

1-1-2008

The Transcendental Dimension of Phenomenology

Sebastian Luft

Marquette University, sebastian.luft@marquette.edu

THE TRANSCENDENTAL DIMENSION OF PHENOMENOLOGY

SEBASTIAN LUFT¹

This short text to follow is an attempt at philosophizing “free-style”; an attempt, that is, which does not concern itself with much recourse to primary or secondary literature. Hence, references to texts by the philosophers mentioned here are kept to a minimum. The purpose of this text, instead, is to initiate a “fundamental reflection”, as one could call it, on the nature of phenomenology. May the reader indulge me in this free-styling activity, and I would welcome equally unburdened responses.

It is a long-standing discussion within phenomenology and without, what this allegedly new discipline, inaugurated by Edmund Husserl over a century ago, really stands for. In other words, what are its various types of “commitments”, as one calls it today, ontological, epistemological, metaphysical? It seems as if there was, and is, little agreement on what these are.¹ Hence, phenomenology threatens to become a label, a catch phrase, an umbrella term under which all kinds of different tendencies can be placed. While I am all for individual freedom on the part of these diverse researchers, it is not very helpful for the way phenomenology is perceived by other philosophical schools and movements. So, what really *is* phenomenology? In trying to answer this question, I am speaking “from the inside”

¹ Already from the onset of the Phenomenological Movement, there was a significant disagreement over the meaning of phenomenology. I cannot recapitulate these discussions, but point especially to the work of the late Karl Schuhmann, who has unearthed the early history of this movement. See esp. his *Selected Papers in Phenomenology* (C. Leijenhorst & P. Steenbakkers, eds., Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer, 2004), see here also the bibliography of his writings, *ibid.* pp. 355 ff.

of phenomenology, as somebody who systematically takes phenomenology serious and thinks there is a lasting truth to it.

Instead of commenting on these commitments that phenomenologists adhere to, what I would like to do here is spell out what, I think (or at least hope), phenomenology is in a way that all of those working in phenomenology should be able to agree. I am offering, as it were, an eidetic variation on phenomenology itself and will try to formulate what I take to be the real nature of phenomenology—or, for that matter, what it *ought* to be. In so doing, I realize I will probably not get everybody to agree with me at the end of the day, despite my hope to the contrary. It was already a tremendous frustration to the founding father, Husserl, that the people working in this increasingly influential movement could not agree on the simplest and most basic paradigms underpinning their work. He supposedly once pointed to everyone around him (all pupils) and said: “Enemies! Enemies! Enemies! — But above all—phenomenology (*“Feinde! Feinde! Feinde! Aber über allem – die Phänomenologie”*)”.² He was even more frustrated that his move towards phenomenology as a *transcendental* enterprise was not seen as a logical continuation of his work, and that is, of phenomenology as such, but as an aberration, a mistake, a self-misunderstanding.

It is precisely this notion of “transcendental” that I want to explore in the following. To state my opinion, which is at the same time the thesis of this paper, right at the outset: I think that Husserl was right to make the move to frame phenomenology as a transcendental discipline. And, I think that to this day, there exists a fundamental misunderstanding as to what Husserl means with this word, taken of course from Kant, but certainly modified, thereby giving it an original new meaning.

This misunderstanding is entertained on the part of phenomenology’s critics, to be sure, but also by some working in the phenomenological tradition itself. Especially when reading some philosophers from the so-called “analytic” tradition, one gets the impression that there seems to exist a knee-jerk reaction to this term. It is as if one desperately needs to find new –isms in order not to utter this dirty word; as if new terms are of help instead of, as I believe, making a fairly simple, but fundamentally important, matter unnecessarily complicated. Now, instead of taking on the phenomenological “realists” or “anti-transcendentalists” directly, what I would like to do in what is to come is to do simple phenomenological work: *show, not argue*. I hope to unfold what I here call the “transcendental dimension” of phenomenology and hope that at the end I will have achieved two

² This anecdote is reported by Roman Ingarden.

tasks: firstly, to show those, who might not know what this dimension consists in, what it is; and secondly, to convince those who might not agree with me initially that there *is* such a transcendental dimension, that it is nothing to be afraid of but instead something that can be accepted without reservation and without having to change one's commitments mentioned above, whatever they may be. This is not to say that my attempt to embrace all those working in phenomenology will be successful. My conciliatory attempt might in the end prompt critique, which I welcome. Hence, if my account strikes some as provocative, more provocative than it actually sounds, I will also see my efforts vindicated.

* * *

A simple definition of what phenomenology does is repeated again and again, and not without good reason, in any introduction, even those written by the founders themselves (e.g., Husserl or Heidegger): *zu den Sachen selbst!*, which is translated as *to the matters themselves!* (The translation as "*things*" in English is somewhat misleading. "*Matters*" is more adequate, as is the Spanish "*cosas*", though I will switch between both English terms.) But of course, the question immediately follows: what are these matters? What are they not, or what does not count as such a matter with which phenomenologists occupy themselves? And why would any other philosopher *not* want to get at the matters themselves, as one also says: *medias in res*? What is peculiar about phenomenology's insistence on getting to the matters themselves? If it is more than a mere triviality, the meaning of these "matters" is crucial for understanding what phenomenology wants.

Indeed, while I do believe that what phenomenology tries to accomplish is something very peculiar, it would be preposterous to claim that all of it is entirely new. The call to the matters themselves is the simple attempt to get to the matters *as they really are*, not as one *thinks they might be*. It is, in this sense, the move that was already thematized in Ancient Greek philosophy from *dóxa*, mere opinion, to *epistème*, a scientific account that precisely does *not* include opinions, if we mean by opinion unchecked and unreflected judgments that one has taken over naively from others. Phenomenology, thus, attempts to revitalize and resuscitate the old sense of science, and ultimately even that of rigorous science: the truly scientific stance is reached when all opinions, biases, presuppositions have been abandoned. This is not a sacrifice, but a freeing oneself of one's old beliefs that dominated our worldview in the "cave." Hence, phenomenology is, first of all a resuscitation of the age-old ideal of a presuppositionless science, or it is the ideal of total presuppositionlessness, and I say deliberately "ideal." For it could turn out that such a stance is ultimately unattainable, that it is impossible to rid oneself

of all presuppositions, that presuppositions in fact underpin every utterance, that every judgment (*Urteil*) rests on a presupposition (*Vor-Urteil*), as Gadamer has argued. But this insight is nothing but the overcoming of the ultimate presupposition: the presupposition of presuppositionlessness. In this sense, hermeneutics is a continuation of the ideal of “rigorous science.” But this just as an aside.

So phenomenology, too, first of all begins by ridding oneself of the old presuppositions. Or to say it more cautiously, it *brackets* them for the time being. It leaves open the possibility that some of them, if examined, turn out to be correct. This bracketing is the famous *epoché* that Husserl talks about: it is a temporary bracketing of those opinions and judgments that we make during the time we are not doing science, whichever science this may be, biology, psychology, anthropology or even philosophy. So the *epoché* is something that all people do who somehow try to wrest themselves from ordinary, everyday opinions and try to figure out how things “really are,” even if the things might be these ordinary opinions themselves. Again in Husserlian terms, *any* scientist distances oneself from the *natural attitude*, which is the natural stance of our everyday lives, a stance to which all of us return the moment we exit the office or laboratory and order a *Cuba Libre* in a café.

But here, the parallel with other sciences ends. For normal sciences study the matters peculiar to them with a certain, well defined *interest*. For instance, the biologist studies matters with respect to them as living things. This is why for him or her, stones or cars are not of interest, unless one day we come to use biotechnology in automobile engineering. Hence, sciences study the matters specific to them *as* this or that (living, non-living, historical, musical, artistic etc.). Hence, they do not study the matters *as matters*, but with a certain interest *as* X, Y or Z. They precisely do *not* study them, in other words, the way they are meant in the natural attitude.

And this is where the meaning of the phrase “the matters themselves” phenomenology is after can come into play again. Phenomenology, as opposed to all other sciences, studies these matters *as they are themselves, as such*, or to say it differently, *as they are in the natural attitude*. Hence, phenomenology does not study specific matters (e.g., flowers) with a specific interest (as botanist, to stay with the example), whereby the scientist necessarily has to restrict him- or herself to these matters. Instead, phenomenology studies in principle *all matters as they are in themselves*, and that is, as they are *in the natural attitude*, all of them, whatever they may be. There is no limit to the matters of the natural attitude. The natural attitude is no *region*, in other words, like in the sciences, where a regionalization is necessary (the region of living matter, organic, inorganic etc.), and where progress can be

sometimes measured in further refinement of regionalization.³ The natural attitude is the stance from which we experience the world as meaningful to us in our everyday living. This is the meaning of the world as *lifeworld*. Hence, while all sciences *depart* from the natural attitude and must necessarily do so, phenomenology *turns back on* this natural attitude itself and studies *it*. This is what makes phenomenology different from all other sciences and constitutes a unique enterprise never embarked upon before.

And here, a curious reversal takes place. I said above that science marks the difference from matters as they *appear* to how they *really are*. But if phenomenology studies matters in the natural attitude, wouldn't it then mean that it studies them *as they appear*? How can this be scientific? Was not the very meaning of science to move away from appearances? Why study these appearances; and, how can this be a science? While it is true that science studies things *as they really are*, this is not at all how things appear to us *as themselves*. But isn't it also true that things appear as what they are to us and that we know fully well the difference between a thing's appearance *as itself* and its "*real*" nature? Take a cube of sugar. While looking at it from an angle, it appears to us optically distorted, while we know fully well that it *is* a cube. We do not see a cube, to be very precise, and yet we say, "it is a cube of sugar," even if it is not a cube in the exact sense of geometry.

What kind of a difference is this? It is a difference that we are fully aware of both in our everyday lives as well as in our potential occupations as scientists, namely that—to use a terminology made famous by Thomas Nagel—between the *first person* perspective and the *third person* perspective, our personal, individual viewpoint on the one hand and that from which science is being carried out, the "view from nowhere," on the other.⁴ The "viewpoint" of the scientist is not supposed to contain any viewpoint at all. And as Nagel's famous phrase indicates, a "view from nowhere" is a paradoxical thing, a standpoint without a standpoint. And yet, we privilege this standpoint over that of our personal one all the time, not only as scientists. We try to be "objective." We do not attribute any real value, scientific (or political, or otherwise) to utterances relative to a subject. But is this fair? Hence, instead of arguing why phenomenology is a science, one can

³ Following the Kantian reminder that "it is not an improvement but a deformation of the sciences when their boundaries are allowed to run over into one another" (*Critique of Pure Reason*, B VIII, Guyer / Wood trans.).

⁴ Though I take this terminological distinction from Nagel, I am using it not in any sense peculiar to his *The View from Nowhere*, but rather in that in which it has become commonplace in contemporary Philosophy of Mind.

ask the opposite, critical question: *what right* does the third person perspective have to do what it does, or pretend to do? How can this be justified if it really is a paradoxical enterprise to begin with? It is not my intention here to criticize the sciences, nor did any serious phenomenologist ever doubt the dignity and importance of the sciences, as witnessed in Husserl's famous last book, the *Crisis of European Sciences*, which precisely lamented the loss of science's original intentions. However, just as one questions the legitimacy of the first person perspective, one might as well turn the tables and question that of the third person perspective.

This polemic will not help us further. But it has become clear that phenomenology purports to be a study of this first person perspective. It is, more precisely, a science of the first person perspective, something that Nagel envisions but at the same time declares not be in existence yet. This is a statement that makes phenomenologists wince. For this is precisely what phenomenology had been doing for nearly a century!⁵ So again, how can it be called a science? And what kind of a science is it? We know this much so far: phenomenology is a science that studies things as they are in themselves, not as they "really are", and this "in themselves" is how they appear to me in my first person perspective, as opposed to an account from the third person perspective (disregarding the problems with it). Phenomenology pays attention to things as they appear or give themselves, and this is precisely as what they are *in the natural attitude*. There is no being behind the appearances, but the appearances are the things themselves. But the shift from things as they "really" are to what they are "themselves" opens up a whole new wealth of experience for the phenomenological scientist. For, how do these things appear to us? Is this really such a simple matter?

Let us take the famous example of Husserl's, rehearsed over and over again to clarify the simple but fascinating meaning of phenomenology and its peculiar description: the perceptual object. We see the object, undoubtedly the object itself, and undoubtedly it exists. It is no mere appearance or representation of something that is otherwise independent of my perceptual faculties. But its being is somehow *given* to me. I see the pulpit with the front side facing me and the backside hidden. When I turn it around, the opposite is the case: the back side is now the front side. Perceptual objects, hence, give themselves perspectively, in "adumbrations". And, I can only perceive this object (the pulpit) in its entirety by walking around it, touching it etc. To the object as it gives itself corresponds

⁵ I am not claiming to do justice to Nagel's positive efforts here. My point is only that, I believe, Nagel is a kindred spirit with phenomenology, though his own interests lie in a different direction (the issue of *qualia*).

someone, in this case an embodied agent, *to whom* this object gives itself, to whom it appears. This structure is true for all creatures, who have perception, as we can easily see through a quick exercise Husserl calls "eidetic variation." It is valid neither only for a particular creature, such as a human being, nor merely a particular perceptual object. *Perception* as such has the structure of givenness-as and appearance-for. Even God, Husserl famously says, if he has perception, would not see in any other way than perspectively.⁶ This claim is wholly independent of a scientific account of the manner in which eyes function or how a certain species has developed its perceptual apparatus in the course of evolution. It is a claim about a certain manner in which objects give themselves *as* themselves. Hence, perception is a genuine topic of phenomenology in the way specified before; a topic, which can be further differentiated into seeing, hearing etc.; another would be memory, another imagination, etc. The list can be expanded almost endlessly into other areas where the founder of phenomenology himself had not forayed.

Hence, we can now give a first definition of phenomenology: it is an eidetic science of the first person perspective. It studies things in their manner of appearance or their manner of givenness, with no limit in principle as to what can count as thing or matter. It studies them precisely in the way they appear to us in our everyday lives, in the natural attitude, but studies them in the way that we, living in the natural attitude, do not realize. And this is the important point: for, paradoxically, this dimension of the natural attitude is hidden to us *in* the natural attitude. Being in the natural attitude, we don't know *that* we are in the natural attitude; this is precisely its basic trait. I take it and its "general thesis," that the world exists (independent of my experiencing it), for granted. Hence, by practicing *epoché* from the natural attitude and turning back on the natural attitude itself, we come to see these things of the natural attitude in a way never seen before. It does not give us an "objective" account, but in phenomenological description we focus on and dig deeper into the ways and manners of the natural attitude, uncovering things we normally take for granted, for instance, the mechanisms by which the most normal and common relation to the world occurs: perception. In this sense, phenomenology is the science of things taken for granted (*Wissenschaft der Selbstverständlichkeiten*). This type of viewpoint and the science that follows from it is *impossible* from the standpoint of the natural attitude itself.

⁶ This brief discussion is a statement of Husserl's transcendental idealism. A more detailed account, comparing Husserl's idealism with that of Kant, can be found in my "From Being to Givenness and Back: Some Remarks on the Meaning of Transcendental Idealism in Kant and Husserl," in: *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 15/3 (2007), pp. 367-394.

As mentioned, Husserl insists that this science is “rigorous,” by which he means eidetic—a science of essences (like mathematics). It is a science, unlike the sciences from the third person perspective, but, Husserl claims, just as rigorous as the eidetic sciences arithmetic and geometry. A science of the first person perspective that is just as rigorous as mathematics! To be sure, the term “eidetic” has been criticized in the Phenomenological Movement and beyond. Since I do not wish to restrict this account of phenomenology to Husserl, let us use a different terminology. Phenomenology can also be called an *a priori* science of the first person perspective, which attempts to determine, as “*a priori*” says in Kant, necessary and universal traits, in this case of appearances of or givennesses for an experiencing agent, whoever this may be. So instead of construing science as “objective” as opposed to “subjective” opinions, phenomenology claims that there can be necessary and universal claims both on the side of science in the ordinary sense of the term—from the third person perspective—as well as of the first person perspective. This undercuts the traditional distinction between subjective and objective, thereby ceasing to privilege the latter.

This definition, I claim, holds generally valid for phenomenology as such. It captures also something like Heidegger’s fundamental ontology of *Dasein*. When Heidegger speaks of “*Dasein*” instead of “subjectivity” or “consciousness,” he does not mean a specifically *human* creature on planet Earth, but any being that is defined by its structures of care, understanding, and through its finitude and being-toward-death. Hence—and this is often misunderstood when talking about Heidegger—even the existential category of “mineness” (*Jemeinigkeit*) is an *a priori* existential category, an *Existenzial*. The same goes for Scheler’s account of emotions and Merleau-Ponty’s descriptions of embodied existence. They all have attempted to describe necessary and universal traits of first person experience of being, matters, things, in the parlance of phenomenology.⁷

But this has led us already implicitly to the *transcendental* dimension of phenomenology, and this will be the next and final step. Using the term “*a priori*” already has brought us into Kantian territory, and deliberately so. So allow me a quick excursion into Kant’s transcendental project. Kant’s Copernican Revolution begins, as is well known, with the thought experiment to imagine “that the objects must conform to our cognition” rather than the other way around. Kant

⁷ Hence, I would characterize the difference between these thinkers not so much with respect to different phenomena they describe, but instead concerning that which they consider to be the *most fundamental* phenomenon, i.e., something that Husserl himself might have overlooked. But this type of discussion, is my point, already takes place within the sphere of phenomenology. Hence, these differences do not in any case question their commitment to phenomenology in the most basic definition expounded above.

simply wants to see what happens if we look at what we lay into things, rather than the objects impressing something on us like a signet-ring. There is something about us that makes for the fact that objects can be experienced in the first place. So the assumed fact, the *factum*, is that objects exist, as well as *a priori* cognition about them, and Kant wants to find out what makes this *factum* possible. This is the transcendental question: how is the *factum* possible, or what is its condition of possibility? This is, most fundamentally, (a) the fact that our sensibility of space and time is the condition of the possibility to experience things *in* space and time, and (b) the categories of the understanding. We know of objects only as they are *given* to us, not as what they might really be, i.e., outside from our experiencing them. Therefore, we must limit our knowledge claims to objects as they appear to us, not as they really are. All knowledge claims, even if they are *a priori* (and some are), must limit themselves to *phainomena*, not *noumena*. God, freedom, and immortality are such *noumena*. We can only have cognition with respect to *phainomena*, objects as they are given to our sensibility, as they appear to us. All of this can be summarized in Kant's notion of transcendental idealism: all our knowledge claims are with respect to objects of experience, and beyond that nothing is given, and if it is not given, we cannot make any claims about them (other than skewed ones).

Back to phenomenology. One thing that irked most phenomenologists, beginning with Hegel (if I may be permitted to call him a phenomenologist!), was the dualism between appearance and being, of which we can have no experience. If we have no experience of objects existing outside of their realm of appearing to us, how can we even know about them? The dualism is highly problematic. Clearly, there exist only things as they are given, nothing beyond that. Husserl says this quite explicitly in texts, where he gives a "proof" of transcendental idealism. He says apodictically, and this is his claim of transcendental idealism, of which he says in a late text that he has "nothing to rescind":⁸ "to the essence of being belongs its being-able-to-be-given".⁹ But is not such a claim just a preposterous as Kant's in the opposite direction, at least as Kant appears implausible from the standpoint of the phenomenologist? Does this not push Husserl into an absolute idealism that Kant was so careful to avoid? Could we not understand Kant's transcendental idealism as a form of humility that simply wants to respect

⁸ This statement is from Husserl's "Nachwort zu meinen *Ideen*" (Post-Script to my *Ideas*), *Husserliana* V, here p. 151.

⁹ I am referring here to a body of texts in which Husserl works out a specific "proof" for transcendental idealism, cf. *Husserliana* XXXVI. The quotation above is from p. 32 of this volume. The original reads: "Zum Wesen des Seins gehört Gegeben-sein-Können [...]."

the limits of our capacities? How can we be certain that being is nothing beyond that, being-given; that it belongs to the *essence* of being to be given? How can Husserl say such a thing and what does it mean?

I allege that the quoted phrase expresses exactly what I here wish to call the “transcendental dimension” of phenomenology. First of all, contrary to Kant, this dimension seems to collapse the distinction between *phainomena* and *noumena*. There are only *phainomena*, only appearances-of and givennesses-to. Now this seems like a claim that certainly a “realist” would deny, to reduce being to being-given. Wouldn't this open the door to an unscientific subjectivism, because things certainly appear differently to different people? Reducing being to appearance would eliminate all objective knowledge claims. But we have already seen that this opposition between objective and subjective is questionable.

But let us further see what this claim can mean. First of all, to say that “to the essence of being belongs its being-able-to-be-given” does not mean that all being is at all times given. It only claims this: All being, if it really exists, must potentially be able to give itself; there is no being outside of the *potentiality* of givenness. If it exists, it must be able to come to appearance at least potentially, even if this potentiality might not be a human potentiality. For instance, there are certain mathematical phenomena of which mathematicians can apparently prove that they cannot be proven. But this doesn't mean that the proof doesn't exist! It just exceeds human capacities of comprehension. Hence, being is, or at least can be, experienced, and in this case, it is experienced in the way it appears or gives itself—to *someone*. *Something* is experienced, even if this turns out to be a “mere appearance,” calling to mind Heidegger's example of somebody appearing in a certain colored light (as red) and therefore only *appearing* ill.¹⁰ But as we already have seen, for phenomenology, “mere” appearance and “real being” are alternatives that are not mutually exclusive.

But to fully understand this claim regarding being as being-given, we need to inquire into the *nature* of this claim. Is it an ontological claim? And I think here is where people critical of this “transcendental-idealistic” sense of phenomenology make the fundamental error: it is nothing like a claim about *being*, about things as they *really are*. Indeed, when Husserl makes these claims as to phenomenology as transcendental idealism, he is speaking from the standpoint of the *epoché*. The claim is metaphysically and ontologically *neutral*. As such, he is speaking from the standpoint of the first person, not from that of the natural attitude or any other science. To insist on realism with respect to being is to be caught up in the natu-

¹⁰ *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1986), pp. 30 f.

ral attitude, which does not acknowledge that we can only speak about being from the first person perspective insofar as it is given to us. To insist on the exclusiveness of the third person perspective is epistemologically naïve. But phenomenology claims to say nothing about the true nature of being, whatever that may be. It only emphasizes the fact that we, as experiencing agents, are bound to a certain standpoint, and this means, being necessarily *gives itself* or appears to us. And it is neither a form of Berkeleyan idealism that claims somehow that we create representations out of our own minds (raising the specter of solipsism).¹¹ Things, matters themselves give themselves, because this is how they *are—to us* and any other creature that has its own first person standpoint. The fact that things have the potential to appear takes nothing away from their “true being” that science wants to attain. If anything, it adds an aspect that will forever escape the sciences of the third person perspective. Hence, the phenomenological meaning of “transcendental,” if we retain the language of “condition of possibility,” is simply this: the condition of the possibility of any experience of being is that it is first of all somehow *given*, which does nothing other than to locate Kant’s claim as to clarifying the “conditions of the possibility” on the *lowest* possible level: things given in their ordinary lifeworldly meaning. Phenomenology does nothing other than draw attention to this very fact, and this is significant because this fact is acknowledged neither in the natural attitude nor in the sciences, which investigate being from a standpoint that precisely tries to get away from the subjective-relative. Givenness is the *próteron prós hemás*, and phenomenology wants to do nothing but restore the meaning of this *próteron* and pay tribute to its proper sense, which is to describe it in all of its manners and details.

To summarize, the transcendental dimension of phenomenology is the commitment to construe being as being-given. It does not claim that we lay something into the objects prior to our knowledge of them, as Kant sees it. To the contrary, as the Husserlian term “constitution” indicates (unfortunately, a misleading term), things constitute *themselves* in experience, that is, there is a correlation of givenness-of and appearance-to, and this is the condition of the possibility of the experience of the world, any world. Nor does it question in any way the “true nature” of being and the quest to attain it. Another, and perhaps more familiar way of saying this is that phenomenology restricts itself to the sphere of intentionality, intentional immanence, where any questions as to the nature of

¹¹ In the same breath that Husserl has argued for this version of transcendental idealism, he has emphasized that it is not a form of solipsism but instead entails the dimension of intersubjectivity. I can, however, only hint at the thorny issue of intersubjectivity, which was tackled in such different manners by the main representatives of phenomenology.

that being, which is experienced, and that agent, who experiences, are bracketed. It is an acknowledgment of the irreducibility of the first person perspective, but more than that, it is a whole new form of science, which hitherto has not existed: an *a priori*, transcendental science of the first person perspective, which investigates the manners and intricacies of being as it gives itself. This is, I believe, the simplest but also most general meaning of phenomenology and it is, I also believe, the eidetic invariant that any phenomenologist would have to agree upon, if they are in any remote way doing *phenomology*, even if they might have abandoned terms such as intentionality, consciousness or subjectivity, terms that were for Husserl all provisional and inadequate notions anyway.

As such, although the definition is simple, it is by no means trivial. It is not trivial because it opens up a viewpoint on the world in intricacies never described before: on the world as a world of meaning, which we take so much for granted that we always already leap over it. Phenomenology has given philosophy a new sense of wonder, of *thaumázein*, about things that were never *things* or *matters*, *Sachen* worth our attention, to begin with. Its claim is as grandiose as, in its actual descriptive work, immensely humble. In this description, phenomenology for the first time *uncovers*—we might daringly say “creates”—these things and brings them before consciousness to contemplate them in their simple but complex beauty. It is in this sense not inappropriate to compare phenomenology to art. I would argue that its closest proximity is to *impressionism*. To make one last comparison with the sciences, phenomenology has invented the microscope for the world of the first person perspective, the natural attitude and the life-world in which it lives. This is its lasting achievement: to never cease to pay attention to the transcendental dimension of *life itself*.¹²

Marquette University/Visiting Professor, UPR, Summer 2008

¹² An earlier version of this paper was presented in the Colloquium Series of the Philosophy Department at the Universidad de Puerto Rico, San Juan (Recinto Río Piedras). I thank the Department of Philosophy for gracefully extending this invitation, both to speak before its faculty and student body and for inviting me for a visiting professorship in the summer of 2008. I thank the participants of the discussion, especially Guillermo Rosado Haddock, Miguel Badía, and Raúl Iturrino, for their interesting and penetrating questions that led me to rethink several of the issues tackled in this short paper. I am not sure I have done justice to their concerns. Finally, I would like to extend my warm thanks to the administrative assistants of the Department of Philosophy, Nilda Pastrana and Gloria González, for their help with the minutiae of daily life in San Juan, all of which made my stay there in August of 2008 an unforgettable delight. Finally, I would like to thank Nathan Blackerby for his help with grammar and style.