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IV)

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# Husserl on the Ego and its Eidos (*Cartesian Meditations*, IV)

ALFREDO FERRARIN

THE THEORY OF the intentionality of consciousness is essential for Husserl's philosophy, and in particular for his mature theory of the ego. But it runs into serious difficulties when it has to account for consciousness's transcendental constitution of its own reflective experience and its relation to immanent time. This intricate knot, the inseparability of time and constitution, is most visibly displayed in Husserl's writings from the 1920s up to the notion of the eidōs ego in the fourth *Cartesian Meditation*.

In this paper I want to dwell on the most problematic aspects of this theory. After a few preliminary remarks about the intentionality of consciousness (section 1), I try to place the theory of the substrate of habitualities in the context of Husserl's evolution on the issue of the reflection of the ego on itself (section 2). I briefly follow the threads of Husserl's shifting position from the *Logical Investigations* and *Ideas I* to *Ideas II*, the *Cartesian Meditations* and the *Crisis*. I indicate

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Husserl's works are quoted with the following abbreviations:

CM = *Cartesianische Meditationen*, Husserliana Bd. I, hrsg. v. S. Strasser (Den Haag, 1950); *Cartesian Meditations*, trans. D. Cairns (Dordrecht, 1960)

SW = Husserl, *Shorter Works*, ed. P. McCormick and F. Elliston (Notre Dame, 1981)

IZ = *Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins (1893–1917)*, Husserliana Bd. X, hrsg. v. R. Boehm (Den Haag, 1966)

*Ideen I* = *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie*, Husserliana Bd. III, hrsg. v. W. Biemel (Den Haag, 1950); *Ideas I*, trans. F. Kersten (The Hague, Boston, Lancaster, 1983)

*Ideen II* = Id., Husserliana Bd. IV, hrsg. v. M. Biemel (Den Haag, 1952); *Ideas II*, trans. R. Rojcewicz and A. Schuwer (Dordrecht, Boston, London, 1989)

FTL = *Formale und transzendente Logik*, Husserliana Bd. XVII, hrsg. v. P. Janssen (Den Haag, 1974)

*Krisis* = *Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften*, Husserliana Bd. VI, hrsg. v. W. Biemel (Den Haag, 1954)

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some historical antecedents, in particular Aristotle, of Husserl's theory of abiding properties which, as far as I can see, have not been pointed out before. Husserl's *Entwicklungsgeschichte* on the topic of the pure ego has already been the object of important scholarly works, of which Kern's 1964 *Husserl und Kant* seems to me the best example. But what the secondary literature does not do is develop thematically the ambiguities of Husserl's definitions of consciousness and temporality in a unitary and comprehensive way. While I follow the lead of Berger, Broekman, Kern, Marbach,<sup>1</sup> and others, I find that their work does not sufficiently stress the difficulties at the core of intentionality and reflective time-consciousness. Therefore, although section 2 is a necessary presupposition for drawing some critical conclusions in the final two sections, it does not exhaust my theme.

After clarifying the peculiarity of the notions of essence, intuition, transcendental and apriori, as well as their irreducibility to a Kantian meaning, I turn to the "de facto transcendental ego" resulting from eidetic variation (section 3) in order to introduce an examination of temporality. The difficulties in the twofold requirement, namely, that consciousness be the identical subject of its *Erlebnisse* and be synthetically unified in time, concern the unity, primacy, and mutual relation of time and consciousness in the constitution of our experience. They have been neatly pointed out by Ricoeur in his commentary on the *Cartesian Meditations*. But what I want to argue in section 4, going beyond Ricoeur's text, is that the tension between temporally constituted and constitutive consciousness in the ego's reflection on its own retentions and protensions does not simply make the question of time ambiguous, but has crucial and problematic bearings on the very definition of consciousness as intentionality.

In this respect, it seems very significant to me that post-Husserlian phenomenology has dissociated the analysis of temporality from that of intentionality. On the one hand, Heidegger (or Ingarden) investigates temporality as such, i.e., without relating it to the problems of the constitution of experience or of the unity of the transcendental ego. On the other hand, Sartre restates intentionality in terms of positional and nonpositional consciousness. He renders thematic the transcendence of the ego as an inescapable consequence of Husserl's theory of intentionality. But thereby the ego is made dispensable in a way that goes far beyond Husserl's original intentions.

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<sup>1</sup> See G. Berger, *Le cogito dans la philosophie de Husserl* (Paris, 1941), English trans. by K. McLaughlin (Evanston, 1972); J. Broekman, *Phänomenologie und Egologie* (Den Haag, 1963); I. Kern, *Husserl und Kant* (Den Haag, 1964); E. Marbach, *Das Problem des Ich in der Phänomenologie Husserls* (Den Haag, 1974).

## 1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

In the mutable and complex evolution of Husserl's mature thought something always remained stable at the core of his philosophy: the idea that phenomenology can present itself as a genuine science insofar as it is conceived as the study of the intentionality of consciousness. This is not meant as a theory which fully renders the mode of existence of a subject abstracted from a reality that it takes for granted in its givenness, but is supposed to question the very meaning of being, which naturalism never makes thematic and tacitly accepts as the universal being-there of the world. The natural attitude presupposes the idea that consciousness is, as part of the world, an object of investigation in the same mundane terms as particular regions of reality are: its main shortcoming is the reification of consciousness, i.e., the disregard for the peculiar sense in which we understand its being. Conscious life, on the other hand, has to be described as the realm in which alone the being of reality is constituted and has a possible meaning for us.

Consciousness is always consciousness of something; in other words, the mode of existence of the subject is its transcending of itself, its being directed outside itself towards what it intends. Nothing of the object has to be taken into consideration but its meaning and validity for consciousness. But consciousness on its side has not to be taken as a subjective, psychological substance; rather, it has to be reduced to its purity in the phenomenological reduction, i.e., in the *epoché* or suspension of the natural attitude performed by the phenomenologist who radically brackets the existence of the world in its givenness for him. What we are left with is neither the positivity of a world nor the authority of established sciences or of any psychical data whatsoever, but only the pure ego for which the existence of the world and any and every determination has meaning and validity in general. In experience the object has a direct validity for consciousness in the form of a flow in which consciousness lives; after the phenomenological reduction and the *epoché* of all objectivity, what is being considered is only the mode of consciousness's direction towards the object: the cogito.

The cogito as consciousness of something is described in as wide a sense as Descartes conceived of it (*Ideen I*, §§ 34–35). Now, Husserl's reading of Descartes comes late<sup>a</sup> in the formation of his own thought, and his appraisal of Descartes's radical doubt, in which the philosopher withdraws into himself and is left alone with the "pure ego of his cogitations" (CM § 1), is at once limited by a

<sup>a</sup> The appendix to the sixth *Logical Investigation*, *The Idea of Phenomenology*, and *Ideen I* mention Descartes, but *Ideen II* contains exceptionally enthusiastic praise, which might bear witness to a study of Descartes's *Meditations* right after 1913: the pure ego is here nothing other "than what Descartes, in his marvelous *Meditations*, grasped with the insight of genius [als welches Descartes in seinem herrlichen Meditationen mit genialem Blick erfasst]" (§ 23).

decisive criticism: Descartes has not distinguished between psychological and pure ego, the ego as *substantia cogitans* is still a part of the world (CM § 10), and, what is most important, Descartes did not recognize the intentionality of the cogito. What he did recognize was the apodicticity of the cogito, which for Husserl is to be distinguished from the kind of evidence in which a given is present to us: while a thing is always present to us in its adumbrations, and the unity of its perceptual sides is only a regulative idea in the Kantian sense, or a horizon of potentialities (CM § 27), the cogito "schattet sich nicht ab," it is a "universal apodictically experienceable structure of the ego" (CM § 12).<sup>3</sup>

Although Husserl never grew tired of repeating that intentionality is the structure of consciousness, hence that, in the words of the *Cartesian Meditations*, "ego cogito cogitatum," his interest in intentional analysis was mostly directed to the attempt at clarifying the meaning of the last two terms of this three-term relation;<sup>4</sup> his theory of the mode of the relationship between the I as the subject of experience and its cogitata was neither stable in the course of his evolution nor easy to detect at a single glance in his major works. Husserl seems to have been particularly sensitive on this point to numerous excitations, coming from a more careful study of previous philosophers, especially Kant, Leibniz, and Fichte, and from objections raised by spokesmen of the neo-Kantian philosophy, in particular Natorp. Kern's study,<sup>5</sup> which I will follow in the next brief exposition of the main stages of Husserl's conception of the ego, shows that we can speak of at least five different positions in Husserl's thought.<sup>6</sup> In the following section I will give an overview of the evolution of Husserl's position on this issue, in order to prepare us for a closer examination of the *eidos ego* (section 3).

## 2. THE EVOLUTION OF THE CONCEPT OF THE PURE EGO

In the *Logische Untersuchungen* no pure ego is postulated as yet; only the empirical ego and its relations to its own experience are considered.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup>See Berger, *Le cogito*, 54; E. Levinas, *La théorie de l'intuition dans la phénoménologie de Husserl* (Paris, 1930), 27–28, English trans. by A. Orianne (Evanston, 1973); P. Ricoeur, *Husserl: An Analysis of His Phenomenology* (Evanston, 1967), 178.

<sup>4</sup>See Kern, *Husserl und Kant*, 286.

<sup>5</sup>*Husserl und Kant*, esp. 286ff. See also J. Kockelmans, "Husserl and Kant on the Pure Ego," in F. Elliston and P. McCormick, eds., *Husserl: Expositions and Appraisals* (Notre Dame, 1977), 269–85.

<sup>6</sup>For a mention of the 'history' of the ego in Husserl, see the sketchy notice in Levinas, *La théorie de l'intuition*, 50–51, and J.-P. Sartre, *La transcendance de l'ego* (Paris, 1936), 20 and 26. See also Ricoeur, *Husserl*, 50 and 55; D. Souche-Dagues, *Le Développement de l'intentionnalité dans la Phénoménologie Husserlienne* (La Haye, 1972), 216ff.; and Marbach, *Das Problem des Ich*, 246ff.

<sup>7</sup>K. Cramer's study, "Erlebnis. Thesen zu Hegels Theorie des Selbstbewusstseins mit Rücksicht auf die Aporien eines Grundbegriffs nachhegelscher Philosophie," in *Hegel-Studien*, Beiheft 11 (Bonn, 1974): 537–603.

In two footnotes added to the second edition of the *Logische Untersuchungen* Husserl advances the idea, probably inspired by a reading of Natorp's works, that the pure ego belongs necessarily to every actual experience, but is in itself empty and indescribable. This view, which is later integrated into *Ideas I* as an expression and result of the renewed critique of psychologism, is displayed in Part II of the book, where we read that the pure ego is irreducible to any *Erlebnis*: "its 'regard' is directed 'through' each actional cogito to the objective something. This ray of regard changes from one cogito to the next . . . the ego, however, is something identical." It is something necessary and "cannot in any sense be a really inherent part or moment of the mental processes themselves" (§ 57). As an appropriate comment thereon, in the same paragraph Husserl recalls the Kantian phrase: "The 'I think' must be capable of accompanying all my presentations." Further on, in the third part, Husserl writes in the same Kantian spirit that the pure ego is "not something taken for itself and which can be made into an object *proper* of an investigation . . . it is indescribable in and for itself; it is pure ego and nothing more" (§ 80).

The third conception is represented by a more elaborate analysis contained in *Ideas II*, where Husserl holds that the pure ego can be made into an object; the pure ego, still no real moment of the cogito (§ 23), is now distinguished from its acts through abstraction or reflection (§ 22): it is their *terminus a quo*, the "Ego-point, from which they irradiate [*ausstrahlen*]" (§ 25). In reflection it is the object of itself in a new superior cogito: "The pure Ego can be posited as an object by the pure Ego which is identically one with it [Das reine Ich ist durch das reine Ich, das identisch selbe, gegenständlich setzbar]" (§ 23). The pure ego can be originarily grasped in an inner perception (*Selbstwahrnehmung*), as the essence of memory *qua* "recollection of the Self [*Selbsterinnerung*]" implies: the reflection of the pure ego has a preceding cogito as its object, which can be brought to evidence in a recollection. From this passage it is clear that the pure ego is nothing comparable to Kant's transcendental apperception as the universal form of representation in general. I will have to return to this later on. For now suffice it to say that the pure, unalterable (*unwandelbares*) ego, although distinguished from the concrete ego of a living person (§ 24), is to be grasped in the sphere of phenomenological inner time (§ 28); it is not a pure apriori function of synthesis inaccessible in itself to intuition. What reflection grasps here is "the identical, which at one time is given objectively, at another time not" (§ 23); the pure ego is the identity of immanent time, in which consciousness constitutes itself. Pure and empirical ego belong to the same ego, which is divided into an originary "unreflected cogito" and a "reflected cogito, hence an essentially transformed, intentional Object or medium of a new act, by means of which the accomplishing Ego grasps the accomplishing of the earlier act [*ein reflektiertes, also wesentlich*

gewandeltes, intentionales Objekt oder Medium eines neuen Aktes, durch das hindurch das vollziehende Ich das vollziehen des alten Aktes erfaßt]" (ibid.). The essence of consciousness is then determined as the unity of a flow in which the pure ego sheds its light on its single acts. If the concrete ego is constituted as the self-objectification of the pure ego, the pure ego is given in the unity of immanent time, as a substrate of habitualities (§ 29).

This concept, which will become pivotal in the *Cartesian Meditations*, seems to me to stem from the Aristotelian notion of *hexis*.<sup>8</sup> In Aristotle the knowing subject is conceived as the continuity of a nature, as the permanence of a potency which makes possible the formation of habits and customs, and the very notion of cumulative experience. The subject is conceived as a disposition that preserves in memory the images left over from sensation;<sup>9</sup> we, the active substrates of our own experience, shape our nature and acquire our knowledge via repeated actualizations, and become thus the latent possession of the world in the form of our habitualities. The idealization of externality in Aristotle is grounded on what he calls *mneme*, a lingering state or disposition *qua* awareness of time past. If the unitary collection of sensations pertaining to the same thing forms our potency, memory is the sedimentation of our past experience, so that we are our own formed *hexis*. Thus for Aristotle man is, so to speak, his second nature; similarly, in *Ideas II*, once the ego has taken a position with respect to something, this remains as an "abiding property [*bleibende Eigenheit*]" of the ego, as an established possession always potentially amenable to actual evidence.

This notion is closely connected with the next line of thought that Husserl developed after composing *Ideas II*, and which constitutes a mediation between that text and the *Cartesian Meditations*: the idea that the ego-pole is the only sense in which the pure ego is to be taken is now rejected. The ego is found to constitute its identity in and via its habitualities, in a quasi-Spinozistic *Selbsterhaltung*. As a manuscript from the mid-twenties says, "I-pole [*Ichpol*] is not I. I am in my habitual convictions. I maintain my one and self-identical I [*mein eines und selbes Ich*]." <sup>10</sup> Now the ego is constituted as unitary through its own constitution of the world: in other words, the conviction of the permanence of the world is necessary for the unity of conscious life, insofar as it forms the horizon of all individual habitualities and attitudes towards the world."<sup>11</sup> This will recur in the *Cartesian Meditations*, where the ego is no pole

<sup>8</sup> See Husserl's manuscript, quoted in Marbach, *Das Problem des Ich*, 307n.

<sup>9</sup> In this context I am thinking of passages such as *De an.* 2.5.412b2–15, *De mem. et rem.* 450a26–32 and 451a12, *Metaph.* 1.1.980b25–29, *An. Post.* 2.19. I give a more detailed analysis of the role of *hexis* in Aristotle's *psyche* in my *Hegel interprete di Aristotele* (Pisa, 1990), 111–13 and 117–24.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Kern, *Husserl und Kant*, 289 (A VI 30, p. 54b).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Kern, *Husserl und Kant*, 292, who stresses the relevance of Husserl's reading of Fichte between 1915 and 1918 and in Husserl's *Erste Philosophie*.

of identity, but a substrate of habitualities (§ 32). The Fourth Meditation provides us with the new conception of the pure ego, which lives in the processes of consciousness as the active and affected subject of experience. If objects exist for me as objects of possible consciousness, the ego is a system of intentionalities which exist partly as actual in the ego's conscious life, partly "as fixed potentialities, which, thanks to predelineating horizons, are available for uncovering" (§ 30). Thus the ego constantly constitutes itself as existing in time: "with every *act* emanating from him and having a new objective sense, he acquires a *new abiding property*." If in an act of judgment I decide that such and such is the case, although the act passes, "*I am the ego who is thus and so decided, 'I am of this conviction'*" (§ 32): the position of an object is a synthesis that produces a second correlative synthesis, namely, a habituality of my ego thanks to which the object becomes mine and forms the permanent horizon of my world.

What constitutes the change from the Fourth Meditation to the *Krisis* is the result of a road Husserl had taken after the *Pariser Vorträge*, the lectures of which the *Cartesian Meditations* are the reelaboration. The problem of solipsism and intersubjectivity is virtually absent in the *Pariser Vorträge*, but constitutes the heart of the Fifth Meditation, which alone is as long as the four Meditations which come before it. Here we note the origin of a contrast with the previous orientation, expressed by the fact that now the "intrinsically first being, the being that precedes and bears every worldly objectivity, is transcendental intersubjectivity" (§ 64). Here as before, the other is only as "mirrored in my own ego" (§ 44) and is constituted as such by me—the windowless monad—so that we can say that my ego is and remains the only ego,<sup>12</sup> while the others are egos only "through equivocation" (*Krisis*, § 54 b, 188). Nonetheless, the shift in Husserl's terminology, and in the interests which occupied the last years of his research, is quite remarkable.

### 3. EIDOS EGO: ESSENCE, TIME, AND APRIORI

I will not concern myself here with the problems these different stages present; I will rather focus on the pure ego of the fourth *Cartesian Meditation*. Now, what has meanwhile emerged with clarity is that here, far from being pure in Kant's sense, Husserl's pure ego is personal; it is not there from the beginning, but rather constitutes itself in a process. This doctrine has to perform a double task, it has to account for both the identity of the pure ego as pole of its acts, and for its concrete status as the permanence of habitualities, the monad. This cannot be understood if we do not concentrate on the consciousness of immanent time. For Husserl an *Erlebnis* is never present to consciousness as definitive, as a

<sup>12</sup> For the ego the others are constituted phenomena produced within it (see § 21, n.).



finished datum. The object meant is always more than what is explicitly seen in it; in other words, it is always a horizon of changing perspectives. This prescribes the necessity of a new method (CM § 20) to the phenomenologist, who, with regard to the temporal mode of givenness of the thing, explores "the modifications of its being still intended while it sinks retentionally into the past and, with respect to the ego, the modes of his specifically own still-having and holding, the modes of attention, and so forth" (ibid.). This requires a distinction between the objective temporality and the immanent temporality of the thing's appearing to consciousness; in inner time, in retention and protention, this appearing "flows away with its temporal extents and phases" and it is this "connectedness that makes the unity of one consciousness, in which the unity of an intentional objectivity, as 'the same' objectivity belonging to multiple modes of appearance, becomes constituted" (§ 18). Synthesis does not originally belong to consciousness *qua* consciousness, let alone to the object; rather, consciousness finds its unity in the form of the "all-embracing consciousness of inner time" (ibid.). In other words, conscious life is unified synthetically in time, and this is to be presupposed as its unity; *Erlebnisse* are understood as prominences in a total consciousness only within this flow, immanent time.<sup>13</sup> If synthesis is originated by consciousness of inner time, we can now understand what Husserl means when he writes that "the ego constitutes himself for himself in, so to speak, the unity of a 'history'" (§ 37); this is possible because *time* implies an "a priori universal structure, in conformity to universal eidetic laws of coexistence and succession in egological time" (§ 36). This means that the flow is ruled by a universe of compossibilities of passive and active genesis;<sup>14</sup> but passive genesis, as original constitution and foundation of our familiarity with the world, is primarily the lawful intentionality, the association that determines the sedimentation and the meaning of the world for us.

In the *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl differentiates for the first time between pure and transcendental ego. If in *Ideas I* (§ 57) Kant's transcendental *Ich denke* was called pure ego, here Husserl, in order to introduce his new project of a phenomenological psychology,<sup>15</sup> distinguishes between the pure ego as the object of the new psychology, and the transcendental ego which results from the phenomenological reduction. But what is now more important is the parallel introduction of a new concept, the *eidōs* ego, and the

<sup>13</sup> See *Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft* (trans. in SW, 180), and IZ, 74–75 (trans. in SW, 286: "the temporally constitutive flux as absolute subjectivity").

<sup>14</sup> Here Husserl refers to Humean laws of association: "in a unitary possible ego not all singly possible types are compossible, and not all compossible ones are compossible in just any order" (CM § 36).

<sup>15</sup> See J. Kockelmans, *Edmund Husserl's Phenomenology Psychology* (Pittsburgh, 1967) and "Husserl and Kant on the Pure Ego," 279.

distinction of phenomenological reduction and eidetic intuition having the ego as its object (CM § 34).

One must admit that to Kantian ears all this sounds like an aberration, or, to borrow Ricoeur's expression, a "monster."<sup>16</sup> 'Transcendental' cannot be taken as personal in Kant, it only designates the foundation of the possibility of our universal apriori way of knowing; therefore it is independent of experience and time, although it is itself the condition of possibility of our experience and of the application of our categories to appearances in time. Of course the meaning of 'transcendental' in Husserl is different; it designates the cogito remaining after the reduction. But even terms like 'apriori', 'eidos', 'essence', and 'intuition' have a radically peculiar meaning in Husserl. To explain this in closer detail, it would be necessary to turn to an analysis of *Ideas I*, §§ 1–26. Here, suffice it to say that 'apriori' in Husserl does not mean independent of experience, but rather necessarily pertaining to pure subjectivity and intentionality, independently of psychological considerations;<sup>17</sup> 'material apriori', for Kant a *contradictio in adiecto*, is for Husserl precisely the eidos as invariant form. 'Essence', far from being endowed with any normative character, is descriptive.

Here again Husserl sounds more Aristotelian than Kantian: the eidos is different from both subjective representations (*Ideas I*, § 22) and individuals. The individual is not essence, but "it has an essence, which can be said of it with evident validity";<sup>18</sup> apart from its essence "the singular is eternally the *apeiron*."<sup>19</sup> The individual is "contingent" (*Ideas I*, § 2), but it is not simply a "this here [*dies da*]"; rather we can say "that it belongs to the sense of anything contingent to have an essence and therefore an Eidos which can be apprehended purely" (*ibid.*). The individual serves as an example of its essence in an intuition; the empirical intuition can overcome its particularity by bringing to evidence or to *Gegebenheit* an individual object, and by grasping the object in its essence, "in its 'personal' [*leibhaftigen*] selfhood" (§ 3) through what Husserl calls ideation or eidetic variation. Thus the intuition is "an originally *presentive* intuition [*eine originär gebende Anschauung*]" (*ibid.*). Ideation is "the free possibility of directing one's regard to the corresponding essence exemplified in what is individu-

<sup>16</sup> Ricoeur, *Husserl*, 180. On Kant and Husserl see also single chapters in the books of Ricoeur, Marbach, Broekman, and A. Gurwitsch, *Studies in Phenomenology and Psychology* (Evanston, 1966); also Kockelmans, "Husserl and Kant on the Pure Ego," G. Funke, "Introduzione," and M. Barale, "Postfazione," in Husserl, *Kant e l'idea della filosofia trascendentale* (Milan: 1990). See especially Kern.

<sup>17</sup> See Kern, *Husserl und Kant*, 56, and T. Pentzopoulou Valalas, "Réflexions sur le fondement du rapport entre l'apriori et l'eidos dans la phénoménologie de Husserl," *Kant-Studien* 65: 136 and 142: "L'apriori husserlien n'implique pas l'antithèse de la raison et de l'expérience."

<sup>18</sup> *Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft*, in SW, 183.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

ally sighted"<sup>20</sup>; in other words, essential intuition is the vision of the material apriori of a *Gegebenheit* at which we arrive by imagining all the possible variants in which a thing can be present to us. In this manner we have a direct grasp of its true essence, which of course can then be expressed more or less precisely depending on our representation in signs and symbols of an original vision. The consequence of this is that, on the one hand, the prepredicative evidence is the source and the touchstone of all our intentionality, of the constitution of our world in representation;<sup>21</sup> on the other hand, phenomenology characterizes itself as an eidetic science, namely as a science of essences and not of matters of fact, unlike psychology (*Ideas I*, Introduction).

In the *Cartesian Meditations*, as mentioned earlier, even the ego has an eidos. This is not so strange if we consider that 'eidos' here means exactly the kind of material apriori, the essence of something in the sense just explained. But doesn't this amount to a naturalization of consciousness, to its objectification, hence to that for which Husserl has always reproached psychology and related mundane disciplines? The answer could be negative to the extent that consciousness is not treated as a fixed datum with different *Abschattungen*, but as the purely subjective process of constituting itself and the world. The eidetic variation is described in the *Cartesian Meditations*, in § 34, as the free variation of a perception of something such that, since a fact can be thought of as exemplifying a pure possibility and the fact in question is here the "de facto transcendental ego," we abstain from the acceptance of the being of the ego and "change the fact of this perception into a pure possibility. . . . We, so to speak, shift the actual perception into the realm of nonactualities, the realm of the as-if, which supplies us with pure possibilities, pure of everything that restricts to this fact or to any fact whatever . . . we keep the aforementioned possibilities . . . just as a completely free imaginalness of phantasy."

In the eidetic variation of a perception we imagine ourselves "into a perceiving, with no relation to the rest of our de facto life. Perception, . . . thus removed from all factualness, has become the pure 'eidos' perception." If every individual type can be abstracted from its milieu and elevated into its pure eidos, then in the eidetic variation performed on ourselves as factual egos we

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.: "die freie Möglichkeit der Blickwendung auf ein 'entsprechendes' Individuelle und der Bildung eines exemplarischen Bewusstseins."

<sup>21</sup> See *Ideen I*, § 19: "Immediate seeing (*noein*), not merely sensuous, experiential seeing, but seeing in the universal sense as an originally presentive consciousness of any kind whatsoever, is the ultimate legitimizing source of all rational assertions." For the analogous relation between eidos and singularity in Aristotle, see for example *Metaph.* 7.15.1039b27–1040a8. For the prepredicative noesis as infallible intuitive grasp of its object that lays down the first principles of our knowledge, and for the origin of falsehood in judgment, see for example *De an.* 3.6. Husserl also employs what could be regarded as a transformed version of the Aristotelian doctrine of the *idia pathe* (*De an.* 3.1–2) in *SW*, 181–82 and in *Ideas I*, § 5.

reach an *eidōs ego* as a purely apriori type which comprises “all purely possible variants of my de facto ego and this ego itself qua possibility.”

#### 4. AN APORETIC RESULT

All this amounts to saying that the essence of the ego is now phenomenologically describable as the unitary consciousness of all possible forms of *Erlebnisse* in time: time and ego are so intertwined that any attempt to grasp their essence which assumes them as separate entities is doomed to failure. We are thus led back to what I briefly mentioned above, namely, that consciousness of inner time is the ground of its unity. But it seems to me that there is a tension in this conception which Husserl cannot solve, i.e., the fact that consciousness must both be the originary consciousness of inner time and be constituted or synthetically unified in time: *synthesis and the object of synthesis, activity and form*. To put it differently, the difficulty is the double requirement that the ego be the identical subject of its *Erlebnisse*, and that it be the object of its concrete self-constitution in a history. If it has to constitute itself, it has in fact to be the subject of its self-objectification—in which case it has to presuppose itself for its constitution of itself. This seems to have been Husserl's view, and on this particular point no shift is to be acknowledged from the ego of *Ideas II* to that of the *Cartesian Meditations*. But there seems to be a distinction between an originally unitary consciousness of inner time and a constituted consciousness of inner time; if the former is the possibility of the latter insofar as constitution of time is its *Leistung*, then when we reach the *eidōs ego* we do not reach the constitutive consciousness, but rather the constituted one, the unfinished flow of being modified in time.

This difficulty has been clearly recognized by Ricoeur, who finds in this view the copresence of two conflicting elements: on the one hand “the consciousness of time is the form of universal synthesis which renders all conscious synthesis possible,” on the other “I grasp time within time.”<sup>22</sup> Time has to be both an unlimited open horizon and the totality of a form. What then remains problematic is: “how can one pass on from this or that subjective process, which flows according to the universal form of subjective life, to the total consciousness?”<sup>23</sup> Or, to state it differently: *how can the flow of time that generates the unitary form of my conscious life be at the same time something my consciousness performs?* And how can I know, and even speak of, a unity or a totality if what I have is only the ordered series of a succession?

It seems to me then that either we have to understand by *eidōs ego* the

<sup>22</sup> See Ricoeur, *Husserl*, 97.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*; see also 109–11. Ricoeur, however, does not dwell on any of the conclusions I draw in the final part of this paper.

invariant form, as in *Ideas I*, the material apriori of the life of consciousness, and then no account of the originating constitution of time is possible, since we only intuit the particular horizon of a temporal consciousness as a whole, thereby abstracting from the mode of its factual givenness. Or else *eidos* is here something still different, without Husserl warning us or elucidating the new meaning. If so, however, the immediate consequence is that on the one hand there can be an *eidos* of a form which is not finite or stable—and here Husserl certainly cannot be Aristotelian any more. In fact, the phenomenology of the habitualities of the ego is a dynamic intentionality as opposed to the static one illustrated by Husserl's works before the *Cartesian Meditations*. But on the other hand this cannot be an account of the identical ego because there is always something that the ego presupposes, be it time, or the ego itself as a superior reflection.

It might be objected that Husserl was well aware of the difficulty. In the first chapters of *Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins* he had criticized Brentano for assuming that time-consciousness occurs, as it were, outside time. In order to show that a present retention has itself a temporal dimension and is part of the flow, Husserl distinguishes two different kinds of intentionality, a *Querintentionalität* which retains objects and their succession, and a longitudinal intentionality (*Längsintentionalität*) thematizing the retentions themselves as a consciousness of their unitary succession and duration.<sup>24</sup> This second intentionality, however, as the ego's reflection on its own retentions and *Erlebnisse*, is problematic and has a very ambiguous status. I want to argue that there are two opposite possibilities for interpreting it, both with undesirable consequences for Husserl's project.

In the first case, if longitudinal intentionality were a modification of the original "transversal" retention occurring in time, we would never be able to pin down a retention in its identity. An *Erlebnis* would itself be differentiated and newly constituted by a higher-order intentionality whenever we make it present to us: the world of phenomenological consciousness would be an absolute multiplicity. When Husserl, in *Ideas II*, collapses the distinction between an abstract I endowed with a merely logical function and the experience of the living ego, he actually cannot escape a similar kind of infinite regress: if in reflection the ego can be object of itself in a new superior cogito, the theory postulates a hierarchy of different levels which represents a *generatio aequivoca*, a self-origination whereby we cannot say what grounds what, or why. Husserl, to be sure, had good reasons to abandon the previous model of the division of the ego into a logical function and a flow of *Erlebnisse*. That is why he now

<sup>24</sup> See IZ, §39, and T. Seebohm, *Die Bedingungen der Möglichkeit der Transzendental-Philosophie* (Bonn, 1962), 108–12, 123–30.

regards the ego as a process of self-constitution in time which purports to avoid precisely the neo-Kantian scission between empirical and transcendental ego.<sup>25</sup> But he does not seem to realize that the reflection of the ego that is both subject and object of itself involves the difficulty that in the pure ego's reflection on the mundane ego a third ego has to account for the pure ego itself, explaining what it actually performs, and so on. It would seem then that reflection and longitudinal intentionality should not be taken as intentional at all, which would apparently conflict with the axiom of phenomenology and with Husserl's very phrase.

The second possibility is to take Husserl's characterization of longitudinal intentionality as the "quasi-temporal disposition of the phases of the flux"<sup>26</sup> to mean that reflection occurs as a *nunc stans*. In a way reflection on intentional acts would then fall outside phenomenological time. But not only would this make the criticism of Brentano senseless; it also leaves us with no clue as to how reflection originates, and as to how it is possible. Consciousness would be divided from the outset into that which is amenable to temporality and intentionality, and into a reflection which is not. But the relation between the two remains unexplained, and, what is worse, incompatible with Husserl's original intentions. What I want to emphasize is that this seems to me puzzling in at least one crucial respect. I think Husserl would agree that synthesis is not something given but an activity. If this is the case, however, synthesis requires something more than time-consciousness itself: a subject of the activity for which *Erlebnisse* have meaning. The subject in question cannot be simply time-consciousness, because consciousness of the succession *presupposes* the persistence of the subject in time and requires the possibility for an *identical ego* to recognize and describe something as belonging to its past, to the temporal order of its consciousness. Husserl's claim that longitudinal and transversal intentionality, i.e., the reflection of a subject and the retentions it focuses on, belong to the unity of the same flow of *Erlebnisse*, cannot be grounded or accounted for phenomenologically. A reflection implies an ego that performs it; another way to spell out this point is to say that a synthesis requires the unity and identity of a self-consciousness which cannot be analyzed in terms of intentionality. Husserl seems to model the ego's relation to itself (assuming for the moment that it makes sense to speak of a relation here) on a paradigm of its relation to an objective content. But these two relations are distinct, irreducible, and equally originary principles, and Husserl's theory fails because he

<sup>25</sup> See Husserl's manuscript (K III 1, pp. 25–26), quoted in G. Brand, *Welt, Ich und Zeit* (Den Haag, 1969), 44–45; see also Souche-Dagues, *Le Développement de l'intentionnalité*, 232ff., for his clear awareness of this side of the problem.

<sup>26</sup> IZ, 83: "quasi-zeitliche Einordnung der Phasen der Flusses"; SW, 288.

cannot—and for that matter does not even care to—derive the identity of the subject, which is necessary for his notion of the unity of temporal flow, from the transcendence of consciousness.

To be sure, intentionality can very well aim at states of consciousness. But consciousness has no form or content by itself, its intention is *erfüllt* (fulfilled and defined) by the object it thematizes. Thus we can use neither a transcendent language nor an intentional model of consciousness as consciousness of an objective content if we want to speak of the ego and of its constitutive synthesis of the temporal flux as of its unity. Stated more sharply: if an *Erlebnis* can be retained as the object of another *Erlebnis* in the presentive reflection of time-consciousness, no consciousness of the belonging of both to the same ego can arise. For this egological consciousness of the synthesis in time cannot be described in terms of an *eidos* (as the pure invariance of a *de facto* ego) or of an *Erlebnis* (as a lived experience of a content within time) in the first place. As Hume knew, the ego cannot be the object of a sensation.

One consequence to draw from all this is to insist, once again, that the *eidos* ego cannot represent any knowledge of the constitutive consciousness; at the most it can be a description of its possible modifications. Thus, the very attempt at linking ego, constitution, and temporality in a monadological theory is more paradoxical than Husserl saw: there is an apparent conflict between pure phenomenological description and a theory of constitution and synthesis. But it might also be argued that, strictly speaking, as intentionality and intuition are *Erfüllung*, consciousness of something does not even require an ego. An *Erlebnis* does not need the intervention of the ego, for it is hetero-directed and inserts itself as a moment in the flow of a constituted consciousness. As Sartre puts it, “consciousness is exhausted in the positing of the world,” “the phenomenological conception of consciousness renders the unifying and individualizing role of the I completely useless.”<sup>27</sup>

It is well-known that the most challenging and rigorous trait of phenomenology, at the same time a sign of its formidable ambitions, is its suspension of any metaphysical commitment about the ultimate essence of the appearances it purports to describe. In this respect I think Sartre saw correctly that phenomenology could be undermined by a fatal flaw if it agreed to admit any entity independent of, and prior to, the phenomenological description of experience, even if that entity were nothing but the identity of consciousness.

<sup>27</sup> Sartre, *La transcendance de l'ego*, 23 (“La conscience s'épuise dans la position du monde.” “La conception phénoménologique de la conscience rend le rôle unifiant et individualisant du Je totalement inutile”). And, in fact, Sartre writes: “Husserl, who studied this subjective unification of consciousness in the *Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*, never had recourse to a synthetic power of the I” (22). Sartre's position has been endorsed also by Gurwitsch, *Studies in Phenomenology*, 289ff.

Sartre is right when he says that intentional consciousness needs no I, because positional consciousness of a given and nonthetic consciousness of itself are simultaneous and do not entail reflection. If all acts of the prereflexive consciousness are autonomous, the ego does not exist in or behind them, for it can only transcend the intentionality of consciousness. Having said that, however, I need to add that, unlike Sartre, I find it difficult to see how reflection can let an ego shine through an intentional consciousness at all. If, à la Lichtenberg, the content of the cogito is not “‘I have consciousness of this chair’, but ‘there is consciousness of this chair,’”<sup>28</sup> it seems to me that Sartre’s effort to think of the ego as an object of reflection (“*corrélatif noématique d’une intention réflexive*”<sup>29</sup>) over and above the unreflected consciousness is something entirely dispensable for the analysis of the intentional, transcendent consciousness. This is not the place to engage in a discussion of the plausibility and difficulties of the Sartrean transcendent ego. Let me just say that the problem I find insoluble in Sartre is that no account of an ego’s self-ascription of *Erlebnisse* or mental states is possible on the basis of his account: the ego, sundered from conscious positional acts, is not only dispensable, but also irretrievable for the theory.

To conclude with a summarizing remark: the pure ego can be obtained by abstraction, Husserl wrote in *Ideas II*. But saying that it can posit itself as identical appears to be a simple *desideratum* of the theory. It does not help explain the nature of the ego and cannot be a theory about the reflection of the ego on itself; still less does the variation resulting in the *eidos* ego entail a self-knowledge. But, in Husserl’s own terms, an intuition or ideation of an *eidos* that is not a knowledge is nothing.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Sartre, *La transcendance de l’ego*, 37: “le contenu . . . n’est pas ‘j’ai conscience de cette chaise’, mais ‘il y a conscience de cette chaise.’”

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>30</sup> Obviously my criticisms are not intended as a polemical attack on Husserl’s philosophy, but mean to emphasize the difficulties at the core of any theory of the ego sharing his assumptions. I have in mind, in other words, a *quaestio juris*: this is also why my points are radically different from Max Scheler’s criticism (*Die Idole der Selbsterkenntnis* in *Gesammelte Werke* III: 41–43, and H. Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement: A Historical Introduction* [The Hague, 1969], 1: 243ff.), which questions the transparency of inner perception and its being subject to illusion and error—i.e., its evidence, not the possibility in principle of a theory of the ego and its *eidos*.