of given phenomena. This is why Kant calls the transcendental idealist a "dualist" because he does not *deny* the realist standpoint, but accepts it as possible if one does *not* conceive of the world as appearance but as being-in-itself from the realist standpoint. "Thus," Kant says, "the transcendental idealist is [at the same time] an empirical realist," because he can accept the realist's position as a position independent of his own.¹⁰ This is what makes Kant's idealism "critical," namely, that it confines itself to statements not about the world as such (*noumenon*) but about the world as experienced (*phainomenon*), as appearing, that is not independent of our cognitive faculties.¹¹ That is, *from the transcendental standpoint* it becomes discernable that the subject is somehow "involved" in the world as experienced; there are subjective "conditions of possibility" that *enable* experience of world. This is the meaning of "transcendental," because the mental faculties that allow being to become experienced for the ego are not part of the ego that is in the world, but of the "transcendental subject," i.e., the ego that *experiences* world, including itself as a psychophysical entity. However, this does not contradict the realist who takes the existence of the world for granted, i.e., who does not look to transcendental conditions of possibility of cognition but at objects in the world, for instance as a scientist. In Kant it is clear that, although the idealist can be a realist, transcendental idealism is the only position possible for philosophy that does not have recourse to transcendence or divine revelations to explain the world, but to the subject that *experiences* world. In this sense, it is a "stronger" idealism as it necessarily reverts to the experiencing subject. Thus, the difference between idealism and realism is entirely methodological, it is a distinction the philosopher operates with in order to clarify the meaning of his epistemic claims concerning the conditions of cognition of world.

In this sense, the mature Husserl can be said to hold a stronger idealism. Although he qualified his, in contradistinction to the Kantians, as "constitutive idealism," his "idealistic" position in *this* respect (as strong idealism) is not fundamentally different from Kant's.¹² Where Husserl's

⁹ Cf., e.g., *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 33.

¹⁰ Kant discusses this distinction in the critique of the fourth paralogism of transcendental psychology in the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, cf. A 367 ff., esp. 368-371.

¹¹ This ties in with Kant's concept of the transcendental *Schein* (semblance), which has the known double sense of appearance and *mere* appearance. The *Schein* that the world exists independently from an experiencing agent *is* an appearance, but a necessary one.

¹² Husserl has always conceived of his idealism in the tradition of Kant and the neo-Kantians, although with certain modifications and corrections, but at all times in the "spirit" of Kant. Cf. Husserl's Kant speech "Kant and the Idea of Transcendental Philosophy" on the occasion of Kant's 200th birthday in 1924, published in *Hua*. VII, pp. 230 ff.; cf. esp. pp. 277 ff. for a discussion of idealism. When I speak of Husserl's transcendental idealism throughout this text, I mean the position of the mature Husserl as of ca. the 1920s, i.e., as of his "genetic" period. This version of idealism is summarized in Husserl's 1930 "*Nachwort*" to the *Ideas*, cf. footnote 4. However, also in many letters as of the late 1920s, Husserl expounds on his concept of idealism in greater detail. Since what he refers to in these passages is what I call his "stronger" idealism, I can neglect these quotations for the most part. One quotation shall suffice; on November 1, 1931, Husserl writes to the Munich phenomenologist M. Beck (*Hua*.-Dok. III/II, p. 12): Husserl first complains that Beck has not comprehended the „Sinn der transzendental-idealistischen-idealistischen Philosophie.“ He does not see, daß *dieser* Transzen<den>talismus u. Idealism<us> durch Abgründe des Sinnes von

transcendental theory of constitution, however, *does* go beyond Kant's transcendental unity of apperception, is as follows. Husserl's "transcendental idealism" is the standpoint the philosopher takes *after* having broken with the "natural attitude." The natural attitude, the pre-philosophical epistemic position, is characterized as believing in the subject-independence of the world (the "general thesis"¹³). The transcendental position, however, understands that the world does not exist independently from experience. The world is only the world insofar as it is experienced, and this experience is *constitutive* of world-as-experienced. The subject *in* its experience is involved in "making" the world *for* experience: subjective experience is carried out in intentional acts, and these *constitute* the object as an object-as-experienced. To the phenomenologist, objects are only objects of experience, whereas the natural attitude is straightforwardly directed at objects "in themselves." Thus, "constitutive idealism" does not claim that the world is "made" or "created" by the subject. It claims that there is a correlation between subject and world, and this correlation entails that the subject is somehow "involved" in the world's being *for us*.

Thus, Husserl does not hold a naïve standpoint according to which the subject *creates* the object. Rather, the epoché is a methodological neutralization of all such beliefs, also the "metaphysical" ones; it is metaphysically neutral and merely states: From the subjective standpoint, gained through the epoché, world is *experienced*, and this experience is structured according to intentionality, as that which "receives" given phenomena and "forms" them in intentional acts. This is why the epoché entails a reduction to the subject, conceived as intentionally structured. Subjectivity is structured according to the "system" of intentionality, and phenomenology's task is to investigate these manners of intentional consciousness and the way they constitute objects. It is not a *creation* of objects, but a *constituting* of experienced objects. To *Noesis* belongs necessarily a *Noema*, and the latter is constituted *by* intentional consciousness; or it *constitutes itself* in intentional experience. The term "constitution" is ambiguous. The cardinal difference to Kant is that subjectivity is not an a priori set of categories but intentional consciousness that can be investigated by a turn to the sphere of the *ego cogito* (understood as *cogito cogitatum*¹⁴). Husserl's transcendental subject is a field of research structured into different regions. Thus, what distinguishes the Kantian from the phenomenological concept of a priori is that Kant's a priori is formal, the phenomenological one "material," it is a dynamic structure of consciousness that constitutes world *for* the experiencing subject.¹⁵ Both have in *common* the conception of this subject as transcendental, i.e., as not part of the world of "constituted" objects.

As examples of "stronger" idealism, both thinkers assume a transcendental, worldless subject that somehow is "involved" in the world as it is experienced, even if, in Husserl, experience-of and givenness-to experience are correlates. However, in both, the subject that *experiences* world is not itself worldly. This involves, *nolens volens*, an "ego metaphysics." Kant's and Husserl's are "stronger" idealisms because they presuppose a transcendental subject for their philosophical project, an assumption that is problematic to "realists," who question the very assumption of a "wordless" subject. This "ego metaphysics" has problematic consequences. Apart from the

allem historischen getrennt ist, bzw. daß die tr<anszendente> Reduction einen total neuen philosophierenden Sinn schafft, der die konstit<utive> Phän<omenologie> von *allen* Philosophien der Vergangenheit schroff abscheidet." I shall later quote in greater detail those passages which I consider as professing a "weak" idealism. It is also interesting to note that the first book that deals with Husserl's philosophy explicitly as "idealism" is already from 1928, written by Husserl's Latvian pupil Theodor Celms, *Der phänomenologische Idealismus Husserls*, Riga 1928 (in Husserl's personal library).

¹³ Cf. Hua. III/1, pp. 60 f. (§ 30).

¹⁴ Modifying Descartes, the *ego cogito* is to Husserl a sphere of the *cogito's cogitata*. Cf. Hua. I, pp. 70 f. (§ 14).

¹⁵ The distinction of a "formal" and "material" a priori has especially been emphasized by Max Scheler.

distinction between world and a non-worldly “entity,” it entails a split between a worldly and “transcendental” ego or the “paradox” of a subject as another object in the world and *at the same time* a subject *for* the world—a paradox that philosophy can better do without.¹⁶

Let us now discuss “weaker” idealism. It will come as a surprise to consider Nagel in this context. However, I hope to show that he has taken up the basic issue of idealism, yet with a different emphasis. He is wrestling with a problematic that can also be found in Husserl once we return to him from the standpoint of Nagel.

Presenting a “traditional” position in analytic philosophy (“physicalism” or “objectivism”), Nagel points out that this type of approach is committed to an “objectivist” paradigm and is therefore blind to a certain type or sphere of reality. Indeed, if philosophy subscribes to a form of research that ascertains “objective” facts, e.g., about language, then it operates on the same plane as science. The knowledge it accrues is “objective.” It is a continuous gathering of knowledge with an endless horizon of possible further research; in doing this it goes about just as positive sciences do that explain certain things, leaving open further regions. Nagel claims, however, that if one were to continue this “objective” path of knowledge and even complete it, there would *necessarily* be something left out, namely *what it is like* to be something. For example, even if biological research ascertained everything about a bat’s sensory apparatus, we would still never know *what it is like* to be a bat. Even if we could reproduce this type of sensory perception in *us*, we would still not know what it is like *for a bat to be a bat*.¹⁷ Analogously, even if we knew all there is to “know” about human beings, we could still not be in a position to explain *what it is like* to be a human being.

This “what it is like to be” recalls the “first person perspective.” Science operates, in contrast, from the “third person perspective.” Scientific knowledge is “objectively true” since it does not matter who has it, i.e., from which perspective one has it. In Husserl’s terms, it is true for “anybody”; anybody who leaves behind her individual first person perspective and takes the scientific standpoint would have to deem this knowledge as true. Indeed, since “anybody” can see this, it is not really a *perspective*; it is a “*view from nowhere*.” This view from nowhere, however, cannot account for the first person perspective and *its* way of conceiving of reality. The first person perspective is *irreducible*. This perspective cannot be explained by “objectivist” science, indeed, it explains it away and cannot account for subjectivity at all. I will not pursue Nagel’s own project of an “objective phenomenology” of this first person perspective. More

¹⁶ For an immanent phenomenological critique of Husserl’s transcendental idealism, cf. the insightful article by K. Schuhmann and B. Smith, “Against Idealism: Johannes Daubert vs. Husserl’s *Ideas I*,” in: *Review of Metaphysics* 39 (1985), pp. 763-793. Daubert was the most powerful thinker of the group of “Munich phenomenologists” (to which belonged also Reinach, Beck, Lipps, and others) who rejected Husserl’s transcendental turn and remained committed to a phenomenological realism that they saw best represented in Husserl’s first edition of the *Logical Investigations*. Since Daubert “never published a line” (ibid., p. 763), Schuhmann and Smith are quoting from his unpublished manuscript material in this essay.

¹⁷ Cf. his famous essay “What is it like to be a bat?,” reprinted in: *Mortal Questions*, Cambridge 1979, pp. 165-180. His later magnum opus *The View from Nowhere* is but an overall application of this basic idea to the traditional regions of philosophy. Some philosophers have disputed this supposed impossibility of knowing what it is like to be a bat; e.g., Hilary Putnam, in *Reason, Truth and History*, Cambridge 1981, pp. 92 ff., argues that it would be possible at least to gain an approximative experience of a bat’s experience. The fact remains, however, that it is impossible for any other creature to have a first person experience of a bat, i.e., to “get inside” a bat, no matter how close one might get to this experience. For example, not even bat A will know what it is like to be bat B, although both have the same physiological “hard wiring.” I think it is this immediacy that Nagel aims at in his talk of “what it is like to be.”

important here is his critique of the “objectivist” standpoint. The problem is that the objectivist not only believes it is a “view from nowhere.” She thinks, moreover, hers is the only “view” possible (at least when one wants to do science). Thus, Nagel further criticizes “objectivism” in that it takes its “standpoint” as *absolute*. It does not see that it is itself a perspective. In this sense, Nagel holds, this “physicalist” position can be called “idealistic”:

“Here it can be seen that physicalism is based ultimately on a form of idealism: an idealism of restricted objectivity. Objectivity of whatever kind is not the test of reality. It is just one way of understanding reality.”¹⁸

Thus, Nagel understands idealism as a dogmatic claim about the world. In a sense, this position is the inverse of a “transcendental idealism.” Let us equate “having a view” with “dependence upon consciousness.” Whereas the transcendental idealist holds a dependence (of whatever kind) of reality to consciousness, i.e., that reality is only possible from *a view (from somewhere)*, and is dogmatic *to the physicalist*, the physicalist *himself* holds that the “view from nowhere” is *not* dependant on consciousness, because it is *not a view*. The physicalist believes that he is not holding an idealistic position because his truth does not depend on a view; whereas the idealist claims a necessary link between thought and reality—via a perspective, no matter which. But, to Nagel, objectivity “is just one way of understanding reality.” Hence the objectivist is idealistic because he does not think that his view *is* a perspective—even if it is “from nowhere,” i.e., a perspective *anybody* could take. But that does *not* mean that *it is not a perspective*. Seeing is not possible without a perspective from where one sees. Yet, since the objectivist thinks that physical objectivity is the only type of reality, he not only neglects the perspectivalness of his own view; he *absolutizes* it by holding that no other view is possible *if* one aims at objective truth. Another way of rephrasing Nagel’s critique of objectivism is that not every perspective needs to be a *first person* perspective—*not every perspective is a distortion*.¹⁹

Nagel’s point is that being is only experiencable from a perspective. The view from nowhere *is a view*, from the third person perspective; and it is not the only view possible, for there is also the first person perspective. Nagel is not only interested in rehabilitating the right of the first person perspective. He also wishes to emphasize that there is not just one type of reality; rather, there are several types of reality *depending on the specific viewpoint*. Being and truth without viewpoint are impossible, and that also means that there are different “truths” depending on the specific viewpoint—of which objective truth is but one *type*. It is for this reason that Nagel’s project of an “objectivist phenomenology” of the first person perspective has familiarity with Husserl.²⁰ But more importantly, Nagel’s critique of the “restricted” idealism of objectivism shows that he *himself* can equally be called an idealist, although he considers himself a realist. Yet, if one sees what he means with “realism,” it becomes clear how it is justified to call him an idealist in the “weaker” sense. “Refuting” the idealism of the “objectivist” he writes:

“The way the world is includes appearances, and there is no single point of view from which they can all be fully grasped. [...] This amounts to the rejection of idealism with regard to the mind. The world is not my world, or our world—not even the mental world is.

¹⁸ Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*, New York/Oxford 1986, p. 26.

¹⁹ In fact, this is how Nagel sees the relation between both perspectives, i.e., as a difference in grades. The view from nowhere is an ideal point in a very far, if not endless distance. It is characterized, in other words, of always moving further away from the first person perspective.

²⁰ For a comparison between Husserl and Nagel, cf. M. Ratcliffe, “Husserl and Nagel on Subjectivity and the Limits of Physical Objectivity,” in: *Continental Philosophy Review*, 35 (2002), pp. 353-377.

This is a particularly unequivocal rejection of idealism because it affirms *the reality of aspects of the world* that cannot be grasped by any conception I can possess [...].²¹

To be sure, Nagel's conception of "idealism" is naïve and amounts to a solipsistic dogmatism. Nagel's "realism" means doing justice to the "reality of aspects of the world," of different "realities" dependent on different standpoints. No reality without a perspective. And in *this* sense Nagel can be considered an "idealist of standpoints" in the very elementary sense of idealism, i.e., of declaring a *fundamental connection between thought and reality*. This is an idealism that states that being can only be thought of as given, i.e., given to a perspective from where one views being. "Reality is not just objective reality,"²² and what reality is depends on the standpoint that one takes or that the *world* presents to us. The world is nothing without standpoints. Nagel's idealism is subtle, in that he claims that the objectivist's rejection of the first person perspective does not rid her of a perspective altogether. Nagel's idealism states: The world is perspectival. We never see the one world "as such," because it is given in different perspectives, of which I can only occupy one *right now*. This does not render the world less real, but only claims that its reality depends on perspectives. Since perspectives are *taken*, there is an *essential* connection between world and consciousness, and this connection can be explained as a givenness in perspectives. Nagel thus attacks the "exclusive realist" who believes that her standpoint—the world as independent of consciousness—is the only one.²³ Nagel is an idealist in stressing not only the plurality of standpoints, but, more fundamentally, that world is nothing *without* a standpoint. The opposition is not between the idealist as the one who believes in standpoints and the realist who doesn't. "Idealism" states that *even the realist* has a standpoint.

What makes Nagel a "weak" idealist? Nagel operates without the conception of a "transcendental" subject. Since he claims that an "objective phenomenology" of the first person perspective does not yet exist, he would deny any notion of a transcendental subject. It is an idealism that makes no claim as to the *character* or *internal functioning* of the first person perspective. He is not interested in privileging the first person perspective—*nor* the third person perspective. It is simply about perspectivalness. It is a formal "*idealism of perspectives*" that insists that one perspective cannot exhaust the truth of the world. In denying the first person perspective any privilege, it may even be called a-subjective.²⁴ Perspectivalness pertains *to the world itself giving itself in perspectives*, no matter to whom. It is essential to the *world* to be perspectival. To say it in McDowell's vocabulary, world and mind—the fact that the world can be understood only from a perspective that is comprehensible to a creature capable of conceptual thought—are inextricably bound together. There is nothing, no reality, outside of the conceptual. McDowell does not hesitate to call his own position *absolute idealism* (although in a

²¹ *The View from Nowhere*, op. cit., p. 26, emphasis added. This quotation, by the way, also shows that to Nagel, perspectives or aspects of the world are nothing subjective but something the world "owns" and "bestows" upon us.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 27.

²³ The same would go, naturally, for the "exclusive idealist"!

²⁴ Although with a different intention (namely for practical philosophy), Patočka has criticized Husserl for his Cartesianism and has made the attempt to draft an "a-subjective phenomenology." In a Heideggerian vein, his critique is that in Husserl givenness is too much, or exclusively, bound to subjectivity. Instead, phenomenology should focus on the "phenomenal field" in which being appears (Heidegger's "*Lichtung*"). Although directed against Husserl's "subjective" idealism, one can exploit his point in the way I do above: It is essential to being to "reveal" itself—to whom, is neither primary nor relevant. Cf. his "Der Subjektivismus der Husserlschen und die Möglichkeit einer 'asubjektiven' Phänomenologie," in: *Die Bewegung der menschlichen Existenz*, Stuttgart 1991, pp. 267-285, cf. here esp. p. 271. For an elucidation of Patočka's critique of Husserl and the validity of this critique, cf. Christian Rhabanus, *Praktische Phänomenologie. Jan Patočkas Revision der Phänomenologie Edmund Husserls*. Frankfurt/M. (et al.), 2002, esp. ch. 3, pp. 27-38.

“domesticated” form). In this sense, Nagel’s idealism of perspectives may also be called “absolute idealism” with the addition, however, that there is no absolute standpoint, in McDowell’s terminology, no conceptual scheme that should have to be privileged a priori.²⁵

The more difficult question is whether Nagel’s idealism can be called “transcendental” without a strong conception of subjectivity. Since it is not about subjectivity, one can be neutral concerning the question whether the subject that *has* this or that perspective is worldly or not. World is perspectival, period. However, if one concedes that world is only given in a certain way and that “being given” correlates to “given in a perspective,” *then* one can say that there is an essential correlation between world and perspective, a “correlational apriori.” In this sense, one may call this “idealism of standpoints” transcendental, despite not making a positive statement about the “manner of being” of perspectives and the agent who has them. The perspective is occupied by *someone*, but that is secondary to the fact that world gives *itself* perspectivally. To say that this perspective is “*had*” by somebody does not necessarily entail a statement about this somebody’s subjectivity. Metaphorically, the world is constructed as a house with many windows. It is not essential to the house who looks in from where.

Thus, “weak idealism” merely claims that being can only be conceived from a certain perspective, that the “realistic” view from nowhere is also a perspective. All that “transcendental” says here is that it is essential for world to be seen from a certain perspective.

II. Husserl’s Conception of Transcendental Idealism as “Real-Idealism”

The intention I pursued in talking about Nagel’s “weak idealism” was to give an example of a type of idealism that can also be found in Husserl, despite his own “strong” idealism. While I do believe that Nagel’s position is idealistic, it is also true that Nagel did not pursue its consequences. Nagel was content to establish the right of the first person perspective, but he was not interested in what follows from this.²⁶ Husserl, on the other hand, saw himself confronted with the same problem but attempted to find a solution. So, how can we “translate” the Husserlian position into Nagel’s?

Nagel’s distinction between the first and third person perspective implies that the proponents of the latter believes that this view is a view “from nowhere.” Since it is a position anybody could occupy, it views the world “as such,” objectively, independently from any experiencing agent. The first person perspective, on the other hand, views the world from the view of radical “mineness.”²⁷ *I* view the world from the perspective of *what it is like to be me*. Thus, only from

²⁵ Cf. *Mind and World*, op. cit., p. 44.

²⁶ I do not claim to do justice to Nagel’s philosophy as a whole; in fact, I merely use him for the purpose of detecting a “weak” idealism in Husserl as well. To be sure, Nagel calls this problem one of the most fundamental philosophical problems, a “problem that faces every creature with the impulse and the capacity to transcend its particular point of view and to conceive of the world as a whole” (*The View From Nowhere*, op. cit., p. 3). The problem entails “the difficulty of reconciling the two standpoints” (ibid.). But although he sees the problem of reconciliation, his understanding of reconciliation amounts to a consideration of how the two standpoints function respectively in different philosophical problem settings. Thus, I do not see that he ever tackles the real issue, e.g., to consider the problem of a possible unity underlying (or synthesis overarching) both aspects. He does not seem to question the “dual aspect theory” as such but instead takes it as an irreducible *factum brutum*. This was a point that was made critically by Dieter Henrich in his overall very positive assessment of Nagel’s philosophy. Cf. D. Henrich, “Dimensionen und Defizite einer Theorie der Subjektivität,” in: *Philosophische Rundschau* 36 (1989), pp. 1-24, esp. pp. 14 ff.

²⁷ I am not sure how Nagel comes up with this artificial term, but it reminds the reader—and not by accident—of Heidegger’s concept of *Jemeinigkeit*, a concept that also wants to grasp human being’s *Dasein* in its radical

the third person perspective can one do science; i.e., one has to depart from one's local viewpoint and take an "objectivist" stance. *My world* is not a depiction of how the world "really" is. What one gets, thus, is objective truth. This third person perspective is comparable to what Husserl calls the "natural attitude." This is the standpoint that we all occupy in our normal life and in which we tacitly believe that the world exists independently of us. In this perspective we do not make a connection between our experience of world and the world itself. Although we know that it is "me" that experiences, we take this "mineness" for granted. In the natural attitude we are "realists." This standpoint enables science: the scientist presupposes the natural attitude. His position is a mere extrapolation of the normal, realist standpoint: Science presupposes this belief that the world exists, and this entails that it exists independently of any experiencing agent. The scientific "attitude" may operate on a higher level of sophistication and the criterion of exactitude. Still, it rests on the natural attitude. For this reason, Husserl calls science's attitude "naturalistic" as it presupposes the tacit belief essential to the natural attitude. But just as in Nagel's account of the third person perspective, which does not consider that it, too, is a perspective, the same can be said for Husserl's account: Strictly speaking, the term "attitude" for this natural standpoint is misleading, for the natural attitude does not think that it in fact *is* a standpoint: the natural "attitude" believes that there *is* no attitude involved in its experiencing of world:

"In the 'natural attitude', the world as universe is in general no theme, thus it [sc., the natural attitude] is actually not an *attitude*. The world is pregiven, it is the field of all natural attitudes in the actual thematic sense."²⁸

Husserl's point is the same as Nagel's: In believing that it is not an attitude, the natural attitude is mistaken. Without even *wanting* it, the natural attitude in its naïveté makes a metaphysical claim; a claim, however, upon which it does not reflect. The natural attitude does "bad metaphysics." It is "bad" because it (a) makes a tacit and unreflected claim. And (b) if it were to make this claim explicit it would realize that it is an absolutization that denies other perspectives, a claim, that is, which is unfounded.

From our previous reflection it is clear that another perspective is possible. Indeed, already in the natural attitude we make recourse to our own first person perspective, in statements that express *what it is like* to be me, e.g., in expressions of belief or opinion. In the statement "I don't like X," I establish an explicit connection between world and myself. This statement is un-objective: it is precisely subjective, but not less valid to me. Yet, it plays no role for science. Husserl's transcendental turn is motivated by the attempt to do justice to this first person perspective *vis-à-vis* the objective sciences. The nature of subjectivity cannot be grasped by the third person perspective. Husserl's transcendental phenomenology is "descriptive psychology," in Nagel's terms; it is a science *of the radical first person perspective*.²⁹ To be sure, there is more to it than

individuality for which it, and only it, can take *care*. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson, by the way, translate *Jemeinigkeit* as "mineness" in their translation of *Being and Time*, San Francisco 1962; cf. the glossary, p. 513.

²⁸ Cf. Hua. XXXIV, p. 14, footnote. (All translations, unless otherwise noted, are of the author.)

²⁹ Although I cannot deal with this problem here, one can point out another point of convergence. Both Nagel and Husserl insist on the scientific character of dealing with the first person perspective. Nagel calls it an "objective phenomenology," Husserl an "eidetic science" of transcendental subjectivity. The crucial difference, however, is that Nagel believes this science to be a matter of the far future, that we at this point have no idea what this science would be like because we do not dispose over the conceptual tools to even thematize it. It seems to me, however, that Husserl's entire philosophical project is about nothing else than to show how such a science would be possible and how it would look like concretely. This is the point Ratcliffe is trying to make (in my opinion, rather schematically), cf. here, footnote 20. Husserl, too, would agree that the completion of this science would be a matter

that: Husserl's transcendental turn is also informed by the Cartesian quest to secure an apodictically certain foundation in the ego. However, we do not *need* to follow him here. For our purposes we can limit ourselves to Husserl's critique of "naturalism," a lead he has pursued already in his early writings and that resurfaces strongly in his later work. This aspect of his phenomenology—the resuscitation of the first person perspective and its "world," the life-world—has arguably been the most influential of his philosophy and it stands on its own despite the criticisms his transcendental method has evoked.³⁰ Husserl's transcendental turn is also a critique of the naturalistic, positivistic absolutizing of the third person perspective—*especially* when applied to the subject. It wants to do justice to the radically subjective, irreducible first person perspective. That is, it is not a wholesale critique of science. Husserl was fully convinced of the importance of science. He was only (like Nagel) adamant about not absolutizing this objectivist perspective. In the language of the *Crisis*, the objective world of science is an *idealization*, which in itself is nothing bad. It only becomes fatal when this "cloak of ideas" is *reapplied* to the life-world³¹, i.e., when the preponderance of the third person perspective *obliterates* the first person perspective. This does justice to Husserl, I believe, without going the next step of claiming that the third person perspective and its world are *products of transcendental constitution*, i.e., that the objective world and its "view from nowhere" are constituted by an absolute consciousness. All that Husserl's critique of the naturalism says is that the third person perspective is not the only perspective.

The question now is—and here Husserl goes beyond Nagel—can these two perspectives be reconciled, and how? What can it mean to reconcile them? In other words, is there a *synthesis* possible between the two? What kind of a synthesis could this be? One way of dealing with opposites is to declare them to be dialectical counterparts, so that in their synthesis the former antithesis no longer exists, but is uplifted to a higher plane. Is this the kind of scenario we face? Do we have to answer this in such a speculative manner? Indeed, the answer Husserl attempts sounds speculative, but states something fairly simple and straight-forward.

What goes for the first person perspective also goes for the third: Both are irreducible—neither to one another nor to another instance (higher or lower). Husserl is very clear about this. The third person perspective is something that can "never be altered" by the philosopher.³² The transcendental turn to the first person perspective is not about "destroying" the third person perspective. It retains its "right," no matter how much one appreciates the first person perspective as a philosophical basis. They are two attitudes I can occupy and that have their own "right" and manner of functioning, no matter which is presently occupied. They are not something I make; rather, they are ways the world reveals *itself* to me. They are not merely perspectives at my disposal, because this would imply the assumption that I am different from the

of an endless generational string of researchers. However, the foundations that he has laid, i.e., research with regard to the spheres of perception, memory, time-consciousness, life-world and others, not only remain. They also show us how such a science could actually look. This interesting lead cannot be pursued here.

³⁰ As I have tried to show elsewhere, one completely misunderstands Husserl when one divorces the concept and science of the life-world from his Cartesianism (cf. my "*Husserl's Theory of the Phenomenological Reduction: Between Life-World and Cartesianism*," in *Research in Phenomenology*, in press). However, since we are not dealing here with Husserl exegesis but with a critical and unorthodox examination of his "weak" idealism, we can ignore questions as to a correct Husserl interpretation.

³¹ Cf. the famous § 9 of the *Crisis* (the "Galileo paragraph"), Hua. VI, pp. 20 ff.

³² Cf. the programmatic statement in *Cartesian Meditations*, Hua. I, p. 177: Phenomenology "does nothing other than—this cannot be stressed often enough—to expound the sense that this world has for all of us before any philosophizing and a sense that it obviously can only have from out of our experience, *a sense that can be discovered philosophically but that can never be altered*" (emphasis added).

attitudes I occupy. A life without perspective is impossible, to recall Nagel. As such, Husserl calls these perspectives also “life-forms” (*Lebensformen*), because there no life outside of them is possible. Moreover, these life-forms are not something I constitute; rather, I have been endowed with them: I have been born into a meaningful world that offers, or is revealed through, perspectives. Thus, first and third person perspectives are irreducible as well as radically different. But can one content oneself with merely stating this? Is this the last word? Can one not reflect on their *relation*? Can one live a life with the difference of perspectives that are completely unrelated? Can one live with two utterly unrelated “truths”? Are we dealing with a relativity of perspectives?³³ Husserl ponders these questions in a late manuscript and compares the two perspectives as two ways of “book keeping.” He writes:

“Yet it is the question whether it is not indeed possible to live a life with ‘double book keeping’. In a way, this is certainly the case, insofar as in these two life forms that permeate each other, two fundamental attitudes take turns and each thematic continues to be valid through interruptions. However, this is the case only as long as I have not noticed that transcendental phenomenology exerts an effect on the meaning of the natural way of viewing the world. The moment I have come to the transcendental interpretation of the natural manner of life as such and its world—to transcendental idealism, that is—then every further natural life (even in inactuality) has its *transcendental apperception*, even if it is not actually carried out by the ego in actual epoché and reflection. Necessarily a synthesis of natural and transcendental world view must enact itself, and its enactment is ‘transcendental idealism’.”³⁴

Now, how are we to interpret this speculative passage? If we strip this quote from its elements germane to Husserl’s conception of transcendental phenomenology: what can such a “synthesis” mean here? Although sounding almost Hegelian, from what we said before, it is impossible to understand “synthesis” here as “*Aufhebung*” (“sublation”) of the two perspectives to a higher synthesis. What would such a higher synthesis be but another perspective? This reading would amount to an infinite regress. And yet Husserl calls this synthesis “idealism.” It is an acknowledgment that these two “life forms” are not only irreducible, but that they *do not stand unrelated* either (as one might be led to think from Husserl’s talk of “absolute consciousness”). What Husserl means with a “synthesis” and why *only this synthesis* merits the title “transcendental idealism,”³⁵ is that they must be somehow *integrated* with each other.³⁶ They essentially belong together as necessary, different ways of the world’s perspectivalness. When Husserl calls *this* “transcendental idealism proper,” it means that the first person perspective is not to be privileged either. Both perspectives are equal in their rights and *together* belong to the way the world is: perspectivally, and to view the totality of the world one cannot privilege either perspective but must come to understand this perspectivalness *as necessarily plural*. Once one has understood this, it follows that when any perspective takes itself as absolute; it makes a

³³ I think it is this consequence that motivated Henrich’s concerns, cf. here, footnote 26

³⁴ Hua. XXXIV, pp. 16 f.

³⁵ It is clear that Husserl himself understands “transcendental idealism” in a wholly novel sense, which can be seen by his using quotation marks.

³⁶ Thus, both perspectives might be mutually exclusive, but from the standpoint of transcendental idealism—the reflective standpoint—this is no longer the case. Thus, their relation is not to be understood figuratively as “tilting figures” like the famous drawing of Freud and the naked woman. *After* one has “seen” the naked woman in the picture, one cannot go back to Freud’s head exclusively. One *knows* that they are both “in” the drawing. It is this “knowing” that, in my reading, Husserl means with “synthesis” here. I owe this metaphor to discussions with Rochus Sowa who, however, disagrees with me concerning the interpretation of this metaphor, insisting that both images remain a strict either/or.

“metaphysical” mistake. The result of “transcendental idealism” in *this* sense is that each perspective has come to see *that it is not the only one*. It is one step beyond “normal” transcendental idealism: It is not *only* about the reflective realization that the third person perspective is a standpoint (something the philosopher sees, the pre-philosophical individual does not). It states that *both*, the first and third person perspectives, are standpoints in an overarching framework of a world given in perspectives, where neither perspective *exhausts* the world’s meaning. Indeed, transcendental idealism means that one perspective—“dialectically”—calls for another, that one standpoint is afforded by the sheer existence of another. Both perspectives stand in the relation of “mutual embrace.”³⁷ While it is true that the third person perspective only becomes understandable on the basis of the first person perspective in Husserl’s theory of constitution, the same must go vice versa. “Transcendental idealism” is thus both an idealism *and* a realism, if idealism stands for the first, realism for the third person perspective. It accommodates both, and this means: it not only *allows* for both positions but necessarily calls for them.

It is in this sense that Husserl’s transcendental idealism can be considered a “Real-Idealism,” a term used by the young Schelling, who employed it for a different purpose³⁸; it may, however, be applied to our context. Schelling writes:

*“Idealism and Realism mutually presuppose each other. If I reflect merely on the ideal activity, then what arises is idealism [...]. If I reflect merely on the real activity, then what arises is realism [...]. If I reflect on both at once, then a third thing arises from both, what one can call Ideal-Realism or what we have thus far called transcendental idealism.”*³⁹

In making recourse to Schelling, I do not want to make things more difficult or speculative. Yet, the term “Real-Idealism” lends itself perfectly for our discussion. Husserl was shy when it came to this kind of speculative terminology, but he is dealing with the same issue. Indeed, this quotation highlights another aspect of Real-Idealism as well: It is nothing mysterious or something only accessible to philosophers. The synthesis we are dealing with here is not a higher stance. Such a higher stance is impossible, not because there is no *other* perspective possible (one we perhaps do not know of yet), but because every “higher” perspective could not be radically different than any other, previously known, perspective. Instead, this Real-Idealism is a matter of *reflection* upon the basic fact that one prime, absolute perspective does not suffice to capture the meaning of the world. Moreover, to even search for such an absolute perspective is misleading from the start. It is a *reflective insight* that can be reached by comparing different perspectives, stating that one perspective calls for another, indeed other perspectives. Their relation is not an either/or. Reflection as the enactment of this synthesis is not another perspective but a shifting back and forth between different standpoints *I* can occupy. I am always *in* a perspective but I *am not* a perspective. “Ideally” one should reflect on as many perspectives

³⁷ This is a quote from Fink where he discusses the relation between natural and transcendental attitude in Husserl’s phenomenology, quoted in: S. Luft, “*Phänomenologie der Phänomenologie*,” Dordrecht/Boston/London, p. 172, fn. 69.

³⁸ The term “real-idealism” (or “ideal-realism”) in Schelling’s early system stands for the equality of the philosophies of nature and of spirit. Whereas in his earliest writings he focused more on philosophy of nature (with “nature” being a speculative concept opposed to the “I,” much in the sense of Fichte’s “Nicht-Ich”), in the *System des transzendentalen Idealismus* of 1800 he focuses on spirit and from there “deduces” nature. Schelling’s point is that one can develop the system “from both ends,” both starting from nature and developing spirit out of it, or vice versa. In this sense, transcendental idealism is properly speaking “real-idealism.”

³⁹ F.W.J. Schelling, *System des transzendentalen Idealismus*, Hamburg 2000, p. 56.

as possible, and this is what constitutes the philosopher's existence; but it is reasonable and a matter of practical wisdom to carry this out to a certain extent already in the normal course of life. Thus, of the philosopher Husserl once writes:

“The phenomenologist has run through all possible attitudes and has theoretically understood them. He now is in command of the possibility to pass from one to the other alternately in their unitary nexus [...].”⁴⁰

In this respect, the philosopher is the ideal type of person reflecting on the difference and multitude of perspectives in the world, occupied by myself as well as by different subjects. This need not entail a recourse to a transcendental ego. It is a reflection on the fact that there exist several views on the world, ones that are actually occupied, others that might not yet have been and perhaps never will be occupied. Indeed, is it not one of the task of philosophy to create yet another perspective on the world and to appeal to the veracity of this new perspective? The world affords a multitude of perspectives, perhaps endless ones, which are not entirely novel positions, but can only be modifications of the first and third person perspective. We are compelled to reflect upon them and their right; and such a reflection always implies relating them back to ourselves, to the perspective we happen to occupy at a given time and location and for certain reasons. Thus, it entails a relation to a subject, ultimately to *me*, though the perspective's existence is not dependant on it. The “I” that comes to the fore through this process is, however, anything but an ultimate transcendental subject.

III. Real-Idealism at Work

When in this last part I briefly want to show how this “Real-Idealism” is “at work,” this might not sound especially profound or mysterious. I believe the project of transcendental idealism is ultimately motivated by a very elementary principle of humanity; it is guided by the ideals of enlightened common sense. Let us summarize:

Idealism in the very basic sense reminds us that there is an essential connection between world and experience. Being and experience are correlates.⁴¹ The next step we took with Nagel was that the world is given not only in *one* manner but in different perspectives.⁴² This is afforded by the fact that world offers us essentially different perspectives yielding different views. Not only are the first and the third person perspective very different, they also afford us completely different views of the same phenomenon: One only needs to compare a romantic poem and an empirical-psychological account of emotions. Idealism in this sense is nothing but this realization that the world is given in many perspectives. What makes it transcendental is that it distinguishes between Being and perspective. The “Copernican” turn to transcendental idealism

⁴⁰ Hua.-Dok. II/1, p. 126, fn. 396 (from Husserl's annotations to Fink's VIth Cartesian Meditation). Although the context here is that Husserl sets Fink's account straight once more, it is nevertheless a passage that can be understood in this general manner. At the end of this longer meditation, Husserl writes: “Thus one can pursue science with the intention of opening up humanity's eyes etc. In this sense, and in a good sense, phenomenology is in the world and analogical in its intentions of addressing [others] like a positive science.” (ibid.). Although my intention above is to abstract from Husserl's phenomenological discussion that seem implausible to some, this quotation makes clear how “existential” the task of philosophy is to Husserl.

⁴¹ As Hönigswald has argued: “Of which one can say in a certain sense that it ‘is’, appears determined *vis-à-vis* the relative coincidence of its being experienced. That however means nothing but that it is *given*.” R. Hönigswald, “Systematische Selbstdarstellung“ (1930), in: *Grundfragen der Erkenntnistheorie*, Hamburg 1997, p. 205.

⁴² In this sense, we can appropriate Aristotle's famous statement, “Being is spoken of in many ways” (*tò òn légethai pollachôs*).

marks the shift from the world in an objectivist sense to talking about the way certain *perspectives* view the world. It is an “enlightened idealism” that lets us understand that perspectives is all we have, but that this is not a limitation of our understanding but its necessary precondition. The best we can do—and *this* is idealism and “idealistic”—is to understand this very fact.

What does this insight teach us concretely? First of all, it is the opposite of solipsism: It teaches us to respect the fact *that the world is not my world alone*. My perspective is merely one possible perspective—as a possible perspective that I occupy at this point in time *and* one among the perspectives others occupy. We can elucidate this concretely by considering an ingenious and well known Kantian *aperçu* regarding the *Sensus communis* from the Third Critique:

“The following maxims of common sense do not belong here as parts of a critique of taste but can in any case serve as elucidations of the principles of taste. They are the following: 1. to think for oneself; 2. to think in the position of every other person; 3. at all times to think unanimously with oneself. The first is the maxim of *unprejudiced*, the second that of *extended*, the third that of *consequential* method of thought.”⁴³

In our terminology, this means, first, that there is the postulate to think for oneself in an unbiased way. I leave the question aside if such thinking is ultimately possible. It can also mean to become clear *about the presuppositions* that I harbor, in other words, *to reflect on the perspective that I occupy*, without taking *it* for granted or without taking for granted *that* I occupy a perspective *in principle*. In short, the first maxim can be understood as a reflection on my first person perspective. This entails that I differentiate between the first and third person perspective. This entailment applies because a reflection on my own stance already “dialectically” calls forth the idea that the world might not be as I conceive of it in my locality. My outlook might merely be—a perspective. Thus, the second principle calls for putting myself in the other’s position. Kant calls it “extended” because it allows me to widen my own horizon. Thus, it makes me consider not only the first and the third, but also the *second person* perspective. It marks the difference between *my* first person perspective and the *other’s*. Not only do I and the other occupy radically different standpoints; this reflection also reveals that the other and I will see *differently* even when viewing the same and even when we agree.⁴⁴ The perspective that something offers me cannot be the same that it offers the other. As Husserl emphasized, although empathy can only occur through “analogical apperception,” by placing myself in the position “as if I was over there,” where the other stands, I will never be able to know what it is like to be the other.⁴⁵ Gadamer amplified this “dialogical” principle: The reflection on the other not only reveals *that* there is another position other than my own. It also marks a potential preponderance of the other.⁴⁶ Placing myself in the other’s position means more than just considering her viewpoint: It entails that the other may be right, no matter how much I may disagree with her.

⁴³ *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, p. 158 (from § 40, On Taste as a Type of *Sensus communis*).

⁴⁴ In this sense one can understand Gadamer’s somewhat apodictic statement “understanding is always understanding differently.”

⁴⁵ Husserl discusses this in the famous Fifth Cartesian Meditation, cf. Hua. I, esp. §§ 50 ff., pp. 138 ff.

⁴⁶ As he says in a late passage: “This the essence, the soul of my hermeneutics: To understand someone else is to see the justice, the truth, of their position. And this is what transforms us. And if we then have to become part of a new world civilization, if this is our task, then we shall need a philosophy which teaches us to see the justification for the other’s point of view and which thus makes us doubt our own.” D. Misgeld and G. Nicholson, ed.s, *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry and History: Applied Hermeneutics*, tr. by L. Smith and M. Reuss, Albany, NY, SUNY Press 1992, p. 152.

The third principle in Kant's maxims of common sense, the ability to think *consequentially*, can be understood as enacting a *synthesis* in considering different viewpoints, while not neglecting the postulate to think in unity with myself (putting myself into the position of the other cannot mean to give up my own). Synthesis does not mean *uniting* them but *relating* them to each other and assessing their mutual validity and veracity. It is also a self-assertion of my own position *after* considering other perspectives—ideally as many as possible. I can only claim for myself to think in unity with myself, when I have considered other standpoints. Otherwise, I am indeed a “solipsist.” For, thinking through the possibility of other perspectives entails a certain and partial self-alienation that in turn makes a real self-understanding possible. This is a self-assertion that defines my subjectivity, but it does not come from a skeptical stance of principal doubt. It is a recognition that what I am is owed by other factors which I can merely reflect upon and did not create. It is only from there that I can even think of convincing others of the perceived rightfulness of my position.

Idealism in this sense is nothing but a critical restatement of enlightened humanism: Through reflecting on not only the first, second, and third person perspectives, but ideally on all their possible modifications *as well as their interplay and their mutual interdependence* we gain something far removed from solipsism and ego-metaphysics. This idealism allows for a mutual tolerance of standpoints as well as their critical evaluation in the spirit of enlightenment that breathes through the famous Kantian passage. It is a realization that the world is not *mine alone*, and that it is neither only the *other's* nor *anybody's* in a centerless universe. Modifying Nagel's dictum, idealism permits us finite beings a *view from everywhere*. It is not a relativism, because the “synthesis” at play here is a continual interplay of checks and balances between all perspectives, in that I not only need to consider different perspectives in my own actions, but also perspectives that others have and that conflict with my own. It is this “synthesis” of human standpoints that defines the *life-world as the intersection of all perspectives*. The life-world thus becomes a public sphere where we can live as enlightened, that is, (self-)critical human beings. Hence, transcendental idealism is not an exclusive type of philosophy distanced from other philosophies, be they realistic, continental or analytic. It is merely the expression of any philosophy that considers itself to be part of the tradition of enlightenment. The “synthesis” envisioned by Husserl reflects the philosophical desire to reconcile fundamentally differing perspectives into one coherent world view, as different views upon the *one world* that we share, no matter how we may disagree. The world is not something we own but something of which we have the privilege to partake. In this conclusion, I have somewhat departed from a traditional Husserl reading. However, I have attempted to open a novel perspective on his philosophy by considering him as a “weak” idealist that makes him compatible, perhaps, with philosophical hermeneutics. It not only demonstrates the continual validity and radicality of Husserl's thoughts. It also shows the proximity of his seemingly abstract methodological considerations to ethical issues of the life-world. Only a philosophy that manages to connect a seemingly abstract philosophical doctrine like transcendental idealism to the concrete life-world deserves to be called phenomenological.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ An earlier version of this essay was presented in Spanish at the XIV. Encuentro Nacional de Fenomenología y Hermenéutica in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in September 2003. I would like to thank the members of this meeting, especially Roberto J. Walton, as well as my translators, Kelly Fabrega and Catalina González, for their helpful comments and criticisms. Furthermore, I would like to thank Nicholas G. Fotion and Donald R. Moore for their help with grammar and style of this essay.