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LÉVINAS AND HEIDEGGER:
A POST-HEIDEGGERIAN APPROACH TO
PHENOMENOLOGICAL ISSUES

I

Let me start with Husserl. To be sure he repeated again and again that the phenomenological investigation demands at the very beginning a universal *epoché* which suspends all accepted conceptions whatever their basis: common experience, scientific experiments, or philosophical tradition whether ancient or modern. Inasmuch as phenomenology claims to be without presupposition, it does not advocate any testament. Such abstention is claimed to be necessary in order to gain access to the field phenomenological investigation has to explore. That field, the famous *Sache selbst*, is the life of intentionality taken in the two-pole correlation of its intendings and of its intended, as well as in the entire diversity of their ways of appearing. That is the phenomenon in the phenomenological sense of the word, and the point is to describe it faithfully as it appears and not at all to submit it to pre-established definitions or problems.

Although the purism of *Wesenschau* is in principle free from all inheritance, the phenomenologist is aware that his research instead of being the dawn of thought is connected with what he learned from masters who had a name, like Brentano. Moreover, he cannot avoid remembering that in order to open the specific field of phenomenology, he had to repudiate several theses which in his early work were only the echo of predominant psychologistic ways of thinking. He is aware as well that the angle from which he is approaching the new field was already designated by inherited terms like logic, theory of knowledge, *Wissenschaftslehre*, and was a subject matter around which trends with historical roots like empiricism and Neo-Kantianism were opposed to one another. Moreover, the exploration of the new field had to be made accessible to students and scholars. It was impossible to convey the exploration results without using words understandable because they are transmitted by a long tradition, such

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as noesis and noema, intuition, category, fact and essence, immanence and transcendence, etc. Finally, inasmuch as the new field is revealing its structures and articulation levels, it reveals as well an ultimate foundation the exploration of which cannot avoid falling under very old labels such as first philosophy and metaphysics.

Hence, the very gesture through which phenomenology emerges as a claim to pure intuition *sub specie aeternitatis* is paradoxically pervaded by history.

However, the link between Husserl's phenomenology and the history of philosophy is not at all limited to the more or less implicit paradox I just evoked. Indeed, the more the exploration expands, the more explicitly and thematically the phenomenologist acknowledges the relevance of many inherited theses, provided that they lend themselves to a strictly phenomenological retrieval. Such are Kant's distinctions between judgment of perception and judgment of experience, or his thesis about Being as a nonreal predicate, or the Cartesian clear and distinct apprehension of the *cogito* resisting the famous doubt.

More generally, Husserl's phenomenology in its aiming to the level of first philosophy had no hesitation in mentioning *expressis verbis* the stages in the history of Western philosophy to be held as the most significant for its own projects. Here is their sequence: Plato's notion of philosophy as a universal science obeying the Socratic demand of a radical justification and proposing to mankind a teleology of reason; the sketching out by Aristotle of a pure logic and of a universal theory of subjectivity; the discovery by Descartes of the *cogito* as the cornerstone of science; the attempt by Locke to elaborate a pure egology conceived as a genetic and intuitive discipline; the progression in Berkeley and Hume of an intuitive investigation of pure immanence; the discovery by Leibniz of several basic features of intentionality thanks to an intuitive elucidation of the apperceptive capacities of the monad; and finally, the irruption in force of the idea of transcendental philosophy in Kant's Copernican revolution.

But at each step of that genealogy, Husserl's stance is twofold. On the one hand, he celebrates what was promising in the past because retrievable by a transcendental phenomenology scrupulously attentive to the imperative of reduction; on the other hand, he firmly denounces a manifold sequence of confusions, misunderstandings, lacks of attention, easy temptations of dogmatism, naturalism, constructivism, and so on. Hence a properly Husserlian relation to the history of philosophy combines the acknowledgment of what in the past anticipates in some way the eidetic exploration of intentionality, which is the task of transcendental phenomenology, and also the rejection in each anticipation of several flaws due to the lack of an authentic reduction.