

Contributions to Phenomenology 114

Daniele De Santis

Husserl and the A Priori

Phenomenology and Rationality

 Springer

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Abbreviations

Husserl

Hua volume, page	Edmund Husserl, <i>Husserliana</i> . <i>Edmund Husserls Gesammelte Werke</i>
Hua-Mat volume, page	Edmund Husserl, <i>Husserliana Materialien</i>
Hua-Dok volume, page	Edmund Husserl, <i>Husserliana Dokumente</i>

Kant

KrV, page	Immanuel Kant, <i>Kritik der reinen Vernunft</i> (Akademie-Ausgabe)
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Part I

Introduction



Were we to describe the current state of Husserl scholarship as we perceive it, we would claim that it seems to lie in a situation which stands in direct opposition to the one in which Dante finds Cavalcante Cavalcanti when he first meets him and Farinata in *Inferno X*. Whereas Cavalcante, just like any other heretic, is able to see and foresee the future—yet is completely blind to the present¹ (“*El par che voi vegiate, se ben odo/dinanzi quel che 'l tempo seco adduce/e nel presente tenete altro modo*”)—most Husserl scholars, by contrast, seem to be blind to the future and have eyes only for the present. For, they are so interested in the present in order to make phenomenology (primarily Husserlian, but to a certain extent also Heideggerian) compatible with the most fashionable trends of contemporary philosophy (whether of an analytic or a continental nature) that they do not realize that—in so doing—nothing will be left of phenomenology in the future.

Indeed, Husserl’s phenomenology has already been stripped of its highest aspirations (viz., that of developing a full-fledged theory of reason able to provide a new foundation for metaphysics and, linked to the latter, reforming humanity); it has already been stripped or freed of its most important methodological tools (e.g., the so-called transcendental reduction); more recently, even Heidegger’s phenomenology has been purged of its language (e.g., by translating *Dasein* as “mind”²).

Sooner or later, phenomenology—as the name of an early twentieth century tradition of thought—will appear to us (and to all the future generations of philosophers and readers) as nothing more than a vague and empty term; it will soon start to look just like an obscure and incomprehensible “relic” from a distant past which not even archeologists will ever again be able to decipher. The desire to make phenomenology, especially Husserl’s thought, attractive to the present will merely

¹As already noticed by Antonio Gramsci in his *Quaderni del Carcere (Quaderno 4 (XIII), §83)*.

²Zahavi (2019, p. 143): “*Being-in-the-world (In-der-Welt-sein)*. A composite term introduced by Heidegger to designate the world-embedded character of the mind and the extent to which mind and world are intertwined and co-dependent.”

relegate it to the past, for phenomenology seems to be suitable for the present only on condition that it is no longer phenomenology itself.

The issue has nothing to do with the opposition between *me-research* and *we-research*, or between *historic* and *systematic* approaches, as if the way out of such a “morass” consists simply in ignoring the present state of contemporary philosophy (whether European or any other strain). Quite the opposite. We contend that phenomenology in general, and Husserl’s phenomenology in particular, could still play a decisive role in contemporary philosophy, but only if it is preliminarily understood as what it properly is. For, phenomenology needs to be understood and studied for what it primarily is, namely, for both its aspirations and its specific principles,³ for its goals and its terminology, for its method(s) and its point of departure. As a consequence, the major ambition of the investigation that we are here offering to the reader is to assess Husserl’s phenomenology *iuxta propria principia*. And such *principles*, as this introduction will further elaborate, are the two forms of rationality and reason, which on Husserl’s view characterize the whole history of philosophy, his phenomenology included (for early attempts at presenting this interpretation, see De Santis 2019a, b).

However, as will soon be evident, this study will gratify the reader with a research that bears only on that form of rationality that Husserl deems immanent to being.

The present investigation will address only *one* issue, it will pursue exclusively *one* goal, hence it will follow solely *one* specific ambition.

The *issue* is the problem of the a priori in the thought of Edmund Husserl, the founder of the so-called phenomenological tradition; the *goal* consists in reconstructing the development of his theory of the a priori from the *Logical Investigations* onward, with special attention paid to the question of why, at some point, Husserl decided to retrieve the Greek term *eidōs* to properly characterize his view on the matter. Finally, the *ambition* will be that of claiming that the Husserlian conception of the a priori is to be understood against the backdrop of his twofold notion of reason and rationality. In a nutshell, the case will be made for distinguishing two conceptions of *reason* and *rationality*, which Husserl labels, respectively, *Rationalität* and *Vernünftigkeit*: if the former is to be regarded as the “ontological” form of rationality, the latter stands for the “transcendental” reason. Now, such a duality being here preliminarily recognized, the very Husserlian notion of a priori will turn out to be the expression of what we just referred to as “ontological reason” or “ontological rationality.”

But how, exactly, are we to pursue our goal? What should the reader expect from this study? The present investigation is divided into six main parts (Parts II–VII), each of which addresses a specific stage in the development of the Husserlian perspective on the a priori. As one could easily imagine, the starting point of our long enterprise is the *Prolegomena* and, in particular, the dismissal of what Husserl dubs therein “logical psychologism.” The opening chapters are in fact dedicated to both

³Which does not mean that it cannot be criticized. But every such criticism should be based on a clear understanding of what phenomenology is as a whole and wants to eventually achieve.

presenting and discussing the way in which Husserl understands logical psychologism, with the aim of showing that what is really at stake in his *Auseinandersetzung* is the conception of *necessity*. For the sake of the further development of our study, what really interests us here is less Husserl's target, that is, the general *psychologistic mis-interpretation* and *mis-conception* of the "nature" of logic in general, and more the specific topic of this misunderstanding, namely, *the character of necessity* pertaining to logical truths and logical principles once they are psychologicistically understood, as it were. Let us also point out that the entire critical discussion of Husserl on psychologism will be laid out within a specific framework, namely, our tentative reconstruction of what Husserl himself calls the metaphysical hypostatization of the ideal, the dismissal and rejection of which he sees as paramount to the introduction of his early idealism and doctrine of ideal species. As we will explain, Husserl regards psychologism—broadly construed as the thesis that the *content* of the laws of logic are *factual*, i.e., they concern the *existence* of our human psyche—as sharing the same core assumption, which historically characterized the "hypostatization" of the ideal sphere.

Logical psychologism postulates that, insofar as the content of logic (or, better, what logic rules over) is our "psyche," different beings will necessarily have a different logic and, hence a different understanding of truth and falsity. Whereas the "traditional hypostatization" assumes the existence of a highest being and of a perfect ideal of knowledge, logical psychologism and, more broadly, any and every form of "relativism" are thought by Husserl to give up on the existence of such an ideal.

After we finish with Husserl's dismissal of logical psychologism (the main result of which for our research is the overall distinction between *real being* and *ideal being*), the analysis will move on to the *Logical Investigations* in order to address the *pars costruens* of the text. The third part, by far the longest of the entire study, is divided into three chapters. While chapters "On the Way to the *Eidos*" and "The Doctrine of Ideality and the A Priori in the *Logical Investigations*" deal with the *Logical Investigations*, notably, with both the *Second* and the *Third Investigation*, chapter "Essence, Idea, and the A Priori After the *Logical Investigations*" is dedicated to the lectures held by Husserl through until 1912. While the objective of chapter "The Doctrine of Ideality and the A Priori in the *Logical Investigations*" consists mainly in expounding Husserl's doctrine of the a priori within the context of his early *idealism* and his doctrine of ideal species (with a special focus on the opposition between *ideality* and *reality*, and on the concepts of *object*, *being*, and *idea*), chapter "Essence, Idea, and the A Priori After the *Logical Investigations*" follows and reconstructs the development of Husserlian terminology and conceptuality while also striving to elucidate *when* and *why* Husserl introduced into his ontological "bestiary" the Greek *eidos*.

The major assertions of chapter "The Doctrine of Ideality and the A Priori in the *Logical Investigations*" can be listed as follows.

- Husserl's *idealism* is to be more properly labeled *dia-noetic idealism*, for the difference between *real being* and *ideal being*—or, which is the same, *real object*

and *ideal object*—primarily points to the distinction between irreducible types of propositions and judgments (and their relevant validity).

- In the famous *Third Logical Investigation*, no idea of a “material ontology” is ever provided, for Husserl still lacks a series of concepts—such as those of “region,” “regional concepts,” “regional axioms,” and *individuum*—which are necessary in order for the idea of ontology, and specifically “material ontology,” to be first introduced and then possibly carried out.
- Contrary to what is usually affirmed, in the first part of the *Third Logical Investigation* Husserl is not developing a mereo-logy, that is, a doctrine of parts and wholes; rather, he is investing all his energy into working out the concepts of “non-independence” and “objective necessity” based upon a quite specific understanding of the idea of “law.” What Husserl is interested in arguing for at this stage of his philosophical development is that there obtain certain necessary relations between ideal objects, which hence turn out to stand in connections of non-independence to one another.

With all of this in mind, the chapter “Essence, Idea, and the A Priori After the *Logical Investigations*” ventures into the great “maze” of Husserl’s Göttingen lectures in order to follow the development of his conceptuality. The aim of this section is twofold. On the one hand, it is to understand when and why Husserl introduced the term *eidos*. On the other hand, it is to bring to the fore in what sense the very traditional expression *a priori* (as well as *a posteriori*) is affected by “ambiguity.” Indeed, Husserl distinguishes three very different meanings implied in that conceptual pair: the expressions *a priori/a posteriori* can in fact be understood (i) *ontologically*, (ii) *logically*, or (iii) in a *gnoseological* and *transcendental* manner. As we will show, the decision to adopt the Greek *eidos* meets two different needs: (a) that of having a more fine-grained terminology able to express the notion of “pure essence” in a way that is different from the German *Wesen*; and (b) that of limiting Husserl’s understanding of the *a priori* to *iii*.

Moreover, it is during our commentary on the 1906 lectures on logic and the theory of knowledge, that the idea of rationality as both *Rationalität* and *Vernünftigkeit* is first encountered. It is here that the notion of *rationality of sense*, regarded as the rationality of “knowledge,” “valuing,” and “action,” is distinguished from the *rationality of being*, the one expressed by *a priori* truths and *a priori* principles: “*All reason in the a posteriori has its principles a priori*, and these principles are the grounds of justification of the objective, unconditional validity that every operation of so-called reason claims in both the theoretical and the axiological sphere” (Hua XXIV, p. 237).

Part IV is on the contrary dedicated to addressing a “methodological” concern: it tries to shed light upon the development of Husserl’s conception of the manner in which the “ideal” can be apprehended and grasped. For this purpose, the analysis is divided into three sub-chapters: the first tackles the notion of “ideation” or “abstractive ideation” in the *Second Logical Investigation*; the second follows and discusses the emergence of the crucial concept of “attitude,” specifically the ideal or *a priori* attitude; the third focuses on the methodological tool known as “eidetic reduction.”

With the distinction between three different meanings of the phrase *a priori* established, and with a firm grasp on the differences between “essence,” “idea,” and *eidos*, one can finally approach *Ideen I*. Chapters “Essence and *Eidos*”, “The Function of Eidetic Sciences” and “Τόδε τι, Individuum, Region” will focus exclusively upon the opening section of Husserl’s 1913 masterpiece (*Tatsache und Wesen*), with the sole intention of addressing his stance on the problem of the *a priori* discernible therein. Three major outcomes from these chapters can be singled out.

- A clear distinction, once and for all, between essence or *Wesen* on the one hand and those of pure essence (*reines Wesen*) and *eidos* on the other.
- Based upon the introduction of the concepts of region, regional concepts, and *individuum*, a clear determination of the very notion of “material ontology” is finally obtained (and the difference of the present framework from the one originally laid out in the *Logical Investigations* elucidated).
- In light of the distinction between the two forms of rationality, and based upon the exemplary case of geometry, the task of what Husserl calls “eidetic sciences” is in general pinpointed as that of providing a *rationalization of the empirical*. In a few (rather blunt) words: the aspiration and goal of the eidetic scientist is from now on recognized as that of tracing the empirical back to its “*a priori*” and “rational” principles, thereby bringing to the fore the ontological rationality immanent to it.

The development of the doctrine of the *a priori* in the thought of Husserl up to this point can be so summarized: from the specific issue of establishing some *a priori* and *necessary* relations holding between *ideal non-independent objects*—via the identification of a specifically ontological form of *rationality*—up to the introduction of the notion of *material ontologies* and the recognition that the task of eidetic sciences is that of *rationalizing the empirical*.

By expanding on what Husserl means by *Rationalität*, chapters “Rationalization” and “The Conflict Between Different Forms of Rationality” will advance two strong theses. First, they will argue that by comprehending the *a priori* as an expression of the ontological rationality Husserl is explicitly reconnecting to the rationalist program of pre-Kantian philosophy (with special reference to Spinoza) while at the same time accepting some aspects of the Kantian criticism. Second, they will show how Husserl understands the dichotomy between the two forms of rationality (rationality of being and rationality of sense, or ontological and transcendental rationality) as the main “motive” underlying the development of the history of philosophy, modern philosophy most notably. In short: the case will be made for reading Husserl’s interpretation of the history of modern philosophy from Descartes to Kant as a “conflict” between two forms of reason and rationality. The history of philosophy is not to be characterized for Husserl as the unfolding of solely one *form* of rationality (the transcendental one), but rather as the ongoing tension between the ontological rationality and the emergence of the transcendental motive, as well as, within the former, between conflicting conceptions of the very “rationality” of being.

By the end of Part VI, the issue of the *a priori* will no longer simply appear as just one specific and circumscribed problem among others, nor solely as the expression of *one* form of rationality in opposition to another; it will disclose itself as one of the two all-encompassing “principles” that drive the vicissitudes of the history of philosophy (since Plato in antiquity, from Descartes’ own revolution onward in modernity).

Having established such a broad and general framework, Part VII of our study finally comes back to the *Logical Investigations*, thereby bringing our research full circle: it is here that the distinctions between *formal* and *material*, and *analytic* and *synthetic a priori* in the first part of the *Third Logical Investigation* are finally tackled. Not only do we strive to emphasize and clarify the *discrepancies*, as it were, between the two editions of the book, we also follow the way in which the above distinctions are re-interpreted and further developed by Husserl within the framework of his later genetic phenomenology. We explore the sense in which and the extent to which the dichotomy between formal and material *a priori* turns into a dichotomy between “contingent” and “innate” *a priori* as soon as it is regarded from the angle of the “self-constitution” of the monad. Of course, far from us is the thesis that Husserl will abandon the former pair in favor of the latter: as soon as we enter the genetic dimension of the “self-constitution” of the concrete subjectivity, what used to be labeled *material* and *formal a priori* turn into the *a priori* of such and such a structure or “structural form” of the monad (“sensibility” in one case, “reason” in the other), the relevant formations of which are deemed either *contingent* or *innate* (in a sense to be better discussed).

Unfortunately, the present study will be able to touch only upon the latter theme, because its sole preoccupation is the overall theory of the *a priori* in Husserl, regardless of any questions and issues of transcendental/constitutive nature (to be addressed in a study to come⁴).

Were we to adopt what Schopenhauer points out in the preface to the first edition of *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, we could claim that what is to be imparted by this book “is a single thought” (*ein einziger Gedanke*). And if—as Schopenhauer also explains to us—“a *system of thoughts* must always have an architectonic connection or coherence, namely, a connection in which one part always supports the other,” a *single thought* must on the contrary “preserve its most perfect unity. If, all the same, it can be split up into parts for the purpose of being communicated, the connection of these parts must once more be organic, that is, of such a kind that every part supports the whole just as much as it is supported by the whole.”⁵

Hopefully, the project outlined in the present study will match Schopenhauer’s description of how a *single thought* should be imparted to the reader. Such a *single thought* has been of course split up into many different parts: the discussion of the

⁴This is why the reader will find here no discussion of problems connected to the so-called evaluative or emotional and also volitional aspects of consciousness; for, they belong to the domain of the transcendental reason and go beyond the scope of this book. Accordingly, also the discussion of the gnosological and epistemological problems, which the reader will find for example in the third and fourth chapters, are only meant to shed a better light on the ontological rationality.

⁵Schopenhauer (1819), *Vorrede zur ersten Auflage*.

objective notion of *necessity* is offered in chapter “Metaphysical Hypostatization” and “A Question of Truth”; the concepts of *ideality* and *ideal being* are tackled in chapter “On the Way to the *Eidos*”, “The Doctrine of Ideality and the A Priori in the *Logical Investigations*”, and “Essence, Idea, and the A Priori After the *Logical Investigations*”, just like that of *law*; in chapter “Ideation, Attitude, Reduction”, there is provided an account of *eidetic attitude*, whereas the distinction between *eidos* and *essence*, along with the treatment of the *rationalization of the empirical-function of eidetic sciences*, are provided in chapters “Essence and *Eidos*”, “The Function of Eidetic Sciences” and “Τόδε τι, Individuum, Region”. Chapters “Rationalization” and “The Conflict Between Different Forms of Rationality” elaborate on *ontological rationality* as one of the two principles in the history of philosophy. Finally, chapters “Formal and Material, Analytic and Synthetic A Priori” and “From Formal to Innate—From Material to Contingent: The Development of the Concept of A Priori in Light of the Genetic Perspective” provide a new insight into the development of Husserl’s distinction between *material* and *formal a priori*, or *synthetic* and *analytic a priori*.

Hopefully, each part supports the whole, just as much as the whole itself supports each part.

The *single thought* is that what goes by the name of *a priori* is for Husserl the expression of a rationality *immanent* to being, which is to be kept separated from the rationality of *sense*. As the reader may have already figured, these two forms of rationality, held as the principles underlying the history of philosophy, correspond to the two hemispheres of Husserl’s phenomenology, viz., the *transcendental* and the *eidetic*. As *Ideas I* affirms, phenomenology is the eidetic or a priori science of all the transcendentially purified phenomena belonging to the region of pure consciousness.

As has already been pointed out, the eidetic side of this definition is or should be what makes phenomenology a science.⁶ Although no satisfactory comprehension of Husserl’s philosophy can ever be achieved unless *both* aspects, namely, *both notions of rationality* are addressed, the present investigation deals exclusively with the *ontological reason*. No direct treatment of transcendental reason is offered herein. The reason for such “one-sidedness” is entirely practical: the assessment of both principles *together* goes far beyond the scope of just one single piece of research.

⁶See Sowa (2005, 2007). Of course, this is true only insofar as every science aspires to making universally valid assertions expressing universally valid truths; however, we should never forget that it is by means of the transcendental reduction that the specific field of investigation of phenomenology, notably, consciousness as a new region of being, is disclosed. If phenomenology is for Husserl a science, it is because its subject-matter differs from that of psychology, which, as pure psychology, is the eidetic science of animal consciousness. Phenomenology in the Husserlian sense can be a science only if both its eidetic and the transcendental sides are kept together. We are convinced that the one-sided emphasis on the eidetic aspects (and the idea that the latter could be separated from the transcendental one) is not able to fully do justice to Husserl’s stance on the very possibility of phenomenology as a science.

Accordingly, the present work is necessarily to be deemed the first part of a far larger project, which the author hopes he will be able to bring to completion soon.⁷

This being asserted, the question that Virgil asks Dante at the beginning of *The Divine Comedy*, “*Ma tu perché ritorni a tanta noia?*” can finally be answered. As a matter of fact, if we felt the pressing urge to return once again to such a crucial and already thoroughly investigated topic, it was not only in order to cast light on some serious *philological* issues still in need of systematic treatment (e.g., what does Husserl really mean when he says that the expression *a priori* is “ambiguous”? Why does he describe the term *eidos*, for example, as a “terminologically unspoiled” notion?), but primarily to “inscribe,” so to speak, the problem of the *a priori* in the wider framework of “ontological” reason and, more broadly, of the two forms of rationality (*Rationalität* and *Vernünftigkeit*; *ratio* and *Vernunft*).⁸

The present investigation is *on* Husserl and therefore *only* about him: the reader will not find in it anything other than a meticulous, in-depth exegesis of his texts and arguments. Many will probably see the book as a product of *mere exegesis*, as if it were suitably fruitful to contrast the exegesis of Husserl’s texts with the (psychologically understandable) aspiration of using them in order to do something else. The point for us is less to shed light on the texts themselves than to contribute to renewing the general coordinates within which his phenomenology could be understood; otherwise, the aspiration above is (as in fact quite often is the case) nothing more than the slavish repetition of schemes borrowed elsewhere. As also Nietzsche would say, one cannot be a psychologist if one is not a philologist first (*Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, §268).

Possible confrontations and comparative examinations (e.g., between Husserl’s and Heidegger’s views on the *a priori*; Husserl vis-à-vis Frege and Bolzano; Husserl and some of his former Göttingen students, or contemporary analytic philosophers) need to be held in abeyance: for, no such confrontations can be *properly* carried out until a systematic and well-structured assessment of Husserl’s stance on the *a priori* is provided. (The present text wants to contribute to such assessment). It is only in the conclusion that we dare sketch some of the possible ways in which our outcomes can be further developed and employed in order to work out a different reading of the Husserl-Heidegger confrontation, as well as of the difference between

⁷ However, this does not mean that what we are here presenting is *per se* partial; quite the contrary: it is a self-contained study, which does not need anything else to be fully appreciated and weighted up.

⁸ To our knowledge, the only text that has so far systematically acknowledged this duality is Jacobs (2016), where a clear distinction is drawn between “two kinds of constraints governing the rationality of our ways of intending something,” i.e., the “*ontological constraints*” and the so-called “*actuality constraint* that governs the rationality of our intentional awareness of something” (pp. 260–261). Although Jacobs does not go so far as to recognize the two types of constraints as the two forms of “reason” that actually determine and guide the history of philosophy (her goal and objective are totally different and she needs not to get to that point), the two rationalities (*constraints* in her terminology) are explicitly held as the two principles structuring from within the life of consciousness and its relation to the world.

Husserl and some of his disciples from the early period (the alleged “realist” phenomenologists).

Let us conclude this introduction with a quick observation of personal character.

As I belong to a generation without masters, I (just like most of my peers and colleagues) had to go looking for those figures elsewhere. As it would be rhetorical of me to explain where did I find them (and of no interest whatsoever for the reader), let me just point out the following. When it comes to one of the central ideas of this book (we would consider it: *the central idea*), namely, the idea of a “conflict” between different forms of rationality that informs the entire history of modern philosophy, we developed it inspired by Carlo Antoni’s masterpiece *La lotta contro la ragione*, a groundbreaking (nowadays unfortunately almost completely forgotten) investigation into the origin of nineteenth century historicism (Antoni 1942; Sasso 1982). Yet, whereas according to Antoni the rise of historicism is to be read as the emergence of a conflict between a new and “historically” structured form of reason and the old Cartesian rationality, the diagnosis that we suggest here via Husserl is to be primarily construed as implying a double conflict (in a sense to be further expanded upon).⁹

In arriving at such thoughts, we have received invaluable assistance, to say the least, from those with whom we have been intensively discussing Husserl, and not only Husserl, over the last decade. They know who they are.

But I must confess that none of the thoughts expressed in this book would ever have come to light without Ignacio Quepons (with whom all of this started, some years ago, in another place), Danilo Manca, and the friends of the Venice Phenomenology Summer School: Matteo Giannasi, Burt Hopkins, Nicolas de Warren (whom I thank also for having accepted to publish this volume in this book series), Claudio Majolino and Emiliano Trizio. I have learned from them how Husserl should be understood and how he should never be misunderstood; most importantly, they made me comprehend that Husserl should never be read for the mere sake of the *hic et nunc*.

For what concerns the English translations of the Husserlian works cited in this book, the reader can consult the following texts: Edmund Husserl, *Collected Works* (The Hague, Boston, London: M. Nijhoff); *Logical Investigations. Vol I and II* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001); *Ideas I* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publisher, 2014); *First Philosophy Lectures* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2019); *Phenomenological Psychology. Lectures, Summer Semester 1925* (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1977); *Formal and Transcendental Logic* (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1969); *Cartesian Meditations* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1993); *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970); *Experience and Judgment* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973). As there is little consistency between the translations, we

⁹ Hopefully, the way has been paved for a systematic confrontation between Husserl’s phenomenology and some of the crucial figures of the Italian neo-idealist tradition, with a focus on both the interpretation of the history of philosophy and the reason-being relation. For a first attempt at connecting Husserl and Gustavo Bontadini, see De Santis (2018).

have always striven to translate or modify the translation according to the way in which we will understand Husserl's conceptuality and terminology. This is why the reader will be always and only referred to the Husserliana volumes.

Praha 2020

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Part II

Husserl on Psychologism and the A Priori



1 Husserl and the Angels

At the end of the *First Logical Investigation* (hereafter *LU*), during a preliminary discussion of the central notion of his own early *idealism*, i.e., the notion of ideal species (§31),¹ Husserl hastens to distance himself from two “traditional” interpretations of that doctrine: “They [meanings] are not for that reason objects which, though existing nowhere in the ‘world,’ have being in a *topos ouranios* or in a divine mind, for such metaphysical hypostatization would be absurd” (Hua XIX/1, p. 106). In less than three lines, Husserl mentions and, more or less explicitly, declares the absurdity of two *loci classici* of the history of philosophy.

Although Husserl misquotes Plato here—who speaks of *hyper-ouranios topos*, not of *topos ouranios*—the reference is, as should be evident, to *Phaedrus* (247C-D; trans. by W. R. M. Lamb), and to that “region above the heaven” which—as Socrates emphasizes—“was never worthily sung by any earthly poet, nor will it ever be.” Now, such a critical comment on the part of Husserl should not be exclusively read as a dismissal of the metaphysical hypostatization according to which *eide*, Forms or Ideas, are endowed with a reality of their own. A careful reading of the relevant pages from *Phaedrus* can immediately convince us that what is at stake is a much deeper issue.

After having explained that “every soul is immortal” (*psykhe pasa athanatos*) because “that which is ever moving is immortal” (*to gar aeikineton athanaton*), Socrates moves on to investigate its “structure” (*tes ideas autes*): “We will liken the soul to the composite nature of a pair of winged horses and charioteers. Now the horses and charioteers of the gods are all good and of good descent [*te agathoi kai ex agathon*], but those of other races are mixed [*to den ton allon memiktai*]”

¹A still valuable and extremely rich introduction to the *First Logical Investigation* is Melandri (1990).

(246A-B). On the one hand, there are the divine souls, that is, the souls of the gods, which are all pure and perfectly good; on the other hand, all the others. “And first the charioteer of the human soul drives a pair, and secondly one of the horses is beautiful and good [*kalos te kai agathos*], but the other quite the opposite in breed and character. Therefore in our case the driving is necessarily [*ex anankes*] difficult and troublesome.” The difference between the two types of soul and the duality immanent to every human soul leads to two different types of life, i.e., the “life of the gods” (*theon bios*) and that of all “the other souls” (*allai psykhai*) (247D). What constitutes the “life of the gods”? And of what is “divine intelligence” (*theou dia-noia*) capable? The passage in which Socrates describes the life of the gods and their ability to reach and contemplate the *hyperouranios topos* where all the Forms harbor and eternally dwell, though quite long, is so beautiful that it is worth being quoted *in extenso*:

But the region above the heaven was never worthily sung by any earthly poet, nor will it ever be. It is, however, as I shall tell; for I must dare to speak the truth, especially as truth is my theme. For the colorless, formless, and intangible truly existing being, with which all true knowledge is concerned, holds this region and is visible only to the mind, the pilot of the soul. Now the divine intelligence, since it is nurtured on mind and pure knowledge, and the intelligence of every soul which is capable of receiving that which befits it, rejoices in seeing what really is for a space of time and, by gazing on truth, is nourished and made happy, until the revolution brings it again to the same place. In the revolution it beholds absolute justice, temperance, and knowledge, not such knowledge as has a beginning and varies as it is associated with one or another of the things we call realities, but that which abides in the real eternal absolute; and in the same way it beholds and feeds upon the other eternal verities, after which, passing down again within the heaven, it goes home, and there the charioteer puts up the horses at the manger and feeds them with ambrosia and then gives them nectar to drink (247D).

If “such is the life of the gods,” whose perfection is reflected by the perfect knowledge of the Forms they alone have access to, completely different are the vicissitudes characterizing all the other souls.

Of the other souls, that which best follows after the gods and is most like it, raises the head of the charioteer up into the other region and is carried around in the revolution, troubled by the horses and hardly beholding what really is; and another sometimes rises and sometimes sinks, and, because its horses are unruly, it sees things and fails to see others. The other souls follow after, all yearning for the upper but unable to reach, and are carried round beneath, trampling upon and colliding with one another, each striving to pass its neighbor. So there is the greatest confusion and sweat of rivalry, wherein many are lamed, and many wings are broken through the incompetence of the drivers; and after much toil they all go away without gaining a view of what really is, and when they have gone away they feed upon opinion (248A-C).

The “mixed” nature of “the other souls,” and their troublesome driving, determines a “hierarchy” of knowledge, depending on whether they reach the *hyperouranios topos* as well as the extent of their contemplation. Some of them—more akin to the gods—can eventually behold “what really is”; others rise and sink—certainly getting a glimpse of some of the *eide*, yet not of all of them. Finally, there are souls that, completely unable to climb up to the region above the heaven, go away without the slightest chance of looking at the perfection of what never changes and eternally

is. Hence, they feed themselves exclusively on the unstable and ever-changing realm of earthly *doxai*.

By rejecting the “*hyper-ouranios* hypothesis,” Husserl is not only distancing himself from the absurd “metaphysical hypostatization” of a *topos* where the Platonic *eide*, or his “ideal” species and meanings, would sojourn; Husserl is dismissing the very idea of a hierarchy of knowledge, which in itself mirrors a hierarchy of beings (or lives) and faculties whose highest peak is the “divine intellect,” or the “mind” able to fully apprehend what “truly is” (*ta onta ontos*).

If the first *locus classicus* Husserl is referring to, and rejecting, is the participative theory of the soul beautifully presented by Socrates in *Phaedrus* (some of the souls “participating” in the realm of truth more than others), the second *locus classicus* is that of the Neo-Platonic Augustine (and of a certain tradition he inaugurates). Indeed, as we can read in *Confessiones*, XII, 25:

If we both see that what you say is true and also that what I say is true, what enables us to recognize this truth? I do not see it in you, nor do you see it in me, but we both see it in the immutable truth which is above our minds.²

“Truth” is in God, and it is only by participating in the latter’s mind (*supra mentes nostras*) that the finite intellect can eventually grasp the truth. As Aquinas remarks in his *Summa Theologiae*, if the Platonic “Ideas” are the essence of things entirely separated from all matter, they are called *rationes* by Augustine, and have their place of residence in God’s own mind (*in mente divina* or, in Husserl’s own terminology, *im göttlichen Geiste*)³:

Now Plato held ... that the forms of things subsist of themselves apart from matter; and these he called Ideas, by participation of which he said that our intellect knows all things ... therefore Augustine (QQ. 83, qu. 46), for the Ideas defended by Plato, substituted the reasons of all creatures existing in the Divine mind, according to which types of all things are made in themselves, and are known to the human soul.⁴

As has been claimed (Scribano 2006, p. v), in light of Augustine’s Platonic attempt to address the question of how the “finite” intellect can reach and get hold of all the universal and necessary truths, the history of philosophy from the Medieval

²“*si ambo videmus verum esse quod dicis, et ambo videmus verum esse quod dico, ubi, quaeso, id videmus? nec ego utique in te nec tu in me, sed ambo in ipsa quae supra mentes nostras est incommutabili veritate.*”

³“The *ideae* ... are primary forms [*principales formae*], or stable and immutable principles of things, which are not themselves formed, and for that reason eternal and always maintaining themselves in the same state; and they are contained in the divine understanding [*in divina intelligentia*]” (Augustine, *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus*, 46). For a more detailed account, see O’Daly (1987, pp. 189–199).

⁴“*Posuit autem Plato ... formas rerum per se subsistere a materia separatas, quas Ideas vocabat, per quorum participationem dicebat intellectum nostrum omnia cognoscere ... ideo Augustinus, in libro Octoginta trium Quest., posuit loco harum idearum quas Plato ponebat, rationes omnium creaturarum in mente divina existere, secundum quas Omnia formantur, et secundum quas etiam anima humana Omnia cognoscit*” (*Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 84, a. 5).

period through Descartes can be understood as a series of different, often mutually exclusive, assessments of that problem.

In this history, Aquinas stands out as the one who—more than any other Medieval philosopher—has striven to separate the finite mind from the infinite in order to make the former's modes of knowledge independent of the latter (Gilson 1926). Yet, by “finite mind,” Aquinas not only means the *viator's* mind, the mind of those beings composed of both “matter” and “form,” “body” and “soul”—namely, the human mind—but also the finite mind proper to those immaterial beings called *angels*.

Without getting into a detailed discussion of Aquinas' overall stance on angels here, and of whether he really succeeded in outlining an angelic theory of knowledge radically different from the human theory (this being a task that goes far beyond the scope of the present text), what needs to be emphasized is that the angels' “ontological” intermediate position between God and the *viator* (God is immaterial and infinite, *angels* are immaterial yet finite, *humans* are material and finite) is “mirrored” by their “gnoseological” position.⁵ On the one hand, there is the abyss separating God's infinite intellect from all the finite ones; on the other hand, the distinction, within the realm of finite minds, between the finite yet immaterial angelic intellect and the finite and material human mind.⁶

Accordingly, the difference between God's infinite mind, the angel's *tabula picta*, and the *viator's* *tabula rasa* finds its expression in three different ways according to which the intellect gets to know God and the “eternal truths” residing in it.⁷ The gnoseological hierarchy mirrors the “ontological” *Stufenbau* of the universe. The first and highest form of cognition is the *direct* and *immediate* one, which pertains only to God and the blessed (whose peculiarity we are not considering here): God knows its nature *directly* and *immediately*, i.e., by virtue of an immediate contact with the object of knowledge. The second species of knowledge is the *direct* yet *mediate* one that takes place by means of an intelligible or sensible *species*. This is the type of knowledge that the *viatores* have of material bodies and angels of God (the *species* being in this case the angel's “nature”). The third and lowest kind of knowledge is the *indirect* and *mediate* one, which occurs when a first being is known “through the mediation” of a second being (known by means of a *species*). This being the one and only possible access to God that the *viator* has:

A thing is seen in three different ways. First, it is seen through its essence, in the way in which a visible essence itself is joined to sight when the eye sees light. Second, it is seen through a species, as takes place when the likeness of a thing is impressed on my sense of

⁵“*Intellectus angelicus est medius inter intellectum divinum et humanum et virtute et modo cognoscendi*” (In II Sent., d. 3, q. 3, a. 1 c).

⁶“*Intellectus noster comparatur ‘tabulae in qua nihil est scriptum,’ intellectus autem angeli tabulae pictae vel speculum in quo rerum rationes resplendent*” (De Veritate, q. 8, a. 9 c). “À partir de Thomas, les théologiens prendront l'habitude de poser le problème de la connaissance humaine en comparant la connaissance de l'homme ici-bas à celle de l'âme séparée (et par extension de l'Ange, voir de Dieu)” (de Libera 2014, p. 338). See also Gilson (1945, pp. 225–244).

⁷What follows is based on Scribano (2006, pp. 42 and ff).

sight when I see a stone. Third, it is seen “through a mirror”; and this takes place when the thing’s likeness, through which it is known, is not caused in the sight by the thing itself directly but by that in which the likeness of the thing is represented, just as sensible species are caused in a mirror. Now, to see God in the first manner is natural only to God. It lies above the nature of humans and angels. To see God in the second manner is natural to an angel. To see God in the third manner, however, is natural to humans, for they can come to know God from creature inasmuch as they represent It somehow or other. Consequently, the statement that all knowledge is either through an essence or through a mirror should be taken as referring to human knowledge. The knowledge that an angel naturally has of God lies between these two types of knowledge (*De Veritate*, q. 8. a. 3 ad 17).⁸

The knowledge of God *per speciem* secures not only the angelic intermediate position between God (the blessed) and the *viatores*, but first and foremost the former’s “intuitive” character in contrast to the latter’s “inferential” or “discursive” mode of cognition (Suarez-Nani 2002a, pp. 61–75). Here is Aquinas’ description of them:

There is a difference, however, between knowing something in another and knowing it *from* another. For when one thing is known in another, the knower is, by one motion, directed to both. This is clearly the case when a thing is known in another as in an intelligible form. This kind of knowledge is not discursive. (...) A thing is said to be known *from* another, however, when the motion to both is not the same, but the intellect is first moved to one and from this is moved to the other. Consequently, discourse takes place here, as it evidently takes place in demonstrations. For the intellect is first directed only to principles, then it is directed through the principles to the conclusions (*De Veritate*, q. 8, a. 15 c).⁹

As Aquinas explains, since the *viator* can have intuitive knowledge of the “first principles” (*prima principia*), and since “the knowledge we have of principles is the highest form of our knowledge, it is evident that on this summit of our nature we reach to some extent the lowest point of an angel’s.” The difference being nevertheless that, whereas we can know *sine discursu* and by simple intuition (*simplici intuitu*) exclusively the “first principles,” angels know all they know in that fashion, that is to say, always and only intuitively.¹⁰

⁸“*Tripliciter aliquid videtur. Uno modo per essentiam suam; sicut quando ipsa essentia visibilis coniungitur visui, sicut oculus videt lucem. Alio modo per speciem; quando scilicet similitudo ipsius rei ab ipsa re imprimatur in visum, sicut cum video lapidem. Tertio modo per speculum; et hoc est quando similitudo rei per quam cognoscitur, non fit in visu immediate ab ipsa re, sed ab eo in quo similitudo rei repraesentatur; sicut in speculo resultant species sensibilibus. Primo igitur modo videre Deum est naturale soli Deo, supra naturam vero hominis et Angeli; sed secundo modo videre Deum est naturale Angeli; tertio autem modo videre Deum est naturale ipsi homini, qui venit in cognitionem Dei ex creaturis, utcumque Deum repraesentantibus. Unde quod dicitur quod omnis cognitio est vel per essentiam vel in speculo, intelligendum est de cognitione humana; cognitio autem Angeli quam de Deo naturaliter habet, est media inter istas duas.*”

⁹“*Differt autem cognoscere aliquid in aliquo, et aliquid ex aliquo. Quando enim aliquid in aliquo cognoscitur, uno motu fertur cognoscens in utrumque, sicut patet quando aliquid cognoscitur in aliquo ut in forma cognoscibili: et talis cognitio non est discursiva ... Sed tunc dicitur aliquid ex aliquo cognosci, quando non est idem motus in utrumque; sed primo movetur intellectus in unum, et ex hoc movetur in aliud; unde hic est quidam discursus, sicut patet in demonstrationibus. Primo enim intellectus fertur in principia tantum, et secundario per principia fertur in conclusiones.*”

¹⁰*De Veritate*, q. 8, a. 15 c.: “*Sicut intellectus noster se habet ad ista principia, sic se habet angelus*

After the attempt made by the *Doctor Angelicus*, it is in the *Doctor Subtilis*, alias Duns Scotus, that we can find the most systematic treatment of the angelic theory of knowledge. It is the signal merit of S. D. Dumont to have shown that Scotus introduces the distinction between “intuitive cognition, in which a thing is known as present and existing, and abstractive cognition, which abstracts from actual presence and existence” (Dumont 1989) in relation to angelic knowledge. As he goes on to point out, Scotus’ solution to the problem of the “natural,” or *in via* knowledge of the “divine nature” (as opposed to the beatific one), is to be read in contrast to Aquinas’ inasmuch as the latter denied that angels can have distinct knowledge of the divine nature and can hence know God only *per speciem*. As mentioned in passing, since no finite species can represent the infinite, in the absence “of any appeal to species to explain angelic cognition of God, Aquinas held that an angel knows God through its own essence as *imago Dei*” (Dumont 1989, p. 582). Against this view, Scotus argues that angels actually have natural cognition of God, which is “distinct” and *per speciem*. Now, it is precisely in order to explain this possibility that he proposes to distinguish two types of cognition—the *intuitive* and the *abstractive*.

The *cognitio abstractiva* is the kind of knowledge according to which a thing is understood and apprehended “by abstracting from all existence” (*abstrahit ab actuali existentia et non existentia*), while the *cognitio intuitiva* is that in which a thing “is seen in its own existence.” What needs to be emphasized is that here “intuitive” is not opposed to “discursive” and “inferential” (as in Aquinas) but to cognition *per speciem*. As a consequence, and *contra* Aquinas, Scotus holds that angels have distinct cognition of God, yet such cognition is “abstractive” (which does not necessarily mean “inferential”) and not intuitive, “since it is caused not by the divine nature as actually present to the intellect [as in the case of the blessed] but by some properly representing species” (Dumont 1989, p. 583). As in Aquinas, in Scotus, too, angels embody and represent the necessity of finding a middle way, or an intermediate mode of knowledge, between the intuitive access to God in beatitude and the confused mode of cognition of the divine essence available to the *viatores*.

If in Aquinas *intuitus* is opposed to *discursus* (inferential mode of knowledge), here *intuitus* refers to the presence, hence the existence, of the object apprehended without the mediation of a species. It is an immediate form of knowledge that does not require any conceptual mediation; as a consequence, it is always non-discursive and non-inferential. *Abstractiva*, on the contrary, means cognition of an object through a concept (*per speciem*) and independently of its existence. Unlike the intuitive one, the *cognitio abstractiva* can be discursive as well as non-discursive, confused as well as distinct (Scribano 2006, pp. 95–96; for a recent discussion of these issues, see Tropia 2020).

ad omnia quae naturaliter cognoscit. Et cum cognitio principiorum in nobis sit altissimum nostrae scientiae, patet quod in supremo nostrae naturae attingimus quodam modo infimum naturae angelicae ... Unde sicut nos sine discursu principia cognoscimus simplici intuitu, it et angeli omnia quae cognoscunt; unde et intellectuales dicuntur, et habitus principiorum in nobis dicitur intellectus.”

Generally speaking, the distinction between angels and *viatores* (to use Aquinas' term) does not only concern the different nature of their access to God, its mind, and the *rationes* sojourning in it. It is not solely a gnoseological issue regarding their knowledge of the *mens divina*: it is the more general problem of identifying two different and radically "irreducible" types of cognition that regard also the access to material things (as we probably remember, for Aquinas the angels' mind is the one *in quo rerum rationes resplendent*). Angels, unlike the *viatores*, can have cognition of the creation in its own nature not only after God creates it (the so-called *evening knowledge of the angel*), but also before, by directly contemplating it *in verbo Dei* (the so-called *morning knowledge of the angel*).¹¹ In other words: *the angel is the ontological "device" that organizes and re-organizes the field of being, and that of knowledge and its nature*. It produces, at the same time, its articulation and disarticulation. It first "dis-articulates" the field of knowledge by dividing it up, for example, into *intuitio* and *discursu*, *cognitio intuitiva* and *cognitio abstractiva*; it then "re-articulates" it back by organizing cognition as an "ascending" series (*viator*, angel, blessed), which "mirrors" the degree of proximity to God's ontological "perfection."¹²

It is time to return to Husserl now. Indeed, we should not forget that the very concise history of angelology sketched above had the specific function of shedding light on Husserl's own statement to the effect that ideal meanings or species, "though existing nowhere in the 'world,'" do not have being in "a *topos ourantos* or in a divine mind."¹³ Husserl is not trying to be metaphorical, and it would be a real mistake to think and believe otherwise; the passage needs to be taken at face value, and hence read in connection to what Husserl himself exclaims in §36 of the *Prolegomena* while defending the ideal status and nature of logical laws (notably, of "truth"):

What is true is absolutely true, true "in itself"; truth is one and the same, whether humans or non-humans, angels or gods judge and apprehend it. Logical laws speak of truth as an ideal unity, set over and against the real multiplicity of races, individuals and experiences, and it is of this ideal unity that we all speak when we are not confused by relativism (Hua XVIII, p. 125).

The question naturally arises as to the relation between §36 of the *Prolegomena* and §31 of *LU I*. Now, if in the *Prolegomena* (as we will see in the next sections) Husserl had invested all his energy in dismissing the so-called relativistic conception of truth (*pars destruens*), the introduction of the notion of ideality (*pars costruens*) requires Husserl to immediately make clear that this is not to be understood as

¹¹ See Faes de Mottoni (1992a, b), and Suarez-Nani (2002a, pp. 70–75).

¹² "God is the measure of all beings: the more close creatures are to the likeness of God the higher is their being, and the more remote they are from God the lower is their being" (Luscombe 2008, p. 15). As has been also rightly pointed out: "*L'ange est alors le moyen terme ('medium') qui relie l'univers humain à son principe: sur le plan ontologique il assure la continuité qui permet à l'être humain de s'orienter vers l'être et le bien suprême, et sur le plan éthique il offre un modèle de perfection*" (Suarez-Nani 2002b, p. 33).

¹³ This is the more general question that Millán-Puelles (1947, pp. 40–72) calls "*el lugar fenomenológico de la idealidad*."

an attempt to recast the *hyper-ouranios* hypothesis or the doctrine of divine *rationes*. In other words: it should not be mistakenly assimilated to that absurd hypostatization, which is the source of every theory of *gnoseological differentiation* (different types of knowledge¹⁴) mirroring (as in Plato, Augustine, or Aquinas) an *ontological Stufenbau* (different types of being or *bios*).

Let us also mention in passing (for we will elaborate on it presently) that the excerpt from the *Prolegomena* explicitly suggests that, for Husserl, *psychologism*, and in general any and every form of *relativism*, seems to paradoxically belong to the history of angelology. Or, to put it in a much less provocative way: “relativism” represents only the final chapter of, or perhaps just an appendix to, the philosophical history of that absurd metaphysical hypostatization.

2 Lotze’s Angel

Now, to whoever argued that perhaps Husserl was not even aware of such a long “metaphysical” history (which we have barely touched on)—which then should not be relied upon to interpret what Husserl means by “relativism” in a highly metaphorical passage about *Menschen* and *Unmenschen*, *Engel* and *Götter*—the following objection could be raised. Husserl did not need to go back in time through such a long history of metaphysical doctrines; indeed, he had at his disposal a modern thinker with whose philosophical work he was extremely familiar: Hermann Lotze. Given the crucial role that Lotze’s (1874) *Logik* played in his elaboration of the doctrine of “ideality,” Husserl cannot have missed Lotze’s explicit reference to the *Engel* in §§307 and 308.

We are in the third book (*Vom Erkennen*), notably Chapter One, dedicated to the problem for which Lotze’s famous interpretation of Plato’s theory of Ideas (offered in Chapter Two) in terms of validity (*Geltung*) will represent the solution: the problem of “skepticism.” In these paragraphs, Lotze’s main concern is to first introduce and then defend the fundamental principle of his theory of knowledge: “All we know of the external world rests upon the representations [*Vorstellungen*] of it which are within us ... This varied world of representations within us ... forms the sole immediate datum [*Gegebene*] from which alone our knowledge can start with” (§306) (Lotze 1874, p. 481). The principle has to be taken as having an exclusively gnoseological significance, for it does not entail the metaphysical question as to the

¹⁴This expression is borrowed from Husserl, who—in his 1902–1903 lectures on *Allgemeine Erkenntnistheorie*—speaks of “gnoseological relativism” (*erkenntnistheoretischer Relativismus*): “Der Erstere begrenzt die Erkenntnis auf den Menschen überhaupt; aus dem Sinn der Erkenntnis glaubt er schließen zu dürfen, dass sie die Quelle ihrer Geltung im allgemein Menschlichen, in dem, was zum menschlichen Bewusstsein überhaupt gehöre, besitze. Alle logischen Formen haben ihren Ursprung in menschlichen Bewusstseinserscheinungen, also gilt auch die Logik nur für den Menschen. Andere Wesen mögen andere Denkformen haben und demgemäß eine andere Logik” (Hua-Mat III, p. 68).

existence of the external world (which Lotze does not doubt), nor the necessity of deciding between idealism and realism: "it is then entirely indifferent whether with idealism we deny the existence of that world, and take our representations of it as the only reality, or whether we maintain with realism the existence of things outside us, which act on us. On the latter hypothesis as little as the former do things themselves pass into our knowledge; they simply awake in us representations, which are not things" (Lotze 1874, p. 481). If knowledge has to do only and exclusively with *Vorstellungen*, which are "in us" (*die in uns sind*), and never with "the external world," which cannot be held "as the standard by which their truth can be measured," then the question arises how we can discriminate between truth and error in general!¹⁵

What Lotze intends to do in §§307 and 308 is defend what we might call an "immanent" (or, in more twentieth century jargon, a "coherentist") conception of knowledge, according to which truth and falsity can be accounted for in terms of mutual relations and syntheses between representations. The "angel" is first mentioned in §307, and then literally summoned in §308. Lotze's reasoning in these two paragraphs can be divided up into three main steps, the first two being presented in §307 and the third only in §308: while the first step bears only upon "humans" (*Mit-Menschen*), and the second step concerns "human reason as such" (*die menschliche Vernunft überhaupt*), the third step will let our angel finally descend from heaven to illuminate us.

Let us then start off with step 1, and Lotze's general presentation of the problem. Here is a long, very important passage from §307 describing the interaction between two fellow human beings:

Suppose we knew from our own observation that between two representations A and B frequently recurring in our experience the relation Z does not uniformly obtain, but on the contrary varies according to the various relations in which B is found conjoined with M, and F with N. Suppose on the other hand that a fellow human being [*ein anderer unserer Mitmenschen*] lived within a sphere where those conditions exclusively obtain under which the relation Z between our B and F does become a necessity. It will follow that he will never have occasion to doubt the universality of that relation Z, nor will his faith in it prejudice the coherence of the rest of the world of his representations, provided only that Z does not conflict with the universal law of his thought ... We indeed who possess the experience which he lacks are aware of his error, but we can only convince him by taking him out of his more limited circle of experience and transplanting him into a wider one. Then when he himself finds fresh conjunctions of representations arising in himself distinct from those which he formerly experienced, he will allow that he has been in error (Lotze 1874, pp. 482–483).

Lotze sets up the entire problem in terms of interactions between different "circles," or "spheres," of representations: the truth or falsity of *one* connection or circle of representations can be judged or measured exclusively by a *second* and *larger* circle of representations including in itself the former as a part. It is important to

¹⁵ The best presentation and discussion of the historico-philosophical background against which Lotze's gnoseological preoccupation becomes understandable is the one provided by Beiser (2002, pp. 17–214).

notice, however, that Lotze immediately translates the question of the truth or falsity of a series of representations into that of their “certainty” (he speaks of “occasion to doubt” and “faith”) and “universality.” Accordingly, the error or mistake that our fellow human is making amounts to his not seeing (*wir sehen seinen Irrthum*) the wider circle; that is why “we can only convince him by taking him out of his more limited circle of experience and transplanting him into a wider one.” Since this is what we could call a “human-to-human relation of transference” (*Versetzung*), the first step of Lotze’s argument is to be referred to as *inter-human Versetzung*.

At this point, Lotze moves on to briefly discuss what we dubbed step 2. What will happen if now we place, not simply such and such an individual fellow human being, but “human reason in general in the position of this unfavorably situated observer, and imagine it confined to a series of representations, coherent in itself, but not corresponding to the real relations which obtain in a world of things external to it?” (Lotze 1874, p. 483) If in the inter-human *Versetzung* a larger human circle can judge another, more limited human series or circle of representations, how can the totality of the human series of representations (the total sphere of human representations) be judged? Analogous to step 1, we can speak of *extra-human Versetzung*, in which “human reason in general” seems now forced to necessarily rely on something external to it. In sum: if a “first” circle of representations can partially correspond to, and be included within, a larger one, then to what can human reason as such correspond? Would it correspond to the external world?

Setting aside for the moment the instruction which an angel might impart to us, what we find is this: it is certainly not the things themselves that are here making their way all of a sudden into the midst of our thoughts, and laying bare their falsity. Even if the world of things running its independent course [*in ihrem selbständigen Verlauf*] were to enter some day on a new arrangement which diametrically contradicted the conceptions that we had previously formed of it, such contradiction could only come within our observation through the new influences awakening in us a series of representations, which we find no longer to observe those laws of combination which we had hitherto assumed to be their laws. Then we have fallen into one of those errors of the understanding to which we of course allow that we are liable ... We recognize now that we have learnt a new lesson, and that the proposition Z does not possess the universal validity with which we had credited it (Lotze 1874, p. 483).

A series of remarks is necessary. As already announced, our angel has been mentioned, but not yet summoned in person; it will have to wait until §308. Lotze accepts as possible the “hypothesis” that the world could run on an “independent” course, i.e., a course radically different from our (human) overall circle of representations. Yet, as Lotze seems to be suggesting, the purported discrepancy between the world as it “really” is and our representations could only be experienced by us as a series of representations! As in the case of our fellow human being, who indeed can profit from interacting with us, and thereby learn his lesson, so “we (human beings in general) recognize now that we have learnt a new lesson.” If we can show to our *Mit-Mensch* that he is wrong in taking the relation Z to be universal (for it simply “looks” universal to him and his sphere of representations), now we (“human beings in general”) finally know “that the proposition Z does not possess the universal validity with which we had credited it.” Lotze’s strategy is to consider the

extra-human *Versetzung* as just an extreme case of inter-human *Versetzung*. In so doing, Lotze's gnoseologically fundamental and universal principle ("All we know of the external world rests upon the representations of it which are within us") is preserved.

Nevertheless, as Lotze acknowledges at the beginning of §308, "This argument, unless I am much deceived, will satisfy no one" (Lotze 1874, p. 484). The problem of a possible experience of the discrepancy between the "totality of our representations" and things "as they are" needs to be addressed (it cannot be dismissed by simply reducing the latter to a variation on the former). The only way to do it is by resorting to a form of *super-human Versetzung*, in which "human reason in general" is not only confronted with its *negative* outside but with a *positive*—and heterogeneous—mode of cognition. Hence our angel: "Now then let us call in our angel from heaven, who beholds from its pure atmosphere things as they are. What a shock we fancy it would be to us if all at once it withdrew the veil from our eyes, and we saw how entirely different things really are from the manner we had represented them" (Lotze 1874, p. 484). Lotze's argument is in this section long, for he first takes into consideration two possible scenarios that follow from the angelic revelation and then advances the final solution to the problem posed at the outset. As we can already imagine, Lotze's own concern will be, once again, to preserve the universality of his gnoseological principle.

If it were an entirely new world [*eine ganz neue Welt*] that rose upon our view, bearing no resemblance and no connection to that in which we had lived before, we simply would not perceive that everything is different from what we thought: what we mean is that *precisely what* we thought is completely different from the way we thought it. The wholly new spectacle admitting, as it would, of no comparison with the former one ... gives us now no shock at all, pleasurable or otherwise (Lotze 1874, p. 484).

Rather than just the hypothesis of the world "running on a different course," here Lotze speaks of "an entirely new world": the "world" revealed by the angel could turn out to be so different to the point of being "an entirely new world." Yet, such lack of connection between the old and the new world would not affect us in any way whatsoever. This would happen, as Lotze writes, only if there were a relation, thereby a clear sense of contrast, between the two worlds; that is to say, only if the new world were brought "into relation with our previous world of illusions. But again, we who see ought to be the same persons who before were blind." Nevertheless, in this latter hypothesis the purported "new" world would not be new and entirely different from the old one, and we would be simply confronted with a case of extra-human *Versetzung*.

The situation would be completely different if "that moment of revelation had at the same time transformed the laws of our thought [*die Gesetze unseres Denkens*] and altered the conditions under which we had hitherto distinguished truth and error [*Wahrheit und Irrthum*]." The angelic *parousia* could be so shocking to the point of altering the "laws of our thought," and, as a consequence, the distinction itself between "truth and error" that rests thereupon. For the sake of our analysis of Husserl, this is the decisive point: the passage seems to suggest that for Lotze the laws, even the meaning of the distinction itself, of "truth and error" could change,

i.e., there could be different laws of thought and different distinctions between (e.g., “pre-angelic” and “post-angelic”) “truth and error.” Different worlds, different laws of our thought, different distinctions between truth and error: this is what we learn from our angel. Yet, in Lotze’s opinion, this does not really affect the universality of the gnoseological principle.

As Lotze goes on to say, “if our newly discovered world completely answered to these new conditions of truth” then we would have no occasion “to doubt about any particular fact in it; but what could preserve us from the general doubt, whether this new world of representations with all its self-consistency may not in its turn distort the true nature of reality, and things be once more quite different in themselves from that in which this new world they appear to be?” (Lotze 1874, pp. 484–485). Now, what is to be emphasized is that for Lotze the hypothesis that the world of our representations could distort “the true nature of reality” (discrepancy between “representations” and “things”) is a valid one: the problem being the *gnoseological* impossibility of getting access to such “true nature of reality” in the first place!

We must also possess means to arrive at a certain *knowledge* that it is the true one ... But it is impossible to test the truth of the entire world of our representations as such by comparing it with a reality which so long as it is not an object of knowledge is for us a non-present [*nicht vorhanden*] and if once it becomes so must be subject to the doubts and uncertainties to which all representations simply as such are liable (Lotze 1874, p. 485).

The discrepancy between “the world of our representations” and “the true nature of the world” can be only metaphysical, not gnoseological, for, as long as *knowledge is possible*, it bears only and exclusively on the world of those representations that are “within us.” In other words: even if there were a discrepancy between representations and things (and, for Lotze, this can really be the case!), and even if there occurred an alteration of our laws of thought (and this can happen, too!) and thereby of our sense of “truth and error”—in all these possible scenarios, the universality of the gnoseological principle would still hold true and be completely unquestioned. Hence Lotze’s conclusion:

What can be the meaning of saying that this higher intuition, representation, knowledge, gives the thing in itself, as it really is? We may exalt the intelligence of more perfect beings above our own as high as we please; but as long as we desire to attach any rational meaning to it, it must always fall under some category of knowledge [*Wissen*], intuition [*Anschauen*] or cognition [*Erkennen*], that is to say, it will never be the thing itself but always some representation *about* the thing. Nothing is simpler than to convince ourselves that *every* knowing intelligence can only see things as they look to it when it sees them, not as they look when no one perceives them. Those who demand a kind of knowledge that should be more than a perfectly connected and consistent system of representations about the thing, a knowledge that should exhaust the thing in itself, are no longer asking for knowledge at all, but for something entirely unintelligible (Lotze 1874, pp. 485–486).

Quod erat demonstrandum. Here, Lotze is not questioning the possible existence of higher beings and minds; he is only disputing the fact that *knowledge* could be for them about something different than what it is about for us, viz., “some representations.” For example, angels can have a different “system of representations” and a different understanding of “truth and error”; nevertheless, in this case, too,

“cognition” (if we are to attach any rational sense to it!) can only consist in a sphere or circle or coherent system of *representations*. “Truth and error” can be different, but they will still have to be about “some representations” (which of course can vary from kind of being to kind of being, or from species to species) “within us” and not the thing itself. Lotze can thus preserve his gnoseological principle only by *psychologizing* the notion of representation (as something that lies “within us,” or “in us”) and thereby *relativizing* the meaning of “truth and error.” Such is then the function of the *angel*: it confirms the “psychologization” of the concept of *representation*, on whose basis alone the alleged universality of the gnoseological principle can be successfully held on to.¹⁶

As a theoretical device, Lotze's angel is evoked to play two roles: one gnoseological, the other metaphysical.

- (i) Gnoseologically speaking, i.e., from the standpoint of Lotze's theory of knowledge, the angel confirms the universal validity of what might be deemed the “formal” conception of knowledge as being about “representations.”
- (ii) Gnoseologically speaking, the angel confirms that, if knowledge is at all possible, it is because the so-called representations reside “within us.”
- (iii) Gnoseologically speaking, the angel confirms that any “discrepancy” between representations and things (as they really are) can be experienced and known only as a series of representations.
- (iv) Metaphysically speaking, the angel confirms that the world of things can be different from the way in which we have always represented it.
- (v) Metaphysically speaking, the angel confirms that different beings (notably, kinds of being) can have different laws of thought and therefore a different conception of *truth and error*.

Even though the *angelos* no longer occupies an intermediate position between the *viator* and God, it fulfills the function of establishing the relativity of knowledge, of the laws of thought, and of the sense of truth and error.

Without directly naming Lotze, §65 of the *Sixth Logical Investigation* (*Das widersinnige Problem der realen Bedeutung des Logischen*) refers to Chapter Four of the third book of Lotze's (1874) *Logik*, the title of which is “Real and Formal Meaning of the Logical” and the aim of which is to reject as “nonsensical” the question of whether the “world” as it really is can be different from the way we logically “represent” it (this being what Lotze calls the “formal” meaning of the logical):

¹⁶As has been written about Medieval discussions on angels: “Discussions about angels often had the status of thought experiments in which basic problems were posed and discussed under idealized conditions. When asking how angels can have cognition or how they are able to communicate with each other, Medieval philosophers intended to analyze how cognition and communication work in general. The best way to start the exploration was to spell out the necessary conditions in an ideal situation for successful cognitive and communicative processes. For once one had achieved a clear description of all the entities and mechanisms required for these processes under ideal conditions, it was possible to depict their general structure—the very same structure that was also to be found in human beings, albeit under non-ideal conditions” (Perler 2008, p. 144).

The problem, earnestly and profoundly treated by great philosophers, as to the “real or formal meaning of the logical,” is therefore a nonsensical problem. One requires no metaphysical or other theories to explain the agreement of the course of nature and the “innate” regularities of the understanding. Instead of an explanation, one needs only a phenomenological clarification of meaning, thinking and knowing, and of the relevant Ideas and laws (Hua XIX/2, pp. 728–729).

As Husserl goes on to exclaim, a “correlation” with perceivability, intuitability, meanability, and knowability is “inseparable from the sense of being in general.” Accordingly, the “ideal laws” that regulate such correlations can never be set aside by their “contingent content” (as on the contrary assumed by Lotze’s hypothesis of a possible catastrophe, in the literal sense of *kata-strophé*, of the laws of thought, and of the meaning of “truth” and “error”): “But enough of such argumentations,” Husserl concludes, “which merely ring the changes on one and the same position, and have already given us guidance in the *Prolegomena*” (Hua XIX/2, p. 730).

This being recognized, and before we get into a close reading of Husserl’s arguments, it will be interesting and important to recall two texts (one from the *Prolegomena*, another from *LU II*) that support and confirm our hermeneutical hypothesis (namely, the understanding of “relativism” as a chapter in the history of angelology and its metaphysical hypostatization).

3 Benno Erdmann and Husserl’s Angels

In 1925, Husserl starts his famous Freiburg lectures on phenomenological psychology by offering to his students a retrospective overview of the development of his phenomenology from the *Logical Investigations* onward. In section (e) of §3 (“Task and Significance of the Logical Investigations”) (Hua IX, pp. 35–42), we are provided with an account of what the editor of the volume designates as a *transition from a purely descriptive psychology to an a priori (eidetic-intuitive) psychology and its significance for the theory of knowledge*. Husserl’s main concern in these pages is to clarify the a priori “co-relation” (first brought to the surface in the *LU*) between ideal objectivities and different species of subjective *Erlebnisse*; this co-relation being exactly, in Husserl’s own perspective, what differentiates traditional descriptive psychology and eidetic psychology. Traditional psychology, as Husserl remarks, wanted to be and always was “an experiential science of human and animal psychical life [*menschlichen und tierischen Seelenlebens*]” (Hua IX, p. 37). Nevertheless, as Husserl immediately explains, “if one goes back from ideal objectivities to the consciousness which forms them subjectively, then one can soon become convinced that the internal passivities and activities in which they are subjectively formed ... are not empirical contingencies [*empirische Zufälligkeiten*] of human act-living, not contingent factualities [*zufällige Faktizitäten*] which could also be thought otherwise [*anders gedacht werden könnten*]” (Hua IX, pp. 37–38); rather,

it is evident that whenever something like numbers, mathematical multiplicities, propositions, theories, etc., are to become subjectively given, become objects of consciousness in subjective lived experiences, the lived experiences that are needed for that to happen must have their essentially necessary and everywhere identical structure. *In other words, whether we take humans as thinking subjects, or whether we imagine angels or devils or gods, etc., any sort of beings* which count, compute, do mathematics—the counting, mathematizing, internal doing and living is, if the logical-mathematical is to result from it, in a priori necessity everywhere essentially the same. To the a priori of pure logic and pure mathematics itself, this realm of unconditionally necessary and universal truths, there corresponds *correlatively* an a priori of psychic species, i.e., a realm of unconditionally necessary and universal truths referring to the mathematical *lived experiencing* [emphasis added] (Hua IX, p. 38).

This excerpt warrants a few remarks. What Husserl is striving to bring to the fore is not just the co-relation between *Erlebnisse* and ideal objectivities, like the logical or mathematical ones; the point is that such correlation is to be understood and accounted for as a co-relation between two different systems of a priori truth: “the a priori truth of the objects” and “the a priori truth of the corresponding subjective *Erlebnisse*.” *In other words, whether we take humans as thinking subjects, or whether we imagine angels or devils or gods*, the correlation between these two systems of a priori truth is not a contingent fact that could vary and hence be otherwise, depending upon the type of being or *bios* under analysis.¹⁷ The second aspect to be underlined is that the quoted passage, with its emphasis on logical and mathematical objectivities and its appeal to angels or devils or gods, is referring back to a passage in the *Prolegomena* where *angels, mathematics, and logic* are explicitly linked together: it is the famous §40, on Benno Erdmann’s “anthropologism.”

Here, Husserl discusses a specific section from Erdmann’s *Logik*, namely, §60 on “Apodictic and Assertoric Judgments” (Erdmann 1892, pp. 372–382). Erdmann’s concern in this section is to clarify both the significance and role of “necessity” (*Notwendigkeit*) as a “criterion” to discriminate between different types of judgment (viz., “apodictic” and “assertoric”). As he puts it: what is the sense of such necessity [*der Sinn dieser Notwendigkeit*] (Erdmann 1892, p. 375)?

At the beginning of §60, Erdmann wonders whether the “necessity” of what we call “logical principles” (like the Aristotelian “principle of contradiction”) is simply a human necessity, expressing our human ability to think, or a universal and unconditional necessity, binding any and every possible being. As he goes on to write, such necessity would be “unconditional” (*unbedingt*) if the essence of thinking, “which we find in ourselves” (*das wir in uns finden*), were unchangeable and “inalterable” (*ein unveränderliches*), or if the conditions of our thinking (*Bedingungen unseres Denkens*) were at the same time the conditions of any and every possible thinking being.¹⁸ In order to verify whether this is the case, Erdmann invites us to

¹⁷ It is the correlation between what Husserl in *Formal and Transcendental Logic* calls “ontic a priori” and “constitutive a priori” (Hua XVII, p. 190).

¹⁸ “*Unbedingt wäre die so begründete Notwendigkeit der formalen Grundsätze deshalb nur dann, wenn unsere Erkenntnis derselben verbürgte, dass das Wesen des Denken, das wir in uns finden und dadurch sie ausdrücken, ein unveränderliches, oder gar das einzig mögliche Wesen des*

imagine (“zu konstruieren,” in Erdmann’s own language) a “being” (*Wesen*) “different” from us yet nevertheless subject to the same logical laws, principles, and necessity. The being Erdmann has in mind is a “transcendent” one, “an infinite, personal and intelligent being”; it is the “well-known hypothesis” (*altgewohnte Hypothese*) of an intuitive thinking (that is to say, God) (Erdmann 1892, p. 376).¹⁹ Yet, such an attempt, as Erdmann himself points out, is doomed from the outset because of the “limitation” of our own thinking (“*die Einschränkung unseres Denkens auf sich selbst*”): the hypothesis is simply *empty* (*Sein Inhalt bleibt leer*), *out of reach* (*unerreichbar*), and hence “incomprehensible” (*unfassbar*). The essence of our thought cannot outrun its own shadow (Erdmann 1892, p. 375).²⁰

Now, if all logical principles are expressions of our mode of thinking, and if every possible attempt we make to imagine and conceive a being different from us is undermined from the very beginning, does it not mean that *the essence of our own thinking is universal* and that there is no other possible mode of thinking than ours? Erdmann has no doubts and does not hesitate in answering the question in the negative. The hypothesis that our mode of thinking can undergo an “alteration” (*Aenderung*) or “change,” and thereby become totally different, cannot be ruled out (“*Sie besteht trotz alledem*”) (Erdmann 1892, pp. 377–378). Without the angel being summoned, Lotze’s catastrophic hypothesis of a radical *metabolé* of our thought, and thereby of all logical laws, is assumed in all its force: the *katastrophé* of *the essence of our thought* will mean a *katastrophé* of logic. Although our thought is unable to even ascribe sense to the well-known hypothesis of an intuitive thinking, the *catastrophic hypothesis* set forth by Erdmann makes clear that different beings can have different laws of logic, and then different understandings of what truth means. As a consequence, the necessity usually ascribed to logic should be characterized as a “*hypothetical fundamental necessity*” (*hypothetische Grundnotwendigkeit*): logical laws, insofar as they express *the essence of our thought*, are necessary only “as long as” or “on condition” that (*vorausgesetzt*) our mode of thinking remains completely “unaltered” and unchanged (“*Sie gelten allgemein, vorausgesetzt dass unser Denken dasselbe bleibt*”) (Erdmann 1892, p. 378).

As Husserl presents Erdmann’s view: “Erdmann calls them [logical principles] ‘*laws of thought*,’ laws which express the essence of *our human* thinking. He thinks they state the conditions by which all *human* representing [*Vorstellen*] and thinking

Denkens wäre, dass jene Bedingungen unseres Denkens zugleich die Bedingungen jedes möglichen Denkens wären.”

¹⁹ “Diesem anschauenden Denken sollen seine Gegenstände nicht durch ein vom Denken unterscheidbares Vorstellen gegeben werden, das seinerseits wiederum von dem Transscendenten abhängig ist, sondern durch das Denken selbst, das seine Gegenstände durch sich selbst, und zwar zugleich als seiend setzt. Es soll ein Denken sein, das mit dem Vorgestelltwerden seiner Gegenstände so zusammenfällt, wir ihr Vorgestelltwerden mit ihrem Sein.”

²⁰ “Wir wissen jedoch nur von unserem Denken. Ein von dem unseren verschiedenes, also auch ein Denken überhaupt als Gattung zu solchen verschiedenen Arten des Denkens zu konstruieren sind wir nicht im Stande ... Denn jeder Versuch, das, was sie beschreiben, ist an die Bedingungen unseres Vorstellens und Denkens gebunden, bewegt sich in ihrem Kreise.”

[*Denken*] are bound, and that they would change, as he *expressis verbis* says, with a change in human essence" (XVIII, pp. 144–145). Only if we make a *metabasis eis allo genos*—mixing up the realm of psychological laws of thought with those of pure logic—can we also assert our incapacity, as Erdmann actually does, to imagine different “modes of thinking.” Of course, we might be unable to form any “correct representation” of such modes of thinking (like the divine or angelic one), “but such an unachievability in no case amounts to impossibility in the sense of what is absurd and countersensical” (Hua XVIII, p. 150). In other words, the “impossibility” for us to imagine and represent “modes of thinking” different from ours can derive from our psychological (real) inability to do it, yet never from their having a “logic” (logical laws and principles) different from “ours” (Hua-Mat III, p. 38)! Indeed, if the expression “essence of thinking” has to have a sense in a “purely logical context,” it will have to be construed as the “sum total of ideal laws that determine the formal consistency” of any possible thought and essence of thinking (what Husserl calls the “ideal essence of thought” (Hua-Mat III, p. 188)). Were we allowed to rephrase Husserl himself here, we would exclaim that logical thought is nobody’s thought (Hua-Mat III, pp. 33–34; Hua XVII, p. 34). Here appears Husserl’s angel:

Theorems belonging to the theory of Abelian transcendents have no “achievable sense” for babies in arms, or for “babies in mathematics,” as mathematicians jestingly call us laymen. As adults stand to children, as mathematicians stand to us laymen, so a higher species of thinking beings, e.g., of *angels*, *could stand to humans*. Such words and concepts have no conceivable sense for us, since certain peculiarities of our psychical constitution stand in the way. A normal human being takes about five years to understand the theory of Abelian functions or even to grasp its concepts. *It might be the case that a millennium would be needed for a humanly constituted being to grasp angelic functions*, though he can hardly hope to live as long as a century. But such an absolute unattainability, rooted in the natural limits of a specific constitution, would not be the one that absurdities and senseless statements offer [emphasis added] (Hua XVIII, pp. 150–151).

Husserl does not rule out the possibility of different, and higher beings, such as angels, for example; yet, the possible existence of kinds of being or *bios* different from “ours” (which in this context is equivalent to Lotze’s “catastrophic hypothesis,” or to Erdmann’s “alteration” of our thought) does not entail the existence of a different logic, nor of a different conception of *truth and error* (Hua-Mat III, p. 191). As Husserl explains to his Freiburg students 25 years after he wrote the above lines, “whether we take humans as thinking subjects, or whether we imagine angels or devils or gods,” the a priori necessity of the correlation between subjective *Erlebnisse* and (logical or mathematical) “objectivities” holds universally (see also Hua III/1, p. 92; Hua VII, p. 362; see also Hua XVII, pp. 289–290).

4 God and the “Infinite Stupidity”

In §24 of *LU II*, Husserl discusses a doctrine known as *Denkökonomie*, and the interpretation of the general or universal representation (“concept”) as a device for “economizing thought” (Hua XIX/1, p. 171). This is how Husserl introduces the theory in question:

There is an error originating from medieval nominalism that tends to represent general concepts and names *as mere devices* in an economy of thinking, devices that will spare us the individual consideration and naming of all individual things. The function of concepts, it is said, is to enable the thinking spirit to transcend the limits set by the unsurveyable multiplicity of individual singulars; their economization of thinking enable us to reach its goal of knowledge indirectly, as it could never have reached it directly (Hua XIX/1, p. 171).

The presupposition upon which the understanding of concepts as economizing devices rests is the difference between two “types” of knowledge, one able to reach its goal directly and without mediation (“intuitive knowledge” or, as Aquinas would say, without any *species*) and another that can reach its goal only indirectly, i.e., via conceptual and discursive mediation. This difference corresponds, in turn, to the ontological distinction between the infinite spirit (as having a perfect, and hence “ideal,” mode of thinking) and the finite.

The perfection of thought lies doubtless in intuitive, i.e., in “authentic” thinking, in knowledge in which our thought-intention is “satisfied,” as it were, by passing over into intuition ... Certainly we are accustomed to using an all-seeing spirit as a logical ideal [*als logisches Ideal*], but because we quietly add to its all-seeing capacities [*Allerschauen*], capacity for knowing and thinking all [*Allerkennen*]. We imagine this spirit [*Geist*] as one not merely active in mere intuitions, that is to say, in intuitions perhaps adequate but nonetheless conceptually empty [*gedankenleeren*], but also casting these intuitions into categorial forms and combining them synthetically, and finding in such formed, combined intuitions the ultimate fulfillment of its thought-intentions, thereby realizing the ideal of all-inclusive knowledge. We shall, therefore, have to say: not bare intuition, but adequate, categorially formed intuitions, completely accommodated to thought, or conversely, thought that draws its evidence from intuition, constitute the goal of true knowledge (Hua XIX/1, pp. 172–173).

If there is such a thing as a “logical ideal” of knowledge (historically identified with that infinite and perfect being known as God), it cannot be a higher form of cognition different from the lower type of knowledge characterizing the *viatores*. The logical ideal of knowledge is not the expression of a perfect being, to whose (ontological and gnoseological) “perfection” the entire *Stufenbau* of the universe (with all its different levels of knowledge, as well as material and immaterial beings) tends and aspires; the logical ideal of knowledge is the expression of the only *idea* of knowledge: “not bare intuition” (this being the type of knowledge that only God would possess), but “categorially formed intuitions,” or “thought that draws its evidence from intuition” (see Hua-Mat III, p. 173).

As Husserl remarks in his 1903 review of Heinrich Gomperz’s *Zur Psychologie der logischen Grundtatsachen*, the “intellectual ideal” of the divine thinking

[*göttliches Denken*²¹] is nothing else but the result of a defective and insufficient descriptive analysis of “intellectual” *Erlebnisse*, notably of the distinction between “intuitive” and “symbolic,” “sensuous” and “categorical” experience (Hua XXII, p. 211). As Husserl harshly comments, the so-called “divine thinking” is “no thinking” at all (*Dieses göttliche Denken ist kein Denken mehr*) (Hua XXII, p. 210), for it is nothing else but the idea of “a blind intuition” (*ein blindes Anschauen*) completely unable to understand the purported object of its allegedly perfect vision.²² He goes on to rhetorically ask:

Is not the specific ideal of an infinite wisdom just the ideal of an infinite stupidity [*unendlichen Dummheit*], which sees everything and yet understands and knows nothing at all? (Hua XXII, pp. 210–211).

As it should be evident, Husserl does not deny the possible existence of a higher being such as the one usually referred to as “God”: what is being dismissed is the idea that to such an ontologically different entity corresponds a different, higher, and more perfect concept of knowledge (i.e., direct and intuitive rather than indirect and discursive), or a different logic as an expression of its different mode of thinking.

The entire reasoning does not bear on the existence or non-existence of God (which is completely immaterial), but only upon the structure of thinking and knowledge²³: if there were such a being as the infinite one usually designated as

²¹ See the corresponding passage in Gomperz (1897, p. 7): “*Die Gottheit hat hier neben ihrer theologischen auch eine typische Bedeutung, und zwar in doppelter Richtung. Sie stellt das Ideal einer mit vollkommener Erkenntnis begabten, und eines völlig unsocialen, isolierten Wesen. (...) Ein solches Ideal ist für uns Menschen unerreichbar.*”

²² Similar points can be found in Husserl’s 1897 review of Heinrich Rickert, *Zur Theorie der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung* (Hua XXII, pp. 145–147). See the remarks by Leclercq (2015, pp. 76–81). See also Hua XXXVI, pp. 66–67, and Hua-Mat IX, pp. 206–207, on the Kantian distinction between *intellectus archetypus* and *ectypus*. Indeed, for Husserl the principle that different kinds of being have different kinds of cognition fully applies to Kant too; in this respect, two important texts are the *Beilage XV* (*Kant und Hume. Einwände gegen Kants Problem der synthetischen Urteile a priori und gegen das Schema seiner Lösung* [Hua VII, pp. 350–356]) and *XVI* (*Gegen Kants anthropologische Theorie*) (Hua VII, pp. 357–364) to *Husserliana VII*. Husserl explicitly accuses Kant of “anthropologism” (the pure forms of sensibility and the categories being nothing else but “human” forms and faculties), and writes: “*Denn dann gilt die reine Arithmetik, z.B. der Satz, daß $2 \times 2 = 4$ ist, und konsequenterweise auch die ganze reine Logik und endlich jede Aussage adäquater innerer Wahrnehmung nur für uns, und für anders konstituierte Wesen mögen all diese Wahrheiten falsch sein*” (Hua VII, p. 355). See for example the remarks by Kern (1964), §9a; by Di Pinto (1988), III.4; and the important research by Pradelle (2012). It would be interesting to spend some time on the difference between Husserl’s own approach to the Kantian distinction between *intellectus archetypus* and *ectypus* and Heidegger’s. Indeed, while Heidegger takes that distinction to express Kant’s metaphysical interest in the problem of finitude (he speaks of the *Klärung des Wesens der Endlichkeit* on the part of Kant), Husserl would consider it as the result of an insufficient analysis of knowledge. Here is Heidegger: “*Der Quellgrund für die Grundlegung der Metaphysik ist die menschliche Vernunft, so zwar, daß für den Kern dieser Grundlegungsproblematik gerade die Menschlichkeit der Vernunft, d.h., ihre Endlichkeit wesentlich ist*” (Heidegger 1991, p. 21).

²³ “*Beliebt es uns, den Gedanken ‘psychischer Wesen,’ ‘menschlicher Bewusstsein’ und ‘übermenschlicher’ hereinanzuziehen, so haben wir eben den mehr oder minder vagen Gedanken eines*

“God,” and if it were to acquire knowledge about the world, it too would be subject to the same a priori correlations, to the same “logical” laws, principles, and necessity²⁴ (see Hua III/1, p. 89; also Hua XXXVI, pp. 93–95, p. 104). Different beings and kinds of *bioi*—be they the consequence of the *kata-strophé* of the *essence of our thought* or characterizing a higher or more perfect being (whether “immaterial and finite” like angels, or “immaterial and infinite” like God)—imply neither a different logic nor the relativity of truth and error.

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Bewusstseins, in dem solche kategorialen Akte vorkommen und vorkommen können und daneben noch wer weiß was für Akte. Soweit ein Wesen aber kategoriale Akte hat, soweit gehören zu ihm die kategorialen Gesetze als Gesetze seiner allgemeinen Artung, und sie gehören zu ihm wie zu jedem anderen Wesen, das ebenfalls diese Akte hat” (Hua-Mat III, p. 192).

²⁴“Es wäre hier spielerisch und prinzipielle verkehrt, den Gedanken einer bedauerlichen Beschränktheit der menschlichen Erkenntnis hereinzuziehen. Appellieren wir an die Idee, die einen bedeutsamen Grenzbegriff der Erkenntnistheorie darstellt, an die Idee einer absolut vollkommenen, einer ‘göttlichen’ Erkenntnis, an die Idee—das heißt, wir machen hier keine Voraussetzung, es existiere Gott—dann ist es evident klar, daß auch für eine absolut vollkommene Erkenntnis, für einen Gott, die Frage nach dem Sinn der Erkenntnis eine vernünftigen Sinn hat und daß auch für einen Gott die Lösung des Erkenntnisproblem nur in einer sich auf sich selbst zurückbeziehenden Erkenntniskritik bestehen würde, also in einer von ihrem eigenen Zweifel zunächst mitbetroffenen Erkenntnisreihe sich vollziehen würde” (Hua XXIV, pp. 193–194).

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1 Psychologism and Relativism

When Husserl introduces the issue of “psychologism” in §17 of the *Prolegomena*, the theme under scrutiny is a very specific and circumscribed one, namely, “the disputed question as to the relation between psychology and logic” (Hua XVIII, p. 63). According to what Husserl dubs the *dominant tendency of our time*, “the essential theoretical foundations of logic lie in psychology, in whose field those propositions belong ... and that give logic its characteristic pattern. Logic is related to psychology just as any branch of chemical technology is related to chemistry, and land-surveying is to geometry, etc.”¹ Of course, this is not yet a definition of psychologism, but a mere presentation of the framework (i.e., the foundational relation between psychology and logic) within which that problem will be addressed and eventually dismissed. Now, the topic of this section is twofold: after a brief discussion of Husserl’s account of “psychologism,” we will strive to make the case for considering it as a mere variation on the more general notion of “relativism” (which is the ultimate target of Husserl’s analysis) and its misinterpretation of “truth.” In other words: we will be claiming that the *bellum omnium contra omnes* (Hua XVIII, p. 20)—which is presented first as the consequence of a confusion of fields of heterogeneous sciences such as logic and psychology²—ultimately revolves around *the ideal character of truth as such*, regardless of any differentiation in *vérités de raison* and *vérités de fait* (§39), or between *relations of ideas* and *matters of fact*. More plainly, *truth is in itself, and by definition, “ideal,”* and this is what “relativism”—and that specific variation thereupon called psychologism—ignores. The subtitle of

¹For a general introduction to the historical context, see the essays published in Poggi (2002).

²As has been said, “*O psicologismo é justamente um exemplo de redução à unidade de domínios de fundamentação essencialmente distintos*” (Ferrer 2008, p. 83).

Husserl's *Prolegomena* should hence read *Quaestio de Veritate*, or, to employ a more outdated phrase, *Peri Aletheias*.

How does Husserl define "psychologism"? In what does "psychologism" consist? Let us start off by considering a series of excerpts that explicitly address these two questions. A straightforward answer is offered in §22, where we can read: "The psychologistic logicians ignore the fundamental, essential and eternally unbridgeable distinction between ideal and real laws, between normative and causal regulation, between logical and real necessity, logical and real ground" (Hua XVIII, pp. 79–80). "Psychologism" is not simply or primarily a thesis or a series of theses stating the foundational role of psychology vis-à-vis logic: indeed, such a foundational claim is the consequence of the denial of what Husserl refers to as the "eternally unbridgeable" distinction between "ideality" and "reality," or, more specifically, between the "ideal laws" of logic and the "real laws" of psychology. Only if we deny or ignore the *ewig* distinction" can we state that the empirical study of "real" phenomena ("psychical acts") theoretically grounds the study of "logical formations," and hence psychology and logic (we shall soon see how Husserl understands this relation). It is clear that the two claims ("denial of the *ewig* distinction between ideality and reality" and "the empirical study of 'real' phenomena grounds the study of 'logical formations'") are neither equivalent nor co-extensive: whereas the latter necessarily includes the former in itself (i.e., psychologism would not be possible without the denial of the *ewig* distinction), the reverse does not hold true, for the denial of the *ewig* distinction could take on different forms. It will be the task of the late Husserl to study the genesis of psychologism: if the *Prolegomena* offer a full-fledged "diagnosis" of psychologism (of its errors as well as self-contradictory implications), their etiology is still quite partial.³

Consider the following excerpts now:

It seems that certain ready confusions have here opened the way to psychologistic errors. Logical laws have first been confused with the judgments, in the sense of acts of judgment, in which we may know them: *the laws, as "contents of judgment"* have been confused with the *judgments themselves*. The latter are real events, having causes and effects (Hua XVIII, p. 77, §22).

With understandable ease a second confusion is added: we confuse a law *as a term of causation* with a law *as the term as the rule of causation* (Hua XVIII, p. 77, §22).

Such absurdities are unavoidable if the fundamental distinction between ideal and real objects, and the corresponding distinction between ideal and real laws, is disregarded or misunderstood. We shall see repeatedly how this distinction settles the disputes that divide psychologistic logic from pure logic (Hua XVIII, p. 87, §24).

If the denial of the *ewig* distinction between "ideality" and "reality" (upon which that between ideal and real objects is only a variation) can be taken as the necessary presupposition of psychologism, the confusion or denial of the distinction between "judgment" as the objective correlate of our acts and "judgment" as the subjective

³We are of course referring to the genealogy of psychologism put forward by Husserl, for example, in Section II of *Krisis*, notably §§18 and 22, and in *Formale und transzendente Logik*, Section II, Chapter 1 (§§55–68) and §93.

act of judging represents the distinctive mark of psychologism.⁴ Indeed, it is only after we deny or refuse to acknowledge the *ewig* distinction between judgments as *ideal correlates* and our *real* and *subjective acts* of judging that we can assert that the “laws” ruling over our subjective acts (psychology) determine those regulating logical formations (logic).⁵

Psychologism, i.e., psychologistic logic, is the thesis stating the foundational role of that specific science called “psychology” vis-à-vis that other specific science called “logic.” Now, psychologism (as is presented, discussed, and dismissed in the *Prolegomena*) is possible if and only if we deny both the general *ewig* distinction between “ideality” and “reality” and that between judgment as an objective content and as a subjective act of judging: they are both necessary because psychology (as is discussed in the *Prolegomena*) is exclusively an empirical science, a science bearing on matters of fact (to employ the language of *Ideen I*) and not pure psychology (which the mature Husserl will understand as the eidetic science of the psyche⁶). For the sake of our interpretation, it may be stated that if the disregard of the *ewig* distinction in general is an *ontological* claim (i.e., bearing upon the distinction between different kinds of being—“real being” and “ideal being”) then the confusion of the distinction between judgments as subjective formations and judgments as objective correlates is an *epistemological* thesis. Let us be clear. For, if the latter yields what psychologistic logic as a “science” is about, i.e., its peculiar subject matter (“logical formations” as title for “psychological acts”), the former determines the factual character of those psychological acts (i.e., “factual” subjective acts), hence the nature itself of the corresponding theoretical investigation (“empirical psychology”). It is precisely by disregarding the ontological distinction between ideal and real being that one can also argue that the subject matter of logic falls completely

⁴“Aber Erlebnis des Vorstellens, oder kurzweg Vorstellung, ist nicht Begriff, Urteil ist nicht Satz oder Wahrheit, Schließen ist nicht Schluss, Beweisen ist nicht Beweis” (Hua-Mat III, p. 17).

⁵“Our main concern here is the *equating of the formations produced by judging* (and then, naturally, of all similar formations produced by rational acts of any sort) *with phenomena appearing in internal experience*. This equating is based on their making their appearance ‘internally,’ in the act-consciousness itself. Thus concepts, judgments, arguments, proofs, theories, would be psychic occurrences; and logic would be, as John Stuart Mill, said it is, a ‘part, or branch of psychology’” (Hua XVII, p. 162). It is in §65 that Husserl provides what he calls “a more general concept of psychologism”: “Psychologism in this sense is to be distinguished by the circumstance that some species or other of possibly evident objectivities ... are *psychologized*, because, as is obvious, they are constituted in the manner peculiar to consciousness; that is to say: their being-sense is built up, in and for subjectivity, by experience or other modes of consciousness that combine with experience. That they are ‘psychologized’ means that their objective sense, their *sense as a species of objects* having a peculiar essence, is *denied* in favor of the subjective experience, the data in immanent or psychological temporality” (Hua XVII, pp. 177–178).

⁶That is why we should take *cum grano salis* Husserl’s claim that “Logic is related to psychology just as any branch of chemical technology is related to chemistry, and land-surveying is to geometry, etc.” This passage is only meant to underline psychology’s foundational role vis-à-vis logic: for, if Husserl takes psychology to be an “empirical” science of real phenomena, geometry is by contrast an “ideal” science or, to use the terminology of *Ideen I*, an eidetic one.

and without rest under the factual domain of psychology and its empirical method: hence, “psychologistic logic.”⁷

What we are confronted with is a series of theses bearing upon both “psychology” and “logic” at the same time. First, let us take the “ontological claim”: the consequence of the denial of the *ewig* distinction between ideality and reality is, (i) with respect to logic, the very denial of the possible *ideality* of “judgments” as objective correlates of our own acts of judging, and, (i’) with respect to psychology, the assertion of the *reality* of the phenomena it is about (which contributes to securing psychology as an “empirical” science). Next, let us take the “epistemological claim”: the consequence of the confusion of the distinction between judgments as objective correlates and as subjective acts is, (ii) with respect to logic, the dismissal of its nature as a self-sufficient theoretical science (its subject matter being stripped of autonomy), and, (ii’) with respect to psychology, the establishment of its foundational role.

The expression “psychologistic logic” bears not only upon the nature of logical formations (e.g., a *Barbara* syllogism or the Aristotelian *arkhè bebaiotate*), but first and foremost upon the status of psychology as an empirical science of that real phenomenon called “psyche.”

Now, to resort to Husserl’s language, what are the *empiricistic consequences of psychologism*?⁸

Chapter Four elaborates on three main consequences deriving from the understanding of the laws of thought as “natural laws” characterizing “our spirit [*Geist*] as a thinking one” (Hua XVIII, p. 76). As Husserl himself introduces this subject:

Let us place ourselves for the moment on the ground of the psychologistic logic, and let us assume therefore that the essential theoretical foundations of the prescriptions of logic lie in psychology. However the latter discipline may be defined—i.e., as the science of psychic phenomena, of the facts of consciousness, of the facts of internal experience, of the *Erlebnisse* in their dependence on the experiencing individual, or whatever—it is universally agreed that psychology is a factual, and hence an experiential science (Hua XVIII, p. 72).

The three main consequences can be divided into two main groups, the first one (including the first two consequences) bearing upon the nature of logical laws and the second one concerning the content of the laws of logic understood as an *Existenz* (i.e., *Existenz von Psychischem*).

Let us start off with the latter. As Husserl points out at the beginning of §23, “if the laws of logic have their epistemological source in psychological matters of fact [*Tatsächlichkeiten*] ... they must be psychological in content, both by being laws for the psyche, and also by presupposing its existence” (Hua XVIII, p. 80). Logical laws, or the laws of thought have a factual “content” or *Gehalt*⁹ (as Husserl calls it)

⁷“*le psychologisme présuppose une théorie de l’être*,” as framed by Levinas (1930, p. 18).

⁸See also Hua-Mat III, pp. 20–22.

⁹As Husserl will contend once again in 1902–1903: “*Wären die logischen Gesetze psychologische, oder wären sie aus psychologischen Gesetzen, gleichgültig wie, abgeleitete Regeln, dann müssten sie einen empirisch psychologischen Gehalt implizieren*” (Hua-Mat III, 24–25).

in two ways: they are laws *for* the psyche and they presuppose its *existence*: “Psychical matters of fact would be the matters regulated, and their existence would be presupposed in the grounding of such laws” (Hua XVIII, p. 81).¹⁰ These two aspects, although related, should not be confused: for, it is precisely such a twofold sense of the “factual content” of the laws of logic that will enable Husserl to dismiss the normative conception of logic as a form of psychologism. In fact, even if in the so-called normative understanding the laws of logic cannot be said to be *for* the psyche, they nevertheless “posit” or “presuppose” its factual existence.¹¹

Let us now take the other two consequences of psychologism. If, as Husserl writes, “psychological laws lack exactness, the same must be true of the prescriptions of logic,” which then turn out to be “merely empirical,” or “approximate laws” (Hua XVIII, pp. 72–73). Secondly, since natural laws can be justified only by induction from singular facts of experience, and since induction only establishes “the greater or lesser probability of the law,” then also logical laws will “rank as mere probabilities” (Hua XVIII, p. 73). If logical laws are merely empirical, and express nothing else but probabilities, it is because their content is factual. The problem is not simply the natural or naturalistic character that the laws of logic display once they are reduced to mere “titles” for “psychological acts” but the relation between the laws of logic and the *existence of the psychical* which they presuppose and upon which they are based. If the content of the laws of logic is the *existence of the*

¹⁰ This twofold aspect lies at the very center of Xavier Zubiri’s analysis of the *Prolegomena* in Zubiri (1999, p. 4): “*La expresión [i.e., the psychologistic definition of logic] es equívoca porque se puede ver ahí la afirmación de que la lógica tiene un contenido material puramente psíquico, o bien la afirmación de la relatividad de las leyes lógicas en relación con la conciencia humana.*”

¹¹ As a consequence, Husserlian “psychologism” would also include what Robert Hanna has recently labeled “logical cognitivism.” Let us read Hanna and see what exactly he means by that: “At this point you are no doubt asking yourself this highly relevant critical question: Is logical cognitivism ultimately a form of psychologism? My answer is that it depends on what one means by the word ‘psychologism.’ If we are being historically precise and take psychologism to be the view that logic is explanatorily reducible to empirical psychology then logical cognitivism is most definitely *not* a form of psychologism, since psychologism entails scientific naturalism whereas logical cognitivism assumes the denial of scientific naturalism and is nonreductive. Nevertheless, if we allow ourselves a temporary historical imprecision, and for the moment take psychologism to be any theory that asserts an essential connection between the logical and the psychological, then we can say that logical cognitivism is indeed a form of psychologism” (Hanna 2006, p. 27). Let us immediately say that the perspective Hanna refers to as “the view that logic is explanatorily reducible to empirical psychology” perfectly corresponds to what Husserl himself means by psychology as having a foundational role vis-à-vis logic. The point to be emphasized is that the second meaning Hanna attaches to the term “psychologism” is not as historically imprecise as he takes it to be: indeed, as long as the logical cognitivist asserts a relation between logic and psychology in the manner spoken of by Hanna (“an essential connection between the logical and the psychological”), he has to assume that logical laws have a “factual *Gehalt*,” that is, that even if logical laws are not *for* the psyche, the latter does nevertheless represent their “content.” For Husserl, this means two different yet related things: one, a misunderstanding of the content of logical laws and propositions (what Husserl calls “ideal forms,” or “formal essences” (Hua III/1, p. 9)); second, the denial of the distinction between logic as a “theoretical” science and as an “applied” or practical science (i.e., the normative understanding of logic as the science of correct thinking).

psychical, e.g., a specific (human) psyche, then the existence of a different psyche (e.g., Lotze's *katastrophé of the essence of our thought*, or Erdmann's) will entail "different" laws of logic. Interpreters and commentators have almost always exclusively focused on the first aspect, that is, on the naturalistic misunderstanding of the laws of logic that always goes hand in hand with psychologism (and with the misunderstanding of *Verstand*, *Vernunft*, *Bewusstsein* in *natürlichen Sinn* (Hua XVIII, p. 131)). On the contrary, it is the second aspect (i.e., the determination of the *content* of the laws of logic as an *existence*) that gives Husserl the possibility of dismissing forms of psychologism (like the normative one¹²) that do not seem to imply any naturalization of the logical laws. Moreover, this also gives Husserl the opportunity of identifying two different—similar though not equivalent—misunderstandings of the "scientific" character of logic.

To sum up: what Husserl calls the *empiricistic consequences of psychologism* amount, first, to determining the "content" of the laws of logic as an "existence," and, second, to characterizing them as merely "approximate" and "probable" laws (just like the laws of psychology).

It is in Chapter Seven (to which §24 refers) that Husserl elaborates on the *skeptical and relativistic contradiction* implied by this conception. Husserl understands what he calls "relativism" as a genus and psychologism as a *differentia specifica*. Without getting into the difference between individual and specific relativism (introduced in §34 and elaborated on in §§35 and 36), let us recall what Husserl's "preliminary" definition of the relativistic conception of truth. By rephrasing Protagoras (πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον ἐστὶν ἄνθρωπος), Husserl points out: "We could therefore also opt for the formula 'all truth (and knowledge) is relative—relative to the contingently judging *subject*.' If, however, instead of such a subject, we make some contingent *species* of judging being the pivot of our relations, we achieve a new form of relativism" (Hua XVIII, p. 122). If relativism can be accounted for as the relativity of truth to a "contingently judging *subject*," then different species of relativism can be provided by varying such a subject; to put it differently: the "contingently judging *subject*" is the variable whose value brings about such and such a specific form of relativism. In Husserl's example, if the value of the variable is the "human species as such," then what we obtain is "anthropocentrism."¹³

In other words, and to sound a little more provocative: tell me what kind of "contingently judging *subject*" you have in mind and I will tell you what kind of "relativist" you are. Were we allowed to resort to Protagoras—"All truth (and knowledge)

¹² See the interesting essay by Kusch (1994, pp. 51–83).

¹³ "Human being *as such* is the measure of all human truth. Every judgment whose roots are to be found in what is *specific* to human beings, in the constitutive laws of humans as a species—is a true judgment, for us human beings. To the extent that such judgments belong to the form of common human subjectivity (of 'human consciousness' in general), the term 'subjectivism' is in place here too (in talk of the subject as the ultimate source of cognition, etc.). It is best to employ the term 'relativism,' and to distinguish between *individual* and *specific* relativism. The restriction of the latter to the human species stamps it as *anthropologism*" (Hua XVIII, p. 122).

is relative to the contingently judging *subject*”—we would replace *anthropos* with an *x* (standing for *contingently judging subject*) and thereby frame the general formula for any possible type of relativism:

τῶν ἀληθειῶν μέτρον ἔστιν (x)

Now, unlike traditional angelology, relativism does not assume the existence of a logical ideal of cognition or of a being to whose “perfection” the entire *Stufenbau* of the universe (with its different levels of knowledge, as well as material and immaterial beings) aspires. No angels nor demons or gods. The *angelos* is no longer necessary to “mediate” (gnoseologically and ontologically) between the *viator* and God; with Rilke, relativism can lament: *Wer, wenn ich schrie, hörte mich denn aus der Engel Ordnungen?* (R. M. Rilke, *Duineser Elegien*, “Die erste Elegie,” 1–2). The history of the “absurd hypostatization” seems to have no application here. Yet, Husserl quite explicitly relates the two. Indeed, they embody the same conception according to which different species of being have different kinds of cognition, thereby implying a different logic and a different understanding of that for which *truth and error* stand. As a “gnoseological device,” the angel, whose catastrophic *parousia* enabled Lotze to assert the relativity of the distinction between *truth and error*, has left once and for all and its place is that of an “empty variable” now.

Such is relativism: the final chapter in the history of the “absurd metaphysical hypostatization”; that is, the chapter in which, the angels having departed, what is left is only the real multiplicity of races, individuals, psyches, cultures, and the like. Relativism is nothing else but “a gigantomachy around a void”: a multiplicity of *contingently judging subjects* occupying—one at a time—the empty “x.” As we should remember, 25 years after the *Prolegomena* Husserl exclaimed, in front of his Freiburg students, “whether we take humans as thinking subjects, or whether we imagine angels or devils or gods,” the *a priori* necessity of the “correlation” between *Erlebnisse* and (logical and mathematical) objectivities universally holds. By the same token, Husserl might as well have said that: “whether we take such and such a species of individuals as thinking subjects, or whether we imagine such and such a type of psyche, culture, or race,” the *a priori* necessity of the correlation between *Erlebnisse* and (logical and mathematical) objectivities universally holds.

It is of course in relation to the “theme” of the *Prolegomena*, i.e., logic and logical principles, that Husserl goes on to elaborate on the consequences of relativism as “anthropologism”: “Modern and recent philosophy leans, however, so strongly towards specific relativism, and in particular, towards anthropologism, that it is quite rare to encounter a thinker free from the taint of such wrong doctrine” (Hua XVIII, p. 124). Let us then turn to §36, where Husserl comments upon a series of implications. More clearly: after having worked out the empiricistic consequences of psychologism, and thus understood the latter as a variation upon “relativism,” Husserl is now going to bring to the fore the “contradictory” consequences of “anthropologism” (according to which the very content of the laws of logic is the human “psyche” or “mind” posited as an existent).

The first one bears on the notions of “true” and “false.” Indeed, relativism claims that whatever is “true” is true “for a given species of judging beings [*jede Spezies urteilender Wesen*]” because it is determined “by their constitution and laws of thought”: “This doctrine is absurd. For it is part of its sense that the same judgment-content [*Urteilsinhalt*] (proposition) can be true for a subject of the species *homo*, but may be false for another subject of a differently constituted species. The same content of judgment cannot, however, be both true and false” (Hua XVIII, p. 124). Now, we could replace *homo* with any “contingently judging subject,” thereby obtaining different variations on this very same argument. For example, one could maintain that a proposition is true for a species or kind of beings (Aquinas’ *viator*) and false for a different species of thinking being (a finite and purely spiritual being, or God). It is “absurd” to speak of a “truth” that would be at the same time “false.” It is important to stress the use of the term *Widersinn*, “absurdity”: Husserl does not hold that such a theory would be “false,” but contradictory to the very “essence” of truth.

The second implication is a sort of further elaboration and variation on the one just discussed. Let us read the following long excerpt:

If the relativist says that there could be beings not bound by these principles [principles of contradiction or excluded middle]—this assertion being easily seen as equivalent to the relativistic formula stated above—they *either* mean that there could be propositions or truths, in the judgments of such beings, which do not conform to those principles, *or* they think that the course of judgment of such beings is not *psychologically* regulated by these principles. If they mean the latter, the doctrine is at all peculiar, since we ourselves are such beings ... But if they mean the former, we may simply reply: Either such beings understand the words “true” and “false” in our sense, in which case it is irrational to speak of logical principles not holding, since they pertain to the mere sense of these words as understood by us ... Alternatively, such beings use the words “true” and “false” in some different sense, and the whole dispute is then one of words (Hua XVIII, pp. 125–126).

Such a completely different sense could refer, for example, to what Husserl—by implicitly hinting at Lotze’s expression “circle of representations”—labels “the circle of truths” (*den Umkreis von Wahrheiten*), to which the type of contingent beings under consideration has actual access.

Now, the “constitution of a species is a fact,” and since “from a fact it is only possible to derive other facts,” if we base “truth” relativistically on the constitution and makeup of a species (or of any kind of beings whatsoever), then we end up assigning to it a “factual” character (*den Charakter der Tatsache*) (Hua XVIII, p. 126). By this latter argument, Husserl is making three different points. First, he is hinting at the “ideal” nature of truth; second, he is relying on and recasting the distinction between judgment *qua* “ideal” content and *qua* “real” act; third, he is dismissing the very notion of *deducing*¹⁴ the ideal conditions of truth from facts (e.g.,

¹⁴“Die bisherigen Kritiken sind mehr als ausreichend, um die grundsätzliche Irrigkeit der psychologischen Lehre zu erkennen. Es war für uns aber von großer Wichtigkeit, in diese Kritik mit einiger Ausführlichkeit einzutreten, weil es sich hier um eine nahezu allgemeine Verirrung handelt und weil die vorliegende Streitfrage, wie ich schon betont habe, nicht bloß für die Abgrenzung zwischen Logik und Erkenntnistheorie, sondern auch für die Erkenntnistheorie in sich selbst von

from a specific constitution or makeup). In other words, as Husserl explains in §38, one can define or characterize “relativism” in general (and all its specifications) as the attempt to derive truth from a fact (or a system of facts). In §36, Husserl presents relativism (in relation to logic) as the doctrine that derives “the pure principle of logic from facts. Facts are ‘contingent’ [*zufällig*]: they might very well not have been the case; they might have been different. If the facts then differ, logical principles also differ; they will also be contingent, with a being *relative* to the facts on which they are founded” (Hua XVIII, p. 129).

In sum: if logic—as a science—spells out those principles (such as the principle of contradiction or excluded middle) that bound any and every possible truth, and if—the relativist contends—the “content” of such principles is the human psyche as a contingent fact, then one can easily surmise that the truth those principles determine is only a human truth, which—as such—is thereby assigned a *factual character* (for it will change as the “content” of those principles turn out to be otherwise).

This is what Husserl means by the idea of “deducing” *the ideal conditions of truth* from facts.

This provides us with a further characterization of relativism. In addition to the original account as the relativity of truth to a “contingently judging subject,” relativism is the denial of the ideal nature of truth, or, alternatively, the deduction or derivation (*ableiten*) of truth from facts (in the sense just described). That is why Husserl goes on to explain that if “truth” has its source in a specific factual constitution then “if there were no such constitution, there would be no truth” (Hua XVIII, p. 126). Yet, such a claim connects “an antecedent having a coherent (‘logically possible’) sense with an absurd (‘logically impossible’) consequent.” Now, the “logically possible” *protasis* is the clause expressed by “if there were no such constitution”; the “logically impossible” *apodosis* is that “there would be no truth.” As Husserl explains, by showing the self-contradictory implication of the claim, that would boil down to asserting that “there exists the truth that ‘there are no truths,’” or that “it is true that ‘there is no truth.’” The self-contradiction implied by any sort of relativism would consist in claiming that “if there were no such constitution, or contingently judging subject (= the ‘logically possible *protasis*’), it would be true that there is no truth at all (= the ‘logically impossible,’ or self-contradictory *apodosis*).” For, this conclusion rests on, and presupposes logical principles that are themselves based upon the existence of such “constitution.” The argument should not be just read in terms of the “traditional” (performative) self-contradiction to which skepticism in general falls prey (already pointed to by Aristotle, Sextus Empiricus, and J. H. Lambert¹⁵): the core of Husserl’s argument consisting in the assertion of the irreducibility of the ideal character of truth.

fundamentaler Bedeutung ist. Mit Sicherheit können wir also aussagen, die reine Logik, jener Inbegriff aller wichtigster von der Idee der Logik unbrennbarer Sätze, die in der Lehre von den Urteils- und Schlussformen u.dgl. behandelt werden, hat keinen psychologischen Charakter; es (sind) nicht empirisch psychologische Gesetze des Denkens und aus empirisch psychologischen in keiner Weise ableitbare” (Hua-Mat III, p. 38).

¹⁵Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1012a 29-1012b 31; Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Logicians*, II, 55;

Moreover, and this is the last consequence Husserl draws from relativism, “the relativity of truth entails the relativity of the existence of the world [*Weltexistenz*]”: “Indeed, the world is merely the unified objective totality corresponding to, and inseparable from, the ideal system of factual truth. One cannot subjectivize truth and allow its object (which only exists as long as truth exists) to count as an absolutely valid entity [*seiend gelten*] (an entity ‘in itself’). There would therefore be no world ‘in itself,’ but only a world for us, or for any other chance species of being” (Hua XVIII, p. 128).

Even if it is tempting to interpret the dichotomy *world in itself* and *world for us* as an anticipation of the later distinction between the one objective *world* and the many *Um-Welten* (each of which is the correlate of a monadic or inter-monadic subjectivity), we better refrain from making such a hermeneutically hasty move. Here, world is understood as the ideal and “objectual” correlate of truth (“the ideal system of factual truth”). As a consequence, if *truth* is relative to a “contingently judging subject” then the *world* (as its ideal and objectual “correlate”) will be relative to it, as well. There will be no world in itself—nor a series of *Umwelten*—but, far more dramatically, a cluster of contingent, and unrelated, worlds relative to such and such a “contingently judging subject.”¹⁶

Now, before we move on to the last section of this chapter, and clarify Husserl’s overall stance on relativism, let us briefly recapitulate the main points made so far.

- The starting point of our investigation was Husserl’s account of psychologism, or psychologicistic logic. As we briefly showed, psychologicistic logic builds upon two interrelated arguments: the denial of the *eternal* distinction between real being and ideal being, and between judgment as real and psychological act and judgment as objective formation.
- As Husserl himself remarks, psychologism is better understood as a variety of relativism, which is presented in three slightly different ways: as truth being relative to a contingently judging subject, as the denial of the ideal nature of truth, and as the derivation of truth from facts.
- As we strove to explain, relativism is understood by Husserl as belonging to the history of “absurd” metaphysical hypostatizations (p. 15 and ff): as we put it,

J. H. Lambert, *Neues Organon*, I, Alethiologie, §258. See also what Bolzano relates to this effect in §31 of Bolzano (1837).

¹⁶It is now clear why this state of affairs should not be confused with the *Welt-Umwelten* distinction: as Husserl explains in the *Cartesian Meditations*, there can be multiple *Um-Welten* only against the backdrop “of the one and only objective and common world”: “This is alone possible: different groups of monads and different worlds are related to one another as those that may belong to invisible stellar worlds are related to us—that is, with living beings who lack all actual connection to us. Nevertheless, their *Welten* are *Um-Welten* with open horizons that are only *de facto*, that is, only accidentally, undiscoverable” (Hua I, p. 167). On the contrary, relativism’s disastrous consequence would consist in the complete and absolute denial of the one *Welt*, only against whose backdrop the idea of a multiplicity of *Umwelten* can make sense: there would be a series of unrelated worlds having nothing to do with each other, which hence would not even deserve to be called “worlds” nor *Um-Welten*. By using a rather strong expression, Xavier Zubiri exclaims that “*el relativismo de la verdad implica el relativismo del ser*” (Zubiri 1999, p. 48).

relativism is the final chapter in the history of the idea that to different kinds of being—finite and material beings; finite and purely immaterial beings; infinite immaterial beings; different species, cultures, races, and individuals—there correspond different understandings of truth (see Hua VII, pp. 54–55).

It is important to keep in mind that every time Husserl speaks of “truth”—“dependence of truth,” “conditions of truth,” “relativity of truth,” “derivation of truth from facts”—its sense and meaning is the one related to the specific topic of the *Prolegomena*: logic, i.e., logical principles and laws (or logical formations¹⁷). It is the notion of *formal truth* that is of paramount importance. As a consequence, the issue as to whether Husserl’s arguments (and his rejection of relativism) can be applied to other notions of truth is a problem that goes far beyond the scope of the present research, and cannot be assessed in this context.¹⁸

2 *De Veritate*

We have already remarked, without really elaborating on it, that Husserl takes “truth” to be ideal: indeed, we have repeatedly spoken of the ideal “character” and “nature” of truth (and described relativism as the denial of such a feature).¹⁹ It is time to explain what that could really mean.

What we call the *ontological claim* consists in psychologism’s denial of the distinction between “ideal being” and “real being” as such; in addition to this, two of the “empiricistic consequences of psychologism” are, one, that logical laws lose their character of “exactness” and turn out to be merely empirical or “approximate,” and, two, that the states of affairs they express will have to be ranked exclusively as mere probabilities. As Husserl critically writes, “the psychologistic logicians ignore the fundamental, essential and eternally unbridgeable distinction between ideal and real laws”; “the fundamental distinction between ideal and real objects, and the corresponding distinction between ideal and real laws, is disregarded or misunderstood.” Husserl often describes this—by resorting to a more traditional conceptuality—as the denial of the difference between (Leibniz’s) *vérités de raison*

¹⁷ Indeed, Husserl speaks of *logical laws* in a more emphatic way (to be distinguished from those that consider only how meanings can be compounded in order to give rise to new combinations), “which consider meanings in respect of their having or not having objects, in respect of their truth or their falsity, their consistency or absurdity, to the extent that they are merely determined by the categorial forms of such meanings” (Hua XIX/1, pp. 100–101).

¹⁸ As Husserl himself remarks in §56 of *Formal and Transcendental Logic*: “It is noteworthy that readers regarded the *Prolegomena* to a *Pure Logic* as an unqualified overcoming of psychologism and failed to take notice that nowhere in that volume was psychologism pure and simple (as a *universal* gnoseological aberration) the theme. Rather, the discussion concerned a *psychologism with a very particular sense*, namely the psychologizing of the irreal formations of meaning [*irrealen Bedeutungsgebilde*] that are the theme of logic” (Hua XVII, p. 160).

¹⁹ García-Baró (2008, p. 70).

and *vérités de fait*, or (Hume's) *relations of ideas* and *matters of fact* (see also Hua XVIII, p. 191). Let us consider the following excerpt from §39 (on Sigwart's logic and his attempt to discredit Leibniz's distinction):

How little Sigwart does justice to these differences, how deeply he is enmeshed in his psychologism, is shown by his treatment of Leibniz's fundamental distinction between *vérités de raison* et *celles de fait*. The "necessity" of both sorts of truth, Sigwart thinks, is "ultimately hypothetical," for "from the fact that the contrary of a factual truth is not impossible a priori, it does not follow that it is not necessary for me to assert it, once the fact has occurred, or that the opposite assertion would be possible for one who knows the fact" ... What is here maintained at the outset is quite correct. Every judgment, while I make it, represents a necessary assertion for me, as its denial, while I remain sure of my judgment, represents an impossibility for me. But does Leibniz intend this psychological necessity when he denies necessity, rationality, to factual truths? ... Did Leibniz call the knowing of a law "necessary," and not rather truth of the law that we know? The necessity of the *vérité de raison* surely accords well with the contingency of the act of judgment, to the extent that this amounts to insight and knowledge. Only through a confusion of two essentially different concepts of knowledge, a subjective, psychologistic concept, and Leibniz's objective, idealistic one, can Sigwart wind up his argument by holding that Leibniz's distinction "in respect of the character of necessity breaks down" ... Leibniz's *vérités de raison* are merely the laws, i.e., the ideal truths in the pure and strict sense, which are "purely grounded in our concepts," which are given and known to us in pure, apodictically evident generalization. Leibniz's *vérités de fait* are individual truths; they form a sphere of propositions, which, even if expressed in universal form ... are, above all, assertions of existence (Hua XVIII, pp. 141–142).

Although in this passage Husserl is primarily interested in the modal notion of "necessity," Sigwart's confusion of "two essentially different concepts of knowledge," subjective and objective, amounts to denying the general (Leibnizian) distinction between two radically different kinds of "truth": the *vérités de raison*, or "purely conceptual truths," and *vérités de fait*, or "individual" and existential truths.

Similar remarks are advanced over the course of §23, where a distinction between *inexact* and *exact* (or *proper*) laws (and hence between two different kinds of science) is made. Let us quote a few passages therefrom:

"Empirical laws" have *eo ipso* a factual content. Not being true laws, they merely assert, roughly speaking, that certain coexistences or successions obtain generally in certain circumstances, or may be expected, with varying probability, in varying circumstances. But even the strict laws of natural sciences are not without factual content. They do not merely concern facts, but also imply their existence. We must, however, be more precise. Exact laws, as normally formulated, are pure laws: they exclude all factual content. But, if we consider the proofs to which they owe their scientific justification, it is at once clear that we cannot justify them as pure laws, in their normal formulation (Hua XVIII, p. 82).

All laws of fact in exact sciences are accordingly genuine laws, but, epistemologically considered, no more than idealizing fictions *cum fundamento in re*. They fulfill the task of rendering those theoretical sciences possible, which bring the ideal of science as near as it may be to actuality, and also realize, to the extent that this can be within the insurmountable limits of human cognition, the ideal of explanatory theory, of law-governed unity, the highest theoretical aim of all scientific research into facts (Hua XVIII, p. 83).

If, as we have shown, pure laws remain a mere ideal in the realm of factual knowledge, it is realized in the realm of "purely conceptual" knowledge. In this sphere, our purely logical laws belong, as well as the laws of *mathesis pura*. Their origin, or, rather, their justifying

proof, is not an inductive one, and so they are free from that existential content which attaches to all probabilities as such (Hua XVIII, pp. 83–84).

These passages deserve further comment. First of all, “pure laws,” rooted purely in “concepts” and constitutive of “pure logic,” are *pure* in two different senses: they are not “about” facts nor do they imply their “existence” (this being the problem of the laws’ own *content*, as we touched upon earlier). Second of all, and in a straightforward opposition to the pure laws of logic, Husserl speaks of “empirical laws” in general: “They do not merely concern facts, but also imply their existence.” This is an opposition being between exact and inexact laws: the former are *not about facts*, *nor do they imply any factual existence* while the latter *imply the existence of some facts* and are *about them*. Now, the group of empirical laws also covers what Husserl dubs “idealizing fictions *cum fundamento in re*”: according to their formulation, they are like *pure laws* (they are not about facts); nevertheless, “if we consider the proofs to which they owe their scientific justification, it is clear that we cannot justify them as pure laws, in their normal formulation” (for they imply the existence of facts). Husserl mentions as examples “theoretical acoustics” and “theoretical optics.”

What is thereby provided is a general distinction between *empirical laws* and *pure laws*: while the former always imply and posit the *existence of some facts*, the latter never do so and are thus *never about facts*. Some empirical laws (called “idealizing fictions”) *posit facts* (“to which they owe their scientific justification”), but their formulation does not seem to *concern them*; others do *posit* their existence and *are about it* (empirical laws in the strict sense of the term).

In light of these definitions, “psychologism” can be characterized as the “denial” of the distinction between “pure laws” and “empirical laws” in the strict sense of the term (hence, of pure science and empirical science)—*logic becoming thus an empirical science that does not only imply the existence of some facts (psychical acts), but is also about them*. But “psychologism” can also be understood as the “denial” of the distinction between “pure science” and “idealizing fiction”—*logic turning in this case into an idealizing fiction cum fundamento in re: although it does not concern any fact whatsoever, it nevertheless implies their existence (like in the normative understanding of logic as the science of correct thinking)*. In either case, the denial could be described as disregarding or overlooking Leibniz’s distinction between two kinds of truth (*vérité de raison* and *vérité de fait*).

Now, if this is how psychologism can be characterized, Husserl asserts vis-à-vis relativism, of which psychologism is a variant, that what is being denied is the *ideal character of truth itself*, irrespective of the distinction between *vérité de raison* and *vérité de fait*. In other words: *truth itself is ideal* (Hua-Mat III, p. 18) *and relativism consists in its denial*.²⁰

²⁰“Unsere Gedanken können wir willkürlich lenken, wir können sie verändern; die Wahrheit können wir nicht verändern, wir können sie nicht machen, wir können sie nur finden. Eine Wahrheit entsteht nicht und vergeht nicht, eine Wahrheit ist nicht, wie jedes Psychische, ein Ereignis, an die Zeit gebunden, anfangend, dauernd und wieder endend. Wie immer die Überzeitlichkeit der Wahrheit interpretiert, wie immer die Frage nach dem Sinn, in dem wir von einem Bewusstwerden,

Let us cite a few passages in which Husserl assesses this specific issue:

No truth is a fact, that is, something temporally determined (Hua XVIII, p. 87).

What is true is absolutely true, true “in itself”: truth is one and the same, whether humans or non-humans, angels or gods apprehend and judge it (Hua XVIII, p. 125).

Truth, however, is “eternal,” or, better put, it is an Idea, and so super-temporal (Hua XVIII, p. 134).

It does not matter whether the truth under analysis is factual (*vérité de fait*) or ideal (*vérité de raison*): as long as it is a “truth,” such *vérité* is “ideal,” “absolute,” “eternal,” and true “in itself.”

What Husserl is setting forth here is “truth” as the “ideal” and objective correlate of any possible “thinking being” (*denkendes Wesen*); accordingly, the denial or the misunderstanding of the “ideal” nature of truth is tantamount to the denial and the misunderstanding of the correlation between “truth” and “thinking being,” which is hence construed as a factual one. If this correlation is factual, then it can vary and become otherwise—depending on the specific constitution of the being at stake. As Husserl explains in a decisive and extremely important passage:

The statements “the truth obtains [*die Wahrheit gilt*]” and “there are *possible* thinking beings, which have the insight into judgments with relevant semantic content [*des bezüglichen Bedeutungsgehalt*]” are equivalent. If there are no intelligent beings, if the natural order excludes them, or if they are, in a real sense, impossible [*real unmöglich*], or if there are no beings capable of knowing certain classes of truths, then such *ideal* possibilities remain without fulfilling actuality. The apprehension, knowledge, or bringing to consciousness of truth (i.e., of a certain classes of truth), is nowhere ever realized. Each truth, however, remains in itself what it is [*an sich bleibt, was sie ist*]; it retains its ideal being [*ideales Sein*] (Hua XVIII, pp. 135–136).

The correlation could be easily represented as follows:

(α)

A Truth Obtains — There Are Possible Thinking Beings
(*ideally possible*) (*ideally possible*)

Such is the ideal (ideally possible) correlation between “truth” and “thinking beings” that relativism in general ends up denying: the *ideal possibility of a truth* implies the *ideal possible existence of a thinking being able to apprehend it* (or, to put it in the language of the actual *Logical Investigations*: of a judgment or a proposition which entails a realization of that truth as an ideal species).²¹ Of course, as Husserl avers, this thinking being can be *really impossible*, and yet the ideal relation will still hold.

(β)

A Truth Obtains — There Are Possible Thinking Beings
(*ideally possible*) (*really impossible*)

Erkennen der Wahrheit sprechen, beantwortet werden mag, sicher ist, dass sie nicht selbst ein Bewusstseinszustand ist” (Hua-Mat III, p. 26).

²¹ For a comprehensive study of Husserl’s notion of truth, see Tugendhat (1967, pp. 88–106). A thorough analysis of these pages is offered by one of the French translators of the *LU* (Schérier 1967, pp. 39–43).

It is ideally possible that a truth holds absent an actual thinking being able to apprehend it; or, to speak the language of the *LU* once again, there is no actual propositional “act,” whose matter is a realization of that truth as an ideal species. And yet, the real impossibility does not mean an ideal one; this is what Husserl dubs “the absence of limits of objective reason” (Hua XIX/1, p. 95). As Husserl in fact urges at the end of the *First Investigation*:

There is no intrinsic connection between the ideal unities which in fact operate as meanings, and the signs to which they are tied, that is, through which they become real in a human conscious life. We cannot therefore say that all ideal unities of this sort are expressed meanings ... There are hence countless meanings, which in the common, and relative sense of the term are merely possible ones, since they are never expressed, and since they can, owing to the limits of human cognitive faculties, never be expressed (Hua XIX/1, pp. 109–110).

Here, too, Husserl is not at all dismissing the possibility of beings higher than humans (in this case, beings endowed with gnoseological capacities superior to ours)—i.e., beings with the capacity to actually access a wider range or “circle” of truths. Nonetheless, whether we imagine angels, devils, or gods; or purely spiritual beings; or material and finite beings; or higher or lower *faculties*; or a catastrophic *metabolé* of the laws of our psyche—the relation between the two systems of a *priori* truth (“the a priori truth of the objects” and “the a priori truth of the *Erlebnisse*”) *universally holds*.

Already in the *Prolegomena*, that is, before the actual *Logical Investigations*, Husserl sets forward the necessity of the relation between (logical) “consciousness” and “truth,” and in so doing he opens up the way for what he would later designate *ein System des Apriori*, “a system of the a priori” (Hua I, p. 165)—a system which is nevertheless still confined in this groundbreaking 1900 text to the a priori correlation between “logical” formations and “logical” *Erlebnisse*.

As Husserl explained to his Freiburg students:

A new world opened up right away ... I must however add that a broadening of the problem area had to thrust itself to the fore at once. Plainly, the same problems, which had arisen here starting with the logical and mathematical idealities, had to be posed for all objectivities, even for real objects of knowledge. And these problems could also have been posed immediately in their regard, and were already partially so taken up in the *Logical Investigations* (Hua IX, p. 28).²²

It is then time to leave the *pars destruens* behind and move on to the so-called *pars costruens*; it is time to approach the actual *Logical Investigations*, first to see how Husserl understands the problem and the notion of the a priori within the framework of his early idealism, then to slowly follow the further developments of both his philosophical terminology and his overall view.

²² Such a strong continuity was already emphasized by Landgrebe (1949, pp. 56–100).

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Part III
Husserl on the Notion of A Priori Before
the *Eidos*



In his 1929 *Formale und transzendente Logik*, notably §98, Husserl explains in what sense the “constitutive” investigations carried out throughout the second section of the book are a priori. The point is to clarify that the notion itself of a “constitutive investigation” consists in the “explication” of the correlation between two systems of a priori truths: the subjective system of “constitutive a priori” and the so-called “ontic a priori.”

It becomes evident that an ontic a priori is possible, as concretely full possibility, only as the correlate of a constitutive a priori that is concretely united with it, concretely inseparable from it. This holds good, not only for systems of possible experience of objects (constitutive systems in the pregnant sense), but also for systems that are constitutive in the broader sense, that is to say, for systems embracing all, even non-intuitive, modes of consciousness that are possible in the case of any objects “of the sorts in question” (Hua XVII, p. 255).

Each category of objects is characterized by a specific a priori (i.e., by a system of a priori truths peculiar to it) and thus corresponds to an equally specific constitutive a priori (i.e., to a system of a priori truths characterizing the subject and its possible, intuitive as well as non-intuitive, experience of those objects). As is evident, at stake here is the problem that lies at the very heart of Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology, namely, the idea of *constitution*. If the so-called phenomenological constitution consists in the correlation between two “systems” of “a priori” truths, and the so-called phenomenological description is nothing else but the rigorous account of this correlation, then the question naturally arises as to the meaning and sense of the term *a priori*.

This is where the *eidos* comes in. As Husserl points out, the notion of *eidos* is that “by means of which the evidence of the indissoluble eidetic correlation between constitution and constituted should also emerge” (Hua XVII, pp. 254–255). Accordingly, the *eidos* is not only what makes it possible for the phenomenological description to have an a priori character; the *eidos* is that without which the “evidence” of the correlation itself would not emerge, i.e., the notion without which the

correlation itself would not be or become visible and thereby scientifically “describable.”

As Husserl remarks in a decisive footnote: “It [i.e., the *eidos*] defines the only concept belonging to the ambiguous [*vieldeutigen*] expression *a priori* that I recognize philosophically. That concept alone is meant wherever the locution *a priori* occurs in any of my writings” (Hua XVII, p. 255). Even if only in a cursory way, Husserl makes a series of important statements here. He tells us:

(α) That the expression *a priori* is *ambiguous* (though nothing is said as to what this “ambiguity” amounts to, or what its many different meanings are¹).

(β) That the *eidos* stands for one of several such meanings of the *ambiguous* expression *a priori*, and the only one accepted by Husserl himself.

(γ) That what is meant by Husserl whenever he uses or writes “*a priori*” is exclusively what the term *eidos* stands for.

Unfortunately, Husserl neither elaborates on the “ambiguity” of the general expression *a priori* nor is it clear what exactly the term *eidos* refers to or signifies. One thing is nevertheless very clear: the Greek term *eidos*’ strategic function is to avoid the semantic “ambiguity” of the traditional notion of *a priori* (and, as we can easily assume, of a series of related expressions such as: “*a priori* knowledge,” “*a priori* science,” “*a priori* judgment,” “*a priori* truth,” and so on and so forth).

Now, if we leave *Formale und transzendente Logik* behind, and move back to the book in which Husserl officially introduces the expression *eidos* for the first time, i.e., the first book of *Ideen*, we will immediately realize that the justification provided by Husserl for resorting to it is exactly the same. Let us read what Husserl remarks at the very end of the *Einleitung*:

We close these introductory words with a brief terminological consideration. As already was the case in the *Logische Untersuchungen*, I avoid as much as possible the expressions *a priori* and *a posteriori* because of the confusing obscurities and ambiguities [*Vieldeutigkeiten*] clinging to them in general use, and also because of the notorious philosophical doctrines that, as an evil heritage from the past, are combined with them. They are to be used only in contexts that confer upon them unambiguousness [*Eindeutigkeit*] and only as equivalents of other terms which are joined to them and upon which we have conferred clear and univocal meanings, particularly where it is a matter of allowing for historical parallels (Hua III/1, p. 8).

As will be the case in the 1929 book, here, too, Husserl describes the term *a priori* as *ambiguous*, this “ambiguity” representing the main reason he will avoid using it as much as possible. In addition to this, Husserl also makes the following points:

(δ) First of all, the denounced “ambiguity” affects the expression *a priori* as well as that of *a posteriori*: both should hence be avoided as much as possible.

¹See *LU I*, §15, where Husserl himself distinguishes *Vieldeutigkeit* from *Vielwertigkeit* and explains that, while the first characterizes “equivocal names,” the latter is proper to “general” names and the ability to predicatively refer to a plurality (*Vielheit*) of objects (Hua XIX/1, p. 59). See also *LU I*, §26 (Hua XIX/1, pp. 85–92).

(ε) Second of all, the “obscurities” of those concepts derive from some “notorious philosophical doctrines” that are “combined” with them.

(ζ) Third of all, and according to his own retrospective narrative, Husserl has been struggling with such semantic ambiguity and philosophical obscurity from the very beginning of his career, i.e., at least from the first edition of the *Logical Investigations* onward.

Let us keep reading the *Einleitung*.

With the expressions *idea* and *ideal*, it is perhaps not quite so bad with respect to disconcerting varieties of meanings, though, on the whole, still bad enough, a fact to which the frequent misinterpretations of my *Logische Untersuchungen* have made me sufficiently sensitive. In addition, the need to keep the supremely important *Kantian concept of idea* cleanly separated from the universal concept (either formal or material) of essence inspired me to make a terminological change. I therefore use, as a foreign word, the terminologically unspoiled [*das terminologisch unverbrauchte*] *eidos*; and, as a German word, the term “essence” [*Wesen*], which is infected with harmless but occasionally vexatious equivocations (Hua III/1, p. 8).

The reason why Husserl felt the “need” to introduce a “new” terminology, notably the notion of *eidos*, is clearly stated:

(η) According to Husserl, the “terminological change” (*Änderung der Terminologie*) that led him to resort to a “foreign word” was resultant not only from the general ambiguity and philosophical obscurities characterizing the “dyad” *a priori*/*a posteriori*, but also from what he calls “the frequent misinterpretations” (*die häufigen Mißdeutungen*) of the language of his *Logical Investigations*, i.e., of the two notions of *idea* and *ideal* (= his doctrine of ideality and ideal being).

Now, since in *Ideen I* Husserl intends to use the term “idea” exclusively to refer to the Kantian conception of it, the need for a new language imposed itself: hence, the Greek *eidos*. It is also very important to remark that, as Husserl himself does not fail to point out, the Greek *eidos* (which from now on will replace the notion of *idea* and express the correct meaning of the term *a priori*) stands for what Husserl calls here “the universal concept (either formal or material) of essence.” In other words: if the Greek *eidos* ends up covering the entire semantic “spectrum” of the essence, it is because the latter (as *Wesen*) “is infected with harmless but occasionally vexatious equivocations.” Nevertheless, and as we will see later on, the situation is not that easy: for, Husserl does not simply replace *Wesen* with *eidos*. As we shall soon verify, the Greek *eidos* does not simply mean the same as the German notion of essence as *Wesen*.

Though Husserl’s characterization of the term *eidos* as “terminologically unspoiled” might sound “naïve” or “ridiculous” if not even “laughable” (for, he seems to be completely unaware of the long philosophical as well as non-philosophical legacy of that term²), what he means to say is not only very clear but also extremely precise and philosophically accurate. If the *eidos* can be described as

²Ritter (1910); Neschke-Hentschke and Etienne (1997); Fronterotta and Leszl (2005); Decomminette and Mazzù (2012).

“terminologically unspoiled,”³ it is because—in Husserl’s view—it can help us avoid not only the semantic ambiguity (α and δ) and the philosophical obscurities (ϵ) of the dyad *a priori/a posteriori*, but also the “misinterpretations” of the notions of *idea* and *ideal* as used by Husserl himself in the *Logical Investigations* (η). By introducing the *eidos*, Husserl is not only trying to purge the tradition of its ambiguities and obscurities, but also to correct himself and compensate for the equivocations of the German language (notably, of both the German words *Idee* and *Wesen*).

Were we to fully accept Husserl’s self-assessment, we could present the development of his stance on the problem of the *a priori* from 1900 to 1913 as follows:

(I) Already in the *Logical Investigations*, Husserl must have been (albeit only partially) aware of the ambiguities and perhaps also of the philosophical obscurities of the dyad *a priori/a posteriori*. Accordingly, the notion of *idea* and the doctrine of *idealities* (i.e., Husserl’s early “idealism”) were introduced with the intention of providing a less ambiguous and obscure framework.

(II) Nevertheless, during the years that followed the publication of his first masterpiece, Husserl must have come to realize that such ambiguities and obscurities were deeper than he first thought, and his early idealism soon proved to be insufficient and in need of a revision.

(III) The combination of this “new” awareness and a series of misinterpretations of his idealism resulted in Husserl slowly, yet radically, changing his philosophical terminology and conceptuality.

If we are on the right track, then the introduction of the term *eidos*—which from 1913 onward will stand for the one and only meaning of the expression *a priori* accepted by Husserl—is precisely the result of this stratified process. The analysis and clarification of such a process, as well as of the reasons that slowly led Husserl to adopt the Greek *eidos*, are the aims of the next two chapters.⁴

In what follows, we will first explore the notion of *a priori* as Husserl understands it in the *Logical Investigations*, then we will take a close look at the developments of his thought over the years that followed the release of his first masterpiece so as to explain how he slowly arrived at the distinction between *idea* and *essence*.

³ See Sect. 5.

⁴ Let us immediately point out, however, that if, from a certain moment on, Husserl will set out to find an expression able to denote his understanding of the *a priori*, the same does not hold true of the “*a posteriori*.” In short: no new expression or term will ever be resorted to by Husserl to stand for what he means by the latter. It is as if—unlike the “*a priori*”—the “*a posteriori*” were not in need of any particular (new) term able to “univocally” express its proper meaning and sense, as if it were enough to elucidate the overall underlying sense of the *a priori/a posteriori* dyad.

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The Doctrine of Ideality and the A Priori in the *Logical Investigations*



The *pars destruens* laid out in the *Prolegomena* against psychologistic logic and, more generally, relativism, resulted in a series of crucial distinctions. Indeed, by “purging” logic of its psychological or psychologistic incrustations, Husserl meant to achieve several goals: his local goals (i.e., the ones relative to the specific context of the *Prolegomena*) were the assertion of the “a priori” character of logic as a science (and of its relevant truths) and the “ideal” nature of its corresponding subject-matter (i.e., logical formations and principles) while his global (or more general) goals were the sharp distinction between “a priori” and “a posteriori” and between “ideal” and “real” being.

In other words: the problem of psychologistic logic represented for Husserl a sort of *casus belli*¹ in order to launch a more general campaign against the denial of those crucial distinctions (a priori/a posteriori, ideal/real) which results in both his more general doctrine of “idealities” or “ideal being” (Husserl’s so-called “early idealism”) and a specific stance on the “a priori.”²

Before we start our close exegesis of the *Logical Investigations* (notably, of the first edition, and partially also of the differences between the first edition and the second), a remark is necessary. As was already evident from reading the *Prolegomena* (and according to the way in which a 1925 Husserl retrospectively accounts for it), the double distinction between “a priori-a posteriori” and “ideal being-real being” has resulted in a series of *binary oppositions*. On the one hand, there is the *unconditionally necessary* and *universal*, the *unchangeable* or *inalterable*; on the other

¹ See Kusch (1995, pp. 61–62), on how Husserl, unlike Frege, holds his argument against psychologism to be conclusive.

² “La fundamentación de una lógica autónoma lleva, come de la mano, a Husserl al tema de la idealidad. La defensa del ser ideal coincide, cada vez, con un ataque al viejo subjetivismo psicológico. Ya el método especial de la fenomenología hace pronto sus armas primeras y adquiere toda la plenitud de su finura en una serie de distinciones encaminadas precisamente a la demostración de la índole ideal de los principios lógicos” (Millán-Puelles 1947, p. 13).

hand, the *empirically contingent* (*empirische Zufälligkeit*), or the *contingent facticity* (*zufällige Faktizität*), that is, what is “alterable” in principle and what can always “be thought otherwise.” Such a series of dichotomies, which might remind the reader of Plato’s account of the two kinds of beings (*Phaedo*, 79a), results in the following, decisive equivalence:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{“Factual”} (faktisch, Faktizität) &= \text{“Empirical”} (empirisch) \\ &= \text{“Contingent”} (zufällig, Zufälligkeit) \text{ (in opposition to what is “a priori”)} \end{aligned}$$

This series of equivalences and following opposition characterizes—by and large—what we may label the “first phase” of Husserl’s doctrine of the a priori: the one running, more or less, from the *Logical Investigations* to *Ideas I* (or, more accurately stated: to the end of the Göttingen period). The introduction of the genetic approach to the problem of the a priori—which will characterize what could be similarly labeled the “second phase”—will lead Husserl to rethink both the equivalence and the opposition: hence the apparently paradoxical notion of “contingent a priori.”

1 The Doctrine of Ideal Species

At the outset of *LU II*, Husserl himself describes his position as “idealism,” not as a “metaphysical doctrine,” of course, but in terms of a “theory of knowledge, which recognizes the ‘ideal’ as the condition for the possibility of objective knowledge in general” (Hua XIX/1, p. 112). Such idealism consists precisely in “defending the intrinsic right of specific (or ideal) objects to be recognized as such alongside of individual (or real) objects.” This passage already provides us with some important information as to what Husserl’s early idealism is all about: while what is *specific* is opposed to what is *individual*, the *ideal* is sharply separated from the *real*, with this twofold distinction concerning the more general notion of “object” (*Gegenstand*). It is also worth remarking that, as far as this introductory text is concerned, these two conceptual pairs (“specific”-“ideal”; “individual”-“real”) seem to be equivalent: if no “specific” object can be real, or endowed with any sort of reality (this being precisely what Husserl aims to reject under the label “metaphysical doctrine”), no “ideal” object is an individual object (“individuality” being always non-specific).

Although only *per viam negationis*, we can already characterize the specific as what is never real, nor individual; by the same token, since what is not real is not, and cannot be, individual, it must be specific and thereby ideal.³ This being said, two

³We are intentionally leaving out the discussion of the nature of what Husserl calls *Sachverhalte*, “states of affairs,” which, as the ontological correlates of judgments and their internal categorial structure, are not real yet not necessarily specific in the sense just described, for there can also be individual states of affairs.

more aspects need to be clarified: one, we need to elaborate on what Husserl precisely means by *object*; two, we will have to look for a more detailed account of the two conceptual pairs *specific-individual* and *ideal-real*.

(a) Let us start off with the notion of “object.” If the passages just discussed seem to apply the distinction between specific and individual exclusively to the notion of object, and hence to present the doctrine of idealism as a sort of “general theory of objects” (*Gegenstandstheorie*), it is crucial to point out that Husserl understands object to mean the same as being. *Ens et objectum convertuntur*, and ontology means the same as theory of objects: “there is a fundamental categorial distinction in our conceptual unity of being (or, what is the same, of object in general); we take account of this split when we distinguish between ideal being and real being, between being as species and being as individual” (Hua XIX/1, p. 130). Let us read what Husserl goes on to remark immediately after this “fundamental categorial distinction”:

The conceptual unity of predication likewise splits into two essentially different sub-species, depending on whether we affirm or deny properties of individuals, or affirm or deny general determinations of species. This difference does not, however, do away with the supreme unity in the concept of object [*im Begriffe des Gegenstandes*], nor with the correlated concept of categorial propositional unity. In either case something (a predicate) pertains or does not pertain to an object (a subject), and the sense of this most universal pertinence, together with the laws governing it, also determines the most universal sense of being, or of object [*des Seins, bzw. des Gegenstandes*] as such (Hua XIX/1, pp. 130–131).

This passage is absolutely crucial. Besides reaffirming the equivalence between “object” and “being,” *Gegenstand* and *Sein*, Husserl is also hinting at his definition of object when he writes “to an object (a subject)”: an object, or *Gegenstand*, being nothing but the subject of a possible (true) statement or proposition. In his famous 1913 *Draft of a Preface to the Logical Investigations*, after he remarks that the characterization of “ideas” as “objects” is the distinctive mark of his early “Platonic” idealism, Husserl explains: “Objects and predicable subjects are equivalents. All logic would come to an end if the concept of ‘object’ [*Gegenstand*] were not conceived in as broad a sense as this equivalence demands—i.e., if one did not also allow ‘ideas’ to count as objects [*Ideen als Gegenstände*]” (Hua XX/1, p. 283). In his 1909 Göttingen lectures, he had already emphasized: “I name ideas objects, namely, subjects of possible statements” (Hua-Mat VII, p. 87). In *Ideen I*, Husserl will insist once again: object is to be taken “*in the necessarily broadened sense proper to formal logic*,” that is, as the “subject of possible true predications” (Hua III/1, p. 15).⁴

⁴“I often make use of the vaguer expression *Gegenständlichkeit* since we are here never limited to the objects in the narrow sense, but have also to do with states of affairs, properties and non-independent forms, whether real or categorial ones” (Hua XIX/1, p. 45)—“*Anders aber, wenn wir die Rede von ‘Gegenstand’ in der ganz unentbehrlichen und alle Logik beherrschenden Allgemeinheit verwenden, wonach ‘seiender Gegenstand’ alles und jedes heißt, was durch Prädikate in Wahrheit bestimmt werden kann, was danach auch wissenschaftliches Objekt werden kann, in der Absicht eben, die ihm wahrhaft zukommenden Prädikate herauszustimmen*” (Hua-Mat IX, p. 43). Husserl’s

If the “unity in the concept of being” is correlative to that of “categorical propositional unity,” and if object means the same as being, then different kinds of beings correspond to different kinds of categorical propositional unities asserting different kinds of truths: if “these truths hold, everything presupposed as an object by their validity must have a being.” In this sense, Husserl seems to be setting up a perfect co-relation between ontology and the theory of (true) propositions.⁵

Nevertheless, we firmly believe that Husserl’s position is even stronger than that.

To put it bluntly: such broad understanding of “object” as “subject of possible true predications,” hence the very distinction between ideal and real being, ideal and real object, are indeed introduced by Husserl *precisely to make sense of different kinds of categorical propositions and truths*. In *LU I* (§31), after pointing out that “meanings” (*Bedeutungen*) should be understood as “specific objects” (also referred to as “universal objects” here), Husserl exclaims:

If one has accustomed oneself to understand by being only “real” being, and by objects only real objects, then the talk of universal objects and of their being may well seem basically wrong: by contrast, no offense will be given to those who take this talk to merely refer to [*als Anzeigen für*] the validity of certain judgments, like the ones concerning numbers, propositions, geometrical formations, etc. (Hua XIX/1, p. 106).⁶

In the second edition, we read “correlate of judgment-validity,” whereas, in the first edition, we read “correlates of the subjects of these judgments.” To parse this: the ontological distinction between different kinds of beings or objects (ideal being and real being, ideal object and real object) refers to, or “is the sign of,”⁷ the validity of certain judgments, hence, of certain truths, with the different “kinds of objects” being nothing but the different kinds of “correlates” of (the subjects of) such judgments. In other words, Husserl’s early idealism, i.e., the defense of “the intrinsic right of specific (or ideal) objects,” is to be understood as a “*dia-noetic idealism*” in which the Platonic *duo eide ton onton* (or two types of beings) turn into “two kinds of categorical proposition,” or *duo eide tes dianoias* (as we may say by rephrasing Plato himself).⁸ In fact, recalling Husserl’s examples:

These differences at once carry over into the field of judgment, and run through the whole of logic. Singular judgments divide into *individual-singular* judgments such as *Socrates is a man*, and *specific-singular* judgments such as *Two is an even number*, or *A round square*

Platonism, as he himself states in the *Draft*, consists in the thesis that “ideas” are “objects,” which is a claim to be distinguished from the assertion of a categorical distinction between “ideal” and “real” being (this representing the core of Husserl’s idealism). An example of the confusion between the two is Schlick (1910, p. 406 and ff).

⁵As Benoist (2001, p. 66) strongly puts it: “*Le champ de l’être est coextensif à celui de la vérité.*”

⁶“*Identifiziert man freilich von vornherein Objektivität und reale Objektivität, Sein oder seiender Gegenstand und reales Sein, real seiender Gegenstand, seiend im räumlich-zeitlichen Zusammenhang wie etwa Steine und Bäume, dann mag die Rede von Ideen, Wesen als Gegenstände paradox und lächerlich erscheinen*” (Hua-Mat IX, p. 43).

⁷Millán-Puelles (1947, p. 52) speaks of *La concepción amplísima de “objeto” y “ser” como signos de la validez del juicio*.

⁸We first defended this reading in De Santis (2016, pp. 221–256).

is a nonsensical concept. Universal judgments divide into *individual-universal* judgments such as *All men are mortal*, and *specific-universal* judgments such as *All analytic functions can be differentiated*, or *All propositions of pure logic are a priori* (Hua XIX/1, p. 116).

The state of affairs just described could be so wrapped up: judgments or propositional unities differ depending on their subject; the “truth” of such judgments implies that the correlates of their subjects “are”⁹; hence, the categorial distinction between different kinds of beings correspond to the one between different kinds of subjects.

All that said, it is important to point out that Husserl is not trying to claim that the distinction between the δύο εἶδη τῶν ὄντων is *per se* nothing but the *Anzeige für* the validity of the δύο εἶδη τῆς διανοίας; as if, in other words, the concept of “real being” were nothing other than the correlate of a certain type of valid judgments. The point is rather that the recognition of the sphere of the “ideal” next to that of the real is only meant to be the *Anzeige für* the validity of certain types of judgments: if “these truths hold, everything presupposed as an object by their validity must have a being.”

Though in *LU II* Husserl first introduces the categorial distinction between “beings” or “objects” which then seems to be applied to the realm of propositions or propositional unities, in *LU I* (§31) Husserl’s line of argument is already quite clear: the ontological differentiation points to the validity of the distinction between irreducible forms of judgments.

(b) In what, exactly, does the ideal differ from the real? What do we talk about when we talk about “idealities” and “ideal objects” in general? The answers to these two questions are provided in *LU II*, §8. As we shall see, Husserl’s major concern here is to produce what we could refer to as a “minimal” characterization of “real being” able not only to avoid any “metaphysical assumption” or interpretation of reality, but also to shed light, although almost exclusively *per viam negationis*, on the notions of ideality and ideal being. To put it more clearly: if Husserl wants to avoid the false “alternative” according to which, “if species are nothing real, and if they are also nothing in thought, then they are nothing at all” (Hua XIX/1, p. 128) then all he needs is a minimal account of reality (as a sort of *conditio sine qua non*) in opposition to which ideality will turn out to be almost “automatically” characterized, as it were. As should already be apparent, the focus in these pages is the notion of reality, and only indirectly that of ideality.

As Husserl hastens to point out, “We do not wish to lose ourselves in the erring paths of such a metaphysics.” What metaphysics would that be?

If species are nothing real, and if they are also nothing in thought, then they are nothing at all. How can we talk about something if it is not at least *in our thought*? The being of the ideal is therefore obviously a being in consciousness; the name “content of consciousness” rightly applies to it. As opposed to this, real being is no mere being in consciousness, or

⁹“Jedes wahre allgemeine Urteil setzt das ‘Sein des Subjekts’ voraus” (Hua XL, p. 316).

being-a-content: it is being-in-itself, transcendent being, being outside of consciousness (Hua XIX/1, p. 129).

As we mentioned, such is the false alternative Husserl intends to reject. It consists of two separate claims: one, the difference between species (as something non-real) and reality is construed in terms of *being in consciousness* and *being outside of consciousness*; two, what is outside of consciousness is said to be “in-itself” (*An-sich*). Whatever is “real” is not, and cannot be, “in” our consciousness, or “thought” (*Denken*): it rests outside of it, as a sort of being-in-itself. In addition to this, as Husserl also mentions in passing in the following paragraph, such a “reality” or “being-in-itself” is usually, and metaphysically, described as a “thing.”

Now, such a metaphysics is not *any* metaphysics; in other words, Husserl is not vaguely referring to metaphysics in general, but to a very specific metaphysical doctrine: Lotze’s.

If there is any notion able to capture the heart of Lotze’s metaphysics, it is precisely the notion of *Ding*, “thing.” Indeed, “metaphysics” is the investigation of the structures of *Wirklichkeit* and the connection between things based on the traditional distinction between ontology, cosmology, and psychology.¹⁰ While psychology studies the soul as a real entity in its real (= “causal”) *commercium* with the totality of things, and cosmology investigates the forms of time, space, and matter, ontology has the more fundamental task of working out the three basic notions without which the identity of things and their causal inter-connection would be unintelligible: being, becoming, effecting (*Sein, Werden, Wirken*).¹¹ Two more aspects characterizing Lotze’s view on metaphysics need to be recalled. One, Lotze explicitly identifies “being” and “reality,” which is then understood in “causal” terms¹²; two, with respect to thought (the immanent structure of which is investigated by Lotze in the *Logik* as the first part of the *System der Philosophie*), being is presented as an external *Ansich*. Indeed, it is the very task of theory of knowledge (with the introduction of the concept of validity) to provide a bridge to connect these two radically separated and heterogeneous realms.

Now, when Husserl exclaims that he does not want to lose himself “in the erring paths of such a metaphysics,” what he intends to avoid is (i) not only the identity of being and reality, but first and foremost the identity of “reality” and “thing” (i.e., the causal understanding of reality or real being), as well as (ii) the so-called “*being in consciousness-being outside of consciousness*” kind of false alternative. The goal is not simply to think of a *being* that is not *real*, and yet not *nothing* (hence, the categorical distinction between *real being* and *ideal being*), but also to think of *reality* in non-causal terms, i.e., not in terms of *things* and connections of things à la Lotze.

¹⁰ Lotze (1879, pp. 3–4).

¹¹ Lotze (1883, p. 7).

¹² He speaks of the “sound Aristotelian doctrine, that reality of being belongs only to the individual thing” (Lotze 1874, p. 548)—“*Die wirkliche Natur der Dinge ist im Sein das Erste oder Einzige*” (Lotze 1879, p. 93). In his Berlin lectures, Lotze stresses that *Sein* applies only to *die ruhige Existenz der Dinge* (Lotze 1883, p. 8).

For us what is “in” consciousness counts as real just as much as what is “outside” of it. What is real is the individual [*das Individuum*] with all its components: it is something here and now. For us temporality is a sufficient mark of reality. Real being and temporal being may not be identical notions, but they coincide in extension. We do not, of course, suppose that psychological experiences are in a metaphysical sense “things.” But even they belong to a think-like unity, if the traditional conviction is right in holding that all temporal entities [*zeitlich Seiende*] must be things, or parts of them. Should we wish, however, to keep all metaphysics out, we may simply define “reality” in terms of temporality. For the only important point is to oppose it to the timeless “being” of the ideal [*zum unzeitlichen “Sein” des Idealen*] (Hua XIX/1, p. 129).

This passage is crucial for several reasons. One, Husserl is discussing the opposition between reality and ideality, whereas the notion of *species* is not even mentioned; though we know that no specific object can be real, it is important to emphasize that Husserl is here interested in clarifying in what the general notion of *ideal being* properly consists. Two, the “positive” characterization belongs to the notion of reality alone, and ideality is defined only in opposition to it: in fact, if temporality is a “sufficient mark of reality,” it may be easily assumed that the lack thereof, i.e., the intemporality is a “sufficient mark of ideality.” *Ideal being* and *intemporal being* are co-extensive notions.¹³ Three, it is also worth underlining that by temporality Husserl simply means being “here and now,” *hic et nunc*. Accordingly, what is ideal or timeless (since we now know they are co-extensive) cannot be reduced to any *hic et nunc* (nor to a series thereof)—which also means that every time Husserl *seems* to offer a positive account of “ideality” in terms of “eternity” (Hua XVIII, pp. 102, 134, 154; Hua XIX/1, p. 298), what he really has in mind is only its time-less character. In this respect, Husserl’s position perfectly aligns with Lotze’s, who speaks of the “independence of all time” and of “the predicate of eternity able to deny the power of time.”¹⁴ Of the two possible interpretations of the Greek αἰεί, which can mean *either* “always present” or “omnipresent” (the Latin *nunc stans*, or *Quel tempo che non avrà più differenza di tempi*¹⁵) or “not subject to time” or “timeless,” both Lotze and Husserl opt for the second option.¹⁶ In the *Prolegomena* (§39), Husserl speaks of “the timeless realm of ideas” (Hua XVIII, p. 136).

Now, if we put together both (a) and (b) above, it follows that the categorial distinction between “ideal” and “real” beings or objects (*duo eide ton onton*)—which points to the distinction between irreducible forms of judgments (*duo eide tes diadnoias*)—refers to the difference between judgments the truth of which is temporally marked and judgments the truth of which is timeless. As we know, “relativism”—and that specific variation thereof called “psychologism”—consists (among other

¹³ Still in 1912 Husserl characterizes the *Ideal* as *Unzeitlich* (Hua XXIII, p. 329).

¹⁴ Lotze (1874, p. 502). Husserl acknowledges his debt to Lotze in his 1903 critical review of Palagyi (Hua XXII, pp. 156–157).

¹⁵ Nievo (2017, p. 11).

¹⁶ Which Husserl also designates by the term *überzeitlich*, “beyond time” (as in Hua-Mat III, p. 53).

things) in denying such a distinction, or, more emphatically, in the “denial” of the possibility of “denying” time (i.e., of truths the validity of which is timeless).

(c) What is, on the contrary, a species? What do we talk about when one talks about “specific” objects? Let us consider a part of *LU I* (§31). Here, Husserl is discussing the difference between the psychological and the logical content of our expressive acts, notably the distinction between the subjective act-character and the objective-ideal meaning. The example at stake is the statement “ π is a transcendent number” and, as Husserl remarks, what we mean and understand when we utter it is no individual feature of our experience but, rather, an *identical sense or meaning*:

The genuine identity that we here assert is none other than the *identity of the species*. As a species, and only as a species, can it embrace in unity (*sumballein eis en*), and, as an ideal unity, the dispersed multiplicity of individual singulars [*der individuellen Einzelheiten*]. The multiplicity of singularities for the ideal unity *meaning* is naturally that of the corresponding act-moments of meanings, the *meaning-intentions*. Meaning [*Bedeutung*] is related to various acts of meaning [*Bedeuten*] ... just as redness [*Röte*] in *specie* is to the slips of paper that lie here, and which all “have” this same redness [*diese selbe Röte*]. Each slip has, in addition to other constitutive aspects (extension, form, etc.), its own individual redness, i.e., its *individual case* of this color-species, though this neither exists in the slip nor anywhere else in the whole world, and particularly not “in our thought,” in so far as this latter is part of the domain of real being, the sphere of temporality (Hua XIX/1, pp. 105–106).

Whoever expects a more “satisfactory” or “explanatory” account of the notion of “species” will be highly disappointed: the reason being its “primitive” and basic character, which seems to defy any definitional approach.¹⁷ It is easy to note in fact that—besides the assertion of its “identity,” or of its being something “identical”—Husserl does not say much about it: unlike what one may expect of him, the “species” is not even presented as something *non-individual* that *individualizes itself hic et nunc* (there is no mention of such a problem¹⁸). Quite the contrary: Husserl’s strategy is to present the species *in opposition to* the multiplicity of its *individual cases*! Given the multiplicity of individual pieces of red paper, all having the same color, the species “redness” is what lies over against them as an “identical” (Hua XIX/1, pp. 8 and 155). It is only by means of this something “identical” that one can make sense of the “objectual” correlate corresponding to the subject of judgments like “Red is a color”—which asserts something of red as the one identical ideal being, rather than as an individual and real occurrence *hic et nunc*.

Were we allowed to use a strong expression to characterize Husserl’s line of argument concerning the necessity of introducing the notion of species itself, we would speak of *apagogic argument*: Husserl’s strategy consists in showing the absurd implication of the opposite thesis (he speaks in fact of the “indispensability” of the talk of “species” (Hua XIX/1, p. 115)). Such an apagogic strategy is particularly evident, e.g., in *LU II* (§3), dedicated to the “improper,” or spurious, identity.

¹⁷ “Identity is wholly indefinable” (Hua XIX/1, p. 118).

¹⁸ See the remarks by Majolino (2015, pp. 34–37).

Very often, Husserl observes, we talk of the *same thing* in the case of exactly like things: e.g., “the same cupboard,” “the same dress,” “the same doubt,” “the same conviction,” “the same meaning,” and so on and so forth.

Against this argument I object that an improper use of identity in the case of like things refers us back, through its very impropriety [*Uneigentlichkeit*], to a proper use of the same term, i.e., to an identity. We find in fact that wherever things are “alike,” an identity in the strict and true sense is also present. We cannot predicate exact likeness of two things, without stating the respect in which they are thus alike. Each exact likeness relates to a species, under which the object compared are subsumed: this species is not, and cannot be, merely “alike” in the two cases, if the worst *regressus in infinitum* is not to become inevitable ... If two things are “alike” as regards form, then the form-species in question is the identical element; if they are “like” as regards color, the color-species is this element, etc. (Hua XIX/1, pp. 117–118).

Husserl’s argument displays its apagogic nature here: the consequence of denying or overlooking the identity of the species is the classic *regressus in infinitum*.¹⁹ Of course, one could still decide to appeal to Ockham and his (all-too-)famous razor and claim that *entia non sunt multiplicanda* and that it is completely illegitimate to enrich our already quite densely populated ontological universe. Now, to whoever so argues, Husserl himself would probably reply that it is equally illegitimate to always recall just the first half of Ockham’s razor: it is true that “beings should not be multiplied,” but only, as Ockham stressed, “unless it is necessary” (*praeter necessitatem*). And it is on the basis of such a necessity that Husserl’s arguments explicitly rely.²⁰

We are now in a good position to appreciate and understand what the three key-terms of Husserl’s early idealism stand for, or are meant to respectively refer to: (i)

¹⁹To our knowledge, the harshest criticism of Husserl’s argument is the one provided by Millan-Puelles, who finds in Husserl a “vicious circle” and remarks: “*En la predicación existe un elemento que actúa formalmente, el predicado, y otro que se comporta como materia, el sujeto. No otro es, en efecto, el papel del sujeto, que ser determinando por el predicado. Pero el fenómeno de juicio en nada afecta a la estructura propia del objeto enunciado. El ser de aquello sobra se juzga, es, para esta doctrina, esencialmente realista, indiferente a las peripecias de nuestro saber*” (Millán-Puelles 1947, p. 154). It seems to us that Millan-Puelles—in addition to not recognizing the apagogic nature of Husserl’s line of thought and his preliminary definition of “object” (upon which that very same argument builds)—conflates “being” and “reality”: this is why he ends up speaking of *doctrina realista*, “realist doctrine.”

²⁰“Repeatedly particular offense has been caused by the fact that, as ‘Platonizing realists,’ we set up ideas or essences as objects and ascribe to them, as to other objects, actual (veritable) being as well as, correlatively with this, the possibility of being grasped by intuition—just as we do in the case of realities ... If *object* and *real*, *actuality* and *real actuality* have one and the same sense, then the conception of ideas as objects and actualities is indeed a perverse ‘Platonic hypostatization.’ But if, as in the *Logical Investigations*, the two are sharply separated, if object is defined as something in general [*etwas*], e.g., as subject of a true (categorical, affirmative) statement, what offense can remain—except one which stems from obscure prejudice? I did not invent [*nicht erfunden*] the universal concept of object; I only restored the concept required by all propositions of pure logic and pointed out that it is an essentially indispensable” (Hua III/1, p. 47). Whether Husserl’s position would be accepted by Ockham, or whether the latter’s view would comply with the former’s, is a question that cannot be dealt with here (cf. de Libera 2014, pp. 453–492).

object or *being*, (ii) *ideality* (hence, *ideal objects* and *ideal beings*), (iii) *species*. They need to be taken as three different, yet mutually connected, aspects of one and the same doctrine.

As to the first notion, that of object *sive* being, construed by Husserl as the subject of possible (true) predications, its function is to point to (or, as Husserl writes, they are the *Anzeigen für...*) the validity of certain kinds of judgments, or, even better, to the distinction between different kinds of judgments ("individual-singular," "specific-singular," "individual-universal," "specific-universal"). As Husserl remarks, if the truth of these judgments holds, then "everything presupposed as an object by their validity must have a being," the distinction between different kinds of "beings" or "objects" meaning the "validity" of certain judgments and their relevant truths. Now, since the only sufficient mark of ideality we are offered is that of its being "timeless" (*unzeitlich*), it can be said that the categorial differentiation of the concept of *ideal object* from the real one (as a subject of possible (true) predications) amounts to the differentiation of judgments expressing truths the validity of which is timeless from judgments expressing truths the validity of which is "time"-determined (*hic et nunc*). Finally, the notion of *species* (not to be confused with the specific difference, or *differentia specifica*, designated by Husserl with the German *Art*) serves to provide a rigorous conception of identity as well as to brand the whole doctrine with the mark of necessity or "indispensability."

One more aspect needs to be mentioned before we move on and start discussing the doctrine of the a priori. The very classical term that Husserl retrieves and employs to designate such *species* that, as a new kind of (*ideal*) *object*, represents the "correlate" of the subject of certain kinds of judgments ("specific-singular" and "specific-universal") is that of *Idee*, "idea." We should never forget that, as Husserl confesses in 1913, the two terms *Idee* and *ideal* are among those the misunderstandings and misinterpretations of which the terminological novelties of *Ideen I* were meant to overcome. If this is the case, and the question is where such misunderstandings stem from, Husserl himself will provide the answer. In two letters to Roman Ingarden (one written in 1918, the other in 1930), and in the famous §64d from *Experience and Judgment*, Husserl both explains the problem affecting his early position and gives us some specific information as to when he definitively abandoned it.

Let us start off by considering Husserl's remarks in *Experience and Judgment*. The language is quite different from that of the *Logical Investigations*, as Husserl speaks for example of "irreality" (*Irrealität*) and "irreal" objects rather than ideality and ideal objects. But we do not need to get into this terminological discrepancy now. Though Husserl does not make any explicit mention of his 1900 work, the view (and the confusion following from it) he is critically discussing is precisely the one we have been propounding thus far: his main concern being to characterize in what manner the irreality of propositions (according to the new terminology: the "objectivities of understanding") differs from what in the 1900 book was called *species*. Here is how he presents the problem:

The irreality [*Irrealität*] of objectivities of understanding must not be confused with generic universality [*Gattungsallgemeinheit*]. Since, in particular, any number of affirmative acts, of no matter how many subjects, affirm this one and the same proposition [*Satz*], it can have one and the same sense, and it is a great temptation to think that the proposition belongs to the various acts of which it is the sense by virtue of its generic universality, as, for example, many red things belong to the generic essence [*Gattungswesen*] “redness.” Just as all this things have red in common and the red apprehended by an ideating abstraction is a general essence [*allgemeines Wesen*], so will the ideal-identical proposition [*ideal-identisches Satz*], which indeed is common to many acts, be a general essence, and this means a generic essence [*Gattungswesen*].²¹

This passage is interesting for many reasons. One, the distinction is between *the ideal-identical*—in this case characterizing the notion of proposition understood as the “sense” of a statement—and a series of other concepts revolving around that of *Wesen*, “essence”: *Gattungs-Wesen*, *allgemeines Wesen*, *Gattungsallgemeinheit*. It is important to remark that a few lines after our passage the term *eidos* is used to cover such a battery of notions: “When the generic universal essence, e.g., the *eidos* color, is exemplified in a number of colored objects, each of these objects has *its own* individual moment of coloring; we have many individual moments of color and, in contrast to them [*ihnen gegenüber*], the one *eidos* color as a generic universal.”²² The opposition is between *the ideal-identical*, proper to the proposition as sense, and the *eidos*. Two, by describing what may be called the “position” of the *eidos* vis-à-vis the individual moments through the preposition *gegenüber*, Husserl is explicitly drawing on the terminology of the *Logical Investigations* (where the ideal species is described as an *Einheit gegenüber der Mannigfaltigkeit*).

On the one hand, there is the *eidos*, which we obtain and grasp by means of an “intuitive process of abstraction of a generic universal”; on the other hand, there is the “sense,” the “proposition itself,” as the “*identical as the correlate of an identification*.”²³ Husserl’s “new” position is very clear: the “ideal” and identical sense of a proposition is not to be confused with the character of universality proper to the *eidos* (with its different “degrees” of universality); and the relation between the “sense” and the “many” judgments expressing it cannot to be construed in terms of “instantiation.”²⁴ The distinction between these two needs to be acknowledged and must never be forgotten; the problem is precisely that in the *Logical Investigations* the term *idea* (and *ideal*) means both: the idea expresses—and thereby confuses—the ideality of the sense of an identical proposition and the universality of what will be later called *eidos*.²⁵ *This could be the source of the ambiguities explicitly mentioned in 1913.*

²¹ Husserl (1999, p. 134).

²² Husserl (1999, pp. 314–315).

²³ Husserl (1999, p. 316).

²⁴ Künne (2013, pp. 120–133).

²⁵ The confusion is apparent considering the examples made by Husserl himself at the very beginning of *LU II* (§§1, 2, and 3), where he goes from “redness” and the many red things (Hua XIX/1, p. 114) to the number 2 or *the theorem of Pythagoras* (Hua XIX/1, 116). Further evidence can also be found in the short §33 from the *First Investigation*. Husserl opens up the paragraph by equating

Let us see now what Husserl writes to Ingarden by first turning to the letter from November 21st, 1930. Husserl has just received from Ingarden a copy of his *Das literarische Kunstwerk*; in this text, notably in the “Preface” and again in chapter 5,²⁶ Ingarden discusses and criticizes Husserl’s early view on idealities. In his reply, Husserl—without really discussing what Ingarden argues—simply confines himself to expressing his (delighted) “surprise” at Ingarden’s own criticism of the doctrine of “ideal species.”²⁷ Why “delighted”? Because, as he goes on to remark, the view of the *Logical Investigations* had already been abandoned during the last years of his stay in Göttingen (“*schon in der letzten Göttingen Zeit*”). Moreover, Husserl reveals to Ingarden that Landgrebe is editing a series of manuscripts from the Göttingen period (Hua-Dok III/3, p. 268) in order to publish a book on logic (now known as *Experience and Judgment*), which deals precisely with these topics.²⁸

The point to be emphasized is not only the indirect reference to *Experience and Judgment*, but that Husserl seems to confirm our thesis that the confusion denounced in §64d might represent precisely one of those misunderstandings or misinterpretations that slowly led Husserl to adopt the Greek term *eidos*: “Generally speaking, in the *Logical Investigations* I was still a philosophical child.”

Now, this is exactly what Husserl had already explained to his former student 12 years earlier, in a letter written on April 5th, 1918 (Hua-Dok III/3, pp. 181–182). Husserl writes many interesting things here, all of them related to the notion of “species” and the problem of the a priori. First of all, Husserl remarks that he had recognized the “falsity” (*unrichtig*) of the view of the *Prolegomena* far before the

“species” and “universal object” and then remarks that “meanings” “constitute a class of ‘universal objects’” or species: “But the meaning in which the species is thought and its object, that is, the species itself, are not one and the same” (Hua XIX/1, p. 108). Although Husserl is being careful in distinguishing *that in which*, or *by means of which*, we think and the *something else*, by equating “species” with “universal object” and by claiming that “meanings” belong to the class of “species” he ends up understanding the relation at stake as the one between the “species” *by means of which* we think and the “species” that is *thought* and thereby represents its object. Or, species meaning the same as universal object, the relation is between the “universal object” *by means of which* we think and the “universal object” that is *thought* and thereby represents its object. As he writes: “So also, in the field of species, we distinguish between, e.g., the number 4 and the representations (that is to say, the meanings) which have 4 as their object, like for example *the number 4—the second even number in the number-series*. The universality *that we think of*, does not therefore resolve itself into the universality of the meanings *in which we think of it*.” Husserl himself explicitly recognizes that the relation holds between two “universalities,” and, although at the end of the paragraph he tries to make things clearer by adopting the Latin distinction between *Generalia* and *Individualia*, the “confusion” seems to be unavoidable: species are all universal (*allgemein*), yet some of them (like *the number 4*, and *the theorem of Pythagoras*) are *Individualia*. In the example above, “Individual representations, as unities of meaning, are then *Generalia*, while their objects are *Individualia*”—but, to the extent that they are “species,” they are all “universalities”!

²⁶ Ingarden (1972).

²⁷ “Eine frohe Überraschung war für mich Ihre Kritik meiner ursprünglichen Lehre von den Bedeutungen als ‘idealen Spezies’” (Hua-Dok III/3, p. 269).

²⁸ “Darüber handeln auch jene ‘logischen Studien,’ u. ganz in Ihrem Sinne” (Hua-Dok III/3, p. 268). See how Landgrebe himself relates the book’s *Entstehungsgeschichte* in Husserl, *Erfahrung und Urteil*, pp. vii–viii.

publication of *Ideen I*.²⁹ In what does the mistake of that position consist? As he points out: “The mistake was primarily in the conception of the ‘sense’ ... as an *essence* [*Wesen*], or as ‘ideas’ in the sense of essence [*species*]. The proposition’s sense’s independence from the contingent judgment and judger does not mean that the ideal-identical is something specific.” If in *Experience and Judgment* the opposition was between *the ideal-identical* and the *eidos*, here it is between *the ideal-identical* and—with a mishmash of different terminologies—the essence or, better, the idea as essence. It is important to underline how now the term essence stands for one of the two original meanings of idea (the other being the “ideal-identical” characterizing the “sense”), and is explicitly replacing the term *species*.

If we put together the two letters and the excerpt from *Experience and Judgment*, it is possible to distinguish three stages, so to speak, in the development of the problem. In the *Logical Investigations*, the term idea (and *ideal*) simply means the species as the one and “identical” meaning as well as the “identity” of a universal “extent” (e.g., of “redness”). No difference is ever made between them, and its denial directly results in a *regressus in infinitum*. As Husserl becomes aware of this confusion, the idea is employed only for the second meaning, which is now properly designated by the essence. In yet a third stage, the idea having disappeared (for it means something different), the Greek *eidos* comes to the fore to refer to something that has been totally divorced from the ideal-identical proper to the so-called objectivities of understanding. As we will see, the main problem at this point is that of clarifying the relation-difference between *eidos* and essence.³⁰

Let us return to the letter. For, if on the one hand Husserl admits the mistake of his early view, he writes on the other that the *Prolegomena* were nevertheless “right” (*richtig*) vis-à-vis the notion of essential truths. As he affirms, in that book the reasons (*Gründe*) for “distinguishing” between essential truths and truths as to matters of fact had already been clarified. Of course, it may be maintained, since in the A-edition of the *Logical Investigations* the meaning of the term essence is still confused with the ideal-identical, and they are both designated by the “idea,” the doctrine of essential truths (which represents the core of Husserl’s doctrine of the a priori) is part of the general doctrine of ideal species (i.e., of Husserl’s early idealism).

²⁹ The fact that Husserl speaks here of the *Prolegomena* (in 1918) and not of the *Logical Investigations* might be due to the fact that—in contrast to the second edition of the actual six investigations—in the *Prolegomena* Husserl’s original view and position is still quite visible and detectable.

³⁰ This sort of “development,” if we are allowed to use such an expression, is briefly hinted at by Ingarden himself in his famous 1967 lectures *Introduction to Husserl’s Phenomenology* (7th lecture), where he clearly distinguishes between *species* (as an “ideal quality”), *essence*, and finally *eidos*. See Ingarden (1992, p. 189).

2 The Problem of the A Priori in the *Logical Investigations*

2.1 Introductory Remarks

Were we to take at face value Husserl's retrospective account ("As already was the case in the *Logische Untersuchungen*, I avoid as much as possible the expressions *a priori* and *a posteriori*"), we should not be surprised at the low number of occurrences of the two expressions "a priori" and "a posteriori." Now, the problem is that, in a straightforward opposition to what Husserl relates in 1913, both the *Prolegomena* and the *Logical Investigations* make extensive use of the expressions *a priori* and *apriorisch*. Of course, a certain number of occurrences does not attest—*per se*—to the presence of a full-fledged theory of the a priori. In fact, if the one and only meaning of the concept of a priori that Husserl recognizes philosophically is the one expressed by the Greek term *eidos* (which, as shown by *Experience and Judgment*, can also be equivalent to the German *Wesen*), and if neither the *eidos* nor the *Wesen* actually play any role in the first edition of the *Logical Investigations*, then it could be surmised that at the time of his breakthrough book Husserl *does not yet have a theory of the a priori*. This is why we prefer to speak of the *problem of the a priori*, meaning that Husserl already has a quite specific understanding of the "problem" yet *still* lacks the appropriate language as well as the methodological or systematic tools that he will acquire and further develop over the years following the publication of the *Logical Investigations*.

A preliminary remark is necessary. Since we said that Husserl "*still* lacks" a series of tools, one might object that our approach to the text, notably to the problem of the a priori, is "teleologically" determined by what Husserl *will* do and *will* argue after the *Logical Investigations*, and that we are reading Husserl and his doctrine while *driven*, not by the text under scrutiny, but by the position he will propound, for example, in the first book of *Ideen* and in *Formale und transzendente Logik*. If this were the objection, then it would be no objection at all: it would be nothing but a plain account of what we are *de facto* trying to do. Indeed, our overall goal is to understand *in what sense* Husserl identifies his understanding of the "a priori" with the Greek term *eidos*, and then *what* led him to slowly adopt that foreign notion. Our investigation (at least this part of it) is explicitly and "teleologically" oriented toward the *eidos*.

As we remarked at the very end of the previous section, Husserl's claim is that the *Prolegomena* already offer the reasons for distinguishing between *essential truths* and *truths as to matters of fact*. Now, this means two different things at once. One, and as already said, since in the first edition the meaning of the essence is still confused with the ideal-identical, and they are both designated by the term *idea*, the doctrine of "essential truths" will necessarily be part of the general doctrine of "ideal species." Two, and in order to grasp in what "one" consists, we should first ask ourselves how the *Prolegomena* actually present the distinction between those two kinds of truths.

In this respect, our commentary on §40 from the *Prolegomena* (p. 28 and ff.) on Husserl's harsh criticism of Erdmann's anthropologism can help us towards answering that question. In that paragraph, Husserl's concern is to dismiss Erdmann's view by showing how he (like any other psychologistic, anthropologistic, and relativistic thinker) falls prey to the confusion between *two different kinds of necessary truths*. As we know, Erdmann does not acknowledge the distinction between objective (*unbedingte* and *unveränderliche*) necessity (characterizing logical formations and logical truths in general) and subjective necessity (proper to *das Wesen unseres Denkens* in a psychological sense) and thus ends up ascribing to the laws of logic what he calls "hypothetical fundamental necessity": Husserl's aim consists in first denouncing and then rejecting such a *metabasis eis allo genos*.³¹

Additionally, we have also seen in the present chapter how the distinction between real and ideal "objects" (this being the core of Husserl's early "idealism") is meant to refer to the distinction between judgments expressing truths the validity of which is timeless and judgments expressing truths the validity of which is time-determined (*hic et nunc*). Now, if we put together these two aspects it will turn out that Husserl's discussion of the problem of the a priori boils down to distinguishing truths the validity of which is timeless and which express an *objective* or *inalterable necessity* from truths the validity of which is not timeless and which do not express an objective or inalterable necessity. This is in fact the core of what Husserl, in his 1918 letter to Ingarden, refers to as the distinction between essential truths and truths as to matters of fact at the time of his first masterpiece. Yet, if what we just remarked contributes to clarifying the former notion, the latter obtains only a negative characterization (for they do not express any inalterable necessity, nor do their truths display timeless validity) and will require particular attention on our part.³²

In other words: we will argue that Husserl's approach to the problem of the a priori consists in distinguishing different notions of *necessity* based on the relations between ideal species (*the problem of the a priori being a part of the doctrine of ideal objects*) and that the key term around which Husserl's account will revolve is that of *law*. This, as we will show, represents the core of the famous *Third Logical Investigation*, notably Chapter I (p. 78 and ff.).³³

Were we to label Husserl's early "treatment" of the doctrine of the a priori (and of the notion of a priori in general), we would speak either of *nomological* or of *chreontic doctrine*—meaning that for Husserl the question of the a priori amounts basically to discriminating different types of "law" (*kata ton nomon*) and different types of relevant "necessity"³⁴ (*kata to chreon*, as we may also say).

³¹ A similar criticism is directed against Sigwart in §39 of the *Prolegomena*, which we briefly recalled and discussed on p. 47 and ff.

³² This is the question of how Husserl understands the problem of the "a posteriori" (see Sect. 3 below).

³³ Let us also remark, for example, that the title of the famous §11 of the *Third Investigation* sounds: "*Der Unterschied dieser 'materialen' Gesetze von den 'formalen' oder 'analytischen' Gesetzen*" (Hua XIX/1, p. 255).

³⁴ We are referring to the distinction between "formal" and "material" (*sachliche*) a priori and necessity.

It might be objected that we are proposing a very “minimal” or “minimalistic” reading of the topic of the a priori in the *Logical Investigations*, notably in the third investigation, which is in conflict with what Husserl retrospectively relates and suggests in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*. Here is what he points out at the beginning of §27: “The *Logical Investigations* as a whole and, above all, the investigations of the second volume ventured to take up in a new form the old idea of an a priori ontology—so strongly interdicted by Kantianism and empiricism—and attempted to establish it, in respect of concretely executed portions, as an idea necessary to philosophy” (Hua XVII, p. 90).

Let us set aside the reference to Kantianism and empiricism. What Husserl is referring to here is not only the idea of a “formal ontology” (the explicit topic of §27) but also the related notion of a “material ontology,” hence the distinction between “formal” (loosely and strictly) and “material” a priori. Accordingly, it could be asked what happens to these notions in the account that we are going to provide. By saying that Husserl’s focus is represented exclusively by the dyad necessity-law, we do not intend to deny the importance of the notions of “material a priori” and “ontology”: the point is to understand what “ontology” stands for in this framework. We would completely agree with the characterization of Husserl’s stance as ontological: indeed, since “ontology” means the same as “theory of object” here (i.e., *ens et objectum convertuntur seu reciprocantur*), Husserl’s position is *de facto* “ontological” insofar as it is based upon the pivotal distinction between different kinds of beings or objects (ideal and real ones) and thus on the relations holding between certain kinds of ideal beings or objects. In other words: it is “ontological” if and only if by that we mean the necessity of a “fundamental categorial distinction in our conceptual unity of being.”³⁵

If, on the contrary, we are saying that there is much more than that to Husserl’s ontology or theory of object here, and the *Third Logical Investigation*, with all its “mereological” distinctions, already provides us with a full-fledged theory of essence and of the a priori, or that for example it includes some anticipations of the notion of “material and eidetic science,” then we would strongly disagree. Husserl, as we have pointed out over and over again, has no notion of essence yet (let alone of the *eidos*), and the concepts necessary in order to speak of *eidetic science as such* (be it phenomenology or other) are nowhere to be found (we mean concepts like “individuum,” “regional domain,” “sub-regions,” “fundamental regional concepts,” and “axioms” (Hua III/1, pp. 23–28; Hua XXXII, pp. 28–30, 174)). Accordingly, Husserl’s view here is not and should not be described as ontological—if by that we mean the relation between specific “ontological” domains, their material concepts (i.e., material categories) and corresponding material laws, hence their inclusion within specific material regions, which also implies cross-regional relations and properties. In this respect, there is no idea and no conception of a material ontology in the *Logical Investigations*; and if by “material a priori” one means something

³⁵ As we will soon see, in the second edition of the *Third Investigation* Husserl uses the expression *ontologisch*, specifically *ontologische Umwendung*, in relation to the concept of “law” (see Sect. 2.3.2 below).

more than just some necessary relations holding between certain kind of ideal objects or beings (e.g., a series of inter-connected laws regulating a specific domain, or the unity of a higher region) then—no matter how unusual it may sound—there is absolutely no idea and no conception of a material a priori (in this “second” meaning) in the *Logical Investigations*.³⁶

2.2 *The Language of the A Priori*

If there is no notion of *Wesen* yet, and if Husserl is not distinguishing the “ideality” of what is universal from the ideality of the identical, what kind of language and conceptuality does he possess? If one cannot yet talk of eidetic or essential relations nor of eidetic or essential judgments then what kind of relations, properties, judgments, and truths is Husserl trying to categorize and investigate here?

A comparative examination with some of the expressions introduced in the second edition will be helpful in better bringing to the fore Husserl’s original interest and concern. In the Introduction (§3), Husserl introduces *pure essence* and the opposition between *essence* and *facticity* (Hua XIX/1, p. 13); he speaks of the *doctrine of essence* and *essential necessity*, while in the first edition the expression was simply *phenomenological content* (Hua XIX/1, p. 15). In the first edition of the *Third Logical Investigation*—the language and structure of which underwent a massive re-elaboration—Husserl speaks of *Aristotelian genus and species* (Hua XIX/1, p. 230), or even just of *species* and *genuses* (Hua XIX/1, pp. 235, 237, 255–256). What is interesting is not simply the introduction of the term *Wesen*—which characterizes the second edition—but first and foremost *what is being replaced by that term*. Let us be clear: if in the second edition Husserl’s effort at reshaping the physiognomy of the text by introducing the language of his later theory of essence is apparent, then the question will turn out to be: *what kind of language is this new conceptuality and terminology meant to replace?*

Husserl originally employs two different terms—which could both be considered either neutral or confusing because extremely vague: *content* (Hua XIX/1, p. 234) and *nature* (Hua XIX/1, p. 239). For example, he writes: *according to their nature* (Hua XIX/1, p. 233), *in the nature* (Hua XIX/1, p. 238, 244), etc. In the B-edition, Husserl systematically replaces *nature* with *essence*, and *in the nature* is replaced by *in the essence* or *in the pure essence*. As a consequence of such a substitution, the term *law*, too, undergoes a transformation: *law* becomes *essential law* (Hua XIX/1, pp. 244, 254), *pure law* (Hua XIX/1, pp. 242, 254), and *a priori law* (Hua XIX/1, p. 253).

³⁶ In opposition to what is held by Costa, Franzini, and Spinicci (2002, p. 76), we firmly believe that the distinction between *formal* and *material* spheres does not suffice for Husserl to speak of material ontology in the strict sense of the term.

If we look at such a state of affairs from the standpoint of Husserl's original concern, then we can understand why that conceptuality was more than sufficient to him. If we recall Husserl's position vis-à-vis Erdmann, then it is clear why all he needs is to single out a kind of necessity grounded in, or that follows from *the very nature* or *content* of the formations under analysis (e.g., the *nature* of logical formations and logical principles).³⁷

Now, before we move on to a close discussion of the *Third Investigation*, an important remark is necessary. In what follows, we will not be simply commenting on that text. Our commentary will be introduced and then accompanied by a parallel discussion of a very important book—*L'a priori conceptuel. Bolzano, Husserl, Schlick* by Jocelyn Benoist—in which the interpretation of the *Third Logical Investigation* provided diverges from ours and is based on a traditional understanding of what that *Investigation* is about.

2.3 The Problem of the A Priori in the Third Logical Investigation

2.3.1 A Possible Interpretation, or: The Janus Dilemma

Jocelyn Benoist's (1999) book *L'a priori conceptuel. Bolzano, Husserl, Schlick* had the great merit of raising a problem that—even if sporadically already touched on by some Husserl scholars³⁸—had never been discussed so seriously or tackled to the fullest extent. Were we to use a catchy expression to characterize this problem, we would speak of a “Janus-faced notion of the a priori” in the *Logical Investigations*. Benoist himself speaks “d'une véritable tête de Janus”³⁹ precisely in order to refer to the duplicity that he finds to be affecting Husserl's first masterpiece and the treatment of the nature of the “a priori” offered therein. Let us briefly review Benoist's arguments.

Benoist's initial remark bears upon the significance of a very specific text, the *Third Investigation*, and the way in which it introduces the idea of “synthetic a priori”⁴⁰: “Lorsque l'a priori synthétique est introduit dans la Recherche III, c'est dans des termes extrêmement généraux, et comme un cas particulier d'un a priori plus général qu'on pourrait qualifier d'a priori méréleogique.”⁴¹ Such a rather concise statement entails two different yet interrelated claims, one regarding the notion

³⁷ Accordingly, we disagree with the claim that “*Der Sache nach ist aber schon in den Logischen Untersuchungen von Eide oder reinen Wesen die Rede*” (Sowa 2016, p. 11).

³⁸ See Tugendhat (1967, pp. 149–168); and Giovanni Piana in Husserl (1977, pp. 7–71).

³⁹ Benoist (1999, p. 129).

⁴⁰ There will be time over the course of our investigation to tackle the difference between the expressions “synthetic” and “material” a priori, and if we now adopt the former it is exclusively in order to follow Benoist's own reasoning and approach to the Husserlian text.

⁴¹ Benoist (1999, p. 95).

itself of “synthetic a priori” (and “a priori” *sic et simpliciter*) and the other bearing on *LU III*. Indeed, to say that the “synthetic a priori” is first introduced as “a particular case” of a more general “mereological a priori” suggests, if it does not presuppose, that the context of its introduction, namely, Chapter I of *LU III*, is itself dedicated to what is usually called “mereology” or the theory of parts and wholes. Here comes what Benoist himself calls *la question difficile*, namely, the one concerning “the ontological presuppositions” (*celle des présupposés ontologiques*) of the *Logical Investigations* themselves and of the mereology upon which they build. As he remarks: “Il y a bien comme une sorte d’ontologie qui est présupposé par la phénoménologie dans la Recherche, précisément celle qui est exposée dans cette Recherche III au titre d’une ‘logique du tout et des parties.’ Mais qu’est-ce qui fonde et justifie cette ontologie?”⁴² As Benoist goes on to maintain, what seems to justify this “ontology” (with all its relevant distinctions, starting with that between “independent” and “non-independent” objects) is what can be referred to as the “phenomenology of perception”: “la légalité synthétique a priori semble être convoquée d’abord par Husserl pour caractériser un domaine d’objets ... qui est bien celui de la perception au sens classique du terme.”⁴³ In other words: Husserl’s leading example—that of the relation between *color* and *extension* as two non-independent, intuitive “objects”—far from being just an example among others should be held as the *paradeigma* on which the entire argument of *LU III*, and the idea of a synthetic and material a priori itself, hinges and builds.

*C’est bien par une analyse de la perception ou plutôt des contenus perceptifs que semble se profiler l’idée de l’a priori synthétique matériel ... L’introduction est assez claire: il est question de la généralisation, et de la transposition sur un plan proprement ontologique, d’une différence ‘apparue tout d’abord dans le domaine de la psychologie descriptive des données sensorielles’ ... Husserl se place alors (§2) dans une tradition qui vient de Berkeley ... C’est une philosophie de la perception, pour laquelle être c’est d’abord percevoir ou, du côté des choses être perçu, qui fonde ici l’idée du synthétique a priori.*⁴⁴

Hence, as we could reasonably conclude, one can speak of a truly perceptual model of the a priori: “C’est bien donc à un modèle perceptif que nous avons affaire, et la possibilité d’un synthétique a priori se déploie par rapport à lui pour ainsi dire latéralement, comme celle de ce qu’on pourrait appeler une grammaire de la perception, ayant trait à l’ordre et à la structuration réciproque des propriétés fondamentales de l’objet perceptif.”⁴⁵

Nevertheless, this *modèle perceptif* represents only one side of “Janus’ two-faced head!” The other one being that provided by the *Fourth Investigation* and the idea of a *Bedeutungslehre*. Indeed, as Benoist hastens to remark, though Husserl himself tends to present the analyses of *LU IV* as a mere “application” (*Anwendung*) of the

⁴² Benoist (1999, p. 93).

⁴³ Benoist (1999, p. 107).

⁴⁴ Benoist (1999, pp. 110–111).

⁴⁵ Benoist (1999, pp. 108–109).

outcomes of *LU III*,⁴⁶ one can speak of a “grammatical character of the synthetic a priori” (*caractère grammatical du synthétique a priori*) with an autonomy of its own: “Et c’est à ce niveau que s’accomplit pour Husserl un autre sens du synthétique a priori, qui n’a plus rien du synthétique intuitif ou perceptif: ce qu’on pourrait nommer à bon droit un a priori grammatical.”⁴⁷ As he rhetorically asks at this point: “L’a priori synthétique grammatical simple variante de l’a priori synthétique perceptif, fût-ce au sens où l’un et l’autre relèveraient simplement de l’application d’un schéma (ontologique?) commun? On nous permettra d’en douter.”⁴⁸ In other words: if the “grammatical a priori” cannot be considered just as an application of the distinctions of *LU III*, then the *vexata quaestio* turns out to be the one as to the nature of this synthetic a priori, as well as that bearing upon the relation between the two: “le rapport des deux a priori, ou des deux versions du synthétique a priori développées (celui de la Recherche III et celui de la Recherche IV) est tout sauf clair et demeure un des points difficiles des Recherches, d’autant plus préoccupant qu’il met en jeu et rend très problématique leur économie d’ensemble.”⁴⁹

These are the two main points to keep in mind. First, what Benoist is trying to bring to the fore is not the discrepancy between *two different kinds* of “synthetic a priori” (as if there were two species of one and the same genus) but that between *two different models of the synthetic a priori itself*: the difference between *LU III* and *IV* amounts to that between a *perceptual* model or origin of the synthetic a priori and a *grammatical* one. Second, such a theoretical “dilemma” (let us call it *the Janus dilemma*) goes hand in hand with the question of Husserl’s overall understanding of the notion of a priori in his first great masterpiece.

Before we embark on our counter-interpretation, a methodological remark on the way we will be referring to Benoist. Indeed, there are two extremes that must be avoided. On the one hand, the present analyses should not be regarded as a series of *argumenta ad hominem*, as if Benoist rather than Husserl were the focus of our inquiry. On the other hand, we want to avoid what can be labeled “hermeneutical occasionalism,” according to which a text (here, Benoist’s) would be only the *causa occasionalis* of our exegesis (with no direct bearing on it). Though this section is not meant to be an answer to Benoist,⁵⁰ it will nevertheless take “the Janus dilemma” seriously into account.

Accordingly, our goal will not consist in criticizing such and such a claim on the part of Benoist: we will strive to show to what extent the “alternative” itself that motivates his research and grounds his arguments is nowhere to be found in the Husserlian text and, to be even more specific, that his view of the *Third Investigation* misses Husserl’s strategy and line of thought altogether.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Sokolowski (1977).

⁴⁷ Benoist (1999, p. 129).

⁴⁸ Benoist (1999, p. 119).

⁴⁹ Benoist (1999, p. 131).

⁵⁰ Majolino (2002, p. 231).

⁵¹ In this sense, our interpretation will be closer to the one propounded by René Schérer, whose

2.3.2 Counter-Interpretation, or: “Who Is the Helmsman of Ananke?”⁵²

Let us start out with our main claim: no matter how unusual it may sound, the *Third Investigation*, especially the first chapter, is not *prima facie* concerned with a mereology! This might sound very provocative, if not downright wrong; in effect, since the “title” of the investigation is “*Zur Lehre von den Ganzen und Teilen*,” our initial bold statement requires elaboration. In a nutshell: what we will argue is that Chapter I of *LU III*—the title of which is “The Distinction between Independent and Non-Independent Objects” and in which the notion of “a priori” (with its varieties) in general is first introduced and extensively discussed—is not at all concerned with mereological distinctions and problems. Accordingly, the account of the a priori, notably of both the material and formal a priori, should not be *prima facie* understood in relation to mereological questions. It is only in Chapter II (“*Gedanken zu einer Theorie der reinen Formen von Ganzen und Teilen*”) that Husserl provides some fundamental mereological definitions; nevertheless, even in this chapter one must wait until §21 to be provided with a definition of “whole.” Let us read the following excerpt:

Our interest in the foregoing treatments was directed to the most general relations of essence between wholes and parts, or between parts among one another (of contents that combine into a “whole”). In our definitions and descriptions on these matters the concept of whole was *presupposed*. It is however possible to *dispense* with this notion *in all cases*: it can be replaced by the simple *being-together* of the contents that were designated as parts. For example, one could define as follows: *A content of the species α is founded on the content of the species β , if an α can by its essence⁵³ (i.e., legally, in virtue of its specific character) not obtain, unless also a β obtains* (Hua XIX/1, pp. 281–282).

The passage should be read as a “self-assessment”: it is Husserl himself retrospectively considering the arguments that have slowly built up to this point (§21). Whereas the “foregoing treatments,” i.e., the descriptions and definitions from §14 through §20, *presuppose* the “concept of whole,” it is only now, in §21, that its *pregnant concept* is provided and explained. Accordingly, it is only from now on—and not before—that one can speak of mereology in the rigorous sense of the term, i.e., without simply assuming the very notion of “whole.”

Moreover, as Husserl hastens to remark, the concepts of “whole” and “part” can be dispensed with and replaced by the “being-together of the contents” (*content standing for what is called part in a mereological framework*). *Now, this is exactly Husserl’s language and conceptuality in Chapter I of LU III.* How can the concept

reading of both the role and function of *LU III* and *LU IV* is much more nuanced than that of Benoist. Indeed, Schérer takes both investigations to make up the “ontological core” (*noyau ontologique*) of the *Logical Investigations* based on the idea of “lawfulness” (*légalité*) (“*Autrement dit, ces deux Recherches sont l’explication des idées qui servent de thèmes directeurs dans les analyses précédentes: l’idée des l’objet et l’idée de la signification*” (Schérer 1967, p. 206)).

⁵²Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, 510 ff.

⁵³As the reader might have already guessed, the first edition writes *seiner Natur nach* instead of *seinem Wesen nach*.

of “whole” (and “part”) be translated into the language of “contents?” By means of the notion of *law*: our main thesis being that Chapter I’s goal is to provide an “objective” notion of *content* (which Husserl will also call *Gegenstand*), notably non-independent content, by means of that of *law* (only on whose basis a full-fledged mereology can be developed). As we shall see, the last part of the passage quoted above refers back to the main theoretical outcome of Chapter I.

This being said, our interpretation will defend:

- (a) Not only the *negative claim* that Chapter I, and the discussion of the a priori, is *prima facie* not to be related to any particular mereological issue, but also...
- (b) The *positive theses* that—according to what we have labeled Husserl’s “nomological” conception of the a priori (Sect. 2.1)—he resorts to the notion of “law” in order to:
 - (b’) Provide a specific account of “object,” notably “dependent object.”
 - (b’’) To move away precisely from that *perceptual language* or *model* that Benoist finds characterizes “Janus’ first head.”

In a nutshell: the pivotal notion of Chapter I is neither part nor whole, but “law” (*Getze*). Now, Husserl’s strategy in *LU III* can be divided into “three” main steps:

(A) The starting point is the discussion of a conceptuality (and relevant definitions) characterizing a very specific tradition (the one that runs from Berkeley all the way down to his master Stumpf).

(B) After emphasizing the latter’s difficulties, Husserl introduces the notion of *law* so as to obtain more objective and rigorous definition able to overcome A.

(Γ) Given this less ambiguous conceptuality, Husserl can outline his mereology and propose all the relevant definitions. Eventually, *I* too could be differentiated into *I'* (which still presupposes the notion of *whole*) and *I''* (where Husserl introduces “the pregnant concept of whole”).

In this section, and for the sake of our interests, we will focus only on (A) and (B). The diagram on the next page can help us distinguish the different phases and relevant sections from *LU III* (Fig. 1).

In relation to Benoist’s thesis, we maintain that the question of whether there is just one or two models shaping Husserl’s account of the a priori is groundless; the point being that, once we show that his approach is not at all mereological (or mereology-based), and that there is no such a thing as a perceptual model (or, better, that the “perceptual” model is precisely the one Husserl is moving away from), the grammatical paradigm, too, will turn out to be something else: a further “specification” of what we called Husserl’s *nomological understanding of the a priori*.

In §1, Husserl finds himself confronted with a series of definitions of the *part-whole* dyad by means of the two correlative ideas of “complexity” and “simplicity.”

The terms *complex* and *simple* are therefore defined by the qualification of having parts or not having parts. They may, however, be understood in a second, possibly more natural sense, in which complexity, as the word’s etymology suggests, points to a plurality of dis-

<i>Logical Investigation III</i>		
<i>Chapter I</i>	(A)	§§1-6; 8-9
	(B)	§§7; 10-13
<i>Chapter II</i>	(Γ')	§§14-20
	(Γ'')	§§21-25

Fig. 1 The structure of the *Third Investigation*

joined parts in the whole, so that we have to call simple whatever cannot be “cut up” into a plurality of parts, i.e. that in which not even two *disjoined* parts can be distinguished (Hua XIX/1, p. 229).

As the text suggests, this first meaning of *part* derives from *the etymology of the word* and is not to be taken as spelling out Husserl’s own understanding. Indeed, as he hastens to write, this account (according to which, for example, “color” and “extension” are “disjoined parts” since “they have no community of content”) “goes against linguistic usage”: “For in such wholes the parts have relative dependence as regards one another” (Hua XIX/1, p. 230). Now, it is important to keep in mind that Husserl is neither “assuming” nor “criticizing” any specific account of the notion of *part*: he is only elaborating on the “ambiguities” of such a notion. The only positive outcome of this section is the acknowledgment that “the relations of parts fall under characteristically different *forms*: we suspect that these forms depend upon the cardinal distinction between independent and non-independent objectualities, which is our theme in the present section” (Hua XIX/1, p. 230).

The last excerpt is important for two main reasons. One, Husserl is explicitly switching from the “mereological” jargon of *part-whole* to that of “independent” and “non-independent” objectualities (which will lead his arguments from now on). Two, he is maintaining that the “relations of parts,” hence their forms, depend on such a *cardinal distinction* (between independent and non-independent *objectualities*), which is more fundamental than any mereological distinction. It follows that any account of the latter can be worked out only against the backdrop of the former.

Now, the rest of Chapter I (notably §§2–6) is dedicated precisely to dismissing a series of possible misunderstandings of the distinction between “dependence” and “non-independence.” In this sense, §2 is decisive: Husserl does not simply introduce

a first definition of the cardinal distinction, he also traces it back to Berkeley's criticism of Locke.⁵⁴

The distinction between independent and non-independent contents historically arose in the psychological realm, more specifically in the field of the phenomenology of inner experience. In a polemic against Locke, Berkeley said: We have the ability to recall individual things previously seen, or to put them together or break them down in imagination [*Einbildung*]. We can represent [*Vorstellen*] a man with two heads, the trunk of a man tied to the body of a horse, or isolated pieces such as a separated head, nose, ear, etc. As opposed to this, it is impossible to form "abstract ideas;" to separate the idea, e.g., of a movement from that of a moving body (Hua XIX/1, p. 232).

It seems to us that "historically" (as well as the expression "the field of the phenomenology of inner experience") has a twofold meaning here: on the one hand, it refers to a very specific moment in the *history of philosophy*, namely, to Berkeley's own criticism of Locke's position; on the other hand, it ought to be taken as referring to Carl Stumpf's account. In other words, the passage should be read as a "self-assessment" on the part of Husserl himself: historically speaking, "the distinction between independence and non-independence" arises in the context of Berkeley's polemic against Locke, and, as such, still characterizes the position of Husserl's own master, namely, Stumpf's very famous "psychological" descriptions. *Contra* Benoist, who urges that "*Husserl se place alors (§2) dans une tradition qui vient de Berkeley*," it is our firm opinion that Husserl's own effort consists precisely in the opposite: Husserl is distancing himself from the "tradition" that—directly or indirectly—shaped and determined his philosophical background as well. In a nutshell: §2 does not spell out Husserl's view or position, but precisely the one he intends to dismiss.⁵⁵

By the end of §2, Husserl has not only left behind the mereological language of "part" and "whole" (and switched to that of independent and non-independent "objectualities"), but also provisionally identified the tradition the approach of which to the latter distinction he intends to overcome once and for all. Here is the definition, hinging on the ambiguous verb *Vorstellen* (hereafter *historical definition* or HD), which Husserl intends to reject:

Contents represented [*vorgestellten*] together on any occasion fall into two main classes: independent and non-independent contents. We have independent contents wherever the elements of a representational complex [*Vorstellungskomplexes*] (complex of contents) *by their very nature permit their being represented (vorgestellt) separately*: we have dependent contents wherever this is not the case (Hua XIX/1, p. 233).

HD is supposed to cover Berkeley's account (as Husserl remarks: "We may now make a statement that brings out the essential point of *Berkeley's distinctions*,

⁵⁴Which Husserl systematically tackles in some of his lectures, like the ones published in Hua-Mat IX, pp. 387–400.

⁵⁵Without ignoring Husserl's indebtedness to Stumpf (Costa 1999, pp. 126–130), our aim here is to analyze the extent to which Husserl explicitly moves away from his master's approach and his emphasis on the verb *Vorstellen*. See also Bucci (2000) for a quick analysis of how to understand Bolzano's influence on Husserl when it comes to the topic under scrutiny.

making use of a readily understandable verbal change”), the terminology of which revolves around the terms *imagination* and *representing*,⁵⁶ and Stumpf’s (whose book is explicitly mentioned in a footnote (Hua XIX/1, p. 233)). Let us see the way in which Stumpf introduces the distinction between independence and non-independence:

Independent contents are present whenever the elements of a representation-complex can, in virtue of their own nature, be also represented as separate; [we speak of] partial content whenever this is not the case.⁵⁷

Rather than embracing a tradition that defines the notion of “non-independence” by resorting to the faculty of imagination or to an even more ambiguous *Vorstellen*, Husserl will move away from HD over the course of both §§5 and 6 by providing his own account. Indeed, after having explained that the problem with “non-independent” contents is that of determining the nature of their *functional dependence* (§3) and also having pointed out some of Stumpf’s terminological ambiguities (§4), Husserl devotes §§5–6 to introducing what he calls “the objective determination of the concept of inseparability” (*die objektive Bestimmung des Begriffs der Unabtrennbarkeit*). That this ought to be taken exclusively as a *preliminary* explanation is retrospectively made clear by the title of §7, which is “More Exact Development of our Determination by Introducing the Concepts of Pure Law and Pure Genus.”⁵⁸ This means that what can be found in §§5 and 6 is only a preliminary determination (*Ausprägung*)—not the “exact” and definitive one—of non-independence.

Already in §3, Husserl slightly modifies and alters HD (an alteration that only later on, in §6, will turn out to be decisive):

It is evident—in regard to certain contents—that the modification or elimination of at least one of the contents given with them ... must modify or eliminate those contents themselves. In the case of *other* contents, this is not evident and the thought [*Gedanke*] of them remaining unaffected despite the modification or elimination of all coexistent contents is not absurd (Hua XIX/1, p. 233).

⁵⁶ Let us read Berkeley: “For myself I find indeed I have a faculty of imagining, or representing to myself the ideas of those particular things I have perceived and of variously compounding and dividing them. I can imagine a man with two heads or the upper part of a man joined to the body of a horse ... But then whatever hand or eye I imagine, it must have some particular shape or colour ... And it is equally impossible for me to form the abstract idea of motion distinct from the body moving, and which is neither swift nor slow, curvilinear nor rectilinear” (Berkeley 1975, p. 68). We are not considering Husserl’s analysis of Berkeley’s theory of abstraction here, nor his dismissal of the concept of representation in both Locke and Berkeley in Chapter 4 of the *Second Investigation*.

⁵⁷ Stumpf (1873, pp. 108–109): “*selbständige Inhalte sind da vorhanden, wo die Elemente eines Vorstellungskomplexes ihrer Natur nach auch getrennt vorgestellt werden können; Theilinhalte, wo dies nicht der Fall ist.*”

⁵⁸ In the first edition, the title is “*Schärfere Ausprägung unserer Bestimmung durch Einführung des Gesetzgedankes.*”

This is only the first step Husserl takes to move away from HD: rather than speak of *vorstellen* and *imagining* (as Stumpf and Berkeley do), he resorts to the notion of *evidence* and to the more objective language of *thought* (as *Gedanke* and *Denken*).

In §4, after providing his own account of *Un-Abtrennbarkeit* (“The sense of *non-independence* lies likewise in the positive thought of *dependence*. The content is by its nature bound to other contents, it cannot be, if other contents are not there together with it” (Hua XIX/1, p. 239)), Husserl remarks:

We need only say “object” and “partial object,” instead of “content” and “partial content”—the term “content” we regard as the narrower term, the one restricted to the sphere of phenomenology—to achieve an *objective distinction* freed from all relation to apprehending acts and to any phenomenological content that might be interpreted. *No reference back to consciousness is therefore needed, no reference to differences in the “mode of representation [Weise des Vorstellens],” to determine the difference between “abstract” and “concrete” which is here in question.* All determinations that make use of such a relation are either incorrect or misleading, or are merely subjectively slanted expressions of a purely objective, ideal state of affairs (Hua XIX/1, p. 240).

In order to obtain an “objective” determination, we must avoid speaking of “content” (for it misleadingly suggests a phenomenological, notably psychological, determination) and avoid any reference to *the mode of representation*, which would end up “subjectivizing” (*sit venia verbo!*) the distinction itself. The two aspects go hand in hand, indeed: the *what* (distinction between abstract and concrete, non-independent and independent “content”) has been determined—by both Berkeley and Stumpf—in terms of *how* it is represented or imagined by consciousness. As Husserl says, it is by replacing *content* with *object* that we can avoid any “reference back to consciousness.”

Yet, an objection could immediately arise: are not the concepts of “thinking” and “thought” (*Denken* and *Gedanke*) as subjective and psychological as the ones Husserl is explicitly discarding (*vorstellen* and *imagining*)? What is Husserl’s strategy? For, if *what* Husserl aims to dismiss—the correlation *content-consciousness*—is apparent (at least *per viam negationis*), it is still quite unclear *how* he will account for its objective determination. All we can say is that—in opposition to notions such as mode of representing, content, and imagining—Husserl understands the expressions *Gedanke* and *Denken* (and what they mean) as entailing no “reference back to consciousness.”

How, then, are we to determine such purely objective (i.e., based on the notion of “object” instead of “content”) states of affairs? At the end of §6 (which is a “continuation” of §5), Husserl elaborates upon the crucial necessity of replacing (the subjective) *vorstellen* with (the more objective) *denken* when accounting for the notion of “dependence.” As he writes, “What we here express by the word *vorstellen* can be better expressed by the word *denken*. A feature, a form of connection and the like, cannot be *thought of* as self-existent, as isolated from all else, as being all that exists” (Hua XIX/1, p. 242). Accordingly, wherever the word *denken* is used in such a peculiar sense, Husserl goes on to write, what we are confronted with is an objective state of affairs (“an a priori one,” according to the B-edition) and objective or material (*sachliche*) differences which do not hinge on the facticity (*Faktizität*) of

our subjective thinking. Hence, Husserl concludes: “What cannot be thought, cannot be; and what cannot be, cannot be thought—this equivalence sets up the distinction between the pregnant concept of *Denken*, and the ordinary subjective sense of *Vorstellen* and *Denken*.”

Let us dwell for a second on the last sentence. Husserl explicitly describes the relation between the objective meaning of thinking and being (*was wir nicht denken können, kann nicht sein, was nicht sein kann, können wir nicht denken*) as an “equivalence” (*Äquivalenz*).⁵⁹ Now, we should not forget that one of the main theses of Husserl’s early idealism is the equivalence of being and object (Sect. 1); accordingly, to affirm the identity of *thinking* and *being* is the precisely same as to state the identity of *object* and *thinking*. Moreover, since—as we already know—the definition of *object* is subject of possible (true) predications, it follows that the objective conception of thinking is to be comprehended based on the notion of *dia-noetic idealism* introduced and explained in Sect. 1.⁶⁰

If we are on the right track, then one can define the objective idea of *Denken* as the one expressing itself in propositions and truths the *validity* of which is *timeless*, and therefore spelling out an *inalterable necessity*: “They are material differences, which, since they obtain and since we know of them, prompt us to assert: a thought that deviates from them is impossible, i.e., a judging that deviates from them is wrong [*sei verkehrt*]” (Hua XIX/1, p. 242 A-edition).

Before we move on, let us sum up Husserl’s strategy to this point. After replacing the language of mereology with that of non-independent and independent “objectualities,” Husserl has ascribed priority to “the positive thought of *dependence*” and then characterized the latter in relation to the more “objective” determination of “thought” rather than to *the mode of representing*. Yet, as already observed, this is only a preliminary account, what is required being in fact what the title of §7 refers to as the “More Exact Development of our Determination by Introducing the Concepts of Pure Law and Pure Genus”; or—according to the first edition—a “More Exact Development of our Determination by Introducing the Notion of Law.” The strong turn of phrase “notion of law” (which translates the German *Gesetzgedanke*) expresses in a quite emphatic way the tight connection (if not even identity!) of law (*Gesetz*) and thinking (*Denken*) on which Husserl will be drawing in §7.

In Sect. 2.1, we stated that, when it comes to the problem of the a priori, Husserl’s main concern is to distinguish different notions of necessity, and the idea his conception will revolve around is that of law: the task of §7 being precisely the introduction of the notion of law. *In opposition to HD’s account of non-independence based on the dyad consciousness-content, Husserl strives to provide a determination of dependence based upon the notion of law.*

Now, Husserl’s line of thought in §7 should be broken down into and presented according to three steps. In fact, (i) Husserl first discusses the idea of “necessity” (ii)

⁵⁹ See Hua-Mat III, p. 200: “*Denken und Sein sind insofern unabtrennbar, als sie, wenn auch nicht real, sondern ideal gesprochen, zusammengehören.*”

⁶⁰ “*Denken in prägnanten Sinn ist Urteilen*” (Hua-Mat III, p. 158).

which will hence be defined by means of the notion of “law,” after which (iii) he will show how the mereological distinctions between part and whole, notably the concept of non-independent “part,” can be recast in light of the concept of law itself (rather than the other way around).

(i) *Hua XIX/1*, p. 242 line 28—p. 243 line 3. By referring back to both the *what cannot be thought* and the *what cannot be* from §6, Husserl opens up the section as follows:

Wherever therefore the verb *can* [können] occurs in conjunction with the pregnant use of *thought* [denken], there is a reference, not to a subjective necessity, i.e., to the *subjective incapacity to represent-things-otherwise*, but to the *objective necessity* of the inability-to-be-otherwise [des Nicht-anders-sein-könnens].

The switch—as is apparent—is from the term *Vostellen* to *Sein*. In the second edition, Husserl adds the following footnote: “The ontological transformation [*ontologische Umwendung*] of the notion of evidence into the one of pure essential lawfulness [*Wesensgesetzlichkeit*]⁶¹—which begins with this sentence, and is decisive for the content of the rest of the investigation—has been already completely accomplished in my *Bericht über deutsche Schriften zur Logik* (1984).”

First of all, it is important that Husserl himself recognizes how this specific paragraph, with the introduction of the notion of “law” (which in the footnote is retrospectively understood as an essential one), marks a decisive turning point in the structure of the investigation. Second of all, and in relation to the *Bericht*, whoever is familiar with the text knows that the page Husserl is referring to (page 225 from the original edition (*Hua XXII*, p. 133)) *is dedicated to Husserl himself!* In sum: on pages 225–227, Husserl is reporting on his own 1894 “Psychologische Studien zur elementaren Logik,” notably part I, “On the Distinction between Abstract and Concrete.” Now, after recalling what the 1894 *Studien* wrote on both the notion of evidence and the difference between independent and non-independent content,⁶¹ the *Bericht* adds a footnote (the one to which the B-edition of the *Logical Investigations* refers) to explicitly warn us against taking the character of non-independence to be determined by “the contingent experience of evidence.”⁶² For, what we are confronted with is an objective state of affairs: the non-independence meaning the “objective validity of a certain law,” stating that contents of a certain kind can exist only *in connection with* contents of a certain kind. According to the B-edition of the *Investigations*, this is precisely the passage accomplishing the ontological transformation to which §7 is referring.

Let us propose two additional remarks.

- If Husserl felt the urge to make such a “retrospective” comment on his *Studien* then it must have been because he found them to be inadequate, or perhaps

⁶¹“Ein Inhalt ist unselbständig, wenn wir die Evidenz haben, daß er nur in Verknüpfung mit anderen Inhalten, also nur als Teil eines umfassenderen Ganzen denkbar ist, während bei selbständigen Inhalten diese Evidenz fehlt” (*Hua XXII*, p. 132).

⁶²“Da natürlich nicht gemeint ist, daß das zufällige Erlebnis der Evidenz ... den Inhalt zu einem unselbständigen mache” (*Hua XXII*, p. 133).

ambiguous, due to their being based on too vague a notion of (“psychological”) evidence. As a consequence, one could distinguish between the *Studien*’s context (in which Husserl did not accomplish any “ontological transformation” of the concept of evidence, or at least in which such a “transformation” does not at all appear); what he contends in the *Bericht* (where in fact the transformation is explicitly accomplished in a footnote); and §§6 and 7 of the *Third Investigation*, in which the transformation is explicitly re-asserted and strengthened through the introduction of the notion of law (*Gesetzgedanke*).

- Moreover, one could also assume that, inasmuch as the *Studien* contained an attempt at developing further Carl Stumpf’s view,⁶³ Husserl’s rejection of HD inaugurated in §2 amounts also to a dismissal of *his own early analyses* (the ones presented in the *Studien*). Which means, once again, that saying that “*Husserl se place alors (§2) dans une tradition qui vient de Berkeley*”—as Benoist does—is saying the exact opposite of what Husserl is actually doing.

That said, the point to keep in mind is that the “ontological transformation” is accomplished by means of the notion of law (*Gesetzgedanke*) and is initiated by the sentence that starts at the bottom of page 242 and ends at the very top of page 243 (Husserliana edition).

(ii) *Hua XIX/1*, p. 243 line 4—p. 243 line 24. How are we to determine such *objective necessity*? As Husserl hastens to point out: “If we remain within the statements of this consciousness, we must assert it to be of the essence of such an objective necessity that it is correlated with a definite pure lawfulness in each case. Generally speaking, objective necessity is, as such, tantamount to a *being that rests on an objective lawfulness* [*Sein auf Grund objektiver Gesetzlichkeit*].” Were we to draw a simple diagram to illustrate Husserl’s strategy up to this point, it would look like the one on the next page (Fig. 2).

Were we to follow the dotted line, we would obtain a very specific sequence, the one mirroring Husserl’s factual line of thought: the positive concept of dependence is first traced back to that of objective thought, which is then understood in terms of objective necessity—the determination of which being accomplished by means of the idea of lawfulness. By contrast, according to the solid line, one can maintain that if something is “objectively necessary”—“cannot be thought otherwise,” thereby determining a specific type of dependence—it is because “it stands in a lawful connection.”

We are now in a position to appreciate what Husserl means by the “pregnant concept” of *Denken*. If the latter consists in the identity of *thinking* and *being*, and if *being* means *being that rests on an objective lawfulness*, then the pregnant concept of thought is that which correlates to a being determined by *objective lawfulness*. This is the meaning of the “*Gesetzgedanke*”: a “thought” in the pregnant sense

⁶³ See also the general remarks proposed by Schérer (1967, pp. 72–100).

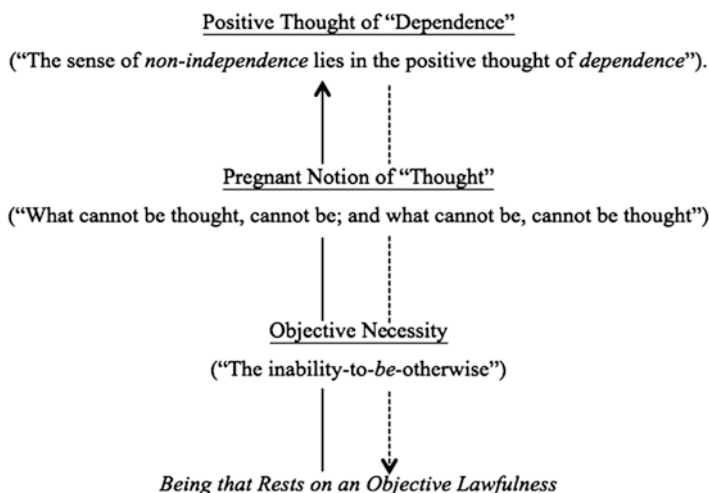


Fig. 2 The objective notion of necessity

of the term is a thought that thinks and “expresses” the “lawfully” inalterable, the “lawfully” necessary (= *objective lawfulness*).

Let us take a few other examples. In the A-edition of §10 (the title of which is “The Multiplicity of Laws Governing the Various Sorts of Non-Independent Contents”), Husserl does not simply confine himself to recognizing that “there is always a *law* governing what is non-independent” (Hua XIX/1, p. 253), he advances a much stronger thesis: he points out that the notion of “non-independence” is “coextensive” (by which we translate *sich decken*) with that of “*lawfulness in unitary connections*” (*Gesetzlichkeit in einheitlichen Zusammenhängen*). In the B-edition, Husserl will even urge that the two are “equivalent” (Hua XIX/1, p. 255). At some point, he remarks that “lawfulness” is only an “indirect” (*nur indirekt definiens*) of “non-independence” (Hua XIX/1, p. 254); but we know what this means: for, if the latter notion (“non-independence”) is to be “directly” defined in terms of “lawfulness,” it first needs to be translated into the positive notion of “dependence.” To put it as a slogan: *lawfulness* is a direct *definiens* of dependence and an *indirect definiens* of non-independence.

The positive thought of “dependence,” presented by Husserl in terms of “objective necessity” and “inability-to-be-otherwise” (in opposition to HD’s account in terms of *Vorstellen* and “incapacity to represent-things-otherwise”), has undergone an “ontological” determination by means of the notion of “lawfulness”⁶⁴: hence, its ultimate account as *being that rests upon an objective lawfulness*. In a nutshell: “being-dependent” means the same as “being that rests on an objective lawfulness.”

⁶⁴ Husserl ends up explicitly using “law” and “necessity” as synonymous, as for example at the very beginning of §11 of the *Third Logical Investigation*, where the A-edition writes *die Notwendigkeiten oder Gesetze* and the B-edition *die Notwendigkeiten*, bzw. *Gesetze* (Hua XIX/1, p. 255); on page 256, Husserl says *Gesetze*, bzw. *Notwendigkeiten*.

If, in so doing, we obtain a preliminary—yet crucial—characterization of the idea of *objective necessity*, Husserl will soon have to explore the many varieties that exist within the very concept of “objective necessity” (“material objective necessity” and “formal objective necessity”). Nevertheless, it must be remarked that, at least up to this point, it is not really evident in what sense, or to what extent, this idea of “objective necessity” (and lawfulness) could also be labeled “a priori.”⁶⁵

(iii) *Hua XIX/1*, pp. 244–245. After stating that “objective necessity is, as such, tantamount to a *being* that rests on an objective lawfulness,” Husserl suddenly re-introduces, or, as we should better state, introduces for the first time in the course of his analyses, the mereological conceptuality.

The inability-to-exist-by-itself of a non-independent part means thereby that there is a *law*, according to which, in general, the existence of a content of the part's species [Art] (i.e., the species of color, form, etc.) presupposes the existence of contents of certain relevant species.

Non-independent objects are objects of certain species that are governed by a law stating that they can in general exist only as parts of more inclusive wholes of certain species.

As the reader should have already guessed, the second edition does not simply state law, but rather, “law of essence” or “essential law” (*Wesensgesetz*).

Husserl is finally in the position to resort to a notion of “part” freed from the ambiguities detected and brought to the light at the very beginning of the *Third Investigation*—and because of which he systematically avoided speaking of “parts and wholes.” *It is the concept of law, or being that rests upon an objective lawfulness, that determines the notion itself of (non-independent) object—which can then be called part of a more inclusive whole—not the other way around*: this being exactly the way in which Husserl elaborates on his arguments in §§10 and 11. As we should remember, the title of §10 is “The Multiplicity of Laws Governing the Various Sorts of Non-Independent Contents” while §11 is “The Distinction between these ‘Material’ Laws from the ‘Formal’ or ‘Analytic’ Laws.”

So, as Husserl himself introduces the topic, the language used is not that of material and formal, or analytic, *a priori*, but of material and formal, or analytic, *laws*.⁶⁶ Now, before we move on to §§10 and 11, let us remark that the specific question of how Husserl tackles the very notion of analytic and formal proposition (hence, the notion of “form”)—and its difference from the notion of material and synthetic proposition—will be set aside: our main focus still being the concept of law itself (we will come back to these topics, specifically to the distinction between “formal” and “analytic,” “synthetic” and “material,” in the last chapter of this book (see Part VII)).

⁶⁵ Let us remark that, while the A-edition of §7 ends at line 12, the B-edition presents a new, long section (line 12—line 24) in which the notion of “objective necessity” is explicitly characterized as “a priori” (*ideale oder apriorische Notwendigkeit*) because grounded in relevant material essences (*in den sachlichen Wesen gründend*).

⁶⁶ The same language is employed in the 1902–1903 lectures *Allgemeine Erkenntnistheorie* (*Hua-Mat III*, pp. 177–179).

Let us quote a series of passages from both paragraphs 10 and 11 (which constitute the very heart of Chapter I of *LU III* and are usually taken to contain Husserl's theory of material a priori).

- (1) The notion of what is non-independent, with its indirectly, generally characterized definitory lawfulness, points to many materially determined and variable laws.
- (2) There are fixed, necessary connections, laws definite *in content*, which vary with the species of non-independent contents, and accordingly prescribe one sort of completion to one of them, another sort of completion to another. The species connected by these laws—which mark off what is, from the standpoint of these very same laws, the spheres of contingent [*zufälligen*] individuality—are occasionally, but not always, lowest specific differences (Hua XIX/1, p. 254).
- (3) The concept of non-independence is essentially co-extensive with that of lawfulness in unitary connections. If a part stands in a law-bound and not merely factual combination, then it is non-independent: for, such a lawful combination means nothing else but that this kind of part can lawfully obtain only in connection with certain other parts of a relevant kind (Hua XIX/1, p. 255).
- (4) The necessities or laws that serve to define given classes of non-independence are grounded, as we often remarked, in the peculiarity of the contents, in their specificity: or, better said, they rest on (Aristotelian) species or differences under which non-independent contents and their supplementing contents fall. What is thereby also determined is the essential distinction that separates “*synthetic necessities*” from the “*analytic*” ones (in a certain sense: the “material” from the “formal” ones) (Hua XIX/1, p. 256).

These passages come from the A-edition. What immediately stands out is Husserl's never speaking of a priori: only the B-edition of 4, which is much longer than the original version, explicitly employs the expression “a priori” (“It is now immediately plain that all these laws or necessities governing different types of *non-independent* items fall into the spheres of the *synthetic a priori*”).

This also means that Husserl's 1913 account holds true: in such a key context, where one would expect him to resort to the *Apriori* or at least to the adjective *apriorisch*, all he speaks about is “necessities” and “laws.” This being remarked, a series of additional observations is required.

What this battery of excerpts captures and perfectly expresses is Husserl's overall early stance on “the problem of the a priori,” which mainly consists in three different, yet related, theses. First of all, the distinction the whole argument builds upon is not that between *a priori* and *a posteriori* or, within the former notion, between material and formal a priori, but between synthetic or material *necessity* and analytic or formal *necessity*. Second of all, this distinction is not based on or derived from the distinction between moments and pieces: quite the opposite, it is the system of “necessities or laws that serve to define given classes of non-independence.” Third of all, and as is put forward in 4, such systems of law and necessity are grounded in what Husserl alternatively calls “contents” (with their “peculiarity” [*Besonderheit*] and “specificity” [*Eingenart*]), “species or differences” (*Arten oder Differenzen*), and ideal “species” in general (*Spezies*). Husserl seems to even perceive a distinction between the first two groups of terms and the third one:

indeed, while the notions of “content,” “peculiarity,” “specificity,” as well as the Aristotelian “species” and “difference” contribute to determine the “materiality” of relevant laws or necessities, their being grounded in ideal species is what brings about their *non-contingent character* and *nature* (in 3, Husserl seems to be implicitly making this distinction by using the adjective *zufällig*⁶⁷).

Having acknowledged this, we can now return to Benoist’s theses so as to sum up the main outcomes of our investigation. *Contra* Benoist, we can finally argue that:

- There is no such a thing as a “perceptual model” driving, let alone shaping, Husserl’s approach to the topic of the a priori, notably the synthetic a priori. Or, better, the alleged “perceptual model” (perfectly embodied by both Berkeley and Stumpf’s conception based on the verbs “imagining” or *Vorstellen*) is precisely the one Husserl dismisses from the very beginning of *LU III*: what Husserl opposes to such a view being what he calls the pregnant or objective determination of “thought.”
- Husserl’s overall view and understanding of the “a priori” (we are using such an expression only because Benoist does) cannot and should not be characterized as “mereological” or “mereology-based”: for, as we have argued over and over again, the introduction of the mereological distinction between “moment” and “piece” (non-independent and dependent part) represents the conclusion of Husserl’s line of thought (in Chapter I of *LU III*), not its opening premise.
- The main notion on which Husserl’s strategy hinges is not part but “law” (together with the co-relative idea of necessity). As we shall soon see (in order also to verify our main claim to the effect that Husserl’s early conception should be labeled *nomological*), over the years running from the *Logische Untersuchungen* to *Ideen I*, the analysis of the concept of law represents one of the main lines of Husserl’s research. By way of corroboration, most of his 1908–1909 lectures (*Alte und neue Logik*) are dedicated to clearing up *the notion of law* (Hua-Mat VI, p. 232).

Benoist is of course right in claiming that Janus’ purported second head, what he calls “l’*a priori* synthétique grammatical” presented in *LU IV*, should not be viewed just as a “variante de l’*a priori* synthétique perceptif,” but for a completely different reason of which he is unaware: if the “grammatical a priori” should not be construed as a “variation” on the perceptual model, it is not because the paradigmatic example of synthetic a priori, that is, the relation between “color” and “extension,” is an inadequate model to also characterize and describe the a priori relations between “meanings” (if this were what Husserl’s attempt is all about, then Benoist would be

⁶⁷ Were we to also take into account the B-edition, we would immediately notice how Husserl replaces *Gesetz* with *Wesensgesetz* or *reine Gesetze* (Hua XIX/1, p. 254); he speaks of *ideale Gesetzmäßigkeit* and also adds *seinem Wesen nach, wesensgesetzlich, wesentliche Besonderheit* (Hua XIX/1, p. 255), and *reines Wesen* (Hua XIX/1, p. 256).

completely right), but rather because there is no such a thing as a *modèle perceptif* determining Husserl's understanding of the synthetic a priori.⁶⁸

Without getting into a nitty-gritty analysis (which would take our investigation in a very different direction), let us limit ourselves to the following remarks. Here is how Husserl preliminarily presents the overall theme in the opening section to *LU IV*:

In the following discussions we wish to turn our attention to a fundamental distinction in the field of meanings and that lies hidden behind insignificant grammatical distinctions, such as those between categorematic and syncategorematic expressions, or between closed and unclosed ones. To clear up such distinctions will enable us to apply our general distinction between independent and non-independent objects in the special field of meanings, so that the distinction treated in our present investigation may be called that of independent and non-independent meanings (Hua XIX/1, p. 301).

As Husserl clearly asserts, his strategy will consist in applying (*Anwendung*) the distinction of non-independent and independent objects worked out in the *Third Investigation*. But this, as we should know by now, amounts to finding and identifying the laws determining the different types of “non-independence” (the positive thought of which lies in the idea of “dependence”) that characterize the domain of “meanings.” What Husserl is *applying* here is not a mereological model paradigmatically exemplified by the color-extension relation (“*l'application d'un schéma (ontologique) commun*,” as Benoist himself calls it), but the re-elaboration of the idea of non-independence based upon that of *Gesetzgedanke*. Indeed, Husserl explicitly speaks of *laws* “which govern the sphere of complex meanings” and yet are not to be confused with “the so-called laws of logic in the pregnant sense of this term” (Hua XIX/1, p. 302); and while the latter follows from what the B-edition calls the “pure form” of the object, the former set forth the requirements of the mere “unity of sense.”

Husserl is not applying any mereological distinction based on a phenomenology of perception, but the notion of law (*Gesetzgedanke*), to which correspond different species of necessity and relevant dependence *and thereby* of parts and wholes (rather than the other way around!). It is not Janus with his “two-faced head,” but Ananke—whose decrees and orders bind mortals, angels, and gods—that watches over Husserl's idea of the a priori. And the law is her exclusive “helmsman.”

3 The Problem of the A Posteriori in the *Logical Investigations*

Let us try to put it as simply as possible: what happens to *the notion of a posteriori* in the *Logical Investigations*? The problem here is not only that the two terms necessarily go hand in hand, but that Husserl's 1913 “self-assessment” explicitly relates

⁶⁸ Of course, we are not disputing the importance that such an example plays in Husserl's own analysis; rather, we are questioning its alleged “paradigmatic” value in determining and shaping, so to say, the whole of Husserl's view.

the two: “As already was the case in the *Logische Untersuchungen*, I avoid as much as possible the expressions *a priori* and *a posteriori* because of the confusing obscurities and ambiguities clinging to them in general use.” Both the *a priori* and the *a posteriori* are affected by “confusing obscurities and ambiguities”: the two seem to suffer from the same kind of problems, hence it could be easily assumed that the manner in which Husserl tackles the topic of the “*a priori*” also tells us—even if only indirectly—something about the “*a posteriori*.”

One interesting aspect must be emphasized at the outset. Unlike the expressions *A Priori* and *apriorisch* (which *de facto* appear on several occasions already in the A-edition), the two terms *A Posteriori* and *aposteriorisch* occur only a few times: both appear, for example, in §25 of the *Third Investigation*, but rather insignificantly (Hua XIX/1, pp. 296, 300). Husserl seems to avoid as much as possible the terminology of the *a posteriori*, and it is important for us to take note of this fact. Now, since these occurrences do not say much about it (they simply associate in passing the two terms to the problem of “induction” and “probability”), the first possible attempt to characterize the *a posteriori* can only be made *per viam oppositionis*—mostly consisting in spelling out what the *a posteriori* is “not” vis-à-vis the “*a priori*” (in what follows, we will be employing the expressions *a priori* and *a posteriori* only for the sake of brevity).

Let us make a list presenting the features of the *a priori* (APr.) within the framework of Husserl’s early idealism compared to a list of the features of the *a posteriori* (APo.).

(APr.1) *Timeless (unzeitliche) validity*: an *a priori* judgment, proposition, or knowledge (we do not need to make any distinction here) is one expressing a truth the validity of which is *timeless*.

(APr.2) *Unalterable (unveränderliche) necessity*: an *a priori* judgment, proposition, or knowledge is one expressing a truth marked by an *unalterable* or *unconditional necessity*—which Husserl also calls “objective” (e.g., §39 of the *Prolegomena*);

(APr.3) *Objective lawfulness (objective Gesetzmäßigkeit)*: an *a priori* judgment, proposition, or knowledge is one the truth of which expresses an *objective lawfulness*.

(APr.4) *Ideal being or ideal object*: an *a priori* judgment, proposition, or knowledge which correlates to an *ideal being* or *object*.

Let us pause for a second in order to ponder the peculiarity of APr.1 and APr.2. It is important to recognize that what these first two features of the *a priori* express is something merely *negative*: Husserl speaks indeed of *Un-Zeitlichkeit* and *Un-Veränderlichkeit*. Accordingly, one could simply negate the two negations and thereby reassert the *original positive characters*, which then belong to the *a posteriori*: “temporality” and “alterability.”

(APo.1) *Temporal validity*: an *a posteriori* judgment, proposition, or knowledge is one expressing a truth the validity of which is *temporally determined*.

(APo.2) *Alterable necessity*: an *a posteriori* judgment, proposition, or knowledge is one expressing a truth characterized by what Husserl labels *alterable*, *conditional*, *hypothetical*, or even *subjective* and *psychological necessity* (e.g., *Prolegomena* §§39 and 40; Hua-Mat III, pp. 36–37).

On the contrary, in opposition to *APr.4* and also based upon “the categorial distinction within the conceptual unity of being,” it can be stated that:

(APo.4) *Real being or real object*: an *a posteriori* judgment, proposition, or knowledge correlates to a *real being* or *object*—which is also called “individual.”

Now, when it comes to *APr.3*, the situation is a little bit more complicated, for it seems to us that there are at least two possible interpretations of *APo.3*; in fact, it could either mean the simple lack of objective lawfulness *sic et simpliciter*:

(APo.3') *No objective lawfulness*: an *a posteriori* judgment, proposition, or knowledge is one the truth of which does not express any sort of objective lawfulness (without any further description or information as to what it would express instead).

Or it could point to something more specific, namely, to a peculiar type of lawfulness and laws that radically differ from the one characterizing *APr.3*:

(APo.3'') *Empirical lawfulness*: an *a posteriori* judgment, proposition, or knowledge is one the truth of which expresses what could be dubbed *empirical lawfulness*—which Husserl refers to as an “approximate” or “probable” (e.g., §23 of the *Prolegomena*).

As we should remember, in his 1918 letter to Ingarden, Husserl writes that the *Prolegomena* have already “clarified” the distinction between *truths of essence* and *truths as to matters of fact*. Now, if in Sect. 2.1 this difference was explicitly related to §40 of the *Prolegomena*, now we want to recall what Husserl writes in §39, where he explicitly resorts to, and extensively elaborates on, Leibniz’s distinction between *vérités de raison* and *vérités de fait*: this will help us move beyond the mere “opposition”-based characterization of the *a posteriori* and will also give us the opportunity to add a new and important element to our account.

After writing that the *vérités de raison* have an *un-hypothetical, unconditional necessity* (*APr.2*), that they express necessary laws (*APr.3*), and that their “correlate” is an ideal one (*APr.4*), Husserl adds that they are “purely grounded in our concepts.”

(*APr.5*) *Conceptual ground*: an *a priori* judgment, proposition, or knowledge is one the truth of which is *purely grounded in our concepts* (= “ideal truths in the pure and strict sense”).

When it comes to the *vérités de fait*, on the contrary, after explaining that they are “hypothetical” (*APo.1*), marked by conditional necessity (*APo.2*), and that their “correlate” is something individual (*APo.4*)—they are called individual truths—Husserl writes that “they form a sphere of propositions, which, even if expressed in universal form ... are, above all, assertions of existence” (Hua XVIII, p. 142).

(APo.5) *Existential ground*: an *a posteriori* judgment, proposition, or knowledge is one the truth of which is grounded in what Husserl calls *Existenz* (see our Sect. 3.2).

Let us stop for a second in order to propose a conceptual map presenting all these oppositions and definitions in a clear and straightforward way (see Fig. 3 below).

With this diagram in mind, our last series of observations can be advanced bearing upon the very notion of “*a posteriori*” and some related problems.

A possible yet misleading understanding of the term *Existenz* must be immediately discarded, namely, *Existenz* as related (or opposed) to *Essenz* (as *de facto* happens in §3 of *Ideen I* (Hua III/1, p. 16)). Although Husserl explicitly resorts to the term *Essenz* in §§29 and 31 of the *Sixth Investigation*, the meaning ascribed to it is quite different from the one the term will display in 1913: “We say that two intuitive acts have the *same* *Essenz*, when *their pure intuitions have the same matter*” (Hua XIX/2, p. 631). As Husserl had already summed up in §28, every objectifying

Vérité de Raison	Vérité de Fait	
<i>A judgment, proposition, or knowledge...</i>	<i>A judgment, proposition, or knowledge...</i>	
(APr.1) Timeless Validity ...expressing a truth the validity of which is timeless	(APo.1) Temporal Validity ...expressing a truth the validity of which is determined <i>hic et nunc</i>	
(APr.2) Unalterable Necessity ...expressing a truth marked by an unalterable, unconditional, objective necessity	(APo.2) Alterable Necessity ...expressing a truth characterized by an alterable, conditional, hypothetical, subjective, psychological necessity ¹³⁰	
(APr.3) Objective Lawfulness ...the truth of which expresses an objective lawfulness	(APo.3)	(APo.3') No Objective Lawfulness ...the truth of which does not express any sort of objective lawfulness
		(APo.3'') Empirical Lawfulness ...the truth of which expresses an empirical lawfulness
(APr.4) Ideal Being or Ideal Object ...which correlates to an ideal being or ideal object (universal object)	(APo.4) Real Being or Real Object ... which correlates to a real being or real object (individual object)	
(APr.5) Conceptual Ground ...the truth of which is purely grounded in concepts	(APo.5) Existential Ground ...the truth of which is grounded in the <i>Existenz</i>	

Fig. 3 A priori and A posteriori in the *Logical Investigations*

act, or, better, what he calls the gnoseological essence (*erkenntnismäßige Wesen*) of every objectifying act, consists of three components: “quality,” “matter,” and intuitive “fullness.” Although they all belong to every intuitive act, these three components can vary independently from one another: the “fullness” can vary when both quality and matter stay the same; the “quality” of an act can change even if both fullness and matter remain unaltered; and the “matter,” too, can change while the other components do not. Two acts have the same *Essenz* when their “pure intuitions” (a “pure intuition” being an act reduced to its “intuitive content” ($i = I s = 0$), as is described in §23 (Hua XIX/2, p. 612)) have the same matter regardless of their quality. The notion of *Essenz* is a term used by the phenomenologist—still a “descriptive psychologist”—to characterize the relation between intuitive acts with respect to one of their real elements. It has nothing with the *eidos* in opposition to *matters of fact*. And yet, a strong objection could be made: does Husserl himself not state that “this probably clarifies the true meaning of the scholastic term *Essenz*, which certainly concerns the possibility of a ‘concept’” (Hua XIX/2, p. 631)? This last sentence refers to Chapter Four of the *Sixth Investigation*, wherein the notion of possibility is recast in terms of “compatibility” (*Verträglichkeit*) between ideal species. Now, it is at the end of §31 that we read the bold statement: “Every valid species is an *Essenz*” (Hua XIX/2, p. 637). A species is “valid” when—as the correlate of a complex meaning that intends it, and the intention of which is determined by the act’s own matter—it obtains intuitive fulfillment and confirmation. As Husserl explains: “The appropriate *Essenz*, the complete intuitive illustration of the corresponding complex content, proves the compatibility of its parts” (Hua XIX/2, p. 636). As a consequence, that “every valid species is an *Essenz*” means that an ideal species (better: a combination thereof), first emptily intended as the correlate of a meaning, has found confirmation in a pure intuitive act and is then to be considered “valid.” And, as a valid species, it is to be called *Essenz* because the different acts (perception, phantasy, and so on...) that can intuit it, thereby fulfilling the empty meaning-intention, have the same matter—independently of their quality and fullness. Since Husserl mentions the Scholastics, one could assert that a “valid” species is precisely that whose intention is not limited to the *cogitatio secundum vocem* (or empty intention) but is an actual *cogitatio rerum*.⁶⁹

No matter how tempting it may be to read it this way, *Essenz* is not an ontological notion describing something opposed to *Existenz*; it is a psychological-descriptive term bearing on the real structure of intentional acts as they are taken in abstraction from all quality and in relation to their intending and intuiting a combination of ideal species.⁷⁰

If the notion of *Existenz* (as is used in the *Prolegomena*) is not to be read in connection to *Essenz*, how then is it to be approached? As far as we understand Husserl’s

⁶⁹ Dal Pra (1974, pp. 3–44).

⁷⁰ That *Essenz* and *Existenz* are not at all opposite concepts here and should not be interpreted in light of *Ideen I* is evident from Husserl’s even speaking of *ideale Existenz einer Spezies* to mean a “valid” one. On this ambiguity of the notion of “existence” in Husserl, see also Millan-Puelles (1990, pp. 208–213) (on the problem of “impossible objects”).

intention in §39, his concern or problem is not really the *Existenz* (which is left in an apparent vagueness), but to better characterize the “purity” of the *vérités de raison*’s being “purely grounded” in concepts (APr.5): *purity* meaning that such *vérités* do not bear on anything *individual*, nor do they posit or presuppose any *existence*.

This represents then what Husserl—in his letter to Ingarden—calls the grounds for distinguishing *essential truths* from *truths as to matters of fact*. The two aspects go hand in hand yet are not to be conflated; they should also remind the reader of Husserl’s distinction between two different kinds of “inexact laws” (see our Sect. 3.2). As we should remember, the *Prolegomena* distinguish sciences and laws that posit an existence and are about facts from sciences and laws that are not about facts and yet presuppose or posit an existence. The former are empirical laws in the strict sense of the term, the latter are called “idealizing fictions.” According to the *vérité de raison-vérité de fait* divide, both the empirical laws in the strict sense of the term and the idealizing fictions *cum fundamento in re* are *vérités de fait*. By contrast, a *vérité de raison* does not concern anything individual (*individuelle Einzelheiten*), nor does it posit or assume or presuppose anything existent (read: *Existenz*).

4 “Notorious Philosophical Doctrines”

As we should remember, one of the reasons for Husserl to avoid the expressions *a priori* and *a posteriori* is the existence of some “notorious philosophical doctrines that, as an evil heritage from the past, are combined with them.” Nevertheless, it would be vain to expect Husserl to explain to us which doctrines he has in mind: nothing is really said as to what they would be, and the interpreter can only try to carefully explore the text so as to eventually bring them to the light.

One could immediately think of all the doctrines associated with what we discussed in Part II, and at which Husserl briefly hints again at the beginning of §7 of *LU II*:

Two misunderstandings have dominated the development of the doctrines of universal objects. First: the *metaphysical hypostatization* of the universal, the assumption that species really exist *externally* to thought. Second: the *psychological hypostatization* of the universal, the assumption of a real existence of species *in thought* (Hua XIX/1, p. 127).

The assumption of a “real” existence of species—whether *inside* or *outside* of (our own human or divine) thought—goes hand in hand with a series of notorious philosophical positions. For example, what Husserl calls “Platonizing realism” (Hua XIX/1, p. 128)—which is not the same as “Platonic realism” (as on the contrary a misleading translation might tend to suggest)—can refer to many different doctrines: it could refer to Plato himself, of course, and his assumption of a real existence of the *eide* external to thought, as is the case with the participative theory of Forms presented in *Phaedrus*.⁷¹ But that very same turn of phrase (“Platonizing

⁷¹ A possible source of this idea could be represented by Lotze, who explicitly acknowledges that—although what Plato really meant to claim is that ideas have “validity” rather than being—the

realism”) could also refer to the Forms residing *in* our soul, according to the “innatist” doctrine propounded for example in *Meno*: now, this form of Platonizing psychological realism would affect not only Plato but a plethora of Platonic thinkers as well such as Descartes and Leibniz⁷² but also—last but not least—Lotze himself. In a *Beilage* to *Husserliana* XIX/2, pp. 787–788, Husserl speaks of the “complete gnoseological lack of clarity” of Lotze’s “doctrine of innate representations” (the reference being to Chapter Three of the third book of Lotze’s *Logik*, the title of which is “*Apriorismus und Empirismus*”).

These two forms of Platonizing realism are usually accompanied by two specific doctrines: while the psychological variety is often connected to the theory of *anamnesis* (and variations thereupon), the former goes hand in hand with the assumption—which was discussed in Part II—of a “hierarchy” of types of “soul” or *bios* and relevant “faculties.” The consequence of the “psychological” version, as Husserl suggests at the very end of his short appendix on Lotze, is what he calls “pneumatologism,” according to which truth, notably a priori truths depend “on the nature of all the spirits” (*Wahrheit abhängig von der Natur aller Geister*) (*Hua* XIX/2, p. 788). Likewise, the unavoidable implications of the other Platonizing realism are: one, the more general assumption of a system of faculties (i.e., lower and higher faculties); two, the existence of some special and unique faculty (be it Plato’s *theou dianoia*, an *intellectus archetypus*, or any sort of intellectual intuition) capable of apprehending what really is (see *Hua-Mat* III, pp. 170–171, and 196–197, where Husserl groups together Platonism, Neo-Platonism, and Christian philosophy based on their joint effort to distinguish different kinds of faculties and then to downgrade “sensibility” to the advantage of the “understanding” as a higher and superior faculty).

Before we move on, let us make a few important of remarks.

The fact that both the “metaphysical” and the “psychological” hypostatization of the species (i.e., the Forms really subsisting either *outside* or *inside* of thought) have their roots in Plato, notably in different aspects of his *theia philosophia*, should not be surprising. Indeed, as Husserl—for example in his *Einleitung in die Philosophie* lectures—starts investigating the historical origin of philosophy and of the very idea of “rigorous science,” Plato will immediately stand out as the one who actually discovered (*Entdeckung*) the a priori (*Hua-Mat* IX, p. 43) by opening up the world of *ideas*, thereby bringing about a brand new “ideal of rationality” (*Hua* VII, p. 35). Nevertheless, as Husserl does not fail to immediately recognize, the expression *a priori* was employed only much later (*Hua-Mat* IX, p. 45) and, as such, is nowhere to be found in the work of the ancient Greek father of philosophy.

It might be held that at least two of these “notorious philosophical doctrines”—the “Platonizing” psychological realism and the doctrine of *anamnesis*—are directly connected to, if not even derived from, the ambiguity of the “concept” of a priori

philosophical inadequacy of the Greek term by which they ended up being characterized (*ontos on*) tends to suggest their being “real” instead (Lotze 1874, p. 502).

⁷² On Plato’s *Meno* and Descartes’ *ideae innae*, see *Hua-Mat* IX, pp. 298–300.

itself, or, better, of what the expression “a priori” will eventually stand for (regardless of its not being factually present in Plato’s texts): i.e., something that is “prior to” the experience (*ein gegenüber der Erfahrung Früheres*) (Hua-Mat IX, p. 45) and that, by not having its source in the experience itself, can only arise from within us. Hence that specific variety of “Platonizing” realism and its corollary.

Now, a further reference to Lotze, specifically to the chapter on “*Apriorismus und Empirismus*” and to what Husserl dubs his gnoseologically obscure doctrine of innate representations, can be helpful here. Why? Because if, on the one hand, Lotze rejects the (e.g., Cartesian) theory of innate ideas (*eingeborene Ideen*) construed as a “stock” of ready-made truths residing “in” our spirit,⁷³ on the other hand, he ends up outlining a new version of the doctrine of the Platonic *anamnesis* (which sounds very much like a variation on Leibniz’s doctrine (see Hua-Mat IX, p. 438)⁷⁴ combined with Kant’s terminology). Let us consider Lotze’s remark at the very beginning of §324:

Even the ancients in speaking of that *quod a natura nobis insitum est*, and all those who have used the like expressions were certainly very far from assuming that a truth, in itself foreign to the spirit, was stamped in upon it at some particular moment when its life was beginning ... What they meant was no more than this: the spirit is of its own nature [*durch seine eigene Natur*] so constituted, that under certain conditions that act on it [*auf ihn einwirken*], it necessarily develops certain habitual modes of combining its thoughts.⁷⁵

As Lotze explains, these ideas “were called innate from the impression that it was not sufficient to represent the spirit in which they were supposed to grow up as merely possessing a certain formal character, or general capacity for representations, in such a way that given the same conditions the same set of ideas would necessarily grow up in every being so endowed.”⁷⁶ By contrast, if we resist such a temptation, then the two sides or aspects of the Cartesian theory (“the apriority of ideas [*die Apriorität der Ideen*]” and their “truth”) can be separated: “To each individual that must necessarily appear to be true, which follows from the laws of *its own nature*.” What is even more interesting (for, it points to the consequence of the other “Platonizing” realism, i.e., the assumption of different faculties) is that Lotze understands the duality of “what acts on us” and what is determined “through our own nature” (*durch seine eigene Natur*) in (the “Kantian”) terms of *receptivity* and *spontaneity* (see the end of §325). Here is how Lotze presents it in §326:

⁷³ Lotze (1874, 516). For Husserl on Descartes on “innate ideas” or representations, see Hua-Mat III, pp. 69–70.

⁷⁴ Which is outlined in Leibniz (1990), notably in the “preface” for starters and then more systematically in the first book (*Des notions innées*): “*et je crois même que toutes les pensées et actions de notre âme viennent de son propre fonds, sans lui pouvoir être données par les sens ... il y a des idées et de principes qui ne nous viennent point des sens, et que nous trouvons en nous sans les former, quoique les sens nous donnent occasion de nous en apercevoir*” (p. 58). Leibniz goes on to refer to Plato and the doctrine of *anamnesis* as propounded in *Meno* (see, e.g., page 61, where he speaks of *réminiscence* and *souvenir* [*subvenire*]). For a more detailed analysis, see Tonelli (1975, pp. 437–454).

⁷⁵ Lotze (1874, pp. 516–517).

⁷⁶ Lotze (1874, p. 517).

Only because the board by virtue of certain modes of operation peculiar to its nature and consistence retains the colored points and prevents them running into each other; only because the wax with its cohesive elements presents the properties of an inelastic body readily receptive of the stamp and capable of retaining it—only by virtue of their peculiar nature are the board and the wax adapted to receive the colors or the stamp impressed on them.⁷⁷

If Kant was wrong, Lotze remarks, it is only because he limited the “apriority” to the intellect alone, without realizing that “even the simplest sensations do not come to us ready made from outside, but on the contrary ... can only be considered as reactions of our own spiritual-sensuous nature to the stimuli coming from that world.”⁷⁸ In so arguing, Lotze can get rid of a very specific interpretation of the doctrine of innate ideas (embodied by the Cartesian one) while at the same time retaining the jargon of faculties and a version of the traditional *anamnesis* understood in terms of effects on the part of what is “external” to us (*Außenwelt*) and reactions or counter-reactions (*Rückwirkungen*) of what lies “in” us as the a priori or innate activity of our spirit (*eingeborene Thätigkeit des Geistes*) or “soul” (*Seele*) with its system of what Husserl calls “innate representations.” As a consequence, and in perfect compliance with what Lotze writes about the possible consequences of the “angelic” *parousia*, what is a priori (*Apriorität*) is identified with our own “nature”—and can thereby change depending on whether our nature stays the same as itself or is somehow altered.

Let us return to our main topic: the existence of “notorious philosophical doctrines.” The reference to Lotze, and to the chapter on “*Apriorismus und Empirismus*” from his *Logik*, is not fortuitous: Husserl had already dedicated §38 of the *Prolegomena* (“*Der Psychologismus in allen seinen Formen ein Relativismus*”) to dismissing the main traits of that very specific German philosophical tradition which, at the end of the nineteenth century, fell under the general label *Apriorismus*.⁷⁹

Let us see how Husserl launches his attack:

Every doctrine is *ipso facto* relativistic, i.e., a case of specific relativism, if, with the empiricists, it treats the pure laws of logic as empirical, psychological laws. It is likewise relativistic, if, with the apriorists, it deduces these laws, in more or less mythic fashion, from certain “original forms” or “modes of functioning” of the (human) understanding, from consciousness as such, conceived as generic (human) reason, from the psycho-physical human constitution, from the *intellectus ipse*, which, as an innate (generically human) disposition, precedes all factual thought and experience [*aller Erfahrung vorhergeht*] (Hua XVIII, pp. 130–131).

Over and above the opposition between psychologism as a form of “empiricism” and “apriorism” (which is supposed to represent its “opposite”), Husserl is able to find a common denominator: both are forms of “relativism.” What Husserl remarks about Lotze applies here as well. It is possible to take the *Apriorismus* doctrine, with its emphasis on what lies before all experience (*aller Erfahrung vorhergeht*), as a

⁷⁷ Lotze (1874, p. 519).

⁷⁸ Lotze (1874, p. 520).

⁷⁹ Which, as an expression, seems to have been introduced by Lotze (Damböck 2017, p. 34).

variation on and a combination of the two Platonizing realisms discussed above: what is not derived from experience, and is prior to it, can only be “in” us⁸⁰—whether as a series of innate ideas, or representations, or the a priori activity of our spirit, or some original forms or modes of functioning of the understanding, or some other kind of faculty (Hua-Mat III, pp. 73–75), like a *supernaturale lumen* in opposition to the *naturale* one (Hua-Mat III, p. 95).

One must of course take the somewhat shifting keywords of apriorism, e.g., “understanding,” “reason,” “consciousness,” in the natural sense, which gives them an essential connection to the human species. It is the curse of the theories under consideration that they at one time give these words a real, at another time an ideal sense, and so weave an inextricable tangle of true and false statements. Aprioristic theories, to the extent that they yield to relativistic motives, must be counted as relativistic. Such relativism is no doubt restricted, i.e., to the realm of mathematics and natural science, when, as in the case of some Kantian thinkers, certain logical principles are set aside as principles of “analytic” judgments, but skeptical absurdities are not thereby avoided. For, in their narrower field, they still deduce truth from generic human nature, the ideal from the real, or, more precisely, the necessity of laws from the contingency of facts (Hua XVIII, p. 131).

That these problems also include, in one way or another, an implicit reference to the Kantian talk of faculties, should come as no surprise (Husserl speaks of “some Kantian thinkers” indeed). Without getting into any nitty-gritty discussion of Husserl’s stance on Kant (which goes far beyond both the scope of this inquiry and our knowledge of the topic, and would also take us in a very different direction), let us confine ourselves to the following remarks. One of Husserl’s constant criticisms of Kant bears on the latter’s jargon of faculties (*Vermögen*) and—especially over the years that run from the publication of the *Logical Investigations* to *Ideen I* (see the *Beilagen* published in Husserliana VII: XV, XVI, XVII, XIX, XX)—on Kant’s project of grounding the “possibility” of the a priori, notably of synthetic and a priori judgments, in a specific system and interaction of faculties. Nevertheless, when it comes to Kant and the Kantian “critique of knowledge,” Husserl has no doubts: the notion of “faculty” undergoes a transformation here and is never construed in a psychological sense. This is what Husserl himself points out in the text he wrote for the entry on *Faculté* for the *Vocabulaire technique et critique de la philosophie* edited by André Lalande (whose original German manuscript has never been found).

Let us quote the French text:

Il faut remarquer que le concept d'une disposition psychique de chaque sujet empirique particulier; concept compris dans celui de Faculté de l'âme, disparaît complètement dans

⁸⁰“Ich spreche von metaphysischen Selbstverständlichkeiten, die überall in den erkenntnistheoretischen Versuchen ihre Rolle spielen. In der Tat spielen sie schon in der Formulierung und Erörterung der bestimmenden Probleme und in der gewöhnlichen Art der Sonderung der erkenntnistheoretischen Haupttrichtungen ihre offensichtliche Rolle; so z.B., wenn traditionell der Empirismus als die Lehre definiert wurde, wonach alle Erkenntnis von außen stamme, *der Apriorismus als die entgegengesetzte Lehre, wonach, wenn nicht alle Erkenntnis, so zum mindesten alle streng wissenschaftliche, mit dem Charakter der Notwendigkeit und Allgemeinheit behaftete Erkenntnis aus gewissen im menschlichen Geiste selbst erzeugten Begriffen entstamme* (our italics)” (Hua-Mat III, p. 83).

*l'usage du mot Faculté [Vermögen] pour la critique de la connaissance. Les théories de la philosophie critique sur la constitution et la connexion des facultés (sensibilité, entendement, etc.) ne sont pas des théories psychologiques sur les rapports mutuels de disposition psychiques : elles impliquent, sous une forme mythique et incomplètement éclaircie, une doctrine sur les relations de valeur nécessaire inhérentes à l'essence des différent espèces de phénomènes : phénomènes de connaissance, phénomènes de volonté, etc.*⁸¹

It is worth mentioning that Husserl's text is only part of a larger entry: after Descartes, Bossuet, Malebranche, Locke, and Charles (by Victor Egger), there is the section on Kant written by Husserl, which is in turn followed by some additional remarks by two French Kant scholars: Jules Lachelier and Gustave Belot. Now, what the latter two write is of particular interest for us, because it testifies to a specific, and popular nineteenth century, "functionalist" interpretation of the Kantian idea of faculty, which perfectly falls under Husserl's dismissal of the *Apriorismus* doctrine. If Lachelier writes that "*Je ne tiens nullement à l'emploi du mot faculté, et je le repousse même s'il faut entendre par là des pouvoirs occultes. Je me contenterais parfaitement de fonction et même de fait,*" Belot distinguishes between *facultés-fonctions* ("*le langage, le mémoires spécifiques, etc.*") and the so-called *facultés-modalités* ("*intelligence, affectivité, etc.*"): "*L'erreur des anciennes psychologues est d'avoir traité des modalités comme des fonctions. Mais le psychologue contemporaine peut réhabiliter l'idée de faculté au sens de fonction, en montrant qu'il a des systèmes réels de pouvoirs (en un sens tout empirique, évidemment) correspondant à un system d'organes.*"⁸²

Even without the possibility of checking the original German manuscript, it immediately stands out how Husserl's interest is in the topic of *necessity*: he speaks of the "necessary value inherent to the essence of different kinds of phenomena [*valeur nécessaire inhérentes à l'essence des différent espèces de phénomènes*]," which the mechanism of "faculties" is meant to ground and express. This gives us the chance to use what Husserl says about Kant to back up and strengthen what we have been arguing in the present chapter. As we should remember, we insisted during our commentary on *LU III* on construing Husserl's own approach as *chreontic*⁸³: his aim being to discriminate different conceptions of *necessities*, notably between formal and material objective necessity.

Now, as we believe, this reading is confirmed by Husserl's critical stance on Kant, or, better, by what Husserl focuses his attention on in his critical assessment of the problem of the a priori in the thinker from Königsberg. In a few yet blunt words: by rooting the possibility of synthetic a priori knowledge in a specific system of "faculties" (the *Eigenheit der menschlichen Intelligenz, die nicht die einzig mögliche ist* (Hua VII, p. 359)), Kant—Husserl contends—is unable to stick to a rigorous, that is to say, objective, notion of necessity as a criterion of the a priori (Hua VII, p. 402), and thus ends up conflating the notion of necessity—as *das Nicht-anders-sein-können*—with a quite vague constraint (*Nötigung*) derived from the

⁸¹ Lalande (2006, pp. 334–335).

⁸² Lalande (2006, p. 335).

⁸³ We borrow this expression from Seifert (2004).

specificity of our human make-up (*die aus der menschlichen Eigenart entspringt*). What Kant takes to be one of the two “safe indicators” of a priori knowledge (*KrV*, B4)—the other being “strict universality”—is not rigorous at all, and it turns out to be only the expression of a specifically marked necessity (*Hua VII*, p. 381) which can vary depending on the nature of the intellect that grounds it.⁸⁴

We are of course aware that the Husserlian scholar will not find this reading to be novel. But our aim has never been novelty: it is to stress how a well-known aspect of Husserl’s criticism of Kant (his dismissal of both the general language of faculty and Kant’s anthropologism) retrospectively corroborates our assessment of the “a priori” in the first chapter of the *Third Logical Investigation*.

This being underlined, it is finally time to weigh up the main outcomes of our analyses thus far, so as to eventually turn to new problems and texts.

5 Closing Evaluation and Transition to New Analyses

If the overall goal of the next chapter will be to contribute to shed some light on why, in *Ideen I*, Husserl decides to officially resort to the Greek term *eidos* to designate the concept of “a priori,” the main goal of this chapter was to verify, so to speak, Husserl’s 1913 retrospective account, according to which already in the *LU* he avoided “as much as possible the expressions *a priori* and *a posteriori* because of the confusing obscurities and ambiguities clinging to them in general use, and also because of the notorious philosophical doctrines that, as an evil heritage from the past, are combined with them.” If this was our general concern, then the question turns out to be: did we find any evidence that would “confirm” Husserl’s “tale”? Or shall we conclude that Husserl is basically retro-projecting on his first masterpiece a terminological and conceptual “awareness,” so to speak, which was acquired only later? What would such “obscurities and ambiguities” be?

Let us try to rehearse the trajectory and the main upshots of our investigations so far.

(θ) *The notion of “a priori.”* If the problem were the simple factual occurrence, or non-occurrence, of the locution “a priori,” then the text of both the *Prolegomena* and the six *Logical Investigations* would simply prove Husserl’s 1913 account wrong! As a matter of fact, Husserl himself extensively employs the two expressions *Apriori* and *apriorisch* throughout the book as a whole. Nevertheless, in relation to this, two important observations are necessary. First of all, we cannot forget that in the retrospective account, immediately after the passage recalled above, Husserl writes that “they are to be used only in contexts [*Zusammenhängen*] that confer upon them unambiguousness and only as equivalents of other terms which are joined to them and upon which we have conferred clear and univocal meanings,

⁸⁴ We originally sketched this reading in De Santis (2015, pp. 161–175). For a different reading, see Trnka (2017), who covers all the most important phases of Husserl’s confrontation with Kant. For what concerns the issues discussed here, see pp. 277–284 (“Čistý názor jako ideace”).

particularly where it is a matter of allowing for historical parallels." Now, if—despite the occurrences and all the alleged "ambiguities," of which Husserl was "already" aware—we were to still accept his account as a whole, then we could, conclude that every time the text uses the terms *Apriori* and *apriorisch* is in "contexts" that confer on them "unambiguousness," or "only as equivalents of other terms which are joined to them." Let us be honest: it would be easier to consider the 1913 account merely as a "retrospective" one the aim of which is to offer a view that is meant to be both coherent and teleologically capable of justifying Husserl's *new terminology*! Yet, here comes the second, very crucial observation. Surprisingly enough, when it comes to *LU III*, notably to §§10, 11, in which Husserl presents his view on the a priori, the term itself is avoided and the entire discourse (as corroborated, for example, by the titles of those very same paragraphs) revolves around the notion of law (and necessity). To the high number of occurrences of the terms *Apriori* and *apriorisch* in the book as a whole, §§10 and 11 of the *Third Investigation* oppose a puzzling absence. Which, of course, does not allow us to assume any intention upon the part of the author to explicitly avoid as much as possible the expression *a priori* because of some "confusing obscurities and ambiguities clinging to them in general use." Generally speaking, it seems to us that, when it comes to what he labels "general use," Husserl resorts to the expression *a priori* without any further ado, but when it is time to propound his own view, neither the term "a priori" nor that of "a posteriori" are at work in the argument.

(i) *The notion of "a posteriori."* Quite different is the situation with the term "a posteriori," which in fact appears only a few times and always insignificantly. Even if one cannot assume any explicit intention on his part, Husserl seems to have really avoided that expression as much as possible: indeed, what might be designated "the problem of the a posteriori" is never tackled by Husserl *per se* but always based on a specific series of interrelated terms such as "reality" (real object or real being), "temporality," and, last but not least, "existence."

(κ) *The notion of "idea."* As we know, a possible source of ambiguities affecting the more general framework of the *Logical Investigations* derives from Husserl using the one term *idea* to designate phenomena whose irreducible "difference" he will recognize only later. Although, according to the 1913 account, when it comes to the two expressions *idea* and *ideal* "it is perhaps not quite so bad with respect to disconcerting varieties of meanings," the need for a more fine-grained terminology and conceptuality will lead Husserl to first introduce the notion of *essence* and then to sharply differentiate it from the notion of *idea*. If this is the case, then the question arises as to why Husserl will also feel the urge to introduce the additional concept of *eidos*, which he ultimately distinguishes from both *idea* and *essence*.

(λ) *"Notorious philosophical doctrines."* Does Husserl himself hint at any notorious philosophical doctrines that as an evil heritage from the past are combined with the expressions in question? Yes, he does, both in the *Prolegomena* (§38 *contra* the *Apriorismus* doctrine) and in *LU II*, in relation to which we tried to elaborate on the meanings involved in the turn of phrase "Platonizing realism." Can this be held as the reason for Husserl to avoid as much as possible the expressions *a priori* and *a posteriori*? Now, even if, as we know, Husserl does not really avoid the expression

a priori, the following can be firmly asserted. If the main philosophical implication of such notorious doctrines is, in one way or another, the denial of any objective concept of “necessity” (and the confusion between ideal and real laws), then it is clear why *LU III* (the first chapter of which is dedicated to the two co-related notions of objective “necessity” and “law”) dispenses as much as possible with the language of the a priori.

With all these remarks in mind, we can now leave the *Logical Investigations* behind and finally venture into the wilderness of Husserl’s lectures in order to follow the further developments of the problems themselves as well as of his philosophical terminology.

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Essence, Idea, and the A Priori After the *Logical Investigations*



1 Introductory Remarks

As we firmly believe, the crucial merit of the foregoing pages is to have made us fully aware of all the different layers involved in the problem we are addressing here; in particular, it should be clear by now that what one could label “the problem of the a priori” *de facto* entails a “set” or “web” of interrelated problems and notions: “a priori,” “a posteriori,” “idea,” “essence,” “species,” “eidos,” “existence,” “necessity,” and “lawfulness.” Now, the task of this second section of the chapter will consist in exploring the vicissitudes of this web in the years that run from the *Logical Investigations* up to the publication of *Ideas I*. Our aim is twofold. On the one hand, we will try to follow the way in which Husserl himself develops his own conceptuality and language; on the other hand—this still being our ultimate goal—we want to bring to light *when*, and based upon *what* sort of difficulties and ambiguities affecting the notion of a priori, Husserl will decide to start resorting to a new word.

As we should remember, the decision to turn to a “new” term (*new* with respect to both “idea” and “essence”) will arise *both from the need for a more differentiated and, so to speak, “fine-grained” language (with the distinction between idea, essence, and eidos) and from the intention to avoid the ambiguity of the notion of a priori itself.*

Were we to assert when, exactly, Husserl finally becomes aware of the semantic and philosophical ambiguities involved in the expression “a priori,” we would point to a series of lectures held in the years 1906–1909, with the peak reached in the 1908–1909 lectures *Alte und neue Logik*. Let us recall once again what Husserl says in 1929: “It [i.e., the *eidos*] defines the only concept belonging to the ambiguous expression *a priori* that I recognize philosophically. That concept alone is meant wherever the locution *a priori* occurs in any of my writings.” Now, in the lectures mentioned above we will see Husserl not only clearly unpacking the different senses of the expression “a priori” but first and foremost *singling out the only one he will*

designate by the Greek “*eidos*.” If, as we said in Part III, “the *eidos* stands for one of the many meanings of the *ambiguous* expression *a priori*,” and “the only one accepted by Husserl,” then it will be the task of this section to finally make this explicit.

Pursuant to this task, three preliminary observations warrant mentioning.

- Every tentative reconstruction of the development of Husserl’s philosophy (especially when it comes to the Göttingen years) is almost necessarily bound to temporariness due to the great amount of still unpublished manuscripts; accordingly, our “ambition” here is less to offer a “philological” account than to provide the specific “theoretical” background against which Husserl’s decision to adopt the term *eidos* can be fully understood.
- In order to do so, the investigation will be divided into a series of *thematic paragraphs* (called *Vicissitudes of Some Concepts*)—each of which follows and tries to reconstruct the development of the Husserlian approach to such and such a *theme* (or group thereof) during the period in question.
- Based upon the main outcomes of the next three sections (Sects. 2, 3, and 4), a final paragraph (Sect. 5) will make some additional remarks concerning Husserl’s decision to adopt the term *eidos* in *Ideen I*.

2 Vicissitudes of Some Concepts I: Species, Essence, Idea

According to our preliminary reconstruction, Husserl seems to distinguish three phases or stages in the development of his conceptuality: in the first stage, namely in the *Logical Investigations*, the term *idea* means the “species” as the one and identical meaning as well as the identity of a universal “extent.” As Husserl becomes aware of this confusion—or as he becomes aware that the notion of an identical meaning (*Sinn* or *Bedeutung*) is to be distinguished from the identity of a universal extent—the term *idea* (or *essence*) is employed only to mean the latter. Finally, with the term “*idea*” now used to mean something completely different, the Greek *eidos* appears.

Although we firmly believe in the correctness of the sequence just outlined, we will soon make clear the extent to which it does not develop quite so linearly. Added to which, it is also important to keep in mind what we would refer to as the distinction between *transformation of the theoretical framework* and *alteration of the theoretical framework*: while, in the former case, the introduction of a new term, for example, goes hand in hand with the re-elaboration or re-assessment of the entire conceptual framework, in the latter case, on the contrary, it can happen that a term is introduced without actually affecting the framework as a whole—the framework is certainly “altered” (a new term is at work) but not at all “transformed” (for it does not really mean anything new).

This is precisely the case with the introduction of the *Wesen* in the 1902–1903 lectures *Allgemeine Erkenntnistheorie*. Husserl speaks of *Wesen* and *Essenzen* to be

grasped by means of “abstraction” from “all empirical objectivation” (*von aller empirischen Objektivation*) (Hua-Mat III, p. 77) and of phenomenology as a “purely immanent description” or *Wesens-Analyse*. Yet, upon closer inspection, all these expressions do not seem to mean anything different from idea (see Hua-Mat III, p. 78, and p. 199, where *Idee*, *Wesen*, and *Essenz* are employed as “synonyms”) or from species (Hua-Mat III, p. 155). It should also be noticed that the idea is still characterized by the confusion that Husserl himself will denounce in his letters to Ingarden and in the manuscript of *Experience and Judgment*: the idea meaning, at the same time, the specific and the universal (Hua-Mat III, pp. 62, 63, 64, 65¹). Universal essence, universal species, and idea (*Allgemeines Wesen*, *allgemeine Spezies*, *Idee*) all still have exactly the same meaning, the one already established by the doctrine of “ideal species” in the *LU*. The examples, too, are quite telling: Husserl goes from “the idea ‘circle’” (Hua-Mat III, p. 26) to “redness” and the “sense” of a word (Hua-Mat III, p. 62); from the general representation of numbers (Hua-Mat III, p. 117) to “the one and the same species red” or “the sphere” (Hua-Mat III, p. 155). This allows us to urge that, even if the theoretical framework is not really transformed with respect to the *LU*, it is nevertheless “altered” in at least two respects: by the systematic reference to the *Wesen* and by the inclusion of the *Essenz* (which, as we should remember, used to be a psychological-descriptive concept bearing on the real structure of some intentional acts as they are taken in abstraction from all quality).

The same holds true for the famous 1903 discussion of M. Palágyi’s *Der Streit der Psychologisten und Formalisten in der modernen Logik* (Hua XXII, pp. 152–161), where the confusion between species, sense, and idea is readily apparent (see in particular pages 156–157). Nevertheless, if we say *confusion* it is because we are looking at these texts from the standpoint of what Husserl will later point out about his early idealism; indeed, if we speak of “confusion” it is only in light of Husserl’s later distinction between the one and identical meaning and sense (*Sinn*) and the identity of a universal extent. As a matter of fact, in all these “early” texts and lectures there is no confusion at all: it would be better to say that Husserl resorts to a battery of terms (i.e., *Idee*, *Spezies*, *Essenz*, and *Wesen*) to characterize what in general belongs to the domain of “ideal being.”

If we now move on to the 1905 lectures on the *Urteilstheorie*, we will find a slightly different, already more articulated conceptual and linguistic framework—not simply an alteration but *the beginning of a true transformation*. The presence of the term *Wesen* becomes simply “massive,” and a series of crucial notions and expressions are already at work: Husserl does not simply speak of essence, but also of a priori essence (Hua-Mat V, p. 18), as well as of essence as “origin” (Hua-Mat V, p. 33), which is the subject matter of the phenomenological description. He talks as well of *essential clarification* (Hua-Mat V, p. 36), *essential analysis*, *doctrine of essence*, *essential connection*, and *essential law* (Hua-Mat V, p. 38). Husserl char-

¹For example: “Die ideale Einheit als einheitlicher Sinn eines Allgemeinen wird bezogen auf ein gegebenes Erlebnis, und im Erlebnis wird der Sinn dieser Allgemeinheit zu fassen sein” (Hua-Mat III, p. 62).

acterizes “phenomenology” as a “discipline” (Hua-Mat V, p. 38), as the doctrine of essences (*Wesenslehre*) capable of carrying out all the available essential investigations (*welche alle uns erreichbaren Wesensanalysen systematisch vollziehen*). But if we employed the turn of phrase *beginning of a true transformation*, rather than “actual” transformation, it is because the German term *Wesen* is not yet distinguished from species understood as meaning (*Bedeutung*) and sense (*Sinn*) (Hua-Mat V, pp. 71, 74, 116).²

Nevertheless, as we approach the end of the lectures, Husserl starts sharply distinguishing the term *idea*—which means the same as *Wesen*—from what he calls *das Allgemeine* or just *Allgemeines* (Hua-Mat V, p. 137)—which is the universal understood as the outcome of an empirical generalization in opposition to the essential abstraction (*Wesensabstraktion*) (Hua-Mat V, p. 67).

Moreover, these two groups of concepts are distinguished from what Husserl calls now *die Allgemeinheit* or *ideale Allgemeinheit* (Hua-Mat V, p. 116)—which is the species understood as the meaning and sense of a proposition. On the one hand, there are the *idea* and the *essence*; on the other hand, there is the *species*. What we thereby obtain is the following series of notions:

$$\begin{array}{ccc}
 \text{Idee} = \text{Wesen} & \neq & \text{das Allgemeine or Allgemeines} \neq \text{ideale Allgemeinheit} \\
 \downarrow & & \downarrow \\
 (\text{Empirical Universality}) & & (\text{Sense or Meaning of a Proposition})
 \end{array}$$

Husserl differentiates the operation of *essence-formation* from the *empirical generalization* (Hua-Mat V, p. 48). Now, this latter distinction is crucial for a second reason: in addition to the difference concerning the result or “outcome” of two such different operations (*Wesen* in one case, empirical universality or *Allgemeines* in the other), Husserl puts a great deal of effort and energy in discriminating their starting point, so to speak, namely, the two different notions of “individuality” (*Einzelheit*) upon which they respectively build. For, as Husserl himself writes, “every abstraction is necessarily based upon an individual phenomenon”: “one can state that every generalization carried out in a proper (intuitive) way builds on something individual. The empirical generalization builds on an empirical individual (as temporally individual); by contrast, the framing of essence, i.e., the idealizing generalization [builds upon] a phenomenological individual”³ (Hua-Mat V, p. 48). As a consequence, the demonstrative *this* can have two very different meanings or references depending on whether it is taken in relation to the “empirical generalization” or to the process of “essence-formation.” In the former case, the “this” refers to *the individual* understood as a *real* or *empirical individuality* (“*empirische Individualität*”) (Hua-Mat V, p. 49), while, in the latter case, “this” refers to “what is in itself” (Hua-

²The same ambiguity can be detected in a 1905 letter to Brentano (Hua-Dok III/1, p. 37).

³“*Man kann sagen, jeder eigentlich (intuitiv) vollzogenen Verallgemeinerung liege ein Einzelnes zugrunde, der empirischen Verallgemeinerung ein empirisches Einzelnes (als zeitlich Individuelles), hingegen der Wesensbildung, der ideierenden Generalisation, ein phänomenologisches Einzelnes.*”

Mat V, p. 48), which Husserl describes as the “immanent content,” or “the universal of the lowest level”: “Each individuum has its essence, its individual essence, namely, the lowest differentiation ... This is not yet an individuum, for it has yet to be multiplied and reproduced” (Hua-Mat V, p. 49; see also Hua-Mat III, p. 78). Let us keep in mind that the difference between *individuality* and *immanent content* does not correspond to the difference between *individual* and *universal*: for, if it is true that the immanent content is, in the words of Husserl, not yet an individuum, he explicitly refers to it as “individual essence.” The term *Wesen* embraces then both the individual essence⁴ and all the higher levels of the essence.

Methodologically speaking, the distinction within the general notion of *abstraction* is between *empirical generalization* and *essence-formation*; then, within the latter notion, between *ideation* or *essential abstraction* (as the process leading to the grasping of individual essences) and *idealizing generalization* (as the method that leads to the higher essential levels).

Quite similar, both conceptually and terminologically, is the situation with the famous 1906–1907 lectures *Einleitung in die Logik und Erkenntnistheorie*. Although there still seems to be some sort of terminological ambiguity, notably towards the end of the lectures, where *idea* means at some point the same as *species* and numbers are still taken ambiguously to be universals (“*So ist Zahl 3 ein Allgemeines, anders Zahl 3 eine Einzelheit gegenüber der Zahl überhaupt*”) (Hua XXIV, p. 299), for the most part this text attests to a series of stable conceptual distinctions. To take a crucial example: the divorce between the sense of a “proposition” (also said *identisches* and *ideal-identisches*) (Hua XXIV, pp. 45–46) and the notion of essence (also referred to as *Allgemeinheit* or *das ideal-Einheitliche*) (Hua XXIV, p. 51) seems to be established and definitely recognized.⁵

Very interesting for us, especially in relation to the notion of individual essence as was discussed by Husserl in the previous lectures, is §47. Here, he points out: “Everything that, in an object, can be grasped conceptually, and can thus be determined by means of internal predicates, is its essence or belongs to its essence” (Hua XXIV, p. 299).

⁴See also the following 1908 excerpt: “*Ich urteile über dieses Dingwesen, das da vorgestellt ist, und wie es da vorgestellt ist: Dies ist eine Zigarettenschachtel, sie liegt auf einem Paket mit Skripturen, sie glänzt an der Kante, sie hat eine flache runde Form. Sie ist aus einem silberähnlichen Metall. Sie ist geschlossen, das Innere nicht sichtbar, die nicht sichtbare Seite hat eine gewisse Farbe etc. All das sage ich ‘aufgrund der bloßen Vorstellung’ aus; all das bleibt bestehen für alle Vorstellungen gleichen Erscheinungsgehalts, aber von den Vorstellungen ist nicht die Rede. All diese Vorstellungen ‘haben’ dasselbe gegenständliche Wesen gleichsam in sich, und es ist als dasselbe gegeben, ob die Vorstellungen Phantasien sind, ob sie Halluzinationen sind oder Wahrnehmungen sind, wofern nur alle Existenzsetzung unterbleibt und Ideation auf dem Grund dieser Akte vollzogen wird. Und ‘in’ allen ist gegeben das ‘Wesen.’ (Überall ist auf dem Grund dieser Akte zu etablieren die Ideation!)*” (Hua LX, p. 342).

⁵We thereby agree with the reconstruction proposed by Lavigne (2005, p. 643), who refers to a 1907 manuscript now published in Hua XXIV, pp. 403–404: “The possibility of any intuition of essence (*Wesenseinsicht*) is given with the intuition of essence, the possibility of any essence with the essence” (p. 403). As a later *Randbemerkung* by Husserl reads: “The full concept of the constitution of objectualities, also of ‘essence,’ was therefore already present in 1907.”

The ambiguity of the passage immediately leaps into view. For, the thesis that the essence includes (as we can also translate *gehört zu seinem Wesen*) everything that, in (*am*) an object, can be grasped conceptually, can mean two different things. It can either mean that it “belongs” to the essence *only to the extent that it has already been grasped conceptually* (and it is not really “in” (*am*) the object, meaning the latter *individual object*⁶) or that it belongs to the essence to the extent that it is “in” (*am*) the object and thus “can” be grasped conceptually. The ambiguity extends over the expression *its essence* as well: in what sense would the essence be “its” (the object’s) essence?

While the first alternative corresponds to the former two senses of *Wesen*, the second option allows us to speak of “individual essences” in a sense quite different from the one meant in 1905: for, it now means that an individual object (as an *empirical individuality*), too, has its own essence. Such an ambiguity will be addressed by Husserl, and thus partially resolved, in the 1909 lectures wherein a sharp distinction is drawn between the two levels and the *Eigenschaft* (the *property* as it belongs to the individual and empirical object) is distinguished from *Beschaffenheit* (the *property* as a universal) (Hua-Mat VI, p. 108).

Now, if we pause for a second and put together what has just been said and what Husserl asserted in 1905 on the same subject matter, then it turns out that the German *Wesen* includes three different meanings. Indeed, *Wesen* is used to mean either:

(A) “Universal essence” (as *das gattungsmäßige, generelle, allgemeine Wesen*).

(B) “Individual essence” construed as the universal of the “lowest” level in abstraction from the *haecceitas*.

(C) “Individual essence” in a completely different sense, that is, as what is “in” (*am*) an object as an *empirical individuality* (let us call it: empirical essence made up of properties as *Eigenschaften*).

In his 1909 lectures, Husserl will further elaborate on the concept of essence in such a way that can help us shed some additional light on the preceding. What we just referred to as *B* is labeled “full essence” (*das volle Wesen*), understood as the “sum-total” (*Gesamtbestand*) of an individual object in its “singularity” (the opposition being between *Singularität* and *Individualität*) (Hua-Mat VII, p. 87). Put otherwise—specifically by means of the terminology of *Ideas I*—the “full essence” is the totality of “eidetic singularities” or universals of the lowest level (as a concretum) that pertain to an individual object in abstraction from its individualization(s) *hic et nunc*, and which therefore can be indifferently repeated in such and such an *hic et nunc* (= B) (Hua-Mat VII, pp. 87–88).

As Husserl goes on to explain, since the universalities of the lowest level are what make up “the extent of the universal essence” (*den Umfang der allgemeinen Wesen*),

⁶“Das universale ist nicht in re (*ist nicht ante und post rem*), *wofern wir das in im selben Sinn nehmen wie bei Ganzem und Teil. Die Sache hat das begriffliche Allgemeine nicht in sich, aber der Begriff kommt der Sache als ihr ‘Wesen’ zu, die Sache hat im Begriff ihre Bestimmung, ihre Merkmale. Plato sprach zum Unterschied von dem individuell-dinglichen Verhältnis des Habens und Zukommens von μέθεξις und κοινωνία*” (Hua XXIV, p. 300).

it follows that by the latter Husserl technically means the sum total of those “species” (*Arten*) whose eidetic singularities make up the “full essence” of an individual object (= B). Whereas the sum total of eidetic singularities constitutes the full essence, the sum total of the universals under which such eidetic singularities fall makes up the individual object’s “universal essence” (in the sense of A) (see Fig. 1 below).

In addition to this, Husserl also points out that the term *Wesen* “originally includes a relation to the individual object” (Hua XXIV, p. 299). Now, this is a crucial aspect we should never lose sight of: *Wesen* is a “relational” notion that *originally* includes a relation to the individual object. Hence, one should never simply speak of essence, but always of *essence of...* (such and such an “individual” object). There is no such a thing as an essence that would not be the essence of an individual object. *If we are on the right track, then it should be quite evident why Husserl will find it necessary to employ a brand new notion (i.e., new with respect to the one previously used) in order to refer to the essence independently of this intrinsic and original (ursprünglich) relation to the individual object: such a new term being precisely the Greek eidos.*

A remark imposes itself. Even if we speak of *ambiguity* in relation to the passage quoted above, as well as to the term *Wesen*, this does not mean that the term itself is ambiguous. Here, too, then, it would be better to say that Husserl relies on the term *Wesen* to describe different formations, which, as such, are clearly distinguished from one another (yet designated by just one and the same term).

So, in 1906, Husserl pairs *idea* and *essence* by radically opposing them to the two notions of *meaning* and *sense*. The state of affairs so described seems to perfectly comply with what Husserl himself will explain to Ingarden: a clear distinction between the identity of a universal *extent* (*Wesen, Idee*) and that of the meaning and sense of a proposition (*Satz*) seems to have been made once and for all. Nevertheless, as we should remember, this is not exactly what Husserl will relate in 1913: that “the supremely important *Kantian concept of idea* [is to be kept] separated from the universal concept ... of essence” (Hua III/1, p. 8). How does it come to be that the *idea* is radically distinguished from the notion of *essence* and made to stand for the *idea* “in the Kantian sense”?

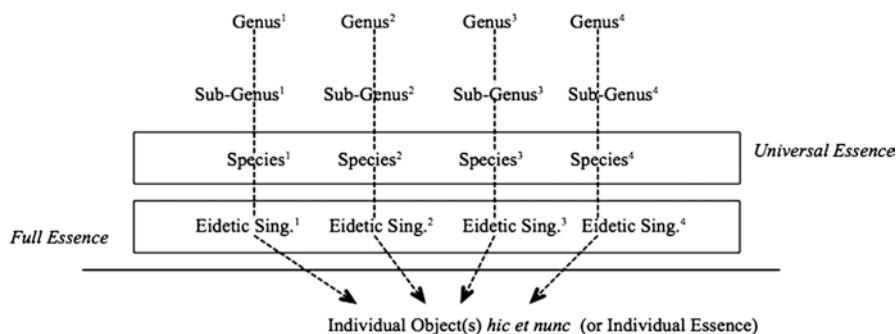


Fig. 1 The different meanings of the term essence

Still in the 1909 lectures *Einführung in die Phänomenologie der Erkenntnis*, for example, the *idea* means the same as *essence* (“*Ideen oder Wesen*” (Hua-Mat VII, p. 87)) and is explicitly employed to refer to both the higher levels and to what the 1905 lectures called “individual essence.” Husserl writes “the universal essence itself, the idea,” but also speaks of “the idea of the lowest level, which constitutes the full essence of the singular *cogitatio*: the last and lowest universality that one can possibly think” (Hua-Mat VII, pp. 87–88). In the 1910–1911 *Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie* lectures, Husserl’s language is almost completely dominated by the term *idea*: he talks of “ideal worlds,” “worlds of ideas,” “the idea of this color” (color-species), and even remarks that to each idea there corresponds a so-called extent, a pure extent of individuals (Hua XIII, p. 126).

If this is the case, then the question turns out to be: when, exactly, does the *idea* start displaying a sense different from the one we have been discussing so far? When does the term *idea* separate and distinguish itself from *essence*, thus paving the way for what Husserl remarks in 1913?

Before we try to tackle this problem and answer these questions, a further remark on the notion of *Idee* as is used in the aforementioned series of lectures imposes itself.

Let us advance it as a hypothesis: it might be the case that the manner in which the *idea* is referred to in both the *Einführung in die Phänomenologie der Erkenntnis* and the *Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie*, for example, already testifies to a certain attempt made by Husserl to avoid using a term (*Wesen*) that, as a matter of fact, could be or sound quite ambiguous (because of *A*, *B*, and *C*). If—even just for a second—we take a look at Husserl’s terminology in 1913, we will immediately realize that he speaks of *eidos* and of *pure essence*—these two being completely equivalent notions (Hua III/1, p. 14). Now, in these two lectures, the *idea* (and a series of related concepts) is often accompanied by the adjective *pure* or by the adverb *purely*: e.g., Husserl speaks of “pure universality” (Hua-Mat VII, p. 82) and describes the *idea* in terms of “pure givenness” (Hua XIII, p. 126); he also employs the phrase “the pure in-general” (*im reinen Überhaupt*), or even simply of purity to characterize the corresponding “mode of judgment” (Hua-Mat VII, p. 90). Our thesis, or, better, hypothesis, is that, by describing the idea as pure universality, Husserl is already doing what he will eventually achieve with the Greek *eidos*: he is already trying to find a way to express the universality of an *extent* (*pure extent*) independently of the original “relation to the individual object.” Since *essence* and *idea* have been used as synonyms, what is required is a mode of speaking capable of establishing the difference: hence, the adjective *pure*, which is meant to better characterize the *idea* (= *A*).

To whoever objected that this would be a petty solution on the part of Husserl, we could reply by reminding them that, as Husserl himself acknowledges, “the term ‘*essence*’”—unlike the more problematically ambiguous term *a priori*—is infected simply “with harmless but occasionally vexatious equivocations” (Hua III/1, p. 8). If we are on the right track, and these equivocations derive from the three different meanings of *essence*, then it is more than reasonable to maintain that the systematic presence of an adjective (or of an adverb) is sufficient to avoid them.

In addition to this, Husserl's observations bearing on *B*, i.e., the individual essence, the universal, or the idea of the "lowest level" (*Idee niederster Stufe; die letzte und niederste Allgemeinheit*) are also quite important. As Husserl hastens to point out, these universals or ideas of the "lowest level" ("full essence") are what ideally make up the extent of the universal essences (*den Umfang der allgemeinen Wesen ausmachen*) with which phenomenology is exclusively concerned (*mit denen es Phänomenologie zu tun hat*) (Hua-Mat VII, pp. 87–88): "For, they [i.e., the ideas of the lowest level] belong to the sphere of the 'indefinite' or 'unlimited' [*Unbegrenzten*], the *ἄπειρον*, which cannot be determined scientifically"⁷ (Hua-Mat VII, p. 88). Quite different is the state of affairs with what is scientifically determinable, namely, the universals of the higher level (*Allgemeinheiten höherer Stufe*), which can be grasped in their pure ideality and hence investigated: the idea of perception as such, the idea of sensuous perception as such, the idea of judgment as such, and so on and so forth.

Let us try to wrap up what we have been arguing so far. After emphasizing what we would call, following Husserl, the "harmless but occasionally vexatious equivocations" characterizing the term *Wesen* (A, B, C), and after recognizing what Husserl refers to as the "relation to an the individual object" originally included in the concept of essence, we hypothesized that the way in which the concept of *idea* is employed from 1909 to 1911 already attests to the need to avoid what could turn out to be some (harmless) equivocations.

As will be the case with the expression *pure essence*, the adjective *pure* (i.e., *pure idea*) is already being employed to refer to a universal extent in its purity. *In opposition to what happened in 1902–1903, here the terminological framework is not altered at all (we are presented with no new terms), yet it is transformed (for the notion of idea, as a pure idea, ends up signifying something specific and not immediately reducible to what "essence" means).*

Perhaps it would be better to account for the state of affairs in the following way: Husserl himself recognizes the necessity of excluding *B* and *C* from the domain of any scientific investigation of essences, but since the notion itself of *essence* covers A, *B*, and *C*, the question of how to find an expression able to keep the reference to A while at the same time ruling out *B* and *C* necessarily arises: hence the adjective "*pure*" (and expressions such as *pure idea* and *pure universality*).

⁷As Husserl writes in the famous essay *Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft*: "Für sie [i.e., for phenomenology as a science of essences] ist das Singuläre ewig das *ἄπειρον*" (Hua XXV, p. 36)—with *das Singuläre* standing here for the empirical individuality. It is quite telling that in 1909 Husserl employs the *ἄπειρον* to exclude from any scientific investigation (of essences) not what is "empirically" individual (what we would refer to as *C*) but the universal of the lowest level (*B*). As he also writes in a 1907 text: "Das allgemeine Wesen Farbe hat unter sich die letzten Differenzen Farbe: Das sind letzte qualitative Wesen. Das allgemeine Wesen Intensität hat unter sich die einzelnen Intensitäten, das sind schon Wesen. Das allgemeine Konkretum 'visuelles Datum,' das da enthält Farbe, Ausbreitung, mit der Farbe und in ihr verflochten Farbenqualität, Sättigung, Helligkeit, enthält unter sich die singulären konkreten Wesen usw.: Das Wesen niederster Stufe, das 'individuelle Wesen,' ist noch kein Allgemeines im Sinne einer Spezies" (Hua XLI, p. 34).

This being said, let us return to our main problem: when, exactly, does the *idea* start displaying a sense different from the one discussed so far? The first decisive manuscript to be taken into account is the one now published as text Nr. 4 in Hua XLI (pp. 56–82). Husserl's main concern here is to distinguish between different kinds of essential concepts based on their different formation processes. Such distinctions are made on the basis of the double difference between, on the one hand, descriptive and explanatory sciences (*deskriptive* and *erklärende Wissenschaft*)—hence, vague and exact concepts—and, on the other hand, between two different kinds of exact concepts. Though the title misleadingly suggests that the *idea* designates only “exact” concepts in opposition to vague and intuition-based ones, we will soon see how the situation is more complicated than that.

As Husserl immediately points out, the formation process characterizing “descriptive” sciences in general is intuition-based (*intuitiv*) (Hua XLI, p. 62), i.e., “the concepts are obtained on the basis of concrete intuition by means of a proper ‘abstraction’; to each descriptive concept there corresponds a conceptual essence, which particularizes itself in some of the moments of what is intuitively given [*Die Begriffe werden auf Grund konkreter Anschauung durch eigentliche ‘Abstraktion’ gewonnen; jedem beschreibenden Begriff entspricht ein begriffliches Wesen, das sich in irgendwelchen Momenten der anschaulichen Gegebenheiten besonders*].” When it comes to explanatory sciences, one cannot properly speak of “abstraction”: none of their concepts can be “exhibited” (*aufweisen*) based on the intuition of something given; they do not express anything “perceivable” or that can be directly intuited (*nichts Wahrnehmbares, nichts direkt Anschauliches*) (Hua XLI, p. 63). As Husserl goes on to point out, these “exact” concepts are to be called *ideal concepts* and, as such, embrace two very different species of concepts: on the one hand, there is the group including geometrical and time-concepts, and, on the other hand, the “physicalistic” ones (*physikalistischen*).

Such a distinction, Husserl contends, is essential because it is derived from the way they relate to intuition; for, though the process of “ideation” leading to geometrical and chronological concepts is not at all to be considered an “abstraction” (*kein Abstraktion*), it nevertheless frames its concepts based on a process of “direct intuitive extrapolation from intuitive sequences” (as one can translate *eine Art unmittelbarer Herausschauung aus Anschauungsreihen*) (Hua XLI, p. 64). As Husserl points out, “geometrical concepts can, in a certain way, still be seen [*kann man ... gewissermaßen sehen*].” The situation is quite different when it comes to the “physicalistic concepts”: concepts such as “potential energy” cannot be seen nor obtained in the same manner in which geometrical concepts can be seen and obtained, namely, through geometrical intuition. When opposed to “descriptive” concepts, geometrical concepts cannot really be said to be “intuitable”; yet, as soon as we compare them to what Husserl labels “physicalistic” concepts, they still display a certain level of “intuitability.”

After emphasizing this crucial distinction, the text elaborates upon the first group, which Husserl also refers to as exact concepts of the “lower level” (or, better, as *das Exakte niederer Stufe*). What he proposes is a distinction between descriptive sciences, the concept-formation of which is based upon an intuitive process of

“abstraction” and the concepts of which correspond to intuitive essences (*Wesen*), and explanatory sciences of the lower level, the concepts of which are not framed by means of abstraction and the correlates of which he labels *ideas*. The difference with respect to what we previously argued should immediately leap into view: for, the term “idea” no longer means the same as *essence* and is now employed to refer to the correlate of a specific type of concepts. A type of concepts whose correlate can still be “seen,” yet only in a quite analogical way: indeed, whereas one can speak of essences that individualize themselves, this cannot really be asserted of exact concepts and their relevant ideas (e.g., geometrical formations).

Let us ask ourselves: how are we to understand these *ideas* if their relation to what is empirical is characterized by Husserl in terms of *approximation*? Husserl’s answer is explicitly Kantian. The idea is to be understood as an “ideal limit” (Hua XLI, p. 65) immanent to what is intuitively given: “The idea is not, so to speak, the eidetic conversion of a *real*-abstract moment into something that would individualize itself ... but something fundamentally new; something that lies in what is intuitively given, in a series of intuitive givennesses, as an ideal limit, an ideal approximation-goal in relation to mere ‘approximations’” (Hua XLI, pp. 65–66).⁸ The example is *geometrical*: Husserl speaks of the “pure straight line” as something that cannot be seen as such but that is given “in the form of something, which we ‘more or less approximate,’” i.e., as an ideal limit or—by resorting to a more explicit terminology—an “idea in the Kantian sense” (what *Kant* als “*Idee*” bezeichnet (Hua XLI, p. 65)). According to this account, the difference between descriptive and explanatory sciences would result in that between two different processes of concept-formation, thereby in two different types of concepts. If in the former case one can speak of *essence* as a “correlate” of the concepts, in the latter case we have *ideas*; the distinction between which represents more than just a distinction between something that can be given to intuition (*Wesen*) and something that cannot (*Ideen*). Both are in fact given to intuition, yet in two radically different ways: whereas the so-called essences (as the correlate of “descriptive” concepts) are directly and by themselves given to intuition, ideas (as the correlate of exact concepts) are certainly given but only as the ideal limit of a series of intuitive data.⁹

If this were simply the case, then one could claim that the term “idea”—now explicitly understood in the Kantian sense—means the intuitive correlate of exact concepts of the lower level. Yet, as we announced at the beginning of our analysis of this manuscript, the state of affairs is not as simple as the previous passages could have us believe: the problem being that Husserl does not resort to the term *idea* to

⁸Here is the German text: “Die Idee ist nicht die eidetische Umwendung sozusagen eines reellen abstrakten Moments, sich in einem solchen vereinzeln ... sondern ein grundwesentlich Neues; etwas, das als eine ideale Grenze im anschaulich Gegebenen und in einer Reihe anschaulicher Gegebenheiten so liegt wie eben ein ideales Annäherungsziel zu den bloßen ‘Annäherungen.’”

⁹As Husserl also writes: “Und doch schöpft der Geometer aus einsichtigen Quellen. Sinnlich zu sehen ist eine Gerade, eine Linie im Sinne der Geometrie nicht, und doch in gewisser Weise schauend zu erfassen. Man denkt sich die dicken Striche feiner und immer feiner gezogen und konzipiert einsichtig das Ideale, die reine Idee einer Grenze, die reine Linie” (Hua-Mat IX, p. 51).

exclusively mean the correlate of certain concepts (exact ones) in opposition to others. Let us see what this means, for this is a crucial point on which it will be worthwhile to expand.

When it comes to typical or descriptive concepts and their different levels of universality, Husserl distinguishes between the “highest genera” from all the lower levels and degrees of universality (*Diese Allgemeinheiten, die hier typische Wesen heißen, sind von verschiedener Stufe, von niederer und höherer*).¹⁰ Now, with the exception of the highest genera, all such universalities are “flowing” (*fließend*) due to their “extent” being only vaguely determined.¹¹ What does this mean?

When it comes to the question of whether something given to intuition is either a “color” or a “sound,” the answer is always clear-cut (*Es untersteht keinem Zweifel, ob ein Angeschauetes eine Farbe oder ein Ton ist*). Quite different is a state of affairs wherein the problem bears upon whether a given color is, for example, “red”: there can be cases in which the given color is not simply and straightforwardly “red” but “reddish” (*die Farbe ist nicht Rot, sondern rötlich*), or cases in which the given color could count as “red” as well as, for example, brown (for it looks “maroon”), etc. Husserl calls these *transition-cases*. To put it bluntly: it might be asserted that the domain of the lower levels and degrees of universality proper to typical and descriptive concepts is a domain of *transition-cases* through and through. Or, as Husserl would say, it is a realm of *transition-cases* that more or less “approximate” an ideal limit—such an ideal limit being what he calls, given the example under analysis, “pure red” (Hua XLI, p. 68). The concept used by Husserl in order to name such an ideal limit is, once again, “the idea in the Kantian sense”: “The pure red cannot be seen the same way as the red *sic et simpliciter* or the redness *sic et simpliciter* (i.e., eidetically intuited as a real essence), and yet can still be intuitively given, given as a limit, as a Kantian idea” (Hua XLI, p. 68).¹²

By distinguishing between red *sic et simpliciter* and pure red, Husserl implies that the essence (as a correlate of the descriptive concept) is not to be equated with the notion of “idea”: whereas the former can be grasped based on individual

¹⁰“*Diese identifizierbaren und unterscheidbaren Allgemeinheiten, die hier typische Wesen heißen, sind von verschiedener Stufe, von niederer und höherer, und sind, von den obersten Gattungen abgesehen, unter denen sie stehen, selbst ‘fließend,’ insofern ihr Umfang nicht eindeutig, sondern ‘vage’ umgrenzt ist. Die Begriffe Farbe, Ton u. dgl. sind absolut streng geschieden, und aus jedem unter sie fallenden Einzelnen der Anschauung kann mit Evidenz das Gattungswesen Farbe oder Ton entnommen bzw. jedes Einzelne mit Evidenz der Gattung untergeordnet und aus anderen Gattungen exkludiert werden*” (Hua XLI, p. 67).

¹¹“*Sie sind anschaulich fließend, in ihrem Fluss anschaulich in ‘kontinuierlichem’ Wechsel ihres Wesens begriffen oder, wenn sie als konstant erscheinen, doch in kontinuierliche Übergänge zu bringen*” (Hua XLI, p. 66).

¹²“*Das reine Rot ist prinzipiell nicht zu sehen, wie das Rot schlechthin oder das Rötliche schlechthin zu sehen ist (bzw. eidetisch zu erschauen ist als reelles Wesen), und doch ist es intuitiv gegeben, gegeben als Grenze, als Kantische Idee (wie denn Kant das reine Rot selbst als Exempel für seinen Begriff von Idee anführt). Es gehört zum Wesen dieses limetischen Erschauens, dass es nicht auf dem Grund einer einzelnen Farbenanschauung erfassbar ist, auch nicht einer beliebigen Kollektion oder Sukzession von Einzelanschauungen wie der Typus. Vielmehr ist erfordert eine gewisse Steigerungsreihe, in der Ordnung der Steigerung ablaufend.*”

intuitions of colors, this is not the case with the idea. Let us try to be more precise so as to make Husserl's thesis perspicuous. What is grasped on the basis of a single intuition is a *transition-case* in a *progressive series* (*Steigerungsreihe*)¹³: as such, it points to an idea, or an ideal limit, which the *transition-case* itself more or less "approximates" along with the entire series. Perhaps it would be better to assert that it is precisely in relation to such an "ideal limit" that the series (*Reihe*) shows itself to be a progressive one (*Steigerungs-Reihe*) (Hua XLI, p. 70).

For the sake of our concerns we have reached a crucial stage, the stage at which the notion of "idea" has not only been distinguished from "essence" (as was already the case around 1909–1911) but separated from it. The *idea* is now construed as an ideal limit. If our preliminary impression was that Husserl makes use of the Kantian-sounding term to characterize only the correlate of a type of exact concepts (such as the "geometrical" ones) in opposition to the correlate of both physicalistic and descriptive ones, it soon became apparent that the idea also plays a crucial role in his account of descriptive concepts.

The way in which Husserl describes the idea, notably its mode of givenness, is quite interesting: while, in the case of geometrical concepts, the *idea* can—in a certain sense—still be seen (as he writes: *kann man...gewissermaßen sehen*) even if it does not express anything "perceivable," when it comes to descriptive and vague concepts the idea cannot be seen (*ist prinzipiell nicht zu sehen*) but is nevertheless *intuitively given*. As is evident, Husserl puts a great deal of energy and effort in finding a way to account for the "idea" as something that can be "seen," but not as an object of perception; as something that can be intuited, although only as an ideal limit and exclusively by means of some "intuition of the limit."¹⁴ The idea is still ascribed some degree of intuitiveness, yet one that is to radically differentiate it from both the objects of perception and the so-called essences.

Whether employed to designate the correlates of exact concepts, or whether relied upon to mean the ideal "pole" of a *progressive series* of essences as correlates

¹³ "Schließlich scheiden wir noch zwischen reinen Grenzideen in der Gattung Farbe, die 'Enden' sind, und solchen, die 'Mitten' sind. Nämlich die Grenzideen selbst ordnen sich in Reihen. Die 'reinen Qualitäten,' und das sind solche Grenzen, ordnen sich in Reihen und haben in gewissen reinen Qualitäten Enden, die dadurch ausgezeichnet sind, dass keine reine Qualität in derselben Richtung mehr möglich ist, welche 'jenseits' der Endqualität läge. Natürlich ist nicht gesagt, dass in jeder Gattung anschaulicher Momente all diese Verhältnisse sich in gleicher Weise wiederholen. Formaliter unterscheiden sich von vornherein für die Konstitution von Grenzideen in Reihen die beiden möglichen Fälle, dass die Reihen ins Unendliche laufen und dass sie nicht ins Unendliche laufen, <und> wieder, dass sie von einem Ende (das auch Anfang heißen kann, je nach der Richtung des Fortschreitens) mehrseitig ins Unendliche laufen, dass sie überhaupt kein Ende haben nach keiner Richtung usw. Es kommen hier alle formalen Möglichkeiten in Betracht, welche die formale Reihenlehre a priori konstruieren kann, sozusagen mathematisch" (Hua XLI, p. 70).

¹⁴ Though for the sake of our problems there is no need to elaborate on this latter point, it is important to remark that, on the one hand, Husserl strives to provide us with a general characterization of the *Idee* as an ideal limit that applies to the correlate of both "exact" and "descriptive" concepts, while, on the other hand, by characterizing the "intuitiveness" of the idea in two slightly different ways, Husserl seems to be making a huge effort to discriminate the two cases based upon the manner in which the alleged "idea" is given to our apprehension as a limit.

of descriptive concepts, one thing is certain: the *idea* no longer means the same as *essence*, let alone *pure essence*. *The theoretical framework has been completely transformed*. From now on, the concept of idea will take a path that diverges from that of the essence: In this sense, as Husserl also bluntly yet quite clearly writes in 1913, “phenomenological objects are not ideas” (Hua XLI, p. 77).

If the *idea* no longer means *essence*, not even as a *pure idea*, the problem naturally arises as to how refer to a universal *extent* independently from the relation to an individual object included in the notion of essence. To put it otherwise: if the term *idea* is no longer relied upon to avoid the eventual confusion affecting the expression *essence*, then how can we avoid mixing up *A*, *B*, and *C*? Husserl’s solution is the Greek *eidos*. Nevertheless—and no matter how decisive text Nr. 4 from Hua XLI is in appreciating the developments of Husserl’s assessment of the *idea*—it must be underlined that the Greek “*eidos*” is nowhere to be found in this 1912 manuscript.

As a matter of fact, Husserl had already employed the Greek term *eidos* in a manuscript probably written in March 1911 (now published as *Beilage XIX* to *Husserliana XXVI*) and dedicated to the problem of the ideality of meanings.¹⁵ Without getting into any detailed analysis of the different issues tackled by Husserl in this manuscript,¹⁶ let us consider the third occurrence of the *eidos*, which can be found in an important footnote at the end of the manuscript (Hua XXVI, p. 217).

The importance of this footnote derives from its offering a sort of “retrospective” account: Husserl has just asserted that meanings as such, pure as well as empirical, have to be considered as something “universal” (*ein Allgemeines*) in opposition to the many individual and subjective acts that can “intend” them. Then comes the footnote, in which all of a sudden Husserl exclaims: “This is inconsistent.” Why? Because if it is really the case that meanings in general are “universal,” then two different species of “universality” need to be recognized and separated. Indeed, as he adds, “this ideality [of meanings] is not the ideality in my original sense (and with which I made a confusion), i.e., that of the *eidos*, of the essence as a ‘universality.’ Universal objects in the sense of meanings and universal objects in the sense of species need to be sharply differentiated.”¹⁷

¹⁵A very “untimely” occurrence of the term *eidos* can be found in a 1908 manuscript on Kant’s critique of knowledge, now published in Hua VII (notably on page p. 359): here the Greek *eidos* is explicitly referred to “*als Gegebenem im echten reinen Allgemeinheitbewußtsein*” and Husserl already speaks of “ideas in the sense of pure and universal essences [*Ideen im Sinne von reinen und allgemeinen Wesen*]” (Hua VII, p. 360). Since Husserl does not elaborate upon the meaning of this “new” term with respect to the two notions of *Wesen* and *Idee*, it is not easy to tell what leads to its introduction, so to speak. As a matter of fact, and even if the text is not particularly clear, Husserl seems to already be using the Greek *eidos* in exactly the same way as he will use it in the first book of *Ideas*.

¹⁶Which has already been submitted to close scrutiny by Gallerand (2014, pp. 121–140).

¹⁷“Nun, aber diese Idealität ist nicht Idealität in meinem ursprünglichen Sinn (mit der ich sie verwechselt habe), die des *Eidos*, des *Wesens* als einer ‘Allgemeinheit.’ Allgemeine Gegenstände im Sinne von Bedeutungen und allgemeine Gegenstände im Sinne von *Spezies* sind scharf zu unterscheiden” (Hua XXVI, p. 217).

Husserl recognizes three different things here. One, he acknowledges that the distinction between the “universality” proper to the ideal domain of “meanings” (*Allgemeine Gegenstände im Sinne von Bedeutungen*) and the one characterizing the realm of essences (also called *eide*) needs to be made; two, he confesses that the two types of universality had been originally “confused”; three, he also explains that what was originally meant by *universality* (in his “original sense”), namely, what in the *LU* used to go by the name of species, now corresponds to the “universality” of the *eidōs* alone.

We are in 1911 here. As we know, Husserl will leave Göttingen to move to Freiburg in 1916, only 5 years after he wrote these lines. We should also keep in mind that, in his 1930 letter to Roman Ingarden, Husserl explains that the view originally held in the *LU* was abandoned already during the last years of his time in Göttingen (“*schon in der letzten Göttinger Zeit*”). This manuscript seems to strongly corroborate Husserl’s retrospective description.

According to our reconstruction of the “vicissitudes” of the concepts of species, idea, and essence, the three stages distinguished at the end of Part III “On the Way to the *Eidōs*” correspond to the following, more internally differentiated sequence:

- (I) During the period immediately following the release of the *LU* (1902–1904), Husserl introduces the notion of *essence* without really distinguishing it from that of *idea*, the latter embracing the specific and the universal: *idea*, *species*, and *essence* have exactly the same meaning, and no real distinction is ever drawn between them. *The theoretical framework is altered without being transformed.*
- (II) Around 1905, the *species*—now relied upon to exclusively cover the notions of *meaning* and *sense* as the objective “correlates” of concepts and propositions—is distinguished from *essence* (still identified with the term *idea*). *The theoretical framework is not altered, but the beginning of a transformation (that is, the introduction of a clear distinction between the identity of meaning and the identity of a universal extent) is clearly perceivable.*

Around 1906, Husserl distinguishes three meanings included in the notion of *Wesen*: (A) universal essence, (B) individual essence, and (C) empirical essence. The *idea* means the same as *essence*, and both are distinguished from *meaning* and *sense*. *The theoretical framework faces no alternation, but Husserl’s understanding of the concept of essence has undergone a transformation: the problem being to recognize its internal differentiation.*

By 1909–1910, the *idea* is not simply employed to designate the *essence sic et simpliciter* but—now accompanied by the adjective *pure*—stands for A as something to be distinguished from both B and C. *The theoretical framework is not only slightly altered (through the systematic presence of the adjective reine), but also transformed.*

- (III) By 1912, the term *idea* has become the “idea in the Kantian sense” and Husserl has already found in the Greek *eidos* that sort of “new” expression by which he can designate *A* in opposition to the domain of meaning and sense and as something to be distinguished from *B* and *C*. *The theoretical framework is altered (by means of the introduction of both the “idea in the Kantian sense” and the *eidos*) and thereby transformed.*

Nevertheless, if we recall, once again, what Husserl himself explains about the introduction of the *eidos*, the state of affairs presented in *Formale und Transzendente Logik* is not exactly the same as the one just described. If in 1913 Husserl justified the appeal to the *eidos* based on the latter being “terminologically unspoiled” with respect to the two notions of *idea* and *essence*, he writes in 1929 that the *eidos* “defines the only concept belonging to the ambiguous expression *a priori* that I recognize philosophically.” In other words: if at some point Husserl decides to resort to the *eidos*, it is not only to have a more “fine-grained” terminology (able to do justice to the different nuances of the ideal world), it is first and foremost to avoid the ambiguities of the notion of *a priori*.

What are these ambiguities?

3 Vicissitudes of Some Concepts II: A Priori, A Posteriori

Unlike the vicissitudes of the concepts of species, essence, and idea, in the case of the *a priori*-*a posteriori* dichotomy one cannot properly speak of a “development” from one framework to another; over time, Husserl became intent on establishing a fixed and unambiguous meaning of the “*a priori*” (and, correlatively, of the “*a posteriori*”). As a consequence, our main concern here is to understand in what, exactly, the “ambiguity” of the *a priori* consists (or, better, what the many meanings it entails are) and how Husserl endeavors, and eventually manages, to determine and fix its meaning. Let us then hasten to point out that, given the specific theme of this section, the question as to the distinction between “analytic” and “synthetic” propositions or truths will not even be raised: the point being to confine our discussion to the meaning of the expression “*a priori*” (and “*a posteriori*”) regardless of any further differentiation (to be assessed later).

A first series of interesting observations can be found in the lectures held by Husserl immediately after the *Logical Investigations*, namely, in the *Allgemeine Erkenntnistheorie* (1902–1903). Though only in relation to the so-called “empirical sciences,” and in a rather generic way, Husserl raises and briefly addresses the problem of the “foundation” (*Begründung*) and, as he also remarks toward the end of the lectures, the “justification” (*Rechtfertigung*) (Hua-Mat III, pp. 216–217) of their truths.

In this respect, Husserl speaks of sciences that acquire “knowledge” on “matters of fact” through “experience and induction” (*Erfahrung und Induktion*) (Hua-Mat III, p. 27)—thereby bearing on “factual actuality” or “reality” (*tatsächliche*

Wirklichkeit). The distinction is in this case between the *character* of such knowledge (*empirisch*), what it is “about” (*tatsächliche Wirklichkeit*), and the *means* by which it is acquired and thus “grounded” and “justified” (*Erfahrung und Induktion*).

In a straightforward opposition to empirical sciences—as sciences grounded in experience—there is “pure logic” (as the example of a priori science), which “is not grounded by means of experience, nor does it directly deal with empirical connections of psychological lived-experiences, but rather with certain ideal and a priori connections” (Hua-Mat III, p. 29). What is important to emphasize is Husserl’s *negative* way of addressing the problem of justification of such a priori science and its “truths” (for example, that “ $a + b = b + a$ ”): “[experience] can neither confirm nor disprove this law” (Hua-Mat III, p. 38). To restate it once again, even if Husserl is here exclusively assessing the formal domain of logic and logical truths, these are immediately assumed as a sort of “paradigm” for any and every a priori science and truth. As a consequence, and in opposition to the “grounding” function of “experience” proper to empirical sciences in general, a priori sciences and a priori truths are described solely *per viam negationis*. Were we to provide some sort of definition, we would say that *an a priori proposition is one for which the validity of its truth can be “neither confirmed nor disproved by experience.”* When it comes to addressing logical truths *per se*, Husserl is clear: in this case, we are confronted with truths grounded in the “content” (*Inhalt*) or “sense” of the concepts themselves in a purely objective manner (*in objectiv theoretischer Hinsicht*) (Hua-Mat III, p. 42).

As should be evident, the Husserlian arguments do not bear directly on the a priori-a posteriori dichotomy *per se* but rather on the nature and character of certain sciences, such as psychology and pure logic: Husserl’s main concern amounts to *distinguishing* and thus *categorizing* different types of sciences based upon their *subject matter*, *method*, as well as *kind of truths*, in order to avoid any confusion between them (which would result, for instance, in “logical psychologism”).

In what, then, would the interest in these lectures properly consist? It consists in the theme or, better, the perspective they bring to the fore. Which one, exactly? The *Begründung*. Let us try to be clear on this point. Even if the term was already employed in the *LU*, it is only from now on that this “theme” systematically and progressively imposes itself and ends up expressing the *specifically phenomenological understanding* of the term *a priori*. This is a fundamental point that warrants elaboration. What is at stake is not simply the question of the *intuitiveness of the a priori* (as is too often claimed¹⁸), and this for two different reasons. One, since Husserl always “couples together” the two expressions *a priori* and *a posteriori*, the catchy formula *intuitiveness of the a priori* bears on the former, yet does not seem to include the latter as well. Two, because the fact that something is “given” to intuition, namely, that there is an intuitive dimension to be taken into account, clarifies neither the meaning nor the function of such intuition.

¹⁸ As is the case, for example, with the otherwise very interesting book by Dufrenne (1996), who, following Scheler, emphasizes how the fundamental question to be asked about the a priori is: *What can be given?* (p. 5).

In a few words that will reveal in advance one of the main outcomes of the present paragraph: when Husserl, in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, will characterize the *eidos* as standing for “the only concept belonging to the ambiguous expression *a priori* that I recognize philosophically,” the issue that he has in mind is precisely that of the *Begründung* as “foundation” or “justification.” In a nutshell: characterizing a proposition, a knowledge, or even a truth as either *a priori* or *a posteriori* means nothing else but stating its own specific *Begründung*—which, phenomenologically speaking, will result in a system of intuitive acts (and relevant givennesses).¹⁹

That this is precisely the case is discernible in the 1906–1907 *Einleitung in die Logik und Erkenntnistheorie*. At the end of §13, Husserl exclaims: “However, one has to be quite careful that no further mischief is gotten into with the concepts *a priori* and *a posteriori* and that no other thing may be understood than what we have set forth” (Hua XXIV, p. 51). What is the meaning that has been set forth by Husserl and that must never be mixed up with any other meaning or sense?

The distinction is also referred to as the one between the *a priori* and the *a posteriori* [*Man bezeichnet den Unterschied auch als den des Apriori und Aposteriori*]. *Pure mathematics is an a priori discipline, the whole of natural science an a posteriori discipline*. The one is entirely grounded [*gründet*] in conceptual essentialities, the other in experience. Mathematical propositions require no reference to experience and no induction through experience. This is what is meant by saying mathematical propositions are *a priori*. It makes no sense to require such a thing of them. The opposite holds for propositions of the natural sciences. However, one has to be quite careful that no further *mischief* is gotten into with the concepts *a priori* and *a posteriori* and that no other thing may be understood than what we have set forth (Hua XXIV, pp. 50–51).

Even if Husserl does not say much on what these other possible nuances of meaning are, what he means by *a priori* and *a posteriori*, or, better, the meaning that he is ascribing to this very traditional dichotomy, should be quite apparent: the “distinction,” which is *also* referred to as that between “*a priori*” and “*a posteriori*,” is the one between two radically different species of *being grounded in...*: (a) *being grounded in...conceptual essentialities* and (b) *being grounded in...experience*.

As Husserl hastens to emphasize: “This is what is meant by saying mathematical propositions are *a priori*.” In other words, and as already announced: saying of a proposition (e.g., a mathematical proposition) that it is *a priori* amounts to asserting its specific type of *Begründung*.

Now, in order to appreciate Husserl’s position, let us compare it with what could be considered the most traditional and influential conception of that very same dichotomy: the one handed down to us by Kant’s *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, notably in the *Einleitung* to the second edition. As is well-known, at the beginning of the *Einleitung* (in “I. On the Distinction between Pure and Empirical Knowledge”) Kant presents the distinction between the type of knowledge that is “independent of experience, and even of all impressions of the senses,” which can be called *a priori*, and “empirical knowledge,” the sources of which “are *a posteriori*, namely, in experience” (B2). It should immediately leap into view how—in this preliminary

¹⁹ See also Hua-Mat III, pp. 66, 108, 140, 145, 157, 198, 207, 216–217.

account—the fundamental “distinction” is not between *a posteriori* and *a priori knowledge*, but rather between *a priori knowledge* and *empirical knowledge*. The expression *a posteriori* is in fact exclusively employed to designate the “source” of the latter, yet not the type of knowledge itself! In spite of some “terminological” discrepancies (Kant speaks of *Quelle*, Husserl of *Begründung*), it might be maintained that Husserl would have absolutely no problem agreeing with Kant on this issue. As he in fact observes: “Mathematical propositions require no reference to experience and no induction through experience ... It makes no sense to require such a thing of them.” Upon closer inspection, however, it is evident that the hypothetical agreement between Husserl and Kant would bear only on the *a posteriori* referring to the “source” or foundation of a certain type of knowledge (*in der Erfahrung*) and on the *a priori* construed as *independence from experience*: the agreement would extend no further. It might even be argued, in fact, that, even if Husserl recognizes that what is *a priori* (e.g., “mathematical propositions”) is also “independent of experience,” they are not at all one and the same thing! For, it is one thing to recognize that *being a priori* means the same as *being grounded in conceptual essentialities* (as is the case with mathematical propositions) and quite another to say that whatever is grounded in conceptual essentialities is not grounded in experience—thereby being independent of it. As we believe, Husserl would certainly concede and admit that what is *a priori*, in opposition to *empirical knowledge*, is *independent of experience*; yet, he would never accept this to express the (“primary”) meaning of the expression “*a priori*” itself. The former simply follows from the latter.

Nevertheless, such independence of experience is not enough of an element for Kant to be able to characterize the *a priori*; he also needs a “feature” or “characteristic” (*Merkmal*) by which we can safely distinguish pure knowledge from empirical knowledge (B3). The first characteristic that Kant discusses is “necessity” (*Notwendigkeit*): “experience does indeed teach us that something is thus and thus, but not that it cannot be otherwise. First, then, if we find a proposition such that in thinking it we think at the same time its *necessity*, then it is an *a priori* judgment.” For the moment, let us simply limit ourselves to underlining the similarity between Kant’s words (*nicht anders sein könne*) and Husserl’s (*das Nicht-anders-sein-können*). But Kant also distinguishes between two different kinds of “universality,” viz., “empirical” and “strict” universality (B4):

Experience never provides its judgment with true or strict *universality*, but only (through induction) with assumed and comparative universality; hence, we should, properly speaking, say that as far as we have observed until now, no exception is to be found to this or that rule. If, therefore, a judgment is thought with strict universality, i.e., thought in such a way that no exception whatever is allowed as possible, then the judgment is not derived from experience, but is valid absolutely *a priori*.

Hence, Kant concludes, “necessity and strict universality are safe indicators of *a priori* knowledge.”

As for Husserl, we know quite well what he thinks of the two Kantian “safe indicators,” or, at least, of “necessity”; indeed, as we concluded in Sect. 4: Kant—

Husserl urges—is unable to stick to a rigorous, that is to say, an objective, notion of necessity as an “indicator” of the a priori, and thus ends up conflating the notion of necessity—as *das Nicht-anders-sein-können*—with a vague “constraint” derived from the specificity of our human makeup. What Kant takes to be one of the two “safe indicators of a priori knowledge” (B4)—the other one being “strict universality”—is not *safe* at all, and it turns out to be only the expression of a specifically marked necessity which can vary depending on the nature of the intellect grounding it. Now, even if this were not really the case, and the Kantian necessity were not the result of a confusion between *das Nicht-anders-sein-können* and a vague constraint derived from the nature of the intellect at stake, Husserl would not hold “necessity” to be one of the *indicators* of the a priori; as already was the case with the independence of experience, here, too, Husserl would distinguish the one and only sense of the a priori (as *being grounded in...*) from what derives from it.²⁰

If we are on the right track, then it might be assumed—even if just as an hypothesis—that, when Husserl warns his students from sneaking in meanings other than the one that “what we have set forth,” what he might be referring to is also Kant’s *Einleitung* to the B-edition of first critique.

Let us keep reading the lectures, notably §39, wherein Husserl says the following immediately after a discussion of the example of “sounds” (and relevant “essential laws”²¹):

What holds for these trivial laws of sounds holds for all laws of essences. They are all *a priori*. And here is the only genuine sense [*der allein echte Sinn*] of *a priori*. *A priori* is everything grounded in pure essence [*Apriori ist alles im reinen Wesen Gründende*]. The knowledge theorist [*der Erkenntnistheoretiker*] can, therefore, claim as *a priori*, namely as directly given in general, immanent intuition. *A priori* is not what is certain to me prior to experience, for example, through divine inspiration, or what is certain to me prior to experience through psychological mechanisms of heredity, but what generally is certain to me while I put in question all experience and all transcendent assumptions, but rather *because in pure beholding I see the state of affairs as irrevocably grounded in the immanent essence of the concepts concerned* (Hua XXIV, p. 235).

A few remarks need to be made in order to really appreciate this excerpt.

First of all, Husserl is recognizing and admitting that the “only genuine sense” of the expression *a priori* does not simply lie in its “intuitiveness” but, much more profoundly, in what we could dub the grounding aspect: “*A priori* is everything

²⁰ Accordingly, whoever kept arguing that the understanding of the “a priori” as *being grounded in...* (in opposition to the manner in which Kant accounts for it) was something that Adolf Reinach first introduced, or emphasized, would be simply ignoring Husserl’s original position vis-à-vis the a priori-a posteriori dichotomy. A good example of this sort of mistake is Dubois (1995, p. 90); and partially also S. Besoli, “La pregnanza del metodo descrittivo e il rispetto delle datità. Adolf Reinach e la traccia di una ‘vera fenomenologia,’” in Reinach (2008, pp. viii–lxxiv).

²¹ “If I make clear to myself what it means for sounds to be higher and deeper, that means I call to mind different sounds in pure intuition and I arrive at the insight that belonging to the essence of the quality of sound is that *a*’s being higher than *b*, rules out *b*’s being higher than *a*, and that if *a* is higher than *b*, which is higher than *c*, *a* is higher than *c*. Then, I have there laws whose validity in pure intuition is absolutely certain and indubitable. Sounds for which that did not hold would just not be sounds” (Hua XXIV, p. 234).

grounded in pure essence.” Second of all, Husserl is clearly and drily spurning a series of historical misunderstandings of the “a priori” (e.g., “divine inspiration” and “psychological mechanism”). Third of all—this being the most interesting aspect—by speaking of “the knowledge theorist” (*der Erkenntnistheoretiker*), Husserl is basically labeling *the only genuine sense of the term a priori (= being grounded in conceptual essentialities) as a gnoseological one*. A few years later, namely, in the 1909 lectures *Alte und neue Logik*, Husserl will affirm—once again and with much stronger emphasis—that the distinction between *a priori* and *a posteriori* judgments or truths does not have a purely “logical meaning,” but a “transcendental” one, i.e., a meaning belonging to the domain of the critique of knowledge (“*Diese neuen Termini haben nicht rein logische, sondern transzendente, d.i. erkenntniskritische Bedeutung*” (Hua-Mat VI, p. 238). As he hastens to remark: such a “fundamental gnoseological distinction” [*grundwesentlicher erkenntnistheoretischer Unterschied*] concerns the manner in which the different truths obtain their ultimate foundation or justification [*letzte Begründung ... erhalten*] [Hua XLI, p. 39]).

Let us pause for a second, because a question naturally arises that needs to be immediately addressed. As a matter of fact, Husserl’s line of reasoning, hence our reading of his texts, seems to rely on two radically different terminologies. On the one hand, Husserl speaks of *being grounded in* (either *conceptual essentialities* or *experience*); on the other hand, the talk is that of *Begründung*. At this point a reasonable objection might be made to the effect that, whereas we have so far made no distinction between the two, they bear upon two distinct issues: if the former way of speaking is of an ontological nature—for it refers to the “objectuality” (the objectual domain, so to speak) *in which the proposition is grounded* (either essences or experience)—the latter terminology seems, by contrast, to imply a reference to the process, or the acts (in more phenomenological jargon), through which the proposition obtains its foundation. A decision is then to be made. As we firmly believe, there is no “contradiction” between the two options—for, they are not even two options, but rather two different perspectives on the same fact: this is why Husserl emphasizes the *transcendental* or *gnoseological* meaning of the expressions *a priori* and *a posteriori*. From the standpoint of the “critique of knowledge,” which Husserl also dubs “transcendental,” speaking of the “object” or the objectual domain—in which the proposition would be grounded—means the same as ascertaining the acts through which the object or objectual domain is given and grasped and thus the proposition at stake firmly grounded.²² (In fact, and as we will soon see, one can also

²²At the very end of 50(d), where a systematic presentation of different species of eidetic laws is offered, Husserl asserts the following: “*Which sciences would be gnoseologically [erkenntniskritisch] founded by this and pulled out of their problematic position?*”

First, *purely formal logic* and the entire formal mathesis. And, similarly, the associated normative logic, so far as the norm is purely related to the analytic form of thinking.

Second, *phenomenology itself*, the immanent essence-analysis of reduced phenomenal events. The necessary auto-clarification of phenomenology by itself would be realized.

Third, *real ontology*, the science of the essence of real being, i.e., of the *a priori* that belongs to the essence of thing, space, time. The *a priori* of geometry, of kinematics, of the pure theory of

speak of a specifically *ontological* perspective or approach to the a priori [and to a posteriori as well] which consistently differs from the meaning we just ascribed to the term “ontological”).

Here, then, is our preliminary conclusion and, at the same time, one of the main outcomes we will never lose sight of: *the only genuine sense of the expression a priori (and, correlatively, of the a posteriori) which Husserl—as he will confess himself in 1929—recognizes philosophically is the transcendental or gnoseological one.*

To say of a proposition or truth that it is a priori (or a posteriori) does not amount—*prima facie*—to asserting its strict universality, nor in recognizing its necessity and independence of experience: rather, it means to point to the manner in which this proposition or truth obtains and receives its ultimate foundation (*letzte Begründung*). Such a foundation, as we already know, consists in a priori propositions being grounded in conceptual essentialities and in a posteriori propositions being grounded in experience.

We are in 1906–1907 and, as we should remember, this is when three different meanings included in the German concept of *Wesen* are first singled out. If Husserl can still maintain that *to be a priori* means the same as *to be grounded in conceptual essentialities* or *essences*, then once the term essence is replaced by the Greek *eidos*, *to be a priori* will mean the same as *to be grounded in eide*. This is why Husserl can go from the terminology of the *a priori* (a priori judgment, a priori knowledge, a priori truth) to the language of the *eidos* (eidetic judgment, eidetic knowledge, eidetic truth): for, if *to be a priori* means the same as *to be grounded in eide*, then to describe a proposition as an *eidetic* one is simply tantamount to stating what ultimately grounds it.

Accordingly, if the “only genuine sense” of the expression a priori is the *gnoseological* one, then it is evident why the *eidos* “defines the only concept belonging to the ambiguous expression *a priori* that I recognize philosophically.”²³

This being acknowledged, let us keep following Husserl’s line of reasoning by first discussing the 1908 *Bedeutungslehre* and then moving on to the crucial 1909 *Alte und neue Logik* lectures.

Chapter Seven of the *Bedeutungslehre* is dedicated to presenting “The Essential Distinctions in the Domain of Judgments” (Hua XXVI, pp. 121–135). Husserl starts

time, therefore, finds its place here and, besides, the a priori of thing, property, change inherently connected with it” (XXIV, p. 334).

²³ In *Die Idee der Phänomenologie*, notably at the end of the third lecture, Husserl describes “the only justifiable concept of the a priori” in the following terms: “Analysis of essence is *eo ipso* general analysis; cognition of essence is knowledge directed at the essences [*Wesen, Essenzen*], at universal objectualities. It is here that the talk of the a priori has its legitimate place. For, what does a priori knowledge mean if not a knowledge that entirely bases its absolute validity on essences, at least to the extent that we exclude the discredited empiristic concept of the a priori?” (Hua II, p. 51). This, as Husserl goes on to point out, is the notion of a priori with which phenomenology deals; yet, also “another concept can be found if we range under the heading of the a priori all concepts that, as categories, have a principal meaning in a certain sense, and then in addition the essential laws based on these concepts” (Hua II, p. 52).

out by immediately equating the conceptual pair *a priori/a posteriori* with *essential/existential* (*Wesens- und Daseinsurteile*), and the discussion is divided into three main sections: after a description and account of that distinction (*Erste Charakteristik der Unterscheidung*) (Hua XXVI, pp. 121–125), the analysis switches to the more crucial topic of the “mode of givenness” of what grounds their truth (*Weitere Ausführung. Die Gegebenheit von Daseinsverhalt und von Wesensverhalt*) (pp. 125–127), finally switching once more to focus on the difference between essential judgments in general and judgments concerning meanings. For the sake of our problems, this latter aspect will be intentionally left out.

Let us start by considering what Husserl says about existential or existence-judgments. They are called “judgments as to matters of fact” (*Tatsachenurteile*), for, they are judgments that assert or state an existence (*Dasein*), a matter of fact (*Tatsache*), or something individual (*Individuelle*). This being recognized, Husserl immediately goes on to distinguish the general notion of existence from the question of whether such an “existence” explicitly “appears” in the judgment—the distinction being between judgments that posit an *explicit existence* (“This house, this real existence in front of me right now, is a Renaissance building”), and judgments that posit only an *implicit existence* (“Socrates is a philosopher,” which is very different from the explicit position involved in “Socrates exists”) (Hua XXVI, p. 122). This distinction does not have the *transcendental* or *gnoseological* meaning discussed above. Rather, it is a *logical distinction*: meaning that it bears upon the concepts that actually occur in a judgment. What is *logical* is not the *position of existence*, but the position’s *occurring* in the judgment: its being expressed—explicitly or not—as a part of it.

We are therefore confronted with “two” different species of “distinctions”: the *transcendental* or *gnoseological* distinction between *existence-judgment* and *essence-judgment*; the *logical* distinction—within the former concept—between *explicit* and *implicit* position of existence. More broadly, it could be argued that the *logical dimension* of the *a priori-a posteriori* dichotomy is the one assessing the kind of concepts that “occur” in a judgment. To put it otherwise, the expressions *a priori* and *a posteriori* are “ambiguous” because they have or can have many different meanings and senses. We have already seen Husserl single out the *transcendental* or *gnoseological meaning* of these expressions, but there is also a *logical meaning or sense*: what is meant in this case being the type of concepts that actually occur in the judgments in question.²⁴

In 1909, Husserl will speak of *Hinsicht*, “perspective,” meaning by this that the distinction between *a priori* and *a posteriori* can be looked at or addressed from the perspective or standpoint of either *logic* or *critique of knowledge*: whereas, in the former case, those expressions refer to the kind of concepts that occur in the judgment (the judgments themselves being thus categorized depending on the kind of concepts they contain), in the latter, they stand for what grounds it (the judgments

²⁴ Let us remark that in 1909, during the discussion of the analytic-synthetic distinction, Husserl will accuse Kant of not recognizing the difference between the *logical* and the *gnoseological perspective* (*Hinsicht*) (Hua-Mat VI, p. 241).

being distinguished based upon what they are grounded in...). In the case of “a priori” propositions, the logical perspective tends to speak of conceptual propositions or conceptual truths (sometimes *purely conceptual* propositions or truths), whereas the gnoseological approach tends to speak of essential and eidetic propositions or essential truths. On the contrary, when it comes to the a posteriori, the gnoseological standpoint tends to employ experiential judgment or perceptual judgment (Hua-Mat VI, p. 239²⁵), but also the ambiguous “existence-judgment” (*Daseinsurteil*), which is in fact also used by the *logical* approach to refer to the (implicit or explicit) expression of the “position.”²⁶

Let us go back to our text. What we have learned so far is that the so-called existence-judgments posit an existence (whether implicitly or explicitly): “Every existence-judgment posits an existence” (Hua XXVI, p. 122). Nobody can really be satisfied by this, since it sounds almost like a tautology: indeed, is it not true that, once we call or characterize a judgment as an “existential” one, the claim that *it posits an existence* follows immediately from it? Are we not simply facing a repetition of that original characterization? As a matter of fact, this would be exactly the case if and only if the term *existence* in the expression “existence-judgment” were the same as the *existence* posited by the judgment. Now, in light of the distinction between *logical* and *transcendental* thus far discussed, it could be urged that, whereas the first *existence* has a logical meaning (and refers to the concepts that actually occur in the judgment), the second *existence* has a transcendental or a gnoseological sense (hence, it stands for what grounds the truth or validity of the judgment at stake).

That this is the case, namely, that the second *existence* has a transcendental or gnoseological sense, is evident in the following: “Every existence-judgment posits an existence, its state of affairs is a ‘fact’ [*Tatsache*]; this corresponds to the phenomenological tenet: every judgment as to matters of fact [*Tatsachenurteil*] requires ‘perception and experience’ in order to determine its evidence and to establish the givenness of its state of affairs.”²⁷ Now, this long sentence is important for at least three reasons. In the first place, it confirms our interpretation of the second *existence* in the sentence “Every existence-judgment posits an existence.” Second of all, Husserl invokes a phenomenological “meaning” (*phänomenologische Bedeutung*); in other words: what has been so far characterized as *transcendental* and *gnoseological* is now labeled *phenomenological*—this consisting in the analysis of what actually grounds a proposition’s truth, both in terms of what is given and of the act through which it is given. Third of all, by writing “its state of affairs is a fact” or a

²⁵ “Was also die Weise der Begründung anlangt, wie sie durch das bedeutungstheoretische Wesen der betreffenden Urteile gefordert werden, sind die Daseinsurteile Erfahrungsurteile.”

²⁶ According to how Husserl describes it, the logical *Hinsicht* deals with mere forms, the form construed in the broadest sense (*Das ist ein Unterschied der bloßen Form, aber der Form im weiteren Sinn*) (Hua-Mat VI, p. 235).

²⁷ “Jedes Daseinsurteil setzt Dasein, sein Sachverhalt ist eine Tatsache; damit äquivalent ist die phänomenologische Behauptung: Jedes Tatsachenurteil fordert zu seine Evidenz, zur Herstellung der Gegebenheit seines Sachverhalt ‘Wahrnehmung und Erfahrung’.”

“matter of fact” (*sein Sachverhalt ist eine Tatsache*), Husserl is suggesting that the talk itself of *Tatsachen* expresses the specific character of the corresponding “state of affairs” (*Sachverhalt*). If we are on the right track, then we are facing a distinction between three different modes of referring to the a priori-a posteriori dichotomy:

- (a) The *logical* meaning or standpoint (*Hinsicht*) that refers to *concepts* that occur in a judgment.
- (b) The *transcendental*, *gnoseological*, and *phenomenological* meaning, which considers the issue of foundation or justification (*Begründung*) of a judgment, both in terms of the giving act and of what is thereby given (see also Hua XL, pp. 311–312).
- (c) What we might call the *ontological* meaning or standpoint, which tackles the character of the corresponding (ontological) state of affairs.

Let us take a concrete example: the notion of a *posteriori* judgment, which is here equivalent to *existence-judgment*. The question turns out to be: what does it mean for a judgment or a proposition to be a *posteriori*? Three answers are indeed available to us. *Phenomenologically* speaking, namely, from the point of view of its justification, it means its *being grounded in the act of perception or experience and what is hence given to us: an existent*.²⁸ *Ontologically* speaking, that is to say, from the standpoint of the character of its state of affairs, it means that its correlate is a *Tatsache*. Finally, the *logical* perspective considers the concepts that actually occur in it as a judgment: in this case, whether the position of existence is explicitly or implicitly present. All three of these meanings are equally implied by the turn of phrase a *posteriori*, hence the ambiguity constantly denounced by Husserl.

If we happen to “neglect” these distinctions, then to say of a proposition or a truth that it is a priori or a posteriori could mean either one of these three things (if not all of them at the same time): its *logical* structure (the kind of concepts it includes), its *phenomenological* foundation (its being grounded in...), the *ontological* character of the state of affairs intended by the proposition itself.

What about “essential truths”? How do these lectures account for them? If our previous analysis of existential truths or propositions holds true, then the same distinctions should be found in this case, too. How is the a priori presented from the *logical*, *phenomenological*, and *ontological* perspective respectively? Let us start with the *logical* one. If in the former case the question was of whether the position of existence explicitly or implicitly occurs in the judgment, now the issue is the explicit or implicit presence of the position of essence: “They include neither *explic-*

²⁸ If Husserl tends to speak of *Erfahrung*, “experience,” it is precisely in virtue of the term’s two-fold meaning, which in fact refers to both the act or process of experiencing and the object thereby experienced: “*jedes Urteil, dessen Gültigkeit nur in Wahrnehmung und Erfahrung auszuweisen ist, ist ein Tatsachenurteil. Das Ausweisen besagt: Wir brauchen Wahrnehmungen und Erfahrungssetzungen und können nur in ihnen die Gegebenheit finden. Die Evidenz der Gegebenheit des Sachverhalts ist eine in Wahrnehmungsakten fundierte Evidenz, Wahrnehmungsurteile, Erfahrungsurteile liegen zugrunde, in ihnen term iniert jederzeit die Letzterfüllung der Urteilsintention bei den Urteilen dieser Gruppe*” (XXVI, p. 122).

ite nor *implicite* any position of existence. On the contrary, they do contain either *explicite* or *implicite* positions of essence (*Wesenssetzungen*)” (Hua XXVI, p. 124). As Husserl writes in what is still known as *Ideen...III*: “Pure essence entails no other position than the position of essence” (Hua V, p. 42). *Phenomenologically* speaking, “essential judgments are characterized by the fact that they do not need perception and experience, yet still some intuition through which their states of affairs are given.” Or, as he also remarks a few lines later on the same topic: “A truth of essence ... is given in evidence, which does not involve any perceptual or experiential position.” Finally, when it comes to the so-called *ontological* perspective, if in the former case Husserl could talk of *Tatsachen* to characterize the relevant state of affairs, now the term is “essential connection,” which is in fact how one might translate *Wesenszusammenhang* (Hua XXVI, p. 125) or, as Husserl writes in 1913, “essential state of affairs” (*Wesensverhalt*) (Hua III/1, pp. 20–21).

Now, a further objection could be made similar to one tackled earlier. One may claim that, in fact, what we have been calling the phenomenological and the ontological perspectives are equivalent, or else are not as different as we would argue. As Husserl maintains at least from his 1896 logic lectures on Bolzano onward, states of affairs are the objectual correlates of propositions and, as such, are what are given to “intuition” (i.e., to a “categorially” shaped intuition) and evidence when it comes to confirming the truth of a given proposition. Now, if this is the case, can we really stick to our distinction between two different perspectives? Yes, we can, and this is why. Although it is absolutely true that states of affairs are what are given to intuition (see Hua XL, p. 310), it does not follow that the distinction between the two perspectives does not hold—for, it is one thing to look at states of affairs from the standpoint of their being given to intuition as their objectual correlate, i.e., from what we have called (following Husserl) the phenomenological standpoint or perspective; it is quite another to consider them according to their “ontological” status and as being either matters of fact or essential states of affairs.²⁹ The two go hand in hand, but they are not equivalent (see Fig. 2 below).

It is now time to read the 1909 lectures *Alte und neue Logik*, so as to bring the present section to a conclusion and move on to the next one.

What we previously called the *ontological* perspective is now explicitly recognized as such and referred to as the “ontological layer” (*Seinsniveau*) of a judgment (Hua-Mat VI, p. 179). Although in these pages Husserl talks of acts and of what appears to them indifferently, this is due to his attempt at distinguishing the *logical dimension* and *components* of a judgment from all the non-logical ones. As he writes: “One component brings about the ontological level, the other gives the expression as such”³⁰ (Hua-Mat VI, p. 179). That the overall description mainly concerns the corresponding state of affairs intended by the judgment, and not its logical structure, is discernible in Husserl’s language, which relies on expressions such as “the judged states of affairs” and “actual state of affairs” (*der geurteilte Sachverhalt, Wirklichkeits-Verhalt*) (Hua-Mat VI, p. 178).³¹

²⁹ See Hua XL, text 16, notably p. 327 on a very interesting “taxonomy” of states of affairs.

³⁰ “Die eine Komponente gibt das Seinsniveau, die andere gibt den Ausdruck als solchen.”

³¹ Accordingly, Husserl distinguishes the logical dimension of the *Existenz* (whether this appears,

Hinsicht		A Priori	A Posteriori
Phenomenological, Transcendental, Gnoseological	<i>What “Grounds” the Proposition, both in terms of Acts and Givennesses</i>	Essences, Pure Essences, Eide, and Relevant Intuitive Acts	Existence, and Experience in general, Perception, Recollection etc.
Logical	<i>Concepts that Actually Occur in a Judgment</i>	Implicit or Explicit Position of Essences in a Judgment	Implicit or Explicit Position of Existence in a Judgment
Ontological	<i>Character and Nature of the Relevant State of Affairs</i>	Essential Connection or Essential States of Affairs	Matters of Fact

Fig. 2 The three perspectives on the a priori/a posteriori

This distinction allows Husserl to criticize Kant on at least two grounds. Husserl seems to accuse Kant of two separate—yet tightly related—confusions: one between “logic” (in a loose sense of the term and as bearing on meanings) and “psychology” (*eine Vermengung von psychologischen und bedeutungslogischen Unterschiede*) and another between the “logical” and the “gnoseological” approach to the problem of the a priori (Hua-Mat VI, p. 241). Let us start with the first one.

The important point is not simply Husserl’s claim to the effect that Kant does not really separate a notion of modality as an expression of the subject’s “position”-taking³² (what one could designate, with more modern terminology, as a doxastic or

explicitly or not, in a judgment as a logical component of it) and the ontological character of the relevant state of affairs: “*Danach kommt Existenz in doppelter Weise im Urteil zum Bewusstsein und in der Urteilsbedeutung eben zur Bedeutung: Einmal haben wir in den oder jenen Sachvorstellungen, die ein Urteil unterbauen, eben Setzungscharaktere, Existentialcharaktere, d.h. der bedeutete Gegenstand ist uns dabei bewusst in Wirklichkeitsweise. Die zweite Form des Existenzbewusstseins ist die als Prädikat ‘existiert’ im Existentialsatz. Freilich muss auch betont werden, dass die Bezeichnung als Existenzbewusstsein im einen und anderen Fall zugleich voraussetzt gewisse geltungslogische Zusammenhänge: z.B. dass, wenn wir überzeugt sind: ‘A existiert,’ wir künftig im nichtprädikativen Existentialbewusstsein, und rechtmäßig ansetzen können: ‘Das A...’ (im Setzungsbewusstsein), und umgekehrt, dass, wenn wir von einem A in setzender Weise sollen aussagen dürfen, wir auch das Recht haben müssen auszusagen, dass das A ein wirkliches sei.*”

³²“*Hätte sich bei den früheren Einteilungen, bei denjenigen nach den früheren Gesichtspunkten, herausgestellt, dass die traditionelle Logik Eigentümlichkeiten, welche die Akte des Urteilens angehen, nicht zu scheiden wusste von denen der entsprechenden Urteilsbedeutungen, d.i. der Urteile im Sinne der reinen Bedeutungslogik, so gilt dasselbe noch in höherem Grad von der jetzt propo- nierten Urteilsteilung. Was in ihr vorgebracht wird, ist eine Vermengung von psychologischen und bedeutungslogischen Unterscheidungen. Zunächst, vonseiten des Aktes kann ein und derselbe Satzgedanke Inhalt einer Gewissheit sein (der Anmutlichkeit, der Vermutlichkeit). Sage ich aus, dass heute ein trüber Wintertag ist, so gebe ich meiner Überzeugung Ausdruck, ich bin dessen gewiss, was ich da sage. Nennt man ein Urteilen mit einer derart vollen Gewissheit des Urteilens*

epistemic modality³³) and the logical analysis of the ideal “content” of judgments (to which the former does not contribute at all), but first and foremost the thesis—strongly advanced by Husserl—that an “objective” and ontological conception of “modality” is to be sharply distinguished (from the “psychological” one) as characterizing “the actual subsistence of a state of affairs” (*das wahrhaft Bestehen des Sachverhaltes*) (Hua-Mat VI, p. 231). In sum: the three modal notions of actuality, necessity, and possibility do not at all contribute to characterizing the logical content of a judgment or proposition, nor the subject’s position, but refer instead to the objectual state of affairs intended by the proposition.

If we are on the right track, then we can understand why for Husserl *necessity* does not represent a safe indicator of what is a priori but rather something derived from its primary meaning and bearing upon the ontological dimension (*Seinsniveau*) of the judgment or proposition at hand. According to Husserl, if to say of a proposition that it is a priori primarily amounts to stating what gives it its ultimate foundation, then the description of it as *necessary* (whether unconditionally or not) refers to the “ontological” dimension of the relevant state of affairs.

Moreover, Kant is accused by Husserl of also conflating the “logical” and the “gnoseological” approaches. When it comes to the a priori-a posteriori dichotomy, Husserl contends, Kant lacks a sharp distinction between the logical and gnoseological perspectives (Hua-Mat VI, p. 241). Now, the crucial importance of such a statement on the part of Husserl lies, for us, less in Kant than in the problem itself of distinguishing between the “logical” and the “gnoseological” perspectives on the a priori. Differently stated: for the sake of our concerns here, what is absolutely important is less the critical target (Kant) than the nature and purpose of the critique, namely, the distinction between a *logical*, a *gnoseological*, and an *ontological* sense.

Husserl’s position vis-à-vis Kant’s view of the a priori should be even clearer now. As a matter of fact, the problem does not simply consist in the Kantian necessity being the result of a confusion between *das Nicht-anders-sein-können* and a constraint derived from the nature of the intellect at stake, but—and more profoundly—in the Kantian *confusion* between different levels of analysis and between different perspectives with regard to the a priori. On Husserl’s view, in fact, Kant does not separate the logical analysis of the semantic distinctions,³⁴ the ontological

ein assertorisches Urteilen, so reihen sich daran andere Aktmodi an. Spricht jemand eine politische Überzeugung aus, und tritt er sie einem Gegner gegenüber, so mögen dessen Einwände ihn innerlich etwas unsicher machen. Trotz der verdoppelten Verve, mit der er nun vielleicht für seine Überzeugung eintritt, und trotzdem er fortfährt zu behaupten und zu urteilen, hat dieses Urteilen einen etwas geänderten Charakter, den einer geringeren inneren Sicherheit oder Gewissheit. Es ist ein wenig angekränkt vom Zweifel. Solcher Modi mag es viele geben; sie gehören natürlich nicht in die Bedeutungslehre” (Hua-Mat VI, p. 229).

³³ Mugnai (2013, p. 9). See also Hua VII, p. 402 on Kant.

³⁴ Which concerns meanings (*Bedeutungen*), notably “pure meanings” (*reine Bedeutungen*): “Vielmehr, wir können dies [the position of existence] immer ausschalten und die reinen Bedeutungen erwägen, und der Unterschied zwischen Existentialurteilen (*Daseinsurteilen*, mat-

dimension of the states of affairs (to which the modalities primarily apply), and the phenomenological perspective regarding the ultimate foundation of a proposition.

Only if we keep this in mind will we be able to really appreciate the meaning of Husserl's blunt statement that Kant does not have "the proper concept of a priori" (*den echten Begriff des Apriori*) (Hua-Mat VI, p. 241): the point is not only that Kant does not have any notion of eidetic intuition³⁵ (why would he, after all?) but also that, by conflating the three perspectives (*Hinsichten*) that Husserl has been so meticulously and carefully trying to discriminate and clearly elucidate, Kant is unable to even understand what one could call the question of the positive foundation of the a priori (beyond the correct, yet merely "negative," feature of "independence of experience"³⁶).

A first preliminary conclusion bearing upon the ambiguity of the a priori and a posteriori can be drawn. As we know, the primary source of confusion is, according to Husserl, the neglect of the distinction between the three different *perspectives*, from which the *a priori-a posteriori* pair can be addressed: the *ontological*, the *logical*, and what Husserl calls the *gnoseological*, *transcendental*, or *phenomenological* perspective. As we should remember, the problem for Husserl does not only consist in recognizing the different meanings actually included in those terms, but first and foremost in identifying what could be called the specifically *phenomenological* meaning of the expression a priori (and a posteriori)—the only one which he recognizes and accepts philosophically. This is the meaning that Husserl already brought to the fore in 1906: the expression a priori (and a posteriori) refers to the *foundation* of the proposition or truth at hand, both in terms of its (objective) *being grounded in...* and the (subjective) *acts* by which it is obtained.

There is also a second source of ambiguity, the one related to the three Kantian *indicators* of the a priori, notably to the feature of necessity, or, better, *unconditional necessity*—which he ascribes to a priori knowledge in general. As far as we understand Husserl, one should not rush to equate a priori to necessity because they refer to two different *perspectives*. While the primary meaning of the phrase a priori concerns the (phenomenological) *foundation* of a truth or proposition, the mark of necessity belongs by contrast to the *ontological layer* and can be deemed an indicator of what is a priori only secondarily, as something derived from its being grounded in pure essences or *eide*.

ters of fact) und Essentialurteilen (Wesensurteilen) drückt sich in den reinen Bedeutungen, in den reinen Sätzen (Daseinssätzen und Wesenssätzen) aus" (Hua XL, p. 314).

³⁵As is claimed in a recent study, the problem would be that Kant "misses" the intuition of essence as Husserl himself understands it (see Buongiorno 2014, p. 36). Now, if this were actually the case, then one could argue that the problem is simply that, in the end, Kant is not Husserl!

³⁶See for example the analyses by Pradelle (2012, pp. 117–183).

4 Vicissitudes of Some Concepts III: The Law, the Problem of Necessity, and the Two Forms of Rationality

Let us now discuss our remaining problems, the ones revolving around the notion of “law,” which played a decisive role in our reading of the *Logical Investigations*. What we want to explore in this section is the way in which Husserl comes to tackle and presents the relation between the notions of law and necessity: the decisive texts are once again Husserl’s lectures from the years 1906–1909.

If we look at the 1902–1903 lectures *Allgemeine Erkenntnistheorie*, as well as the 1905 *Urteilstheorie*, we cannot help noticing the tight connection between the notion of “law” and the problem of “foundation” (*Begründung*) as discussed earlier: the different kinds of laws depending on the actual species of content (whether sensuous or purely categorial) in which they are grounded (Hua-Mat III, p. 178). Accordingly, an a priori law is one grounded in that specific kind of objectuality, which Husserl here calls idea, essence, or species (Hua-Mat III, pp. 192–193): the point to be emphasized is that the expression “essential law” explicitly refers to the law’s being grounded in an essence. In other words, and to make this aspect even clearer, to say of a “law” that it is “a priori” or “essential” does not *prima facie* amount to stating its universality or necessary character, but to stressing what actually “grounds” it as a law (Hua-Mat V, pp. 39, 54).

If this should not come as a surprise, for it represents nothing but a further development of what Husserl had already clearly asserted in the *Third Logical Investigation*, the 1906 lectures *Einleitung in die Logik und Erkenntnistheorie* introduce a new and crucial line of thought. If in the previous “vicissitudes”-section we focused on §39, now it is §40 (entitled by the editor “*Das Ideal absoluter Vernünftigkeit und seine Erreichbarkeit auf dem Wege der Phänomenologie*”), notably the relation between “law” and “necessity” (*Gesetzlichkeit* and *Notwendigkeit*), that requires close scrutiny.

After explaining in what the proper sense of the a priori consists (Hua XXIV, p. 235), Husserl goes on to elaborate on the “ideal” of “rationality” that would be represented by a complete and full-fledged system of a priori truths as ones grounded in essences (whether formal or material): “All principles in the strict, genuine sense belong in this sphere: in the first place, all principles of knowledge that belong to the essence of knowledge as such according to its different species and have thereby universal, science-theoretical significance” (Hua XXIV, p. 236). If the question is now in what such significance actually and properly consists, then the answer lies in the relation between “law” and “necessity.” Let us quote Husserl *in extenso*:

They present the principles to which the individual steps of all knowledge of nature, as well as mathematical knowledge, are subject. Each simple step in reasoning must be able to display its justification [*sein Recht*], whether in terms of formal logic, or noetically. By the essence legitimated relationship between necessity and being law bound [*Notwendigkeit und Gesetzlichkeit*], since it lays claim to being necessary, each such step is a particular instance of a law, and to being directly necessary, a particular instance of a directly and valid law. This is the principle both for this step and for every one of essentially the same nature. The procedure is, therefore, perspicuous and justified on ultimate grounds when the

principle proper to each step is to be set forth and seen as a law of essence in immanent intuition. Just as the steps of deductive or intuitive reasoning, the ontological concepts and propositions that collectively form the basis of all knowledge of reality are to be traced back to their ultimate sources. They must be set forth in accordance with their ultimate meaning and as given through laws of essence (Hua XXIV, p. 236).

This excerpt touches on many problems (such as the structure of deductive and intuitive reasoning, the difference between knowledge of nature and mathematical cognition) that do not concern us in the present context: our focus is exclusively the specific relation between the notions of law and necessity. Bluntly asserted: necessity is a “particular instance” (*Einzelfall*) of a valid law. *Per se* taken, a law, even an essential one, is not and should not be referred to as necessary (whether unconditionally or not), because the very indicator of “necessity” (to speak like Kant) applies only to the law’s own instances and not to the law itself! Or, to put it the other way around: a proposition is to be considered necessary to the extent that it is taken to be an instance of a valid law. Or, to resort to Husserl’s language and terminology, to the extent that it is “traced back” (Husserl himself speaks of *zurückführen*) to a law, of which the proposition is, indeed, an “instance.” Accordingly, the different species of necessity (whether material or purely formal) follow from the different kinds of laws of which a given proposition represents an instance.

And, as we already know, the different kinds of necessity are determined by the different species of objectuality in which they are grounded. Here, too, a question arises: did we not insist, especially in the previous section and against Kant, on the three “modal” notions (*Wirklichkeit*, *Notwendigkeit*, and *Möglichkeit*) being only features and characters of states of affairs as the objectual correlates of propositions? Yet, Husserl now seems to be maintaining that even a proposition can be said to be necessary. Is this not a contradiction? As far as we understand Husserl’s argument here, what he is striving to do is clarify in what sense specific reasoning (e.g., a specific “deductive argument”) is necessary, or, better: on what conditions the series of steps of which such argument consists present themselves as necessary and thus completely justified (*Jeder einfache Denkschritt muß sein Recht... ausweisen können*). And this is the case—as should be evident by now—if and only if each single step is the instance of a valid law. Husserl would still contend that the talk of necessity primarily applies to the corresponding state of affairs and only secondarily to the proposition itself by which such state of affairs is intended. His overall view can be so presented: a state of affairs is necessary to the extent that it is “intended” by a proposition that has been “traced back” to a valid “law.”

As Husserl points out, what has just been said holds true not only of the theoretical and scientific sphere, but also of the domains of ethics and values: “The same thing holds of principles of ethics, of pure practice, of the principles of axiological disciplines to the extent that they have been established up until now, or are yet to be established” (Hua XXIV, p. 236). It is the entire domain of reason (*Vernunft*)—according to its three expressions: gnoseological, practical, and axiological (*erken-nende, wertende, praktische Vernunft*) (Hua VII, p. 6), and whose correlates are what Scholastic philosophers used to call *verum, bonum et pulchrum*—that Husserl has in mind here: “All reason in the *a posteriori* has its principles *a priori*, and these

principles are the grounds of justification of the objective, unconditional validity that every operation of so-called reason claims in both the theoretical and axiological spheres" (Hua XXIV, p. 237). "The true philosophical task," to Husserl's mind, is the task of "bringing principles to light everywhere and testing their authenticity, solving transcendental problems regarding them, [and] tracing them back to their phenomenological origin and meaning," then "showing them in the realm of intuitive essences to be the authentic matrix of knowledge as givens of seeing reason, or rejecting them as absurdities" (Hua XXIV, p. 237). In other words, the "absolute ideal" for all rational beings with regard to knowledge, values, and action is the ability to trace the activity of reason back to the a priori principles and laws which rule knowledge, value, and action. Hence Husserl's contention that it is "in the idea of God as an absolutely perfect intelligent being [that] we think of this ideal as realized," for "God does not judge anything, God does not want anything without this very clarity and absolute perspicacity with respect to the principles that govern valuing and wanting respectively" (Hua XXIV, p. 237).

This point is of absolute importance and thus warrants elaboration. If Husserl speaks here of reason as *Vernunft*, of its different expressions and activities (in the domain of knowing, valuing, and wanting), as well as of the necessity of bringing to light the a priori principles that rule over such domains, he does not yet have a clear expression to characterize and directly "capture" such a tracing back-effort (*zurückführen*). Let us try to be clear on this point.

What is at stake here is what we could designate as the interplay of two different forms of "rationality." On the one hand, there is the transcendental reason, which Husserl calls *Vernunft* and the rationality of which is the *Vernünftigkeit* (Hua XXIV, p. 238)—the transcendental rationality expressing itself in the "activities" of knowing (whose correlate is the *verum*), valuing (whose correlate is the *pulchrum*), and acting (whose correlate is the *bonum*). Nevertheless, such reason and "rationality" are a posteriori and will remain so until we bring to light the a priori laws that rule over them: *Alle Vernunft im Aposteriori hat ihre Prinzipien a priori*. On the other hand, then, there is what Husserl recognizes as a different form of "rationality" and calls *Rationalität*: it is the "eidetic" or a priori rationality, which expresses itself—so to speak—in the "activity" of tracing the a posteriori back to its a priori, that is, rational principles. As we will see in the chapters to follow, Husserl will describe this by the term "rationalization" (*Rationalisierung*): what in these lectures is being referred to by the vague verb *zurückführen* will eventually be recognized as the expression of this second form of rationality (*Rationalität*).³⁷

The ideal that Husserl is striving to describe (the "absolute ideal" for all rational beings) would be the result of a complete rationalization of reason, that is to say—and in order to elucidate what could look like just a tongue twister—of a full-fledged *Rationalisierung* of *Vernünftigkeit* in its gnoseological, axiological, and practical

³⁷ See Hua III/1, pp. 24–25, where Husserl speaks of *Rationalisierung des Empirischen*; but also Hua I, p. 106; Hua VI, p. 291; Hua IX, pp. 244 and 251.

domains. The latter are “traced back” to their a priori principles and valid laws, and thereby grasped based in their strict and unconditional necessity.

As a preliminary conclusion, it might suffice to assert that the Latin sounding terms *rational* and *Rationalität* stand for a notion of rationality which is to be kept separate and sharply distinguished from the idea of “rationality” designated by the German *Vernunft*, *Vernünftigkeit*, and *vernünftig*: the former is the a priori rationality, not simply the rationality of the eidetic sphere as such but to the extent that it is applied to the empirical (or insofar as the empirical is traced back to its rational and a priori principles), which is thereby rationalized. The latter is the transcendental rationality, the rationality of what is assumed to be a correlate of reason (*Vernunft*) according to one of its three expressions (gnoseological, axiological, and practical³⁸). If in the former case one can speak of rationality of being, or ontological rationality (its laws being *Seinsgesetze* (Hua-Mat III, p. 11)), in the latter case, on the contrary, one should speak of rationality of “sense” (*Sinn*). As Husserl will remark in the *Cartesian Meditations*: “under the broadly understood titles, reason and unreason, as correlative titles for being and non-being, they are an all-embracing theme for phenomenology. Through the *epoché* we accomplish a reduction to our pure intention (*cogito*) and to the intended, purely as intended. The predicates being and non-being, and their modal variants, relate to the latter accordingly, not to objects *simpliciter* but to the objective sense [*Sinn*]” (Hua I, p. 91).

Let us go back to our texts now, and ask: what exactly is a law?

It is clear that a law is a universal proposition, although the reverse is not true: not every universal proposition is a law. A law is also a universal truth. But this does not suffice either (Hua-Mat VI, p. 232).³⁹

What kind of truth, namely, universal truth, is a law? Husserl’s answer is quite straightforward: “a purely conceptual universal truth” (Hua-Mat VI, p. 234). Any “particularization” (*Besonderung*) of a law brings about a case of apodictic necessity. If *truths as to matters of fact* are truths including “singular representations” and “positions of existence,” purely conceptual truths are valid whether an actual reality corresponds to them or not (Hua-Mat VI, p. 235). As Husserl also points out—by asserting with strength what he had already held in 1906—these laws are the source of necessities, and yet not themselves necessities (*Es sind Gesetze, die nur Quellen für Notwendigkeiten sind, aber nicht selbst Notwendigkeiten* (Hua-Mat VI, p. 246)).

What follows is that there will be as many different kinds of necessity (i.e., “strict” necessity) as species of purely conceptual and universal truth or law (whether formal or material). Husserl first discusses what he calls “contingent truths in the pregnant sense of the term” (*Zufällige Wahrheiten im prägnanten Sinn*), that is, truths that are not the particularization of any a priori truth or law; they are purely a

³⁸ As shown by a beautiful manuscript such as text 21 from Hua XLII, pp. 265–277: *Autonomie und Heteronomie in der theoretischen, der praktischen und der religiösen Sphäre*.

³⁹ “Denn das ist ja klar, dass ein Gesetz ein allgemeiner Satz ist, obschon nicht umgekehrt jeder allgemeine Satz ein Gesetz. Ein Gesetz ist ferner eine allgemeine Wahrheit. Aber auch das genügt noch nicht.”

posteriori or “contingent.” For example, propositions like “This is a house” or “That man is named Maier” (and all kinds of “natural laws”).⁴⁰ There are also truths that present themselves as existential or existence-truths (*Daseinswahrheiten*)—for they include in themselves the position of an existent—yet are to be grasped only as particularizations of a priori and purely conceptual truths, thereby being characterized by strict or apodictic necessity. Now, this latter group of truths includes, as could be easily guessed, analytic necessities (i.e., the “particularizations” of purely analytic conceptual truths)—e.g.: “This house is red and not non-red”—as well as synthetic necessities (i.e., the particularizations of purely synthetic conceptual truths)—e.g.: “The interior angles of this triangle add up to 180°.”⁴¹

Let us also underline that—in compliance with the language of *Rationalität*—Husserl describes the position of existence, hence the very notion of contingent truths, as characterized by irrationality (*Irrationalität*) (Hua-Mat VI, p. 246): they entail an irrational element (*ein sozusagen irrationales Element*) and thus cannot be rationalized or traced back to any universal valid law. What is thereby obtained is a fairly straightforward definition of a posteriori truths or propositions: accordingly, a proposition or truth is a posteriori if it is not the particularization of any purely conceptual truth; differently phrased: a proposition or truth is a posteriori if it cannot be traced back to any purely conceptual truth or law. Perhaps it would be better to maintain that a proposition is a posteriori, and its corresponding state of affairs contingent, if it cannot be rationalized by means of any purely conceptual truth or law.

In so doing, that is to say, by distinguishing between purely conceptual and a priori truths or laws, on the one hand, and their particularizations, on the other, Husserl is able to avoid another possible confusion affecting the very term “a priori.” As a matter of fact, one could apply the label “a priori” to the *purely conceptual truth or law* as well as to its *particularization or instance*; in other words: one could be tempted to refer to both: “If something is a, it is not non-a (*Ist Irgendetwas a, so ist es nicht nicht-a*)” and: “If something is red, it is not non-red (*Ist Irgendetwas rot, so ist es nicht nicht-rot*)” as a priori (Hua-Mat VI, p. 244). In Husserl’s view, the latter is a priori only insofar as it is grasped as a particularization of the former; by the same token, the former can be characterized as *necessary* only as long as it is looked at from the standpoint of its particularizations. Thus, the source of necessity is a priori but is not *itself* to be called necessary, while what is strictly and unconditionally necessary derives from what is a priori but is not *itself* to be called a priori.

⁴⁰ “Als zufällige Wahrheiten im prägnanten Sinn können wir diejenigen Daseinswahrheiten bezeichnen, welche keine singulären Besonderungen von irgendwelchen apriorischen Sätzen sind, mögen diese nun analytisch oder synthetisch sein. Sie sind sozusagen rein a posteriori, rein zufällig. Dahin gehört jede Wahrheit, die einer Beobachtung Ausdruck gibt, jeder Satz der Art wie ‘Dies ist ein Haus,’ ‘Der Mann heißt Maier’ etc., aber auch jedes Naturgesetz” (Hua-Mat VI, p. 246).

⁴¹ “Zweitens haben wir zwei Gruppen von Wahrheiten, welche zwar Daseinswahrheiten sind, sofern sie singuläre Setzungen enthalten, Setzungen von individuellem Dasein, andererseits aber als singuläre Besonderungen von apriorischen (rein begrifflichen) Sätzen aufzufassen sind. Die eine Gruppe ist die der singulären analytischen Notwendigkeiten, z.B. ‘Dies Haus ist rot und darum nicht nicht-rot’; die andere die der singulären synthetischen Notwendigkeiten, z.B. jede Übertragung einer geometrischen Wahrheit auf empirische Objekte, auf Kristalle u.dgl.”

Moreover, since Husserl seems to apply the term “truth” only to what he calls “purely conceptual truths” (or laws), and only indirectly and secondarily to their particularizations, another conclusion could be drawn to the effect that a posteriori propositions should not even be called *truths* because they are not particularizations of any truths in the strict sense of the term. Strictly speaking, and no matter how unusual this might sound, a posteriori or contingent truths are not truths at all; only a priori truths are really truths, the sources of all necessity and rationality—with the adjective “a posteriori” expressing by contrast what cannot be rationalized at all.

5 Once Again, *Idee* and *Eidos*

As we should remember, in the *Einleitung* to *Ideen I*, where Husserl quickly elaborates on the reasons that slowly led him to adopt the “new” terminology, the decision to resort to the Greek *eidos* was motivated by its being “terminologically unspoiled” (Hua III/1, p. 8). The aim of the present section is to show—or at least to try to show (within the limited scope of what can be proposed in a handful of pages)—in what sense, and to what extent, Husserl must have felt entitled to make such a seemingly odd claim!

Given the impossibility of mapping out the *mare magnum* of all the possible texts that, in one way or another—directly or indirectly—could have motivated Husserl’s description of the *eidos*, hence his decision to adopt it, our thesis—or, better, our “suggestion”—is as follows: as soon as we take a look at writings such as R. H. Lotze’s *Logik*, notably his interpretation of Plato, or, to take another important example, Paul Natorp’s *Platons Ideenlehre*, we will immediately realize that, as a matter of fact, the Greek *eidos* plays little to no role in comparison to the *idea*.

Let us try to directly and concretely show to the reader what we mean.

In the first part of the *System der Philosophie*, specifically Chapter Two (“*Die Ideenwelt*”) of the third book (“*Vom Erkennen*”)—the crucial importance of which for Husserl is beyond question—the expressions quoted by Lotze are *idea* and *ideas*, ἰδέα, ἰδέας ὅν, οὐσία, αὐτὰ καθ’ αὐτὰ ὄντα, ἐνάδες and μονάδες.⁴² When it comes to the εἶδος, by contrast, the reader is under the impression that its meaning does not directly bear on the doctrine of ideas (i.e., on Lotze’s reading thereof), and its role is only a minor one. As far as we can tell, in fact, it appears only “twice” in the book: the first time in §30 of Chapter One (“*Die Lehre vom Begriffe*”) of the first book (“*Vom Denken*”) and the second time in §318 of the chapter on Plato’s “doctrine.” In both cases, we maintain, the meaning is the same. As §30 explains: if we can call *species* any “universal that still admits of an image [*ein Bild*]” then the term *eidos* stands for that species “which includes only individuals under it [and] is the common element in the look or appearance of things.”⁴³ §318 is even clearer on the

⁴² Lotze (1874, §§317–318).

⁴³ Lotze (1874, pp. 49–50).

difference between idea and the term εἶδος: “we understand the ideas being called separable or separate from things (χωρὶς τῶν ὄντων), first because the image (εἶδος) of their content can be still called upon by memory after the things, which originally occasioned its appearance in us have vanished from real existence.”⁴⁴ Regardless of the question of whether Lotze’s reading would find any confirmation in Plato’s own texts, the point to be emphasized concerns his literal understanding of the εἶδος as a look or image (*Bild* or *Aussehen* and *Erscheinung*) that can be “recalled upon” by memory once the real thing has vanished from the limited circle of our experience. As is apparent, Lotze gives the εἶδος a double meaning. On the one hand, the εἶδος is a logical-ontological concept that refers to the *infima species*, the universal of the lowest level; on the other hand, the term has a clear “psychological” sense (which it shares with the more general concept of species [*Art*]), meaning the “image” of the thing that can still be recalled upon by our “memory.”⁴⁵

At the very beginning of his investigation of Plato’s doctrine of ideas, especially Chapter One on the first five dialogues (*Apology*, *Crito*, *Protagoras*, *Laches*, and *Charmides*), Paul Natorp edifies the reader with an interesting distinction between the two Greek terms *idea* and *eidos*. Natorp hastens to immediately set out the two terms’ common root (from *id-*, *vid-*), hence their entailing a reference to what he calls the *Gestalt*, the look or “aspect” (*Ansehen*) that something presents to the “viewer.”⁴⁶ As he also points out, the sense of such *Gestalt* is not to be limited to the “sensible” or “sensuous” dimension (i.e., to the thing’s “external” look), for it also characterizes what, on the contrary, could be called the “internal” look or aspect, which offers itself to the observer’s mental and spiritual eye (*die innere, dem geistigen Auge sich darstellende*).

This being acknowledged, Natorp goes on to emphasize what he holds to be the crucial conceptual distinction between them: if the term *eidos* tends to designate the thing’s *inner image* to the extent that it imposes itself “on” the observer, the *idea* implies on the contrary a reference to the “activity” proper to the “seeing,” i.e., the very activity (*Tätigkeit*) of the seeing subject—it is not only the “internal” look or aspect that impresses itself “on” the (passive) mental eye, but the activity itself of the spiritual eye that “actually” and “actively” grasps it (*idein*).

Accordingly—and by designating the lawfulness by means of which *das Denken* logically shapes (*gestaltet*) its object of knowledge (which is no longer passively given [*gegebenen*] and received)—the *idea* testifies to “the discovery of the logical” (*die Entdeckung des Logischen*), the origin of which does not lie in the object imposing itself from the outside (as a seal on melted wax) but in the (“logical”)

⁴⁴ Lotze (1874, p. 502).

⁴⁵ Such ambiguity was originally noticed by Spiegelberg (1930, p. 136). See also De Santis (2014, p. 123).

⁴⁶ Natorp (2013, p. 12): “Als Abstraktum vom Verbalstamm *id-* (*vid-*), *sehen*, *abgeleitet*, *bedeutet es, gleich dem ebendaher stammenden *eidos*, für gewöhnlich die Gestalt, in der eine Sache sich dem Betrachtenden darstellt, das Ansehen, den Anblick, den sie ihm bietet.*”

activity of our thought (i.e., an activity that stems from within our *Denken*, so to say).

Natorp acknowledges, however, that, *as such*, this distinction is not always visible in the Platonic dialogues, and Plato himself tends to often associate the two: while the *idea* is then used to express the “unity of a conceptual content” (*die Einheit des Begriffsinhalts*), the *eidos*, on the contrary, designates the “extent” (*Umfang*) of the concept itself.⁴⁷ As long as Natorp emphasizes the logical implications of Plato’s doctrine of ideas,⁴⁸ the *eidos* is slowly but systematically set aside, whereas the concept of *idea* ends up dominating the stage: the difference between *eidos* and *idea* presenting itself according to the (Kantian-sounding) opposition between passivity and activity.

The privilege granted to the “*idea*” (to the detriment of the *eidos*) can be described as a real *locus classicus* of the neo-Kantian tradition (and Plato-hermeneutics). It can be encountered, for example, not only in a late book such as *Die Idee* by Bruno Bauch—where it is said to represent “the core of the Platonic thought” (*der Kern des Platonischen Denkens*)⁴⁹—but also in what we can designate as the “foundational” writings, so to speak, of such a tradition. It can be found, just to take a couple of important and well-known examples, in Hermann Cohen’s essays on Plato, i.e., both in the 1866 *Die platonische Ideenlehre, psychologisch entwickelt* and in the more famous 1879 booklet *Platons Ideenlehre und die Mathematik*. The former text, in particular, is of great interest to us: indeed, after pointing out that the term *Idee* is what expresses “the essence of things” (*das Wesen der Dinge*),⁵⁰ Cohen recognizes that a difference between εἶδη and ἰδέα characterizes Plato’s dialogues from the second period.⁵¹ As he frames it, if the εἶδος can always be traced back to the Socratic concept (*der sokratische Begriff*), thereby “identified” with notions such as γένος, φύσις, and οὐσία, the concept of ἰδέα, on the contrary, is purely Platonic, imbued with a true “creative” meaning and sense (he speaks of “*ein wahrhaft schöpferisches Element in der platonischen Idee*”). Unlike the more “static” character affecting the εἶδος, the ἰδέα (here Cohen paves the way for what Natorp will later argue) stands for “the living conceptual-activity of our intuition” (*die lebendige Denkhätigkeit des Schauens*).⁵² Now, that the εἶδος is to be identified with the Socratic “concept” is a point made by Cohen in the 1879 booklet, where he speaks of “Socratic εἶδος” and “defined γένος,”⁵³ and where the notion of ἰδέα is

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁴⁸ See also Natorp (1912), where he strongly defends the reading propounded in his book.

⁴⁹ Bauch (1926, p. 2).

⁵⁰ Cohen (1866, p. 404).

⁵¹ Cohen (1866, p. 435).

⁵² Cohen (1866, p. 435). In Hartmann (1909), the author describes the *Idee* as *das Einheit-Schaffende* (p. 175), or as *das Prinzip der Einheit* (p. 174).

⁵³ Cohen (1879, p. 8). “*Sie [the Idee] ist keineswegs ohneweiteres dasselbe wie εἶδος, wenn auch sie in den späteren Schriften zuweilen in gleichem Sinne mit εἶδος zusammensteht. εἶδος war schon der Sokratische Begriff, ebenso wie er γένος war. Aber ebenso wie Plato über das εἶδος hinausgehen mußte, um ihm die Begründung zu finden, so mußte er auch über das εἶδος hinaus nach einem*

said to embody the so-called critical motive concerning the investigation of the conditions of possibility of knowledge (*diese kritische Motiv in der Idee selbst arbeitet*).⁵⁴

In the 1883 *Die Platonische Ideenlehre* by August Auffarth, the hermeneutical and terminological framework laid out by Cohen finds systematic expression: the *idea* stands for (*der Ausdruck*) our conceptual activity (*Denkthätigkeit*) consisting in the “spiritual process” by way of which the given material of perception is brought to consciousness (*durch welchen der durch die Sinne gegebene Wahrnehmungsstoff in das Bewusstsein erhoben wird*) and hence given unity (*Einheit*).⁵⁵

If now we take a peek at what some of the Göttingen phenomenologists say about this issue, we will find that—far more radically and incisively than in the neo-Kantian line of thought—the term *Idee* continues to play a major role while the *eidōs* seems to have no bearing at all.

The first text to be taken into consideration is—in this case—Wilhelm Schapp’s 1910 *Beiträge zur Phänomenologie der Wahrnehmung*, a dissertation written under Husserl’s direction in Göttingen, section three of which (“*Die Idee in der Wahrnehmung*”), in particular, is crucial for us.

Rather than go through Schapp’s long and meticulous analyses of how ideas are given to our “intellectual” apprehension (namely, as the limit [*Grenze*] of things⁵⁶), we will focus on Schapp’s overall “assessment” of the *Idee*. For the sake of our problems, the main question to be tackled is what exactly an idea is, to which Schapp answers: the “idea” is that element without which our “perception of things” would be, to adopt Kant’s terminology, “blind” (*blind wäre*).⁵⁷ “We label it idea by following Plato. Instead of idea, we could also say concept or essence [*Mit Idee bezeichnen wir es im Anschluß an Plato. Wir könnten statt Idee auch Begriff oder Wesen sagen*].” *Idea*, *concept*, and *essence* are, then, equivalent expressions (or at least this is the impression we are under). Let us remark, however, that Schapp is not concerned with “formal-ontological” issues; he is not concerned with elucidating what an idea is as an ontological formation: on the contrary, his point of focus is to its givenness, that is, the extent to which it is given as a component of the perceived thing (*das sinnlich Gegebene*). As Schapp goes on to explain, when we intend (*meinen*) something, we always intend it “as” such and such a specific thing (*als Ding*), namely, as having such and such a specific property (*von der oder der Beschaffenheit*). Now, as far as we understand Schapp’s view, one can argue that idea and concept mean one and the same thing only in the quite peculiar sense that they refer to the same component of our perception, though “looked at” from two different angles: if the “concept” is what—a *parte subiecti*—provides our intention

weniger abgegriffenen Terminus suchen, in dem sich das hervorheben ließ, was erst zum Begriff führen sollte” (Hartmann 1909, p. 186).

⁵⁴ Cohen (1879, p. 99). For an overall discussion of these texts, see Lembeck (1994).

⁵⁵ Auffarth (1883, p. 17).

⁵⁶ De Santis (2014, pp. 28–35).

⁵⁷ Schapp (1981, p. 130).

with a direction, the “idea” is the “objectual” correlate of the concept. Moreover, if the “concept” is what makes our intention intend and see the thing as the thing it is, what we refer to as idea is precisely the thing *seen* as the thing it is. It is the thing itself *conceptually* perceived in such and such a way.

It is not our intention to discuss the extent to which Schapp’s stance would be compatible with the neo-Kantian’s (who actually share with him the same Kantian jargon), nor to raise the quite thorny and sticky question as to Schapp’s relation to Husserl’s notion of idea in the *Logical Investigations* (or in its subsequent developments). Our aim is simply to emphasize the role, so to speak, that the idea is ascribed and assigned in this framework: every perception is made up of two inseparable (*untrennbar*) elements, what is “sensuously” given (*sinnliche Gegebenheit*) and the “idea” which determines the former all the way to its “individuality” (*in die letzte individuelle Ausgestaltung*).⁵⁸ It is the intellectual element of our perceptual experience of things, which Schapp also accounts for as follows: “I perceive the thing in this idea; I grasp it under this idea. This is not to be understood as if the thing were here and the idea there: for, I perceive the thing in its idea.”⁵⁹

Now, if the “concept” (*Begriff*) is what determines, *a parte subiecti*, our grasping of things and the “idea” (*Idee*) is the thing *as* it is given, hence intellectually understood in such and such a way, the latter can also be called “essence” (*Wesen*), thereby signifying the set of properties (*Bestimmtheiten*) that makes up the thing at hand. Let us try to expand a bit on this subsequent point. Schapp is not trying to determine which element has priority—whether it is the “concept” that determines the idea and hence the essence or whether, on the contrary, it is the “essence” (as some sort of ontologically independent component) that brings about the “range” of all possible conceptual ways in which the thing can be intended and looked at. Schapp’s preoccupation is simply pinpointing, and describing, the relation that—in every perception—ties the three elements together. The framework is static and descriptive, with no genetic bearing or aspiration.

Let us stop here—for there is no need to keep dragging our discussion any further than this. The reader should have already gotten the point that we have been trying to reach: the essay that on the “list of texts” attached by Husserl to the first draft of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* article (Hua IX, p. 255) counts as the first publication ever by a phenomenologist after the *Logical Investigations* makes extensive use of the expression “idea” (along with the notions of *concept* and *essence*) to describe the phenomenon of perception, that is to say, what is intellectually given, but contains absolutely no reference to the Greek *eidos*.⁶⁰

Let us now turn to the work of the one usually regarded as the actual leader of the Göttingen phenomenologists: Adolf Reinach.

⁵⁸ Schapp (1981, p. 133).

⁵⁹ Schapp (1981, p. 141): “*In dieser Idee nehme ich das Ding wahr, unter dieser Idee fasse ich es auf. Das ist nicht so zu verstehen, als ob ich hier das Ding und dort die Idee hätte, sondern ich nehme das Ding in seiner Idee wahr.*”

⁶⁰ For a discussion of Schapp on these issues, see also Nuccilli (2019).

At the outset of his 1914 *Über Phänomenologie*, Reinach presents phenomenology as “a method of philosophizing which is required by the problems of philosophy, which is very different from the manner of viewing and verifying in life, and which is even more different from the way in which one does and must work in most sciences.”⁶¹ Such difference derives from the peculiarity of the phenomenological attitude and of what it is about:

The significant—in fact, the frightening—example of this latter is psychology. I do not speak of it insofar as it is a science of empirical laws, i.e., insofar as it attempts to formulate laws of the factual, real course of consciousness. Here the case is quite different. I am speaking of what is called “descriptive psychology,” of that discipline which strives to take an inventory of consciousness, and to fix upon the various species of live-experience as such. This has nothing to do with establishing existence: with the individual lived-experience, with its occurrence in the world at some point of objective time, and with its union with a spatially localized body. In the sphere of descriptive psychology, all of that is of no concern. There the question is not about existence, but about essence, about the possible species of consciousness as such, indifferently of whether, or where, or when they occur. But it will surely be replied that we nonetheless could not know of any essentiality of lived-experiences were they not also realized in the world. Now this objection is mistaken, as it stands. We do in fact also have knowledge of species of lived-experience of which we know that, in the purity that they have as conceived by us, they perhaps have never been realized in the world. But even if the objection were wholly correct, it could only indicate that we humans are limited in the species of lived-experience accessible to us, and limited by what we are ourselves permitted to lived-experience. But the dependence of essences themselves upon their possible realization in consciousness is, of course, not thereby established.⁶²

The expressions used by Reinach are essence (as *Wesen* and *Essenz* and in opposition to *existence*) as well as essentiality (*Wesenheit*): these being in effect what the “phenomenological” method aims at uncovering and therefore describing. Of course, if the question were what the “end goal” of the phenomenologist is, Reinach would explain that he/she is not simply preoccupied with describing these objects (*Gegenstände*) but with systematically establishing universally necessary “laws,” which, by being rooted in them, rule over a specific ontological realm⁶³:

I have already indicated that essence analysis is no ultimate goal, but rather is a means. Of essences laws hold true, and these laws are incommensurable with any fact or factual connection of which sense perception informs us. The laws in question hold of the essences as such, in virtue of their essence. There is no accidentally-being-so in essences, but rather a necessarily-having-to-be-so, and an in-virtue-of-essence-cannot-be-otherwise. That there are these laws is one of the most important things for philosophy and—if one thinks it out completely—for the world at large. To present them in their purity is, therefore, a significant task of philosophy. But one cannot deny that this task has not been carried out. True,

⁶¹ Reinach (1989, pp. 531–550: 531).

⁶² Reinach (1989, p. 533).

⁶³ Accordingly, Reinach’s view here is perfectly aligned with the twofold notion of the a priori drawn upon by Husserl at the very end of the third lecture of *Die Idee der Phänomenologie* (Hua II, pp. 51–52).

the *a priori* has always been acknowledged. Plato discovered it, and since then it has never disappeared from sight in the history of philosophy.⁶⁴

For the sake of our concerns here, what is important to highlight is not only the talk of “essence” (*Wesen*), but first and foremost the claim to the effect that we owe to Plato the discovery of the *a priori* as something that “is not derived from experience.” Just like the neo-Kantians, Reinach, too, holds Plato to be the *Entdecker* of this new and still virtually unexplored continent: nevertheless, whereas the neo-Kantians (the two paradigmatic cases being, once again, Cohen and Natorp) credit Plato for discovering the “logical” (the *a priori* being for them purely logical), Reinach, by contrast, has in mind an ontological conception of the *a priori*.

Now, as we turn to the way in which Reinach presents and discusses Plato in his *Einleitung in die Philosophie* lectures⁶⁵ and *Platons Philosophie*⁶⁶ (a series of notes taken by A. Koyré at Reinach’s 1910 summer semester lectures), we will immediately realize that the expressions mentioned are *idea* and *ideas*, ὄντως ὄν, *being of the entity* (*Sein des Seienden*), and *the ideal* (*das Ideelle*).⁶⁷ In sum, the εἶδος is here nowhere to be found: it is never mentioned by Reinach in his assessment of Plato’s philosophy nor is it ever evoked in his general discussion of the problem of the *a priori*.

As already was the case with the neo-Kantians, here, too, the systematic problem of how to assess the more general concept of the *a priori* immediately flows into the more historical one of the role that has to be ascribed to Plato, hence into the much more specific and slippery hermeneutical issue of how to understand the latter’s philosophy and doctrine of ideas. Especially for what concerns the neo-Kantian line of thought, the three are almost undistinguishable: it does not seem to be possible to raise the question of the significance of the *a priori* without tackling Plato and the difference between *Idee* and *eidos*. If the *a priori* is understood according to the opposition between “activity” and “passivity,” which traces back to the discrepancy between ἰδέα and εἶδος, Plato is the one credited with the discovery of the former while the latter represents his “Socratic” heritage, so to speak. To frame it differently: what a neo-Kantian would exclaim is that if Plato is to be credited with “the discovery of the *a priori*,” which—in its “logical” nature—is better expressed by the ἰδέα rather than the εἶδος, then the concept of ἰδέα “defines the only concept belonging to the expression *a priori* that I, as a neo-Kantian, recognize philosophically. That concept alone is meant wherever the locution *a priori* occurs in any of my writings.”

When it comes to the so-called Göttingen phenomenologists, particularly Schapp and Reinach, the εἶδος seems to play absolutely no role in presenting, discussing, or assessing the problem of the *a priori*—their language is characterized instead by terms such as *Idee* and *Wesen*, *Wesenheit* and *Wesenszusammenhang*—nor does it

⁶⁴ Reinach (1989, pp. 542–543).

⁶⁵ Reinach (1989, pp. 369–513).

⁶⁶ Published in Seifert (2000, pp. 181–237).

⁶⁷ Reinach (1989, pp. 407–410).

seem to ever be included in the actual evaluation of the thought of Plato. As far as we know, one has to wait until 1921—specifically for the publication of Jean Hering’s booklet *Bemerkungen über das Wesen, die Wesenheit und die Idee*⁶⁸—for a meticulous treatment of the concepts of essence, essentiality or εἶδος, and *Idee*.⁶⁹

For our purposes here, there is no need to explore in depth Hering’s contribution to the problem of essence and idea. We are of course aware that this brief discussion might not be enough yet to *completely justify* Husserl’s decision to express his understanding of the a priori by means of the εἶδος due to its being “terminologically unspoiled”: for, if it is true that, when it comes to the Göttingen period, the decision to retrieve the Greek expression εἶδος seems to characterize Husserl’s own conceptuality and terminology exclusively, thereby differentiating it from that of other phenomenologists,⁷⁰ we have seen on the contrary how massive its presence is in the neo-Kantian tradition. Accordingly, the objection can be made that if Husserl is right in describing the εἶδος as “terminologically unspoiled” with respect to his students and disciples, the same does not hold true of the neo-Kantians (such as Natorp and Cohen). Nevertheless—and without disputing the correctness of the latter observation—the following could serve as a response to this objection.

As a matter of fact, the neo-Kantian conception of the a priori tends to exclude the εἶδος from its domain—for, it is both traced back to the Socratic “concept” (in opposition to the Platonic ἰδέα) and simply understood in terms of what is “passively” received by the mind (in contrast to what is “actively” produced by it). In this specific respect we can assert, along with Husserl, not only that the term εἶδος has never been employed (*unverbraucht*) to designate the a priori (neither by the neo-Kantians nor by the Göttingen phenomenologists⁷⁰) but—more profoundly—that the way in which he uses it also *frees* the term from the speculative framework imposed upon it by the neo-Kantians.

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⁶⁸ Hering (1921).

⁶⁹ See De Santis (2015, 2016, 2021).

⁷⁰ As should be apparent by now, we take the turn of phrase *terminologisch unverbraucht* to refer not to the totality of the history of philosophy (which would be simply absurd!) but rather to a series of philosophical traditions (such as the neo-Kantian tradition) with which Husserl is in a constant dialogue.

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Part IV
On How to Apprehend the Ideal: Three
Different Stages

Ideation, Attitude, Reduction



The ambition of this chapter is to make the case for distinguishing three phases characterizing the development of Husserl's "methodology" from the *Logical Investigations* up to *Ideen I*: the first is related to the notion of "ideation" and "idealizing abstraction" as introduced in the *LU* and systematically discussed by Husserl in his lectures; the methodological notion of "ideation" is then followed by that of attitude (*Einstellung*), which characterizes Husserl's language right before the publication of *Ideen I*; finally, the official appearance of the Greek *eidos* in 1913 is accompanied by a new methodological tool, namely, "eidetic reduction" (*eidetische Reduktion*).

As for this latter aspect in particular, Ingarden offers us some precious information. In his 1967 Oslo lectures *Einführung in die Phänomenologie Husserls*, he relates that in Göttingen, when he was still a complete novice in phenomenology (*als ich in der Phänomenologie noch Anfänger war*), nobody would speak of *two reductions* (that is, of an eidetic reduction alongside the transcendental one): before the publication of *Ideen I*, people used to speak only of an "attitude" towards or directed at the essence, towards or directed at the idea (*von der einen "Einstellung" auf das Wesen, auf die "Idee"*) (Ingarden 1992, p. 187). As Ingarden goes on to further say, the Husserlian conception of how to "grasp" an essence goes through "different phases": if the doctrine of "ideal species" is characterized *methodologically* by the understanding of their apprehension in terms of *ideation* (*das ist dieser besondere Akt, in dem man Species erfassen will und eventuell wirklich erfaßt*), new expressions are brought in by *Ideen I*, viz., intuition of essence and eidetic reduction (Ingarden 1992, pp. 188–189). At least when it comes to the eidetic reduction, one thing can be affirmed with certainty: Ingarden is right: in the 1910–1911 lectures, Husserl's arguments build on the notion of attitude ("an essentially new attitude") (Hua XIII, p. 112) while the eidetic reduction is nowhere to be found.

This being preliminarily acknowledged, the present chapter will be divided into three sections, each dedicated to one of the three methodological notions mentioned above: "ideation," "attitude," and "eidetic reduction." Our ambition in this chapter

is not only to show in what sense and to what extent they differ from one another, but first and foremost to clarify the transition that leads Husserl from the concept of ideation to that of reduction via the notion of attitude.

1 Ideation and Idealizing Abstraction

Ideation, Abstraktion, spezialisierendes Auffassen und Meinen (Hua XIX/1, pp. 112, 114): such is the jargon used in the *Logical Investigations* to describe the specific and irreducible act which first emptily intends a species or an idea and thanks to which the latter is intuitively given. Now, if the discussion of the act of “ideation,” hence its very notion, is first introduced by Husserl in *LU II*, it is only in *LU VI* that its crucial importance can be fully appreciated. Indeed, if in the former the act of “ideation” is presented as the act *by means of which consciousness can (emptily) intend* something ideal—Husserl’s preoccupation here being to separate the different “modes” of (empty or signitive) intention, thereby laying claim to *the irreducibility of the intention of what is universal*—it is only in *LU VI* that, thanks to the widening of the concept of intuition, the *irreducibility of the act of intuition of something universal can finally be understood*.¹

Accordingly, the analysis will have to first discuss *LU II* and then move on to *LU VI* in order to elaborate on the manner in which the *empty intention* side of the problem finds its confirmation in the introduction of the notion of categorial intuition (and of two different varieties thereof). Now, let us start off with how Husserl himself presents the issue at the outset of *LU II*:

When we intend red *in specie*, a red object appears before us, and in this sense we look towards the red object, which we are nevertheless not intending. The moment of red is at the same time emphasized in this object, and to that extent we can again say that we are looking towards this moment of red. But we are not intending this individually definite feature in the object ... While the red object and its emphasized moment of red appear before us, we are rather “intending” the single identical red, and are intending it in a new *mode* of consciousness, through which precisely the species, and not the individual, becomes our object (Hua XIX/1, p. 111).

Two aspects immediately stand out. One, the intention of a species (in this instance, of the red color as a species) is described as a new and irreducible mode of consciousness (*Bewußtseinsweise*); two, and as Husserl never fails to emphasize, the act in question is a founded one, an act that necessarily builds upon a previous “founding” act the object of which functions as its intuitive basis:

¹“When in the *Logical Investigations* Husserl speaks of intuition of the universal, he is extending over to this new dimension the concept of intuition in the sense of fulfilment of a mere intention” (*Když Husserl mluví v Logických zkoumáních o názoru obecného, přenáší na novou úroveň pojem názor ve smyslu vyplnění pouhé intence*) (Janoušek 2014, p. 292). More generally, see the entire last chapter of the book, which deals with the a priori in the early Husserl and in relation to Brentano (pp. 279–314).

The act in which we mean the species is in fact essentially different from the act in which we mean the individual, whether, in this latter case, we refer to a whole concrete thing or an individual piece or property attaching to it. There are, of course, certain phenomenal communities. In either case the same concrete thing appears, and to the extent that it does so, the same sense-contents are given in the same mode of apprehension ... But the same appearance sustains different acts in the two cases. In the first case it provides the representative basis for an act of *individual* intention, i.e., for an act in which we refer to what appears, to this thing or this feature, this piece of this thing. In the latter case, it provides the representative basis for an act of *specializing* [*spezialisierenden*] conception and intention: namely, while the thing or, better, the feature in it, appears, it is not this objectual feature, this feature here and now, that we mean. *We mean its content, its "idea"; we mean not this aspect of red in the house, but red as such.* Such act of meaning is plainly an act founded ... A new mode of apprehension has been built upon the intuition of the individual house, namely, of its red, a mode of apprehension constitutive of the intuitive presence of the idea of *red* [emphasis added] (Hua XIX/1, pp. 113–114).

Let us sum up these first characteristics of the act of ideation as follows:

(*Ideation.1*): The act of *ideation* is described as a new and irreducible *mode of (intending) consciousness*, i.e., one characterized by an irreducible “act-character.”

(*Ideation.2*): It is a *founded* act building upon an already accomplished act.

(*Ideation.3*): The *objectual correlate* is the idea or species, also referred to as the *content* of the appearance originally given by the founding act.

Let us expand a bit on 2. Husserl stresses the “founded” character of the act of ideation on various occasions. For instance, he stresses in §10 of *LU II* that, “the intuitive foundation being identical, the act-character makes the difference” (Hua XIX/1, p. 136) and that “one and the same sensuous intuition can serve as the basis for all these modes of apprehension” (Hua XIX/1, pp. 136–137). Furthermore, he observes at the end of §25 that “people fail to see that while individual intuitions in a certain way provide the basis for the new acts of conceptual representation that we build upon them ... they themselves, with their own sensuous-intuitive intention, do not enter into the content of our thought at all” (Hua XIX/1, p. 175). The act necessarily requires some *foundation*, as the 1906–1907 *Erkenntnistheorie* lectures strongly point out (Hua XXIV, p. 225), and the apprehension of the universal is a “founded consciousness” (see Hua XXIV, pp. 296, 298; Hua-Mat III, p. 78). This “foundedness” entails two implications: on the one hand, it denies the act’s “self-sufficiency” inasmuch as it points to the necessity of a previous founding act on the basis of which the idealizing abstraction can obtain; on the other hand, this foundedness points to the *irrelevance* of the founded act. Here is how Husserl presents this in §52 of *LU VI*:

The talk of perception presupposes the possibility of a corresponding imagination: a distinction between them, we held, is part of the natural sense of our ordinary talk about *intuition*. But it is just this distinction that we cannot draw here. This seems to stem from the fact that abstractive acts do not differ according to the character of the founding straightforward intuitions; they are quite unaffected by the positing or non-positing of such founding acts, or by their perceptual or imaginative character. The *red*, the *triangle* exemplified in mere phantasy is specifically the same as the *red*, the *triangle* exemplified in our percepts.

Our consciousness of the universal has as satisfactory a basis in perception as it has in parallel imagination, and, whatever it arises, the idea *red*, the idea *triangle*, is *itself* apprehended, is intuited in the one unique way that permits no distinction between image and original (Hua XIX/1, pp. 691–692).

In order for the act of ideation to obtain, and the universal to be given, it is completely irrelevant whether the founding act upon which it builds is a positing or a non-positing one, a perceptual or an imaginative form of intuition. Indeed, the “ontological positing of the universal” (*Seinssetzung vom Allgemeinen*) in no way depends upon the being of the underlying individual (whether this is given to perception, remembrance, or phantasy) (Hua-Mat VII, p. 109). As far as the givenness or the so-called founded apprehension of the universal (construed as “species” or “idea” or “content” of the appearance) is concerned, neither perception (as a positing act) nor phantasy (as a non-positing act) is granted any privilege whatsoever (whether methodological or otherwise).

(*Ideation.4*): As the founded act of ideation is irrelevant vis-à-vis the nature of the founding act, so is the ontological position (*Seinssetzung*) of the relevant universal irrelevant vis-à-vis that of its underlying experience (whether of a positing nature or otherwise).

This being recognized, two more aspects characterizing Husserl’s assessment of the act of ideation need to be dealt with, the first being its “abstractive” nature and the second that of the wider framework within which the entire discussion is set forward.

The abstractive nature of the act of ideation, which Husserl tries to differentiate from the manner in which abstraction is understood by modern empiricism, is first introduced in *LU II* in light of the difference between “exclusive attention” to what “appears” as an individual (e.g., an individually appearing statue with its moment of red color) and the intuitive grasp of a relevant “idea” (e.g., the idea “red” as such) (Hua XIX/1, p. 162). In what sense can we speak of abstraction? As Husserl will explain to his students in 1906, the term “abstraction” has two meanings: “Abstraction consists in disregarding the differences (abstraction from something) and, on the other hand, stressing what is common (positive abstraction)” (Hua XXIV, p. 294). To frame it in Latin: *abstrahere ab aliquo* is one thing, *abstrahere aliquid* is another. Nevertheless, even if we abstract the moment of “red” color (*abstrahere aliquid*) by abstracting from all the other moments connected with it, for instance “extension” (*abstrahere ab aliquo*), we do not at all obtain the corresponding idea or species (e.g., red as such). The abstraction of an individual moment (e.g., the moment red color) from all the other individual moments (e.g., the moment extension) still and simply results in the grasping of something individual (as isolated from all the rest). (Hua XIX/1, p. 136).

What is thereby needed is a further distinction or, better, a different understanding of what the terms *abstrahere* and “abstraction” stand for (a distinction that will cut across the former without coinciding with it). The *abstrahere ab aliquo* is not only to be understood as an abstraction *from* other individual moments, but first and

foremost as an abstraction *from* individuality itself,² that is, from the forms themselves that make individualization (i.e., the *hic et nunc* sort of character) possible. By the same token, the action of *abstrahere aliquid* is not simply to be comprehended as the abstraction of an “individual” moment (which would then be “freed,” so to speak, from its co-positing “moments”), but first and foremost as the positive abstraction of the idea, i.e., the “content” of the original appearance: “If the former, the moment, is meant, the intention is individual in character; if the species is meant, the intention is specific in character” (Hua XIX/1, p. 136).³

If the question were why Husserl keeps speaking of abstraction, i.e., “idealizing abstraction” (Hua XIX/2, p. 690), instead of simply sticking with the expression “ideation,” the answer would be that his intention is precisely to retain both senses of the notion of abstraction: both the individual and the specific, as it were. If this is the case, then the obtaining of the universal by “ideation” can be accounted for as follows: we first abstract an individual moment, e.g., the moment red color (= individual *abstrahere aliquid*) by isolating it from all the co-positing moments, e.g., the moment extension (= individual *abstrahere ab aliquo*); then we abstract from the form of individuality itself, from the *hic et nunc* character of the appearance (= specific *abstrahere ab aliquo*), thereby obtaining the idea, that is, the *content*, of the originally appearing moment (= specific *abstrahere aliquid*).⁴ The idealizing abstraction is the very act in which “no such non-independent moment, but its ‘idea,’ its universal is brought to consciousness, thereby achieving actual givenness” (Hua XIX/2, p. 690).

If our reconstruction of Husserl’s line of thought is sound, then we obtain another crucial feature of the act of ideation. The latter is based upon a conception of species and ideas understood in light of the distinction between independent and non-independent objects (i.e., pieces and, most notably, moments) eventually worked out in *LU III*: the ideation is the very act through which the idea, the universal of a relevant part (Husserl writes: “its idea, its universal”), is brought to intuition.

²In the 1902–1903 lectures, Husserl speaks of *Abstraktion von aller empirischen Objektivation* (Hua-Mat III, p. 77) to mean what we will call “specific *abstrahere ab aliquo*.”

³See also Hua XVIII, p. 174: “Looking at this intuited individual, we perform an ‘abstraction,’ i.e., we not only isolate the non-independent moment of collective form in what is before us, but we apprehend the idea in it [*wir erfassen die Idee in ihm*]: the number five as the species of the form swims into our conscious sphere of reference.” Here, Husserl clearly speaks of abstraction *both* in the sense of singling out a non-independent and individual moment (the collective form as an individual) and of grasping the corresponding ideal species or idea.

⁴“We directly apprehend the specific unity *redness* ‘itself’ based on a singular intuition of something red, but we perform a peculiar act, whose intention is directed to the ‘idea,’ the ‘universal.’ Abstraction in the sense of this act is wholly different from the mere attention to, or emphasis on, the moment of red; to indicate the differences we have repeatedly spoken of *idealizing* or *generalizing abstraction*. This is the act aimed at by traditional talk of ‘abstraction:’ through ‘abstraction’ in this sense we do not get at individual features, but at general concepts (direct representations of attributes as unities for thought). The same talk possibly extends over conceptual representations of the more complex forms indicated; in the representation *an A*, *several A*’s, and so on, there is an abstraction from all other properties. The abstract representation *A* takes one new ‘forms,’ but acquires no new ‘matter’” (Hua XIX/1, pp. 225–226).

(*Ideation.5*): *Ideation* is the act that intuitively offers the idea of a relevant individual (i.e., non-independent) part (e.g., color or extension; quality or matter of an act).

As should be evident, 5 bears more upon the nature of what is intuitively given than on the act of ideation itself; nevertheless, it highlights the fact that Husserl still understands it as an act of abstraction: for, it first abstracts (in the double sense of the expression) the “part” and then abstracts the “idea” (this distinction corresponding to the double sense of “abstraction” expounded above).

Let us now turn to the wider framework within which Husserl moves the discussion forward:

The empiricistic “theory of abstraction,” like most parts of modern theory of knowledge, suffers from the mixture of two essentially scientific interests, one concerned with the psychological *explanation of lived-experiences*, the other with the “logical” *clarification of their conceptual [gedanklichen] content or sense*, and the critique of their possible achievement as acts of knowing. In the former regard we seek to establish empirical connections tying the conceptual lived-experiences in question to other facts in the flux of real happening, facts causally responsible for them, or on which they exert effects. In the latter regard, we are intent on “the origin of concepts” pertaining to our words: we seek to clarify their “proper intention” or meaning by means of evident confirmation of their intention in their *fulfilling* sense, which are first realized when suitable intuitions are provided. To study the essence of these phenomenological connections is to lay bare the indispensable foundation for a gnoseological-critical clarification of the “possibility” of knowledge. It is also, in our case, to give essential clarity to the possibility of making valid assertions regarding universal objects (Hua XIX/1, pp. 124–125).

The passage lays out the “general coordinates” of Husserl’s assessment, the issue at stake being the “logical clarification” of the *conceptual content or sense* of the meaning of our words. Only in so doing, in fact, can “the possibility of making valid assertions regarding universal objects” finally be understood: the “ideation” being that suitable intuitive act that realizes the “meaning” of certain words, notably those intending something universal (e.g., red *in specie*). “Abstraction must here be the act, in which the consciousness of universality, as fulfillment of the intention of general names, is achieved” (Hua XIX/1, p. 157). In a few clear words, the “framework” is the one we labeled “dia-noetic idealism,” which concerns the issue of how to make valid “assertions” about ideas or, to go the other way around, of assuming ideas as objects or subjects of possible true propositions: “One cannot, however, deny that we speak of species in a distinct sense, that in countless cases we both mean and give a name, not to the individual, but to its idea, that we can make assertions having what is ideally one as their subject” (Hua XIX/1, pp. 159–160).

The *object of the intention* [*Objektive des Meinens*] is variously the universal *state of affairs* *All A’s are B’s*, or the generic state of affairs *The A (in specie) is B*, or the indefinitely singular state of affairs *Any A is a B*, etc. We do not attend to the individual intuition ... What we attend to are the *objects of our thinking* [*gedanklichen Objekte*], the *objects and the states of affairs* grasped by thought in such and such a manner, which are revealed to our “insight” [*Einsichtig*] when we perform such acts on such a foundation. And the “*abstraction*” in which we seize something conceptual [*ein Gedankliches*], some meaning-like object, where we do not merely look to what is individual and intuitive ... means no more

than we perform certain conceptual acts with insight, acts sometimes of one form, sometimes of another (Hua XIX/1, p. 168).

To abstract here means the same as “to perform certain conceptual acts with insight, acts sometimes of one form, sometimes of another.” It amounts to performing certain “categorical acts,” as Husserl will more clearly assert in *LU VI*: namely, those acts (first emptily) “intending” and then intuitively grasping certain states of affairs such as “The A (*in specie*) is B.”

(*Ideation.6*): The act of ideation, or idealizing abstraction, is a categorical act intending the idea as part of a state of affairs of the form “The A (*in specie*) is...”⁵

Now, that the assessment of the act responsible for both intending and grasping the species takes place against the backdrop of a more general concern with the structure of “categorical acts” is reasserted with strength at the end of §27 of *LU II*. Here, after he emphasizes the “irreducibility” of “conceptual” acts (*ein begriffliches Vorstellen*) vis-à-vis “intuitive” acts (construed as sensuous acts), Husserl writes: “an intention of a basically new type, to which the forms *some one* or *several* [*Ein und Mehrere*], or *two* or *three*, or *something in general*, or *all* etc., essentially belong. Among these forms is also one, in which the *species* is made to function as a *represented object*, in such a way becoming the subject for possible attributions or predications” (Hua XIX/1, p. 179).

Let us now see how Husserl accounts for the nature of the act of abstraction as a categorical act in *LU VI*. The crucial distinction, systematically presented and worked out in §46, is that between “sensuous” and “super-sensuous” acts (*sinnlichen und übersinnlichen*), notably “perception,” which accompanies the “widening” (*Erweiterung*) of the notion of “object” (*Gegenstand*) accomplished in §45. The widening of the concept of intuition (from sensuous to categorical) goes hand in hand with the widening of the concept of object (from the object as the correlate of a sensuous intuitive act to the state of affairs (*Sachverhalt*) as the correlate of a categorical act): “Plainly, the relation between the wider and the narrower, the *super-sensuous* (i.e., that builds upon sensibility, or categorical) and *sensuous concept of perception*, is not something external or contingent, but one rooted in the whole business on hand. It falls within the great class of acts whose peculiarity it is that in them something appears as ‘actual,’ as ‘self-given’” (Hua XIX/2, p. 672).

If this is the first and to a certain extent the most crucial “widening,” at the end of §45 Husserl announces a second widening within the already accomplished widening: “Our widened concept of perception permits—further—of a narrower and a wider conception [*Fassung*]. In the widest sense even universal states of affairs can be said to be perceived (‘seen,’ grasped ‘with evidence’). In the narrower sense, perception terminates upon individuals, thus upon temporal being” (Hua XIX/2, p. 673). As can be easily surmised, the same holds true of “object”: if the first

⁵In §16 of *LU II*, Husserl directly tackles the form *das A (in specie)*, whose “meaning-content” is said to be that of “a wholly different sort of universality, namely, the universality of the species” (Hua XIX/1, p. 153). What we encounter here is an essentially new mode of representation, in which we become aware of *eine neue Art von Einzelheiten*, the specific ones (Hua XIX/1, p. 154).

widening leads us from the equivalence *object = sensuously perceived or intuited to object = state of affair* (which belongs to the domain of the *übersinnlich*), the second widening takes us from individual to non-individual and non-temporal states of affairs (*überempirische* states, in Husserl's words [Hua XIX/2, p. 33]).

If the act of ideation or idealizing abstraction is one in which a species is given as an object, i.e., as the subject for possible true predications, then it is clear why Husserl thinks of it as a categorial act in the strict sense of the term: the *species* is always given as a part (the subject) of a possible true predication, hence of a possible relevant state of affairs.⁶ Since there are individual as well as specific states of affairs, the *categorial* nature of such an act will have to be characterized also from the angle of its universality.

In this specific respect, Husserl distinguishes two kinds of categorial acts: the examples of the first species being the acts of conjunction and disjunction.

Each straightforward act of perception ... can serve as a basic act for new acts which at times include it, at times merely presuppose it, acts which in their new mode of consciousness likewise bring to maturity *a new awareness of objects that essentially presuppose the old*. When the new acts of conjunction, disjunction, definite and indefinite individual apprehension ... generalization, straightforward, relational and connective knowledge arise, we do not have *any* sort of subjective lived-experiences, nor just acts connected with the original one. What we have are acts that, as we said, *set up new objectualities*, acts in which something *appears as actual and self-given*, which was not given, and could not have been given, as what it now appears to be, in these foundational acts alone. *On the other hand, the new objectualities are based on the older acts, they are related to what appears in the basic acts* (Hua XIX/2, pp. 674–675).

As the first lines of the passage make quite clear, the different species of “categorial” acts can be distinguished according to whether they simply build on some other (founding) act or if the latter, namely, its objectuality, is also included in the new, founded one: the latter case being, for instance, that of conjunctions and disjunctions, which include the originally given appearance in the new and founded state of affairs. Quite different is the situation when it comes to the *idealizing abstraction*, which Husserl systematically expounds in §52; while the acts so far discussed “were so founded on straightforward perceptions that the *synthetic intention was co-directed* [mitgerichtet] *to the objects of these founding perceptions*,” the kind of categorial acts now in question do not at all co-intend the appearance provided by the founding act: “Here we have the field of the *universal intuition*, an

⁶Which means that no more misleading reading of this point can be found than the one defended by Gilbert Ryle, who polemically contends that Husserl's understanding of essences (for Ryle does not make any fine-grained distinction), hence of the relevant act of intuition responsible for “giving” them, results in the idea of “concepts” as “crystallized in a splendid isolation” (Ryle 2009, p. 192). For an important contribution on the relationship between states of affairs and ideas/essences in Husserl, see Sowa (2007). In light of *Ideation*,⁶ one can affirm that “*le concept d'idéation oscille ainsi entre l'intuition et la pensée discursive*” (Sivák 2015, p. 71) only if this is not taken to mean some sort of ambiguity on the part of Husserl; otherwise, one would simply be missing the very context in which this concept is worked out.

expression which no doubt will not seem better to many than ‘wooden iron’” (Hua XIX/2, p. 690).⁷

(*Ideation.7*): The act of ideation, or universal intuition, is a categorial act of the type that does not co-intend the objectuality originally given by the founding act.

Accordingly, the (universal or specific) “state of affairs” posited by the act of ideation and then confirmed by universal intuition is founded on a more original, founding act and its objectuality, yet without co-positing or co-intending the latter; this being therefore the second sense in which the act of ideation, also called idealizing abstraction or universal intuition, is said to have a categorial nature: for, (i) it is a categorial act in that it first intends, then intuit, an idea as part of a (specific and universal) “state of affairs” (instead of a “straightforward object”), which (ii) does not include in itself the objectuality of the founding act (but merely builds on it).⁸

All the different aspects and characteristics of the act of idealizing abstraction being recognized, it is time to raise the question concerning the relation between the idea and the objectuality originally offered by the founding act. That Husserl himself is aware of this complicated issue is evidenced, for example, by the following passage:

The objectively constituting relationship is akin to that of part and whole and yet fundamentally different. The *universale* is not *in re* (is not *ante* and *post rem*), provided that we understand the *in* in the same sense as in whole and part. The thing does not *have* the conceptual universal within itself, *but the concept belongs to the thing as its “essence”*; the thing has its determination, its properties, in the concept (Hua XXIV, p. 300).

The characterization is confined to a merely negative description: the *universale* is neither *in re* (ἐν τοῖς πολλοῖς) nor *ante rem* (πρὸ τῶν πολλῶν) nor *post rem* (ἐπὶ τοῖς πολλοῖς).⁹

⁷This point has been perfectly captured by Heidegger (1979, p. 91): “The individual is indeed founding, but in such a way that it is precisely not co-intended, as it is in the ‘and’ of conjunction, which co-intends both this and that, raises this ‘a and b’ up into the new objectivity. Here, however, the founding objectivity is *not* taken up into the content of what is intended in ideation.”

⁸In reference to such conceptual distinction, it is worth noticing that also the “status” that Husserl recognizes them is different: for, while the notion of categorial act in the first meaning is said to be the result of an *Erweiterung*-operation regarding the concepts of “intuition” and “object” (Husserl himself speaks of *erweiterter Sinn* [Hua XIX/2, p. 672]), the categorial act in the second sense seems to be considered a “brand new” concept. That of “universal intuition, Husserl explains, is “an expression which no doubt will not seem better to many than ‘wooden iron’” (Hua XIX/2, p. 690).

⁹For an analysis of these expressions and their historical roots, see de Libera (2014, pp. 40–41). As for Husserl himself, if the state of affairs is the one just presented, then it becomes quite difficult to try to categorize his position based upon the “nominalism”-“realism” dichotomy according to the way in which they are understood by, for example, Moreland (1989, p. 664): “A nominalist is one who holds that an entity like redness is outside the being of its instances and not in them as the entity which constitutes their nature. Instances like red₁, and red₂, are simples with no further entities in them, they stand one another in the relation of exact similarity, and they stand to redness in a primitive type/token relation which is similar to the $\in$ of set membership without extensionality of the latter ... By contrast, a realist is one who holds that a universal is a multiply exemplifiable constituent *in* its instances. The universal is the essence of those instances and the ground of their

As should be evident, the question extends over the more general issue of the “founded” nature of the act of ideation, that is, as an act that requires a previous founding act giving the object in which the universal would be the “contained.” Put otherwise: if the “universal” is not to be construed as *being in* the object given by the founding act, then the act of ideation should not to be deemed an abstractive act (what would it abstract, after all?).

That Husserl is aware of this consequence is revealed by a text also published as an appendix to Hua XXIV.

If in the theory of abstraction, one says that every abstraction is necessarily based on an individual phenomenon, then that is not true in the authentic sense. One can say, each authentically (intuitively) performed generalization is based on a particular, empirical generalization on an empirical particular (therefore, something temporally individual), whereas, essence-formation, idealizing generalization is based on a phenomenological individual, and that is not something individual in the psychological sense ... If I look at “this,” this perception, this judgment, etc., then I am purely concerned with this as what it is purely immanently in itself, and belonging to it in terms of immanent content is nothing of space, time, individual consciousness. Therefore, it is already a universal, a universal of the lowest difference. It is what it is independently of whether it belongs to this or that or to “a” “consciousness in general” (consciousness as a soul, or the like). Of course, it is not something obtained by generalization [*Verallgemeinerung*]. But ideation is not generalization either [*Aber Ideation ist auch nicht Verallgemeinerung*]. We must keep idea and universal (genus in the original sense) separate. Red is not the same as red in general (belonging to the general judgment), like color in general (in contrast to “the color”), the “universal content” (or object), better the essence red, the essence perception, etc. “This”—there is an essence too, only a concrete essence, an essence of least essence-individualization (Hua XXIV, pp. 385–386).

That “idea” and “universal” need to be kept “separated” and not confused means that the “universal of the lowest difference” (what *Ideen...* I will call “eidetic singularity”) is not—strictly speaking—a “universal” (which is then used exclusively to refer to the “higher” universals). If the act of ideation is then the one broadly meant to offer *ideas* in general (both of the lower and higher kind), the term “generalization” stands for the act that, based upon a “universal of the lowest difference” (e.g., a specific shade of red), leads us upwards to the universals in the proper sense of the term (e.g., “red in general,” “color in general,” “sensuous quality in general”).¹⁰

What really matters is the manner in which Husserl now frames the theory of abstraction. As he clearly asserts, it is not really the case that “every abstraction is necessarily based on an individual phenomenon,” that is, it is not really the case that what we call abstraction (idealizing abstraction) is a “founded” act based upon a previous “founding” act and its appearance. In other words, and as far as we understand Husserl’s line of reasoning here, he seems to doubt the very idea that we first have a “founding” act providing us with an individual or a quasi-individual object

resemblance with other instances of the same universal. Thus, red₁ and red₂ are complex entities which have the same nature, redness, and they stand to that nature in a basic relation which is the tie of predication between the redness and a bare particular in each instance.”

¹⁰ See also a 1907 manuscript, now published in Hua XLI, pp. 34–35, wherein exactly the same kind of problems are raised.

and then a second “founded” act that, by building upon the former, *abstracts* (*abstrahere aliquid*) the “idea.”¹¹ As a matter of fact, Husserl maintains that “if I look at ‘this,’ this perception, this judgment, etc., then I am purely concerned with this as what it is purely immanently in itself.” I do not need to first have the intuition of something individual (e.g., an individual and specific shade of red) and then to intend it in a new way so as to grasp, *in it*, the idea: I directly *look at this*, e.g., at a specific shade of red, and *immediately grasp or apprehend it as an idea* (of the lowest kind). What is in question is a different meaning of the demonstrative *this* (*dies*) (see our Sect. 2). As we understand Husserl, it is not the case that we are first confronted with an individual *this* which we subsequently abstract from its individualization (specific *abstrahere ab aliquo*) so as to bring to consciousness the relevant idea (specific *abstrahere aliquid*); I can directly *look at this*, not as an individual objectuality, but *as an idea*, as a universal of the lowest difference.¹² The “*this*” directly designates the idea of the lowest level. “I look [*Blicke ich*] at the phenomenon,” exclaims Husserl to his students in 1902–1903, “I look at this ‘phenomenon’” (Hua-Mat III, pp. 77–78): “I look at this...” (Hua XXIV, p. 386).

Nevertheless, an observation is necessary here: for, we do not at all mean to maintain that Husserl abandons the language and the conceptuality of “abstraction” once and for all. Quite the opposite. Indeed, after the passage: “Therefore, it is already a universal” (*Also es ist schon ein Allgemeines*) (Hua XXIV, p. 386), he himself adds in a side-note: “That is not right! Of course, if I disregard the *haecceitas* and only refer to an idea of this perception, its essence!”

2 A Priori or Eidetic Attitude

As we just saw, the notion of idealizing abstraction or ideation plays a crucial role in the economy of the *LU*, for it expresses a “mode of consciousness” (the one that first emptily intends and then grasps an idea or universal) irreducible to the one to which something individual is given. We also saw in what sense the concept of ideation is connected to what we have been labeling “dia-noetic idealism” (*Ideation.6*), and, moreover, to the mereological terminology of *LU III* (*Ideation.5*).

It is now time to see how all of this is recasted by Husserl via the notion of attitude, notably introduced as the a priori or eidetic attitude. First, we will explore the 1910–1911 intersubjectivity lectures wherein the concept of *Einstellung* is submitted for the first time to systematic scrutiny.¹³

¹¹ If Husserl writes that not “every abstraction is necessarily based on an individual phenomenon,” it is because *de facto* there is a certain form of abstraction that builds on previously given individual phenomena, i.e., empirical abstraction.

¹² For a more detailed presentation of this aspect, see Sowa (2008).

¹³ In *The Idea of Phenomenology*, Husserl employs the still vague term of *Haltung*, specifically *Geisteshaltung*, and speaks, for example, of *philosophische Geisteshaltung* (Hua II, p. 17). Already in 1909 (Hua-Mat VII), Husserl makes extensive use of the concept of attitude, notably of the

At the outset, Husserl recognizes that the “investigations that we want to conduct require a completely different attitude [*total andere Einstellung*] than the natural one within which natural-scientific and psychological knowledge is obtained” (Hua XIII, p. 112). As a consequence, a good portion of these lectures (§§1–6) is dedicated to a description of the different kinds of attitudes (*der verschiedenen Einstellungen*) in which experience and knowledge can in general take place. Now, the introduction of the attitude that interests us occurs in §9, entitled “The Empirical or Natural Attitude and the A Priori Attitude. Ontology of Nature and Formal Ontology” (Hua XIII, p. 125).

What kind of new attitude is now possible in opposition [*gegenüber*] to the just described natural apprehension of the world where nature or world becomes a visible and knowable field? Does not nature encompass all real being [*alles wirkliche Sein*]? Certainly that is true, if we understand by “real” that which exists in space and time. It is not true, however, if we consider that correct judging and insightful knowing aim at objects which have no such existence (Hua XIII, p. 125).

Three observations immediately impose themselves.

- First of all, the new attitude about to be described is said to be “in opposition to” (*gegenüber der*) the one discussed up to now, i.e., the “natural attitude,” in which nature or world appears as a field of knowledge.
- Second of all, the question at stake is whether “being” means in general the same as “real” or “actual” being: for, if this is the case, then no other “attitude” seems to be possible at all.
- Third of all, and as the last sentence clearly explains, the falsity of the equivalence “being = real or actual being,” hence the possibility of a new attitude opposed to the natural one, is demonstrated by the fact that judgments are possible bearing on or referring to objects which have no existence.

In a nutshell: that an attitude opposed to the natural one is possible is demonstrated by our judging about “objects” the “being” of which cannot be equated with real and actual being. As Husserl goes on to emphasize: “Thus, pure geometry speaks of geometrical figures; pure arithmetic speaks of numbers, etc. The figures of pure geometry, as possible formations of pure space, the numbers of arithmetic, as the pure numbers of numerical series, are not things and are not in any sense facts of nature” (Hua XIII, p. 125).¹⁴ In sum, the geometer “speaks” of possible formations, and so does the arithmetician about numbers: such objects, however, have no

distinction between transcendental, natural, and psychological attitudes. Based on the material at our disposal, it can be surmised that it is around 1906–1907 that Husserl starts employing the concept of attitude (in the same period of the so-called “transcendental turn”), even though one has to wait until the 1910–1911 lectures to have a direct systematic assessment. The analysis of why Husserl feels the need to introduce such a concept will not be assessed here, for it belongs to the discussion of the transcendental dimension of Husserl’s thought, which we are leaving aside: in fact, Husserl seems to first resort to the concept of attitude to make sense of the transcendental attitude, namely, of the specific dimension that is disclosed by the transcendental reduction.

¹⁴A side note by Husserl himself reads: “eidetic attitude” (*eidetische Einstellung*).

“being” understood in terms of spatio-temporal “existence,” yet they represent a new, and different, “visible and knowable field.”

Now, before we elaborate upon what is meant by the a priori or eidetic attitude, attention shall be focused on the attitude opposed to it: the so-called natural attitude. As Husserl himself had already pointed out at the very end of §8: “We just wanted to indicate what the natural attitude is; and we described it through a general and brief characterization of what is found in advance [*vorgefunden*] by being in this attitude, i.e., the world in the natural sense. And we saw that the world is nothing other than that infinite object of the natural and psychological sciences” (Hua XIII, p. 125).

Here, too, a few remarks might be helpful to grasp what Husserl means. The natural attitude is indirectly described through a characterization of what can be *found in advance* by living in it: “the world in the natural sense.” The problem is to understand what “world” in this sense means; only in this way will we arrive at a full comprehension of the natural attitude. If this is the question we are facing, then Husserl’s answer sounds straightforward: it is nothing else but “the infinite object of the natural and psychological sciences.”

The “natural attitude” is that in which the “world” is found as the “object” (*Objekt*) of the natural science, that is to say, as *nature*. The notion of the natural attitude is hence primarily described and accounted for by means of a *characterization of the way in which the world is found in it as studied by such and such a type of science in general* (“the natural and psychological sciences”): “The natural attitude is hence the attitude of experience” (Hua XIII, p. 120); the *science of experience* is “the science of the natural attitude” (Hua XIII, 122). As one could present it:

(*Natural Attitude. I*): *Natural* is the *attitude* in which the *world* is already found or found in advance (*vorgefunden*) as *nature*.

If this is the case, then the question turns out to be: what is nature?

Every science of existence in the one space and the one time is a natural science. And the unified all-embracing concept is nature, or rather, as it becomes manifest on closer consideration, the law-governed unified whole of all spatial-temporal existence, hence of all that which has place and extension in the one space and which has position or duration in the one time. This whole we call the *world* or *all-nature*. In this world, there are not two separate worlds, called things and souls. Experience knows only one world, insofar as souls are souls of lived bodies, and insofar as the world is the world of experience, which, as such, refers back to I’s, which in turn, like all other I’s, experientially fit into the world (Hua XIII, p. 124).

What we refer to as *nature* is the unitary whole of all spatiotemporal existence, the latter construed as “that which has place and extension in the one space and which has position or duration in the one time.” All-nature is thus the *world* understood as the all-embracing unity of space and time in which each and every *existence* finds its own place. One could now present the natural attitude as that attitude in which what is *found* is a unified spatiotemporal totality embracing all existence and within which “being” is identical with “real” or “actual” being. What is thereby obtained is both a characterization of “nature” (= the unitary whole of all

spatiotemporal existence) and its relevant “attitude” (= that in which, or by living in which, the world is *found in advance* as “nature”).

(*Natural Attitude.2*): Natural is the attitude in which, or by living in which, the unitary whole of all spatiotemporal *existence* is found in advance.

But also, by the same token:

(*Natural Attitude.3*): Natural is the attitude in which “being” (*Sein*) and “real” or actual being (*wirkliches Sein*) mean one and the same thing.

Now, if it is the case that the a priori or eidetic attitude is “opposed” to the natural attitude, then its description and assessment will have to present us with traits that stand in direct opposition to those so far discussed.

In contraposition to nature, to the world of factual spatial-temporal existence, to the “empirical” world, there are, as one says, *ideal* worlds, worlds of ideas, which are non-spatial, non-temporal, and unreal. And yet, they are indeed, as for example, numbers in a series exist. Moreover, they are the subjects of valid scientific statements, just as much as the things of nature are. One must consequently distinguish, on the one hand, between the natural or empirical attitude and, on the other hand, the non-empirical, *a priori* attitude. In the one attitude, objectualities of existence [*Daseinsgegenständlichkeiten*] come to givenness, in the other, objectualities of essence [*Wesensgegenständlichkeiten*]; in the one, nature comes to givenness, in the other, ideas (Hua XIII, pp. 125–126).

The passage, which is quite dense, demands for a series of clarifying remarks.

The main opposition is between the “one” world (nature) of the natural attitude and the “many” ideal worlds of the a priori attitude. Just like in *Ideen I*, wherein Husserl speaks of the world of propositions, the world of numbers, and the arithmetical world (Hua III/1, pp. 47 and 59), here, too, he talks of the “world of ideas” (*Welten von Ideen*).¹⁵ The difference with respect to the framework characterized by the notion of ideation should immediately appear: for, what might be designated as the “correlate” of the attitude is a “world” in general—the one real world in the case of the natural attitude, the many ideal worlds in the case of the a priori attitude.¹⁶

What we have been labeling Husserl’s “dia-noetic idealism” plays a crucial role here, too: if we can distinguish between the “empirical attitude” and the a priori attitude, it is because both the one world “found” in the former and the many ideal worlds given to the latter can be held as objects, namely, as “subjects of valid scientific statements” (*Subjekte gültiger wissenschaftlicher Aussagen*). Husserl’s grammar is unequivocal: “One must consequently distinguish...” He argues to the effect that the distinction between the two attitudes, thus between the one real world and the many ideal worlds, is justified based on the fact that both existence and ideas

¹⁵“*La expresión mundo se pluraliza,*” as noticed by Serrano de Haro (2016, p. 98).

¹⁶Here is how Husserl himself will describe, in *Ideen...I*, the relation between the one world of the natural attitude and the “many” other worlds, with specific reference to the “world of arithmetic”: “*The arithmetical world is there for me only if, and as long as, I am in the arithmetical attitude. The natural world, however, the world in the usual sense of the term, is and has been there for me continuously as long as I go on living naturally. As long as this is the case, I am ‘in the natural attitude,’ indeed both mean precisely the same thing ... I appropriate to myself the arithmetical world and other similar ‘worlds’ by assuming the relevant attitude*” (Hua III/1, pp. 59–60).

count as objects: "Such ideas now function as *objects* and, at the same time, they make possible statements with the character of unconditional universality" (Hua XIII, p. 126). The possibility of ideas counting as objects no longer simply points to the irreducibility of a relevant mode of consciousness (as was the case with the act of ideation), but to a different "attitude," hence to a "world" corresponding to it.

In sum, the "attitude" is that in which the one real world is "found" (= natural attitude) or to which the many worlds of ideas are directly given (= a priori attitude). Now, even if the account of the many ideal worlds in terms of *non-temporality* and *non-spatiality* perfectly accords with the one worked out in *LU II*, the point to be made is that it is the notion of "world" to be now so described: it is the world to be described now as either *spatial* or *non-spatial*, *temporal* or *timeless*, *real* or *ideal*. As for the a priori attitude, one could preliminarily put it as follows:

(*A Priori Attitude. I*): A priori or eidetic is that "attitude" in which a world of ideas, that is to say, a world of "non-spatial" and "timeless" objectualities, is given.

Let us keep reading the text.

Surely, there is nothing to object here. It clearly is a different attitude when, on the one hand, we have given to us, through perception or memory, a color as a moment of a thing and take the color in this *intending* [meinen], in the perceiving or remembering, and when, on the other hand, we apply ourselves differently, as it were, and grasp only the idea of this color, the corresponding species of the color as a pure givenness (Hua XIII, p. 126).

As far as this account is concerned, the impression we are under is that there are two "distinct" attitudes, and what might be called the transition from the one to the other is not clear: as if the two attitudes, therefore the two "worlds," had nothing in common. Yet, the situation is not this easy: for, Husserl speaks of "the idea of this color"—the idea, grasped in the a priori attitude, is the idea "of" the individual color first apprehended in the natural attitude.

It is one thing to perceive a single note of the quality *c*, as the note of the violin just now beginning to sound, and another thing to form, in a changed attitude, yet on the basis of the appearing of this exemplary note, the *idea* of the quality *c*, which is sui generis within the ideal and singular scale of tone qualities. Likewise, it is one thing to look at four dashes, and it is quite another thing, while seeing the four dashes, not to pay attention to them, but rather to focus on the idea alone, the number 4, which here is instantiated in an intuition in an exemplary fashion, etc. (Hua XIII, p. 126).

As this passage suggests, the two attitudes are not "coordinated": the a priori attitude presupposes the natural attitude and whatever is given in it. Husserl's terminology could not be clearer: "on the basis (*auf Grund*) of the appearing of this exemplary note" Husserl is trying to lay emphasis upon the founded (*auf Grund*) nature of the a priori attitude, yet without resorting to the *Fundierung*-terminology that characterizes the talk of acts: if an act can be founded (*fundiert*) on a previous act, an attitude is more properly based (*auf Grund*) on another one.

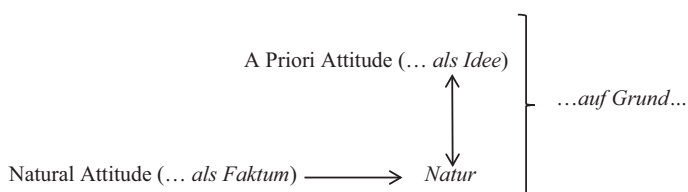
Nature as fact we contrast to nature as idea [*Der Natur als Faktum stellen wir gegenüber Natur als Idee*]. The natural sciences, in the usual empirical sense, are related to nature as fact; the pure natural sciences are related to nature as idea. This yields the sciences of the ideas, which are constitutive of the idea of nature: geometry, pure theory of time, pure

theory of motions and possible deformations of what is proper to the nature of things [*im Dinglichen*] as such—this latter would correspond to *Kant's* idea of pure natural science. Let us classify these disciplines that correspond to the idea of nature under the title of *ontology of nature* (Hua XIII, p. 128).

The *based on*-character of the a priori attitude vis-à-vis the natural attitude is clearly recognizable; and even though the expressions “nature as fact” and “nature as idea” might suggest some sort of “equivalence” between two possible, and alternative, apprehensions (...*als*...) of one and the same object (nature), we should never forget that nature (world *as* nature) is precisely what is *found in advance* in the natural attitude. Rather than representing the state of affairs as follows...

Natural Attitude (... *als Faktum*) $\longrightarrow$ *Natur* $\longleftarrow$ (... *als Idee*) A Priori Attitude

...the diagram should look more like this (with the curly brackets standing for the *auf Grund*-sort of relation that holds between the two attitudes):



This based on-character (*auf Grund*)¹⁷ of the a priori attitude vis-à-vis the empirical attitude can be better characterized if we compare it to the way in which Husserl presents the relation between the empirical attitude and the transcendental attitude. The latter, as Husserl points out without any further ado, “excludes” (*ausschaltet*) “every empirical transcendent attitude” (Hua XIII, p. 148), and “realm of the phenomenological objectualities is one that is completely separate from the realm of nature” (Hua XIII, p. 149). If the a priori attitude is “opposed” to the natural attitude while its realm is still *based on* it, the transcendental attitude is “opposed” to the empirical attitude and its domain stands out as completely “separate” from it.

One more element touched on by Husserl deserves our attention, namely, the notion of exemplar (*Exempel*), or, in the specific language of the lectures at hand, *exemplary appearance*. Let us point out that the exemplar already played a role in the *LU*, though only a minor one: Husserl speaks of *Exempel* (*LU I*, §18; *LU II*, §11) and uses *exemplarisch* (*LU V*, §33) on only a few occasions, and only rarely does he use it in the lectures (Hua-Mat III, pp. 62, 89, 161; Hua XXIV, pp. 46, 55).

If we understand Husserl on the matter, the a priori or eidetic attitude is the attitude in which an objectuality is assumed as exemplarily standing for an idea. The a priori attitude is the one in which, on the basis of another attitude, an existential objectuality (*Daseinsgegenständlichkeit*) is given or assumed as the exemplar of a

¹⁷Which Husserl quickly employed in §52 of the *Sixth Logical Investigation* to account for the relation between “universal intuition” and the act that functions as its basis.

relevant essential objectuality (*Wesensgegenständlichkeit*), which can eventually be investigated *per se* (this will be explored further in the next chapter).

(*A Priori Attitude.2*): *A priori* or *eidetic* is the attitude in which an existential objectuality is given or assumed as the *exemplar* of a relevant essential objectuality.

If this holds true of the “ontology of nature,” as Husserl himself calls it, the same cannot be said of “another group of a priori disciplines,” which have “an essentially different character”:

Here, I mean the pure logic of propositions, the pure theory of probability, pure arithmetic, and, finally, the pure theory of manifolds. These sciences do not belong to the idea of nature; they do not expound the a priori, which constitutes the idea of nature. Arithmetic’s freedom from existence includes not only any actual positing of real existence but also every positing of the idea of nature, every employment of the idea of things, of properties, etc. The one in arithmetic is something whatever in general, and under this does not merely fall what has a thing-like being [*Dingliches*], the spatial-temporal, but, rather, precisely the something in general, be it an idea, be it even a number itself. To the extent that formal logic addresses the truth of propositions, the very *idea of a proposition*, taken in its unconditional universality, contains not only any propositions you like, which have a natural-scientific thought-content, but also propositions that have any thought-content whatever, for instance, pure arithmetic. And it can be shown that the designated group of disciplines can also be interpreted as a universal, a priori ontology, an ontology that refers to intended *being in general* (Hua XIII, pp. 128–129).

This passage lists the disciplines that make up the *mathesis universalis* (pure arithmetic, pure theory of manifolds) along with formal logic and its “objectual” correlate, formal ontology, which—due to their “formal” character—do not presuppose “the idea of a nature in general” (Hua XIII, p. 129).

The “ontology of nature”—on the contrary—is “a title for all disciplines that belong to the idea of nature or to the ideas that are constitutive of the idea of nature. Here are relevant the ideas of space and time, that is to say, pure theory of space (geometry), pure theory of time, pure kinetics, and the pure disciplines of the possible deformations of the spatial formations” (Hua XIII, p. 129).

As should be clear from the last excerpt, and as we will better see over the course of the next two chapters, the emphasis on the notion of attitude, and especially on the a priori attitude, goes hand in hand with the growing emphasis that Husserl places on the notion of eidetic science. In other words: whereas the “act of ideation” or idealizing abstraction was originally introduced to vindicate the irreducibility of a certain mode of consciousness (i.e., the one that intends the universal) and relevant propositions, the language of “attitude” is more appropriate to characterize the relation between acts and systems of acts the correlate of which is such and such a world (of ideas) understood as the very subject-matter of such and such an eidetic or a priori science.

Since, in the lectures just discussed, Husserl confines himself to contrasting the a priori attitude with the empirical attitude without actually proposing a new account of the notion of attitude in general prior to all its possible distinctions, it will be a good idea to quickly switch to the *Erste Philosophie II* lectures so as to elaborate on how “attitude” is presented therein: the aim being to integrate the 1923–1924 analyses into our present discussion.

Husserl's line of arguments in the *Erste Philosophie II* lectures (notably §42) concerns itself with the distinction, and relevant "articulation," between theoretical, axiological, and practical attitudes (Hua VIII, pp. 98–99). For the sake of our problems here, we can confine ourselves to the following observations the overall aim of which is simply to provide a general understanding of the notion of attitude to be applied to what in 1910–1911 Husserl called the a priori attitude. Indeed, as Husserl does not fail to emphasize, each one of three aforementioned attitudes is characterized by a specific interest: Husserl speaks of "a fundamental concept, the concept of interest and of acts of interest" (Hua VIII, p. 99¹⁸), on the basis of which one can arrive at a full comprehension of what an attitude in general properly is.

Let us start out with the following excerpt:

How is it possible that in the multiplicity of acts of an ego's act-trait [*in der Mannigfaltigkeit von Akten eines ichlichen Aktzuges*] the unity of an intellectual action [*Einheit einer... Aktion*] ... stands out and thus takes on such a unity that we speak of *one act* [*gewinnt eine derartige Einheit, dass wir von einem...Akte...sprechen*]*—albeit a synthetic one—*for example of an experiencing or a proving or a pure intellectual act? As a *global act* [*Gesamtakt*] it probably embraces several intellectual partial acts [*Teilakte*] (Hua VIII, pp. 99–100).

The passage provides us with a double distinction: on the one hand, between "global act" and "partial act" or "part-act" (*Gesamtakt-Teilakt*); on the other, between global act, here understood as embracing (*umspannt*) several partial acts, and what Husserl labels unity of an action (*Einheit einer Aktion*). The issue is the constitution of the "unity of action" based on a multiplicity of acts. It is at this point also that the talk of theme (*die Rede vom Thema*) needs to be addressed: "The same must be said, of course, for the talk of *theme* (*Thema*), which, while common in the theoretical sphere, can easily be widened. What we are 'directed at' [*gerichtet*], 'focused on' [*eingestellt*] in a special way is our theme, and it belongs perhaps to an infinitely encompassing sphere, which is co-viewed, and upon which we are co-focused habitually—as our thematic universe" (Hua VIII, p. 100).

Husserl's language is very clear: if the theme is what we are directed at and focused on (*worauf...eingestellt*), then it can be surmised that different species of *attitudes* (*Einstellungen*) can be distinguished based on different species of themes. What I am focused on, that is to say, my theme, is what brings about the character of the corresponding *attitude*, for the theme is what we are driven towards by a certain line or direction of "interest." Otherwise: the adoption of such and such an attitude—which is guided by such and such a line of interest—determines my being focused on such and such a theme. It is the theme—towards which the directions of interest converge—that makes possible for several partial acts to be "united" or "unified" into a global act (Hua VIII, 100).

¹⁸ See also the preliminary discussion of the notion of "theoretical interest" in the 1904–1905 lectures (Hua XXXVIII, pp. 112–113).

(*Attitude.1*): The attitude is that in which, or by living in which, we are focused on a certain “theme,” which Husserl also designates as its “thematic universe” (*thematisches Universum*).

Or, differently stated:

(*Attitude.2*): Every “attitude” has a “theme” as its own correlate.

Let us now consider the following nuanced and articulate description:

For instance, someone who is doing clay modeling should have the clay in front of himself or herself in a perceptual way; in addition, he or she has to be conscious of the figure to be realized—even if obscurely—in the mode of an end-idea [*Zielidee*], so to say, of a mere δόξαμις and he or she is conscious of each intermediary formation [*Zwischengestaltung*] as a more or less accomplished or unaccomplished approximation to what is finally to be realized. This clearly implies a constant process of evaluations; all intermediary stages of the realizing activity are assessed in their own way. What I tend to achieve as a goal needs to have a value for me. So, as a naïve subject of such a practical act, I am at the same time the subject of several act intentions, which, as partial acts, join up together within the unity of a total act [*die sich zwar als Teilakte zur Einheit eines Gesamtaktes zusammenschließen*]. Among these partial acts, acts having a subordinate function [*dienender Funktion*] distinguish themselves from those exerting a dominant [*herrschende*] action (Hua VIII, pp. 100–101).

The artist who is busy working on a statue lives in the “practical” attitude, for she is trying to realize something: the dominant action is clearly “practical” (the end-goal or end-idea being the realization of the statue itself), but both intellectual and evaluative acts are involved and performed. The latter, however, have only, in the words of Husserl, a subordinate function, for they are subordinated to the dominant action and its being teleologically oriented towards the end-goal: the practical realization of the statue. The thematic universe, towards which the lines or directions of interest are directed, is in this case of practical nature, and all the “intermediary formations” count for the artist solely and uniquely as approximations to the realization of the goal. However, as Husserl hastens to add:

In another way acts can stand in a *side action* [*Nebenaktion*] or also in a *main action* [*Hauptaktion*], and this concerns acts which are connected, but are not unified into the unity of a single global act [*aber nicht zur Einheit eines einzigen Gesamtaktes vereinigt*]. As a botanist, I may be delighted at the beauty of a flower, but this delight is not the main action when I am focused on [*in der Einstellung*] knowing and classifying it by means of observation and determination. Once I am finished [observing and determining the flower], then, it is the aesthetical joy, which went alongside, that may now take the place of the theoretical attitude and become the main action: hence, I am in the aesthetical attitude, the [attitude] of the heart, rather than in the theoretical attitude, the [attitude] of the understanding (Hua VIII, p. 101).

The example of the botanist, in contrast to the previous one, is meant to illustrate another possible relation that may hold between acts. If, in the case of the artist, evaluative and *doxic* acts work at the service of the main, “dominant” action (the practical realization of a goal) in such a way to count as partial acts joining together into the unity of a global act, then, in the case of the botanist, we have a series of acts (of evaluative character) that do not merge into the unity of the *doxic* action (“classification” and “determination” of a flower) and which instead stay on the

“side,” so to speak. The side action-main action dichotomy replaces here the previous distinction between subordinate and dominant functions.

As should be clear by now, it is the specific attitude we live in (i.e., its theme) that brings about the nature of our acts and their mutual relations: their being either “side” or “main” actions; their standing in either a “subordinate” or a “dominant” function. When it comes to the “theoretical” attitude, for example, “the dominant interest is an interest in being and being-thus” (*am Sein und Sosein*), and the corresponding theme displays a gnoseological character (*ein Erkenntnisthema*) (Hua VIII, p. 103). As Husserl says: “The unity of a goal [*Zieleinheit*] runs here through all the acts, although they may have several partial goals [*Sondernziele*]. Through the synthetic unification of the relevant mono-thematic acts [*einzelthematischen Akte*], there stands out the relation of the cognitive intention [*absehenden Erkennens*] to one and the same object, i.e., to the unity of an objectual-connection [*Objektzusammenhangs*]” (Hua VIII, p. 103). The theme we are thereby focused on corresponds to a full “domain” (*Umfassung des Gebiets*), and our “interest” in it amounts to arriving (*gewinnen*) at the “being” in question (*das betreffende Seiende*), which is posited as a being (*als seiend Gesetzt*) by stating and ascertaining its qualities, properties, and relations—or, in a word, arriving at its truth (*in seine Wahrheit*) (see Hua VIII, p. 103).

As one could put it:

(*Theoretical Attitude.1*): The attitude the *theme* of which is *being* and *being-thus* and the end-goal for which is the determination of the *truth* of the being in question.

(*Theoretical Attitude.2*): The attitude per which all the relevant mono-thematic gnoseological acts are *synthetically united* into a *cognitive intention aiming at one and the same object* (i.e., the actual theme of the attitude itself).¹⁹

If we apply the 1923–1924 account to the 1910–1911 assessment, the following characterization is possible: *the a priori attitude is a species of the theoretical attitude, the theme or thematic universe (Attitude.1 and Attitude.2) of which is represented by a world of ideas or by a plurality thereof (A Priori Attitude.1); the end-goal for which is the determination of the truth of what is assumed as a theme (Theoretical Attitude.1); and in which such a determination takes on the dominant function, thereby synthetically unifying all the mono-thematic gnoseological acts into a cognitive intention that aims at one and the same object (Theoretical Attitude.2).*

Let us consider a clear example, that of the ontology of nature and the attitude aiming at *nature as idea*. The thematic universe is here represented by nature as an idea, or, better, by the idea of nature in general, which includes in itself a series of

¹⁹ We want to express our gratitude to Claudio Majolino for allowing us to read and use text from lectures on the notion of attitude in phenomenology delivered at the “Husserl Archive” in Leuven. See the published version of this text in Majolino (2020). On the concept of attitude in Husserl’s phenomenology, see the systematic account presented by Luft (2002, pp. 35–78); on the relation between “natural” and “personalistic” attitudes, see Staiti (2009).

“worlds of ideas” (corresponding to the pure theory of space, the pure theory of time, pure kinetics, and the pure disciplines of the possible deformations of the spatial formations); the dominant function is imposed by the end-goal, i.e., the determination of the truth of the idea of nature (i.e., the determination of its qualities, properties, and relations) in such a way that all the gnoseological acts directed towards their partial goals, i.e., the determination of the worlds of ideas of pure space, pure time, pure kinetics, etc., are synthetically unified into the cognitive intention that aims at one and the same “objectual connection.”

3 Eidetic Reduction

In the 1976 version of *Ideen I* edited by K. Schuhmann, Husserl seems to resort to the expression “eidetic reduction” only once, at the very beginning of the text during a preliminary categorization of the “sciences” and, in particular, of the difference between psychology and pure transcendental phenomenology:

Psychology is an experiential science. Two things are implied in the usual meaning of the word experience: (1) It is a science of *facts* [Tatsachen], of matters of fact in the sense of David Hume; and (2) It is a science of *realities*. The “phenomena” that it, as psychological “phenomenology,” deals with are real occurrences that, as such, if they have actual existence, find their place with the real subjects to whom they belong in the one spatiotemporal world as *omnitudo realitatis*. In opposition to this, *pure or transcendental phenomenology* will be established, *not as a science of matters of fact, but as a science of essences* (as an “eidetic” science): it will become established as a science that exclusively determines “knowledge of essence” and *no “matters of fact” whatsoever*. The relevant reduction that leads over from the psychological phenomena to the pure “essence” or, in the case of judgmental thinking, from factual (“empirical”) universality to the universality of “essence,” is the *eidetic reduction* (Hua III/1, p. 6).

The passage could not be clearer: the eidetic reduction, which Husserl will immediately contrast with the transcendental reduction, is the one that leads us over to the pure essence.

The 1950 version, by contrast, edited by W. Biemel, which includes in the actual text Husserl’s observations and side notes, presents us with an interesting and crucial appearance of the expression “eidetic reduction” also in §77:

If we now perform both the phenomenological and the eidetic reduction, our findings (inside their parentheses) turn into exemplificatory cases [*exemplarische Fälle*] of universalities of essence, which we can appropriate and study within the limits of pure intuition (Hua III/1, p. 179 [1950 edition]; Hua III/1, p. 163 [1976 edition]).

In the original version, there is no mention of eidetic reduction, only transcendental reduction; yet, the reason why Husserl decided to “include” the eidetic reduction in this passage, or at least to explicitly mention it, is easy enough to grasp. Given the double conceptual distinction between *facts* and *essences*, on the one hand, and *real* and *unreal* phenomena, on the other, the goal of the transcendental reduction is to lead us over from what is *real* to what is *non-real* (transcendental),

yet not from facts to essences, for this is the goal of the eidetic reduction. A 1912 excerpt from the *Ergänzungsband* to the first volume of *Ideen* (Beilage 4) is quite clear about this latter point:

The “eidetic reduction” is always [*prinzipiell*] and constantly [*in jedem Schritt*] performed, especially at the very beginning [of the investigation], in order to bring about a pure eidetic science and to make sure that we are not carrying out any factual scientific research; but also to make sure that misunderstandings are avoided that derive from mistaking what is eidetic [*das Eidetische*] for something factual [*Faktisches*] (Hua III/2, p. 528).

This being said, and having preliminarily acknowledged both the necessity and importance of this second form of reduction, some additional points are worth making. One, unlike the “transcendental” reduction, the eidetic reduction is never submitted by Husserl to any systematic analysis capable of shedding light on what its functions and mode of working would properly and precisely be. Two, even in terms of “presence,” the expression itself of “eidetic reduction” is rare in the book. However, this does not mean that Husserl was not already aware of its pivotal “role” within the economy of the arguments set forward in *Ideen I*. In fact, one could argue—this being our third remark—that, as the transcendental reduction is necessary to open up the transcendental field and enter the transcendental attitude, so is the eidetic reduction required in order to open up the eidetic field (*das Eidetische*) and enter the eidetic attitude.²⁰ Moreover, as Husserl distinguishes between exclusion and transcendental reduction in the proper sense, so he also clearly distinguishes between eidetic reduction and “eidetic exclusion of individual existence” (Hua III/1, p. 134).

Given the structural analogy between the two methods (*i.* both entail a clear distinction between *reduction* and *exclusion*, *ii.* both are necessary to open up a new field of scientific investigation, *iii.* Both are necessary in order to switch to a new attitude²¹), the case can be made for drawing on what Husserl says about the transcendental reduction to try to shed some light on its twin sister.

Let us start off with a passage from §33 (which precedes the introduction of transcendental consciousness as the actual “theme” of the phenomenological investigation in §34):

Important motives, grounded in the gnoseological problematic, justify our designating “pure” consciousness, about which we shall have so much to say, as a *transcendental consciousness* and the operation by which it is reached the *transcendental ἐποχή*. As a method,

²⁰ Let us hasten to point out that, even philologically, *reduce* and *reducere* suggest a “bringing-back” sort of operation, e.g., “to bring back home (from an exile).” Accordingly, the Husserlian reduction (whether “transcendental” or just “eidetic”) is not meant to signify a reduction of something *down* to something else (e.g., the world *to* consciousness or fact *to* essence), but to *bring* the attention *from* something *back* to something else (e.g., “pure consciousness” or the “pure essence”). On these points, see the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* entry on “*Reduco*.”

²¹ “We can undertake an ‘eidetic reduction,’ exclude all questions about existence, about the judgment-positing of the latter, and carry through the attitude of purely eidetic research. We concern ourselves then with the *eidos*, with the essence ‘perception,’ and with what belongs to a perception as such” (Hua V, p. 40). Let us remark that, whereas the transcendental reduction belongs to phenomenology alone, the eidetic reduction is a tool available to any eidetic science.

this operation will be divided into different steps of “excluding,” “parenthesizing” [*Ausschaltung, Einklammerung*]; and thus our method will assume the characteristic of a step-by-step reduction. For this reason, we shall, on most occasions, speak of *phenomenological reductions* (but also, with reference to their total-unity [*Gesamtheit*] of the phenomenological reduction) and, accordingly, from a gnoseological perspective, we shall refer to transcendental reductions (Hua III/1, pp. 68–69).

As we understand this passage, the methodological notion of “transcendental reduction” is used and employed by Husserl in at least two different senses. On the one hand, one can speak of it in the plural (= transcendental reductions), meaning the many thematic exclusions performed by Husserl in Chapter 4 (“The Phenomenological Reductions”), after the already successfully accomplished opening up of the transcendental “field” of that new science called phenomenology. On the other hand, however, the expression can be spoken of in the singular (= *the* transcendental reduction), meaning the “total-unity” of that step-by-step process that leads the phenomenologist, after a series of exclusions, to disclose and open up the transcendental field. In this latter case, *the* turn of phrase “transcendental reduction” embraces both the operations of exclusion (in terms of *Ausschaltung* and *Einklammerung*) and the actual reduction, namely, both the *exclusion* of what is not included in the phenomenological domain (the world as a real one) and the disclosure, if we can so speak, of the “theme” of the phenomenological investigation (the region “pure consciousness”). As Husserl in fact maintains in §76, it is only by the method of phenomenological reduction that the field of pure consciousness can be obtained and brought about *in its purity* (Hua III/1, p. 159; Hua IX, p. 250).

One should never forget, however, that if the goal of the introduction of that methodological tool called “transcendental reduction” is to actually bring to the fore a new field of investigation, thereby justifying the introduction of a new material eidetic science, then what is preliminarily excluded by the many different exclusions is subsequently reintroduced—as a “correlate” of pure consciousness itself—into the domain of phenomenology itself: “*The exclusion has at the same time the characteristic of a revaluing [umwertenden] change in sign; thereby what has been revalued finds its place in the phenomenological sphere*” (Hua III/1, p. 159).

Although quite sketchy, this short presentation of the method of transcendental reduction makes it clear that at least three “steps” can be distinguished.

- (a) The many *exclusions*, the overall aim of which is precisely to exclude all that does not fall within the actual field and theme of the phenomenological investigations, notably, among many other things, the thesis of the world posited from within the natural attitude (roughly corresponding to §§27–46).
- (b) The actual “reduction,” that is, the disclosure of the “field of phenomenology”: the region pure consciousness (which occurs in §§47–55), which is also accompanied by the opening up of a new attitude (the transcendental attitude) with the field of phenomenology representing its “thematic universe.”
- (c) A systematic “re-inclusion” into the phenomenological domain of what has been preliminarily excluded: indeed, Husserl clearly distinguishes between phenomenology as the eidetic and material science of the region of pure con-

sciousness and its “applications” (*angewandte Phänomenologie*) (Hua III/1, p. 133) to other objectual and non-phenomenological domains.²²

To put it bluntly: (a) exclusion, (b) opening up of a new “theme” (and assumption of the relevant attitude), (c) re-inclusion of (a) into (b). As a consequence, and given the “structural” analogy that was emphasized above, the same should hold true of the eidetic reduction.

Let consider the following excerpt from §34, dedicated to the essence of consciousness as a theme of eidetic investigation:

We therefore effect exemplarily [*exemplarisch*] any single conscious lived-experience whatever and take them as they themselves are given to us in the natural attitude, as real human facts; or else we presentify them to ourselves in memory or in freely inventive phantasy. Based on such exemplars ... we seize upon and fix, in an adequate ideation, the pure essence that interests us (Hua III/1, pp. 69–70).

As the passage clearly maintains, we are still in the natural attitude, which basically means that the conceptual distinction at hand is that between *facts* and *essences*. This being recognized, we firmly believe that the argument should be broken down as follows:

- (A) A singular *Erlebnis* is “effected” (*Wir vollziehen...*) or presentified (whether by remembering or phantasy).
- (B) The *Erlebnis* in question is then assumed as an “exemplar” (*exemplarisch*). Hence,
- (C) Based upon such an exemplar, the relevant “pure essence” is seized upon and scientifically fixed.²³

In §66, Husserl affirms, once again, that, “in phenomenology, which is nothing else but a theory of essences by pure intuition, we perform acts of seeing essences immediately in given exemplars of transcendently pure consciousness” (Hua III/1, p. 139).

Yet, the sequence (A) + (B) + (C) does not perfectly match the previous sequence (a) + (b) + (c), for no re-inclusion of what has been previously excluded seems to take place in this case. Moreover, we believe that (A) and (B) should be combined together so as to represent just one single step; it is not the case, in fact, that we *first* take an individual fact and *then* we assume it as an exemplar: indeed, from within the eidetic attitude, facts (whether directly offered in perception or barely imagined) are directly assumed *exemplarily*. Or, better said, the taking up of the attitude means

²² Needless to say, the “re-inclusion” can obtain thanks to the eidetic investigation of consciousness and its structures, notably the noetic-noematic “correlation,” which is what makes the “application” of phenomenology actually possible: for, whatever is re-included is re-included precisely by virtue of its being a noematic pole of correlation. Accordingly, it falls outside the actual scope of the method of “transcendental reduction,” the goal of which is exclusively to lead us to (b).

²³ The next chapter will elaborate on the difference between (B) and (C) in terms of the different propositional modes of referring oneself to them, which Husserl dubs “eidetic judging” and “judging about pure essences *per se*”).

the assumption of the fact as an exemplar: this being the methodological step that Husserl labels *eidetic exclusion*.

(A + B) A given individual lived-experience (whether perceived or merely imagined) is eidetically excluded, i.e., “bracketed,” as an individual existence, hence assumed as an exemplar.

(C) Based on the given exemplar, a relevant pure essence is brought to consciousness and thus submitted *per se* to scientific investigation.

In this case, even if we have managed to narrow the previous “threefold” sequence down to only two methodological steps, there still lacks what would correspond to the so-called “re-inclusion” (c). Can we still really speak of a “re-inclusion” of what has been excluded, namely, the individual “existence” itself? More than “re-inclusion,” one could say “application.” In other words: if in the case of the transcendental reduction can one speak of a re-inclusion of what is excluded as a correlate of consciousness, when it comes to the eidetic reduction (or to the eidetic method in general) there occurs an *application* of the essential truths spelled out and established at (C) to the previously excluded “existence” (Hua III/1, p. 19).

(D) “Application” of a relevant eidetic law to the previously excluded individual existence.

As was already the case with the transcendental reduction, the label *eidetic reduction* can be used to actually mean the totality of the process (A) + (B) + (C), i.e., both the operation of bringing essences to intuition (C) and the “eidetic exclusion,” viz., the preliminary exclusion of whatever is characterized in terms of existence (A + B). But the turn of phrase “eidetic reduction” can be also used—in a strict sense—to express solely (C). One could then resort to the conceptual distinctions worked out in the previous paragraph and thus maintain that, while (C) is or represents the “dominant” action, (A) + (B) stands in a “subordinate” function working at its service: “the unity of a goal” runs through all the actions, and the one of taking an individual existence as an *exemplar* works at the service of the apprehension of the relevant essence (Husserl retrieves the term *ideation* for this act of intuition), which thereby becomes the relevant theme or thematic universe (what in the 1910–1911 lectures Husserl refers to as the disclosure of a corresponding world of ideas).

As should be clear by now, the “eidetic reduction” does not really represent a further “stage” with respect to the previous two. Quite the opposite: it is a methodological tool that Husserl introduces in order to set up a parallel between the taking up of the transcendental attitude and the a priori or eidetic attitude. Thus, whosoever is intent on conducting an eidetic investigation must first adopt a new attitude by excluding any and all positions of existence (which Husserl now calls “eidetic exclusion”); the individual, looked at as an *exemplar*, serves as the basis on which a pure essence or *eidos* can become an “object” (which Husserl now calls “eidetic

reduction” in the proper sense of the term), i.e., *the subject of a series of possible true statements and predications*.²⁴

One more question bearing upon the relation between this chapter and the previous one should be posed before we move on to a more systematic discussion of the first volume of *Ideen*: Is there any *one-to-one* sort of correspondence between the vicissitudes of the notions of species, idea, and essence (see Sect. 2) and what we just proposed as the development of Husserl’s methodology broadly speaking? This is not an easy question to answer, though we would be inclined to answer it in the negative: it does not seem to be the case that the vicissitudes of the “ideal” language *goes hand in hand* with the development of the methodology. Nevertheless, some analogies can be identified:

- It is around 1906 that Husserl starts distinguishing three different meanings of the German term *Wesen*.
- It is around 1909–1910 that the *idea* comes to be relied on only to designate the “universal essence” and that the notion of the a priori or eidetic attitude (the corresponding theme of which is a world of ideas, or a plurality of worlds of ideas) is first submitted to systematic investigation.
- It is around 1912 that Husserl brings in the *eidōs* and also becomes aware of the necessity of introducing the method of eidetic reduction as an analogue of transcendental reduction.

Nevertheless, we should never lose of sight of how stratified the “process” highlighted on page 123, was where five different stages were distinguished. Only to some of these stages, not to all of them, does there appear to correspond a specific development of the relevant methodological apparatus and language.

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²⁴(D), the “application” of the eidetic findings to what has been excluded, is being left out of the account because it will be more extensively and systematically tackled over the course of the next two chapters.

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Part V
Essence, Pure Essence, *Eidos*. The Doctrine
of the A Priori in *Ideas I*



After elaborating Husserl's stance in the *LU*, systematically following the vicissitudes of both his conceptuality and terminology over the years that led to the release of *Ideen I*, we can approach his 1913 masterpiece. In particular, we will be paying close attention to one chapter of the book above all others, namely, the first chapter of the first section (§§1–17), which is dedicated to the distinction between *fact* and *essence*: “The sign above Plato's *Academy* allegedly read: ‘Let no one ignorant of geometry enter herein.’ The sign put above the entrance of Husserl's ‘pure phenomenology and phenomenological philosophy’ reads instead: ‘*Fact and Essence*—or: let no one ignorant of formal ontology enter herein.’”¹ *Fact* and *essence* represent indeed the double door through which the reader of *Ideen I* must necessarily pass. However, the reason for this is not merely factual, i.e., due to their being the first theme *de facto* addressed by Husserl in the book: the more profound reason consists in this chapter providing the formal-ontological toolbox, the grounding, so to speak, only on the basis of which one can understand what eidetic sciences in general are. Moreover, and as one can also easily imagine, it is in this chapter that the doctrine of the *a priori* receives its systematic presentation and all our findings to this point are confirmed, systematized, and further elaborated.

Our discussion will be divided into three main sections, each of which corresponds to one of the three parts in which chapter one of *Ideen I* can itself be ideally divided.

- §§1–6: This portion is mainly concerned with the introduction of the *eidos* (and *reines Wesen*) but also with the justification and legitimization of its status as a new sort of “object” (*Gegenstand*) (which will be discussed in Sects. 1, 2, and 3).
- §§7–10: The idea of “science” is brought in and the major preoccupation becomes the distinction between factual and eidetic sciences in general (including a series of related problems and notions, such as “region,” “category,” and “regional eidetics”) (to be tackled in chapter “The Function of Eidetic Sciences”).

¹ Majolino (2015, p. 33).

- §§11–16: Husserl systematically tackles concepts such as independent and non-independent objects, *tode ti*, *individuum*, etc.: the goal is to provide the reader with all the fundamental formal-ontological tools necessary to understand what a “region” rigorously is and—correlatively—in what material ontologies properly consist (to be extensively discussed in chapter “Τόδε τι, Individuum, Region”).

From the issue of “eidetic knowledge” via “eidetic science” up to the concept of “material ontology”: such is the long trajectory of the first chapter of *Ideen I*.

This being announced, the goal of the present chapter is twofold. On the one hand, it will confirm and systematize some of our “findings” (for, *Ideen I* represents the end-station of the vicissitudes that we so meticulously followed and reconstructed in chapter “Essence, Idea, and the A Priori After the *Logical Investigations*”); on the other hand, however, it will contribute to opening up a new “path” which will lead to the problem of “rationalization,” now construed as the very and most proper function of eidetic sciences.

1 A New Sort of Object

The opening paragraph of the chapter quickly elaborates on the notion of “world” understood as “the sum-total of objects of possible experience and experiential knowledge” (Hua III/1, p. 11). Quite similarly to what was argued in the 1910–1911 lectures, the so-called sciences of the world are said to be “sciences in the natural attitude” because for them “the concepts ‘true being,’ ‘actual being,’ that is to say, real being and—since everything real joins together to make up the unity of the world—‘being in the world’ coincide” (Hua III/1, p. 10). It is important to point out that, right from the start, the issue Husserl is grappling with is that of *Begründung*, i.e., the problem of justification or foundation of (scientific) statements: “To each science there corresponds an object-province as the domain of its investigation; and to all its knowledge, i.e., here to all its correct statements, there corresponds, as a primal source of the grounding [*Begründung*] validating their legitimacy, certain intuitions in which objects belonging to the province become themselves-given as existent” (Hua III/1, pp. 10–11). Although only *per viam negationis*, this passage lays out the general coordinates within which Husserl will be proceeding in the following paragraphs: the issue is that of the *validation* (*Begründung*)—through the *givenness* of relevant *objectualities* belonging to a specific *domain* (*Gebiet*)—of all the *propositions* of which a *science* consists. *Science* and *valid statements*; *domain* and *objects*; *validation* or even *foundation* and *intuition*²: such is the battery of

² See for example §4 (Hua III/1, p. 17) on *Setzung*, *Begründung* and *begründende Unterlagen*; §7 (Hua III/1, p. 21) on *die Funktion der Begründung* and *letztbegründende Akt*; §10 (Hua III/1, p. 42) on the *Erkenntnisbegründung* in relation to empiricism and the question of whether only “experience” can play such a function; finally, see §51 on the famous principle of all principles, described

“interrelated” terms and concepts upon which Husserl will be systematically drawing in order to introduce the idea of a new material and eidetic science called “phenomenology.” We said *per viam negationis*, though. Why? Because, when it comes to the “sciences of the world,” the dominant equivalence is “true being” = “actual or real being”; accordingly, the objects in question belong to the domain of reality and the foundation or validation of the propositions at hand amounts to actually perceiving them against the backdrop of the one and only “real” world.

Not surprisingly, Husserl’s effort will be directed toward breaking that equivalence in order to show that not every true being is an actual being, that not every object belongs to the domain of reality and actuality, and that not every validation or foundation takes place by means of that specific form of intuition labeled perception. In order to do so, Husserl will proceed as follows. First, he will argue for the necessity of the talk of “essence” (and *eidōs*) (§2). He will then make the case for identifying a specific mode of intuition corresponding to it (§3). Following from this, §§4–5 are dedicated to distinguishing different modes of predicatively referring to the essence. Finally, §6 will explain in what sense, and to what extent, one can speak of “universality” and “necessity” in reference to eidetic knowledge. Let us start off with the arguments set forward in §2.

As the title suggests, §2 bases its arguments on what Husserl calls the “inseparability of matters of fact and essence.” After he stresses that “individual being of every sort” is merely “contingent,” meaning that it could always be otherwise, Husserl goes on to draw the following conclusion:

When we said that any matter of fact, “in respect of its own essence,” could be otherwise, we were already saying that *it belongs to the sense of anything contingent to have an essence and thereby [und somit] an eidōs to be apprehended purely*; and that this *eidōs* comes under *eidetic truths belonging to different levels of universality*. An individual object is not merely something individual, a this-here!, something never repeatable; it “*has in itself*” so and so a qualified *specific character* [*so und so beschaffener seine Eigenart*], its stocks of *essential* predicables, which must belong to it (as “an entity according to the way in which it is in itself” [*als Seiendem, wie er in sich selbst ist*]), if other, secondary, relative determination can belong to it (Hua III/1, pp. 12–13).

The passage needs to be carefully unpacked and broken down, because it builds upon the distinction between three crucial notions: (i) individual being as a *this-here*, (ii) essence (*Wesen*), and (iii) *eidōs*. As Husserl asserts, if anything contingent has an *eidōs* to be apprehended directly, it is because it has an essence in the first place. Husserl’s grammar is unequivocal: “...and therefore or thereby an *eidōs*.” The two concepts (*Wesen* and *eidōs*) need not be identified: for, it is the *eidōs*—not the *essence*—that “comes under *eidetic truths belonging to different levels of universality*.”

What, then, is an essence, if it is not to be conflated with the concept of *eidōs*? Husserl’s answer is pretty straightforward: it is the “specific character” and “constitution” (*Eigenart*), the “stock” or set of predicates or predicables belonging to such

as a *Prinzip der Begründung* (Hua III/1, p. 51).

and such an individual object as it is in itself.³ In other words, precisely because individual beings are not merely a series of anonymous *this-heres* deprived of inner qualifications, precisely because they are always *in such and such a way*, precisely because they always have an “essence” in this sense of the term—for all of these reasons (...und somit...), they also have an *eidos*. An individual being is not a bare *this-here*; rather, it is an entity characterized in such and such a way: the system of predicates that makes up the “...in such and such a way...” of the individual object being precisely what the so-called “essence” signifies.⁴

(*Essence.I*): An essence is the stock or set of predicates pertaining to an “individual object” as an entity that is in such and such a way.

(*Eidos.I*): It comes under “truths” belonging to “different levels of universality.”⁵

³ Majolino (2015, p. 37). This point is astutely averred by Stein (1962, pp. 70–71).

⁴ “Essences are the ‘ontic’ universals corresponding to the semantic universals that—as concepts—make up propositions. They are therefore the universals that we are dealing with if we are directed toward objects and use concepts in projecting states of affairs. For example, we are dealing with the verbal universals that is expressed by the concept ‘to sleep’ when we say or simply see that Peter is sleeping. What we primarily have in mind, then, is not a proposition or a concept, but a state of affairs and an essence that is a constitutive part of it” (Sowa 2012, p. 262). It must be pointed out, however, that, no matter how illuminating and useful Sowa’s attempt at providing a sort of “Fregean” reading of both the notion of essence and state of affairs (understood as functions and states-of-affairs-functions) may be, it seems to intentionally underplay the “intuitive” dimension of the Husserlian discourse.

⁵ As we should remember from Sect. 2, Husserl recognized in his 1909–1910 lectures that the ideas of the “lowest level” or degree belong to the sphere of the *ἄπειρον*, the sphere of the “indefinite” or “unlimited,” i.e., “what cannot be determined scientifically” (*das wissenschaftlich nicht Bestimmbare*) (Hua-Mat VII, pp. 87–88). In §75 of *Ideen*, the same point will be reasserted once again with regard to phenomenology as a descriptive doctrine of pure *Erlebnisse*: “Consciousness in general has the peculiarity of fluctuating [*Fluktuieren*] in a way that elapses according to various dimensions, so that there can be no talk of conceptually securing any eidetic concrete or inherent aspects immediately constituting them. Let us take, for instance, a lived-experience of the genus ‘phantasy of a thing,’ just as it is given to us, regardless of whether it is in a phenomenologically immanent perception or some other (always reduced) intuition. ... Phenomenology lets *only the individuation* fall to the side while it elevates into eidetic consciousness the entire essential content in the fullness of its concreteness and takes it as an ideally-identical essence that, like any essence, could be individualized, not only *hic et nunc* but in countless exemplars. One sees without any further ado that there can be no thought of conceptually and terminologically *securing* this or any such flowing *concretum* and that the same holds for each of its immediate flowing parts and abstract inherent moments. While there is the no talk of a universal determination of *eidetic singularities* in our descriptive sphere, matters are completely different when it comes to the essences of *higher levels of specificity*. They are capable of being firmly differentiated, steadily identified, grasped in a rigorous conceptual way, and likewise analyzed into component essences. It keeping with all this, it is necessary and meaningful to pose for them the tasks of a comprehensive scientific description. Thus, we describe and, by this means, determine in *rigorous* concepts the essence of perception in general, in accord to its genus, or of subordinate kind, such as perception of physical things in general, of animal essences and the like. We do this also for memory in general, empathy in general, willing in general, and so on and so forth. But prior to them are the supreme universalities, lived-experience in general, *cogitatio* in general, that already make possible comprehensive essential descriptions” (Hua III/1, pp. 156–157). See also Hua V, p. 41.

In contrast to the *eidos*, what Husserl calls essence characterizes such and such a contingent being or “individual being of any sort”⁶ (for further clarification, see chapter “Τόδε τι, Individuum, Region”).

This being preliminarily acknowledged, let us pause for a second to recall what Jean Hering writes in his booklet *Bemerkungen über das Wesen, die Wesenheit und die Idee*. This essay—based upon his dissertation project on R. H. Lotze and composed between 1909 and 1914—was published only in 1921 in the phenomenological *Jahrbuch* and is an important textual testimony to the state of affairs in Göttingen right before and during the period in which *Ideen* was composed.⁷ It will soon be apparent that the way in which Hering defines the concept of “essence” at the very beginning of his investigation will strongly corroborate our reading of §2 of *Ideen I*.

Hering’s concern, as he puts it at the very beginning of the first section of the essay, is how to account for the “essence” of any “individual” object whatsoever, be it real or ideal, be it an individual red rose, the politics of Cardinal Richelieu, or the essence of Christianity. (For the sake of our problems here, we will limit ourselves to a few remarks bearing upon the notion of *Wesen*, thus setting aside all the other issues involved in Hering’s assessment).

Hering would agree with Husserl’s claim that any individual object “has its own specific character ... which must belong to it ... if other, secondary, contingent determinations can belong to it.” This is what Hering labels the “fundamental principle [*Hauptsatz*] of the essence,” which he frames as follows: “Every object... has one and only one essence, which—as its own essence—makes up the fullness of its constituting specificity.” By the same token, “Every essence is by its nature the essence of something, namely, the essence of this something and of nothing else” (Hering 1921, p. 497). Instead of the demonstrative: “...of *this* something,” the original version reads: “the essence of a completely determined individual something;” and the principle of the essence affirms that: the essence “determines the full constitution of the entity all the way to its individuality” (Hering 1914, p. 165). The essence is always the essence of an individual object and is therefore always an individual essence.⁸ Let us recall Hering’s example: of two different yet completely similar “red roses,” each one possesses its “own” essence; that is to say, despite their

⁶As, for example, Jean Hering remarks, aligning himself perfectly with Husserl: there cannot be an essence that is not the essence of something individual (*Wesen von a*) and determined (*voll bestimmt*) (Hering 1921, pp. 497–498). For a general discussion, see also Ferrari (2001), especially pp. 62–72 on eidetic intuition. For the record, we do not agree with Ferrari’s account, most notably with the diagram he offers on p. 64, where a comparative analysis is provided bearing on Husserl, Hering, and Josef Seifert. For example, Ferrari does not seem to recognize the equivocal nature of the German term *Wesen*, nor does he seem to distinguish between the three different meanings so carefully singled out by Husserl (universal, individual, empirical essence). A systematic assessment of the notion of “empirical essence” can be found in the monumental Seifert (1996), notably in Chapter I (“*Was ist Wesen?*”).

⁷Hering himself relates in a footnote to the introduction to his short essay that his thoughts about the subject matter arose from discussions in Husserl’s seminars and Reinach’s that he attended in 1913. For a more detailed discussion of these problems, see De Santis (2016, pp. 145–148).

⁸For a discussion of Hering’s dissertation, see De Santis (2021).

both being “red roses,” the essence of the one is not the essence of the other. The essence is what Hering labels *being-thus* (*So-Sein*) or, in a more Aristotelian vein, *poion einai*: “The individual features of the being-thus (*poion einai*) are thereby features of its essence.”⁹ To better understand Hering’s assessment of the notion of essence, the following distinctions must be kept in mind.

- (a) Hering’s concept of *poion einai* or of being-thus does not include the Aristotelian categories of *pou* and *pote einai* (“where” and “when” [*Categories*, 1b 25]) nor the *poiein kai paskhein* (“action and affection” [11b 1–5]). The essence of a human being includes its being a rational being; the act of sitting on a couch and eating right now does not belong to its essence.
- (b) Among all such “features” (*Züge*) not belonging to the essence, it is necessary to make a sharp distinction between those features that are “completely contingent” or “accidental” and those which, despite their not belonging to the essence, nevertheless derive from it. As Hering himself explains: “From the essence of a sphere with a diameter of 1 meter follows with absolute necessity its being smaller in comparison with every cube whose edge is 1 meter long, but this does not belong to its essence; for its essence is what it is, whether there are other bodies.” Even though its being smaller does not at all belong to the sphere’s own essence or being-thus, it necessarily “derives” or follows from its *So-Sein* (i.e., from its having “a diameter of 1 meter”). By contrast, that very same sphere’s being on my table on such and such a date (*pou einai* and *pote einai*) is something accidental. Or, to consider Hering’s own leading example, that Konrad Gessner was the first poet in German poetry to employ the hexameter is something “contingent” and external to its essence. On the contrary, that the hexameter was mostly employed in epic poetry rather than in lyric poetry is something that, although not belonging to its essence, follows essentially from it. As a consequence, the distinction between “belonging to the essence-not belonging to the essence” (*zum Wesen gehörig-nicht zu ihm gehörig*) cuts across, and is not tantamount to the one between “essential-contingent” (*wesentlich-zufällig*). The aforementioned examples present us with two essential features (“being smaller in comparison with every cube whose edge is 1 meter long”; “being used in epic poetry”) which, albeit not belonging to the essence, are not at all contingent.¹⁰

Let us stop here, for this should suffice to convince us that the way in which Hering understands the concept of essence (*Wesen*) is in accord with Husserl’s¹¹: the

⁹Hering (1921, pp. 496–497).

¹⁰Hering (1921, pp. 499–500). On this aspect, see De Santis (2016, pp. 163–165). Husserl himself acknowledges the correspondence between his view and Hering’s when he equates the latter’s concept of *Merkmal* with his notion of *Eigenschaft* (Hua XLI, p. 84; Ms. A III/1: 9a)—understood as the property of an empirically given individual object in opposition to *Beschaffenheit* (Hua-Mat VI, p. 108).

¹¹This assertion finds further confirmation in Ingarden (1925, pp. 168–169) (footnote). Hering himself refers to the first pages of *Ideen I*, yet without explicitly mentioning the text (see Hering

essence being always something individual, that is, the essence of such and such an individual being (the essence of *this* individual is different from the essence of *that* individual, even though they are both “red roses”).¹²

As a further confirmation of all of this, let us remind ourselves that, in his 1926 *Phénoménologie et philosophie religieuse*, Hering will retrieve the discussion of the concept of essence by stressing that the latter primarily means essence of an empirical object (“*tout événement ou objet empirique a son essence*”) and is to be understood as the sum total of the object’s own characteristic traits (“*un ensemble d’éléments caractéristiques*”). This is why Hering now explicitly refers to it as “empirical essence” or *essence empirique* (also identified with the *Wesen von...* of the 1921 booklet).¹³

This being said, let us return to Husserl’s text and ask ourselves: how can the difference between essence and *eidōs* be further characterized?

At first “essence” designates what is to be found in the very own being of an individuum as its *what* [*als sein Was*]. Any such what, however, can be “put into an idea.” *Experiencing or individual intuition* can be turned into *intuition of essence (ideation)*—a possibility, which is itself to be understood not as empirical, but as an essential one. What is seen when that takes place is the corresponding *pure* essence or *eidōs* (Hua III/1, p. 13).

1921, p. 497). Let us also add that in his notes on Hering, Husserl distinguishes “essence” and “total essence” (*Gesamtwesen*): the former is called “defining essence” (which characterizes the object to the extent that it falls under a “region”), whereas the latter also includes what derives from the object’s relation to other objects. Yet, such a distinction does not correspond to the one between what is “essential” and what is “non-essential”: for, the latter phrase refers to what is altogether “external” to the essence (Hua XLI, p. 85).

¹²Accordingly, it is inaccurate if not utterly incorrect to say that Husserl, unlike Hering, equates *eidōs* and *Wesen*: for, not only does Husserl distinguish between the two, he employs the notion of *Wesen* in the same way as Hering (we are referring critically to the otherwise important reading by Ales Bello (1995, p. 43)) Actually, it the other way around: Hering speaks of *Wesen* in the same sense as Husserl (and the first chapter of the *Bemerkungen* makes in fact several references to *Ideen I*). As a consequence, claiming—with reference to Hering (and Reinach) and hence *contra* Husserl—that “the proposal of individual essences runs contrary the task of phenomenology as a rigorous science, as it precludes the possibility of general knowledge” (Baltzer-Jaray 2016, p. 125) ignores both that Husserl himself primarily construes *Wesen* as “individual essences” and that the latter represent the unavoidable starting point in order for a general form of knowledge to be successfully attained: the problem is thus to carefully distinguish all the methodological steps leading us from the individual essence to the apprehension of *eide*. Were there no essence, then for Husserl it would be impossible to even speak of *eide*. More generally, any attempt at drawing a “line” between Husserl and the purported “realist” phenomenologists (whose alleged leader would have been Reinach) based on “formal-ontological” arguments (i.e., arguments that bear on notions such as essence and *eidōs*), is not only bound to fail (for, “formal ontology” does not decide on matters of realism and idealism); it also misses one major aspect in particular: the distinction between the two forms of “rationality” that we have tried so carefully to distinguish. For, we either tackle the issue from the “transcendental” standpoint, but then no formal-ontological claim (i.e., claims bearing for example on the concept of individual essence) can be brought in, or we take a formal-ontological stance, but then there is no way a decision can be made bearing on the idealism-realism controversy.

¹³Hering (1926, p. 111).

The distinction between what essence designates *at first* (*zunächst*), that is, before the intuition of essence, and what it stands for *afterwards*, is unequivocal: before the “turn,” so to speak, essence means *the what* of an *individuum* (we will soon see what Husserl means by this term).¹⁴

In other words, the terminological difference between *essence*, on the one hand, and *pure essence* and *eidos*, on the other, is tantamount to the difference between *empirical intuition* and *intuition of essence*. Just as the essence is what is given to “individual” or “empirical” intuition, in such a way corresponding to what we refer to as “empirical essence,” so do pure essence and *eidos* designate what is given to an intuition of essence.¹⁵ As Husserl remarks: “*The essence (eidos) is a new sort of object. Just as what is given to individual or experiencing intuition is an individual object, so what is given to the intuition of essence is a pure essence*” (Hua III/1, p. 14). No matter how paradoxical it may sound, what is given to an intuition of essence is not, properly speaking, an *essence* (*Wesen*), but a pure essence or *eidos*.¹⁶ There occurs perfect analogy between the two forms of “intuition” and their “objects.” So far, so good. But what is an *object* in this context?

Not merely an external analogy but a radical community is present here. *The intuition of essence is also precisely an intuition*, just as an eidetic object is precisely an object. The universalization of the correlatively interrelated concepts “intuition” and “object” is not an arbitrary conceit, but compellingly demanded by the nature of the issues in question. Empirical intuition or, specifically, experience, is consciousness of an individual object; and as an intuitive consciousness “it brings the object to givenness” ... In the same way, the intuition of essence is consciousness of something, of an “object,” something to which the intuitional regard is directed and which is “itself given” in the intuition. It is something which can, however, be “represented” in other acts as well, something that can be thought of vaguely and distinctly—just like any other “object” in the necessarily broadened sense proper to formal logic. Any possible object—logically speaking, “any subject of possible true predications”—has, prior to all predicative thinking, precisely *its* mode of becoming the object of a representing, an intuiting regard that perhaps reaches in it its “presence in person,” and that “seizes upon” it. Seeing an essence is therefore intuition (Hua III/1, p. 15).

¹⁴ Just like in Hering’s concept of essence, here, too, what is at stake is both the *Was* and the *Wie*, “what” and “how” an individual entity is. This aspect is stressed by Schmücker (1958, p. 40).

¹⁵ Only if we do not distinguish the *essence* from *pure essence* and *eidos* do we end up making the mistake of believing that “just as what is given in empirical perception is an individual, so what is given in essential intuition is an essence” (see Mohanty 1959, p. 222). Generally speaking, most of Mohanty’s arguments in this essay are affected by the lack of distinction between essence and pure essence or *eidos*; consider the following statement: “Husserl is not telling us that what we perceive in an individual fact are essences, as they are according to critical realists like Santayana. If that were Husserl’s opinion, that is to say, if he held that every ‘what’ of an individual fact *as* given in the mode in which the individual fact itself is given were a universal or an essence, then it would be difficult to explain why he should have followed up the above account with the statement: ‘Jedes solches Wesen kann aber ‘in Idee gesetzt’ werden’” (p. 224).

¹⁶ A difficulty may then appear because after he distinguishes between essence, on the one hand, and pure essence or *eidos* on the other, Husserl keeps speaking of “essence” to actually mean “pure essence.”

We are already familiar with Husserl's definition of "object": an "object" being, in the formal-ontological language that he himself employs here, "any subject of possible true predications." As a consequence, and in perfect compliance with *Ideation.6* and *Ideation.7* (see Sect. 8.1), the "intuition of essence" is to be deemed of categorial nature, namely, an act intending its object ("pure essence" or *eidos*) as part of a state of affairs. In contrast to Paul Ricoeur, who sees the intuition of essence as "the crucial notion of this chapter" (see Husserl 1950, p. 19, footnote) we believe that the formal-ontological notion of "object" plays the more pivotal role; for, it is the concept of *object*, as a subject of possible true predications, that allows for the appraisal of the relevant act of intuition as a "categorial" one. Accordingly, the "correlate" of the intuition of essence is to be better described as an "essential state of affairs."¹⁷ What kind of act is an "intuition of essence"? As we can already guess, it is a *founded* act, which necessarily builds upon something else.

Certainly, its own specific character is such that intuition of essence has as its basis a principal part of intuition of something individual, namely, an appearing, sightedness of something individual ... Certainly, in consequence of that, no intuition of essence is possible without the free possibility of turning one's regard to a "corresponding" individual and forming a consciousness of something exemplar [*Bildung eines exemplarischen Bewußtseins*]¹⁸—just as, conversely, no intuition of something individual is possible without the free possibility of bringing about an ideation and, in it, directing one's regard to the corresponding essence exemplified [*exemplifizierenden Wesen*] in what is individually grasped; but this in no way alters the fact that *the two sorts of intuition are essentially different* (Hua III/, p. 15).

The "founded" character of the act by means of which a pure essence or *eidos* is brought to intuition requires two different things: one, a founding act (be it the consciousness of an individual or, as we will see, of a quasi-individual), and, two, what might be considered an "in-between" operation that alone can allow us to go *from* such founding act *to* the intuitive apprehension of the *eidos*. Husserl calls the latter "exemplary consciousness" or also "consciousness of an exemplar" (*exemplarisches Bewußtseins*), and its operation a formation (*Bildung*).

In a nutshell: given the (empirical) intuition of something individual, an exemplar is formed, only on the basis of which a corresponding *eidos* can be brought to direct intuition. *Empirical intuition—formation of exemplary consciousness—intuition of essence*: such is the methodological "sequence" that Husserl has in mind and which could be roughly represented with the following diagram (Fig. 1).

¹⁷As a consequence, the attempt at understanding such a notion of *Gegenstand* based upon the Heideggerian sounding etymology of it (*Gegen-Stand*) is only misleading (see Mensch 1981, 61, who makes such a claim).

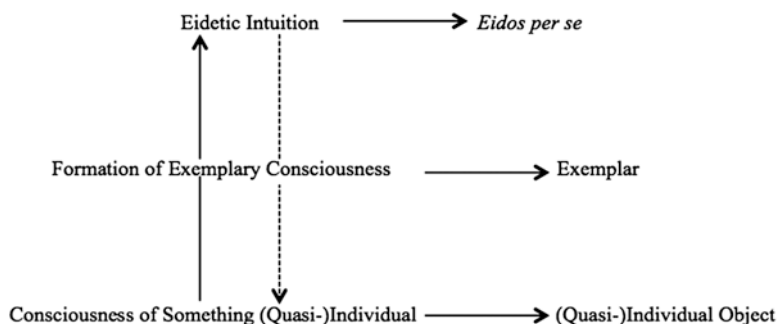


Fig. 1 Exemplary consciousness

If the upward movement is described in terms of “exemplarity” (= such and such an “individual” or quasi-individual *exemplarily* standing for such and such an *eidos*), the downward movement is characterized in terms of “exemplification”¹⁸ (= such and such an *eidos* being *exemplified* in such and such an individual or quasi-individual). As a consequence, and with respect to *Ideation.2*, the intuition of essence is “founded” in a *double* way: for, it rests upon both the original and *founding act* and the formation of an *exemplary consciousness* building on it.

As we know from the previous chapter, Husserl labels as “eidetic exclusion” the “exclusion” of the position of existence of what is assumed as an “exemplar.”¹⁹ To better elucidate what all of this means, let us quickly recall the descriptions carried out at the very beginning of §34. “We follow our universal principle,” Husserl proclaims at the outset, the one according to which “every individual occurrence has its essence, which can be seized upon in eidetic purity and, in this purity, must belong to a field of possible eidetic research” (Hua III/1, p. 69). This sentence fully confirms our view. In order for the eidetic research to be possibly carried out, the “essence” needs to first be apprehended in its purity, that is to say, as an *eidos* or *pure essence*: the adjective *purity* refers in this instance both to the pure essence’s being distinguished from the “individualized” one and to its freedom from any position of existence whatsoever.²⁰ So important is this methodological switch that Husserl designates it “our universal principle.”

Accordingly, the general natural fact “I am,” “I think,” “I have a world over against me,” and the like, has its essential content with which we shall now preoccupy ourselves exclusively. We therefore effect exemplarily any single conscious lived-experience whatever and take them as they themselves are given to us in the natural attitude, as real human facts; or else we presentify them to ourselves in memory or in freely inventive phantasy. Based on such exemplars ... we seize upon and fix, in an adequate ideation, the pure essence that interests us. In the process, the single facts, the facticity of the natural world taken universally, disappear from our theoretical gaze or regard—as they do wherever we carry out a purely eidetic research (Hua III/1, pp. 69–70).

¹⁸ It is now clear why in Sect. 2 we used *exemplifying* and *exemplarily standing for* indifferently and without making any real distinction between them.

¹⁹ As Husserl will point out in a 1926 manuscript, the *Grundfeststellung eines Apriori* requires (*bedürft*) an *expliziter* and *exemplarischer Anschauungen* (Hua XLI, p. 292).

²⁰ Majolino (2015, p. 44).

Two aspects need to be underlined. The first is the intermediary or “in-between” function played by the exemplar. In order for the eidetic researcher to preoccupy himself or herself with the essential content of what is at first encountered as single “facts,” facts of the natural world, these facts are to be effected *exemplarily*, that is, to follow the downward arrow, they are to be taken as exemplifying such and such a pure essence.²¹ The second is indicated by the turn of phrase “theoretical gaze” (*unserem theoretischen Blicke*) along with the expression *interest* (*die uns interessieren*). What is being indicated here is the switch to a new *attitude*—the a priori attitude—the only attitude within which our eidetic inquiries can be pursued.

In this specific respect, nothing could be further from the truth than the thesis that “It is part of our experience, according to Husserl, that we intuit universals”²²—for, as should be evident by now, experience only provides us with “empirical essences,” never with the so-called “universals,” not even with those of the lowest level (the “appearances” of which requires a quite stratified and multi-layered methodology, which includes the distinction between different types of attitudes²³). As a consequence, remarking—as Hedwig Conrad-Martius actually does in her short 1951 introduction to Adolf Reinach’s work—that “you either see the essence or you do not” (Conrad-Martius 1951, p. 10), with the *essence* standing for the universal essence, amounts to over-simplifying the question, thereby paving the way for all sorts of possible misunderstandings of what such purported “vision” would be like.

2 Remarks on Phantasy

Before we move on to the paragraphs grappling with the problem of “judgment,” an additional aspect warrants consideration: the role of the act of “phantasy.” As we should remember, the founding act, upon which both the “formation” of the exemplary consciousness and the actual intuition of essence build, can either be a positing (consciousness of something individual) or a non-positing (consciousness of a quasi-individual) act. §4, entitled “Intuition of Essence and Phantasy,” is quite clear

²¹ “The single datum of experience, e.g., of some ‘apprehension,’ ‘perception,’ or the like, counted throughout only as an exemplar; we always shifted immediately to the eidetic attitude and explored eidetically what belongs to the essence, the possibilities included in the essence of certain apprehensions” (Hua V, p. 21). “‘Reine’ Begriffe (apriorische) und reine apodiktische Begriffssätze können nur geltungsmäßig (in apodiktischer Geltung) geschöpft werden, so erfordert es ihre apodiktische Evidenz, aus der ‘exemplarischen’ Anschauung, so z.B. die geometrischen aus geometrischer Anschauung von einzelnen Figuren. Nun fungiert freilich diese exemplarische Anschauung, als Evidenz begründende, nicht als das Dasein des exemplarisch fungierenden Gegenstandes setzende, wenn die hier fungierende Einzelanschauung überhaupt eine Erfahrung war” (Hua XLI, p. 293).

²² Mares (2011, p. 125).

²³ See the beginning of §10, where the expression *gerichtet sein* is employed. See also Eley (1962, pp. 31–37), with whom we disagree but who nevertheless does not fail to emphasize the role of the notion of attitude (p. 38).

on the issue: “The *eidos*, the pure essence, can be exemplified for intuition in the givennesses of experience—such as those of perception, remembrance, and so forth; but it can equally well be exemplified in *the givennesses of mere phantasy*. As a consequence, to grasp an essence itself and *originarily*, we can start from corresponding experiential intuitions, *but equally well from intuitions which are non-experiencing, which do not offer any existence but are instead ‘merely imaginative’*” (Hua III/1, p. 16). This is quite plain and straightforward, as one might be inclined to say. Indeed, as we already know from *Ideation.4*, the founded act in charge of grasping the *eidos* does not depend on the nature of the founding one, and the ontological position of the universal does not depend on that of its underlying appearance (be it of a positing or non-positing character). As Husserl restates: “*Positing of and, to begin with, intuitive seeing essences implies not the slightest positing of any individual factual existence [individuellen Daseins]*” (Hua III/1, p. 17).

Now, problems arise when one recalls what Husserl emphatically asserts at the very end of §70: “Thus, if one is fond of paradoxical phrases ... one can assert in strict truth that ‘fiction’ [Fiktion] *makes up the vital element of phenomenology as well as of every other eidetic science*, that fiction is the source from which the knowledge of ‘eternal truths’ is fed” (Hua III/1, p. 148).

The issue is far more complicated than one might naïvely think. For, if it is absolutely true that in §70 Husserl himself speaks of the “privileged status of free phantasy” in such a way as to ascribe to it the crucial and pivotal “role” of which perception, on the contrary (and all the other species of positing acts), would be totally stripped, it is no less true that the actual grasping of pure essences, hence the formation of exemplars, is indifferent to the founding act upon which it rests.²⁴ If it is the case that both assertions hold true, how are we meant to reconcile them? Or, to put it otherwise: *in what, exactly, does such privilege granted to the act of phantasy as a non-positing act consist?*

That the act of phantasy (as a “non-positing” act) can be granted some sort of “privilege” when it comes to actually seeing the pure essence is a thesis to be rejected altogether.²⁵ A 1918 manuscript (*On the Theory of Intuitions and their Modes*), now published in Husserliana XXIII, makes a series of quite interesting and important remarks worth being recalled in the present context. Let us begin with a footnote on the general concept of intuition: “‘Intuiting’ is a universal title for positional and neutral acts that make us conscious of an individual in a fulfilled manner. They are either ‘actually’ intuiting acts or ‘quasi’-intuiting acts, and in both cases content is formed. But in one case we are conscious of the individual as something actual, in the other case as a fiction. In both, however, the same concrete essence can be obtained by means of ‘ideation’” (Hua XXIII, p. 504). Although the

²⁴ Hua XLI, p. 34: “*Das Allgemeinheitsbewusstsein konstituiert sich auf dem Grund eines Individualbewusstseins; es ist aber gleichgültig, ob es Wahrnehmungsbewusstsein ist oder Phantasiebewusstsein.*”

²⁵ Which seems to be the view held by Majolino (2010, p. 597): “*Eidos: ce dont seul un fictum peut être l'exemple.*”

passage does not seem to convey anything new—at least when it comes to the theme of ideation—it is important in that *positional* and *neutral acts* are placed on an equal footing, so to speak, and in no way can one talk of privilege granted to either of them. If in the former case one is confronted with an actual individualization (*Wirklichkeits-Vereinzelung*) of an *eidos* (which is thus exemplified in such and such a perceptual, hence “actual,” givenness), in the latter there obtains what Husserl calls possible individualization (*Möglichkeits-Vereinzelung*) (the *eidos* being exemplified in such and such a *Fiktum* as a possible among others). What we face in both cases is an “individualization,” namely, an individual case: it is only by switching to what Husserl calls *exemplar attitude*, or *attitude focused on the exemplar* (*exemplarische Einstellung*), that “the same essence as ‘something universal’ can be drawn from both through eidetic intuition” (Hua XXIII, p. 508). What is given to phantasy is always and exclusively an “individual essence,” but in the *quasi-mode* (*Das individuelle Wesen ist im Phantasieren quasi gegeben*) (Hua XXIII, p. 500).

Of course, if we focus on phantasy as a “non-positing” act, then a methodological privilege can absolutely be conceded; yet, this “privilege” would not concern the actual grasping of *eide* (for, this latter is indifferent as to the nature of the founding act), but the methodological “step” that we have identified with the so-called “eidetic exclusion of individual existence.” In fact, by broadly holding phantasy “as the *neutrality modification* of ‘positing’ presentification” (Hua III/1, p. 250), it might be asserted that the quasi-individual offered by it is already freed of any position of existence. If this is the case, then such preliminary methodological privilege, which would grant the act of phantasy a sort of primacy over perception, bears on the passage *from* the grasping of individual existences *to* their exclusion and the formation of an exemplary consciousness. In this respect, phantasy—and its non-positing character—really makes the eidetic enterprise, namely, the “entering” into the *a priori* attitude on the part of the eidetic researcher, a much easier task.²⁶

But this is not what Husserl has mind when referring to the “privilege of pure phantasy.” What does he have in mind, then? What do we mean when we talk about such privilege? “There are reasons by virtue of which in phenomenology, as in all other eidetic sciences, presentifications and, more precisely, *free phantasies* acquire a *position of primacy over perceptions*” (Hua III/1, p. 147).

²⁶The 1925 psychology lectures systematically elaborate on this specific point: “I can in phantasy imagine the brown bench as painted green; then it remains an individual entity in this lecture hall, only imagined as changed. But I can as it were transform each and every fact into a fiction in free arbitrariness. I can imagine as a pure fiction a bench with a mermaid sitting on it, in no place and no time, free from all weight of actuality, free from any restriction to the factual world. Instead of preferring the factual world by placing myself on the ground of its factual acceptance; instead of finding every instance of imagining it other than it is a nullity in connection with its existence and in conflict with its empirical nexus—I can instead let every fictional transformation stand as equal to it and let it itself stand only as one possibility next to other possibilities. *By doing so, I abandon the ground of its acceptance and put my experiential acceptance of it out of play, so to speak [emphasis added]*” (Hua IX, p. 71).

What are these alleged reasons? The paradigmatic example comes from an already existing and well-established “eidetic” and material science, namely, geometry:

In his investigative thinking the geometer operates on the figure or model incomparably more in phantasy than in perception ... In phantasy, to be sure, he must take an effort to obtain clear intuitions from which he is exempted by the sketch or model. But in actually sketching and constructing a model he is restricted; in phantasy he has incomparably more freedom reshaping at will the figures feigned [*der fingierten Figuren*], and in running through continuously modified possible shapings, thus in producing or generating an immense number of new formations [*Erzeugung einer Unzahl neuer Gebilde*] (Hua III/1, p. 147).

This passage makes it very clear in what the purported “privilege” of phantasy consists: it consists in the incomparable freedom—the *incomparably greater freedom*—that the eidetic investigator (in this case, the geometer) has in reshaping at will the figures on which he or she is working. Nevertheless, as the second sentence quite explicitly puts it, such privilege goes hand in hand with what might be called a sort of “deficiency” affecting phantasy (as well as any sort of presentifying act): namely, the difficulty of obtaining “clear intuitions.” As in fact Husserl himself had already recognized at the outset of §70: “*Originally offering* [originärgebende] *perception* in general and, in particular, external perception, has its primacies over all kinds of presentifications ... External perception has its perfect clarity with respect to all the objectual moments that are actually given in it in the mode of originariness” (Hua III/1, p. 146). If *perception* has *primacy* over *phantasy* (and presentifications in general) when it comes to the *clarity* of its *givennesses* (see Hua V, p. 54),²⁷ *phantasy* turns out to be superior to *perception* due to its *freedom* in *shaping* and *reshaping* the formations on which we work (Hua V, pp. 32, 51).

Of course, the same holds true of that new eidetic and material science called phenomenology:

In its most universal features, the situation is no different for the phenomenologist who deals with reduced lived-experiences and their eidetically necessary correlates. There are also infinitely many eidetic phenomenological formations [*Wesensgestaltungen*]. He or she too can use the resources of originary givenness only to a limited extent ... Insofar as the most universal essences are concerned, in the sphere of originariness he has at his command in the same way exemplars of judging, deemings likely, feelings, and willings. However, of course, he or she does not have exemplars for all possible particular formations any more than the geometer has sketches or model at his or her disposal for the infinitely many kinds of solids. Here, in any case, the freedom of eidetic research also necessarily demands operating in phantasy (Hua III/1, pp. 147–148).

The free re-shaping of phantasy-givennesses: this is what the eidetic researcher (be it a geometer, a pure psychologist, or a phenomenologist) recognizes as phantasy’s chief, and to a certain extent its indispensable, contribution to any eidetic inquiry. As a matter of fact, Husserl seems to think of the “ideal” situation as includ-

²⁷ “Only in a clarifying intuition can it become apparent to us, through a purely expressive fitting of the word-meaning, the logical one, to the essence given in the intuition, whether the expression with its sense actually fits onto that which is unclearly meant” (Hua V, p. 87; see also Hua-Mat IX, p. 27, where this procedure is linked to the Socratic method).

ing both acts; in other words, the ideal situation is the one in which the eidetic researcher relies on both perception (as a presenting act) and phantasy (as a presentation), continuously moving back and forth between the two so as to take advantage of both the “clarify” of what can be perceptually offered and the “freedom” that only phantasy can grant us in exploring all the possible eidetic formations.

3 Universality and Necessity

Moving on now to §5, the major distinction Husserl works with is that between *judging on essences and essential states of affairs* and *eidetic judging* (Hua III/1, p. 17), and only the former—as he hastens to also point out—have essences as “*the objects-about-which*.” “it is a matter of the difference between judgments *on* essences and judgments that, in an indeterminately universal manner and without admixture of positings of the individual, nevertheless judge in the mode *in general* [Überhaupt] *about the individual, although purely as a singular case of the essences* als Einzelheit der Wesen” (Hua III/1, p. 17). Examples of the former are:

- (i) “The ‘triangle’ (as such) has three sides”
- (ii) “The ‘transcendent perception’ (as such) offers its object in perspective”

Examples of the latter are:

- (i’) “Every triangle has three sides” (Überhaupt)
- (ii’) “Every transcendent perceptions offers its objects in perspective”²⁸ (Überhaupt)

As Husserl explains, in pure geometry, we do not usually judge on the *eidos* “straight line” or “triangle,” but rather on straight lines and angles in general (*über Gerade und Winkel überhaupt*). And such universal judgments, Husserl adds, “have the characteristic of *eidetic universality*” or “‘*strict, absolutely ‘unconditional’ universality*” (Hua III/1, p. 18). That said, as he also reminds us at the end of the paragraph, any judgment about essences can be converted into an equivalent unconditionally universal judgment about individuals assumed as exemplifying such and such an essence and vice versa.²⁹ This point brings us over to §6 on “uni-

²⁸ Sowa frames this in a different fashion: “As *a priori* research, Husserlian phenomenology aims at descriptive eidetic laws. Husserl uses two linguistic or logical forms for these laws: generic judgments and universal judgments. *Generic judgments* are typically singular judgments about the universal objects (especially kinds of types) that Husserl initially terms ‘species’ and later ‘essences.’ In the simplest case, such a judgment has the form ‘the *F* (in specie) is (a) *G*,’ where *G* is a pure concept and ‘*F* (in specie)’ refers, through the pure concept *F*, to a pure kind and makes it the object that the statement is about (e.g., ‘the equilateral triangle is equiangular’). Generic judgments of this simple form are equivalent to *universal judgments* of the form ‘For any conceivable *x*, it holds true that if *x* is (an) *F*, then *x* is (a) *G*’ (e.g., ‘any conceivable equilateral triangle is equilateral’), in which we do not claim something about the pure kinds *F* and *G*, but about the possible particular or individuals belonging to them” (Sowa 2012 p. 258).

²⁹ An interesting and useful analysis of this paragraph can be found in Heffernan (2017), who recognizes the importance of the notion of “attitude” in understanding this distinction: “For

versality” and “necessity”: it is universal judgments (i’, ii’)—that can be characterized as *unconditionally universal*.

Now, for the sake of our interest here, and what we will deal with extensively in the next chapter, §6 is of particular importance: for, the introduction of the “modal” notion of necessity immediately points to the topic of “eidetic science” and, in particular, the latter’s “rationalizing” function vis-à-vis the “empirical” world.

It is now apparent that the following ideas belong together: eidetic *judging*, eidetic *judgment* or eidetic *proposition*, eidetic *truth* (or true proposition); as a correlate of the last idea: the eidetic state of affairs *sic et simpliciter* (was what obtains in eidetic truth); finally, as a correlate of the first ideas: the eidetic *state of affairs* in the *modified* sense of what is merely *intended* [*Vermeintheit*], in the sense of the judged as judged which can either obtain or not obtain (Hua III/1, p. 19).

Let us remark that, by speaking of *eidetic judging*, Husserl is here thinking of examples such as *i’* and *ii’*, that is, examples of judging in the *Überhaupt*-mode (“Every x...”) about individuals taken as exemplarily standing for a pure essence (corresponding to the “exemplary consciousness”). As one could generally put it, the purpose of any eidetic inquiry, i.e., the pursuing and establishing of “eidetic truths,” consists of two distinct steps: there first occurs a signitive or judgmental activity delineating a possible state of affairs as *intended* and still in need of eventual confirmation, after which, in the case of a true proposition, there is a *given* state of affairs *confirming* the corresponding *state of affairs* and *validating* or *grounding* (by means of fulfillment) the proposition itself, which turns out to establish what we have been seeking, notably, a so-called *eidetic truth*.

Any eidetic particularization and individualization of an eidetically universal state of affairs, *in so far as* it is that, is called an *eidetic necessity*. *Eidetic universality and eidetic necessity* are therefore correlates ... It is important, however, to heed the distinctions and above all not to designate eidetic universality a necessity (as people usually do). The consciousness of necessity, more particularly a judging consciousness in which there is consciousness of a state of affairs as a particularization of an eidetic universality, is called *apodictic* consciousness; the judgment itself, the asserted proposition, is called apodictic (also an apodictically “necessary”) *consequence* of the universal judgment with which it is connected (Hua III/1, p. 19).

The importance of this excerpt can hardly be ignored. Let us propose a series of remarks to better single out the various lines of argument.

- First of all, and in perfect compliance with what we saw on p. 124 and ff., the modal notion of necessity is of an “ontological” nature, i.e., it is used to characterize states of affairs (first “emptily” intended by an eidetic proposition and then

example, Husserl asserts that the ‘situation is essentially such’ that the eidetic phenomenologist is free to shift from the one *attitude* or *focus* or *orientation* (*Einstellung*) to the other, that is, that the turning from ‘making eidetic judgments’ to ‘making judgments about essences’ and vice versa is always an essential possibility” (pp. 76–77).

intuitively grasped as such). It is not the “proposition” itself, nor the eidetic truth (i.e., the intuitively confirmed proposition), to be primarily characterized by the mark of necessity, but their ontological correlates. The former can in fact be said to be necessary only in a secondary and transferred way, i.e., in light of the posited state of affairs.

- Second of all, and despite the correlation between “universality” and “necessity,” the two must not be conflated: whereas the former applies to the consciousness of the universal state of affairs—namely, to the consciousness of the (universal) state of affairs posited by the “eidetic proposition”³⁰—the latter pertains exclusively to its *particularizations* and *individualizations*.³¹

One further step needs to be taken before the notion of (eidetic) “science” is brought in; we mean what Husserl himself calls the “application” of eidetic universalities to individuals:

The combination of an *eidetic* judging about any individual in general with the *position of existence* of something individual is also very important. The eidetic universality becomes “transferred” to an individual posited as existing ... Every “application” of geometrical truths to cases in nature (posited as actual) belongs here. The actually formed state of affairs is then a *matter of fact* to the extent that it is an individual and actual state of affairs *Wirklichkeitsverhalt*; it is, however, an *eidetic necessity* in so far as it is an individualization of an essential universality (Hua III/1, p. 19).

The issue has already been touched upon on p. 138 and ff. As should be clear by now, in perfect compliance with what we saw in the previous chapter on the notion of “attitude,” what we are confronted with is three possible “directions” of our thematic attention, which can aim at (i) either the *eide per se*, (ii) individuals assumed or judged on in the *Überhaupt*-mode (“eidetic judging,” corresponding to the formation of the “exemplary consciousness”); finally, (iii) the application of our eidetic findings (= universalities) to such individuals now (re-)posited as existent (Fig. 2).

³⁰ Let us not forget that we are still speaking of “eidetic judging” here and that the feature of “universality” includes in itself what might be called a “relational” component: for, it characterizes states of affairs of the type *i'* and *ii'*, namely, states of affairs posited by propositions that refer to “individuals” taken as exemplifying such and such an *eidos*. See also Hua IV, p. 86, on “universality” and its relation to what is “actual.”

³¹ It is worth pointing out that Husserl resorts to two different expressions to designate the necessity of a state of affairs construed as the individualization of an eidetic law and the necessity pertaining to the law itself. Indeed, if the former is described in terms of “eidetic necessity” *sic et simpliciter*, the latter is referred to as a “necessary possibility” (*notwendige Möglichkeit*), that is, “forms of unity of compatibilities [*Einigungsformen der Verträglichkeit*], which are prescribed in the *essences* and delimited by laws of essence” (Hua III/1, p. 336).

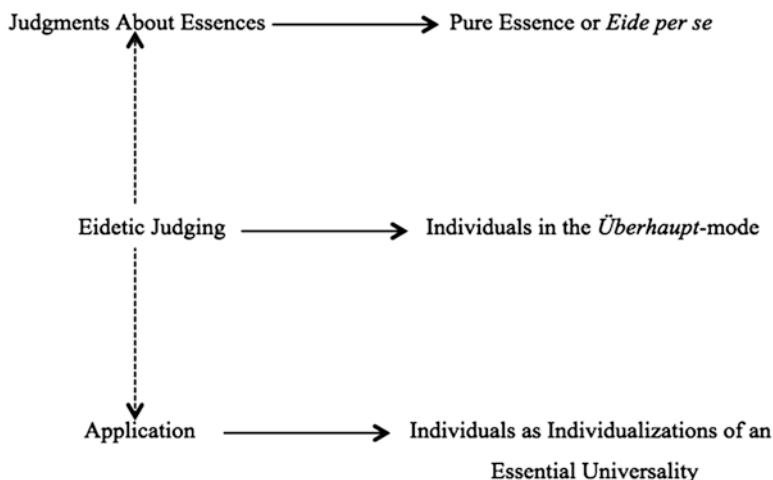


Fig. 2 The eidetic investigation's two directions

After the exclusion of the position of existence (*eidetische Ausschaltung*), the “thematic” attention focuses upon such and such an individual now assumed as an *exemplar* of such and such an *eidos*, thereby judged on in the *Überhaupt*-mode (eidetic judging). At this point, the thematic attention can either move upward, thereby switching to the “pure essences” *per se* (judging about *eide*), or move downward, in order to focus on the “application” of the eidetic truths first spelled out by the eidetic judgments to a series of individual states of affairs, which hence turn out to be eidetically necessary.

Husserl’s line of reasoning is clear: the individual state of affairs is a bare *matter of fact* only to the extent that it is looked at as *actually posited*; yet, as soon as we hold it (question of attitudes) as the *individualization* of an *eidetic universality*, it turns out to be an *eidetic necessity*. Even more bluntly: only *the fact* that *there is* something actual (*das Wirkliche*), to which the above application is made, is a fact (*Tatsache*); but that something actual corresponds to such truths is not a mere fact (*ist nicht ein bloßes Faktum*), rather, it is, itself, Husserl urges, an eidetic necessity (Hua III/1, p. 20). It is a *fact* that *there is something* corresponding to the eidetic truths, yet such *correspondence* is not itself a *Faktum*. If this is the case, then the highest aspiration of the eidetic scientist does not simply amount to spelling out what is grounded in an essence (*rein im Wesen... gründet*) (Hua III/1, p. 20), but in applying the “eidetic truths” so established to such and such an “actual state of affairs” (*Wirklichkeitsverhalt*) looked at as the “individualization” of such and such an “essential state of affairs” (*Wesensverhalt*), thereby determining it as “eidetically” necessary.³²

³² See also what Husserl explains in §137, where he speaks of “knowledge of the necessity of the *being-thus* of a posited individual” as a result of the “application” (*Anwendung*) of the intuition of an essential state of affairs (*Einsehen eines Wesensverhaltes*) to what is “intuited assertorically”

If we understand Husserl correctly, to anyone eidetically focused (*eingestellt*), the one and only irreducible *fact* is *that there is something* corresponding to the system of eidetic truths; and if, as we already know, one can label *rationalization* the overall application-procedure just described, then it could be maintained that, to anyone researching eidetically, the one and only irrational fact is that—*de facto*—*there is something actual* corresponding to such eidetic truths (what is irrational being the *fact* of the correspondence, not the correspondence itself).

Were we allowed to rephrase Leibniz here, then, according to Husserl, the question “*Pourquoi y a-t-il quelque chose (qui correspond à des vérités eidétiques) plutôt que rien?*” cannot be given any rational answer whatsoever! It is irrational (for it cannot be accounted for rationally, that is to say, eidetically) to maintain that there is something factual that can be traced back to its *a priori sive* eidetic *sive* rational principles (see also Hua IX, p. 244).³³

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(*assertorisch Gesehenes*) (Hua III/1, p. 318). Also: “What we, phenomenologically naïve, take as mere facts [*bloße Fakta*]*—that a spatial thing always to ‘us humans’ with a certain ‘orientation,’ for example, oriented in the visual field of sight as above and below, right and left, near and far; that we can see a thing only at a certain ‘depth’ and ‘distance’; that all changing distance in which it is to be seen are related to an invisible center but as an ideal-limit quite familiar to us, the center of all orientations of depth, ‘localized’ by us in the head—all these purported facticities, all these contingencies of the intuition of space that are alien to the ‘true,’ ‘objective’ space, prove to be essential necessities even for slight empirical particularizations*” (Hua III/1, pp. 350–351).

³³“*Hier befinden wir uns in der Tat gegenüber einem nicht mehr rationalisierbaren Etwas*” (Conrad-Martius 1963, p. 42).

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The Function of Eidetic Sciences



What makes the framework of *Ideen I* far more articulated and refined than the one provided in the 1909 lectures is that now Husserl explicitly ascribes to the so-called “eidetic sciences” a systematic “rationalizing” function. In other words, the task of what Husserl generally labels eidetic sciences precisely consists, in the words of Husserl himself, in a systematic *rationalization of the empirical*: the paradigmatic example—as we will see—being that eidetic and material science of “space” that goes by the name of “geometry.”¹

The introduction of the very notion of eidetic science is based on the analogy with the matters of the fact-essence relation first expounded at the outset of the chapter. Indeed, there are pure sciences of essences, Husserl explains, such as pure logic, pure mathematics, and a pure doctrine of time and space, which imply no position of “facts.” In them, Husserl goes on to remark, “*no experience as experience*, i.e., as actuality, as a consciousness apprehending or positing an existence, *can assume the function of foundation or justification in them*” (Hua III/1, pp. 20–21). The geometer, here already looked up to as a paradigm, investigates not “actualities” but “ideal possibilities,” i.e., “not actual relationships but essential relationships,” for “*the intuition of essence*, in place of experience, is the *ultimately grounding or justifying act*” (Hua III/1, p. 21). “Geometry,” as an eidetic and material science, epitomizes every eidetic science’s methodological “independence of experience,” their dealing exclusively with “pure possibilities” and “essential state of affairs.” So far, so good.

That said, the second half of §7 introduces elaborates on a subtler aspect, characterizing only what Husserl will later label “exact” (as opposed to “morphological”) eidetic sciences.

¹ For a systematic discussion of the relation between phenomenology and sciences, see the ground-breaking work by Trizio (2020).

So it is in all eidetic sciences. Essential states of affairs that are mediated—namely, those that come to be given in an intuitive yet mediated thinking and, indeed, according to principles that are immediately intuited—are grounded in essential states of affairs (that is, eidetic axioms) to be apprehended in an immediate intuition. *Each step of mediated justification or foundation is then apodictic and eidetically necessary.* Thus, the essence of purely eidetic science is so constituted that it proceeds *in an exclusively eidetic way*, such that from the outset, and then subsequently, it only gnoseologically recognizes [*zur Erkenntnis bringt*] states of affairs that have eidetic validity, that is, those that can be brought either immediately to originary givenness (as grounded immediately in essences in originarily intuited essences) or can be “inferred” from such “axiomatic” states of affairs through mere implication.

Tied up with this is the *practical ideal of an exact, eidetic science* that more than modern [*neuere*] mathematics has for the first time taught us genuinely how to realize, i.e., the ideal of conveying to each eidetic science the highest level of rationality [*Rationalität*] through the reduction of all intermediate steps of thinking to mere subsumptions under the definitively and systematically assembled axioms of the respective eidetic domain, together with all the axioms of “formal” or “pure” logic (in the *widest* sense of the *mathesis universalis*), to the extent that it is not a matter of this discipline itself.

And connected with the foregoing is once again the *ideal of “mathematization”* that, like the just characterized ideal, is also of great gnoseological importance for all “exact” eidetic disciplines whose entire gnoseological asset (as, for instance, in geometry) is contained in the universality of a few axioms with a purely deductive necessity (Hua III/1, pp. 21–22).

This passage is quite rich. It describes the specific relation between the notion of “rationality” as we know it, i.e., the “ontological” form of rationality, and what Husserl calls the “practical ideal of an exact eidetic science,” the realization of which is made possible in modern times by mathematics; it is the *ideal* of a purely deductive science able to apodictically justify or ground all its steps, thereby carrying out a reduction “of all intermediate steps of thinking to mere subsumptions under the definitively and systematically assembled axioms of the respective eidetic domain.” Alongside the previous paradigmatic function of geometry (which exemplifies any eidetic science’s independence of experience), a second paradigmatic role is here pinpointed. For, geometry epitomizes the “ideal” of a rationality understood as the possibility, for it, to become a fully mathematized science²:

Geometry fixes far more on a few kinds of fundamental forms, the ideas of body, surface, point, angle, and the like, the same ideas that play the determining role in “axioms.” With the help of axioms, i.e., the primitive essential laws, it is then in a position to derive in purely deductive fashion *all* shapes “existing” in space, i.e., all ideally possible spatial shapes and the essential relations pertaining to them (Hua III/, p. 151).³

²For an extensive discussion of this topic, see Leclercq (2015). Also Derrida (1962) has been important for us.

³For a further analysis, see also what Husserl will explain in the famous §31 of *Formale und Transzendente Logik* on “The Pregnant Concept of Manifold and, Correlatively, that of a ‘Deductive’ and ‘Nomological System’ Clarified by the Concept of ‘Definiteness’” (Hua XVII, pp. 98–102), wherein Husserl clarifies, for example, that space in the Kantian sense is only an individual case of the analytic form of the “Euclidean manifold” (p. 98, footnote).

(*Geometry.1*): It epitomizes the eidetic sciences' overall independence of experience and of all positions of existence.

(*Geometry.2*): It paradigmatically exemplifies the practical ideal of a full-fledged "rational" (*rational*) and exact, or "mathematized," science.

Husserl's line of reasoning thus far should be clear and, we would say, linear. After introducing that new sort of "object" called *eidos* or pure essence, and after distinguishing between different ways of propositionally referring oneself to them, Husserl pinpoints what eidetic sciences in general are based upon the undeniably paradigmatic case of "geometry." The task of §9 is thus to provide a preliminary assessment of "region," only upon the basis of which one can really appreciate to what the "rationalizing" operation described at the very end of the last section actually amounts.

As we understand Husserl's arguments here, the paragraph in question can be broken down into three parts: while the first one merely introduces the two intertwined notions of "region," namely, eidetic region, and "ontology," the second part dwells on the example represented by the "ontology of nature" and the third part addresses the "rationalization of the empirical."

Every empirical object, Husserl remarks in light of his account of essence, is arranged with its material essence (*materialen Wesen*) under a "supreme" material genus, i.e., a "region" of empirical objects. To such a region there corresponds an eidetic science, namely, a "regional ontology."

We thereby assume that the regional essence or, better, the various genera making it up provide the grounds for knowledge so rich in content and so highly ramified that, in regard to its systematic unfolding in general, it is worthwhile to speak of a science or, better, of an entire complex of ontological disciplines, corresponding to the individual genus-components of the region ... Thus, each empirical science that fits within the scope or extent of a region is essentially related to the regional ontological disciplines ... We can also express this in the following manner: *every science of facts* (science of experience) *has essential, theoretical foundations in eidetic ontologies* (Hua III/1, p. 23).

Clearly, there is no definition yet of region: this is simply called "the highest material genus." All we know about it, in fact, is that every empirical object "falls" under such and such a region based upon its own material essence: what we call "ontology" being the a priori science of this highest material genus. There will be as many ontologies as there are highest material genera (under which such and such an empirical object falls). Let us hasten to point out that, even though "ontology" and "eidetic science" are basically employed as synonyms here, a more fine-grained distinction can be drawn: whereas the term *ontology* is employed by Husserl almost exclusively to designate *eidetic sciences* of a *material region* (= the highest material genus), the term *discipline* is resorted to only to refer to the study of the various and corresponding "genus-components."

As one could frame all of this: based on their essence, empirical objects fall under such and such a highest material genus, also known as a region; for each such region there is a relevant ontology, that is, a relevant eidetic science, the goal of which is to investigate all the highest a priori principles of the region itself (called

axioms), which in turn convey the foundation of the empirical or experiential sciences corresponding to the empirical objects falling under the region in question.

(*Ontology.1*): The eidetic science of a “highest material genus,” also called *region*.

(*Ontology.2*): There are as many ontologies as there are highest genera.

(*Ontology.3*): The eidetic investigation of the various “genera” composing or making up a region is called a *discipline*.

(*Ontology.4*): There are as many ontological disciplines as genera and sub-genera, also called genus-components (*Gattungskomponenten*).

Here is an example: “In this way, for example, the eidetic science of physical nature in general (the *ontology of nature*) corresponds to all the disciplines of natural science, insofar as there is an *eidos* corresponding to factual nature that can be grasped purely: it is the ‘essence’ of *nature in general* with an infinite fullness of essential states of affairs included therein” (Hua III/1, p. 24).

Here is where things get particularly interesting. By analogy with the practical “ideal” of §7, an “idea” is now introduced, i.e., “*the idea of a perfectly and completely [vollkommenen] rationalized experiential science of nature*” (Hua III/1, p. 24). Let us hasten to stress that by not italicizing the specification “of nature” Husserl is bringing attention to the more general implications of what he is about to argue for; that is, “the idea of a perfectly rationalized experiential science” is not confined to the science of nature (which is here taken as a paradigmatic example), for Husserl has something much wider in mind, with a reach potentially bearing upon any experiential science whatsoever.

Here is the rest of the argument:

If we form *the idea of a perfectly and completely rationalized experiential science of nature*, i.e., of the sort that has progressed so far in theorizing that every particular included in it is reduced to its most universal and most fundamental grounds, then it is clear *that the realization of this idea is essentially dependent upon the development of the corresponding eidetic sciences* (Hua III/1, p. 24).

If the former ideal of a fully rationalized or mathematized science concerns only exact and a priori sciences (e.g., geometry), the present “idea” of a fully rationalized science bears, on the contrary, upon experiential or empirical sciences (e.g., the science of factual nature). In this latter case, the degree of “rationality” of any experiential science whatsoever is proportional to its particulars being traced back (the terms are the same as the ones employed in 1909: *zurückführen, zurückgeführt*) to their grounds, namely, the a priori principles of the relevant ontology (e.g., the ontology of nature). As Husserl does not fail to stress, “that obviously holds for any particular region.” On the one hand, the “practical ideal” of a fully mathematized a priori exact science; on the other hand, the “idea” of a totally rationalized “experiential” science: “Also, *with respect to the practice of knowledge*, it is to be expected from the outset that the more a science of experience approximates the ‘rational’ level ... namely, the higher the degree to which it avails itself of developed eidetic disciplines as the foundations and makes use of them for its justifications and foundations, the more the scope and power of its operations with respect to the practice of knowledge will increase” (Hua III/1, p. 24).

Let us now take the rest of §9 in order to also understand what sort of paradigmatic role geometry is called upon, once again, to fulfill.

All of this is confirmed by the development of the rational natural sciences, of the physical sciences. Indeed, their great epoch beings in modernity precisely when geometry, already highly developed as a pure eidetics in antiquity (and essentially in the Platonic school) is all at once and in grand style made fruitful for physical method. It becomes clear that it is the *essence* of the material thing to be *res extensa*, that by this means *geometry is the ontological discipline relevant to an inherently essential aspect of this sort of thing, the form of space* ... All of this is evident from the fact that the orientation of the development of sciences pursues at the same time the formation of *a series of new disciplines called upon to be coordinated with geometry and for the same function of rationalizing the empirical* [*in der Funktion der Rationalisierung des Empirischen*]. The splendid blossoming of formal and material mathematical sciences springs from this tendency. With passionate zeal, they are elaborated or newly formed as *purely* “rational” sciences [*“rationalen” Wissenschaften*] respectively (as *eidetic ontologies* in our sense) and, to be sure (in the beginnings of modernity and long thereafter), not for their own sake but for the sake of the empirical sciences (Hua III/1, pp. 24–25).

The reader might have already recognized some of the powerful themes with which Husserl will be grappling in *Krisis*, such as the Platonic “origin” of geometry as an eidetic science, its application to physics and the “mathematization of nature” pursued by Galileo, and, more generally, the idea of modernity philosophically interpreted as an “ontological” epoch (“the metaphysical era,” as Husserl would also designate the period of pre-Kantian rationalisms (Hua-Mat IX, p. 189)).

As we believe, the passage pinpoints the very general “function” proper to each and every “eidetic science” based upon the historically undeniable case of “geometry”: Husserl himself speaks of “the same function,” namely, the function of *rationalizing the empirical*.

This having been preliminarily recognized, a couple of remarks are worth making.

If we put together §§7 and 9, then what we obtain is four slightly different meanings of the term *Rationalität* (and *rational*).

- (i) First, it refers to the level of “mathematization” attained by a science, e.g., geometry: “the more mathematization, the more rationality” (corresponding to *the practical ideal of a fully mathematized science*).
- (ii) Second, both *Rationalität* and *rational* refer to experiential sciences in general and to the degree to which every particular included in them is reduced or, better, traced back to its most universal and fundamental (i.e., “a priori”) grounds: “the more *Zurückführung*, the more rationality” (corresponding to *the idea of a completely rationalized experiential science* the operations of which with respect to the practice of knowledge increase their scope and power).
- (iii) Third, in conjunction with *ii*, the Latin sounding expression *Rationalität* points to what Husserl calls the function of rationalizing the empirical: “Blind *empeiria* is rationalized: it obtains a share in pure *ratio*” (Hua XXVII, p. 167).
- (iv) Fourth, and as the last sentence from the above excerpt clearly contends, Husserl speaks of “rational sciences” to generally designate “*eidetic ontologies* in our sense.”

As is evident, *ii* and *iii* represent nothing else but the two sides of the same coin, as it were; in fact, it might be urged that the *rationalization* operation (*iii*) accomplished by such and such a rational science (i.e., eidetic ontology) (*iv*) properly consists in the “tracing back” of every particular that is included in such and such an experiential science to its most universal and fundamental ground (*ii*). As one could bluntly and a bit improperly put it: $iv + ii = iii$. Moreover, with only the exception of *i*, which clearly holds true solely of exact sciences, *ii*, *iii*, and *iv* apply to eidetic sciences or ontologies in general and regardless of their nature. Generally speaking, and as we have already suggested on several occasions, the rationalizing of the empirical is to be deemed the function of every eidetic science or ontology. Thus, the four aforementioned meanings of *Rationalität* (and the adjective *rational*) can be re-listed in the following manner:

(*Rationality.1*): It refers to eidetic sciences or “ontologies” in general, also called “rational sciences”⁴ (in comparison to which empirical sciences are in need of rationalization).

(*Rationality.2*): It applies to the idea of a fully rationalized *experiential science* in general (to be understood in connection to *Rationality.1*).⁵

(*Rationality.3*): It refers to the “rationalization of the empirical” function of every ontology or eidetic science (which directly follows from both *Rationality.1* and *Rationality.2*).

(*Rationality.4*): It points to the practical ideal of a fully “mathematized” science.

It should be apparent in what sense, and to what extent, the “science” that goes by the name of geometry is ascribed a paradigmatic function in relation to all four of the meanings just listed. For, to Husserl it looks like the most established eidetic, that is to say, rational and material science (its origins harking back to the school of Plato himself) (*i*); it perfectly embodies the practical ideal of a complete mathematized (or “mathematizable”) science (*iv*); since modern times, and in virtue of its application to “physics” (“it is all at once and in grand style made fruitful for physi-

⁴See for example Hua V, p. 23, where psychology, understood as an a priori science, is called “rational psychology”; and also Hua V, p. 78.

⁵For instance, Husserl will speak of *die methodische Fundamentierung* (of experiential sciences such as empirical psychology) *durch eine entsprechende apriorische Wissenschaft* (Hua IX, p. 298). Or, as Husserl also insists in another passage, sciences as to matters of fact, namely, the sciences of the “world of experience,” can attain the level of “rigorous sciences” (*echte Wissenschaften*) solely by being traced back to the (essential) form of the relevant rational ontology (*nur in der Rückbezogenheit auf diese Form*) (Hua IX, p. 525). As he explains during his 1925 lectures on *Phenomenological Psychology*: “Empirically inductive natural science mounted an incomparably higher level of knowledge at that moment when it appropriated the mathematics of nature and recognized that the systematic formation of that a priori which belongs inseparably to nature provides *ipso facto* an infinity of absolutely necessary laws for factual nature. The same must hold for every experiential science. It must rise above the level of vague inductive empirical procedure. If it is to become rigorous science, its first concern must be to establish those essential laws that govern its province a priori, therefore, before any additional consideration of the contingently factual” (Hua IX, p. 49).

cal method”), geometry also stands for the perfect example of both *ii* (the rationalization of the science of nature) and *iii* (the rationalization of the empirical).⁶

It might be useful to compare the language used by Husserl on the pages under scrutiny with the one employed in a 1908 manuscript on Kant dedicated to quite similar issues. Without getting into any detailed discussion of this text (Hua VII, pp. 381–395; De Santis 2019), let us confine ourselves to stressing that here Kant is mainly charged with overlooking the necessity of a previous eidetic investigation of consciousness able to trace the various empirical conscious experiences back to their *a priori*, rational principle. For the sake of our topic, attention shall be focused on the way in which Husserl works with the *factual-empirical* dichotomy (*das Faktum* and *das Empirische*): a fact is to be understood as the factual realization of some essential possibilities (Hua VII, p. 390) and, in this sense, as standing in direct opposition to that which is empirical. Differently said: *das Faktum* is *das Empirische* “from the point of view of what is *a priori*” (*unter apriorischen Gesichtspunkten*). What is empirical is submitted to eidetic investigation, thereby turning into the factual realization of some eidetic possibilities. Husserl’s view has not changed, yet his language sounds different: now the “fact” is what cannot be rationalized, whereas the term “empirical” is still used to designate what can be, and hence is to be “submitted” to the rationalization operation. Were we to resort to the 1908 jargon to account for the new view, then one could catchily affirm that the “factual” is the empirical *from the point of view of what is rational*, thus revealing itself as eidetically necessary.

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⁶“For example, with regard to corporeal nature: pure mathematics, as the *a priori* whereby nature can be thought at all, makes possible genuine philosophical science and even mathematical natural science. Yet, this is more than just an example, since pure mathematics and mathematical natural science have allowed us to see, in an admittedly narrow sphere, *exactly what it was* that the original objectivistic idea of philosophy/science was striving for” (Hua XXVII, p. 167). For a discussion of this topic, see Hartimo (2010) and Ortiz Hill (2010). For an introduction to the topic in relation to Plato, see Crapanzano (2014) and De Caro (2012). On Husserl on Plato and geometry, see Majolino (2017).

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We have already seen Husserl gratify the reader with a preliminary account of region simply and straightforwardly described as “the highest material genus.” But it is at the outset of §16 that a more productive definition will be worked out based on a series of distinctions unfolded in both §§14 and 15. Here is what Husserl maintains: “With the concepts ‘individuum’ and ‘concretum,’ the scientific-theoretical and fundamental concept of *region* is also defined in a rigorously ‘analytic’ way. Region is nothing else but the *entire, supreme generic unity belonging to a concretum*, i.e., the essentially united connection of the supreme genera that pertain to the lowest differences within the concretum” (Hua III/1, p. 36). If this is the case, then attention shall be paid to the three interrelated concepts of *individuum*, *concretum*, and *lowest difference*. We will begin with the third term.

Each essence, Husserl explains at the beginning of §12, fits into a series of levels (*Stufenreihe*) of essences, a series of levels of *generality* and *specificity*. Yet, there are two “limits” that necessarily belong to such “series”: “Descending, we arrive at the *lowest specific differences* or, as we may also say, *eidetic singularities*; ascending through the specific and generic essences, we arrive at the *highest genus*. Eidetic singularities are essences that necessarily have over them, to be sure, ‘more universal essences’ as their genera, but no more particularizations under them, in relation to which they would themselves be species” (Hua III/1, p. 30). Eidetic singularities represent the lowest level of the *Stufenreihe*, essences that can only be “individualized” *hic et nunc*, yet not further specified. Accordingly, eidetic singularities “imply” (*implizieren*) all the universalities lying above them, i.e., universalities that, for their part, “lie” in one another, “the higher always in the lower” (Hua III/1, p. 31).¹ To

¹ “The different color species, each of which has a series of particular shades that fall under it, again in turn fall under the species of *color in general*. Color is that higher species under which the red, yellow, green, blue, and violet fall, the *genus* of the individual color species, which in their turn are genera of the shades of color that belong to them. The genus color, under which all these fall, is found [*kommt...vor*] in the different color species, in the shades of color, and in the individual

give a few examples: “sensible quality” is a highest genus, “white” is a species of the sub-genus “color” (whose genus is: “visual quality”), and “pearl white” is an eidetic singularity (with the former three always lying in the latter).

If we now know what an eidetic singularity is, how do we get to the notion of “individual” in the strict sense of the term *individuum*? What is needed is, first, the introduction of the notion of *tode ti*, which Husserl employs as equivalent to *this-here* (*Dies-da*), and, second, the distinction between “independent” and “non-independent” objects (which will be provided over the course of §15).

Husserl is clear that the notion of “ultimate material essence” (or “eidetic singularity”²) is to be kept separated from the *this-here*—as a “pure, syntactically formless, individual singularity” (Hua III/1, p. 33): “Thus, we take over the Aristotelian expression *Τόδε τι*” to designate such formless singularity: “each ‘this-here’ has its material essential stock” (Hua III/1, p. 34). The “this-here,” or *τόδε τι*, is what actually *has* (Husserl writes: *seinen sachaltigen Bestand*) the essence, understood as such and such an eidetic singularity “individualized” in it: “whatever is itself a ‘this-here’ (*dies da*), and not an essence, *has* an essence” (Hua IX, p. 92).

A passage from the Bernau manuscripts will help to further elucidate this relation:

Each entity has its essence and existence, for which it is customary also to say: being-thus and being-there [*Sosein und Dasein*] ... The essence, the What [*das Was*] of the substrate is, on the one hand, a concrete and specific essence, what is “repeatable” and repeated in different individuals with different substrates and possible individualizations of this specific essence; on the other hand, it is the *τόδε τι*. The *τόδε τι* is what individualizes [*individuell vereinzelt*] the specific, that is to say, the lowest and not further differentiable species, the *principium individuationis* (Hua XXXIII, pp. 299–300).

The *Τόδε τι* is “a universal form” (*eine allgemeine Form*), as Husserl further asserts (Hua XXXIII, p. 300). Claudio Majolino has extensively commented upon this crucial excerpt:

With such an uncanny mishmash of terms (Greek, Latin, German) Husserl ultimately attempts to distinguish a broad notion of essence (named “Essenz,” “Was sein” or “So-sein”), to which also belongs the *tode ti* (what singularizes the lowest species), from a narrower notion (called “*spezifische Wesen*”) limited to the “predicables” that an individual object can have in common with other individuals of the relevant kind.³

What we thereby obtain is the “formal-ontological” characterization of what we have designated the “second” and the “third” meanings of the term *Wesen*: the individual essence, which is the set or stock of “predicables” that “an individual object can have in common with other individuals of the relevant kind” (what Majolino

exemplars of those shades of color ... Every species that still has species under it is called a *genus*—but, insofar as it also has a genus over it, is called a species. The individual exemplars of a certain shade of red are *qualitatively* exactly the same; they differ only in their different *individuation-moments*. All species and genera lack this individuation-moment. Hence, species and general differ from each other only qualitatively” (Pfänder 1963, p. 138).

²Which in 1905 Husserl called “individual essence.”

³Majolino (2015, p. 38).

calls the *narrow notion of essence*), and the empirical essence, which includes the predicables and what “individualizes” them, the τόδε τι or *principium individuationis* (what Majolino labels the *broad notion of essence*).

If we bring in the manner in which Husserl described the “implication” relation between eidetic singularities and the higher species and genera, then what we obtain is a full-fledged clarification of the formal-ontological structure of the essence that also sheds light upon the equivocations so emphatically denounced by Husserl himself. The term essence can loosely mean: either (i) the stock or set of predicables (the narrow concept of essence), (ii) the same stock or set but “individualized” *hic et nunc* by a Τόδε τι (what Hering would call “empirical essence”); or, finally, (iii) the higher genera and species that are included in *i* and thereby individualized in *ii*.

Before we move on, let us make two final remarks. First of all, if the *tode ti* is what individualizes the essence of the lowest difference, thereby making it something individual, this is not yet enough to speak of *individuum*. Second of all, and in regard to the Aristotelian sounding expression *tode ti*, it is important to keep in mind that the manner in which Husserl understands it openly diverges from what it actually means in Greek (and from how the Stagirite himself uses it): for Aristotle, a *tode ti* is a qualified something, a “this-here that is a something”; it is neither an indeterminate this nor something solely determined by its deictic moment.⁴ In other words, what would correspond to the Aristotelian *tode ti* is not what Husserl himself calls by the same expression but “the essence in the broad sense of the term” (= eidetic singularity + *tode ti*).

Let us move on to §15, wherein Husserl observes that “we are still in need of a further and basic distinction,” namely, between “independent” and “non-independent” objects (already introduced in the *LU*). The first examples mentioned by Husserl are of a formal nature: a “categorical” form, for instance, is to be deemed non-independent to the extent that it refers back to a substrate. But these are not really the cases that interest Husserl in the present context: “What especially interests us here is the situation for the ultimate substrates and, conceived even more narrowly, for the material substrate-essence” (Hua III/1, p. 34). Here is what he further explains:

There are two possibilities in regard to them: that such essence, together with another, establishes the unity of *one* essence, or that it does not. In the former case, relations present themselves that need to be described in greater detail; relations that are perhaps independent on one side or both. With respect to the eidetic and individual singularities [*individuelle Einzelheiten*] falling under the unified essences, the apodictically necessary consequence follows that there cannot be individualities of the one essence unless they are determined by essence that have at least the community of a genus [*Gattungsgemeinschaft*] with the other essence. For example, sensory quality necessarily points to some sort of difference of extension, while extension is necessarily extension of some sort of quality in union with it, “covering over” it (Hua III/1, pp. 34–35).

Given the (further and basic) distinction between “non-independent” essence (necessarily in need of completion on the part of another essence) and “independent”

⁴Majolino (2015, p. 38).

essence (to which the former does not apply), the determination of the “formal-ontological” concepts of “individuum,” “concretum,” and “abstractum” can be easily obtained. As Husserl frames them:

- *Abstractum* = an essence that is “dependent.”
- *Concretum* = an absolutely “independent” essence.
- *Individuum* = a “this-here” the material essence of which is a *concretum*.

Accordingly, the concepts *individual* and *individuum* do not at all coincide inasmuch as the former is broader than the latter: an “individual color,” for example, understood as the “individualization” of the eidetic singularity “ruby red,” is not an *individuum*, for its essence is of a non-independent nature (being indeed an *abstractum*).

With this in mind, we can finally go back to what Husserl asserts at the very beginning of §16, for we now have all the “theoretical” tools and resources needed to understand why, “with the concepts ‘individuum’ and ‘concretum,’ the scientific-theoretical and fundamental concept of *region* is also defined in a rigorously ‘analytic’ way.” Here is Husserl’s rigorous definition: “The *entire, supreme generic unity belonging to a concretum*, i.e., the essentially united connection of the supreme genera that pertain to the lowest differences within the concretum” (Hua III/1, p. 36). The difference with respect to *Ontology.I* should immediately leap into view: indeed, as we should remember, Husserl determines in §9 the notion of “region” as being “the highest material genus” and “ontology” as being the relevant eidetic science of it. According to these definitions, for example, if sensory or “sensible quality” is the highest material genus (*sensible quality* = highest material genus; *visual quality* = genus; *color* = sub-genus; *green*: species; *grass green* = eidetic singularity) then it would also have to be called a “region.” According to the new definition, on the contrary, obtained based on the introduction of the concepts of *concretum*, *abstractum*, and *individuum*, the genus “sensible quality” does not deserve to be “rigorously” referred to as “region.”

(*Region.I*): The united or unified connection of the supreme or highest genera that pertain to the lowest differences (or eidetic singularities) within the *concretum*.

Region is *not* a highest genus anymore; it is rather the *unity of highest genera* (*die gesamte zu einem Konkretum gehörige oberste Gattungseinheit*).⁵ Let us quote Husserl *in extenso*:

If we transport ourselves into any eidetic science whatsoever, for example, into the ontology of nature, then we find ourselves (this is, indeed, what is normal) not oriented toward essences as objects but instead toward objects of the essences that in our example are clas-

⁵That the more technical definition of region can be easily missed is shown by Cobb-Stevens (1990, p. 170), who in fact speaks only of “a domain determined by some highest concrete genus.” Even a very refined reader of Husserl like Jan Patočka seems to overlook the distinction when he defines the “region” as the highest genus (*Regio je u Husserla nejvyšší rod*) (Patočka 2009, p. 244 in footnote). As he also points out in another text, “Regions” (*Regiony*) are “*summa genera* of eidetic universality” (*eidetické obecnosti*) (Patočka 2009, p. 185).

sified under the region of nature. We observe thereby however that “*object*” is a title for many different yet interrelated formations, for example: “thing,” “property,” “relation,” “state of affairs,” “set,” “order,” and so forth. These are obviously not equivalent to one another but instead refer back respectively to one kind of object that has, so to say, the privilege of being the *original objectuality*, with respect to which all the others present themselves to a certain extent merely as variants. In our example, *the thing itself* [*das Ding selbst*] ... naturally has this prerogative (Hua III/1, p. 25).

Husserl’s example is *the thing* (*das Ding*), here held as the original object or objectuality, in which a series of eidetic singularities can be found (what in 1909 Husserl called “full essence”): the region is not simply the “unity of highest genera” but, rather, “the unity of highest genera that pertain to the lowest differences within the *concretum*” (*Region. I*).

In order to determine a region, what first needs to be singled out are the many eidetic singularities making up the *concretum* (and eventually individualized in such and such an *individuum*); we then move up, by means of generalization, from the singularities to the highest genera; now, the *unity* of such genera, insofar as they are the genera of the *concretum*’s own eidetic singularities, is precisely what Husserl labels “region.” According to such a conception, the highest genus “sensible quality” is not itself a region; yet, it is part of the region that goes by the name of “nature” to the extent that its “eidetic singularities” constitute the *concretum* (the individual object’s full essence).

For example, if a this-here is taken as the *original objectuality* of the region “nature” (individual thing), then it will belong to its essence to have a determination of “time,” “duration,” “figure” and “materiality” (Hua III/1, p. 13); yet the determinations of time and figure, or the ones of figure and materiality do not belong to one another in the same manner in which “color” and “extension” inseparably belong to one another as two non-independent objects in the sense of the *Third Logical Investigation*. This becomes even clearer if we consider the determination of the “material thing” in terms of *res temporalis*, *res extensa* and *res materialis* (Hua III/1, §150); for, such determinations do not belong to one another in the sense of non-independent objects. For example, we can easily think of the former two (*res temporalis* + *res extensa*) without the third (*res materialis*): what we would thereby obtain is a “phantom” (= a shape filled with sensuous quality); by the same token, we can think of a *res temporalis* without extension and material determination: it would be a mere lived-experience. Of course, far from us in the claim that the relation of non-independence between “color” and “extension,” hence the impossibility of thinking the one without the other, is no longer valid. Quite the contrary, the point is rather to understand that such a relation is now regarded by Husserl as characterizing only a specific layer of the essence of things, i.e., the one corresponding to the *res extensa*, yet not the relations between the layers themselves (*res temporalis* + *res extensa* + *res materialis*). It would not directly be the subject-matter of the “material ontology” of the region “nature,” yet of the eidetic disciplines that fall under it and that investigate the specific layer of the *res extensa*.

Indeed, if the this-here were the *original objectuality* of the region “consciousness,” then the determinations of time and duration would belong to its “essence” inseparably without however the other two being minimally involved (for, the region

consciousness unites “supreme genera” that are different from those united by the region *nature* precisely because the eidetic singularities included in the relevant *concreta* are different). Although these relations should be more deeply investigated, it should be evident that “regions” do not unite in the same sense in which non-independent objects were said to belong to one another.

The (methodological) importance of the distinction between full essence and universal essence (see p. 110 and ff.) should also be coming into focus. A region (which Husserl also labels “regional essence”) is the unity of all the “supreme genera” that correspond to the full essence; yet, if the latter is *per se* scientifically non-determinable (as Husserl remarks in 1909) then the universal essence is the first scientifically determinable level of universality on the basis of which the highest genera, and hence a relevant region as the domain of such and such a material ontology, can successfully be reached.

By expanding on Fig. 1 on p. 115, a new diagram can be proposed.

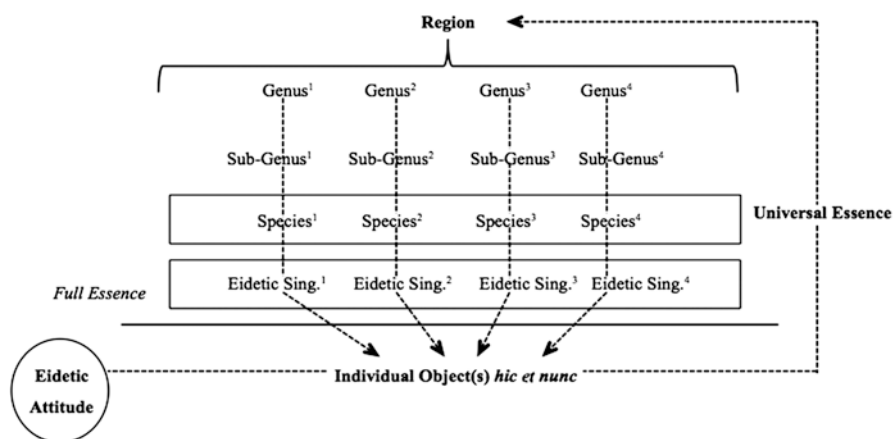


Fig. 1 The analytic concept of region

If according to *Ontology I* we called ontology the eidetic science of a highest material genus, then what we obtain based upon the preceding is a twofold meaning of the term *ontology* as both the eidetic science of such and such a “highest material genus” (such as sensible or “sensory quality”) and, more *rigorously*, the eidetic science of the “unity” of such material genera to the extent that they refer back, via the eidetic singularities or the “full essence,” to an original objectuality.

(*Ontology.5*): In a more rigorous sense, “ontology” is the eidetic science of a region, that is, of a unitary connection of all the highest material genera pertaining to the lowest differences within such and such an “original objectuality” (e.g., a “thing,” a “lived-experience,” etc.).

It should be clear by now why in relation to the *Logical Investigations* we ventured to say that it would be incorrect to even speak of “material ontology”: indeed, in order for such a concept to be employed, what is required is precisely the

notion of “region” (Hua XLI, p. 94). According to the way in which we reconstructed Husserl’s position in the *LU*, the concept of region is nowhere to be found; we must wait until 1906 to be confronted with its initial appearances (Hua XXIV, pp. 7, 134)⁶ and until *Ideen I* for the term (which, as far as we know, has yet to become the object of systematic investigation on the part of Husserl scholars) to finally be brought in to play a significant role. Moreover, if “ontology” is the name for the “eidetic science” of a relevant region (while discipline is the name of the study of the genus-components), then one cannot seriously and rigorously speak of material ontology when we are still “bereft” of the idea of region (*Region. I*). As Husserl recognizes in *Ideen III*: “The a priori in the sense of the region is the *source-point of the ontologies*” (Hua V, p. 36). As Fig. 1 suggests, “regions” should now be deemed the correlate of attitudes as Husserl first assessed them in the 1910–1911 lectures previously discussed.

Each regional essence determines “synthetic” truths of essence, namely, such as are grounded in it as this generic essence [Gattungswesen] ... The sum total of the synthetic truths grounded in the regional essence makes up the content of the regional ontology. The sum total of the *fundamental* truths among them, i.e., the *regional axioms*, circumscribes—and defines for us—the *sum of regional categories* ... they are distinguished by the fact that, in virtue of the regional axioms, they express what belongs *properly* to the regional essence or, better, they express in an *eidetic universality* what necessarily pertains to an individual object of the region “a priori” and “synthetically.” The application to such (not purely logical) concepts to given individuals is an apodictically and unconditionally necessary one [*apodiktisch und unbedingt notwendig*] (Hua III/1, p. 37).

This passage is nothing other than a powerful, incisive, and crystal clear overall picture of what we have been grappling with thus far, for all the most crucial points are herein reasserted.

Each region, now understood as the “unity” or unitary connection of a series of “highest material genera,” determines a series of synthetic truths (the content of the “regional ontology” itself): now, the most fundamental of these truths are called “axioms” to the extent that they are not grounded in such and such a highest material genus *per se*, but rather in the “unity” of a plurality thereof.

The axioms express in *eidetic universality* what properly belongs to, and thus characterizes, the region itself: now, the application (*Anwendung*) of such “universal” synthetic truths, which Husserl also refers to as “laws,” to given individuals (*Individuen* = this-heres the material essences of which are *concreta*) brings about *apodictic and unconditional necessities*.

Our empirical intuition constantly and uninterruptedly exposes us to a multiplicity of “facts” (*Tatsachen*) which never present themselves as bare and naked “this-heres” deprived of any sort of qualification. Whatever we experience is always a “something” (*Was*) qualified in such and such a way (*Wie*): these *Was* and *Wie* characterizing such and such an individual being encountered in our experience *hic et nunc* is what Husserl calls “essence” (“empirical essence” in the words of Hering).

⁶For Ursula Panzer the concept of region first appears in 1908–1909 (Hua XXX, p. xxviii), when Husserl first makes the distinction between “the originally and essentially different regions of objectualities.” See Trizio (2020, pp. 65–70).

All of this before we enter the eidetic attitude: for, the thematic interest of the eidetic scientist is not directed towards the essence *per se*, but only to the extent that the latter can serve as a “basis” to arrive at the apprehension of a relevant pure essence or *eidōs*. Indeed, to the eidetic researcher the essence turns out to be a multiplicity of (abstract or concrete) “individualized” eidetic singularities, which in turn imply a series or system of higher “species” and “genera” (universal essences).

Eidetic singularities contained disjunctively in a *concretum* are necessarily “heterogeneous,” with respect to the formal-ontological law that two eidetic singularities of one and the same genus cannot be combined in the unity of *one* essence, or as one also says: lowest differences of a genus are “incompatible” with one another. Considered as difference, each singularity fitted to a *concretum* accordingly leads to a separate system of species and genera, and, hence, too, to separate highest genera. For instance: in the unity of a phenomenal thing, the determinate shape leads to the supreme genus of spatial shape in general; the determinate color leads to visual quality in general. However, instead of being disjunctive, lowest differences can also be overlapping. For example, since physical properties presuppose and contain in themselves spatial determinations, in such cases the highest genera are also not disjunctive (Hua III/1, pp. 35–36).

The task of the eidetic scientist is not only to map out such relations—compatibilities and incompatibilities; inclusions, disjunctions, overlapping; etc.—between the many different species and genera, but also to determine and fix the different categories, or “regions,” or “basic regional and fundamental concepts”: the aspiration properly amounting to spelling out all the so-called “regional axioms,” i.e., the highest synthetic and a priori “laws” that rule over the genera and species subordinate to it. If the study of the former pertains to the eidetic *sciences*, also called *ontologies*, the investigation of the latter is the main job of the various eidetic *disciplines*.

But the ultimate “task” of anyone eidetically “focused” (*eingestellt*) is that of “going back” (*sit venia verbo!*) to the variegated domain of experience and individual facts so as to apply to them the laws and principles grounded in such and such a region: “The application of these... concepts to given individuals is an apodictically and unconditionally necessary task, and is *de facto* regulated by the (regional) axioms” (Hua III/1, p. 37).

Merleau-Ponty is more right than he knows when he states that phenomenology puts the essences back into existence.⁷ As a matter of fact, “the transition from the factuality to the *eidōs*” (*Übergang von der Faktizität zum Eidos*) is necessarily followed by “the transition from the *eidōs* back to the fact” (*Übergang vom Eidos zum Faktum*) (Hua IX, pp. 284, 519). If the Leibnizian God purportedly thought or even exclaimed “*Calculemus!*” as he got himself ready to create the world, the imperative of the Husserlian “eidetic scientist” always and everywhere is “*Let’s rationalize!*”

* * *

If, as Husserl goes on to add, one wanted to establish some sort of “resonances” with the Kantian critique of reason, then his synthetic and a priori knowledge should be understood in terms of what are called “regional axioms”; accordingly, there would be as many irreducible classes of a priori and synthetic knowledge as there

⁷Merleau-Ponty (1945, p. 7).

are regions, no longer construed as a series of highest and material genera but as “unities” thereof. The “proliferation of the a priori” in Husserl’s phenomenology—to employ a suggestive and incisive turn of phrase by Mikel Dufrenne⁸—mirrors what might be called an irreducible “ontological plurality,” i.e., that of the regions as irreducible “unities of being.”⁹ As Herbert Spiegelberg will characteristically affirm in his monumental 1930 *Über das Wesen der Idee*: there is absolutely no unique being, “only a being that differs from sphere of being to sphere of being [*nur ein von Seinsphäre zu Seinsphäre verschiedenes Sein*].”¹⁰

The Husserlian theory of the a priori, at least in the systematic form it displays from 1913 onward, is precisely the most incisive expression of such ontological irreducibility and ontological plurality: “there must a priori be as many ontologies as regional concepts [*es a priori soviele Ontologien geben muß als regionale Begriffe*]” (Hua V, p. 25).

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⁸Dufrenne (2009, p. 56).

⁹Majolino (2015, p. 47), speaks of regions as *unities of being*. See also what Husserl says in §72: “We obtain a radical unity only by going back to the utterly supreme genus, hence, to the respective region and the regional components of the genus, i.e., the supreme genera that are united in the regional genus and may be grounded in one another. The structure of the supreme concrete genus (of the region), constructed from supreme genera that are partly disjunctive, partly founded on one another (and in this way mutually encompassing), corresponds to the structure of the relevant *concreta*, composed of partly disjunctive, partly lowest differences founded upon one another (for example: temporal, spatial, and material determination in the case of the thing). To each region there corresponds a regional ontology with a series of independent regional sciences, closed off from others, or regional sciences resting on one another, all corresponding to the supreme genera that possess their unity in the region. Mere disciplines or so-called theories correspond to subordinate genera; for example, the discipline of conic sections corresponds to the genus: conic section. Such a discipline is not completely independent from a conceptual point of view, for in its forms of knowledge and its justifications of that knowledge it will naturally to have to make use of the gnoseological foundations of the relevant knowledge of essences, a foundation that its unity in the supreme genus” (Hua III/1, p. 150).

¹⁰Spiegelberg (1930, p. 6). As has been rightly observed, “*Non c'è quindi una forma universale dell'esperienza, ma una pluralità aperta di forme possibili*” (see De Palma 2001, p. 28).

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Part VI
Adventures and Misadventures of the
Rationalität



“The wonder here is the rationality (*Rationalität*),” exclaims Husserl in a 1908 manuscript on Kant and the idea of transcendental philosophy (Hua VII, p. 394). There is a “rationality” immanent to being, and such “rationality” Husserl designates with the Latin sounding expression *Rationalität*. Being is not the difference (*C’est l’être qui est Différence*), nor what differentiates (*l’être est... le différenciant de la différence*)¹; *being* is what is always *different*, depending on the region at stake, and the multiplicity of regions results in an irreducible ontological plurality.²

For the sake of brevity, we might label this Husserl’s *ontological plurality principle*:

(*OPP*): There are as many ontologies as regional concepts (with the ontologies being irreducible to one another and the regional concepts being irreducible to one another)³

Now, before we elaborate on any further implications of *OPP*, it will be helpful to recapitulate the journey that has slowly and systematically led us to it.

The trajectory was opened up by an assessment of Husserl’s position on psychologism. As was revealed by analysis, at stake in Husserl’s *Auseinandersetzung* with logical psychologism is the very notion of “necessity” (see p. 37 and ff.) and the confusion between the sort of necessity supposed to characterize logical truths and laws (apodictic necessity) and what can be called conditional necessity. According to Benno Erdmann, for instance, logical laws are the expression of the

¹ Deleuze (1968, pp. 57, and 90).

² The question of the unity of such plurality cannot be addressed here, for it would require an analysis of Husserl’s conception of the transcendental.

³ See also Levinas (1930, pp. 20–22), who perfectly understands this point. On the contrary, Sinha (1969, 107), completely misses the point when he claims that ontology seeks “the final meaning of existence ... what there *is* on ultimate analysis,” thereby mistakenly conflating Husserlian “ontology” and “metaphysics.”

essence of our human thought, and they are to be deemed necessary *only as long as* our mode of thinking stays unaltered and unchanged. Accordingly, different (psychological) modes of thinking will necessarily result in different laws and principles of logic. We saw Husserl already distinguishing between different forms of “law” (pure laws, empirical laws in the strict sense of the term, idealizing fictions *cum fundamento in re*) in order to understand psychologism and its misunderstanding of the laws of logic. Once we were done with the *pars destruens* of Husserl’s enterprise, the analysis moved on to the *Logical Investigations* to explore his *pars costruens*, so to speak, namely, the doctrine of “ideal species” and his overall stance on the a priori. After a careful reconstruction of Husserl’s early idealism, we put our energy into a detailed commentary on the “first chapter” of the famous *Third Logical Investigation*.

Our ambition was “twofold.” On the one hand, the aim was to dismiss the thesis that what Husserl is grappling with in this part of the investigation is a mereology, which he would be developing by following in Stumpf’s footsteps. On the other hand, we wanted to show that what Husserl is striving to obtain is primarily an objective notion of “non-independence” based upon the concept of “law” so as to determine the idea of objective and unalterable necessity. Our analysis of the *Logical Investigations* was then followed by a discussion of the development of Husserl’s own language and conceptuality in the lectures held over the course of the years that led to *Ideen I*: the topics discussed were Husserl’s “ideal” language (species, essence, idea, *eidos*), his exploration of the a priori-a posteriori dichotomy and, last but not least, the two concepts of necessity and law. The assessment of the latter in particular led us to the introduction of the important topic of “reason,” namely, the distinction between two *forms* of rationality (*Rationalität* and *Vernünftigkeit*), and the crucial theme of “rationalization” (*Rationalisierung*).

At this stage, however, and even though Husserl already recognizes that such a tracing back procedure concerns mathematics as well as “the ontological concepts and propositions that collectively form the basis of all knowledge of reality,” he is still far from the idea that it is “eidetic sciences” (i.e., “ontologies”) in general that are tasked with providing a full-fledged “rationalization of the empirical.” For, Husserl does not have yet the notion of eidetic science,⁴ the rigorous introduction and definition of which requires that “region” be understood as a “unity of being” (which will in fact be articulated only in *Ideen I*). To be more precise, and despite the talk of *rationalization* that we already used to characterize the 1906 framework, it could be argued that the difference between the *Zurückführung*-terminology and the terminology of *rationalization* is based on the introduction of the notion of “material ontology,” rigorously construed as the eidetic science of such and such a “material region”: while the former term (*zurückführen*) merely stands for the “operation” applied to such and such a proposition or series thereof (and corresponding states of affairs), the latter is meant to express the eidetic sciences’ or ontologies’ overall “function.”

⁴In 1905, for example, phenomenology is still vaguely called the “doctrine of essence” (*Wesenlehre*) as opposed to science (Hua-Mat V, p. 38).

From the initial concern of defining the concept of “objective necessity” via the “tracing back” procedure up to the project of “rationalizing the empirical” now understood as the very “function” of eidetic sciences and ontologies, the trajectory along which Husserl develops his doctrine of the *a priori* from the *LU* through until *Ideen I* comes into focus.

We also reconstructed the development of Husserl’s own “methodology” over the course of these years from the *Logical Investigations* to *Ideen I*. As we firmly believe, our analysis clarifies once and for all how stratified the method for “apprehending” the ideal is according to Husserl, and that there is nothing further from the truth than the claim that pure essences are “grasped” in just one blow, as it were, as if they were simply there, before us and at our disposal, just like any empirical object. Finally, the analysis of the framework offered in *Ideen I* corroborated our interpretations and paved the way for new important discussions.

In particular, what drove our commentary was the idea of the *rationalization of the empirical*, seen by Husserl as the very “function” of eidetic sciences based on the example of geometry. In a way, the latter could be considered the eidetic and material science *par excellence* insofar as geometry stands out as the most paradigmatic eidetic and material science⁵: it perfectly embodies the methodological independence of experience characteristic of eidetic sciences in general and it offers the most advanced example in modern times, especially with its “application” to physics, of a successful rationalization of the empirical.

All of this being recognized, an objection could still be made. According to our reconstruction, and in particular our claim that geometry plays a paradigmatic role as a material eidetic science, are we not ignoring the difference between exact and descriptive (or morphological) sciences that Husserl so carefully examines in *Ideen I*?

This objection provides us with an opportunity to elaborate our perspective on this issue. To be clear, it is not our intention to ignore the crucial distinction between exact and descriptive sciences, nor are we asserting that the “exact” character of geometry as an eidetic and material science should be “extended over” any material and eidetic science, including, for example, pure psychology or pure phenomenology (as two descriptive eidetic material sciences). Rather, our point is that geometry becomes crucial for Husserl because it perfectly and paradigmatically “exemplifies” what he takes to be the task and “function” of *any* eidetic science, be it exact or descriptive. To assert that all eidetic sciences should “conform” to the *exact* character of geometry as an eidetic material science would be to contradict *OPP*.⁶ Indeed, it would amount to arguing that the nature of *a* material domain among others, therefore that of *an* eidetic science among others, should yield at the same time the

⁵ In *Ideen I*, Husserl speaks of “the old highly developed eidetic disciplines, that is, ... the mathematical disciplines, especially geometry and arithmetic” (Hua III/1, p. 149).

⁶ “Since the mathematical disciplines are the only ones which can at present provide in an effective way the idea of a scientific eidetics, they will at first be far from thinking that there could be eidetic disciplines of another kind, non-mathematical eidetic disciplines fundamentally different from the familiar eidetic disciplines” (Hua III/1, p. 149).

character of *any and all other* ontological domains and a priori material sciences—which is precisely the grand mistake made by modern philosophy from Descartes to Kant and which Husserl opposes so strongly in many of his manuscripts and lectures⁷ that it becomes the central theme of *Krisis*.⁸

Accordingly, the present chapter will be divided into two main sections. The first will briefly rehearse the exact-descriptive dichotomy as Husserl presents it in *Ideen I* (just to make sure that our reading does not fall prey to the objection evoked above); the second section will be dedicated to elaborating how Husserl understands the rationalization of the empirical carried out by eidetic sciences; and only the next chapter will be concerned with the *philosophic-historical* dimension of *Rationalität*. There, the case will be made for considering the history of philosophy, as Husserl understands it in some of his lectures and texts, in terms of a progressive unfolding of the ontological rationality, which will eventually culminate in what we will call “the conflict between different forms of reason,”⁹ which so dramatically marks the trajectory of modern philosophy.

1 Remarks on Exactness

Husserl discusses the notion of “exact” definition or determination (*Bestimmung*) and that of exact science in §§73–74 of *Ideen I*, immediately after having assessed the specific nature of geometry as a “mathematical” science (*mathematische Wissenschaft*) in §72 (dedicated to the classification of sciences into concrete, abstract, and mathematical sciences). Geometry, Husserl explains, “fixes” a few fundamental forms, such as the ideas of body, surface, point, angle, and so forth; accordingly, “with the help of axioms, i.e., the primitive essential laws, it is then in a position to derive in purely deductive fashion *all* shapes ‘existing’ in space, i.e., all ideally possible spatial shapes and all the essential relations pertaining to them” (Hua III/1, p. 151). This is possible due to the nature of the geometrical domain: “the manifold of spatial configurations in general has a remarkable and logical fundamental property, for which we introduce the names ‘*definite*’ manifold or ‘*mathematical*’ manifold in this precise sense” (Hua III/1, p. 152). This type of manifold is characterized by the fact that by a finite number of concepts and propositions one can completely and univocally “determine” “*all possible configurations of the*

⁷It is the “mistake” that has hindered, for example, the development of a proper eidetic science of the psyche (rational or a priori psychology): “The methods of thought customary to the natural sciences are transferred to psychology; what in the former was a method suited to the subject matter, had to become here finally a harmful inhibition. In a completely one-sided fashion, one attempted always to continue proceeding exclusively in the mode of natural science and to reduce all research concerning reality to inductive research” (Hua IX, p. 142).

⁸See also Husserl’s crucial remarks in his Freiburg inaugural speech, Hua XXV, p. 114.

⁹By analogy with the title of Antoni (1942).

domain in the manner of a purely analytic necessity.”¹⁰ Such a manifold, Husserl goes on to explain, can be defined in a mathematically exhaustive way, in such a fashion that “the concepts ‘true’ and ‘formal logical consequence of the axioms’ are equivalent.” The system of axioms that in a purely analytic manner defines a manifold is thus called a *definite system of axioms*; accordingly, “any deductive discipline resting on such a system is a *definite discipline* or a *mathematical discipline in the most pregnant sense*” (Hua III/1, p. 152). The reader might have already recognized what we dubbed *Rationality.4*, namely, geometry as embodying the ideal of a fully mathematized science based on the nature of its ontological domain as a “definite manifold.”¹¹

This being recognized, §73 raises the question: how do things stand with *phenomenology* in comparison to geometry? Can phenomenology, that is, its domain be understood the same way as geometry? “Is the stream of consciousness a genuine mathematical manifold?” (Hua III/1, pp. 153–154). Can the rationality proper to geometry characterize the domain of the stream of consciousness and its corresponding science, i.e., pure phenomenology? Let us quote Husserl *in extenso*:

After settling on the concept of the definite manifold, the problem is to consider the necessary conditions that a materially determinate domain must satisfy if it is supposed to be able to correspond to this idea. A condition for this is the *exactness of the “concept-formation,”* which is by no means a matter of our free and arbitrary will and logical art but, instead, presupposes *exactness* [Exaktheit] *in the apprehended essences themselves* with respect to the supposed axiomatic concepts that must still be demonstrable in immediate intuition. But the extent to which “exact” essences are to be found within a domain of essences—and whether exact essences can be grasped in actual intuition as substructuring [*substruierbar*] all essences and, as a consequence, as substructuring all their eidetic components too, are matters depending entirely upon the specificity of the domain at hand (Hua III/1, p. 154).

¹⁰ A deeper analysis of the notion of “definite manifold” can be found in Becker (1923).

¹¹ We are not unaware of the fact that, as to the question of whether space is a “definite manifold,” Husserl would answer in the negative: for, what we call “space” (*Sachgebiet*) is not only the subject matter of geometry as an exact science but also of the empirical morphology characteristic of descriptive sciences of the natural world such as mineralogy, botany, and zoology (on this, see Becker 1923, p. 391). Hence, as Becker does not fail to emphasize, the talk of a “double character of geometry” (*Doppelcharakter der Geometrie*): it is based on both the “empirical intuition” of space and the process of idealization (*Prozess der Idealisierung*) that leads us to “ideal formations” such as “straight line,” “circle” (*Übergang zur Grenze oder zum Limes*), and so forth (Drummond 1984; Tieszen 2005). It is important then to keep in mind that the observations proposed by Husserl in §§73–74 presuppose the already accomplished process of idealization from the morphological level to the exact level, only upon the basis of which any further process of formalization can be pursued. As Husserl already explained in the *Prolegomena* (§70): “If we use the term ‘space’ of the familiar type of order of the world of phenomena, the talk of ‘spaces’ for which, for example, the axioms of parallels does not hold, makes naturally no sense ... But if we mean by ‘space’ the categorial form of the world-space and, as a consequence, by ‘geometry’ the categorial theoretical form of geometry in the ordinary sense, then space falls under a genus, which can be bound by laws of pure, categorially determinate manifolds, in regard to which it is natural to speak of ‘space’ in a yet broader sense ... The theory of a Euclidean manifold of three dimensions is an ultimate ideal singular in this legally interconnected series of *a priori* and purely categorial theoretical forms (formal deductive systems)” (Hua XVIII, pp. 252–253).

Husserl is very straightforward: the “necessary condition” that a “material domain” must meet so as to correspond to the idea of a definite manifold is the *exactness* of its concept-formation, which in turn depends on the specificity of the domain itself (the *exactness in the apprehended essences*). Here the opposition is between ideal concepts and descriptive concepts; description and univocal or exact definition and determination; non-exact essences and exact essences; descriptive sciences and explanatory sciences; material and non-mathematical domains and material and mathematical domains (see also Hua XLI, Text 24, notably p. 284, on the *idealizing thought* and the difference between “exact” and “non-exact” sciences).¹²

The geometer, we read at the outset of §74, is not interested in the factual intuitive formations (as is the scientist who works by *describing* nature); they do not form morphological concepts of vague types of formations that are “directly” apprehended on the basis of sensory intuition.¹³ By contrast:

Geometrical concepts are “ideal” concepts; they express something that one cannot “see.” Their “origin” (and thus also their content) is essentially different from that of the *descriptive concepts* as concepts that immediately express essences taken from straightforward intuition, and therefore no “ideals.” Exact concepts have their correlate in essences that have the character of “ideas” in the Kantian sense ... The very process of focusing on an idea, as a process that yields ideal essences as ideal “limits,” is in principle not to be found in any sensory intuition, while morphological essences respectively “approximate” those ideal limits more or less, yet without ever attaining them. This ideation is, in a fundamentally essential way, different from the apprehension of essences through simple “abstraction,” in which an “inherent aspect” is singled out and elevated into the region of essences as something vague in principle, as something typical (Hua III/1, pp. 155–156).

Once again, “geometry” is called upon to play a paradigmatic role, for it exemplifies the idea of “exact sciences” in general: sciences the “concepts” of which have their correlates in “ideas in the Kantian sense”—ideal limits or substractions (*ideale Substruktionen*), as Husserl also calls them.

Husserl’s main preoccupation in these paragraphs is to lay claim to the irreducible “descriptive” character of phenomenology as a material-eidetic science¹⁴ by

¹²As Becker frames it: “Dann und nur dann, wenn ein Sachgebiet eine derartige definite Mannigfaltigkeit bildet, ist es möglich, in ihm eine exakte (im weitesten Sinn ‘mathematische’) Wissenschaft zu begründen. Die Möglichkeit einer exakten Geometrie gründet sich also auf die Wesenseigentümlichkeit des Raumes, eine definite Mannigfaltigkeit zu sein” (Becker 1923, p. 390).

¹³“Mineralogy, geology and all so-called descriptive sciences are not foundations of physics at all. Physics ‘explains’ what they ‘describe,’ but it itself is not built up on descriptions. The procedure of physics, the science of objective nature in its pure objectivity, is a remarkable one as regards the concrete intuitional basis of which it, of course, like: every science, makes use. It operates, works with intuitively given things; it names them; it therefore also uses descriptive concepts. But there is nothing to be noticed of a toilsome fashioning of concepts out of sensuous intuition, of a complicated scientific work of clarifying the pre-given empirical concepts that everyday life has formed on intuitions, a grasping of essences and a delimiting of essences to be carried out by eidetic analysis” (Hua V, pp. 60–61).

¹⁴“As far as phenomenology is concerned, its aim is to be a *descriptive* doctrine of essences of the transcendently pure lived-experiences ... and, like any descriptive doctrine that does not idealize

emphasizing the non-mathematical nature of its domain, that is, the region of “pure consciousness.”

In this specific sense, then, geometry stands for *one type of eidetic science*, i.e., “exact” science, in a straightforward opposition to descriptive eidetic sciences in general, such as pure psychology, for example, or phenomenology. As a consequence, nothing could be further from Husserl’s intentions than the idea of extending the *exact* character of geometry, that is, the *exact character of its domain*, to that of other—and radically different—eidetic sciences or ontologies (e.g., phenomenology): “as a descriptive science of essences, however, transcendental phenomenology belongs to a *fundamental class of eidetic sciences* that is *totally different* from that to which the mathematical sciences belong” (Hua III/1, p. 158), or, similarly, “rational psychology is not mathematics, and specifically the phenomenology of lived-experiences is not mathematics of lived-experiences. Common to both is the fact that they are eidetic theories and eidetic theories connected to the regional a priori. But not every eidetic theory is of the mathematical species” (Hua V, p. 44).

In terms of what we have called “ontological rationality,” nothing could be further from Husserl’s intentions than to claim that the “rationality” immanent to the “domain” of geometry is the same as the rationality immanent to the domain of a “descriptive” science such as pure phenomenology. *Rationality.2* and *Rationality.3*—both paradigmatically exemplified by geometry and its application to physics—do not necessarily entail *Rationality.4* (for, this would immediately result in a violation of *OPP*), of which geometry, however, still represents the only epitome.

“Geometry” is looked upon by Husserl as the most “historically” successful eidetic science, i.e., the one that perfectly and clearly embodies the idea of rational science in general and, correlatively, its *rationalizing function*. As Husserl further explains, with explicit reference to geometry, “one does not study the figures of the material bodies by description in experience, but at first a priori, as geometrical ones. All study of the figures of factual bodies is application of geometrical knowledge, and has to be. This is the only *correct* method” (Hua V, p. 70). In this specific sense—and only in this specific sense—any further distinctions within the realm of ontologies or eidetic sciences are to be held in abeyance. And yet, as soon as Husserl tries to shed light on the distinction between exact and descriptive sciences, therefore on the nature of the relevant essences and concept-formation, geometry represents only exact sciences—even though the role that Husserl assigns to geometry in clarifying the *function of any eidetic science* should not be confused (and he *de facto* never makes such a confusion) with the value of the (ontological) rationality to which it gives expression.¹⁵

and does not do substructions, it has its legitimacy in itself” (Hua III/1, p. 156).

¹⁵ “Indeed, physics rests on rational disciplines, but of quite different fundamental natures from that of phenomenology. Phenomenology is an infinite field of eidetic analyses and eidetic descriptions, but not a field of deductions; rational natural science, e.g., pure geometry or kinematics, is an infinite field of deductions but not a field of eidetic analyses and descriptions. Geometry begins by fixing a few concepts derived from intuition. Obviously the conceptual essences are taken from the intuition of spatial formations in a way that demands no great formalities (‘reductions,’ ‘analyses’).

2 *Sub specie aeternitatis*, or: Husserl on Spinoza

If our foregoing analysis is on the right track, then two possible interpretations of eidetic sciences need to be distinguished.

- (A) On the one hand, there is what we could call a *minimalistic conception* of eidetic sciences and ontologies. Per this conception, they investigate what belongs to the essence of an objectual domain in such a way that the foundations, presuppositions, and implicit assumptions at the root of positive sciences are “clarified” (*die Klärung ihrer Grundlagen*). This is the interpretation embraced, e.g., by Edith Stein in her *Einführung in die Philosophie* lectures (Stein 2004, 8–11) and also by Martin Heidegger, who affirmed that “fundamental concepts determine the way in which we obtain a preliminary understanding of the material domain underlying all the thematic objects of a science, and all positive investigation is guided by it” (Heidegger 1967, p. 10)
- (B) On the other hand, there is what we could call a *maximalistic conception* of eidetic sciences and ontologies. It is with reference to this conception that we believe that Husserl himself operated. Per this conception, eidetic sciences and ontologies investigate what belongs to the essence, not only with the intention of clarifying the presuppositions of positive sciences, but first and foremost with the aim of yielding a *full-fledged rationalization of the empirical* (see p. 205 and ff.).

The difference between (A) and (B) is that while the former takes the function of eidetic sciences to be solely that of ascertaining and spelling out the “eternal truths” (Hua III/1, p. 148) grounded in such and such a region, the latter *also* ascribes to eidetic sciences a positive attitude vis-à-vis *the empirical*: the empirical is *not* to be thought of as *excluded* from the scientific “scope” of rational ontologies. But rather, as what they ultimately aim to “grasp” in light of those very same *veritates*. As a consequence, we might distinguish the *subject matter* of eidetic sciences (what they investigate and study, the system of truths grounded in such and such a material region) and their *function*.

If for the a priori Husserl retrieved the Greek *eidos*, the function of eidetic sciences is presented by means of a Latin turn of phrase borrowed from Baruch Spinoza: *sub specie aeternitatis*. What does it mean? How are we to understand this appropriation of a famous, yet also highly controversial, Spinozistic motive?

The mysterious formula, perhaps coined by Spinoza himself, can be found in *Ethica*, Part V, Prop. XXIII, Scholium. The “proposition” sounds: “The human mind cannot be absolutely destroyed with the body, but there remains of it something that is eternal” (*Mens humana non potest cum corpore absolute destrui, sed eius aliquid remanet quod aeternum est*). Here comes the *Scholium*:

There arise immediate eidetic insights which are expressed as axioms in conceptual thought: a few axioms and everything else is formal deduction according to the principles of the formal *mathesis*” (Hua V, pp. 59–60).

This idea, which expresses the essence of the body *sub specie aeternitatis*, is, as we have said, a certain mode of thinking, which belongs to the essence of the mind, and is necessarily eternal. Yet it is not possible that we should remember that we existed before our body, for our body can bear no trace of such existence, neither can eternity be defined in terms of time, or have any relation to time. But, notwithstanding, we feel and know that we are eternal. For the mind feels those things that it conceives by understanding, no less than those things that it remembers. For the eyes of the mind, whereby it sees and observes things, are none other than proofs. Thus, although we do not remember that we existed before the body, yet we feel that our mind, in so far as it involves the essence of the body, under the form of eternity, is eternal, and that thus its existence cannot be defined in terms of time, or explained through duration. Thus our mind can only be said to endure, and its existence can only be defined by a fixed time, in so far as it involves the actual existence of the body. Thus far only has it the power of determining the existence of things by time, and conceiving them under the category of duration.

We left the expression in Latin due to the possible translations and interpretations of what Spinoza means by such an enigmatic turn of phrase. In particular, it is the term *specie* that can be construed in different manners, in such a way determining several divergent interpretations or lines of reading of the entire expression and, correlatively, of the very notion of eternity. For, as we shall soon see, the issue at hand does not only bear on how to understand the *sub specie*, but first and foremost on the *aeternitas* and the manner in which the latter can or cannot be attributed to finite modes. As has been maintained, scholars have thus far adopted four major hermeneutical options.¹⁶

- (α) *Specie* can be loosely understood as *sort*, *way*, or *manner* (*by some manner* or *somehow*): accordingly, “to understand something *sub specie aeternitatis*” would amount to conceiving it *somehow as eternal*, or *by some manner eternal*. What is implied by this interpretation is that humans do not and cannot actually conceive of things *eternally* the same way as God, but can only “approximate” it (*une connaissance qui aurait des airs d’éternité*).¹⁷
- (β) A second option is that of understanding *specie* as meaning *form* in the Platonic sense of εἶδος.¹⁸ In this case, the trait of eternity is *indifferently* ascribed to both the substance and its finite modes, as if no fundamental difference or ontological discrepancy between the two ever obtained. In other words, they would be *eternal* in exactly the same sense.
- (γ) A third possibility is to understand *specie* as *species* and “eternity” as being a “genus” within which different species can be distinguished. Accordingly, the question here is whether such different *species* of eternity have to be thought of in terms of “gradation” (*from* the one pertaining to the infinite substance *to* that of its finite modes).

¹⁶ Jaquet (2015, pp. 20–22).

¹⁷ Jaquet (2015, p. 20).

¹⁸ Rodis-Lewis (1986, p. 212).

- (8) But *specie* could also be construed as *aspect*¹⁹ in such a way that the understanding of something *sub specie aeternitatis* becomes a question of mere perspective.²⁰

Now let us turn back to Husserl. The expression *sub specie aeternitatis*, or *sub specie aeterni*,²¹ is used by Husserl systematically and on several occasions. Sometimes, the reference seems to be merely rhetorical, while, other times, Husserl clearly takes it at face value—the expression being evidently imbued with a technical meaning and sense. (Let us hasten to warn the reader that in what follows we will be confining ourselves to the most significant and relevant cases).

- In *Ideen I*, at the very end of the chapter on noesis and noema (§96), Husserl adds a sort of final remark concerning both the value and scope of his phenomenological descriptions. As he explains to the reader, phenomenology presents itself in our expositions as a “science” that is only just commencing (*anfängende Wissenschaft*); as a consequence, “only the future can instruct us on how many of the results of the analyses tried here are ultimately valid. Certainly much of what we have described will have to be described differently *sub specie aeterni*” (Hua III/1, p. 224). It might look like the reference to the *sub specie aeterni* is only rhetorical here, as if Husserl were only striving to sound humble with respect to the investigations provided throughout the volume. Now, even if this were actually the case, it would still be quite interesting to emphasize that the appeal to the *sub specie aeterni* points to a radically different description (*anders zu beschreiben sein*) of exactly the same phenomena, namely, the ones Husserl has so far conveyed to the reader.
- Quite different is the context of a 1914 manuscript containing a series of loose notes and remarks on post-Kantian philosophy (*Exzerpte und Notizen zur nachkantischen Philosophie*) (Hua VII, pp. 408–412). In the section on the *Voraussetzungslosigkeit der Philosophie*, i.e., the one on the work of Henrik Steffens—a Danish philosopher who was a former student of Schelling in Berlin—Husserl writes that “the method of natural philosophy” (= Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie*) consists in yielding a peculiar sort of “evidence” radically divergent from the sort based on matters of fact. As he also goes on to point out, the kind of knowledge that derives from it has a “timeless character”: for, it is “knowledge *sub specie aeternitatis*” (*Zeitlose Charakter. Erkenntnis sub specie aeternitatis*) (Hua VI, p. 411). Although it is not easy to tell what Husserl means by that, two points can be made with certainty. One, the *sub specie aeternitatis*

¹⁹ Gueroult (1974, pp. 609–615), notably, p. 609: “La connaissance des choses *sub specie aeternitatis* ne peut donc être que leur connaissance selon une espèce ou une sorte d’éternité qui n’est pas l’éternité de Dieu même.”

²⁰ Jaquet (2015, p. 22); and Gueroult (1974, p. 611).

²¹ Let us point out that the Latin expression *sub specie aeterni* could also possibly be only an abbreviation of *sub specie aeternitatis*, rather than a “variation” thereupon. If this were the case, it would be completely pointless to speculate on what their purported difference would amount to. I am very grateful to Anna Tropia for such remark.

formula characterizes a kind of knowledge having a “timeless” nature. Two, the notes on Schelling that immediately precede those on Steffens explicitly recognize the a priori character of such an “idealism” (Hua VI, pp. 410–411).

- In his 1922–1923 *Einleitung in die Philosophie* lectures, specifically toward the end of what is now §63 on *Die Phänomenologie als Wissenschaft von allen Seinsmöglichkeiten und allen möglichen realen Welten (und die) Zukunft der phänomenologischen Philosophie* (Hua XXXV, pp. 304–307), the formula makes an interesting appearance. Husserl is wrapping up the main outcomes of his analysis of phenomenology as a “first philosophy” and, in particular, of its role and function vis-à-vis the totality of empirical sciences and their having been “founded” on it (*von der Phänomenologie abhängige Wissenschaften*) (Hua XXXV, p. 305). As Husserl hastens to point out, although in the present situation the “separation” (*Trennung*) between philosophy (read: phenomenology construed in light of its foundational role) and “non-” or “extra-” philosophical sciences (*außerphilosophischen Wissenschaften*) is undeniable, “considered *sub specie aeterni* this separation does not hold up [*Sub specie aeterni betrachtet ist diese Trennung nicht zu halten*],” for philosophy “pursues” the idea of absolute knowledge, of irrevocably binding rationality (*von von letzterdenklicher Rationalität*) possible only within the domain of phenomenologically-grounded sciences (*in einem Universum phänomenologisch begründeter Wissenschaften*) (Hua XXXV, p. 306). It is important to notice that the phrase *sub specie aeterni* seems to have two functions. On the one hand, it is a “rhetorical” device: Husserl is putting all his energy into “underplaying” the radical separation between philosophy and science that characterizes contemporary philosophy (in contrast to the ideal “realization” of his phenomenological project). On the other hand, however, the expression *sub specie aeterni* designates the manner in which empirical sciences are to be regarded *once* they are “grounded” in pure phenomenology as first philosophy, thereby bringing about what Husserl also calls “second philosophy” (Hua VII, pp. 13–14). Accordingly, the understanding of the totality of empirical sciences *sub specie aeterni* amounts to “conceiving” them based upon their foundation on “the a priori system” of phenomenology (Hua VII, p. 14), namely, as parts of the one and only universal system of the a priori (which Husserl also calls “universal ontology”).
- A further important appearance of the *sub specie aeternitatis* can be found in a 1926 manuscript now published in Husserliana XLI (*Physikalische Realität und morphologische Realität. Physik und Morphologie der Natur, insbesondere deskriptive Naturwissenschaft* (Hua XLI, pp. 278–296)). Here, the framework is explicitly eidetic, namely, dedicated to expounding the different a priori structures and layers that make up what we call the “world” in general. In particular, the second half of the manuscript offers a systematic assessment of what Husserl calls “formal a priori,” understood as the material a priori characterizing the “form” of any nature *überhaupt* (*natura formaliter spectata*), including the spatiotemporal structure of “phantoms” and their embeddedness within a network of

causal relations and causal dependences (Hua XLI, p. 288).²² Toward the end of the manuscript, after he elaborates on the relations between the idea of a possible world in general, that of nature, and the extent to which the a priori of any possible world and nature can be raised up to the level of “mathematization,”²³ Husserl raises the thorny question of whether it is also possible to speak of a “concrete” a priori pertaining to the objectual domain of morphological sciences such as biology, anthropology, zoology, and botany (Hua XLI, p. 290). For the sake of our issues here, let us confine ourselves to acknowledging that *de facto* Husserl recognizes the existence of “a universal biological a priori” (*ein universales biologisches Apriori*) (Hua XLI, p. 291), i.e., the a priori of “biological morphology” (Hua XLI, p. 295).²⁴ The expression employed here to characterize such “biological a priori,” or, better, the idea of biology as an a priori science, is *sub specie aeternitatis*: Husserl speaks of “the autonomy of biology itself *sub specie aeternitatis* [*die Eigenständigkeit der Biologie selbst sub specie aeternitatis*]” (Hua XLI, p. 291). Such a science—as can also be easily guessed—would investigate the lawfulness of “organic beings,” namely, all those eidetic laws that rule over “organic being and life in general” in contrast to the factual lines of development of the factual *morphai* that are studied by biology as an experiential science of facts.

- The last text to be briefly recalled is the famous Vienna lecture on *Philosophy and The Crisis of European Humanity* (Hua VI, pp. 314–348). The expression, introduced by Husserl in section two of the lecture, is related to the appearance of “universal reason” (*Vernunft*) with its infinite tasks. As Husserl emphasizes, “reason is a broad title” and—according to a long-standing tradition—humans are rational beings having “ends” and “acting reflectively” upon their “practical possibilities.” Nevertheless—Husserl urges—“just as humans and even the Papuan represent a new stage of animal nature, i.e., as opposed to the beast, so philosophical reason represents a new stage of humanity and its reason. But the stage of human existence and of ideal norms for infinite tasks, the stage of existence *sub specie aeterni*, is possible only through absolute universality, precisely

²² “Wenn wir die Welt a priori betrachten und sie zunächst auf ihre unterste Struktur Natur reduzieren und diese wieder auf die Struktur der Phantome und damit auf die formalen notwendigen Möglichkeiten, die in den apriorischen Formen Raum und Zeit beschlossen sind, so gewinnen wir ein Reich freier und theoretisch konstruierbarer Möglichkeiten und zugehöriger Wesensgesetze.”

²³ “Zu jeder möglichen Welt und der ihr zugehörigen möglichen Natur ist gehörig eine mögliche Physik, über allen Möglichkeiten liegt die allgemeine Möglichkeit der Physik, die Form einer Physik überhaupt, korrelativ die Form einer Physis überhaupt, und so für jede mögliche konkrete Welt. Zum Wesen einer Welt überhaupt gehört eine systematische, eine infinite, aber systematisch-mathematische Struktur” (Hua XLI, pp. 286–287).

²⁴ “So würden wir darunter auch rein formal und a priori die Idee einer apriorischen Biologie konstruieren können, eventuell sich in besonderen Typen differenzierend. Natürlich anwenden könnten wir sie nur auf eine anschaulich deskriptiv ausgebildete Zoologie etc., so wie eine von der Geometrie her und mit Heranziehung eines formalen Begriffs von Kausalität a priori konstruierte Mechanik nur empirische Anwendung finden könnte auf experimentelle, am Faktum geübte Erforschung mechanischer Phänomene” (Hua XLI, p. 295).

the universality contained from the start in the idea of philosophy" (Hua VI, p. 338). It is not easy to tell whether the *sub specie aeterni* merely designates a way of regarding our human existence (e.g., philosophy and its universal reason would "regard" our human existence *sub specie aeterni*, that is, *from the standpoint* of its universal tasks and possibilities), or whether the emergence of reason brings about a radical transformation of our existence—which from now on could exist exclusively as a task to be "infinitely" fulfilled and practically realized.

With all of this in mind, we are now in a position to better understand what Husserl means by the enigmatic *sub specie aeternitatis*. For, the problem does not simply consist in getting a grasp of the sense of both *aeternitatis* and *aeterni* but, more broadly and generally, of the very turn of phrase *sub specie...*, to which Husserl resorts also in order to coin other formulas such as *sub specie infiniti* (Hua XXXV, p. 459) and *sub specie der Echtheit* (Hua XLII, p. 438).

Now, based on the quick overview of Husserl's texts just offered, and given our general concern with the issue of the a priori in his thought, the following theses can be proposed.

- (1) The expression *sub specie aeternitatis*, notably the "*sub specie...*," always designates a "mode of consideration" (*Betrachtung*) and a sort of "description" (*beschreiben*) that radically differs from, e.g., that which sees phenomenology only as a commencing science, the relation between philosophy and sciences in terms of "separation," and our human existence as merely a brute fact with only finite tasks.
- (2) In a more strict sense, it characterizes a type of knowledge or cognition that is of an a priori nature in opposition to experiential science or knowledge based on matters of fact.
- (3) In an even more rigorous way, it points to a "gnoseological" or scientific *Betrachtung* of something *from the standpoint* of what is *eternal*, i.e., "timeless."

For the sake of our issues here, the conclusion can be then drawn that the *sub specie aeternitatis*, notably the "*sub specie...*," is to be construed as signifying the adoption of a radically different attitude, notably, the "eidetic attitude." So far, so good. This being recognized, however, a cluster of problems and questions still needs to be addressed. First, is there a way to relate (1), (2), and (3) above to the earlier (α), (β), (γ), and (δ)? Can we somehow make use of the latter to shed light upon the former?

As far as we can tell, the first option (α) is to be ruled out altogether, for Husserl does not seem to understand the *specie* in the loose sense of *sort*, *way*, or *manner*: the understanding of something *sub specie aeternitatis* does not amount for him to *somehow* looking at it as eternal. (γ) also seems to be alien to Husserl's position: the distinction between the "real" and the "ideal," hence between the temporal character of the former and the "timeless" nature of the latter, does not leave any room for holding eternity as a "genus" within which several "species" could be singled out.

When it comes to the second option (*specie* as meaning *form* in the sense of the Platonic εἶδος), we would be inclined to accept this: indeed, if we are on the right track in interpreting the *sub specie aeternitatis* as signifying the taking up of the eidetic or a priori attitude, then the construal of the expression as meaning *sub specie* τοῦ εἶδους or *sub specie* τῶν εἶδων perfectly aligns with it. If this is the case, however, we will also have to explain in what sense and to what extent the trait of eternity—which according to (β) can be “indifferently” applied to *both the substance and its finite modes*—can apply to what is a priori *as well as* to what is regarded *sub specie* of it (for, this seems to be in conflict with the ontological distinction between real and ideal beings). Moreover, since (δ) also seems compatible with Husserl’s perspective, yet incompatible with (β)—either the character of eternity can be applied to the substance and the modes in the same way, but then it cannot simply be a matter of mere perspective, or is it just a question of *aspect*, but then the finite modes cannot be said to be eternal *in the same way as* the infinite substance)—then the question arises of how to reconcile the two. In what sense can we talk of “perspective” while at the same time urging that “eternity” can be predicated of both the a priori and whatever is regarded *sub specie* of it?

The answer lies in the discussion of the notion of the eidetic or a priori attitude propounded on p. 138 and ff. and which can be now “completed,” so to speak, by means of the above distinction between the “subject matter” of eidetic sciences and their specific functions.

According to *A Priori Attitude.1* and *A Priori Attitude.2* (see p. 156 and ff.), by “adopting” the a priori attitude we preliminarily assume an objectuality as the exemplar of a corresponding “pure essence,” which thereby will disclose itself as the theme or thematic universe of the attitude at hand. The “theme” having been established (e.g., *Natur als Idee*), its scientific investigation can then be undertaken and all the relevant a priori truths grounded in it (*veritates aeternae*) ascertained, systematically studied, and spelled out. Yet, and as we should remember, anyone eidetically “focused” (*eingestellt*) does not only aspire to get a glimpse of “what really is” (in Platonic parlance) but also to *return* to that original objectuality in order to understand it in light of those *veritates aeternae* (to borrow from Husserl himself), that is to say, *sub specie aeternitatis*. If we are on the right track, then the latter formula designates the specific “function” of ontologies; i.e., it points to the very methodological moment in which, the eternal truths having been established and scientifically fixed, “the empirical” can be understood *sub specie* of them. By so construing the relation between the eidetic attitude and eidetic sciences, our reading is in a position to do justice to both (β) and (δ): for, the eidetic attitude ultimately leads to the understanding of something *sub specie aeternitatis* or, even better, *sub specie veritatum aeternarum* “grounded” in such and such a region or eidetic domain (β).

As C. Jaquet has shown with respect to Spinoza, the *sub specie aeternitatis* kind of conception can make sense only in a philosophy that admits the possibility of conceiving of things as at the same time eternal (*sub specie aeternitatis*) and durable

(*sub specie durationis*).²⁵ In a more Husserlian vein, it makes sense only if we can think of as matters of fact either as subject to the universality of the laws of nature (*Natur als Faktum*) or as an individualization of some eidetic universality (*Natur als Idee*) (Hua III/1, p. 20).

This being stated, we can now correct ourselves. For, it is not simply the case that the expression *sub specie aeternitatis* is to be construed as designating the adoption of a radically different attitude: it refers to the latter *insofar as* the “function” of eidetic sciences is considered—otherwise, the very sense of the “*sub specie...*” and what it refers to would remain altogether unintelligible.

But if our line of thought so far is correct, then in what sense can eternity be predicated of both the a priori (*veritates aeternae* grounded in such and such an *eidōs* or eidetic domain) and whatever is regarded *sub specie* of it? We should never forget (cf. p. 138 and ff.) that Husserl tends to ascribe the modal character of “necessity” exclusively to the “particularizations” or *Einzelfälle* of a purely conceptual truth or law (better: to their corresponding states of affairs) while the predicate of “eternity” is ascribed only to the latter (*ewige Wahrheiten*).

As we acknowledged at the end of the paragraph in question: what is “a priori” is the source of necessity, though it cannot itself be called “necessary,” and what is unconditionally necessary derives from what is a priori, though it cannot itself be called “unconditionally necessary.” In the *Prolegomena*, Husserl writes: “Necessity as an objective predicate of a truth (which is hence called a necessary truth) basically means the law-governed validity of the relevant state of affairs” (Hua XVIII, p. 233). Husserl himself, however, for example, in his 1919 lectures on *Natur und Geist*, explicitly speaks of “eternal necessity” (Hua-Mat IV, p. 33; see also Hua XVII, p. 363) to designate the necessity that, in this case, marks the state of affairs following from the (eidetic) law according to which every perception perceives or gives its object through appearances (*durch Erscheinung*).²⁶

Since we are not sure about how often Husserl resorts to such an expression, the only way to elucidate its sense is by relating it back to the assessment provided in the *LU* (Sect. 1), where it was understood as “absence of time.” Now, if what Husserl maintains in the *Prolegomena* holds true, and the talk of “necessity” stands for the “law-governed validity of the relevant state of affairs,” then to describe it as *eternal* (*ewige Notwendigkeit*) means the same as to characterize its *validity* as *timeless*, and the relevant *law* as *purely conceptual*. Differently framed: to acknowledge that a state of affairs is *eternally necessary* is to recognize that the relevant positing proposition is the *Einzelfall* of a purely conceptual law and a priori truth (p. 138 and ff.). As a consequence, *eternity* is to be primarily predicated of a relevant *law*, and indirectly of the *modal* determination of the state of affairs (to which, by contrast, “necessity” applies in the first place).

²⁵ Jaquet (2015, p. 127); Scribano (2006, pp. 261–262).

²⁶ “Alle äußere Wahrnehmung ist, und zwar nicht zufällig, sondern in ewiger Notwendigkeit, Wahrnehmung durch Erscheinung.”

If, in Spinoza, the *sub specie aeternitatis* sort of knowledge consists in the cognition of something “from within,” i.e., by privileging the “necessary” bond that tightly “connects” them to the infinite substance in which they are actually “contained,”²⁷ and is therefore fundamentally defined by the exclusion of all contingency, in Husserl, it designates the “knowledge” of something based on its immanent rationality; if, in Spinoza, it derives from reason’s natural capacity of contemplating things as necessary rather than contingent, that is, as grounded in God’s existence,²⁸ in Husserl, it is employed as a catchy expression to characterize in what the “function” of eidetic sciences properly consists.²⁹ To whoever investigates “eidetically,” or “ontologically” (*Ontology.1* to *Ontology.5*), the world turns out to be a system of eternal necessities, i.e., a plurality of irreducible necessities resulting from the scientific activity that first aims at ascertaining the *veritates aeternae* ruling over such and such a region of being and then applies them to “the empirical.”

What is thereby obtained is not only, as we hope, an explanation of why Husserl decided to resort to Spinoza’s famous expression *sub specie aeternitatis* (or, at least, what he meant to convey by it), but first and foremost an illuminating example of the way in which Husserl relates to the history of philosophy, notably, “modern philosophy,” in order to appropriate some its “metaphysical” motives by purging them precisely of all their “metaphysical” incrustations, as it were. In this case, Husserl retrieves Spinoza’s idea of a form of knowledge able to apprehend things as eternal by disentangling it from its original metaphysical framework. Accordingly, the *sub specie aeternitatis* sort of formula no longer implies notions such as that of infinite substance and its finite modes, the distinction between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*, nor that of a special faculty called reason or the eternity of our human “spirit.” It now refers to a very specific aspect of Husserl’s doctrine of the a priori as originally propounded in *Ideen I*, namely, the function of eidetic sciences obtained thanks to a meticulous study of concepts such as essence and *eidos*, region and sub-region, regional “axioms,” *tode ti* and *abstractum*, *concretum* and *individuum*, “law” and “necessity,” etc.

²⁷“*En ce sens, la connaissance sub specie aeternitatis consiste à saisir les choses de l’intérieur en privilégiant leur lien nécessaire avec la substance qui les contient*” (Jaquet 2015, p. 130).

²⁸Jaquet (2015, p. 132).

²⁹Let us point out that, as shown by Husserl’s 1919 draft of a letter to C. Stumpf (Hua-Dok III/1, p. 174), a very likely source of his knowledge of Spinoza is Høffding (1895, pp. 324–371). Here are two passages on Spinoza that might have caught Husserl’s attention: “*Die Vernunftkenntnis ist nach ihm eine Auffassung der Dinge ‘unter dem Gesichtspunkte der Ewigkeit’ (sub specie aeterni)*” and “*Die Vernunftkenntnis (Ratio) bringt uns zwar zum Erblicken des Ewigen und Notwendigen in den Dingen*” (p. 340). Far from us to claim that Husserl derived his interpretation from Høffding: it is more reasonable to think that what he found in the handbook is a corroboration of some of his thoughts. For instance, while Husserl makes a clear-cut distinction between *Vernunft* and *Ratio*, between the transcendental and the ontological form of rationality, Høffding uses *Vernunft* and *ratio* interchangeably.

2.1 *The Old Rationalists*

At this point, another objection may be raised vis-à-vis Husserl and Spinoza. Even if the point can be made that *de facto* Husserl employs a Spinozistic sounding expression, thereby bestowing on it a meaning that *de facto* “frees” it from its original “metaphysical” system, this does not mean that Husserl is also striving to establish a *de jure* connection to Spinoza’s philosophy. But how, then, is Husserl’s (more or less) explicit reference to Spinoza to be judged and understood? Besides the *de facto* appropriation of the *sub specie aeternitatis*, could we also speak of a *de jure* relation that, in Husserl’s view, relates his understanding of eidetic sciences back to Spinoza’s philosophy?

Though this might come as a surprise, the answer is: yes. In a nutshell, Husserl’s explicit retrieval of Spinoza’s own turn of phrase is to be understood as part of his broader and systematic endeavor to set up what for lack of a better term we can call a “genealogy” running from the “old” and “pre-Kantian” *rationalists* to his conception of eidetic science and rational ontology. Such an endeavor, in turn, is to be interpreted from within the Husserlian attempt—made mostly in the texts and manuscripts from the 1920s and 1930s—to understand the trajectory of modern philosophy from Descartes through Kant as an intense and dramatic tension between different forms of rationality.

While the latter theme will be the explicit subject matter of the next paragraph, our task now is to quickly expand on the former so as to pave the way for the investigation of said tension.

The only systematic and quite dense reflection that in *Krisis* Husserl dedicates to Spinoza could not be more straightforward. It appears at the end of §11:

One must, of course, correctly understand Spinoza’s historical sense. It is a complete misunderstanding to interpret Spinoza according to what is visible on the surface of his “geometrical” method of demonstration. Beginning as a Cartesian, he is at first, of course, completely convinced that not only nature but the totality of being as such must be a unitary rational system [*ein einheitliches rationales System*]. That was taken for granted in advance. The mathematical system of nature must be enclosed in the total system—but, as part of a system, the former cannot be self-sufficient ... God, the absolute substance, would also have to belong within the unity of the rational total system [*In die Einheit des rationalen Totalsystems*] as a subject for theory. Spinoza is confronted with the task of discovering the postulated rational total system [*rational Totalsystem*] of what is—discovering first of all the conditions of its being thought in coherent fashion—and then of systematically realizing it through actual construction. It is only thus, through the deed, that the actual conceivability of a rational totality of being [*eines rationalen Seinsalls*] is established. Prior to this, in spite of the self-evidence this attitude found in the exemplary character of natural science, it was only a postulate; for the dualism of radically different “substances,” with the one absolute and most real substance above them, the possibility of its being thought through was not at all clear. Of course, Spinoza was interested only in what was systematically general—his *Ethica* is the *first universal ontology* (Hua VI, pp. 65–66).

Husserl’s view on Spinoza is quite clear: even though he falls prey to the uncritical “assumption” of the exemplary and paradigmatic character of (modern) natural science, it would be a mistake to judge Spinoza based exclusively upon “what is

visible on the surface of his ‘geometrical’ method of demonstration”: *the historical sense of his thought lies elsewhere*, i.e., in the “conviction” that “not only nature but the totality of being as such must be a unitary rational system.” Expressions such as “unitary rational system,” “the unity of the rational total system,” and “rational totality of being” leave no room for doubt: Spinoza is the first philosopher to have recognized that not only “nature” but “the totality of being” is immanently *rational* through and through (in the sense of *Rationalität*). Hence Husserl’s depiction of the *Ethica* as “the first universal ontology.”

In his 1916–1918 lectures, Husserl is more critical of Spinoza’s position, which is discussed from different angles (we will come back to these lectures later). Indeed, Husserl remarks that Spinoza’s “metaphysics” is dogmatic (*dogmatische Metaphysik*) (Hua-Mat IX, p. 425); it is a metaphysics *à la* Euclid (*eine Metaphysik à la Euklid*), as he also polemically puts it, in which the rationality of the totality of being is conceived based upon the paradigmatic model of the rationality pertaining to axiomatic systems (*ein rationales Axiomensystem*).³⁰

For what concerns, in particular, the *Ethica*, Husserl speaks of a monistic and a priori metaphysics (Hua-Mat IX, p. 426), but also of “extreme apriorism” (*extremer Apriorismus*) based on the explicit assumption that mathematical knowledge is in general “the most fundamental type of rigorous and valid knowledge.”³¹

Nevertheless, over and above such critical observations, the thought of Spinoza is to be positively deemed: a general metaphysics (*eine allgemeine Metaphysik*), a universal science of the real (*die Idee eine allgemeinen Wissenschaft vom Realen*)

³⁰“Üppig blüht er als dogmatische Metaphysik, die zwar beständig von erkenntnistheoretischen Motiven bestimmt ist, aber, was das Entscheidende ist, eben nicht auf eine phänomenologisch reine, von allen transzendenten Suppositionen befreite Erkenntnistheorie gegründet ist ... Wir besprachen früher den Einfluss eines allgemeinen, aber ungeklärten erkenntnistheoretischen Motivs auf die ganze Entwicklung des Rationalismus, nämlich den Einfluss der Vorbildlichkeit der mathematischen Theorie, die als Prototyp echter und endgültiger Wissenschaften angesehen wurde. Damit hängt die im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert grassierende Mode zusammen, alle Wissenschaften in euklidischer Demonstrationsform zu begründen und darzustellen. Die extreme Konsequenz dieser Vorbildlichkeit, die auf einer noch völligen Unklarheit über die erkenntnistheoretische Wesensstruktur mathematischer Erkenntnis beruhte, war der Ontologismus des Spinoza, wie wir das früher schon erörtert haben, der eine Metaphysik *à la* Euklid, ordine geometrico demonstrata aufbaute, der also glaubte ein rein rationales Axiomensystem aufweisen und als Fundament nutzen zu können, auf dem in rein logischer Deduktion eine absolute Wissenschaft von der Realität zu gründen sei, eine Wissenschaft von Gott und den göttlichen Attributen, von der Art, wie aus Gottes begrifflichem Wesen, vermöge dessen er notwendig die eine und einzige Substanz sei.”

³¹“Ihr extremer Apriorismus ist bestimmt durch die von Descartes herstammende Auffassung des Typus mathematischer Erkenntnis als des Grundtypus strenger und endgültiger Erkenntnis überhaupt. Diese Vorbildlichkeit der mathematischen Erkenntnis, die den Rationalismus charakterisiert, nimmt Spinoza so ernst, dass er seine Metaphysik ordine geometrico aufbaut und damit sozusagen der Euklid der Metaphysik werden will. Dass in diesem Apriorismus der Metaphysik oder, wie man auch sagt, im Ontologismus ein erkenntnistheoretischer Grundirrtum liegt, das hat die weitere Entwicklung des Rationalismus selbst herausstellen müssen und wir werden davon noch zu sprechen haben” (Hua-Mat IX, p. 426).

(Hua-Mat IX, pp. 427–429)³² the extreme rationalism (*Rationalismus*) of which has the undeniable merit of implicitly raising the question of the very possibility of an “a priori metaphysics” as the doctrine of “purely a priori being.”

Accordingly, three elements in Husserl’s account of Spinoza can be distinguished:

- (a) The dogmatic aspect based upon the explicit assumption that “mathematical knowledge” is the most rigorous form of cognition and thus must be adopted to ground metaphysics.³³
- (b) The universal bearing of his metaphysics, which follows from his conviction (*Überzeugung*)...
- (c) ...that being is a “rational” and unitary totality (*All*).

As Husserl will explicitly acknowledge in *Krisis*, (c) embodies the historical sense or meaning of Spinoza’s rationalism. The turn of phrase employed by Husserl—*Seinsall*—is not, strictly speaking, technical: it does not designate (to use Husserl’s mereological terminology) a “whole” made up of “parts” as its components (be they of an independent or a non-independent nature). The *All*, notably *Seinsall*, is meant to refer to what for lack of a better expression we will call an “undifferentiated” totality: it is the totality of being *sic et simpliciter* without any internal (ontological) differentiation.

If this is the case, then (a) and (c) go hand in hand: the idea of mathematical knowledge as a paradigm (*Vorbildlichkeit*) for all forms of rigorous knowledge goes hand in hand with the idea of an ontological totality “devoid” of all its internal distinctions (in “regions” and “sub-regions,” as Husserl would contend) the rationality of which is hence left completely “undifferentiated.” No wonder that Husserl borrows from “the first universal ontology” the *sub specie aeternitatis* to express the function of eidetic sciences.³⁴ Indeed, Husserl shares with Spinoza the conviction that being is *rational* through and through; or, to make a much stronger claim: Husserl praises Spinoza precisely for first pointing this out. Nevertheless, where

³²With respect to *Krisis*, where Husserl will consider Spinoza’s *Ethica* the “first universal ontology” of modernity (and not only a metaphysics of the real), these lectures clearly concede much less to his work.

³³In the 1919 letter to Stumpf (who had just published his *Spinozastudien*), Husserl describes Spinoza’s system as an extreme rationalistic one, i.e., as an “absurd ontologism” (Hua-Dok, III/1, pp. 174–178).

³⁴It could even be argued that this *Seinsall* sort of conception that Husserl ascribes to Spinoza is precisely the result of what Alexandre Koyré calls “the destruction of the Cosmos” by Galileo’s mathematization of nature. As Koyré presents it in his famous 1943 essay “Galileo and Plato”: “The dissolution of the Cosmos means the destruction of the idea of a hierarchically-ordered finite world-structure, of the idea of a qualitatively and ontologically differentiated world, and its replacement by that of an open, indefinite and even infinite universe, united and governed by the same universal laws; a universe in which, in contradiction to the traditional conception with its distinction and opposition of the worlds of Heaven and of Earth, all things are on the same level of Being” (Koyré 1943, p. 404). See Koyré (1966, pp. 150–291).

Spinoza ends up embracing an ontological monism (a),³⁵ Husserl commits himself to *OPP*.

Generally speaking, Husserl never fails to relate his own conception of eidetic sciences or rational ontologies to the thought, aspirations, and ambitions of “the old rationalists.” A series of texts from *Ideen III* bearing on psychology, notably “rational psychology,” corroborates this view.

It is actually as the old rationalists [*alten Rationalisten*] believed: an infinity of possibilities precedes actuality. Thus the systematic infinity of the geometric possibilities of physical actuality; thus the infinity of possible formations of consciousness and noematic formations of psychological actuality and psychology regulated by eidetic necessity—*pervasive* [*durchgängige*] essential necessity. It does not help at all to close one’s eyes here; rational psychology is a great science, and it circumscribes the apodictic law-derived possibilities to whose absolutely fixed frame the psychological actualities are bound (Hua V, p. 56).

Leaving aside the specific example of “psychology” and the analogy Husserl sets up between it and geometry, what needs to be emphasized is that Husserl recognizes that the idea of a system of essential necessities that rules over such and such a domain of being (e.g., the psychological domain) is precisely that for which *the old rationalists* argued: it is the “old idea of an a priori ontology” that was “strictly interdicted by Kantianism and empiricism” (Hua XVII, p. 90; see also Hua IX, pp. 40–41). Another excerpt on the same issue (i.e., the possibility of an a priori ontology of the psyche) is also illuminating vis-à-vis Husserl’s sense of his connection to the old rationalists:

We live in a time of great reversals. Rational ontology and rational psychology—how long will it last, and also rational cosmology and theology—the much maligned and apparently permanently abolished disciplines of past epochs, seem to be awakening again to life. But it would be bad if those dead should be awakened again which were alive only as materially insufficient convictions and had to pass away because what they set down as truth had no place in the realm of truth, of eternal life. Only the general idea of such rational disciplines, but with completely new content, comes to life again in our analyses, and we may calmly trust that a rational psychology like that required here will hold its own *sub specie aeterni* (Hua V, pp. 70–71).

Husserl is clear: the point is not to simply go back to the old rational disciplines so as to bring them back to life but to accept “the general form of such rational disciplines,” on condition, of course, that a “completely new content” be “instilled” into them (see also Hua IX, *Beilage XXX*). And this “new content,” as Husserl explains over and over again, is to be obtained based upon an “intuitive method” rather than “constructions” and “empty” speculations (Hua IX, pp. 139, 216, 247).

It was Kant, according to Husserl in his 1925 lectures, who brought the “old rational disciplines,” i.e., the idea of a non-intuitive but “construction”-based rational psychology, to a definite end: “The Kantian critique put an end to that. But this psychology [of the old rationalists] was ontological-metaphysical. It was not a psychology that, like this new one, was purely intuitive and descriptive, and yet at the

³⁵ “Spinoza hat eine durchaus apriorische Metaphysik und darin beschlossen eine apriorische Physik und eine apriorische Psychik” (Hua-Mat IX, p. 239).

same time a priori, which therefore, based on intuitive concrete instances ascended to intuitive necessities and universalities” (Hua IX, p. 39).

Husserl agrees on the *form* but disagrees on the *content*; he embraces the very same philosophical *aspirations* of the old rationalists, yet he rejects the way in which their project was first understood and carried out: “A priori truths are not so easy to arrive at as people thought in earlier times. They arise as authentic essential truths in apodictic intuition only from out of their original sources in intuition. These sources, however, must be disclosed in the right way” (Hua IX, p. 306). Husserl acknowledges both the aspiration of the old rationalists and the Kantian critique of it (the implicit reference being to the paralogisms of pure reason); he embraces both the necessity of reconnecting to the *form* of the old rationalists’ thesis of a completely rational being and that of a critique able to replace its speculations with a brand new (and intuition-based) *content*: “Phenomenology joins ranks with Kant in the battle against the shallow ontologism of concept-analysis, but it is itself an ontology, albeit one drawn from transcendental experience” (Hua IX, p. 254).

Hence the Husserlian notion of eidetic sciences resultant from the conjunction of the old *form* (i.e., the function of rationalizing the empirical) and the new *content* derived from an intuitive method (i.e., the entire methodological apparatus discussed in the previous two chapters).³⁶

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³⁶ Accordingly, claims such as the one to the effect that for Husserl “the critical reflection on knowledge is not a prelude to a revived and reassured metaphysics in the old style, that is, in the sense of a science of the world that at once builds upon, goes beyond, and complements the existing sciences” (Carr 1999, p. 102), seems to utterly “contradict” what Husserl himself affirms as we have just seen on several occasions. That Husserl intends to revive the idea, proper to the old rationalists and metaphysicians of the modern period, of a rational science of the world according to its various domains is beyond question. The issue is one of understanding how this should be achieved and then the “function” and role of such science vis-à-vis Husserl’s conception of “transcendental” phenomenology and, in general, of philosophy, which for us amounts to addressing the issue of the relation between the two forms of rationality (and that cannot be done in the present context, where only the “ontological” rationalist is indeed under scrutiny).

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The Conflict Between Different Forms of Rationality



The problem of the “a priori,” initially understood in terms of the circumscribed question as to the possibility of pinpointing different species of necessity, soon turned out to entail something deeper, namely, a specific conception of rationality. This conception of rationality as *Rationalität*, i.e., as a “rationality of being,” is not to be confused with what Husserl conceives of as *Vernünftigkeit*, i.e., as a “rationality of sense.” *Rationalität*, *rational*, and *Ratio*: this is the battery of interconnected terms mobilized by the notion of a priori and which Husserl turns into a category through which he can read the developments of the history of philosophy. Accordingly, whenever Husserl speaks of *rationalism* (*Rationalismus*)—e.g., in opposition to *empiricism* (*Empirismus*)—the meaning he ascribes to it must be traced back to the *ontological rationality* (the actual sequence being: *rationale Wahrheit*—*Ratio*—*Rationalität*—*Rationalismus*).

To better grasp the sense of the move that Husserl makes in the 1920s and 1930s (from the a priori as a specific topic to ontological rationality now construed as a *category* to interpret the adventures and misadventures of the history of philosophy), two excerpts could be compared. We already know the first one: it comes from the 1906 lectures *Einleitung in die Logik und Erkenntnistheorie* (Sect. 4), where “the absolute ideal” for all “rational” beings is discussed. Husserl speaks of reason (*Vernunft*) and its a priori principles, and he asserts that “these principles are the grounds of justification of the objective validity that every operation of so-called reason claims in both the theoretical and the axiological spheres” (Hua XXIV, p. 237). As Husserl indeed writes, the *ideal* amounts to “bringing principles to light everywhere and testing their authenticity, solving transcendental problems regarding them, then tracing them back to their phenomenological origin and meaning.” That is to say, the ideal is to bring the activities of *Vernunft* back to their a priori *sive* rational (*rational*) principles: it is in this that the *Zurückführung* operation consists.

If this text is compared with the 1928 *Realitätswissenschaft und Idealisierung* (Hua VI, pp. 281–293), the difference between the two frameworks, yet also the coherence of Husserl’s position, will come into focus.

Platonic idealism, through the fully conscious discovery of the “idea” and of approximation, opened up the path of logical thinking, “logical” and “rational” science [*der rationale*]. Ideas were taken as archetypes, in which everything singular participates more or less “ideally,” which everything approaches, which everything realizes more or less fully; the ideal truths belonging to the ideas were taken as the absolute norms for all empirical truths. If we designate as rationalism [*Rationalismus*] the conviction that all rational knowing [*vernünftige Erkennen*] must be rational [*rational sein muß*]¹—whether purely rationally [*rein rational*], in the thinking that investigates the essential relations between the purely rational [*rationale*] concepts (or rather, the thinking that investigates, in terms of laws, everything that is possible, insofar as it stands under purely rational [*rationale*] ideas, or is thought in an exactly determinate manner) or else in such a way that it measures the empirical against the pure ideals through methods of approximation and other norms for judging the empirical according to corresponding pure ideas—then the whole modern conviction is rationalistic [*rationalistisch*] (Hua VI, p. 291).

Even if the language of the “ontological rationality” is quite apparent, a series of observations could still be made to single out the different layers of Husserl’s line of thought.

- (A) First of all, it is Plato’s idealism that opens up the path of logical or rational thinking: the famous or infamous concept of idea, hence that of approximation, is understood by Husserl as the archetype the ideal truths of which stand for the set of “absolute norms for empirical truths.” As we will soon see, the Platonic idealism, notably the “geometry” based upon it, is, according to Husserl, the first attempt at “rationalizing” the empirical.
- (B) Based on Plato’s idealism, one could call *Rationalismus* the general or generalized conviction that *Vernunft* must be *rational*, and clarified in light of its purely rational truths and principles (or, perhaps better still, must be comprehended *sub specie aeternitatis*).
- (C) If this is the case, then the entirety of modern philosophy could be deemed *rationalistisch*.

In less than half a page, Husserl pinpoints (C) the essential trait of modern philosophy (its being rationalistic), (B) what its rationalism actually consists in (its “conviction”), and (A) the latter’s historic-philosophical origin (Plato’s idealism and the concept of idea). In what follows, we will first turn toward Plato in order to briefly address (A), after which we will turn to (B) and (C).

However, before we embark on our long journey, a preliminary remark bearing on what we have been calling *the conflict between different forms of rationality* is necessary. As will soon become apparent, what is at stake in Husserl’s interpretation of the history of (modern) philosophy should be better presented and characterized as a *double* or *twofold conflict*, as it were. On the one hand, there is what could be labeled (perhaps a little bit improperly) *exogenous conflict*:

- The conflict between the ontological version of rationality (*Rationalität*) and the transcendental reason (*Vernünftigkeit*), with the former striving to “impose”

itself upon the latter and the latter striving to display its independent *novelty* and *uniqueness*.¹

This is what in *Krisis* (§14) Husserl will label the “objectivism-transcendentalism” opposition. Objectivism, he writes at the outset, “moves upon the ground of the world which is pre-given, taken for granted through experience, and seeks the ‘objective truth’ of this world.” As he elaborates, “it is the task of *episteme*, *ratio*, or philosophy to carry this out universally. In so doing, one arrives at what ultimately is; beyond this, no further questions would have a rational sense [*vernünftigen Sinn*]” (Hua VI, p. 70). Accordingly, everything is *ontologically rational*, and no room is left for the transcendental rationality, namely, for the “sense” of whatever is assumed as a correlate of *Vernunft* according to one of its three spheres (gnoseological, practical, axiological), and which is the very subject-matter of any “transcendental philosophy” worthy of this name.

On the other hand, however, one could also speak of an *endogenous conflict*:

- The *conflict immanent* to the ontological concept of rationality (*Rationalität*), namely, the *conflict between the notion of Rationalität understood based upon the sole model of modern science of nature and a different concept of Rationalität that slowly tries to emerge* and lay claim to its irreducibility to the former (and which will eventually culminate in our *OPP*).

Rationalität vs. *Rationalität* (endogenous conflict) and *Rationalität* vs. *Vernünftigkeit* (exogenous conflict): such is the *double conflict between forms of rationality* that dramatically marks the history of modern philosophy from Descartes through Kant and which conveys the very theme with which the monumental “archeological” investigation carried out in *Krisis* grapples.²

Having acknowledged this, we can now shift to (A). However, let us hasten to warn the reader that, given the theme of the present study (the notion of the *a priori* and its relevant rationality), priority will be given to the analysis of the endogenous conflict while the exogenous conflict will be addressed only to the extent that it helps us better assess the former.

Husserl explains to his students in 1919–1920 that Plato is the great theoretical thinker (Hua-Mat IX, p. 36) to whom we owe the discovery of the idea, namely, the *a priori* (*die Entdeckung des Apriori*). After the uncritical attempt made by the so-called “pre-Socratics” to determine the “principle of unity and order” (*Prinzip der Einheit und Ordnung*) capable of making sense of the unity of being,³ and after the Sophistic attack on the very possibility of reason “attaining” it (as Husserl presents it, Sophistic skepticism bears on “truth” and “being” as a “correlate” of “objective truth”), the Socratic reaction against the Sophists aimed at rehabilitating and

¹“Die Souveränität der ratio ist die Souveränität des Seins,” one could exclaim with Conrad-Martius (1963 p. 65).

²See also our first attempt at presenting the “conflict” in De Santis (2018).

³It is Xenophanes’ *ἐν καὶ πάντων*, Heraclitus’ “all being is becoming” (Hua-Mat IX, p. 191), or Pythagoras’ claim that everything in the world is “number” and “the essence of number is order, harmony” (Hua-Mat IX, p. 11).

reevaluating the *practical form of reason* (in order to promote a reason-based conduct of life) (Hua VI, p. 280; Hua-Mat IX, p. 22). Based on Socrates' insight, Plato brings about "the creation of the idea of a true and genuine science," the "beginning of a genuine and radical philosophy" (Hua VIII, p. 8; Hua XXXV, pp. 53–54). The doctrine of ideas, this great step (*der große Schritt*) taken by philosophy (Hua-Mat IX, p. 42) and consisting in a domain of being always "identical" to itself (*in starrer Identität*) over and above the realm of ever-changing bodies (*über allem Fluss des zeitlichen Daseins*) or subjective relativities,⁴ is what finally makes possible a "rigorous scientific" study of empirical reality (*eine strenge Wissenschaft von empirischer Wirklichkeit*) (see De Santis 2019a, 2020).

The latter is possible, Husserl contends, only if such a domain of ideal being, or, "as we could also say," "the pure a priori," becomes "the theme of a rigorous science" (*solange nicht vorher dieses Reich des Idealen oder, wie wir auch sagen können, das reine Apriori zum Thema strenger Wissenschaft geworden ist*) (Hua-Mat IX, p. 43). As we understand Husserl here, the domain of ideal being (*das Reich des Idealen*) is both the "subject matter" (*Thema*) of such a rigorous science and that through which a rigorous scientific investigation of the empirical (its rationalization) is eventually brought about. As we should remember, Husserl will point out in 1928 that "ideas were taken as archetypes, in which everything singular participates more or less 'ideally,' which everything approaches, which everything realizes more or less fully; the ideal truths belonging to the ideas were taken as the absolute norms for all empirical truths." In *Erste Philosophie*, Husserl will bombastically assert that "the tendency toward a universal rationalization that most notably characterizes European culture" was born in the first place with Plato (Hua VII, p. 15).

Further, it is only against this backdrop that Husserl's statement about Euclid—that he was "a known Platonist" (*ein bekannter Platoniker*) and "the first classical author to have systematized pure mathematics" (Hua VII, p. 34)—is understandable. To Husserl's mind, Euclid was "the first one [to have] developed a 'material ontology' on the basis of Plato's doctrine of ideas" (Hua XXV, p. 132)⁵: on the one hand, his geometry, "dealing with space and spatial figures in general," was clearly Platonist "in the most doctrinal sense of the term"⁶; on the other hand, however,

⁴ "[In its Greek origin] Science is confronted with the issue of that which is, as the real which exists in itself, existing in itself over against the multiplicity of subjective manners of givenness belonging to the particular knowing subject; the question concerning the flux of being in becoming and concerning the conditions of the possibility of the identity of being in becoming, of the identical determinability of an existing real [entity] as the determinability of intuitively given continuity through the mathematization of continua. But this must be independent of accidental subjectivity, and this means, first of all, independent of the accidental character of the particular sensibility" (Hua VI, p. 279).

⁵ On this general topic, see the important analyses offered by de Gandt (2004, pp. 65–74): "Le récit ne sépare pas Euclide et Platon, la géométrie apparaît comme un rejeton de la philosophie grecque" (p. 66).

⁶ "Science has its origin in Greek philosophy with the discovery of the idea and of the exact science which determines by means of ideas. It leads to the development of pure mathematics as pure science of ideas, science of possible objects in general as objects determined by ideas" (Hua VI,

Husserl observed that, inspired as he was by Eudoxus, Euclid also worked out the “first accomplished project of a purely rational science according to the ideal of the Platonic school.” Euclid’s *Elements* are then Platonic both thanks to their *content* (for, they develop a “material ontology” dealing with idealities in the sense of the doctrine of ideas) and their *deductive form* (“they are a model of rigorously connected truths and propositions, gesturing toward the disciplines of the *mathesis*”⁷).

Such is the opening state of affairs with which the reader of *Krisis* is immediately confronted. Husserl’s goal at the outset of his journey could not be clearer: “The first thing we must do is understand the fundamental transformation of the idea, the task of universal philosophy which took place at the beginning of the modern age when the ancient idea was taken over” (Hua VI, p. 18).

What is to be assessed is the *Verwandlung*, the “transformation” of the *Idee* and *Aufgabe* of philosophy at the dawn of modernity. Or, to come at it from the opposite direction: at the beginning of modernity, the *idea* of philosophy, namely, its very *conception* and *task*, undergoes a *transformation*, and our goal is precisely to understand how this happened. As Husserl adds, “the reshaping [*Umgestaltung*] begins with prominent special sciences inherited from the ancients: Euclidean geometry and the rest of Greek mathematics, and then Greek natural science.” Husserl distinguishes clearly, even linguistically, between what happened with the “special sciences inherited from the ancients” and philosophy respectively: the *reshaping* undergone by Greek natural science, Euclidean geometry, and Greek mathematics is to be kept separate from the *transformation* that, somehow and as a consequence of the former, will affect “philosophy” itself.

If the *reshaping* is what we owe to Galileo,⁸ then it is Descartes who is on the contrary the first to bring about a proper *transformation*: “From Descartes on, the new idea [of philosophy] governs the total development of philosophical movements and becomes the inner motive behind all their tensions”⁹ (Hua VI, p. 18).

For our purpose here, the *reshaping* will only be briefly touched upon (we will only mention the Galilean revolution, and with very little ceremony, for its assessment goes far beyond the scope of this research) while the *transformation* will receive extensive consideration. That said, in what did the reshaping properly consist? How are we to understand the reshaping so as to be in a position to also grasp the meaning of the transformation?

Let us take Husserl’s explanation of the “prominent special sciences inherited from the ancients”:

p. 279).

⁷Majolino (2017, p. 174).

⁸As has been noticed, “Husserl est conscient de la simplification historique,” yet Galileo “est à ses yeux le fondateur” (de Gandt 2004, p. 72).

⁹“After Galileo had carried out, slightly earlier, the primal establishment of the new natural science, it was Descartes who conceived and at the same time set in systematic motion the new idea of universal philosophy: in the sense of mathematical or, better expressed, physicalistic rationalism [*des physikalistischen Rationalismus*]—philosophy as a ‘universal mathematics.’ And immediately it had a powerful effect” (Hua VI, p. 75).

Of course the ancients, guided by the Platonic doctrine of ideas [*Ideenlehre*], had already idealized empirical numbers, units of measurement, empirical figures in space, points, lines, surfaces, bodies; and they had transformed the propositions and proofs of geometry into ideal-geometrical propositions and proofs. What is more, with Euclidean geometry had grown up the highly impressive idea of a systematically coherent deductive theory, aimed at a most broadly and highly conceived ideal goal, resting on “axiomatic” fundamental concepts and principles, proceeding according to apodictic arguments—a totality formed of pure rationality [*ein Ganzes aus reiner Rationalität*], a totality whose unconditioned truth is available to insight and consisting exclusively of unconditioned truths recognized by immediate and mediate insight (Hua VI, pp. 18–19).

As is clear, the future Galilean reshaping rests on the transformation already accomplished by the Greeks based on the Platonic doctrine of ideas: it is the *idealization* (of empirical numbers, units of measurement, empirical figures in (ideal) space, points, lines, surfaces, bodies). If this is the case, then the question must be rephrased: *what is the difference between the Galilean reshaping and the Greek transformation?* “For Platonism, the real had a more or less complete or perfect *methexis* in the ideal. This provided ancient geometry with possibilities of a primitive application to reality. Through Galileo’s *mathematization of nature*, *nature itself* is idealized under the guidance of the new mathematics: it becomes—to express it in a modern fashion—a mathematical manifold” (Hua VI, p. 20). Whereas the Greek transformation consisted in the *idealization* of empirical numbers and figures, the truths of which were then *applied to the empirical world* (which therefore turns out to *participate* in the ideal sphere *to a greater or lesser degree*¹⁰), with *Galileo’s* reshaping *nature itself becomes idealized*.¹¹

There is no need for us to look over Husserl’s fine-grained analyses in §9, namely, the different presuppositions that, on Husserl’s view, Galileo inherited and never really called into question, nor will we discuss the quite crucial problem of the loss of the life-world (*Lebenswelt*) that the Galilean mathematization inevitably brings with it. For our purpose, what needs to be pointed out is the meaning of the Galilean reshaping, i.e., the new sense with which “nature” itself is.

Precisely in this way we see that, universally, things and their occurrences do not arbitrarily appear and run their course but are *bound “a priori”* by this style, by the invariant form of the intuitable world. In other words, through *a universal causal regulation*, *all that is together* [*Zusammen-Seiende*] *in the world* has a universal immediate or mediate way of belonging together; through this the world is not merely a totality [*Allheit*] but a *unitary totality* [*Alleinheit*], a *whole* (even though it is infinite) (Hua VI, p. 29).

¹⁰“Die Idealisierung der raumzeitlichen Form war schon im Altertum da und natürliche auch die Möglichkeit der Anwendung der idealisierten Mathematik (der reinen) auf die Empirie, also in der Auffassung der empirischen Figuren als <idealer> Figuren, in grober Annäherung” (Hua VI, p. 350).

¹¹“En géométrie on maîtrise d’avance toutes les formes à partir d’un stock de formes élémentaires, désormais ce sont tous les objets et les événements du monde naturel qui sont conçus comme dominés par avance, comme entièrement soumis au maillage des idéautés”; “Selon Platon le réel ne faisait que participer à l’idéal, désormais il n’y a plus cette distance de principe, qui permettait des applications et maintenait une matière comme un en soi inaccessible. La nature es de part en part idéalisée” (de Gandt 2004, pp. 69 and 70).

Based on this “hypothesis” (the world as a unitary whole made up of interconnected “causal” relations¹² (Hua VI, p. 37)), mathematics can “offer its services as a teacher”:

Out of the undetermined universal form of the life-world, space and time, and the manifold of empirical intuitable shapes that can be imagined into it, it made for the first time an *objective* world in the true sense—i.e., an infinite totality of *ideal objectivities* that are determinable univocally, methodically, and quite universally for everyone. Thus mathematics showed [*gezeigt*] for the first time that an infinity of objects that are subjectively relative and are thought only in a vague, general representation is, through an a priori all-encompassing method, *objectively determinable and can actually be thought as determined in itself* or, more exactly, as an infinity that is determined, decided in advance, in itself, in respect to all its objects and all their properties and relations (Hua VI, p. 30).

If we understand Husserl correctly here, the “objective” determination carried out by mathematics amounts to actually “showing” and “bringing to light” (*Sie hat...gezeigt*) the intrinsically *idealized* character of nature itself based upon the “hypothesis” of the universal causal regulation that makes up the world of things (nature) as a unitary totality (*Alleinheit*). Or, differently framed, “nature” is a self-contained unitary totality consisting of universal causal relations; based on such a “hypothesis,” mathematics can successfully carry out a process of objective “determination,” thereby overcoming any subjective, or relative, dimension: “*Every in-itself is a mathematical in-itself*,” Husserl would exclaim (Hua VI, p. 287). It is the famous problem of the mathematization of the *plena*: “everything which manifests itself as real through the specific sense-qualities must have its *mathematical index* in events belonging to the sphere of shapes—which is, of course, already thought of as idealized—and ... there must arise from this the possibility of an indirect mathematization” (Hua VI, p. 35).¹³

Accordingly, “the whole of infinite nature, taken as a *concrete universe of causality* ... became a *peculiarly applied mathematics*” (Hua VI, p. 36). As far as our

¹²“As far as we have come, only a general idea has been attained or, more precisely, a general hypothesis: that a universal inductivity obtains in the intuitively given world, one which announces itself in everyday experiences but whose infinity is hidden. To be sure, this inductivity was not understood by Galileo as a hypothesis. For him a physics was immediately almost as certain as the previous pure and applied mathematics. The hypothesis also immediately traced out for him [its own] path of realization (a realization whose success necessarily has the sense, in our eyes, of a verification of the hypothesis—this by no means obvious hypothesis related to the [previously] inaccessible factual structure of the concrete world)” (Hua VI, pp. 37–38).

¹³On this specific subject, see de Gandt (2004, pp. 74–82). For the broader picture against which Husserl might have come to develop his interpretation of Galileo, see also what de Gandt explains on pp. 97–125. See also what Carr claims in a footnote to his introduction to the English translation of the *Crisis of European Sciences*: “Husserl remarks in one of his letters that the additions amounted to one and a half signatures—‘almost a treatise in itself.’ Comparison of the *Crisis* with the original Prague lecture, of which a transcription has been made, suggests that the added section was the long §9 on Galileo. (I am indebted to Professor Spiegelberg and the staff of the Husserl Archives at Louvain for allowing me to examine this transcription and certain late correspondence of Husserl). It is interesting to speculate that the Galileo section might have resulted from a reported visit during this period by Husserl’s friend and former student Alexander Koyré, who published his monumental *Etudes Galiléennes* in 1940” (Carr in Husserl 1970, p. xix).

line of study is concerned, the sense of the Galilean reshaping can be condensed in a series of three straightforward theses:

- (π) Rather than nature being thought of as *participating* in the ideal (as was the case for Plato), nature itself becomes *idealized*.¹⁴
- (ρ) Everything that manifests itself as “real” through sense-qualities has a *mathematical index*.¹⁵
- (σ) Based on the hypothesis of nature as a unitary totality of interconnected causality, an indirect mathematization of the *plena*, namely, of everything that is subjective and relative, is carried out.¹⁶

If, in a nutshell, π , ρ and σ capture both the meaning and extent of Galileo’s “reshaping,” we can raise the question as to the meaning of the Cartesian “transformation.” As Husserl emphasizes, once again, at the outset of §10, by *abstracting* “from the subjects as persons leading a personal life,” Galileo determines “things” as “pure bodies,” and “the idea of nature as a *really self-enclosed world of bodies* first emerges” (Hua VI, pp. 60–61). The way for dualism has thereby been prepared. Let us now briefly recall a series of excerpts in which the meaning of the transformation of both the “idea” and the “task” of philosophy is apparent (Hua VI, pp. 61–62).

In general we must realize that the conception of the new idea of “nature” as an encapsulated, really and theoretically self-enclosed world of bodies soon brings about a complete transformation of the idea of the world in general [*eine völlige Verwandlung der Idee der Welt überhaupt*]. The world splits, so to speak, into two worlds: nature and the psychic world, although the latter, because of the way in which it is related to nature, does not achieve the status of an independent world [*Weltlichkeit*]. The ancients had individual investigations and theories about bodies, but not a closed world of bodies as subject matter of a universal science of nature. They also had investigations of the human and the animal soul, but they could not have a psychology in the modern sense, a psychology which, because it had universal nature and a science of nature before it [as a model], could strive for a corresponding universality, i.e., within a similarly self-enclosed field of its own.

The splitting of the world and the transformation of its meaning were the understandable consequences of the exemplary role of natural-scientific method, or, to put it otherwise, natural-scientific rationality [*Rationalität*]¹⁷—a role which was indeed quite unavoidable at the beginning of the modern period.

In any case, natural science possessed the highest rationality [*Rationalität*] because it was guided by pure mathematics and achieved, through inductions, mathematical results. Should this not become the model of all genuine knowledge?

It is no wonder that we already find the idea of a universal mathematics in Descartes. Of course the weight of the theoretical and practical successes [of science], beginning immediately with Galileo, had its effect. Thus the world and, correlatively, philosophy, take on a completely new appearance. The world must, in itself, be a rational world [*rationale Welt*],

¹⁴ See the analysis by Trizio (2020, p. 221 and ff.): “After Galileo, therefore, what is real, say, the shape of a specific thing, *as it is in itself*, does perfectly instantiate a geometrical *eidōs*, although in practice, as it is given to us in perception and in measurement, It will only do so approximately.”

¹⁵ Galluzzi (1994, pp. 390–391); Giusti (1994, pp. 432–438).

¹⁶ On the process of mathematization of the *plena*, see Trizio (2020, p. 231 and ff.).

in the new sense of rationality [*Rationalität*] taken from mathematics, or mathematized nature; correspondingly, philosophy, the universal science of the world, must be built up as a unified rational theory [*einheitlich rationale Theorie*] “*more geometrico*.”

Husserl’s reasoning, dense as usual, requires unpacking in order to single out the main points. The *transformation* of the idea of philosophy goes hand in hand with the *transformation* of the idea of the world: indeed, as the world becomes a *rational world*, so philosophy itself—construed as the universal science of the world—needs to become a “unified” *rational theory*. As the rationality of the world is conceived based on the paradigm of mathematical rationality (and derived from the mathematization of nature and its determination as a “self-contained” world), so the character of the new idea of philosophy is to be thought of as *more geometrico*. The “division” or distinction of the world into two separate yet related worlds (“nature” and *seelische Welt*) is the first signal of the future double conflict: for, it already announces the “endogenous conflict” between a conception of the *Seele* based upon “the highest rationality” achieved by modern science and the necessity of “acknowledging” that the *seelische Welt* displays a rationality irreducible to the former. But it also points to the “exogenous conflict,” which amounts to the clash between a purely “ontological” rationality ascribed to the *Seele* and the necessity of recognizing its “transcendental” rationality. The title of §10 is quite telling: “*Dualism as the Reason (Grund) for the Inconceivability of the Problems of Reason (Vernunftprobleme), as Presupposition for the Specialization of the Sciences and as the Foundation of Naturalistic Psychology*” (Hua VI, p. 62).

The two *conflicts* meet at the crossroad of the possibility of that new science (of the subject) called “rational psychology”: “as soon as Descartes had proclaimed the idea of a rational philosophy and the division of nature and spirit, a new psychology was an immediate requirement, and it already made its appearance in Descartes’ contemporary, Hobbes” (Hua VI, p. 63). In fact, as he explains, “the paradigmatic role of physics’ conception of nature, and of the scientific method, has the understandable effect—this since the time of Hobbes—that a type of being is ascribed to the soul which is similar in principle to that of nature; and to psychology is ascribed a progression from description to ultimate theoretical ‘explanation’ similar to that of biophysics” (Hua VI, p. 64).

Such a naturalization of the *Seele* (which consists in ascribing to it the same rationality of nature) “comes down through John Locke”: “Locke’s image of the white paper is characteristic—the *tabula rasa* on which psychic data come and go, somehow ordered like the events of bodies in nature.” And yet, as Husserl had already asked at the very beginning of §11: “Does not rational being, first thought of as nature, in order to be thinkable at all, presuppose rational theory and a subjectivity which accomplishes it?” (Hua VI, p. 62).

This is where what we have called the exogenous conflict unmistakably emerges:

In general, the separating-off of the psychic caused greater and greater difficulties whenever problems of reason [*Vernunftprobleme*] made themselves felt. Of course it was only later that these difficulties became so pressing that they became the central theme of philosophy, in the great investigations on human understanding, in “critiques of reason [*Kritik der Vernunft*].” But the power of rationalistic [*rationalistischen*] motives was as yet unbroken;

everywhere men proceeded, full of confidence, to carry through the rationalistic [*rationalistischen*] philosophy on all fronts (Hua VI, p. 63).

If all of this contributes to clarifying in what the transformation of the idea of philosophy consists, how are we to make sense of its new “task”? Here is Husserl on this question:

Every establishment of a special science was now *eo ipso* guided by the idea of a rational theory [*rationale Theorie*], or of a rational domain [*rationales Gebiet*], corresponding to it. The specialization of philosophy into particular sciences accordingly has a deeper meaning, one exclusively related to the modern attitude. The specializations of ancient scientists could not result in particular sciences in our sense. Galileo’s natural science did not arise through a specialization. It was only the subsequent new sciences which by contrast specialized the idea of a rational philosophy [*Idee einer rationalen Philosophie*] motivated by the new natural science; it was from this idea that they received the momentum to make progress and conquer new domains, rationally closed special regions within the rational totality of the universe [*rational geschlossener Sonderregionen innerhalb der rationalen Totalität des Universums*] (Hua VI, p. 63).

The new “idea” of the world does not simply consist in its now being determined as *eine rationale Welt* but in its being a “rational” totality including a multiplicity of special “rational” regions, each of which corresponds to a relevant rational discipline. Accordingly, as the rational world consists of a multiplicity of special regions, so philosophy embraces a multiplicity of corresponding sciences or rational disciplines. And the paradigm of such rationality was the one first set out by Galileo, both in terms of the (ontological) rationality of the “universe” (and its sub-regions) and of the knowledge of it. The “task” of philosophy thus becomes investigating such sub-regions and domains by first developing their corresponding rational disciplines (e.g., rational psychology) and then by putting them all back together so as to “recompose,” so to say, “the unity of a rational total-system” able to rationally account for the “totality of being in general.” This is what the “modern rationalism” of Spinoza, Leibniz, and, last but not least, Wolff clearly shows.

Here is another series of excerpts:

For the most part, in fact, the guiding sense of the new rationality [*Rationalität*] was not precisely thought out, even though it was the driving force behind the movements. Its explication in more precise terms was itself a part of philosophy’s intellectual labor up to the time of Leibniz and Christian Wolff. In Spinoza’s *Ethica* we have a classical example of how the new naturalistic rationalism [*Rationalismus*] thought itself capable of creating *ordine geometrico* a systematic philosophy—metaphysics, a science of the ultimate and highest questions...

One must, of course, correctly understand Spinoza’s historical meaning. It is a complete misunderstanding to interpret Spinoza according to what is visible on the surface of his “geometrical” method of demonstration. Beginning as a Cartesian, he is at first, of course, completely convinced that not only nature but the totality of being as such must be a coherent rational system [*einheitliches rationales System*].

Spinoza is confronted with the task of discovering the postulated rational total system of being [*das postulierte rationale Totalsystem des Seienden*]*—discovering first of all the conditions of its being thought in coherent fashion—and then of systematically realizing it through actual construction. It is only thus, through the deed, that the actual conceivability of a rational totality of being [die wirkliche Denkbarkeit eines rationalen Seinsalls] is*

established. Prior to this, in spite of the self-evidence this attitude found in the exemplary character of natural science, it was only a postulate (Hua VI, pp. 65–66).

We are already acquainted with Husserl's stance on Spinoza and his *Ethica* as the first "universal" ontology. Husserl is clear: it was the historical *task* of modern (post-Cartesian) rationalism to make sense of the new *Rationalität*, which before them had only been "postulated," so as to also build up a complete "metaphysics," now understood as the rational system of the totality of being (*des Seienden*), i.e., as a universal rational ontology.

We are now in a position to get an insight into the most profound dimension of the dialectic of "empiricism" and "rationalism" that Husserl will unravel and analyze *in extenso*. In the first place, the difference between ancient and modern empiricism must be firmly kept in mind: whereas ancient empiricism, as Husserl explains to his students in 1919–1920, stands in a straightforward opposition to (Platonic) rationalism,¹⁷ this does not hold true of its "modern" version—for, just like its purported "opponent," it accepts and endorses the universal "validity" of mathematical science of nature: "In its new form, empiricism shares with rationalism exact physics" (*Der Empirismus hat in der neuen Form mit dem Rationalismus gemeinsam die exakte Physik*) (Hua-Mat IX, p. 234).

If this is the case, then such commonality, i.e., the acceptance of the new *Rationalität*, is the backdrop against which their antagonism can be understood. *Rationalism* and *empiricism* share the same *idea* of philosophy: it is only with *rationalism*, notably with Spinoza, that its full sense will be brought to light and therefore grasped in all its universality (Spinoza's "universal ontology"); however, the "function" Husserl ascribes to *empiricism*, namely, to what Gustavo Bontadini used to label the "dialectical dynasty" (*la dinastia dialettica*)¹⁸ (Locke, Berkeley, Hume), is both to react against the (rationalists') conviction that through the method *more geometrico* a "universal knowledge of the world, thought of as a transcendent 'in-itself,' can be realized,"¹⁹ and to pave the way for the future transcendental revolution

¹⁷"Dieser antike Empirismus ist noch in einem besonderen Sinne antirationalistisch. Der Platonismus hatte gelehrt, dass die reine Vernunft, d. i., die von aller Beimengung mit Sinnlichkeit sich völlig befreiende, die Ideen als ihr eigentümliche Wesenheiten erschauet. Selbstverständlich leugnet der Empirismus die Ideen, sofern sie eben allgemein als transzendente Realitäten interpretiert wurden. In dieser Art steht also der Empirismus auch gegen den Apriorismus in Gegensatz" (Hua-Mat IX, p. 217).

¹⁸Bontadini (1996, pp. 135–139).

¹⁹"Precisely against this conviction, against the new science as having such scope as to extend to something 'transcendent,' indeed finally against this 'transcendent' itself, English empiricism reacts—even though it is likewise strongly influenced by Descartes" (Hua VI, 85). Husserl is convinced that the line running from British empiricism through Kant had the merit of making clear that, were "ontology" in general possible, it could not be built up upon "substructions": "We must keep firmly in mind the fact that this ontology's own sense of an a priori science contrasts sharply with that of the tradition. We must never ignore the fact that modern philosophy, with its objective sciences, is guided by a constructive concept of a world that is true in itself, one substructured in mathematical form, at least in respect to nature. Modern philosophy's concept of an a priori science, which is ultimately a universal mathematics (logic, logistic), cannot therefore have the dig-

by first working out “the psychologically adulterated transcendentalism of Descartes” and then eventually bringing it to an end (Hua VI, p. 86).²⁰

In this respect, §14 (which we quoted in part previously) turns out to be quite illuminating:

The whole history of philosophy since the appearance of the “theory of knowledge” and the serious attempts at a transcendental philosophy is a history of tremendous tensions between objectivistic and transcendental philosophy. It is a history of constant attempts to maintain objectivism and to develop it in a new form and, on the other side, of attempts by transcendentalism to overcome the difficulties entailed by the idea of transcendental subjectivity and the method it requires. The clarification of the origin of this internal split in the philosophical development, the analysis of the ultimate motives for this most radical transformation of the idea of philosophy, is of the utmost importance. It affords the first insight into the most *profound meaningfulness* [*Sinnhaftigkeit*] that unifies the whole movement of philosophical history in the modern period: a unity of purpose binding generations of philosophers together, and through this a direction for all the efforts of individual subjects and schools. It is a direction, as I shall try to show here, toward a *final form* of transcendental philosophy—as *phenomenology*. This also contains, as a cancelled moment [*aufgehobenes Moment*], the *final form of psychology* that uproots the naturalistic sense of modern psychology (Hua VI, p. 71).

The “conflict” here is not only between “transcendentalism” and “objectivism,” *Vernünftigkeit* and *Rationalität*,²¹ but first and foremost, within the domain of the psyche, between its naturalistic conception (established based on the *Rationalität* of nature) and its “final form” which overcomes it by “recognizing” the psyche’s own peculiar and irreducible *Rationalität*.²²

Given the scope of our investigation, the crucial topic of the relation between psychology and transcendental phenomenology and of the emergence of transcendental reason cannot be addressed in this context. Instead, what must be firmly

nity of actual self-evidence, i.e., the dignity of essential insight obtained from direct self-giving (experiencing intuition), much as it would like to claim this for itself” (Hua VI, pp. 176–177).

²⁰“Of greater interest for us, however, because of its immense effect on psychology and the theory of knowledge, is Locke’s critique of the understanding, together with its subsequent continuations in Berkeley and Hume. This line of development is especially significant in that it is an essential segment of the historical path on which the psychologically adulterated transcendentalism of Descartes ... seeks, through unfolding its consequences, to work its way through to the realization of its untenability and, from there, to a transcendentalism which is more genuine and more conscious of its true meaning. The primary and historically most important thing here was the self-revelation of empirical psychologism (of the sensationalistic, naturalistic cast) as an intolerable absurdity.”

²¹“The whole transcendental set of problems circles around the relation of this, my ‘I’—the ‘ego’—to what it is at first taken for granted to be—my soul—and, again, around the relation of this ego and my conscious life to the world of which I am conscious and whose true being I know through my own cognitive structures” (Hua VI, p. 101).

²²“Rather than beginning with the latter, psychology began with a concept of soul which was not at all formulated in an original way but which stemmed from Cartesian dualism, a concept furnished by a prior constructive idea of a corporeal nature and of a mathematical natural science. Thus psychology was burdened in advance with the task of being a science parallel [to physics] and with the conception that the soul—its subject matter—was something real in a sense similar to corporeal nature, the subject matter of natural science” (Hua VI, p. 216).

maintained and affirmed is that Husserl thinks of his transcendental phenomenology, understood as the *eidetic science* of the transcendental phenomena belonging to the region pure consciousness, hence of the *very idea of eidetic sciences* or rational ontologies in general, as the *resolution*, so to speak, of the double conflict between conceptions of reason that express themselves through the development of the rationalism-empiricism dialectic.²³

If we are on the right track, then *OPP* is to be construed as the result (or, better, as “one” of the outcomes) of this resolution: it is the *idea* of philosophy understood as a “unified rational theory” the *task* of which is to investigate the rationality immanent to the world; it is the *idea* of a universal ontology of the totality of being the *task* of which is “doing justice” to the many (ontological) “rationalities” pertaining to all the different regions and sub-regions, beginning with the crucial and unbridgeable distinction between “nature” and “spirit,” the world of bodies and the domain of the psyche (which will lead to the transcendental “revolution” brought about by Kant himself²⁴).

As should be evident, *OPP* is obtained by playing one aspect of modern rationalism (viz., the (Spinozistic) idea of the “totality of being” as rational) against another aspect of the same tradition (viz., the highest rationality achieved by modern science as “the model [*Vorbild*] of all genuine knowledge”²⁵). In other words: Husserl’s idea of a full-fledged or complete rationalization of the empirical, construed as the function of eidetic sciences, is the end-result, if not the legacy, of the Cartesian transformation of both the idea and the task of philosophy, which in turn is the effect of the reshaping accomplished by Galileo at the dawn of modernity.

This is why Husserl can distance himself from “the universally accepted critique of the idea of rationality immanent to modern philosophy” (*die allgemein übliche Kritik des der neuzeitlichen Philosophie einwohnenden Ideals der Rationalität*), which presumes to dispel its “rationalism” as a mere confusion or “disorientation” (*Verwirrung*) (Hua XXVII, p. 237). Quite the contrary, Husserl maintains: for, in order to dismiss the ever-returning skepticism, we need to bring to light and then

²³“Freilich der Vorwurf gilt der ganzen Philosophie seit dem 18. Jahrhundert und die notwendigen Aufgaben, die wir uns herausgearbeitet haben, bezeichnen bis jetzt nur Postulate, zu deren Erfüllung die phänomenologische Philosophie unserer Zeit nur eben die ersten Schritte tun konnte. Aber der Anfang ist gemacht. Und das Wichtigste ist: Was in den Bewegungen des Rationalismus nach Seiten der Ontologien und in den Bewegungen des Empirismus nach Seiten des Bewusstseins und der Ursprungsaufklärung im Bewusstsein an dunklen und so viel irrenden Tendenzen lebendig war, haben wir uns zur vollen Reinheit und zu begrifflicher Bestimmtheit gebracht” (Hua-Mat IX, p. 467).

²⁴“Thus world-enigmas now enter the stage, of a sort previously never imagined, and they bring about a completely new manner of philosophizing, the ‘epistemological’ philosophy, that of the ‘theory of reason.’ Soon they also give rise to systematic philosophies with completely novel goals and methods. This greatest of all revolutions must be characterized as *the transformation of scientific objectivism*—not only modern *objectivism* but also that of *all the earlier philosophies of the millennia*—into a *transcendental subjectivism*” (Hua VI, p. 69).

²⁵“Das Ideal der Rationalität, nach dem der neuzeitliche Mensch seine Welt gestaltet, war von Anfang an das Ideal der ‘exakten,’ der positiven Tatsachenwissenschaften” (Hua XXVII, p. 237).

rightly grasp the “essential sense of rationalism as a universal philosophy” (Hua XXVII, p. 238).

The concept of eidetic sciences—understood as a system of material ontologies corresponding to a system of material regions (and sub-regions), the *eternal truths* of which are the subject-matter of the former’s investigation and scientific enterprise—directly connects back to the old metaphysical systems of modernity, i.e., to their aspirations and rationalistic ambitions (their *sachlich wertvolle Motive* (Hua-Mat IX, p. 425)), while at the same time purging them of their “erroneous” methods and one-sided nature (this “partially” being the achievement of Kant’s critique of reason).

Let us then pay closer attention to the “rationalist” trajectory as outlined in the *Einleitung in die Philosophie* lectures from the years 1916–1918, where Husserl tackles Spinoza, Leibniz, Wolff (albeit only quickly), and finally Kant, who brings this line of development to a dramatic end.

After the conclusion of the analysis of the “empiricistic” line, the commentary on Spinoza opens up the confrontation with the “rationalistic” tradition that, just like its counterpart, stems from Descartes. As we know, Husserl holds the tendency to found metaphysics “in a Euclidean way” (*à la Euklyd*) to be one of the distinctive traits of this tradition, Spinoza’s *ontologism* representing nothing but an extreme consequence. As we should remember, in these lectures (and in opposition to what he will do in *Krisis*), Husserl describes Spinoza’s philosophy as a *general metaphysics* the overall goal of which is a “complete rationalization” (*vollkommene Rationalisierung*) of nature. Even though “the guiding idea” (*die leitende Idee*) was a “mistake” (*Irrwahn*), there resides in it an “enduring meaningful idea” (*bleidend bedeutsame...Idee*) in which we are, Husserl says, still very interested (*diese rechtmäßige Idee soll unser Interesse beschäftigen*) (Hua-Mat IX, p. 425).

Now, to describe Spinoza’s system as basically a “general metaphysics” is the same as to say that it is built on the equivalence “being = real being” (already established by Aristotle) (Hua-Mat IX, p. 427); accordingly, the primary aim of such metaphysics or first philosophy is to fix the essential determinations of nature and what gives it its own “unity” (*Einheit*).²⁶ This is why, Husserl further explains, Spinoza is not interested in exploring the different and “specific ontological domains” (*die besonderen Seinsgebieten*), which are the subject matter of the so-called “second philosophies” (Hua-Mat IX, p. 427). Husserl could not be clearer about this point: “The idea of a universal science of the real in general, in opposition to the particular sciences of reality, is clearly a necessary one.” (Hua-Mat IX, p. 429). The problem consists in the way in which it was carried out and realized.

This being recognized, Husserl can raise what might be deemed the most crucial objection against Spinoza’s system and, in general, against any attempt at “founding” a metaphysical project on modern science of nature (an objection that, as such, is not present in *Krisis*).

²⁶ Perhaps it would be better to say that the objective of Spinoza’s “general metaphysics” is to fix the universal determinations of reality understood as “nature” (in the sense of modern science of nature): this is why in these pages Husserl can go from the language of reality to that of nature.

Husserl's argument directly follows from the pivotal distinction between *metaphysics* or *first philosophy* (in the sense introduced above) as the science of the essential determinations of "real being" or nature as it factually is (this being, for Husserl, what Spinoza's metaphysics is about) and the *a priori ontology* of any possible "reality," or, as Husserl frames it, "a science of the idea of possible actualities in general" (Hua-Mat IX, p. 430) prior to the former. Indeed, it is only after we investigate what pertains to the *idea* of any actuality and reality that we can also apply the universal principles or truths so obtained to the given reality,²⁷ which will then turn out to be exclusively a possible realization *among others* of that idea. In other words: it is only by first ascertaining all the essential possibilities of the *idea* of reality that we can scientifically understand the one factually given to us (Hua-Mat IX, pp. 430–431).²⁸ By contrast, by "shaping up" his or their science of the real (i.e., "first philosophy") in the image of modern science of nature, Spinoza and the modern rationalists mistake *the structure of a reality and real being* (among many other possible ones) *for the one and only possibility*.²⁹ In other words: by ignoring and overlooking the distinction between "metaphysics" or "first philosophy" (in their sense) and eidetic science or rational ontology (in Husserl's sense), therefore failing to see that the "physicalistic mechanics is only a particular and factual case over against the multiplicity of ideally possible theoretical systems or mechanics" (Hua-Mat IX, p. 430; Hua XLII, p. 161), they end up falling short of their ambition and aspiration, i.e., that of a full-fledged "rationalization" of the natural world and, more broadly, of the totality of being. As should be evident, it is the "being = real

²⁷ "Es muss doch was zur Idee der Realität überhaupt gehört, was für alle mögliche Realität somit notwendige Norm ist, auch grundlegende Norm sein für die Erforschung der gegebenen Realität" (Hua-Mat IX, p. 430).

²⁸ "Ist diese Scheidung richtig, so würde sich also sondern müssen Metaphysik und apriorische Ontologie, und beide wären aufeinander bezogen wie ein faktischer Sonderfall zu dem idealen System möglicher Fälle überhaupt, umgrenzt durch eine rein begrifflich bestimmte Allgemeinheit" (Hua-Mat IX, p. 431).

²⁹ "Was gemeint ist, wird klar, wenn wir darauf hinweisen, dass auf der unteren Stufe der naturwissenschaftlichen Seinslehre uns zum Beispiel entgegentritt die naturwissenschaftliche Mechanik als Wissenschaft von den realen Bewegungen der gegebenen Natur und den für sie erfahrungsmäßig geltenden Naturgesetzen; dass dies aber andererseits nicht ausschließt eine apriorische Bewegungslehre. Eine solche besteht nicht nur als Idee, sondern kam längst neben der physikalischen Mechanik zu systematischer Ausbildung und fungiert zudem in ihr als ein unentbehrliches methodisches Instrument. Sie besteht einerseits als geometrische Bewegungslehre, als Theorie der im euklidischen Raum ideal-möglichen Bewegungen, sofern sie rein durch die geometrischen Axiome konstruierbare Möglichkeiten sind, und andererseits, und darüber hinausgehend, als apriorische Theorie der möglichen physischen Bewegungen, Bewegungen von möglichen materiellen Realitäten. Das Letzte sagt, dass die physikalische Mechanik auffassbar ist als ein faktischer Sonderfall gegenüber einer Mannigfaltigkeit ideal-möglicher theoretischer Systeme oder Mechaniken. Die moderne mathematische Mechanik hat diese idealen Möglichkeiten auch wissenschaftlich zu fixieren gesucht. Das ist aber für die Naturwissenschaft kein leeres Spiel von Möglichkeiten: Reine Mathematik ist überall methodisches Instrument der faktischen Naturforschung. Nur wer wissenschaftlich das Reich idealer Möglichkeiten auszuschöpfen vermag, vermag eine vollendete wissenschaftliche Beherrschung der gegebenen Erfahrungswirklichkeit zu gewinnen" (Hua-Mat IX, pp. 430–431).

being” identification that, according to the 1916–1918 lectures, prevents Spinoza from carrying through his rationalistic plan: for, it leads Spinoza first to identify the “possibility” of an a priori metaphysics with that of modern science of nature (what Husserl calls “physicalistic mechanics”) and then to ignore the fact that such a metaphysics should itself be grounded in an a priori investigation of *the idea of reality in general*.

Just like the empiricistic horn (Locke, Berkeley, and Hume) of the Cartesian legacy develops for Husserl based upon some intrinsic motives that give it its “unity” and “form” (the progressive dissolution of the *in-itself* both of nature and eventually of the ego), so the “rationalistic” half of the same rich legacy displays a similar unitary historical character (Hua-Mat IX, p. 435).

Such “unitary” character, if we understand Husserl correctly, consists in what might be labeled, by a quite catchy turn of phrase, the *radicalization of the rationalization*—which tends to progressively reduce the principles on the basis of which the rationalization should be carried out. If the Cartesian substance “dualism” is turned into a “monism” by Spinoza (the *Rationalität* of the world being in fact “traced back” to the rationality of the one “infinite substance,” which he understands as a sort of “space of all the finite things” [*gleichsam zum Raum aller endlichen Dinge*] (Hua-Mat IX, p. 433)), Leibniz takes the entire process to the next level. Only “thought” (*Denken*) can grant us access to the “truth,” namely, to the domain of *veritates aeternae*; accordingly, even in the ever-changing domain of experience, where completely different principles might seem to be in play, it is still the forms of “thought” that actually determine its rationality (Hua-Mat IX, p. 438).³⁰

In other words: even though one might be tempted to claim that experience entails the presence of something irrational that needs to be rationalized by thought, it would be better to say that the domain of experience *displays* itself as irrational while the function of thought is precisely to show that this is not really the case. It *looks* “irrational” only to confused forms of thinking (*für unser verworrenes Auffassen*).

As a consequence, if the problem were that of how Leibniz conceives of the rationalization of the empirical, Husserl would solve the problem by showing that the “givennesses of experience” are not irrational: “rather, they are rational when considered in themselves” (*nicht an sich irrational, sondern vielmehr, an sich betrachtet, rational sind*). This is why Husserl can talk of a *verborgene Rationalität* to be brought to distinctiveness and clarity “in the form of logical acts; in the form of logical inferences, demonstrations, and theories.” There is no such a thing as a completely irrational experience, sensibility or sensuous experience being only “a lower degree of the understanding” (*eine niedere Stufe des Verstandes*) such that the latter is already or implicitly at work in it, thereby determining its own rationality (Hua-Mat IX, p. 441).

³⁰ “Wo Denken rein waltet, ohne auf Erfahrung sich zu gründen, gibt es jene echte Rationalität der ewigen Wahrheiten, deren Prinzip der Satz vom Widerspruch ist. Wo es auf Erfahrung sich gründet, da walten dieselben Denkfunktionen, treten dieselben Denkformen auf, die eben zum Denken als solchen gehören und die im reinen Denken jene ewigen Wahrheiten ergebe.”

In other words, *rationalizing the experience* boils down, for Leibniz, to making its “implicit” (= logical) rationality (*eine niedere Stufe des Verstandes*) explicit. For, experience has no *Rationalität* of its own that would be different from the logical rationality of thought.³¹

In short: if, on the one hand, Husserl praises Leibniz for the grand idea of a *mathesis universalis* the realization of which is the very task and function of modern mathematics, on the other hand, he harshly criticizes him for overlooking the crucial distinction between “formal” and “material” a priori and, within the latter sphere, between the two irreducible realms of “nature” and “spirit.”³² Accordingly, Leibniz represents both the *peak* of the rational or rationalistic ambition of modernity (for, Leibniz denies that there can be anything irrational “in need” of rationalization) and what for Husserl counts as the most apparent violation of *OPP* (for, the one and only *Rationalität*, even of “experience” itself as a seemingly irrational kingdom, is the “logical” one).

Now, after the long discussion of Leibniz but before he tackles Kant, Husserl makes a quick yet interesting remark bearing upon “the extreme logicism” of Christian Wolff (Hua-Mat IX, p. 469). Husserl’s goal is precisely to pave the way for a confrontation with the thinker of Königsberg.

Husserl is concise and goes straight to the point: Wolff has given up (*preisgegeben*) *in toto* “the fundamental distinction between truths of reason and truths as to matters of fact” and has radicalized (*überboten*) the *more geometrico* “ideal of the mathematizing rationalism” in such a way that he believes that “all truths can be traced back to formal-logical truths according to the principle of contradiction” (*dass er alle Wahrheit auf formal-logische Wahrheit nach dem Gesetz vom Widerspruch glaubte zurückführen zu können*) (Hua-Mat IX, p. 469).

If Leibniz still sticks to the truths of reason-truths as to matters of fact distinction based upon the claim that a full analysis of any of the latter can be accomplished only by means of an “infinite process,” because infinite is the series of reasons that can verify the belongingness of the predicate to the subject of the proposition in question,³³ Wolff takes a step further and, by crossing out that crucial distinction, radicalizes Leibniz’s claim to the effect that the rationality immanent to the domain of (seemingly irrational) experience is the “logical” one. Hence the thesis that all

³¹ As Husserl writes: “Leibniz antwortet darauf: Es ist gar nicht ein völlig Irrationales; die Sinnlichkeit ist eine niedere Stufe des Verstandes, von vornherein hat die Erfahrung schon eine verborgene, vom verborgenen Walten des Verstandes herstammende rationale Gestalt. Leibniz analysiert nicht das Wesen der Erfahrung phänomenologisch und weist nicht in ihr rationale Strukturen als Implikationen nach, geschweige denn, dass er an diesen phänomenologischen Strukturen den Sinn der Geltung und Nicht-Geltung klarlegte” (Hua-Mat IX, p. 441).

³² “Hat man einmal die Idee einer universellen formalen Ontologie erfasst, hat man die wirkliche Durchführbarkeit dieser Leibniz’schen Ideen einer scientia oder mathesis universalis erkannt und den Entwicklungsgang der modernsten Mathematik als Gang der Realisierung dieser Idee begriffen, dann ist es nur ein Schritt zu erkennen, dass dieser Idee gleich laufen muss die Idee einer scientia universalis hinsichtlich aller materialen Seinsregionen, wie zum Beispiel ‘Natur’ und ‘Geist’” (Hua-Mat IX, p. 466).

³³ See Lamarra (1994, p. 462); Carraud (2002, pp. 417–439).

truths can eventually be traced back to the supreme principle of thought, i.e., the principle of contradiction.

If we are dwelling on such a quick remark, it is because Kant is introduced and thus understood by Husserl precisely in opposition to it (*gegen diesen Logizismus*). In other words, and in contrast to what he will do in *Krisis*, where the thinker of Königsberg is mostly depicted as “reacting” against Hume’s “extreme” skepticism (thereby to the self-dissolution of the empiricistic line, which is replaced and overcome by his transcendental revolution), here, Husserl explicitly argues that Kant’s philosophical effort can be properly “appreciated” only if construed as “belonging” to those (*Kant selbst gehört zu diesen Opponenten*)³⁴ who “reacted” against such “extreme logicism.”

In this final section of the lectures, the relevance of Kant’s critique of reason consists much less in the transcendental revolution than in the distinction between a priori and analytic truths on the one hand and a priori and synthetic truths on the other. The very notion of the “synthetic a priori” is seen as what finally “ratifies” the end not of the legitimate rational ambition and aspirations of modernity but of what Husserl takes to be its “extreme” rationalism (which culminates in *die deutsche Schulphilosophie*³⁵). For the first time, the concept of *Rationalität* becomes a problem. Kant realizes that it cannot be accounted for solely by means of the principle of contradiction, to which the totality of truths should be traced back. Such is “the fundamental theme of the Kantian philosophy” (*das Grundthema des kantischen Philosophierens*), the “metaphysical implications” (*metaphysische Tragweite*) of which were quite evident to Kant himself (Hua-Mat IX, pp. 470–471). “The realm of the analytic a priori,” Husserl says, does not coincide with the totality of the a priori (*das gesamte Apriori*) “as rationalism thought” (Hua-Mat IX, p. 473): there are “concepts and propositions that, on the one hand, have the apparent character of a priori laws and yet, on the other hand, do not stem from a merely analytic thought.”

As can be guessed, Kant’s achievement is that of pointing to the necessity of distinguishing analytic and synthetic a priori in opposition to the one-sided reduction to the analytic sphere carried out by the Leibnizians and the rationalist tradition. Such a distinction, Husserl goes on to say, bears witness to the distinction between two irreducible “ontological rationalities” as the condition of possibility for any future metaphysics (Hua-Mat IX, p. 474). Nevertheless, as Husserl does not fail to recognize, Kant is far from giving up the scientific paradigm of modernity, i.e., of exact science (*das Vorbild der exakten Wissenschaften*), as the prototype of

³⁴“*Gegen diesen Logizismus wirkte in Kants Entwicklungsjahren der in Deutschland bekannt werdende englische Empirismus Lockes sehr nachhaltig. Bei einzelnen selbständigen Köpfen wie Rüdiger und Crusius begannen sich Oppositionen zu regen, und Kant selbst gehört zu diesen Opponenten in seinen bedeutenden Jugendschriften, in denen er übrigens in der Hauptsache doch Rationalist blieb*” (Hua-Mat IX, p. 469).

³⁵“*Speziell kann Kant nur verstanden werden unter der speziellen historischen Perspektive, unter der er steht. Leibniz, Christian Wolff und die deutsche Schulphilosophie, mit den ersten oppositionellen Gegenströmungen, die auf Einflüssen des englischen Empirismus beruhen*” (Hua-Mat IX, p. 469, footnote).

any science whatsoever (*das Prototyp jeder Wissenschaft überhaupt*) (Hua-Mat IX, p. 470).

Although Kant lays claim to the irreducibility of the synthetic sphere vis-à-vis the formal and analytic a priori, thereby undermining once and for all the logicism of Leibniz and Wolff, he still remains blind to the variety inhabiting the ontological rationality of the material domain.³⁶

* * *

We have now reached the end of our study of the concept of *Rationalität* and, in particular, of the way in which Husserl employs it in order to work out a systematic reading of the adventures and misadventures of modern philosophy from Descartes through Kant. The goal of the present chapter was twofold. On the one hand, the case was made for considering the notion of a priori, construed by Husserl as the expression of the ontological form of rationality, as a “category” through which the very history of philosophy, notably “modern philosophy,” could be understood and interpreted. We first explained in what sense and to what extent one can speak of a “twofold” or double conflict (the first immanent to the *Rationalität*, the other concerning the tension between the latter and the emergence of a transcendental understanding of rationality (*Vernunft*)); then, we tried to follow and reconstruct Husserl’s interpretation of the “rationalist” line in both his 1916–1918 lectures and in the *Crisis of European Sciences*. On the other hand, however, the more systematic thesis was proposed bearing on the relation between Husserl’s project of rationalizing the empirical (construed as the very “function” of eidetic sciences or rational ontologies) and the “rationalist tradition” itself: *the main claim being that Husserl conceives the former as directly deriving from the latter*.

In short: Husserl’s intention should not be described in terms of a straightforward opposition to the “old rationalists”; on the contrary, it consists in taking up what he holds to be the true ambition and aspiration of the philosophical trajectory of modern rationalism, while at the same dismissing all the most problematic elements of their speculation.

In this respect, the analysis of Husserl’s own stance on Spinoza turned out to be quite telling. It soon became apparent that if Husserl borrows from Spinoza’s metaphysics the mysterious turn of phrase *sub specie aeternitatis* to designate the function of eidetic sciences, it is precisely because he acknowledges that Spinoza’s system is to be deemed the first universal ontology claiming that not only nature but *the totality of being* is rational through and through. Accordingly, and by comparing the 1916–1918 *Einleitung in die Philosophie* lectures with the more famous diagnosis offered in *Krisis*, we saw to what extent Husserl’s appreciation of Spinoza’s philosophy develops: indeed, if in the former text Husserl is more critical and Spinoza’s “system” is taken to be a mere “universal metaphysics” (i.e., the a priori science of the “real” as it factually is), a much greater concession is made by Husserl

³⁶ Implicit reference is made here by Husserl to passages such as the following (from the preface to the second edition): “The task, then, of this critique of pure speculative reason consists in the described attempt to transform the procedure previously followed in metaphysics, by subjecting metaphysics to a complete revolution, thus following the example set by the geometers and investigators of nature” (*KrV*, B p. XXII).

in the latter, wherein Spinoza's metaphysics becomes a "universal ontology" (i.e., the a priori science of being as a rational totality (*Seins-All*)).³⁷

If we are on the right track, then what Levinas exclaims about Husserl's relation to the tradition of modern rationalism turns out to be quite insufficient and inappropriate. In the first chapter of his *La théorie de l'intuition dans la phénoménologie de Husserl*, after acknowledging what we have been calling *OPP* and recognizing that "ontology" (or, better: ontologies) is the name that Husserl gives to the study of such and such a region of being (or plurality thereof), he adds the following footnote: "It is clear that the term *ontology* must not be understood here—or in the rest of our work—in the sense which it had in the eighteenth century. It should not be identified with the term *metaphysics*."³⁸

That the term *ontology* (in Husserl's sense) should not be identified with *metaphysics* (in the sense of the eighteenth century's rationalist traditions) is not only explicitly maintained by Husserl, it also represents a strategic element in his harsh and radical criticism of modernity. However, as we have already seen, the very idea of ontology (and of a plurality thereof) is directly traced back by Husserl himself to the aspirations of modern rationalism while trying also to clearly establish a genealogy between the latter and his project of rationalizing the empirical.

If our trajectory thus far can be described as going from *the problem of the a priori* (Parts I, II, III and IV) to the *ontological notion of rationality* (Parts V and VI), then it is now time to return to the problem of the a priori by addressing Husserl's own understanding of it, notably the difference from the *Logical Investigations* on between formal and material/analytic and synthetic a priori.

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³⁷ A more thorough investigation of the relation between Husserl and modern rationalism should also take into account Hans Pichler (1910, 1919), whose work Husserl knew well.

³⁸ Levinas (1930, p. 22) (footnote). See De Santis (2019b).

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Part VII
Formal and Material, Innate and
Contingent A Priori

Formal and Material, Analytic and Synthetic A Priori



Although a sizable amount of Part III was dedicated to the *Logical Investigations*, notably to the problem of the a priori in the famous *Third Investigation*, §§10–12 (from the second edition) were only touched upon rather than thoroughly analyzed. The reason for this is that in Part II all our energy was put into clarifying the wider systematic framework of Husserl’s assessment of the problem of the a priori (i.e., the two “interrelated” notions of necessity and law) in order to also dismiss a widespread (and hence widely misleading) reading of Husserl’s line of reasoning according to which what he is grappling with in the first place is a “mereology” (based on a specific perceptual paradigm inherited from his master Stumpf and, via the latter, from Berkeley). There is no need to reargue that chapter here. Instead, we will pick up where we left off. The objective here in this Part is twofold, at once philological and systematic.

On the one hand—call this the philological objective—we will aim to clarify the Husserlian understanding of the material a priori (*das sachliche Apriori*) by also tackling a series of conceptually and terminologically nuanced distinctions such as between “material” and “synthetic” and “formal” and “analytic” a priori as presented and addressed in *LU III*. On the other hand—call this the systematic objective—the next chapter will advance a thesis bearing on the relation between the a priori and the so-called genetic turn of Husserl’s phenomenology: as we will argue, the introduction of the genetic dimension, that is, of the systematic project of disclosing and bringing to light the phenomenologically “genetic” origin of (both) the (formal and material) a priori leads Husserl to replace the conceptual pair *formal-material* with *innate-contingent*.

In other words, we will encourage considering the latter conceptual distinction (innate-contingent) as the result of the genetic approach to the former (formal-material). To be clear, it is not our position that Husserl ceases all mention of the formal-material pair. Rather, our point is that what, from a “static” perspective, Husserl identifies as *formal a priori* systematically turns out to have an *innate* character (in a sense to be elaborated further) when the very concept of a priori is subject

to “genetic” investigation. The same holds true of the concept of *material a priori*, which will be understood in terms of *contingent a priori* (in a double sense to be elucidated later) as it, too, is subject to “genetic” exploration.

As a consequence, this Part will be divided into three main parts. In this chapter, attention will be paid to *LU III* and to the distinctions between material and formal a priori and analytic and synthetic a priori; Chapter “From Formal to Innate—From Material to Contingent: The Development of the Concept of A Priori in Light of the Genetic Perspective” will briefly introduce the notion of “genetic phenomenology” in order to systematically address the “new” conceptual distinction between innate and contingent a priori; and, finally, it will also focus on the transition from the notions of “ideality” and ideal to talk of “irreality,” which so strongly characterizes Husserl’s later texts.

As we should remember, toward the end of §10 of *LU III*, Husserl arrives at the conclusion that the concept of non-independence amounts to the “*ideal lawfulness in a unified connection*” (Hua XIX/1, p. 255). In other words, Husserl goes on to say, if an object stands in a “law-bound” and not merely factual connection (*Zusammenhang*) then it is “non-independent”: the concept of *lawfulness* determines non-independence, not the other way around. Accordingly, even where a law states the impossibility of a connection or synthesis (*Verknüpfung*) (the presence of A excludes B as incompatible with it), “one can still trace this back (*zurückgeführt*) to non-independence. For, A can only exclude a B if both exclusively require the same thing.” For example, a color excludes another color, but “exclusively” if both aim to cover the same identical surface, “and both cannot do so completely”: “To each essential, law-bound exclusion of a determinate delimitation or boundary, there corresponds a positive law-bound requirement [*Forderung*] of a corresponding delimitation or boundary and vice versa” (Hua XIX/1, p. 255).

Two observations are necessary. In the first place, what needs to be emphasized is Husserl’s talk of synthesis, at least as *Verknüpfung* and, more broadly, as “connection.” Or, better, the case could be made for taking the latter notion as standing for any sort of connection the character and nature of which is determined by the specific type of synthesis that actually binds the elements of the connection itself. And Husserl uses *Verknüpfung* in a quite technical way to designate the synthesis between “species” (*die verknüpften Spezies*) while the term *Verbindung* (*mit-verbunden*) designates the synthesis between the corresponding (individual) moments (Hua XIX/1, pp. 158, 238). As a matter of fact, however, and precisely because priority is given to the notion of lawfulness (if a part stands in a law-bound connection then it is “non-independent”), it would be better to affirm that if an object stands in a law-bound connection and is *mit-verbunden* with some other moments, it is because the relevant ideal species are *verknüpft*. It is the presence of what in the second edition Husserl calls “ideal lawfulness” that brings about the specific relation between moments and species, namely, their peculiar and relevant syntheses. Second of all, and as Husserl affirms at the very end of §10, any negative case of exclusion can always be translated back into the positive case of a non-independence: the *impossibility of a synthesis or incompatibility* (between moments,

hence between species) always refers back to an ideal law, hence to the *necessity of a synthesis*.

With this mind, we can now approach §11, the title of which is “The Difference between these ‘Material’ Laws and ‘Formal’ and ‘Analytic’ Laws.” As is known, the first edition is very concise when it comes to “defining” the essential difference between “synthetic” and “analytic”:

The necessities or laws that serve to define given classes of non-independences are grounded, as we often have emphasized, in the peculiarity of contents [*in der Besonderheit der Inhalte*], in their specificity [*Eigenart*]. More precisely: they are grounded in (the Aristotelian) *genera, species, differences*, under which non-independent contents as well as their complementary ones fall. Thereby the essential distinction that separates “synthetic necessities” from the “analytic” ones (in a certain sense: “material” and “formal”) is also determined (Hua XIX/1, p. 256).

The distinction seems quite clear: synthetic necessities are grounded in the specificity of some contents while analytic necessities are not. It is important to emphasize that Husserl is speaking of “necessity” (or law), that the distinction is between “synthetic” and “analytic” (necessities or laws), and that “in a certain sense” the latter seems to correspond to that between “material” and “formal” necessities or laws (even though nothing is really conveyed as to how we should understand the relation between these two different terminologies). If this is the case, then one can *indifferently* speak of synthetic *sive* material necessity as well as of analytic *sive* formal necessity.

However, in the second edition, the last sentence (“Thereby... also determined”) is removed and a new, rather long excerpt is introduced, as if Husserl were trying to be more careful about the possible conflation of the two conceptual pairs.

If we conceive of the totality of such ideal objects, we have with them the totality of pure “essences” [*reinen Wesen*], the “essences” [*Essenzen*] of all *idealiter* possible individual objectualities (existences). To these essences [*Essenzen*] there correspond “material concepts,” namely, propositions that we sharply distinguish from “purely formal concepts” and propositions, which are free of all “material matter” [*sachhaltigen Materie*]. To the latter belong the *categories of formal logic* and the *formal ontological categories* mentioned in the last chapter of the *Prolegomena*, which are essentially related to these, as well as to all syntactical formations they engender. Concepts like *something, one, object, quality, relation, synthesis, plurality, number, order, ordinal number, whole, part, magnitude* etc., have a basically different character from concepts like *house, tree, color, tone, space, sensation, feeling* etc., which for their part express something material [*Sachhaltiges*]. Whereas the former group themselves round the empty idea of something [*Etwas*] or object [*Gegenstand*] as such, and are associated with this through formal ontological axioms, the latter are disposed about [*ordnen sich...um*] various highest material genera (*material categories*), in which *material ontologies* have their root. This cardinal division between the “formal” and the “material” [*“sachhaltigen” oder materialen*] spheres of essence gives us the true distinction between the *analytically a priori* and the *synthetically a priori disciplines*, notably, between *laws and necessities*. The next section will make systematic pronouncements on these matters (Hua XIX/1, p. 256).

The passage is quite dense, primarily because of the presence of both the terminology of the first edition of the *LU* and the language of *Ideen I*. Now, in order

to unpack all the different aspects of Husserl's line of argumentation, a few remarks are necessary.

The term *synthetic* is used to characterize primarily "disciplines," the opposition being between "analytically a priori disciplines" and "synthetically a priori disciplines"; on the contrary, *material* (as *sachhaltig*) refers to concepts and propositions. Hence, one can speak of synthetic disciplines, the propositions (and relevant concepts) of which are of a material nature, as well as of analytic disciplines, the propositions (and relevant concepts) of which are of a formal character.

It is worth noticing that, while the above passage from the first edition relates the "synthetic" and "material" character of such and such a necessity or law to their being grounded *in the peculiarity of contents* or *in their specificity*, the second edition excerpt adopts a different perspective (which clearly derives from *Ideen I*). Indeed, the material nature of certain concepts (such as *color, tone, space, sensation, feeling*) is now explained based upon their "grouping themselves round" (*ordnen sich...um*) "various highest material genera (*material categories*), in which *material ontologies* have their root." This perfectly aligns with *Ontology.1*, *Ontology.2*, *Ontology.3* (cf. p. 205 and ff.): the *materiality* of the so-called material concepts, hence of the relevant material propositions, being the expression of the irreducible multiplicity of the material categories (*Ontology.4*). The problem is no longer that of simply laying claim to the irreducible distinction between types of "necessities" (one of them being grounded in the nature of the contents, while the other is not)¹ but first and foremost the plurality of material ontologies, that is, the irreducible multiplicity of the material domains of being (*OPP*). Indeed, if the formal categories "group themselves round" the *one* empty category of *Etwas* or "object" (the latter two being in fact equivalent²), the material concepts group themselves round *several and different* highest material genera (*verschiedene oberste sachhaltige Gattungen*). The decisive or vital factor is no longer the necessities' *being grounded in such and such a content*, but the concepts grouping themselves round *various material regions* (in the sense of *Ontology.1*).

As is clear, the framework systematically worked out in *Ideen I* now imposes on the primitive textual layer of the *Logical Investigations* the talk of ontology, namely,

¹As a matter of fact, analytic laws are also now described as "grounded in..." *merely* "*analytic essences*" (*im bloßen "analytischen Wesen" gründet*) (Hua XIX/1, p. 258). Of course, as Husserl recognizes, "material essences" "are in a certain sense the '*genuine*' essences." Then again, as he also recognizes: "On the other hand, however, there is, to be sure, something eidetic yet different in a fundamentally essential way: *a mere form of essence*; that is, to be sure, an essence but a fully '*empty*' essence, an essence that *in the manner of an empty form is suited to every possible essence*" (Hua III/1, p. 26).

²As Husserl remarks in §10 of *Ideen I*: "*Fundamental concepts of a purely logical sort* surface in these axioms [the fundamental truths in the purely logical disciplines], and we define these concepts as *logical categories* or *categories of the logical region 'object in general'*. They are concepts through which the logical essence of an object in general is determined in the entire system of axioms, or they are concepts that express the unconditioned, necessary, and constitutive determinations of an object as such" (Hua III/1, p. 29).

material ontologies, which is in fact nowhere to be found in the first edition of the text.

This being preliminarily acknowledged, the argument goes on as follows (we are quoting from the second edition):

It is now immediately plain, that all the laws or necessities governing different sorts of *non-independencies* fall into the spheres of the *synthetic* a priori: one grasps fully what divides them from what is merely formal and non-material. Laws of the type of the law of causation, which lay down the non-independence of changes in what is thing-like—or the laws (generally insufficiently formulated) that assert the non-independence of mere qualities, intensities, extensions, boundaries, relational forms etc. would not be put on a level with a purely “analytic” generalization such as *A whole cannot be without parts*, or with analytic necessities such as *There cannot be a king (master, father) without subjects (servants, children)* etc. We may assert in general: correlatives mutually entail one another, they cannot be thought of, or cannot be, without each other. If we set beside these any definite propositions of the opposite sort, e.g., *A color cannot be without something colored*, or *A color cannot be without some space that it covers*, etc.—the difference leaps into view. *Color* is not a relative expression, whose meaning includes the representation of a relation to something else. Though color is “unthinkable” [*nicht ohne Farbigen denkbar ist*] without something colored, the existence of the latter, and more definitely that of an extension, is not “analytically” grounded in the notion of color (Hua XIX/1, pp. 256–257).

This excerpt is by far one of most difficult passages in the entire *Third Investigation*. As should be clear, Husserl’s main preoccupation here is not really to address the distinction between “formal” and “material” (which was already done in the preceding portions of the paragraph), but to elucidate the distinction between two species of laws that *do not seem to be different at all*: the laws of non-independence that fall within the “synthetic” sphere (*A color cannot be without something colored*) and the analytic sphere of the correlatives (*There cannot be a king without subjects*), which Husserl keeps separate from what is now labeled the “purely analytic” (*A whole cannot be without parts*).

The issue is of crucial importance. For, if Husserl were not able to vindicate the “synthetic” nature of propositions such as *A color cannot be without something colored*, if this species of laws turned out to be merely analytic (albeit not purely analytic), it would be the value of the phenomenological descriptions of consciousness, hence the very notion of “intentionality” as Husserl will investigate it over the course of the *Fifth Investigation*, to be called into question.³

³ Indeed, and as Moritz Schlick rightly understands, what is at stake for Husserl is the very existence of phenomenology as a (material-eidetic) science of consciousness. See Schlick (1938, pp. 19–30), notably, the dismissive conclusion on page 30. There is no need in the present context to go over Schlick’s quite famous, yet also very misleading, attempt at rejecting the phenomenological concept of a material a priori (for, it would take us in a completely different direction). Nevertheless, two points are worth being stressed: in the first place, Schlick’s emphasis on the purported critique of Kant’s formalism is nowhere to be found in Husserl (and this is why it played no role whatsoever in our reconstruction of the Husserlian account in chapter “A Question of Truth”), for it is based on Max Scheler’s interpretation in *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik*. In the second place, however, Schlick perfectly grasps that the problem at stake is that of the foundation or grounding (*Begründung*) of the a priori truths, even though he ends up fully misunderstanding its sense by claiming that the only possibility, for phenomenology, to lay claim to the existence of

Let us quickly quote from §15 of *LU V* to see what we mean.

At the beginning of section *a* (dedicated to assessing whether there are “intentional feelings in general”), Husserl needs to rule out the hypothesis that intentional relations could be construed in terms of mere “associations,” as is the case with our “representation” of Naples, which immediately carries with it “the representation of Vesuvius” (Hua XIX/1, p. 404). They are so bound up with one another that “one reminds us of the other.” It is clear, however, Husserl goes on to remark, that such an association is “extrinsic” and cannot be put on an equal footing with the “relation of pleasure to the pleasant” (*die Beziehung des Gefallens auf das Gefällige*). In the former case (Naples-Vesuvius), in fact, and although the two are always given as “associated” with one another, “the representation which reproduces is also possible without such reproductive function.” In other words, the “representation of Naples” is not necessarily related to the “representation of Vesuvius,” and the former can occur even without necessarily implying the latter. Quite the opposite is the state of affairs when it comes to “the relation of pleasure to the pleasant,” for “pleasure without anything pleasant is unthinkable [*nicht denkbar*].”

Why, exactly?

It is unthinkable not because we are dealing here with correlative [*korrelativen*] expressions, as when we say, e.g., that a cause without an effect, or a father without a child, is unthinkable [*nicht denkbar*], but because *the specific essence of pleasure demands [fordert] a relation to something pleasing*. Just so the moment known as conviction is unthinkable [*undenkbar*] apart from something of which we are convinced. There is, similarly, no desire whose specific character can do without something desired, no agreement or approval without something agreed on or approved etc. These are all intentions, genuine acts in our sense (Hua XIX/1, p. 404).

It is the very subject-matter of the phenomenological description, namely, the many different modes of intentionality in question in the *Korrelativa* issue raised by Husserl in §11 of *LU III*. For, if Husserl were unable, as we were stating above, to lay claim to the irreducible “synthetic” character and nature of “laws” such as *A color cannot be without something colored* and *A pleasure cannot be without something pleasant* in opposition to the analytic character of correlative expressions such as *A father cannot be without a child*, the phenomenological “descriptions” would lose their sense and significance and phenomenology itself would be reduced to a mere “semantic” analysis (as *de facto* and quite polemically contended by Wundt in his *Logizismus und Psychologismus*⁴).

a material a priori would consist in embracing a “Fichtean” variety of idealism (p. 24). On Schlick and Husserl, see De Santis (2015); see also the systematic analysis offered by Van de Vite (1984).

⁴Wundt (1910, pp. 511–634). It is of crucial importance to stress the difference between the analyses set forward by Husserl in both the present paragraphs and the first chapter of the *Third Investigation*—which *de facto* bear upon the semantic structure of certain propositions (and relevant laws)—and the value of the phenomenological investigations themselves, which, being of a descriptive nature, necessarily point toward their intuitive foundation and source (for, as we should remember, this is precisely the one and only sense of the expression a priori that Husserl will end up recognizing philosophically). Wundt would deny precisely such an intuitive foundation of phenomenology as a descriptive science by maintaining that the

How does Husserl account for their difference? Let us go back to *LU III* to try to understand it.

According to Husserl, “the difference leaps into view.” But what difference, exactly? For, if it is “unthinkable” that a color be without something colored, so “correlatives” “cannot be thought of” (*nicht gedacht werden*) without one another; and just like pleasure demands or requires (*fordert*) the relation to something pleasant, so it is with correlatives, which mutually “entail” or “require” one another (*fordern einander gegenseitig*). In a nutshell: colors cannot be thought of without something colored; a pleasure cannot be thought of without something pleasant; a king or a father cannot be thought of without a subject or a child. Colors require the relation to something colored; a pleasure requires the relation to something pleasant; a king requires the relation to a subject. If this is the case, in what does the difference between them consist?

As Husserl goes on to explain, thereby presuming to gratify the reader with a satisfactory answer: “*Color* is not a relative expression (*relativer Ausdruck*) the meaning of which includes (*einschlösse*) the representation of a relation to something else (*die Vorstellung einer Beziehung zu anderem*).” The same holds true of the pleasure example: “*Pleasure* is not a correlative expression the meaning of which includes the representation of a relation to something else.” Based upon such a characterization, one could also state that correlative expressions are those the meaning of which includes the representation of a “relation to something else.” In other words, two expressions can be characterized as correlative when the “representation of their relation” is included in them. If this is not the case, Husserl would assert, then the relation holding between them is “synthetic.”

(*Correlatives. I*): Two expressions are *correlative* when the *representation* of their relation is included in them, i.e., an expression is to be called *correlative* of another when the representation of their relation is included in it (and vice versa).

By contrast, when an expression requires the relation to something else, and yet the representation of such relation is not included in either of them, then these two expressions are not correlative. On the one hand, there obtains a relation that is *required* and the representation of which is *included* (in both terms); on the other hand, however, there occurs a relation that is *required* and the representation of which is nevertheless *included* in neither of them.

This being preliminarily stated, the following concern should be raised bearing upon this account of “correlative” and “non-correlative” expressions: Does not Husserl himself, at the very end of *LU V* (§44), distinguish between 13 different meanings of the term “representation” (Hua XIX/1, pp. 520–527)? When Husserl talks of *the representation of a relation to something else* that would be *included* or *not included* in an expression, which meaning does he have in mind? Which meaning of the term *Vorstellung* is he resorting to in order to discriminate correlative from non-correlative expressions? The objection could be made, in fact, that by speaking of *Vorstellung sic et simpliciter* Husserl is intentionally relying upon, and

phenomenological descriptions are nothing but “semantic” analyses.

playing with, that ambiguity of the term “representation” that in *LU V* he will by contrast explicitly denounce as the source of a series of misunderstandings affecting our comprehension of the acts of consciousness (among many other things).

Let us then briefly recall the 13 different meanings of the term *Vorstellung* as Husserl singles them out at the very end of *LU V* (Hua XIX/1, pp. 520–527).

- (1) In the first place, *Vorstellung* means act-matter, namely, “the representation [*Repräsentation*] underlying the act, i.e., the full content of the act exclusive of quality.” The matter, Husserl goes on to specify, “tells us what object is meant in the act, and in what sense it is meant” (i.e., whether the object is referred to in a perceptually or imaginatively intuitive way).
- (2) *Vorstellung* as “mere representation,” i.e., “as qualitative modification of any form of belief,” or, differently framed, the mere understanding of a proposition (*Satzverständnis*).
- (3) *Vorstellung* can additionally be a “nominal act,” namely, “the subject-representation of an act of assertion.”
- (4) *Vorstellung* understood as an “objectifying act”: “This qualitative ground-class includes acts of belief, whether nominal or propositional, as well as their counterparts, so that all representations in the second and third of our above senses are included here.”
- (5) *Vorstellung* as opposed to “mere thinking” (*bloßen sich Denken*). We also call it, Husserl goes on to state, “the difference between *intuition* and *concept*”: “Of an *ellipsoid* I have a representation, though not of a *Kummer-surface*: through suitable drawings, models or theoretically guided flights of phantasy I can also achieve a representation of the latter. A *round square*, a *regular icosahedron* and similar a priori *impossibilia* are in this sense ‘un-representable.’” *Vorstellung* and *Vorstellen* are then opposed to “mere thinking” in the specific sense that “plainly this means the intuition which gives fulfillment, and adequate fulfillment, to the mere meaning-intention.” To have a representation, to represent something to oneself, amounts “to achieving a corresponding intuition of what one merely thought of or what one meant but only at best very insufficiently intuited.”
- (6) *Vorstellung* can also stand for a mode of intuition in opposition to another, as is the case with “imagination” in contrast to “perception”: “If I see St. Peter’s Church, I do not have a representation of it. But I do have the latter, when I picture it in my memory.”
- (7) As tightly linked to the latter, *Vorstellung* can also mean the “physical-thing image,” which is the representation of what it depicts—e.g.: “This photograph represents St. Peter’s Church.”
- (8) *Vorstellung* in the sense of “representative,” “replacement,” and “proxy”—e.g.: “The mathematician drawing on the blackboard says: ‘Let *OX* represent the asymptote of the hyperbola,’ or, calculating, ‘Let *x* represent the root of the equation $f(x) = 0$.’ A sign, whether it depicts or names, is called the ‘representation’ of that for which it stands.”

- (9) "The distinction between *perception* and *imagination* (which latter itself shows important descriptive differences) is always confused with the distinction between *sensations* and *phantasms*." Accordingly, *Vorstellung* is employed to designate "the corresponding *phantasm* (the complex of representative contents or imagery), so that a new ambiguity arises."
- (10) The confusion between appearance and what appears leads us, Husserl explains, to the further confusion between representation and represented object, hence to the idea that the world is only my representation.
- (11) The idea that all conscious lived-experiences ("contents" in the real sense of the term) are "in consciousness" in the sense of "inner perception," and that with this orientation a *Vorstellung* is *eo ipso* given (with the ego "representing" the content to itself) "led to all contents of consciousness being called 'representations.'"
- (12) *Vorstellung* in the Bolzanian sense of "representation in itself," "which we," Husserl remarks, interpret "as meaning the same as every independent or dependent part-meaning within a complete assertion."
- (13) Finally, there is the quite loose talk of representation in the sense of "opinion" (*doxa*).

Which meaning does Husserl have in mind when he presents "correlative expressions" as those expressions the meaning of which includes in itself the *Vorstellung* of a representation to something else? Differently put: In what sense does the expression *color* not include in itself the *Vorstellung* of a relation to something else, namely, something colored?

One could try to go one by one, so as to substitute each one of these various meanings for the *Vorstellung* as it occurs in the characterization of correlatives until what we seek finally leaps into view. As far as we are concerned, we believe that the most suitable candidates for this function are (2) and (5) from the above list.

Per (2), the two propositions in question could be rephrased as follows:

- (1a) *Color* is not a correlative expression the meaning of which includes *the understanding* of a relation to something colored.
- (1b) *King* is a correlative expression the meaning of which includes *the understanding* of a relation to a subject.

Per (5), meanwhile, they could be rephrased as follows:

- (2a) *Color* is not a correlative expression the meaning of which includes *the intuition* of a relation to something colored.
- (2b) *King* is a correlative expression the meaning of which includes *the intuition* of a relation to a subject.

It is clear, however, that even so rephrased our propositions still sound odd. In particular, (2a) and (2b) are difficult to grasp: for, in what sense would a relevant "intuition" of a relation to something else (be it "something colored" or a "subject" or a "child") be included in the meaning of the expressions in question? There do not seem to be any issues with (1a) and (1b): an *expression* can be said to be the

correlative of another one when it both “requires” a relation to the latter and when the *understanding* of such a relation is *included* in its meaning. On the contrary, an expression cannot be said the *correlative* of another one when it requires a relation to the latter yet the *conception* or *understanding* of such a relation is *not included* in its meaning. (2b) does not seem to us to make any real sense: for, it would be odd to claim that “king” and “subject” are “correlative” expressions because the meaning of the former includes the (reference to a) relevant “intuition” of a relation to a “subject”; as if, accordingly, the possible intuition of a king were to be necessarily accompanied by the relevant intuition of its relation to a subject. If this is the case, then (2a) cannot be adopted as a possible reading of the color-proposition,⁵ either, for it is the idea itself of resorting to (5) that has to be abandoned altogether. On a closer look, (1) is not in a good position, either: for, the appeal to the (vague) notion of understanding does not seem to be adequate to address, let alone resolve our problem.

One method of escape from this terminological morass appears in *LU IV*. At the very beginning of the investigation, immediately after ruling out the idea that the distinction between simple and complex meanings should be held as a mere expression or simple mirroring of the “grammatical distinction between simple and complex expressions or locutions” (Hua XIX/1, p. 303), Husserl asks whether “complexity of meanings merely reflects complexity of objects.” As can be easily imagined, Husserl will answer in the negative: for, it is not only the case that “complex” meanings can “represent” (*vorstellen*) simple objects (as is the case with the very expression “simple object”); it can also be the case that “simple meanings” represent complex objects (Hua XIX/1, p. 304). Now, when it comes to the latter, one of the examples evoked by Husserl is precisely that of “king”: “One might doubt (though I do not think correctly) whether the simple names in our above examples (*man*, *iron*, *king*, etc.), really give expression to simple meanings, but we shall have to count names like *something* and *one* as doing so” (Hua XIX/1, p. 304).

It is worth emphasizing that the first edition writes *simple representations* instead of *simple meanings* (in the phrase “...really give expression to simple meanings”). *King*, Husserl would probably point out, is a simple “name” that nevertheless gives expression to a “complex meaning.”

It is the task of §3 to explain in what sense one can actually speak of *implicit meanings*. In the first edition, at the very end of this paragraph, Husserl sums up his major findings in the following way. Two different senses of *complexity* (and *simplicity*) of meanings have been distinguished: on the one hand, there can be a “plurality of meanings” that “synthetically” make up one meaning (*eine Mehrheit von Bedeutungen sich zu einer Bedeutung verknüpfen kann*), in such a manner that the resultant meaning is like a machine made up of several other machines. Accordingly, one can speak of “simple” meanings if there is no such conception of “complexity” (*Wo auf der anderen Seite die Einheit der Bedeutung derartiger Zusammengesetztheit ermangelt, gilt sie als einfache*). On the other hand, there can be meanings that

⁵We no longer agree with what we argued in De Santis (2015, pp. 173–174).

include “certain distinguishable moments,” but not in the form of parsed or “articulated” special-meanings (*gegliederten Sonderbedeutungen*) (Hua XIX/1, p. 310). In this case, Husserl surmises, one can speak of “implicit content” (*implizierten Inhalt*) or meaning; accordingly, the talk of simple meanings is allowed if implicit contents are nowhere to be found. Now, as the first edition of §3 concludes, the *normal sense* of complexity will from now on be associated with the former idea. According to such a view, a meaning can be deemed *simple* (if no *Sonderbedeutungen* are found in it) and yet still *implicitly* include in itself some other meaning (what in the first edition Husserl ambiguously labels “implicit contents”), thereby representing also a complex object.⁶

Now, if we are on the right track, and the double meaning or sense of the complexity-simplicity dichotomy laid out in §3 can be applied to correlatives, then our above propositions can in theory be formulated as follows:

- (3a) *Color* is not a correlative expression the meaning of which includes, as an “implicit content,” the relation to something else (i.e., something colored).
- (3b) *King* is a correlative expression the meaning of which includes, as an “implicit content,” the relation to something else (i.e., subjects).

A new general account of *Korrelativa* follows therefrom:

(*Correlatives.2*): Two expressions are *correlative* when their relation is included in them as an implicit content, or, better, as an implicit meaning.

With respect to (1a) and (1b), this new version has the advantage of avoiding assuming the vague notion of “understanding,” and, with respect to (2a) and (2b), it no longer needs to rely upon the concept of “intuition,” which inevitably leads us beyond the domain of meanings.

Both *color* and *king* would count as *simple meanings* in the first sense distinguished above (they do not imply any *gegliederten Sonderbedeutungen*), yet they could also be deemed *complex* insofar as an “implicit content” can be found in them (such *implicit content* being *the relation to something else*). Differently framed: in one case (*king*), a “relation to something else” is required that is also included (or precisely *because* it is included), as an “implicit content,” in the expression in question, while, in another case (*color*), a “relation to something else” is required which is not included in it as an “implicit content.” As *LU III* explains: “Though color is ‘unthinkable’ without something colored, the existence of the latter, and more definitely that of an extension, is not ‘analytically’ grounded in the notion of color” (Hua XIX/1, p. 257). This is why the relation between *color* and *something colored* is to be deemed *synthetic*: the relation consists in a necessary synthesis between species, hence between their relevant individual moments.

This being maintained, and the end of §11 having finally been reached, let us sum up our findings as they come to bear on the double distinction between *material* and *formal*, on the one hand, and *synthetic* and *analytic*, on the other.

⁶On Husserl’s early philosophy of language, see the systematic investigation by Urban (2013), notably, Ch. 6 and the entire second part of the book.

As we should remember, in §11, *material* and *formal* are mainly used by Husserl to designate “concepts” and “proposition” (the latter to the extent that they include the former). If, in the first edition, the distinction between the two amounts to the question of whether or not the concepts correspond to specific contents (in such a way that the relevant propositions and truths can be said to be “grounded in such and such a content”), in the second edition, there occurs a shift, with more emphasis placed on *formality* deriving from the (formal) concepts’ “grouping themselves round” *one* empty category and the *materiality* being determined by the corresponding concepts’ “grouping themselves round” the *many various highest material genera*.

On the contrary, *synthetic* and *analytic* are mostly used to designate the corresponding (a priori) disciplines as well as the system of necessities and “laws” belonging to them. Accordingly, Husserl distinguishes between “purely analytic laws” (*A whole cannot be without parts*), “analytic laws” such as the ones that entail correlatives (*A king cannot be without subjects*), and “synthetic laws” (*A color cannot be without something colored* or *A pleasure cannot be without something pleasant*). If the so-called *correlatives* can be understood with reference to the complexity-simplicity dichotomy, then synthetic laws are synthetic precisely because they express a synthesis between species, which are not included in, nor required by, the meaning itself of the expression.⁷

It follows that a *proposition* can be designated *material* (or *formal*) based on the kind of concepts that occur in it and either *synthetic* or *analytic* depending on the kind of laws and necessities to which it gives expression.

With this series of conceptual and terminological distinctions in mind, we can now approach what the second edition displays as a separate paragraph, namely, §12, which is dedicated to expanding on the fundamental distinction between

⁷Let us hasten to emphasize, however, that Husserl does not really clarify in what, exactly, the difference between the *analytic* character of the correlatives and the *analytic* character of what is “purely analytic” consists, as is evident from what he writes toward the end of §11, where the former seems to be understood only as a case of the latter: “That correlatives as such mutually condition one another certainly points to certain mutually requiring ‘moments,’ it points to the mutually ‘belonging’ relationships and relative properties which we find in the case of every relation. But it does so only with formal indeterminacy. The lawfulness that here obtains is *one* and the same for all relations as such: it is in fact a merely formal lawfulness, rooted in mere analytic essences, here in fact in the essence of relation as a formal category. It takes over none of the material specificity of relations and of their members, and discourses merely of ‘certain’ relations and members. It will perhaps say in the simple case of dyadic relations: if a *certain* α stands in a *certain* relation to a certain β , this same β stands in a *certain corresponding* relation to that α ; hence, α and β are here *unlimited or undetermined variable*” (Hua XIX/1, p. 258). What concerns Husserl here is less the status of correlatives *per se* (and their purported distinction from the analytic in the strict sense) and more the urge to defend and lay claim to the irreducible character of the synthetic a priori, namely, the necessity of differentiating the latter from the former. In other words, Husserl’s main concern is to maintain that, even though there seems to be no distinction between synthetic a priori laws and correlatives, the former are not to be taken as a case of the latter. This is why Benoist can rightly remark that the “analytic” in the strong sense of the term is “*le seul reconnu par Husserl*” (Benoist 1999, p. 102).

analytic and synthetic propositions. The paragraph opens up with a long brand new excerpt, which is nowhere to be found in the first edition:

Analytic laws are unconditionally universal propositions (and are accordingly free from all explicit or implicit positions of individual existence); they include none but formal concepts, and if we go back to those that are primitive, they contain only formal categories. Analytic laws are opposed to their *particularizations*, which arise when we introduce *material* concepts, and thoughts perhaps positing individual existence, e.g. *this, the Kaiser*. The particularization of laws always yields necessities: the particularizations of analytic laws hence yield *analytic necessities*. What are called “*analytic propositions*” are in general analytic necessities. When they imply positions of existence (e.g. *if this house is red, then redness pertains to this house*) such analytic necessity relates to that content of the proposition in virtue of which it empirically particularizes the analytic law, not to its empirical position of existence (Hua XIX/1, p. 259).

We are already familiar with this line of Husserl’s reasoning, for it perfectly aligns with what we have seen Husserl explain to his students in 1906 and again in 1909 (Sect. 4): the particularization of a pure (analytic) law yields a form of relevant necessity, and what we call analytic propositions are usually precisely such “necessities.”

This latter point is worth reiterating, for, if we understand Husserl correctly, whenever we talk of (*analytic*) *propositions* what we mean is not the analytic law itself but rather its *particularizations*. “Analytic propositions” are not “analytic laws”; rather, they are “analytic necessities” (the *necessity* being the *particularization* of a law, yet not the law itself). As Husserl goes on to explain:

We may define *analytically necessary propositions* as propositions whose truth is completely independent of the material specificity of their objectualities ... of the relevant facticity of the instance [*Fall*] as well as of the validity of any possible position of existence. They are propositions that permit of a *complete “formalization”* and can be regarded as particular cases or empirical applications of the formal, analytic laws whose validity appears in such formalization. In an analytic proposition it must be possible, without altering the proposition’s logical form, to replace all material content [*sachhaltige Materie*], with an empty formal *something*, and to eliminate every position of existence by giving all one’s judgments the corresponding form of an “unconditional universality” and lawfulness [*Gesetzlichkeit*] (Hua XIX/1, p. 259).

Such is the sense of the famous *formalization* operation: it consists in regarding the proposition at hand merely and exclusively as a special or particular case, as the “application”—as Husserl would also say—of a formal and analytic law. A given proposition can be deemed *analytically necessary* if all its “material content” (*sachhaltige Materie*), i.e., all the material concepts occurring in it, can be replaced with the formal *something* and its variations (= their material validity occurs vacuously⁸), thereby disclosing itself as the application of an analytic law. What Husserl

⁸“Das Charakteristische dieser Gesetze ist, dass sie absolut keine bestimmten sinnlichen Begriffe enthalten und dass die Variablen in ihnen Unbestimmte sind, die völlig frei variieren können. Diese Variablen, die üblicherweise und sehr passend durch Buchstaben bezeichnet werden, sind die einzigen Stellen, an denen Sinnlichkeit in die Satzform eintreten kann. (Es sind nämlich die Stellen, welche die fundierenden Vorstellungen in unbestimmter Weise andeuten). Aber das logische Gesetz ergibt bei Substitution eines jeden beliebigen sinnlichen Begriffs und eines jeden beliebigen

labels *formalization*, or, better, the way in which he describes and accounts for its sense and procedure, perfectly matches the *Zurückführung* operation discussed in relation to the 1906 lectures (and that slowly led us to the issue concerning the two forms of rationality).

In order to corroborate our reading, it is worth underlining that, although the two editions do not present any substantial difference as to the actual arguments they set forward, the text of the second edition clearly places more emphasis upon the difference between and the relevant articulations of the notions of *law* and *necessity*.⁹ Now, this being recognized, Husserl can surmise that:

Having formed the concept of an analytic law and of an analytic necessity, we also have *eo ipso* formed the concept of a *synthetic a priori law*, and of a *synthetic a priori necessity*. Each pure law, which includes material concepts, so as not to permit of a formalization of these concepts *salva veritate*—that is to say, each such law, i.e., that is not analytically necessary—is a synthetic *a priori* law. Particularizations of such laws are synthetic necessities: empirical particularizations of course are so also, such as *This red is different from this green* (Hua XIX/1, p. 260).

As the very beginning of the passage indicates, the notion of synthetic and a priori law or necessity is obtained *per viam negationis* vis-à-vis that of analytic law or necessity. Upon closer inspection, however, Husserl's argument consists of two different—yet closely related—steps.

Let us start off with what Husserl remarks at the outset: “Each pure law, which includes material concepts, so as not to permit of a formalization of these concepts *salva veritate* ... is a synthetic *a priori* law.” Here the talk is of *laws* in general, notably “pure laws,” and not of analytic and synthetic *necessities* (a synthetic law being one that does not permit of its full formalization *salva veritate*). That is to say, if a purely conceptual law cannot be fully formalized then it is a synthetic law. The

Begriffs überhaupt einen wahren Satz, weil eben die Unbestimmten frei variabel sind. Und weil diese Gesetze nichts von Sinnlichkeit enthalten, nichts von irgendwelchen Begriffen, welche den Inhalt des Gesetzes an irgendeine besondere Gattung des Realen binden, eben darum umspannen sie alles Sein überhaupt; sie umspannen alles Sein, sofern es eben gedachtes Sein ist, sofern es kategorial so und so gefasst ist. Die Gesetze gründen rein in den Kategorien. Sie befassen all das, was sich für Gegenstände überhaupt aussagen lässt, nicht aufgrund der spezifischen Besonderheit dieser Gegenstände, sondern unangesehen dieser Besonderheit, was sich für sie eben aussagen lässt, sofern sie irgendwelcher kategorialer Formung unterzogen sind” (Hua-Mat III, p. 179). On the novelty of Husserl's “formalization” operation with respect to Kant and Bolzano, see Benoist (1997, pp. 226–232).

⁹Here is the original text from the first edition that in the second version will be replaced by the two excerpts just discussed: “Analytische Sätze sind solche Sätze, welche eine von der inhaltlichen Eigenart ihrer Gegenstände (und somit auch der gegenständlichen Verknüpfungsformen) völlig unabhängige Geltung haben; also Sätze, die sich vollständig formalisieren und als Specialfälle oder bloße Anwendungen der hierdurch erwachsenden formalen oder analytischen Gesetze fassen lassen. Die Formalisierung besteht darin, daß in dem vorgegebenen analytischen Satze alle sachhaltigen Bestimmungen durch Unbestimmte ersetzt und diese dann als unbeschränkte Variable gefaßt werden.”

notion of *a priori synthetic law* is obtained as the “negative” result, as it were, of a *failed formalization*,¹⁰ i.e., of a failed attempt at “tracing” it “back” (*Zurückführung*) to a purely analytic law. In so doing, it bears witness to a specific form of the *Rationalität*, i.e., the *material* ontological rationality and its irreducibility to the formal (and to its being expressed by a relevant analytic law¹¹). This being said, Husserl can move on to the talk of *particularizations*. As already was the case with the analytic necessities, the synthetic necessities, too, are the *particularizations* of some relevant *a priori* laws, notably synthetic laws. On the one hand, the system of synthetic laws that come to the fore as a result of the failed attempt at a formalization; on the other hand, the synthetic necessities result from the application of such and such a synthetic *a priori* law.

The entire process consists, first, in the *Zurückführung* of such and such a proposition to such and such a purely *a priori* law, after which an attempt is made at formalizing the *a priori* law: if the attempt is successful, then the *a priori* law turns out to be of an analytic nature and the original proposition an analytic necessity; if, on the contrary, the formalization fails, then the law in question turns out to be of a synthetic nature and the original proposition a synthetic necessity. What Husserl labels here laws are the sources of all necessity but which cannot themselves be deemed necessary; by contrast, “necessities” (whether analytic or synthetic) are yielded by the application of *a priori* laws (whether analytic or synthetic) but cannot themselves be deemed laws, the notion of *proposition* (when we speak of either analytic or synthetic propositions) standing in the first place for the many necessities, i.e., for the *particularizations*, of such and such an *a priori* law.

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¹⁰ “L’analytique apparaît alors comme la limite du synthétique *a priori*” (Benoist 1999, p. 98).

¹¹ “Cette résistance a valeur constitutive de légalité synthétique dans la mesure où elle délimite pour lesdites substitutions un domaine, où elle constitue une classe particulière ... d’objets pour laquelle elles sont légitimes. A ce niveau seulement ... l’objet peut se spécifier en ‘domaines’—Husserl parlera bientôt de ‘régions’” (Benoist 1999, p. 102).

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From Formal to Innate—From Material to Contingent: The Development of the Concept of A Priori in Light of the Genetic Perspective



1 Genetic Phenomenology: A Very Brief Introduction

Even though in the present context we are not interested in addressing Husserl's overall idea of a “genetic phenomenology” and how it develops over the years,¹ a look at the famous 1921 text on *Static and Genetic Phenomenological Method* (Hua XI, pp. 336–345) will turn out to be useful for us in order to appreciate the framework within which the switch from formal to innate a priori, and from material to contingent a priori, takes place.²

As Husserl remarks, “we can thus distinguish ‘explanatory’ phenomenology as a phenomenology of lawful genesis and ‘descriptive’ phenomenology as a phenomenology of possible essential forms ... in pure consciousness” (Hua XI, p. 340). The latter—which “in my lectures” is labeled static— “offers an understanding of intentional operations, in particular, of the operations of reason and its *negata*.” Static phenomenology, as we could also reframe it, describes the essential forms of all the different levels of apperception and the manner in which they build upon each other (*Fundierung*), thereby bringing about their “sense-giving” function (*Sinngebung*). By contrast, as Husserl goes on to explain, the so-called “genetic phenomenology” investigates how these phenomena “emerge” and arise according to seven different sets of genetic laws: (1) the genesis of passivity, which accounts for the lawful regularity of genetic regularity in passivity; (2) the participation of the ego itself and the relations between activity and passivity; (3) formations of “pure activity” secondary sensibility (habits); (4) the genesis of the individuality of a monad as a “unity of development” so as to also investigate “which types of individual monads are *a priori* possible”; (5) connected to the former, there arises then the question bearing upon the constitution of an anthropological world construed as implication and

¹ See the famous essay by Biemel (1959).

² For an overall discussion of the topic, see Lee (1993, pp. 17–30); and Lee (2002).

co-implication of a plurality of monads (Hua XI, p. 343): with respect to our world, Husserl further points out, this is the issue of “monadologically” understanding “the natural and psycho-physical world and communal world”; (6) the genetic explanation of a monad, only within which “a unitary nature and a world in general is constituted genetically, and how a unitary nature and a world in general remain constituted from this point onward throughout its entire life”; and, finally, (7) the genesis of my passivity in relation to that of all others, which brings about the constitution of “the same time,” for “primordial laws of genesis are the laws of original time-consciousness, the primordial laws of reproduction and then of association and associative expectation. In relation to this there is genesis on the basis of active motivation” (Hua XI, p. 343).

With this series of genetic laws in place, let us point out that what interests us in the present context is what Husserl asserts from (4) onward. In another 1921 manuscript on static and genetic phenomenology (Hua XIV, pp. 34–42), the latter is identified with the “phenomenology of monadic individuality, which embraces the phenomenology of an inter-connected genesis in which the unity of a monad arises, i.e., in which the monad is to the extent that it becomes” (Hua XIV, p. 38).

How is the genetic phenomenology supposed to bear on the topic we are investigating? What is the relation between genetic phenomenology, rigorously understood as the phenomenology of the self-constitution of the monad, and the general question of the formal and material *a priori*?

As we should remember our long assessment of the idea of *Rationalisierung* arrived at the blunt conclusion that the very fact of rationalization cannot itself be accounted for in a rational, that is, “eidetic” way, for it is (eidetically) irrational that there is something factual that can be traced back to its *a priori* *sive* rational principles. Now, the objective of the genetic investigation, understood as the phenomenology of monadic individuality, is to *comprehend* this fact from within what Husserl refers to as “the system of the concrete *a priori*,” that of the “self-development” of the concrete subjectivity or monad. As Husserl himself explains toward the end of §30 in the *Cartesian Meditations*, the developed ego has a “multi-layered structure,” which is conserved “as a persistent form-system of apperception and consequently of constituted objectualities—among them, also the ones that belong to an objectual universe that has a fixed ontological structure.” Such a conserving, Husserl goes on to further assert, is itself only “a form of genesis,” within which

the particular fact is irrational; but it is possible only in the *a priori* form-system pertaining to it as an egological fact. Nor should it be overlooked here that *fact*, with its *irrationality*, is itself a *structural concept within the system of the concrete a priori* (Hua I, p. 114).

The *fact*—which is *per se* irrational—of a certain *a priori* “ontological structure” (of an “objectual universe”) belongs to the system of the monadic or even inter-monadic individuality (“the system of the concrete *a priori*”), thereby becoming comprehensible (*verständlich*) as the specific form taken up by such individuality.³

³In this specific respect, Levinas is wrong when he remarks that “*Dire que le sujet est une monade, c’est en somme nier l’existence de l’irrationnel*” (Levinas 1994, p. 47). For, if it is absolutely true

As soon as we enter the monadological dimension, all the constitutional problems are included “*without exception*” in the explication of “the actual and potential life” of the concrete subjectivity, in such a way that—Husserl surmises—“phenomenology in general coincides with the phenomenology of this self-constitution” (Hua I, pp. 102–103).

Accordingly, the problem is no longer that of ascertaining the correlation between an ontological structure and a certain act of consciousness (or series thereof) so as to investigate and eventually fix the former’s mode of givenness to the latter; rather, the ontological structure belongs now to the “form-system” of the ego, thereby becoming a structural concept of the concrete a priori, with the genesis of the ego itself implying at the same time the “genetic development” of the ontological structure in question. What follows is that the account of the latter refers back to the account of the former, or, from the other direction, the account of the former includes the account of the latter.

The dichotomy between material and formal a priori—originally obtained based on the character of the concepts at stake, hence of the corresponding propositions and truths—is now understood in light of their referring to, or standing for, such and such a “structure” of the concrete subjectivity, to which they essentially belong. As we will soon see, from within this new framework what used to be called *formal* and *material* a priori can be characterized as *either innate or contingent depending upon the structural form of the concrete subjectivity from which their concepts derive*.⁴

Let us hasten to emphasize, once again, that here we are not interested in actually investigating or exploring the issue of the a priori’s “embeddedness,” as it were, in the monad (for, this would be the topic of a completely different work), but only in assessing and elucidating the consequences that this approach has for the notion of a priori, specifically vis-à-vis the material-formal dichotomy.

Moreover, before we get into a detailed discussion of what Husserl means by “contingent” and “innate” a priori, a second question arises: Are we allowed to actu-

that the reduction to the monad brings about a form of higher rationality and understanding, namely, the transcendental one, this does not amount to also denying the “irrationality” of the *fact* itself of such and such an ontological rationality. Quite the opposite: it is precisely because it is (ontologically) irrational that there is such and such an ontological form of rationality, the latter having to be traced back to the system of the concrete a priori so as to become transcendently comprehensible. In other words, the *irrationality of the fact of ontological rationality* is made “comprehensible” by its being traced back to the *transcendental rationality* within the monadic system; nevertheless, since the existence of such and such a factual monadological system is in turn transcendently irrational (the so-called transcendental cannot make sense of its own “fact” *transcendentally*), the science expected to make such a further irrationality comprehensible is *metaphysics* construed as the science of ultimate facts (which Husserl also labels sometimes “last philosophy” [*letzte Philosophie*]). See De Santis (2018, 2021).

⁴However, this should not be understood as if from now on we were no longer allowed to resort to the formal-material distinction. The new perspective, in fact, does not replace the previous one, but provides a more encompassing point of view from which the very opposition between formal and material a priori acquires a brand new sense and meaning: the one that derives from the specific “structural form” of the concrete subjectivity from which the corresponding concepts (and eventually propositions) are derived (in particular, see Sects. 2 and 3 below).

ally speak of *innate* (whether “a priori” or otherwise) from within the phenomenological perspective? Is this not one of those concepts belonging to the tradition of philosophy (or to “metaphysics” in the pejorative sense of the term) from which Husserl’s phenomenology intends to break once and for all? That Husserl himself employs the expression (or, better, the adjective) *innate* (*eingeboren*) is a fact and cannot be denied!

In the *Cartesian Meditations*, for example, the term appears in §39 in a discussion of “association” as a “principle” of “passive genesis.” As Husserl hastens to specify, association is in this context a matter of intentionality and stands under eidetic laws: it is “a *fundamental concept belonging to transcendental phenomenology*” (Hua I, pp. 113–114). This means, Husserl goes on to say, that “association is not a title merely for conformity to empirical laws on the part of complexes of sense-data of a *psyche* ... but a title (moreover an extremely comprehensive one) for the intentional essential lawfulness of the constitution of the pure ego. It then designates a *realm of the ‘innate’ a priori*, without which an ego as such is unthinkable” (Hua I, p. 114).

As we will soon see over the course of the next paragraph, the turn of phrase *innate a priori* appears also in the introduction to *Formal and Transcendental Logic* (composed in 1929—the same year as the *Paris Lectures*⁵). Husserl is clear: the very locution *innate a priori* designates a domain (*Reich*) of structures, or, better, a series of essential laws prescribing an intentional self-constitution-structure (i.e., what goes by the name of “association”) characterizing the “concrete ego,” without which the latter is *unthinkable*. In sum, there cannot be any concrete ego, or “monad,” without such *intentional lawfulness*, which is therefore to be labeled “innate,” for it is what makes such an ego thinkable or “conceivable” in the first place.

To be even more precise, it is important to emphasize Husserl’s talk of *concrete* ego, for the laws of motivation (as a domain of the innate a priori) are what contribute precisely to bringing about the “concreteness” of such an ego. Moreover, it is crucial to also point out that such an attempt at “retrieving” an expression that belongs to the old metaphysical tradition is not made without an explicit criticism of the latter—as is the case, for instance, with the Cartesian appeal to principles “innate” to the ego as a “substance” on the basis of which a series of “inferences” can be made that bear upon the existence of God and the external world (Hua I, pp. 3⁶ and 49⁷).

⁵Where Husserl also speaks of *Eingeborenheit* and *eingeborenes Apriori des konkreten Ego, eingeborenen idealen Möglichkeiten, und eingeborenen Apriori des universalen Logos alles erdenklichen Seins* (Hua I, pp. 28, 37–38).

⁶“The core of the [Cartesian] argument is well known: first God’s existence and veracity are deduced and then, by means of them, objective nature, the duality of finite substances—in short: the objective field of metaphysics and the positive sciences, and these disciplines themselves. All the various inferences proceed, as they must, according to guiding principles that are immanent, or ‘innate,’ in the pure ego.”

⁷“Obviously it was, for Descartes, a truism from the start that the all-embracing science must have the form of a deductive system, in which the whole structures rests, *ordine geometrico*, on an axiomatic foundation that grounds the deduction absolutely. For him a similar role to that of geometri-

The adjective *innate* no longer designates a system or stock of “principles” or “truths” *to be found* in the subject, or that the latter *would somehow find within itself*, but rather the lawfulness that rules over the process of the intentional self-constitution of the monad—which hence *is* only to the extent that it always *becomes* (the innate a priori being precisely the a priori of such “becoming”).

For the sake of our concerns, what is important and worth being stressed is that Husserl’s decision to resort to the expression *innate a priori* to designate some intentional structures takes place within the genetic framework, namely, over the course of the account of the “genesis” of the monad itself (§38 is in fact dedicated to the distinction between active and passive genesis). As we have already mentioned, at the outset of §39, Husserl calls the principle of association “the *universal principle of passive genesis*” (Hua I, p. 113): “anything built by activity necessarily presupposes, as the lowest level, a passivity that gives something beforehand; and, when we trace anything built actively, we run into constitution by passive generation” (Hua I, p. 112). But if the laws of association are *innate* because without them the talk itself of *concrete ego*, namely, its *concreteness*, is deprived of sense, in what sense would the formal a priori contribute to the bringing about of the concrete subjectivity?

2 The Notion of Innate A Priori and the Two Senses of Purity

Among the texts published by Husserl himself, the most systematic and *public* discussion of (or at least allusion to) both contingent and formal a priori as “innate” can be found in the opening sections of *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, wherein the latter is introduced and characterized *per viam negationis* vis-à-vis the former. The discussions of the two are so linked and intertwined that it is basically impossible to tackle the one without also keeping an eye upon the other: as a consequence, already in the present paragraph the account of the contingent a priori will have to be preliminarily brought in (even though only with the intention of better understanding the very notion of “innate a priori”). Let us proceed step by step.

At the very beginning of §6, Husserl clarifies the nature of the universality of logic, which is of a purely “formal” nature: “The universality of logic, as concerned with principles, is not simply an a priori or eidetic universality; rather it is, more particularly, a *formal* universality” (Hua XVII, p. 32). In other words, Husserl exclaims, “*reason itself*, in particular also theoretical reason, *is a form-concept* [*Formbegriff*].”⁸ Husserl is aware that generally speaking every essential knowledge

cal axioms in geometry is played in the all-embracing science by the axiom of the ego’s absolute certainty of himself, along with the axiomatic principles innate in the ego.”

⁸“Reason is not an accidental-factual faculty ... but rather a title for an *all-embracing essentially necessary structure-form* [*Strukturform*] belonging to all transcendental subjectivity” (Hua I, p. 92).

“is a product of ‘pure’ reason”—the concept of *purity* referring to their being “*pure from all the empirical* [*rein von aller Empirie*] (which is what, from another side, the term *a priori* also indicates)” (Hua XVII, p. 33). Now, if the very turn of phrase *a priori* means purity from all the empirical, what is the peculiarity of the *purity* of the logical realm? In what sense and to what extent is the universality of logic *pure* in a way different from that of other *a priori* domains?

The distinction is between two different meanings of the adjective *pure* (*rein*): for, if, on the one hand, any *a priori* formation is pure from all the empirical (this being the general sense that Husserl is ascribing to the expression “*a priori*” in the present context), on the other hand, not every *a priori* “is pure in a *second sense*, the one pertaining to *form as a principle*” (Hua XVII, p. 33).

This notion of form as a principle obtains immediate clarification *per viam oppositionis*, namely, by Husserl contrasting it with the example of an *a priori* and “pure” proposition in the first sense which is not pure in the second sense.

An *a priori* proposition about *sounds* in general, that is, thought in “pure” universality, is pure only in the first sense; it is, as we may say for certain reasons, a “contingent” [*kontingentes*] *a priori*. It has in the *eidos* sound a material core [*sachhaltigen Kern*] that goes beyond the realm of the universality of “principles” [*prinzipielle Allgemeinheit*] in the most radical sense, and restricts it to the “contingent” domain of ideally possible sounds. “*Pure*” reason is not only above all that is empirically factual [*alles empirisch Faktische*], but also above every sphere of hyletic-material essence [*hyletisch-sachhaltigen Wesenssphären*]. It is the title for the self-contained system of pure principles that precede every hyletic-material *a priori* [*vor allem hyletisch-sachhaltigen Apriori*] and then all the sciences concerned with such an *a priori*, but that, on the other hand, govern these sciences themselves as formations of reason [*Vernunftgebilde*] with respect to the form (Hua XVII, p. 33).

The passage contains various crucial elements that need to be carefully unpacked in order to really appreciate the complexity of Husserl’s line of thought.

As for the material *a priori* itself, two important remarks must be made. First, Husserl employs the adjective *contingent* to characterize it: the contingency (expressed by the German *kontingentes*) meaning that such an *a priori* is pure only in the first sense of the term. As far as the opposition between “formal” and “material” *a priori* is concerned, the description of the latter as *contingent* is meant to be, in the present context, a *negative* characterization (= it is *not* pure in both senses of the term). Second, it is worth remarking that the adjective *sachhaltig*—which Husserl employs in the *LU III* to designate the materiality of certain concepts and relevant propositions in opposition to others (the formal ones)—is here explicitly accompanied by *hyletic*, which is alien to the framework of the discussion carried out in *LU* (and, generally, to Husserl’s assessment of both the analytic-synthetic and formal-material divides). Indeed, as we shall see in the next section, “hyletic” is a transcendental notion, as it were, referring back to the very structure of the constituting subjectivity.

In opposition to the contingent nature of the material *a priori*, the formal *a priori*, that is to say, the “formal” character of the principles and laws of logic, is to be positively characterized as being “pure” in both senses distinguished above: it is *free* from all the “empirical” as well as from any “hyletic-material” determination. If

whatever is empirically determined is also, and by definition, hyletically and materially determined (= the domain of the a posteriori), the discrepancy between the empirical and the realm of hyletic-material determinations opens up the “dimension” of the so-called contingent a priori (= material a priori); finally, the possibility of leaving behind both the empirical dimension and any hyletic-material determination leads us to the realm of the formal a priori in the strict sense of the term (i.e., pure in both senses of the term).

Reason itself, Husserl recognizes, is a *form-concept*, and every a priori knowledge is a product of reason. Accordingly, both the material a priori and the formal a priori can be designated *formal*, but in two radically different senses: while the latter is “formal” in the strict sense of the term (the *form* being free from all the empirical as well as from any hyletic-material determination), the former is formal only in a “loose” sense (the *form* being independent of the empirical but not of any hyletic-material determination).

This being recognized, and with the intention of elaborating on the concept of contingent a priori, Husserl quickly brings in the method of variation: the goal being to see in what sense an invariable structure of the concrete subjectivity can be actually brought to the fore. For the sake of our present discussion, however, what interests us is the fact that if, as Husserl says, we “hold on” to the conception of this subjectivity as a rational one (*vernünftige*), “and, in particular, [as] a judicatively cognizing (*urteilend-erkennende*) subjectivity, we encounter binding structures of essence that fall under the heading of pure reason and, in particular, pure judicative reason” (Hua, XVII, p. 33).

Since there is no essential requirement that such a subjectivity be also able to sense colors and sounds (we will see what all of this means over the course of the next paragraph), we are allowed to speak of the latter in terms of “contingent a priori” (which is not an a priori of pure reason) in opposition to what could be labeled—by “an old word that tended blindly in the same direction”—“an ‘innate’ a priori [*eingeborenes Apriori*]” (Hua XVII, p. 34).

If we restrict ourselves to judicative reason, then, as pure reason, as the complete system of this *formal a priori in the most fundamental sense* [*im prinzipiellsten*], it means at the same time the highest and widest conceivable theme of logic, of the “theory of science.” As a consequence, we may say that logic is the *self-explication of pure reason itself* or, ideally, the science in which pure theoretical reason accomplishes a complete investigation of its own sense and perfectly objectifies itself in a system of principles. In this system pure reason or, correlatively, logic is related reflexively to itself; the self-explication of pure reason is itself a purely rational activity and comes under the very principles that thereby obtain explication (Hua XVII, p. 34).

This passage, too, requires some unpacking in order to understand the point that Husserl is making.

In the first place, what needs to be emphasized is the definition of logic as the self-explication of reason itself understood as pure reason: logic as a *Wissenschaftslehre* is here construed as the direct explication (*Auslegung* and *Selbstausslegung*) of the complete system of the “formal” a priori in the strict sense of the term. In other words, logic is the self-explication of the “innate” a priori.

What follows is that by innate a priori Husserl means a “system” of principles that pertains to the concrete subjectivity as a “rational” one and that he himself explicates and clarifies in the first part of *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, which includes in particular the so-called grammar of pure logic (or *reine Formenlehre* (§13)⁹) as well as the consequence-logic as the second or higher level of formal logic (§14) construed as “the science of the *possible forms of true judgments*” (Hua XVII, pp. 54–60). Such a system would correspond to the domain of “pure analytics” as the foundation of the formal logic of truth: “In this research, then, we must never go outside the proper essence of judgments or judgment-forms, never go beyond distinct evidence” (Hua XVII, p. 70). Indeed, as he hastens to add, we go beyond this a priori sphere as soon as we ask questions concerning the adequation of our judgments to the things themselves (*an die Sachen selbst*). By contrast, as long as we confine ourselves to merely *distinct evidence*, “even though every contradiction (every *analytic counter-sense*) is indeed excluded, an opening remains for every *material counter-sense*.” The step beyond the domain of the pure analytics and the formal conditions of truth, that is, the entering into the realm of (material) truth, would entail the assumption, on the part of the concrete subjectivity, of such and such a “contingent” (read: material) a priori: e.g., that of sounds or colors (or, in the more “transcendental” jargon that Husserl also uses here, of some “hyletic” determinations).

However, if the question was the sense in which we should understand the “innate” character of such principles of pure reason, namely, the innate character of the formal analytics, the following could be proposed. Husserl is not claiming that the principles of pure analytics are innate in the sense that the concrete subjectivity could find them within itself by means of self-reflection. It is not the case that the subjectivity can look into itself to find—within its own reason and as if reason were just a faculty—the principles of pure analytics. Quite the contrary. Husserl is trying to define and characterize reason, notably “pure reason” (hence the idea of a rational subjectivity), by means of the principles of pure analytics. In a nutshell, a rational subjectivity—which Husserl also refers to, and not by accident, as a *judicative-cognizing* one—is a subjectivity able to make “distinct judgments” (*deutliche Urteile*). Or, from the opposite direction, a subjectivity that were in principle incapable of making “distinct judgments,” a subjectivity able to make only “analytically counter-sensical” judgments, would not be a “rational” one.

A subjectivity the judgments as to “matters of fact” (domain of the a posteriori) of which were all false would still count as a rational subjectivity (a subjectivity

⁹An extensive presentation and discussion was already offered by Husserl in §12 of the *Fourth Logical Investigation* in terms of the distinction between *Unsinn* and *Widersinn*: “As said in our *First Investigation*, one must not confound the senseless (or nonsensical) with the absurd (or ‘counter-sensical’), though we tend to exaggerate and call the latter ‘senseless,’ when it is rather a sub-species of the significant. The combination ‘a round square’ really yields a unified meaning, having its mode of ‘existence’ or being in the realm of ideal meanings, but it is apodictically evident that no existent object can correspond to such an existent meaning. But if we say ‘a round or,’ ‘a man and is’ etc., there exist no meanings which correspond to such verbal combinations as their expressed sense” (Hua XIX/1, p. 334).

unable to make factually true judgments), as would a subjectivity the judgments of which were all marked by material contradictions (domain of the material a priori: *All squares have 5 sides* (Hua XIX/1, p. 335¹⁰)). By contrast, a subjectivity the judgments of which were all affected and dramatically marked by analytic contradictions (domain of the “formal” a priori: *A is B and non-B*) would no longer count as a rational subjectivity. In short, the domain of rationality (in the sense meant here) is abandoned altogether as soon as we fall below the level of pure analytics or the logic of consequence.¹¹

This being recognized, one more aspect needs to be addressed. As we should remember, the notion of a subjectivity that is always rational, hence that of an innate a priori, is obtained by means of the method of free variation or free modification (*freie Abwandlung*) of the concrete subjectivity itself. Let us quickly recall Husserl’s own words:

To acquaint us more closely with the concept of the contingent a priori, the following exposition will suffice within the bounds of our present, merely anticipatory observations: a subjectivity as such ... is thinkable only as having an essential form, whose highly multifarious constituents we obtain with progressive evidence when we uncover intuitively our own concrete subjectivity and then, with the aid of a free modification of its actuality into possibility of a concrete subjectivity in general, direct our regard to the invariable that can be seen throughout ... If, from the beginning of this variation, we hold on to the fact that this subjectivity shall always have the capacity to be and remain “rational” and, in particular, a judicatively cognizing subjectivity, we encounter binding structures of essence that fall under the heading of pure reason and, in particular, pure judicative reason.

As Husserl also recognizes over the course of the *Fourth Cartesian Meditation*, the “commencing” phenomenologist “is bound involuntarily by the circumstance that he/she takes himself/herself as the starting exemplar [*exemplarischen Ausgang*]” in the process of variation or modification (Hua I, p. 110); accordingly, as he says in §36 of the *Cartesian Meditations*, the rationality that is thereby uncovered as an “essential type” within the unitary possible ego is the “rationality” understood “in a

¹⁰“The difference between the two incompatibilities is plain. In the one case certain partial meanings fail to assort together in a unity of meaning as far as the objectivity or truth of the total meaning is concerned. An object (e.g. a thing, state of affairs) which unites all that the unified meaning conceives as pertaining to it by way of its ‘incompatible’ meanings, neither exists nor can exist, though the meaning itself exists. Names such as *wooden iron* and *round square* or sentences such as *All squares have five angles* are names or sentences as genuine as any. In the other case the possibility of a unitary meaning itself excludes the possible coexistence of certain partial meanings in itself. We have then only an indirect idea, directed upon the synthesis of such partial meanings in a single meaning, and at the same time see that no object can ever correspond to such an idea, i.e. that a meaning of the intended sort cannot exist. The judgment of incompatibility is in one case connected with presentations, in another with objects; presentations of presentations enter the former unity of judgment, whereas plain presentations enter the latter” (Hua XIX/1, p. 335).

¹¹“Needless to say, our separation of the formal logic of non-contradiction from the formal logic of truth is something fundamentally and essentially new, however familiar its wording may sound to everyone. For the words in question meant something entirely different, namely, the distinction between, on the one hand, all the problems of formal logic, which, as formal, leave out all the non-formal ‘material of knowledge,’ and, on the other hand, the somewhat broader problems (broader in the sense that was not exactly clear) to be propounded by a logic” (Hua XVII, p. 76).

particular sense”: it is “the same that, with the mundanization of the ego, presents itself in the essential form: human (*animal rationale*)”¹² (Hua I, p. 108). What this rationality stands for is one of the possibilities or, better, *co-possibilities*, that make up the ego in general and “in a conformity to universal eidetic laws of co-existence and succession in the egological time.” In fact, as Husserl hastens to write, “eidetic apprehension of my childhood life and its possibilities of constitution brings about a type, such that in its further development, but not in its own connection, the type *scientific theorizing* can occur and emerge [*auftreten kann*]” (Hua I, p. 108).

We are now in a position to answer in what sense the “formal” a priori—as an “innate” one—contributes to the constitution of the concrete subjectivity: to the extent that it designates a possibility immanent to the “ego as such,” i.e., one of those possibilities that realizes itself according to the eidetic laws of “succession” in the egological time. Hence the very talk of “innate” a priori, even though the concrete subjectivity *de facto* might not (yet) or no more be endowed with it. In Husserl’s example, even if the *rationality* of *scientific theorizing* cannot *co-exist* with the possibilities implied by the type *childhood*, it is still to be held as *co-possible* with it to the extent that these two types emerge according to their respective temporalities.¹³ As Husserl points out at the end of §36 in the *Cartesian Meditations*: “Indeed, whatever occurs in my ego, and eidetically in an ego in general ... has its temporality and, in this respect, participates in the system of forms that belongs to the all-inclusive temporality with which every thinkable ego constitutes itself for itself.”

As is clear, “formal a priori” designates from within the genetic perspective a system of principles that are *innate* to the concrete subjectivity, i.e., a system of possibilities or “co-possibilities” (i.e., “a realm of the innate a priori”) that character-

¹² For the “teleologically” normative role of the “human subject,” see the insightful analyses developed by Trizio (2018). On this problem, see a manuscript now published in Hua XLII, pp. 243–246 (*Der Seinsvorzug des Vernunftmenschen*): “Aber für die phänomenologische Untersuchung ist nicht zufällig der Mensch, und zwar der entwickelte Mensch als Phänomenologe die Basis. Er sieht ein, er vollzieht Wesenseinsichten, zunächst an seinen Fakten der Erfahrung Enthüllung ühend und dann eidetisch verallgemeinernd. Erklärt Erfahrungswelt und die Erfahrungswelt konstituierende Subjektivität als Vermögenssubjektivität, klärt die Geschichtlichkeit derselben, die Selbstverweltlichung, die Psychologie und Phänomenologie auf. Es klärt sich auf in der Reflexion auf das Verhältnis von Phänomenologie und Phänomenologen, dass dieser die für ihn und für den Menschen überhaupt seiende Welt, die da ontologisch umschrieben und konstitutiv geklärt wird, voraussetzt und dass er nicht nur in der phänomenologischen Auslegung seine wohlausgebildete wissenschaftliche Vernunft, sondern auch hinsichtlich des menschlichen Weltlebens, das für ihn thematisch ist, und hinsichtlich der daraus entsprungenen Seinsgestalten jede Art Vernunft wieder als schon ausgebildetes Vermögen, und zwar seiner, des Phänomenologen, voraussetzt. Vernunft muss am Werke sein, damit das Vernunftgebilde ‘wahre Welt’ wirklich sein und als seiend ausgewiesen werden kann. Vernunft des Phänomenologen schafft ursprünglich phänomenologische Wissenschaft, und sie ist Voraussetzung auch dafür, dass er Vernunft in der Welt als niedere menschliche Vernunft und als Vernunftgebilde der Welt eingestaltend vorfinden kann” (pp. 244–245).

¹³ For example, *rationality* as an essential type cannot *co-exist* with the possibilities implied by the type *schizophrenic*, yet it can still be said to be *co-possible* with it according to their respective temporalities.

izes the process of the “self-constitution” of the concrete subject as a unitarily possible one and based on its own temporal development.¹⁴

3 Contingent A Priori: *Kontingenz* and *Zufälligkeit*

Since, as recognized at the outset of the last paragraph, the only exoteric systematic discussion of both the innate and the contingent a priori is offered in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, it will be a good idea to dwell a little bit more on this book.

Let us recall the long excerpt where the turn of phrase “contingent a priori” appears:

An a priori proposition about *sounds* in general, that is, thought in “pure” universality, is pure only in the first sense; it is, as we may say for certain reasons, a “contingent” [kontingentes] a priori. It has in the *eidos* sound a material core [sachhaltigen Kern] that goes beyond the realm of the universality of “principles” [prinzipielle Allgemeinheit] in the most radical sense, and restricts it to the “contingent” domain of ideally possible sounds. “Pure” reason is not only above all that is empirically factual [alles empirisch Faktische], but also above every sphere of hyletic-material essence [hyletisch-sachhaltigen Wesenssphären]. It is the title for the self-contained system of pure principles that precede every hyletic-material a priori [vor allem hyletisch-sachhaltigen Apriori] and then all the sciences concerned with such an a priori, but that, on the other hand, govern these sciences themselves as formations of reason [Vernunftgebilde] with respect to the form (Hua XVII, p. 33).

As we should remember from our last discussion, the assessment of the formal a priori is presented by Husserl from two different angles. On the one hand, he is interested in emphasizing the character of the a priori propositions of formal logic in opposition to those bearing on some specific material content (like those concerning “sounds” and “colors”). In this case, the distinction is between the former’s “pure” universality and the latter’s “restricted” universality (i.e., restricted to the material domain in question). On the other hand, the bringing in of the subjective dimension, that is to say, of the subjectivity as a rational subjectivity, along with the method of self-variation by means of which the pure form of such a subjectivity is obtained, leads Husserl to speak of “innate” a priori construed as a system of a priori laws innate to the monad itself.

Now, the same “duality” of perspective, so to speak, applies to what Husserl calls here “contingent a priori.” The general expression employed in this context is

¹⁴ This being recognized, let us hasten to remark that it is not clear to us how Husserl would understand the difference between the innate nature of the formal a priori (which he discusses in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*) and the laws of association which, as he himself acknowledges in the *Fourth Cartesian Meditation*, circumscribe only a domain of the innate a priori next to many other possible ones. Indeed, whereas the laws of association can be called “innate” because without them the very concept of concrete subjectivity would be *unthinkable*, the lack of the “innate” domain of formal logic would make *unthinkable* only the concrete subjectivity understood as a “rational” one. And yet, in both cases Husserl uses the adjective “innate.”

kontingentes Apriori, which—as far as we understand Husserl here—captures both perspectives from which Husserl tackles the notion of (specifically material) a priori.

If we are on the right track, the terminological distinction between the two senses of “material” both as “hyletic” and *sachhaltig* would correspond to the double angle emphasized above: whereas the adjective *sachhaltig* would characterize the material a priori from the standpoint of its “restricted universality” (in opposition to the “pure universality” of the formal a priori of logic), the adjective hyletics would on the contrary point to what we have been referring to as the subjective dimension (the opposition being between the absolute formality of a purely rational subjectivity and a rational subjectivity having such and such a specific material, that is to say, hyletic content).

If, from the beginning of this variation, we hold on to the fact that this subjectivity shall always have the capacity to be and remain “rational” and, in particular, a judicatively cognizing subjectivity, we encounter binding structures of essence that fall under the heading of pure reason and, in particular, pure judicative reason. Such a subjectivity also involves as a presupposition a continual and essentially necessary relation to some hyletic components or other: as apperceptive foundations for the possible experiences that judging necessarily presupposes. Therefore, if we define the concept of form, as a principle, by the essentially necessary components of any rational subjectivity in general, the concept of *hyle* (exemplified by every “data of sensation”) if a form-concept and not what we shall define as the opposite of this, a contingent concept [*kontingenter Begriff*]. On the other hand, there is no essential requirement that a judicatively cognizing subjectivity (or a rational subjectivity of any kind) be capable of sensing colors or sounds, that it be capable of sensuous feelings having such and such a difference [*der und der Differenz*] ... As a consequence, they, too, have their a priori, which, however, is contingent [*kontingent*] and not an a priori of pure reason (Hua XVII, pp. 33–34).

It is worth emphasizing the way in which the very notion of “contingency” is employed here in relation to the idea of a material a priori. To the extent that the concept of *hyle* stands for a “form-concept” (*Formbegriff*) of the subjectivity itself, it is not and cannot be called “contingent”: for, there cannot be any subjectivity without the essential relation “to some hyletic components”—the *hyle* standing precisely for such a structural form of the concrete subject. What is “contingent,” on the contrary, is this necessary “form” displaying such and such a specific material determination.

If this is the case, then an additional point must be made to the effect that Husserl seems to be employing *kontingent* in two slightly different ways. On the one hand, *kontingent* is used to characterize the overall “contingent” nature of the “material a priori” in opposition to the innate character of the formal a priori of pure logic (in such a way covering both the adjectives *hyletisch* and *sachhaltig*). On the other hand, *kontingent* is used to designate the “contingency” of the specific material determination of the *hyle* itself as a structural form of the concrete subject. It is as if the more general contingent (*kontigent*) nature of the material a priori as such were primarily drawn from the contingency of the specific determination of the *hyle* itself.¹⁵

¹⁵ However, it is important to keep the concept of *hyle* as a *Formbegriff* distinct from that of the *hyle*

However, as we shall soon verify, the situation is more complex than this, for Husserl mobilizes a further concept, that of *Zufälligkeit* and *zufällig*, to designate exclusively the contingency of the “restricted” universality of the *Sachhaltigkeit* itself: as a consequence, the material a priori will have to be understood to be contingent (*kontingentes Apriori*) both in virtue of its universal validity being restricted (*zufälliges Apriori*) and its being rooted in such and such a specific and therefore contingent (*kontingent*) “determination” of that structural form of the concrete subject called *hyle*.

If we are on the right track, then, while the adjective *kontingent* mainly expresses the contingency of the material a priori from the new standpoint of the genetic approach to the problem of the (self-)constitution of the concrete subject, *zufällig* is meant to express the restricted universality of the domain of the materiality (*Sachhaltigkeit*), i.e., of those a priori and *material truths* the assessment of which was one of the central themes of the *Third Investigation*.

The material a priori can thus be labeled *zufällig* to the extent that its validity is a “restricted” one (in opposition to the “universal” validity of the a priori of formal logic) and *kontingent* as long as it refers back to the material determinations involved in the process of the self-constitution of the monad (in opposition to the innate character of the formal a priori of pure reason).

This duality having been acknowledged, let us switch for a moment to a 1916–1917 manuscript dedicated to pure thought and its relations to the aesthetic sphere.

In this text, Husserl gratifies the reader with a discussion of a series of important topics such as the distinction between empirical concepts and pure concepts, the notion of region and regional a priori, the concept of proper-essence (*Eigenwesen*), etc. Toward the end of the manuscript the “subjective” dimension is brought in to address the issue of the constitution of objectivity (*Objektivität*). Every subject, Husserl points out, “is in principle a subject of purely logical acts, and the latter are *a priori* in the specific sense that every subject can, as such, freely perform logical acts.” Accordingly, he goes on to write, “every subject is a logical subject, and the ‘intellect’ belongs to the essence of the subject.” The “intellect” is the “original source of logical concepts and truths, which are ‘innate’ [*angeboren*] to every subject.”¹⁶ Although Husserl’s analysis in these pages diverges a little bit from the one he will provide in *Formal and Transcendental Logic* (for, he speaks of *intellect*

as a content of consciousness, i.e., as a series of unities immanent to the ultimate temporal flow. See text Nr. 15 from the Bernau manuscripts, notably §1, wherein *hyle* means both a “*notwendige Wesensform*” and the many “*hyletische Einheiten*” (Hua XXXIII, pp. 281–283).

¹⁶ “Jedes Subjekt ist prinzipiell Subjekt rein logischer Akte, und diese sind a priori in dem besondern Sinn, dass jedes Subjekt als solches in Freiheit logische Akte vollziehen kann ... Also jedes Subjekt ist logisches Subjekt, zum Wesen des Subjekts gehört ‘Verstand.’ Und so ist es ursprüngliche Quelle von logischen Begriffen und Wahrheiten, die jedem Subjekte ‘angeboren’ sind, die jedes aus sich selbst als Subjekt schöpfen kann, die es immer wieder produktiv konstituieren kann” (Hua XLI, p. 101).

rather than *reason*, of *Angeborenheit* rather than *Eingeborenheit*), the idea of logical truths as innate to the subject should not come as a surprise.

However, in opposition to the innate character of logical truths and concepts, Husserl contends:

Whatever is sensible is not essential to the subject, unless [the latter] has sensuous data in general. But whatever sensuous element [the subject] has is a contingent one. As a consequence, all sensuously determined concepts—with the exception of the concept of the sensible in general—are contingent, “*a posteriori*” (Hua XLI, p. 101).¹⁷

Husserl sounds much less precise than in the 1929 account. For, on the one hand, he argues that what is sensible (*alle Sinnliche*) is not essential (*außerwesentlich*) to the subject (whereas in *Formal and Transcendental Logic* he will recognize that the relation to something sensible is essential to the subject as one of its structural forms); yet, on the other hand, by stating that “the concept of the sensible in general” (*der Begriff von Sinnlichem überhaupt*) is not contingent nor *a posteriori*, he seems to be assuming that a certain form of sensibility in general essentially pertains to the subject.

As he concludes:

Also pure concepts of essence, e.g., color, can be called “*a posteriori*.” The *a priori* in the sense of essence does not coincide with the *a priori* in the sense of the concepts derived from the unconditional forms of spontaneity belonging to every subject. We distinguish terminologically the *innate transcendental a priori* and the *affective contingent a priori*. Its contingency consists in the fact it can be obtained only by those subjects that have exemplars of it, and the latter derive from affection. As a consequence, also the eternal truths are only affectively contingent [*kontingent*], depending upon whether their concepts, too, are contingent (Hua XLI, p. 101).¹⁸

Even if Husserl’s language seems to blur the distinction between contingency as *Kontingenz* and as *Zufälligkeit*, the following observations can be proposed bearing on such pivotal dichotomy.

First of all, let us hasten to remark that when it comes to what Husserl refer to as *das kontingente Apriori*—hence, to the opposition between the latter and “the innate *a priori*”—the issue at stake is clearly of a “transcendental” nature, the two expressions designating what for the sake of brevity could be referred to as “forms” of the subject. It must be noted, however, that, whereas the term *transzendente* is used by Husserl to characterize the innate *a priori* alone (the trait of “innateness” deriving precisely from its being transcendental), “affectivity” is employed to describe the material *a priori* (which is contingent precisely because *affective*), which suggests

¹⁷“Alles Sinnliche ist dem Subjekt außerwesentlich, es sei denn, dass es überhaupt sinnliche Daten hat. Aber welche es hat, ist zufällig. Daher sind alle sinnlichen Begriffe, die bestimmten, außer dem Begriff von Sinnlichem überhaupt, zufällig, ‘*a posteriori*.’”

¹⁸“Es können also reine Wesensbegriffe, wie Farbe, ‘*a posteriori*’ genannt werden. Das Apriori im Sinne des Wesens deckt sich nicht mit dem Apriori im Sinne der Begriffe aus unbedingten, zu jedem Subjekt gehörigen Formen der Spontaneität. Also scheiden wir terminologisch das angeborene, transzendente Apriori und das affektive kontingente Apriori. Seine Kontingenz besteht darin, dass nur solche Subjekte es erwerben können, die Exempel dafür haben, und diese stammen aus der Affektion. So sind auch ewige Wahrheiten bloß affektiv kontingent, wenn ihre Begriffe es sind.”

the latter's "external" origin, that is, its not coming from within the domain of the subject.

In short, Husserl seems to identify the concept of the transcendental with the forms of spontaneity, as if the affective aspect of the subject, i.e., that of the constitution of the affective a priori, were not a transcendental issue at all. Husserl is here clearly ascribing a quite narrow meaning to the concept of transcendental, which characterizes only a certain kind of a priori, viz., forms of intellect.

By contrast, when we maintained that the issue at stake in the opposition between innate a priori and contingent a priori is of a transcendental nature, the meaning we were giving to the latter is broad enough to cover the constitution of both species of a priori *within* the concrete subject and as part of the self-constitution-process of the monad itself.

In both cases, what is in question is the derivation (Husserl speaks of *aus* and *stammen...aus*) of certain concepts either from within the subject, that is to say, from the forms of spontaneity (this corresponding to the only transcendental a priori recognized by Husserl), or from the outside, that is to say, from the subjectivity being "contingently" (*kontingent*) affected by such and such sensuous data (which in the late manuscripts on time will be described as *ichfremd* or "alien to the ego" (see for example Hua-Mat VIII, pp. 183–185; 185–203¹⁹)).

Second of all, unlike *kontingent*, the adjective *zufällig* designates a certain species of *concepts* in opposition to others (and relevant "eternal truths"), namely, those derived (*stammen...aus*) from the exemplars (*Exempel*) available to the subject. As a consequence, and based upon the two senses of contingency recognized by Husserl, a pure *concept* of essence, hence its relevant eternal truths, is contingent (*zufällig*) if it is derived from a contingent (*kontingent*) determination of the *hyle* as a structural form of the subject rather than from the (transcendental) forms of spontaneity.²⁰

A diagram can be provided to illustrate the many meanings ascribed to the expression "contingent a priori" (Fig. 1):

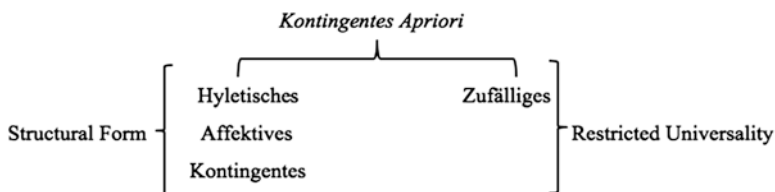


Fig. 1 The many meanings of the contingent a priori

¹⁹On all these problems, see the work by Zippel (2007, pp. 99–108).

²⁰Detailed discussion of the structure of the subjectivity and, in particular, of the constitution of the ultimate temporal flow is beyond the scope of our investigation. What concerns us is exclusively the manner in which Husserl comes to understand the very character of the material a priori as a contingent a priori from within the genetic perspective, yet without tackling the latter *per se*. See the analysis of genetic phenomenology offered by De Palma (2015, pp. 189–212).

The material a priori (*materiales Apriori*) can be referred to as the hyletic, affective, or contingent (*kontingentes*) a priori vis-à-vis the “structural form” of the subject from which such and such a concept of essence is derived (i.e., from the perspective of its source), or contingent (as *zufälliges*) a priori vis-à-vis the angle of its materiality (*Sachhaltigkeit*) and the restricted universality of all the *aeternae veritates* grounded in it.

Let us hasten to point out that, even though the 1916–1917 manuscript just commented on presents a few terminological and conceptual discrepancies with respect to the more systematic assessment in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, it both corroborates our thesis that it is from within the genetic dimension that the new understanding of the a priori emerges (for, these are the years in which the genetic “turn” is officially made, as already recognized by scholars²¹) and shows how consistent and coherent was the development of Husserl’s stance on the a priori.

With all of this in mind, we can now approach *Ideen III*, where the most systematic and detailed discussion of the “contingency” (*Zufälligkeit*) of the material a priori is to be found.

In §7, which is dedicated to the distinction between “regional concepts” and genus-concepts (Hua V, pp. 25–37) and, in particular, the very notion of the a priori construed as “a form [Form] for all possible objects of possible experience” (Hua V, p. 33), Husserl’s goal is to clarify the difference between two concepts, that of the idea as a form, for example “the idea of the thing in general” (*die Idee des Dinges*), and what he refers to as “the idea of something universal” (*die Idee eines Allgemeinen*) (Hua V, p. 33).²² As he preliminarily puts it: “The idea of the thing in general accordingly has a quite different status than the idea of any other universal based on experience. Of course the idea of mineral, the idea of plant, and the like, also prescribes a rule for the course of experience. But in a quite different sense from the idea of the thing.”

What a universal concept “prescribes” (and the way in which it does so) should not be conflated with what an essence prescribes (and the way in which it does so). For example, the notion of mineral “prescribes in the mode of thinking”: “If the apprehension is to be valid, then it must legitimate itself and legitimate itself in *experience* as a conceptual apprehension to whose sense it belongs to be a conceptual apprehension of a thing: in the object, as it comes to givenness in experience, the objectual moments that were conceptually meant must become apparent” (Hua V, pp. 33–34). But—as Husserl goes on to point out—in this case, “experience with its demands precedes the conceptual thinking with its demands.” As should be clear, not only is Husserl making the case for the necessity that all our universal concepts, such as “mineral,” draw their validity from experience; he is primarily elaborating upon the more general relation that binds experience and our “universal concepts”:

²¹ Bernet et al. (1989), Chapter VII.

²² See the remarks by De Palma (2014, pp. 200–201).

although the latter can be said “to prescribe in the mode of thinking” (for, they prescribe the manner in which we think and “apprehend” the objects given in experience), such “prescription” is preceded by the demands of experience, i.e., by the latter’s form having already been prescribed by, e.g., *the idea of the thing*. In short, in order for something to be “conceptually” apprehended as a mineral, its experience needs to display a certain preliminary “form”:

It comes naturally to expression in the concept mineral together with its particular content; it “contains,” we say, the concept of thing in general. But that is just what is peculiar, that the demand for fulfillment that this conceptual component [*begriffliche Bestand*] makes is essentially different from the demand that all other components of such a concept as mineral make: it expresses merely the regional form, the correlate of the basic species of experience, while the others express particular determinations (Hua V, p. 34).

“Thing,” then, is a regional concept, while “mineral” merely expresses a specific and particular determination of “thing.” Added to which, if a “conceptual apprehension” (of something as a mineral) can be “false,” then “there is something it can never prove to be invalid to the extent that any experienceable object at all sustains itself validly: precisely that which belongs to the object as an object of such a regional sort of experience: its thing-like being [*das Dingliche*].” As one could summarize the state of affairs just described: on the one hand, there is *das Ding* as a regional concept or essence, which prescribes the “form” of experience (this being something recognized by Husserl already in the first volume of *Ideen*, §9, where he talks of the “form of all regional objects” (Hua III/1, pp. 23–24)); on the other, there are what Husserl calls its “particular determinations,” e.g., the concept of “mineral,” which prescribe and drive—within the boundaries first set by the *form*—our “conceptual apprehension” of such objects of experience while in turn being validated by it.

Having clarified this crucial difference within the domain of our material concepts, Husserl goes on to expand on the relation that holds between regional concepts or regional essences in general and their material “particularizations” (*Besonderungen*).

Thing is not a generic concept of the same type as mineral, ranking equally with it and similar generic concepts, only perhaps more general. As long as we ascend in the formation of species and genus and form proper genera, we ascend from the fully material essence of the object [*vom vollen sachhaltigen Wesen des Gegenstandes*] to universal eidetic traits [*zu allgemeinen Wesenszügen*] that could be common to several, innumerable many, objects; from the already singled out material essences of species [*sachhaltigen Artwesen*] something material which is in “common” [*ein gemeinsames Sachhaltiges*] can then again be singled out, etc. In this way we acquire from the essence of a determinate tone, placing it in a series with the essence of other tones, the essence of tone in general, the acoustic in general, sensuous quality in general and the like. All its material content [*sachhaltiger Inhalt*], however, is in our sphere of realities “something contingent” [*ein Zufälliges*] that is bound to something “necessary” [*ein Notwendiges*], a necessary form [*eine notwendige Form*], precisely the one that the concept of thing [*der Begriff Ding*] expresses (Hua V, pp. 34–35).

For starters, the concept of “region” requires clarification. With this concept, Husserl is implicitly relying on the concept of “thing” (*das Ding*), which has, in fact, already been defined as a “regional concept.” Now, as we should remember from the discussion presented in chapter “Τόδε τι, Individuum, Region”, Husserl tends to understand the concept of “region” in two slightly different ways: generally speaking, the term region stands for what he calls the “highest material genus” (*Ontology. I*); however, according to its rigorous definition (*Region. I*), region signifies the “unified connection of the supreme genera that pertain to the lowest differences (or eidetic singularities) within the *concretum*.”

When it comes to the excerpt we are commenting upon, even though Husserl seems to be adopting the former, looser meaning (e.g., when he says that “thing is not a generic concept [*Gattungsbegriff*] of the same type as mineral”), we are under the strong impression that what he has properly in mind is the “rigorous” conception instead: “region” meaning the *unity* of all the *supreme genera* (such as “sensuous quality in general”) the lowest differences of which can be found within a given *concretum*. Indeed, it seems clear from the manner in which the argument is set forward that, if we can arrive at the “supreme genera” by means of a process of generalization, this does not hold true of the region itself.²³ If this is the case then it follows that the region construed as the “unity of the supreme genera” is the “necessary form,” whereas all its material particularizations, starting with those of the genera themselves (e.g., “the acoustic in general” as a particularization of the supreme genus called “sensuous quality in general”) are something merely “contingent” (*ein Zufälliges*).

It is important to note that the difference between the necessary form and the contingent material particularizations is a distinction made from “within” the domain of essences or pure essences and is not tantamount to the previous distinction between *the idea of thing* and *the idea of something universal*. The relation that in these pages holds between “ideas,” their “particularizations,” and the “universals” can be presented as follows:

- (a) The region means the “*form for all possible objects of possible experience*.”
- (b) The material content of the region (i.e., the specific particularizations of the supreme genera) brings about the specifically material determinations of the form of all possible experience.²⁴
- (c) “The idea of something universal” (as a “determination” of the “material particularization”), which *prescribes in the mode of thinking* our conceptual apprehension of the objects of experience.

Now, when in the present context Husserl speaks of *ein Zufälliges* he is speaking of (b), although (c) could also be called contingent as *zufällig* to the extent that there

²³ Let us hasten to point out that nothing in these pages seems to be conveyed as to how the level of “regions” as unity of all the highest or supreme material genera is actually to be reached.

²⁴ As Husserl recognizes in a 1926 manuscript, *die sinnlichen Gattungen und Differenzen* of the *eidos* nature in general are only its *kontingente Materie* (Hua XLI, p. 325).

could not be any determination without the material “particularization” of the “form” of experience.

“Everything material is contingent” (*Alle Sachhaltige ist zufällig*) (Hua V, p. 35), Husserl asserts, with “materiality” (*Sachhaltigkeit*) pointing here to the many “material particularizations” of the form of experience. As he goes on to explain:

Thus there is in the world of the essences themselves and of the eidetic concepts a distinction predelineated between *priority* and *posteriority*, which justifies speaking in a certain sense of a *a priori* and a *a posteriori* concepts. This sense of a *a priori* belongs to the concepts of realities and is a “transcendental” distinction insofar as it and its distinction from the *a posteriori* has its source in the basic property that the realities have of “constituting” themselves as unities of multiplicities (Hua V, p. 35).

Let us stop for a second to unpack the various arguments included in this excerpt.

- Husserl’s distinction bears upon the very domain of essences or pure essences, i.e., the realm of the *a priori*; as he frames it, within the more general concept of “*a priori*” a distinction can be made between “priority” and “posteriority” (*Priorität und Posteriorität*), hence between “*a priori*” and “*a posteriori*” concepts. In a nutshell, there are (generally speaking) “*a priori*” concepts that are *a priori* according to this new sense (the regional concept of *Ding*) and also (generally speaking) “*a priori*” concepts that are *a posteriori* based on this new sense (e.g., “the acoustic in general”).
- For the sake of our concerns, however, what is of crucial importance is the way in which Husserl describes the new distinction: it is a “transcendental distinction” (*ein transzendentaler Unterschied*) deriving from the manner in which the “realities” themselves are constituted.²⁵

In less than five lines, Husserl is both introducing a new distinction within the domain of the *a priori* itself and pinpointing the (transcendental) nature of the distinction.

Were we to reframe Husserl here, we would say that: there are “*a priori*” concepts (such as that of “the acoustic in general”) that, from the transcendental standpoint of the constitution of realities, turn out to be a *a posteriori*, that is, merely “contingent” (*zufällig*); by contrast, there are other *a priori* concepts (such as the “regional” concept *thing*) that, from the transcendental standpoint of the constitution of realities, turn out to *still* be *a priori* (for, it stands for the all-encompassing “form” of all possible experience). It is to be noted that Husserl is here only speaking of realities (*Realitäten*), and that the distinction at stake (*a posteriori*-*a priori* within the domain of the *a priori* itself) applies exclusively to them and their constitution. In other words, the regional concept *Ding* is accounted for as *a priori* only and exclusively in opposition to its material particularizations, and only from within the specific framework of the constitution of realities. This means, for example, that it

²⁵ The expression employed by Husserl, namely, that of “unities of multiplicities” (*Einheiten von Mannigfaltigkeiten*), is a technical one, referring to the process of constitution by a transcendental subjectivity. On this topic, see Majolino (2012).

could still be characterized as “a posteriori,” and thus stripped of its “form,” if looked at from the angle of what Husserl calls innate a priori.

* * *

Having said all that, it is time now to wrap up our analyses to this point so as to provide the reader with a systematic presentation of all the crucial distinctions discussed over the course of the last two paragraphs, in particular, the many senses displayed by the concept of *Form*.

Indeed, and as we should remember, the concept of “form” is referred to by Husserl:

- To designate form-concepts (*Form-Begriffe*) or “structural forms” of the concrete subjectivity, such as the *hyle*, on the one hand, or reason and intellect, on the other hand, understood as the two structural forms of the subject from which certain concepts are derived.
- To designate “regional concepts” (e.g., that of *Ding*) construed as the “form” of all possible experience of realities.

What is described as contingent—as *zufällig*—is either the (restricted) universality of the concepts (and relevant truths) derived from the determination of the *hyle* as the subject’s structural form or the particularization of the region itself. If in these cases, however, the “form” can be said to be “pure” from all empirical determinations, it cannot be said “pure” from all material determinations: for, “pure” in both these senses of the term is only “pure reason” (that of formal logic). This is why Husserl can also refer to the contingent a priori as *kontingentes Apriori* to designate what is “pure” in only the first sense of the term *purity*.

If the (a priori) regional notion of *thing* can be called a priori vis-à-vis its a posteriori or contingent (*zufällig*) particularizations, it is still to be called “contingent” as *kontingent* because of its being “materially” determined and in opposition to that structural form of the subject labeled reason or intellect. Moreover, and to elaborate upon a point that Husserl does not directly tackle, to the extent that *thing* is a concept derived from the determination of the *hyle* as a structural form of the subject, it could also be called contingent as *zufällig*.²⁶

²⁶ Let us immediately point that the framework discussed so far should not be identified with what Husserl explains in §60 of the *Sixth Logical Investigation*, which is dedicated to a systematic discussion and assessment of the distinction between “sensuous concepts” and “categories” (*Sinnliche Begriffe und Kategorien*). Here, Husserl is mainly interested in making a clear distinction between sensuous and categorial concepts based upon two forms of “abstraction” to be traced back to the founding-founded act dichotomy (Hua XIX/2, p. 712): “If we ponder on the peculiarity of idealizing abstraction [*ideierender Abstraktion*], that it necessarily rests upon individual intuition, but does not for that reason intend what is individual in such intuition, if we pay heed to the fact that it is really a new manner of apprehending, constitutive of universality instead of individuality, then the possibility of *universal intuitions* arises, *intuitions which not merely exclude all individuality, but also all sensibility from their intentional purview* (Hua XIX/2, pp. 712–713). It is important to emphasize that here Husserl is interested in clarifying the distinction between material and purely categorial concepts, regardless of the difference between a priori concepts and a posteriori ones: “*Color, house, judgment, wish* are purely sensuous concepts; *coloredness* (being-colored), *virtue, the axiom of parallels, etc.*, have a categorial admixture, while *unity, plurality, relation, concept* are purely categorial. Where we speak absolutely of categorial concepts, purely categorial ones are

4 Irreality

That within the constitutive framework laid out in the late works the terms “ideal” and “ideality” (the core notions of Husserl’s early doctrine of the *a priori*) are almost systematically replaced with “irreal” (*irreal*) and “irreality” (*Irrealität*) was already noticed and emphasized by Roman Ingarden (in the preface to his *Das literarische Kunstwerk*),²⁷ according to whom the reason for this terminological and conceptual switch was the growing emphasis on the all-embracing scope of the constitutive and intentional operations of consciousness and thus on the ontological “dependence” of any and every sort of formation (including the ideal ones) on the latter.

Now, without getting into any assessment of Ingarden’s own critical position vis-à-vis Husserl’s idealism, let us confine ourselves to stating our agreement with his claim that in such a framework the pivotal (ontological) distinction is no longer between ideality, or ideal being, and reality, or real being in general, but between *irreality* and *reality*. As Husserl remarks at the end of §57 of *Formal and Transcendental Logic* (this being the text to which Ingarden himself refers the reader):

Every sort of irreality, of which the ideality of meanings and the different ideality of universal essences or species are particular cases, has manners of possible participation in reality [*Anteilhabe an Realität*]. Yet, this in no way alters the essential separation between the real and the irreal [*an der prinzipiellen Sonderung zwischen Realem und Irrealem*] (Hua XVII, p. 163).

Without discussing how Husserl interprets the difference between the ideality of essences versus the ideality of meanings, what is worth pointing out is that here they are both understood as species of what Husserl labels “irreality.”

Now, if we understand Husserl correctly on this matter, the character of “irreality” that now pertains to the ideality of both universal essences and meanings derives from their peculiar manner of possibly *participating in the real*. *De facto*, Husserl does not seem to be completely giving up on the terminology and the language of “ideality”: rather, he is making the point to the effect that such ideality is now to be

always meant. Sensuous concepts find their immediate foundation in the data of sensuous intuition, categorial concepts in the data of categorial intuition, purely with regard to the categorial form of the whole categorially formed object” (Hua XIX/2, p. 713). On the one hand, there is the idea that the nature of such and such a concept derives from the corresponding mode of abstraction, hence from the specific nature of the intuitive act that lies at its basis (whether founding or founded); on the other hand, there is the conception according to which such and such an *a priori* concept derives (*stammen...aus*) from such and such a structural form of the concrete subjectivity. That there is a strong continuity between the two views cannot be denied: nevertheless, if in the *Logical Investigations* “sensitivity” and “intellect” are regarded merely as titles for possible “acts” of consciousness, in *Formal and Transcendental Logic* they stand for the two forms out of which the concrete subject and its becoming are actually made. That in both cases what is at stake is (also) the genesis of certain concepts cannot and should not be denied: the issue is that in the latter framework the genesis or origin of such and such a concept is understood as part of the genesis or self-development of the monad itself.

²⁷ See the preface to Ingarden (1972).

comprehended based upon, or in light of, the manner in which it *participates in the real*. This is made quite clear by Husserl himself in §64, wherein, after rejecting the “parity” (*Gleichordnung*) between real objects and ideal objects, he goes on to comment that “*reality has an ontological precedence to every sort of irreality whatsoever*, since all irrealities [*alle Irrealitäten*] are essentially to be traced back to actual or possible realities” (Hua XVII, p. 177).

Now, since in the framework propounded in the *Second Logical Investigation* the distinctive mark of ideal being in opposition to any form of reality was its *eternity* construed as *intemporality* (see our Sect. 1), it might be the case that the notion of “irreality” entails quite a different conception of the “temporality” of the ideal sphere, specifically a different grasp on the notion of *intemporality*.

That this is the case is indicated by a manuscript now published in Hua XXXIX (pp. 298–300), which was originally included by Ludwig Landgrebe in §65 of *Experience and Judgment*. Let us hasten to preliminarily remark that even though the pages in question are dedicated to discussing a specific type of objectualities, i.e., what is now referred to as “objectualities of understanding,”²⁸ Husserl’s observations and remarks often have a much broader bearing and end up concerning the notion of “irreality” itself, i.e., the very opposition between real and irreal objects.

Let us start out by considering Husserl’s account of reality and real objects.

After a first (rather narrow) definition of real objects (“Real objectualities are joined together in the unity of an objective time and have their *horizon of connection*”²⁹), Husserl proposes to widen the concept of “real object” to include within its domain not only “things” (i.e., natural things) but also cultural objectualities, that is to say, objects imbued with sense and meaning (value-predicates).

According to this broader conception, “we call real ... *all that is individualized by its spatio-temporal position*.”³⁰ What follows from this is a specific determination of what a “world” is: “The world—*every possible world*—is the universe of realities, among which we count all objects individualized in spatio-temporality, as the form of the world, by their spatio-temporal localization.”³¹ If what is *real* is *essentially* determined by its spatio-temporal *individualization*—in such a way that there cannot be any reality that is not already individualized in space and time—then it follows that the meaning of the *irreal* primarily consists in the opposite of that, namely, in its not being essentially determined by any spatiotemporal individualization. As Husserl remarks: “It is contingently (*κατὰ συμβεβηκός*) in time.”³²

The opposition between reality and irreality seems to coincide with *LU II*’s account of the reality-ideality dichotomy: as we should remember, in that early framework, *real being* and *temporal being* are coextensive notions akin to *ideal being* and *intemporal being*.

²⁸ “The irreality of the objectualities of understanding does not signify generic universality” (Husserl 1999, p. 314).

²⁹ Husserl (1999, p. 311).

³⁰ Husserl (1999, p. 319).

³¹ Husserl (1999, p. 311).

³² Husserl (1999, p. 311).

Upon closer inspection, however, the two frameworks are not perfect matches. Let us quote a series of passages wherein Husserl characterizes the notions of irreality and irreal object.

The irreality of the proposition as the idea of a synthetic unity of becoming is the idea of something which can appear in individual acts in any temporal position, occurring in each as necessarily temporal and temporally becoming, but which is the same “*at all times*” [*allzeit*].³³

Irreal objectualities make their spatiotemporal appearance in the world, but they can appear simultaneously in many spatio-temporal positions and yet be numerically identical as the same. It belongs essentially to their appearance that they are subjective formations, therefore localized in worldliness (spatio-temporality) by the localization of the subject. But they can be produced in different moments of time of the same subject as *the same* in contrast to their repeated productions and as *the same* in contrast to the productions of different subjects.³⁴

The timelessness of the objectualities of the understanding, their being “everywhere and nowhere” [*überall und nirgends*], proves, therefore, to be a *privileged form of temporality*, a form which distinguishes these objectualities fundamentally and essentially from individual objectualities. That is, a super-temporal unity pervades the temporal multiplicity within which it is situated: this *super-temporality implies omni-temporality* [*Überzeitlichkeit besagt Allzeitlichkeit*].³⁵

Such irreality has the temporal being of super-temporality, of *omni-temporality*, which, nevertheless, is a *mode of temporality*.³⁶

Like every objectuality of the understanding, a universal objectuality is irreal in the sense of being omni-temporal [*irreal im Sinne der Allzeitlichkeit*].³⁷

Different bodies [*Körper*] can be precise embodiments [*Verkörperungen*] of the same “ideal,” which for this reason [*um dessentwillen*] is termed irreal.³⁸

What immediately strikes us is that, in opposition to the independence of time, which in *LU II* used to characterize the domain of ideal being in contrast to reality, it is a certain form of temporality that now pertains to the realm of the irreal. In other words, the opposition between reality and irreality is not to be conceived in terms of temporality (proper to the former) and in-temporality (characterizing on the contrary the latter) but rather between two different forms of “temporality.” The notion of *in-temporality* is now replaced by *sovera-temporality*, which—as Husserl points out—means the same as *omni-temporality*. As the last quoted passage points out, the *ideal* is to be called or labeled *irreal* precisely *because* it can be “embodied” (i.e., individualized) in many different bodies (i.e., spatio-temporal individualizations) while remaining “numerically identical.”

³³ Husserl (1999, p. 311).

³⁴ Husserl (1999, p. 312).

³⁵ Husserl (1999, p. 313).

³⁶ Husserl (1999, p. 313).

³⁷ Husserl (1999, p. 316).

³⁸ Husserl (1999, p. 320).

If we are on the right track, then where Husserl maintains that the irreal “is contingently (κατὰ συμβεβηκός) in time” he means not that irreality is stripped of every temporal determination but that its participation in the realm of reality is such that it can appear in any space and time, i.e., that its numerical identity is not bound to or determined by any specific “individualization” in space and time. The *timelessness* of the “ideal” is understood as the possibility for the latter to identically “appear” (*auftreten*) anytime, anywhere.

Let us hasten to remark that what we are interested in is Husserl’s overall account of irreality beyond the specific topic under consideration, namely, the constitution of propositions understood as unities of sense.³⁹ This being said, and based upon the general description of the “irreal” just outlined, Husserl goes on to propose another crucial distinction: between *free idealities* and *bound idealities* (*freie Idealitäten* and *gebundene Idealitäten*).

Among the examples of “free idealities,” Husserl mentions the “logico-mathematical formations” and the so-called “pure structures of essence” (*reine Wesensstrukturen jeder Art*).

All reality is here led back to spatio-temporality as the form of the individual. But originally, reality belongs to nature; the world as the world of realities receives its individuality from nature as its lowest stratum. When we speak of truths, true states of affairs in the sense of theoretical science, and of the fact that validity “once and for all” and “for everyone” belongs to their sense as the *telos* of judicative stipulation, then these are *free* idealities. They are bound to no territory, or rather, they have their territory in the totality of the universe and in every possible universe. In what concerns their possible reactivation, they are omni-spatial and omni-temporal. Bound realities are bound to Earth, to Mars, to particular territories, etc. But free idealities are in fact also mundane or worldly [*weltlich*]: by their historical and territorial occurrence, their “being discovered,” and so on.⁴⁰

The “free” character of the free idealities (for example, those of pure essences) does not mean their independence and freedom from any possible relation to the world; contrariwise, it amounts to their freedom from any specific “territory,” yet not from what Husserl calls here “the totality of the universe.” As the last sentences

³⁹ In contrast to the universality of essences, to which the entire §64d is devoted: “The irrealities of objectualities of understanding must not be confused with generic universality. Since, in particular, any number of affirmative acts, of no matter how many subjects, affirm this one and the same proposition, it can have one and the same sense, and it is a great temptation to think that the proposition belongs to the various acts of which it is the sense by virtue of its generic universality, as, for example, many red things belong to the generic essence ‘redness.’ Just as all these things have red in common and the red apprehended by an ideating abstraction is a general essence, so will the ideal-identical proposition, which indeed is common to the many acts, be a general essence, and this means a generic essence. But one must say in opposition to this: certainly, the proposition is general insofar as it refers to an infinite number of positional acts in which it is precisely what is intended; but it is not general in the sense of generic universality, that is to say, the *universality of an ‘extent,’* which belongs specifically to the universality of a species [*Spezies*], or of a species or genus [*Art oder Gattung*] and, at the lowest level, the concrete quiddity [*Washeit*]. It is therefore not general in the manner of essences, which correspond to so-called general concepts such as tone, color, and the like” (Husserl 1999, pp. 314–315).

⁴⁰ Husserl (1999, p. 321).

clearly states: free idealities are also *weltlich*, or, as he had already and quite clearly written in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, “all irrealties are essentially to be traced back to actual or possible realities.”⁴¹ Of course, this new view, including the new idea of temporality pertaining to the irreal, would remain unintelligible if we did not remind ourselves that Husserl is now understanding the very concept of ideality in relation to the subjective operations of “reactivation”: “In what concerns their possible reactivation [*Reaktivierung*], they are omni-spatial and omni-temporal.” As he also puts it: “Their super-temporality turns out to be *omni-temporality* as a correlate of free producibility and re-producibility at all times” (Hua I, p. 156).

In other words: the trait of *omni-temporality* is now meant to point to the possibility for the subject to reactivate the “constitution” of the ideality, which is therefore to be referred to as *irreal* because the reactivation can possibly take place anytime, anywhere. In the case of a “bound ideality,” by contrast, e.g., that of a “state constitution,” the possibility of its reactivation is bound to a specific territory:

A state (a nation) is a mundane reality, at once unitary and plural. It has a localization of a specific kind, inasmuch as it has a territory as a real national domain in which it enjoys jurisdiction. A state constitution has an ideality so far as it is a categorial objectivity, an expression of the national will ... which is repeatable at different times, is capable of being reactivated, and can be understood and identified by different people. But in its relation to a definite mundane nation, this ideal still has an irreality of a particular kind. The repeatability (the possibility of reactivation) by anyone whatsoever implies that anyone can repeat it in its sense of obligation, which then bears an identical relation to the mundane localization.⁴²

Hence the distinction between the *authentic* reactivation, or reactivation in the proper sense of the term, which is the one performed by a citizen of the state in question and in relation to the specific territory, and what Husserl calls *inauthentic* reactivation, which is accomplished “by the outsider, for example by one who understands this constitution in a merely ‘historical’ fashion.”⁴³

For the sake of our discussion, the crucial point to be emphasized is how the conception of the character of “ideality,” hence its temporal determination, changes as the problems of its genesis and constitution by a transcendental subjectivity are brought in, namely, as soon as it is included within the larger domain of the constitutive analyses: “The irreality of irreal objectualities, therefore, can also be interpreted in such a fashion that we affirm they are objectualities of sense.”⁴⁴

Innate a priori rather than *formal a priori*; *contingent a priori* instead of *material a priori*; *irreality* and *omni-temporality* in place of *ideality* and *in-temporality*: such is the transformation that these three crucial notions or concepts of the Husserlian

⁴¹ We will leave as an open question whether, as Dieter Lohmar (2005, pp. 73–74) seems to think, this ontological priority of the real over the ideal should be taken as a form of reversed Platonism (assuming that the latter in fact gives priority to the latter over the former).

⁴² Husserl (1999, p. 320).

⁴³ Husserl (1999, p. 321).

⁴⁴ Husserl (1999, p. 323).

doctrine of the a priori undergo as soon as they are assessed from the perspective of genetic phenomenology, that is, from the perspective of the “self-constitution” of the monad, thereby of the world itself as its inseparable correlate. If both the formal and material a priori are reinterpreted by Husserl in connection to the two “structural forms” of the concrete subject (reason and sensibility) from which their concepts are respectively derived, the domain of “ideality” is now comprehended in terms of “irreality,” for it is now to be understood in relation to the possibility, belonging to the subject, both to constitute it and reactivate its own constitution within the domain of the one and only “reality,” i.e., the world in which we all live. It is no accident that Husserl speaks of “irreal objectualities” as “objectualities of sense,” for they are now put in a relation to, or, better, included within the sphere of, the *Vernünftigkeit*, that is to say, within the sphere of that type of “rationality” that we have dubbed “rationality of sense” in contrast to the ontological rationality or rationality of being, which Husserl terms *Rationalität*.

We cannot go any further than this, however, for our ambition was exclusively to assess Husserl’s doctrine of the “a priori” against the backdrop of such a twofold conception of rationality, notably as the expression of the ontological rationality, namely, of the *Rationalität* that, as we know, is for Husserl one of the two driving “principles” of the history of philosophy. By contrast, the elucidation of what he means by *Vernünftigkeit*, of how it emerges and appears over the course of the history of Western thought, goes far beyond the scope of the present research and thus will have to be postponed until the author gathers enough strength and energy to embark upon a new, long journey.

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Part VIII

Conclusion



Our long adventure has ended right where it began: with the acknowledgment of the necessity of the intentional correlation between consciousness and its relevant objectualities, the constitutive a priori and the ontic a priori (to adopt the language of *Formal and Transcendental Logic*). At the beginning of our journey (Sect. 2), however, this was announced as the correlation between the a priori of logical *Erlebnisse* and their corresponding formations, whereas, here at the end of our journey, it is the correlation, within the concrete subjectivity or monad, between the latter's "structural forms" and relevant a priori objectualities. The notion of *Rationalität* seems to necessarily lead over to that of *Vernunft* and *Vernünftigkeit* (which in the present context has only been hinted at rather than properly analyzed).

This trajectory is explained by Husserl himself in §59 in the *Cartesian Meditations*, wherein he explains that the task of a priori ontologies (i.e., structures of the "real world") is "inevitable" but "one-sided and not philosophical in the final sense." Such a priori, Husserl also elaborates, "confers on the ontic fact, on the factual world in its *contingency*, a relative intelligibility, that of an evident and necessary being-thus based upon the eidetic laws; yet, it does not confer upon it philosophical, that is, transcendental intelligibility" (Hua I, p. 164).

Philosophy, in effect, "demands elucidation based on the ultimate and most concrete essential necessities, and these are the necessities that satisfy the essential rootedness of any objective world in transcendental subjectivity and hence make the world intelligible concretely as constituted sense. Only then, moreover, do the *supreme and ultimate* questions become disclosed, those which are still to be addressed to the world even as understood in this manner" (Hua I, pp. 164–165). What is at stake in the distinction between the two forms of rationality and reason, hence in the necessity of rooting the ontological rationality *in* the transcendental one, is the question of intelligibility (i.e., of the "real world"). Whereas the eidetic rationality confers upon the irrational "fact" a form of *ontological* intelligibility (according to the ways investigated over the last three chapters), a much higher level of intelligibility (*Verständlichkeit*) is obtained as soon as the objectual formation at

hand is viewed *as a constituted sense (als konstituierten Sinn)*.¹ In other words, the supreme and ultimate (i.e., metaphysical) questions can eventually be raised only on condition that the rationality of being (*Sein*) has already been “rooted” in the rationality of sense (*Sinn*) (De Santis 2021). Such is the ambition of the all-too-(in) famous Husserlian idealism systematically expounded at the very end of the *Fourth Cartesian Meditation* (§41)²:

Every thinkable sense, every thinkable being, whether the latter is called immanent or transcendent, falls within the domain of transcendental subjectivity, as the subjectivity the constitutes sense and being [*Sinn und Sein*]. The attempt to conceive the universe of true being as something lying outside the universe of possible consciousness, possible knowledge, possible evidence ... is non-sensical [*unsinnig*]. They belong together essentially; they are also concretely one, one in the absolute concretion of the transcendental subjectivity. If the transcendental subjectivity is the universe of all possible sense [*das Universum möglichen Sinnes*], then an outside is precisely non-sense [*Unsinn*]. But even non-sense is always a mode of the sense and has its non-sensicalness within the sphere of evidence [*Einsichtbarkeit*] ... All wrong interpretations being come from naïve blindness to the horizons that join in determining the sense of being [*den Seinssinn*] (Hua I, pp. 117–118).

As a consequence, Husserl’s conception of “transcendental” or “monadological” idealism needs to be understood from the perspective of the two forms of rationality and their conjunction (the sense of being or *Seinssinn*). However, this is far beyond the scope of the present study, the twofold purpose of which was to clarify in what sense the seemingly technical and narrow theme of the “a priori” is to be comprehended as an expression, so to speak, of a broader idea, viz., what we have been calling *ontological rationality*, and to make the case for distinguishing between two different conceptions of rationality and reason. Now, if the present study addressed only ontological reason, the path has thereby been paved for further investigation (yet to be conducted) of transcendental rationality (understood as theoretical, axiological, and practical rationality).

Even so, this twofold conception of rationality represents not only a criterion, as it were, to read and better assess the development of Husserl’s phenomenology (as well as of his interpretation of the history of philosophy); it also provides us with a hermeneutical “tool” which we can use in a new reading of the many developments of the early phenomenological movement. Put differently, the case could be made for interpreting some of the crucial moments and figures characterizing the early stages of the history of the phenomenological tradition based on the dialectic

¹ “To go back to the intentional origins and unities of the formation of sense [*Sinnbildung*] is to proceed toward an intelligibility [*Verständlichkeit*] which, once achieved (which is of course an ideal case), would leave no meaningful question unanswered. But every serious and genuine move from a ‘ready-made entity back’ to its intentional origins gives us, in respect to those strata already uncovered and the clarification of what is accomplished in them, an understanding which, though merely relative, is yet an actual understanding as far as it goes” (Hua VI, p. 171).

² See also what Husserl writes in a beautiful letter to his friend G. Albrecht in 1932 (Hua-Dok III/9, p. 83): “Stattdessen besteht der Radikalismus meiner Methode darin, oder führt im Radikalismus der Vorurteilslosigkeit selbstbesinnlich dahin, daß ein von der Möglichkeit der Erkenntnis abge-sondertes Sein ein Unsinn ist und daß jede sinnvolle Frage ihre Antwort finden kann, auf dem Wege, den ihr Sinn selbst vorgezeichnet.”

between *Sein* and *Sinn*, rationality of being and rationality of sense, *Rationalität* and *Vernünftigkeit*. In particular, two initial lines of development can be singled out.

- (A) The opposition between Husserl's transcendental or phenomenological idealism and the alleged "realism" of the Göttingen and Munich circles should be tackled anew from the perspective of the twofold notion of rationality and reason (henceforth the problem of *Seinssinn*). At least when it comes to Husserl's own perspective on the matter, the controversy does not simply bear upon the refusal, on the part of most of his former students and disciples, to embrace such and such a view or specific philosophical position (i.e., "transcendental idealism") but in their failure to grasp the very distinction between the two forms of "intelligibility" and thereby the necessity of grounding the ontological intelligibility in the intelligibility of sense. In this respect, the charge of "ontologism"³ that, in a letter to Spiegelberg, Husserl makes against "so many phenomenologists from the old time [*so manche Phänomenologen der älteren Periode*]" (Hua-Dok III/2, p. 251) takes on new meaning. For, the so-called realist phenomenologists are not accused of disregarding the necessity of espousing idealism, but—far more profoundly—of not acknowledging the difference between ontological and transcendental rationality, hence the need for a reconciliation between the two after the long struggle that so dramatically tormented the history of modern philosophy.⁴ From this perspective, the opposition should not be seen as bearing upon such and such a specific position on the existence of the world ("realist" in one case, "idealist" in the other⁵) but in terms of a contrast between the acceptance of only one form of intelligibility, i.e., the ontological one pursued by the ontological phenomenologists (as they should be labeled), and Husserl's claim that there exist two forms of intelligibility and that the highest intelligibility can be attained exclusively through a combination of the two (*Seins-Sinn*).
- (B) The complicated Husserl-Heidegger relation. As should be apparent by now, *the question about the sense of being* does not exclusively belong to the Heideggerian speculation; it is central to Husserl's thought, as well. In this respect, then, nothing is farther from the truth than Hedwig Conrad-Martius'

³Which Husserl, as we know from our analyses in Part IV, also uses to characterize some of the aspects of modern philosophy and, in particular, Spinoza's own ontological and metaphysical speculation.

⁴We should never forget that one of the champions of the so-called "realist phenomenology," namely, Hedwig Conrad-Martius, frames the opposition between Husserl and his former students in terms of "transcendental" and "ontological" phenomenology (Conrad-Martius 1965, pp. 393–402).

⁵Which, as Ingarden himself recognizes, is the theme of a very specific ontological discipline, which he thereby labels "existential ontology" inasmuch as it deals exclusively with the different modes of existence. In this respect, it is important to note as well that, already by the mid-1930s, Husserl stops systematically employing the label "idealism" to characterize his phenomenology; as he explains to Baudin: "*Kein gewöhnlicher 'Realist' ist je so realistisch und so concret gewesen als ich, der phänomenologische 'Idealist'* (ein Wort, das ich übrigens nicht mehr gebrauche) [emphasis added]" (Hua-Dok III/7, p. 16).

assertion that the question of the sense of being was never raised prior to Heidegger.⁶ As for Husserl, the question of sense, or, better, the question of the sense of being, emerges explicitly at the end of the *Second Cartesian Meditation* (although it can be traced back to at least *Ideen I*), where the notion of intentional object as a transcendental clue is first brought in and expended on: “Every object in general [*Jeder Objekt, jeder Gegenstand*] signifies a structural rule within the transcendental ego” (Hua I, p. 90). This “structural rule” prescribes the specific *sense* of the object and its *ontological* domain, i.e., the specific synthetic “constitution” of such and such a unity within the manifold(s) of consciousness. What thereby arises is “the task of carrying out all phenomenological investigations within the unity of a systematic and all-embracing order by following—as our mobile clue—a system to be found out level by level of all objects of possible consciousness, including the system of their formal and material categories” (Hua I, p. 90). The relation between modes of being and their transcendental constitution within the subjective sphere is the Husserlian meaning of the technical term “sense”: it points to a multiplicity of systems of syntheses bringing about a multiplicity of systems of unities as their own correlates.

If we were now to compare Husserl’s understanding of the *Seins-Sinn*-question with Heidegger’s, we would immediately realize that for the latter the very concept of “sense” is not imbued with such a broad meaning: it no longer designates being’s overall referring back to the very process of subjective, i.e., transcendental and synthetic, “constitution” by the concrete subject (= this being what Husserl’s transcendental idealism is all about); on the contrary, it is now used to explain the structure of only *one* of the most fundamental existentials of *Dasein*, that is to say, what Heidegger refers to as “comprehension” or “understanding” (*das Verstehen*).

In §32 of *Being and Time* (on *Verstehen* and *Auslegung*), Heidegger mobilizes exactly the same language and terminology that Husserl would use in the *Fourth Cartesian Meditation* to present transcendental idealism, the difference being that the terminology is used by Heidegger to describe *Dasein*’s “comprehension” of the entity within-the-world: “When entities within-the-world are discovered along with the being of *Dasein*—that is, when they have come to be understood—we maintain that they have a *sense* [*Sinn*].”⁷ Of course, as Heidegger hastens to point out, *that* which is understood is not the sense but the “entity” or, better, the “being”: “Sense is that wherein the intelligibility [*Verständlichkeit*] of something maintains itself”:

Sense is an *existentiale* of *Dasein*, not a property attached to the entity ... *Dasein* only “has” sense, so far as the disclosedness of being-in-the-world can be “filled in” by the entities discoverable in it. Hence, only *Dasein* can be meaningful or meaningless [*sinnvoll oder sinnlos sein*] ... The interpretation of the concept of “sense” is one which is ontologico-existential in principle; if we adhere to it, then all entities whose mode of being is of a character other than *Dasein*’s must be conceived as *non-sensical* [*unsinniges*], essentially

⁶Conrad-Martius (1957, pp. 15–16).

⁷Heidegger (1967, p. 151).

devoid of any sense at all. Here “non-sensical” [*unsinnig*] does not signify that we are saying anything about the value of such entities, but it gives expression to an ontological characteristic. *And only the non-sensical* [das Unsinnige] *can be absurd or counter-sensical* [widersinnig]. The present-at-hand, as *Dasein* encounters it, can, as it were, assault *Dasein*’s being; natural events, for instance, can break in upon us and destroy us.⁸

Just like in Husserl’s idealism, *Sinn* is not an ontological property but the expression of what can be called a transcendental structure (an *existentiale*); if, in Husserl’s transcendental idealism, beings can be said to have a sense only insofar as they stand in a relation to the concrete subjectivity, in Heidegger, too, they have a sense only insofar as they are discovered and encountered by *Dasein*.

Even more radically than in Husserl’s monadological idealism, where the conception of a being “lying outside the universe of possible consciousness” is said to be non-sensical (*unsinnig*), in Heidegger, entities in general are described as non-sensical to the extent that their mode of being is of a kind other than *Dasein*’s. Moreover, just as the counter-sensical (*das Widersinnige*) is a mode of the sense in Husserl’s transcendental idealism, in Heidegger, too, the absurd is itself a mode of the sense, namely, of *Dasein*’s encounter with the entities that are “within-the-world.” And, last but not least, just as in Husserl’s transcendental idealism the question of the sense of being is tightly connected to the problem of “intelligibility,” that is to say, to a form of intelligibility higher than the ontological one,⁹ in Heidegger, too, what emerges is precisely the possible intelligibility of the entities as they are understood by *Dasein*.¹⁰

This being said, let us immediately warn the reader that it is not our intention to deny differences or distinctions between Husserl (and his transcendental idealism) and Heidegger (and his own version of phenomenology). Rather, it is our contention that the philosophical differences and divergences between Husserl and Heidegger are to be understood and investigated against the backdrop of the question of the *sense of being*, i.e., against the backdrop of the two forms of intelligibility and, more broadly, the twofold concept of rationality.

If, in the case of the “ontologism” proper to the Göttingen and Munich circles, it is the very idea of a distinction between two types of rationality that is to be abandoned altogether (for, they recognize only one form of rationality, namely, ontological rationality), for Heidegger, it is the “universality,” as it were, of the rationality of sense that is to be called into question. The *sense* no longer designates the overall and all-embracing domain of the synthetic constitution (in such a way that each mode of being or each ontological category corresponds to a specific mode of the

⁸Heidegger (1967, pp. 151–152).

⁹Heidegger himself recognizes it in the second appendix to his 1927 letter to Husserl concerning the second draft of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* article: “The *first* thing in the presentation of the transcendental problem is to clarify what the ‘unintelligibility’ of entities means. In what respect are entities unintelligible? I.e., what higher claim of intelligibility is possible and necessary. By a return to what is this intelligibility achieved?” (Hua-Dok, III/4, p. 147).

¹⁰One of the early criticisms of Heidegger’s position that also underlines the ambiguity of the phrase *sense of being* can be found in Hartmann (1934, pp. 44–46).

sense): it is now understood in a much more “circumscribed” manner, namely, as bearing exclusively upon that fundamental *existentiale* called understanding. For Husserl, sense is primarily *constituted* (*constituted sense* being a pleonastic expression); for Heidegger, on the other hand, it is always and only *understood*. To be more precise, if, for Husserl, it means *that* wherein the *constitution of being* takes places, for Heidegger, it signifies *that* wherein its *comprehension* occurs. However, no matter the specific differences that can be adumbrated, it stands for both thinkers as something totally irreducible to being (and its rationality).

As far as the present study is concerned, even if we are still at the level of what Husserl considers a lower type of rationality, i.e., ontological rationality, we should not lose sight of the fact that he takes the very task of “rationalizing the empirical”—notably, of bringing to the fore the *ratio* immanent to the world as such—to be essential to philosophy itself since the Greek, or, more specifically, the Platonic breakthrough (see for example Hua XVII, p. 5):

As we know, science in our European sense is, generally speaking, a creation of the Greek spirit. Its original name is philosophy, and the domain of its knowledge is the totality of whatever there is. It branches out into specific disciplines, the main branches of which we call science. But we give the name *philosophical* only to those sciences that generally tackle questions about everything that is ... Philosophical knowledge of the given world requires first of all a universal *a priori* knowledge of the world—one might say: a universal ontology that is not just abstract and general but also concrete and regional. It allows us to grasp the *invariant essential form, the pure ratio of the world*, including all of its regional spheres of being. To put the same thing otherwise: prior to knowledge of the factual world there is universal knowledge of those essential possibilities without which no world whatever, and this includes the factual world as well, can be thought of as being (Hua XXVII, pp. 166–167).

In the *Erste Philosophie* lectures (Hua VII, p. 14), Husserl echoes Plato and maintains that the one just described is the function carried out by “the archons of humanity”: they alone can disclose the “gnoseological domains of all rationality” (*Rationalität*) and raise humanity up to an unheard-of dimension. And this, he would also add, is in our time the task and ambition of “phenomenology”: “Phenomenology as eidetics ... is rationalistic [*rationalistisch*]” (Hua IX, p. 254).

Perhaps one day at the Husserl Archive a new and hitherto undiscovered manuscript, perhaps even just a tiny undiscovered *Zettel*, will be found in which the old and tired Husserl had engraved (paraphrasing Marx’s famous eleventh thesis on Feuerbach) the following incisive words:

*Philosophers have hitherto interpreted the world in various ways;
the point now is to rationalize it... and to do it in the right way!*

Until then, we will patiently ponder the difficult problem of the difference and relevant conjunction between the two conceptions of rationality (in Husserl’s) phenomenology.

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