

Summary of the dissertation

“Life of apodicticity”. Contributions to the phenomenology of truth The problem of apodictic self-evidence in the late Husserl’s philosophy

Bence Peter Marosan

The main theme of the dissertation is the problem of philosophical truth. I would like to treat this problem especially from a phenomenological perspective, and within the field of phenomenology primarily from the viewpoint of Husserlian philosophy. My work focuses on the Husserlian account of truth and evidence, and I will treat all the more important concepts and problems associated with the question of truth and evidence in Husserl. I will try to elaborate the question of truth on a Husserlian basis. I will not only attempt to reconstruct Husserl’s own views concerning truth and evidence, but I will also attempt to show some consequences of Husserl’s theory, which Husserl himself did not make explicit and did not address as a distinct issue. I will seek to express these consequences explicitly, and I will also try to reconstruct the theories to which these consequences lead.

The basic question of my work is the following: the main aim of Husserl’s philosophical efforts was to provide a new basis for philosophy on a strictly scientific, absolutely firm and “apodictically” certain basis that is immune to any and all possible forms of scepticism. If one were to take a closer look at the history of the phenomenological movement, then at first sight this history seems to some extent be at odds with Husserl’s aim of and desire for a strictly scientific and absolutely apodictic philosophy that excludes “any and all” possible forms of doubt. The history of phenomenology could also be interpreted as a series of radical criticisms against Husserl’s conception of phenomenology, and passionate attempts at rebutting the latter. What is the case then with the absolutely certain scientific philosophy which excludes any and all possible scepticism?

Husserl faced the criticisms expressed by his students and former followers with an ever greater bitterness and disappointment. He expressed his sorrow about the “desertion” of his earlier fellow-phenomenologists in phrases such as this: “I am a leader without followers”, (BW 2: 182), and: I am the greatest enemy of the famous “phenomenological movement” (BW 9: 79).¹ Husserl made attempts to solve the apparent tension between his own claims about his phenomenology as an apodictically certain scientific discipline and the continuous criticism of his students and colleagues in philosophy. He argued that these critics failed to understand the real radicalism and depth of phenomenological reduction; they were not able to stick to the phenomenological attitude and always lapsed back into naturalism; they were not able to accomplish the phenomenological reduction and *epokhe* properly, etc. (cf. Hua 27: 164-181). In my dissertation I tried to show that there is another, alternative answer to this question, which follows inevitably from Husserl’s own account of truth and evidence.

*

Introduction

Originally, my plan was for the complete dissertation to contain six major systematic parts. The final version of the official dissertation contains only two of these parts. (I left out the third completed part because that would have made the work in its entirety too long. I plan to publish the third part in a separate book. Subsequently, a third book is planned to include the three remaining parts). The official dissertation thus constitutes only a third of a major systematic work.

In the Introduction to the dissertation I aimed to sketch the most important aspects and features of the current state of the question of truth in philosophy, and especially in

¹ See e.g. Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, London & New York: Routledge, 2002: 2.

phenomenology. Furthermore, I sought to provide a preliminary sketch of the most important points and concepts in the main parts of the work. According to these points, contemporary phenomenology, which is committed to reason and universal truth, had to face at least two major forms of potential criticisms: postmodern and radical naturalism.² Postmodern denies the universality of reason and truth. Radical naturalism denies that there are such things as mind or subjectivity and a priori. Phenomenology needs to establish a secure intellectual basis to counter these two basic forms of criticisms and intellectual threats.

The Introduction concludes that Husserl elaborated a type of rationality that is grounded in the intellectual heritage of the Enlightenment, but is at the same time not a simple reformulation of the latter's naïve rationalism and optimism. The Husserlian concept of rationality implies a flexible conception of reason; so: a form of rationality that cannot be treated as something ready-made and already completed, but must be seen as adapting to and accommodating an inherent, inner logic, structure, and rationality of the things themselves; in other words as something whose rationality lies in its universal adaptability, its universal capacity to adapt to every and any form of rationality. (We observe a strong parallel between Husserl's and Hegel's respective conceptions of rationality, as the latter writes: "To him who looks upon the world rationally, the world in its turn, presents a rational aspect." The parallel to Hegel is by no means a coincidence: for Husserl's implicit Hegel-reception see Tanja Stähler's monography³ and Peter Varga's essay.)⁴

On the subjective side, the phenomenological concept of truth in Husserl could be interpreted as disclosing or unfolding (*erschließen*), and on the objective side as the self-givenness (*Selbstgegebenheit*) of the thing itself, of a situation. What is given in the flesh, *in propria persona*, is always a thing or situation *in context*; that is to say a thing or a situation is always given in the complex of other things and situations. What is really given is always a context: a synchronically and diachronically organized and articulated system of elements. The two basic structural features of truth are intentionality (the truth is always the truth of something) and contextuality (particular truths are always embedded in the context of other particular truths, and are never separated and isolated by themselves). Intentionality and contextuality: these two concepts will serve as the dissertation's leitmotifs.

*

First part. Truth as self-givenness

The representatives of the phenomenological movement have unanimously defined the concept of truth as the self-givenness of the thing itself. In elaborating the structure of this self-givenness, they emphasized different points and moments, in accordance with their own particular philosophical vision and interests.

In the first part of the dissertation I mainly followed chronological and historical points of view, but this effort notwithstanding I also tried to assert some systemic viewpoints in these preliminary stages and early deliberations of the study. I addressed the notions of truth as conceptualized by the main authors of the phenomenological movement, with special regard to the particular aspect of the dimension of truth, which is at the center of the arguments presented by the particular author in question. The dissertation contains five sections in total, only the first one of which can be found in the first part of the entire study. The first section ("Truth as self-givenness") contains four chapters, which for the most part follow a chronological order. The first chapter treats the Austro-German period of

² For this problem see: Robert Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000: 1-7, 113f.

³ Tanja Stähler: *Die Unruhe des Anfangs. Hegel und Husserl über den Weg in die Phanomenologie*, Phae 170, 2003.

⁴ Varga Péter András: „Husserl és a filozófiai megismerés kibontakozásának fenomenológiája. Egy fejezet a Hegel-recepció történetéből”, in *Világosság*, 2008/3-4: 147-159.

phenomenology, and particularly three authors: Brentano, Husserl, and Heidegger. In the second chapter I analyze three basic figures of French phenomenology: Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and Lévinas. The third chapter discusses Balazs Mezei's conception of truth as revelation, and hence the concept of truth in the context of philosophy of religion. Finally, in the fourth and last chapter I address the phenomenon which I think capable of integrating and unifying all the various dimensions of truth emphasized by the abovementioned authors. This is the phenomenon of intentionality.

The fundamental idea that truth in its essence is self-givenness appeared in Brentano. He conceived of phenomenology as descriptive psychology, and thus he highlighted the psychological dimension of truth. Husserl emphasized the transcendental aspect of truth: he described truth as the result of the constitution of transcendental consciousness. Heidegger treated the question of truth in the context of the question of Being. For him, the question of Being is intertwined with the question of truth. According to him, the question of truth aims at the truth of Being. He emphasized the existential dimension of truth. In the French period of phenomenology the *incarnation* of subjectivity and the embodiment of the subject became a central topic for French phenomenological authors. Sartre's main topic was the special connection of truth and freedom. He interpreted truth as an achievement of freedom. Merleau-Ponty's main question concerned the ontological genesis of truth. Lévinas focused on the intersubjective aspect of truth; he conceived of truth as revelation made possible by the Other. Balazs Mezei argues that in the religious experience an infinite reality unfolds itself. In his opinion truth is the manifestation of the infinite in the form of a *revelation*.

The last chapter of the first section (and first part) sought to show that all these dimensions were organized into a systematic unity by the phenomenon of intentionality. Moreover, I tried to demonstrate that the existential dimension of truth, for the alleged absence of which Heidegger criticized Husserl, can also be found in the latter, though on a relatively high level of constitution.

*

Second part. The texture of experience

After the first part, which for the most part performed a chronological review, the second part will mainly discuss systematic, problem-centric points of view. In the second part I will try to systematically elaborate the details of a phenomenology of truth, essentially on the basis of Husserl's philosophy. The second part of the dissertation contains four sections: methodology (II. section), noetics (III. section), noematics (IV. section), and egology (V. section).

Methodology. The second section contains two chapters: 1. Attitudes, 2. Reductions. 1. An attitude is a general way to look upon the world; it uncovers the world from a certain point of view. Every attitude has matching region or type of truth. In this chapter I try to discover the basis of motivation underlying the performance of phenomenological epokhe and reduction.⁵ 2. In Husserl, the system of reduction refers to the methodologically conscious elaboration and deepening of the issue of phenomenological attitude. The phenomenological epokhe opens up the realm of transcendental phenomena, and it reveals everything as a complex of sense and validity, as an achievement of the constituting activity of transcendental subjectivity. A given type of reduction focuses our attention on a given region or moment of the phenomena. A given type of phenomena requires a corresponding type of reduction. It is not the method that determines the object, quite the contrary: the object demands the proper method with which it can be revealed.⁶

⁵ This section owes a lot to the excellent analysis of Orsolya Horvath. Horváth Orsolya: *Az öneszmélés fenomenológiája – A fenomenológiai redukció problémája Husserl késői filozófiájában*, Budapest: L'Harmattan kiadó, 2010.

Noetics. The third section contains four chapters: 1. Consciousness as experience (Erlebnis), 2. Intuitive acts, 3. Signitive acts, 4. Self-evidence. This section treats the most important structures of consciousness. Ultimately, truth manifests itself in a series of cognitive acts, in the nexus of acts of cognition that constitute a context. The underlying idea of this section is that consciousness is in an immediate connection with being and existence. Consciousness is living through the reality and the world, it is experiencing them. It is not something which isolates and separates us from reality; quite the contrary: consciousness makes up our vivid connection with being and reality. It is not (only) immanence but (also) transcendence. Consciousness, as an intentional act, in its full concreteness has both intuitive and signitive moments, which are both necessary to reach truth.

In this section, following Husserl, we distinguish the two fundamental levels of truth: the level of sensible and categorical truth. Sensual truth concerns the self-giveness of concrete, individual, particular, and sensual objects. Categorical truth concerns the purely rational level of truth, which consists of clear and self-evident constructions of essential (eidetic) objects (categories, categorical complexions) and situations. The aim of the concept of categorical intuition in Husserl was not to sanctify the primacy of presence or the primacy of intuition,⁷ but to resolve the problem of *how* we verify our intuitive thoughts.⁸ According to Husserl sensual acts (perceptions) are always embedded in a texture of other sensual acts, and in the same way categorical acts are always placed in the context of other categorical acts.

Noematics. The fourth section of the work is made up of two long chapters: 1. Object, 2. World. 1. The verifying act always has an objective correlate. The truth is always the truth of something. The verifying act consists of either the verification or the falsification of an idea, intention, or opinion (Meinung). The object, which is the target of a revelatory or disclosing act, has several dimensions. In this chapter I treated three fundamentally objective dimensions: sensible, categorical, and transcendental. Correspondingly, we speak of sensible, categorical, and transcendental objects. The sensible and the categorical objects belong to the mundane attitudes, while the transcendental object belongs to the transcendental attitude. The object's transcendental aspect is the *noema*.⁹ The final problem in the chapter is the question of "transcendental ontology." I tried to show that in his examinations concerning the object, Husserl sought to reveal the object in its being; thus – as Michael Theunissen put it¹⁰ – the thought of question of Being was not the least something completely unfamiliar to Husserl.

2. The concept of horizon-intentionality leads us to the problem of the world. Objects are fitted onto a horizon of objects of the same type, they are always surrounded by objects from the same region. An intentional act which aims at an object is accompanied by co-intentions (Mitmeinungen), which aim at the objects embedded into an environment of another object, an objective horizon. Similarly, the truth of the object in question has the structure of a horizon. This takes us a step further, from the notion of horizon-intentionality to the problem of space, the world in general, and finally the life-world (Lebenswelt). The life-world is the concrete historical, cultural, and social environment of the subject in question, which performs the act of verification. It is the enviring context of the acts of

⁶ Just as Max Scheler emphasized. Cf. Scheler, "Phenomenology and the Theory of Cognition", in *Selected Philosophical Essays*, Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1973.

⁷ As Derrida thought it. See: Derrida, *Voice and Phenomenon: Introduction to the Problem of the Sign in Husserl's Phenomenology*, Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2011.

⁸ See e.g.: Ernst Tugendhat, *Der Wahrheitsbegriff bei Husserl und Heidegger*, Berlin: Walter Gruyter & Co, 1970, Dieter Lohmar, *Erfahrung und kategoriales Denken*, Phaenomenologica 147, 1998.

⁹ Hence in the interpretation of Husserl's concept of noema I followed the ideas of Robert Sokolowski, John Drummond, and Dan Zahavi.

¹⁰ Michael Theunissen: "Intentionaler Gegenstand und ontologische Differenz", in: *Philosophisches Jahrbuch der Görresgesellschaft*, 70. Jg., Alber, Freiburg/München, 1962/63, 344-362.

verification. The problem of life-world leads us to the last major topic of the dissertation: the problem of *ego*.

Egology. Verification is always performed by a *subject*. The subject, in his or her full concreteness, has a sensible, socio-cultural (“geistige”), and transcendental dimension. The fundamental aspect is the transcendental, which organizes every other dimension. In his/her full concreteness, the ego proves itself to be the transcendental ego. But a further analysis reveals that even the transcendental ego proves to be something dependent, who is also an abstract being in himself/herself alone, in isolation from other transcendental egos. *The transcendental ego is a dependent moment of transcendental intersubjectivity.*

The subject is necessarily and essentially a part of a community. He/she inherits a language, a cultural tradition, and socio-cultural contents from this community. He/she cannot even constitute a single objective meaning, validity, or truth in (ontological) isolation from this community. His/her insights and verifications are always the potential subjects of his/her fellow subjects' criticism. Being subject to intersubjective criticism is an essential feature of any and all egological self-evidence.¹¹ This fact yields an answer to the dissertation's opening question: every philosophical insight, theory, and achievement is surrounded by the context of other philosophical insights, etc. We have limited access to the possible implications of our own philosophical insights. The philosophical achievements in the course of the history of philosophy continuously become part of a continuously widening context of ever newer philosophical insights and theories. The newer insights interpret the earlier ones. Every philosophical insight has a potentially open meaning. Every philosophical insight is essentially *contextual*.

We might even have concluded the dissertation by showing the essentially intersubjective nature of the transcendental ego, and that egological evidence is subject to intersubjective criticism. But for Husserl transcendental intersubjectivity is not the final level of phenomenology. His manuscripts contained a fragmentary vision of a speculative metaphysics, at the center of which there is a super-subject, an infinite, divine subject, namely God himself. According to Husserl every particular subject and the complete transcendental intersubjectivity are dependent levels, abstract moments in the divine life of God.¹² We can reconstruct the idea of such a divine, infinite subject by following the indications towards the Absolute and infinity in the particular, finite subjects. The idea of God as the ultimate basis of Being (“Seinsgrund”) is revealed by investigating the teleological structure of history.

For Husserl God is the absolute, ultimate context, the hyper-context into which every particular context is embedded. Nothing is outside of the context, everything is part of a context. *Il n'y a pas de hors-contexte.*

¹¹ For a discussion of this problem I would recommend the excellent essay by Harry P Reeder: "Husserl's Hermeneutic Phenomenology", 2010. See: http://www.husserlcircle.org/HC_NYC_Proceedings.pdf

¹² See e.g. Lee-Chun Lo, *Die Gottesauffassung in Husserls Phänomenologie*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Verlag, 2008.