

D. C. S. Oosthuizen on Husserl's Doctrine of Constitution

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Husserl's doctrine of constitution provides a fruitful and philosophically satisfying means to understand and integrate several aspects of his broader phenomenological position, most especially his phenomenological reduction, as well as his views on perception and temporality. Indeed, the explanatory capacity of phenomenology becomes more fully evident when one considers the problem of constitution (Sokolowski 2013). However, the concept of constitution remains a contested one, perhaps because Husserl himself revised his own account of constitution (Sandmeyer 2009, p. 94), but especially because of the role it could be said to play in the larger debate as to whether Husserl's approach constitutes a realism or an idealism.

D. C. S. Oosthuizen's "Transcendental-Phenomenological Idealism: An Aspect of the Problem of Constitution in the Philosophy of Edmund Husserl" takes on these themes in the reception and interpretation of Husserl's thinking. The paper was first presented in Afrikaans at the *Society for the Advancement of Philosophy* in South Africa in 1957, and then published by the University of South Africa in *Festschrift H. J. de Vleeschouwer* in 1960.¹ In the paper Oosthuizen demonstrates how the phenomenological, eidetic, and transcendental reductions, the problem of constitution, and transcendental genesis form crucial parts of Husserl's phenomenological method. Oosthuizen then argues that the phenomenological method and its results cannot be said to conclusively favour a metaphysical or epistemological idealism, specifically because the transcendental reductions cannot be undone.

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Daniel (Daantjie) Charl Stephanus Oosthuizen was born in Knysa, South Africa in 1926. He died suddenly in Grahamstown in 1969. He is described by Alan Paton as

a loving and beloved husband and father; a great teacher: a clear and deep and honest thinker: the guide, philosopher, and friend of generations of students: an Afrikaner who was not bound by any shackles of race and group and nation: a South African whose love of his country was deep and loyal, and was surpassed only by his love of mankind: a Christian whose love of his church was deep also, and was surpassed only by his love of Christ, and of truth, justice and righteousness (Paton 1970, p. 1).

From 1943 to 1950, Oosthuizen studied philosophy at the University of Stellenbosch, also spending three years at the Dutch Reformed Church seminary in Stellenbosch during this time. He completed his Master's thesis at Stellenbosch in 1949 on the philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard – a thinker whose work continued to influence him throughout his life.

Oosthuizen married Ann Schonland in 1952, and the couple had three children. As a “thorn in the flesh of the establishment” (Brink 2009), he became

perhaps *the* central figure in a remarkably gifted and innovative group of young philosophers who, by 1947, if not earlier, were exploring new lines of argument and analysis that were unfamiliar to their teachers and were to leave their mark for decades to come both in Stellenbosch and in the broader field of South African intellectual life (Nash 2005, p. 63; emphasis mine).

Because of his exposure to the phenomenology of Husserl under the supervision of Prof. H. J. Pos, for his DPhil at the University of Amsterdam, as well as his sabbatical under the

tutorship of Gilbert Ryle at Oxford, Oosthuizen's writings are perhaps unique in their intense engagement with two of the great traditions in philosophy – phenomenology and ordinary language philosophy. As Evans (1999, p. 14) points out, Oosthuizen agreed with Ryle that phenomenology and ordinary language philosophy show significant areas of convergence. In a South Africa, where philosophy departments at the various universities were then generally either *only* continental or *only* analytic in orientation, Oosthuizen stands out as a philosopher who could move easily between these approaches and draw out points of affinity in their concerns.

Despite the fact that the majority of his work is centred on problems in epistemology and the philosophy of mind, Oosthuizen is today perhaps best known in South Africa for his moral, political and religious essays.² As one of the first Afrikaner academics who openly rejected apartheid, his influence on others was strongly felt. Johan Degenaar, for example, recalls that Oosthuizen played the main role in making him an opponent of apartheid. (Degenaar 1984, p. 5)³ and Van Zyl Slabbert comments on his influence thus: “From [Oosthuizen] I learnt that intellectual life is about the non-stop subversion of orthodoxy and dogmatism, whether in politics, academia and civil life” (Van Zyl Slabbert 2003, p. 1). In this context, Oosthuizen's writings on academic freedom and tertiary education are also particularly notable. He specifically aimed to demonstrate how an “open conversation” about academic freedom was possible (Oosthuizen 1967, p. 22), rejecting all instrumentalist conceptions of education (Du Toit 2005, p. 53), and so also the then common conception that academic teaching involved the mere transfer of information by lecturers to students (Oosthuizen 1967, p. 11). For Oosthuizen, success in teaching was “not that students come

² A selection of these papers were collected and published by Ian Bunting. See Oosthuizen (1973).

³ Oosthuizen, James Oglethorpe and Johan Degenaar are the three main philosophical figures who develop responses to the political and ideological conflicts of the 1940s and 1950s in South Africa. See Nash (1997).

with questions to a class and go away with information, but that they come to class with information and go away with questions” (Oosthuizen 1967, p. 12).

Oosthuizen’s work represents, then, a significant point in the development of philosophy in South Africa. His writings on tertiary education and academic freedom are once more of particular relevance, specifically in the context of the recent student protests at universities throughout South Africa. In addition, even though Husserl’s phenomenology remained his enduring concern, his ability to move between the analytic and continental traditions, and his ability to use these approaches to develop his political and ethical writings, still speaks to the current philosophical generation in South Africa.

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Transcendental-Phenomenological Idealism: An Aspect of the Problem of Constitution in the Philosophy of Edmund Husserl

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In this paper I will attempt to show, firstly, that the phenomenological, eidetic and transcendental reductions, the problem of constitution, and transcendental genesis are indispensable parts of the transcendental phenomenological method; but that, secondly, this method and the results that are obtained by means of it cannot, strictly speaking, be said to decisively favour a metaphysical or epistemological idealism, specifically because the transcendental reductions cannot be undone.

1. The Background of the Constitution Problem in E. Husserl

It has already been implied that Husserl's constitutive analyses are only meaningful within a specific framework, i.e. that of the phenomenological method. Indeed, the framework and the contexts of this method show considerable correspondence with the frames of reference of traditional epistemological and metaphysical idealism; however, the method also displays specific differences that are, in my view, more than a mere shift of accent within the same area of discourse. I will thus begin by provisionally indicating a few points of similarity and difference in this regard, so as to also simultaneously make the background of the Husserlian concept of constitution clearer.

The traditional idealist-realist opposition in epistemology, which was one of the precursors to Husserl's phenomenology, cannot be easily articulated to everyone's satisfaction. Perhaps it could be said that the various solutions here vary between, on the one hand, an extreme realist position

that would claim that in the act of knowing, a subject makes direct contact with an object that does not depend upon the act of knowing for its existence; and, on the other hand, an extreme idealist position that would claim that in the act of knowing, a subject actively objectifies moments of consciousness towards an object that may claim trans-conscious existence, but that nonetheless has no reality outside of the act of knowing. Seen in this way, it would be a central moment of this issue to determine the meaning and being of the known object and the knowing subject in their mutual relationship.

If phenomenology is intended as a clarification of the meaning and being of that which is, by means of a descriptive analysis of the means by which an act is directed towards its object – an exposition of meaning, thus, of constitutive intentionality – the correspondence becomes immediately apparent. A possible point of difference here is that phenomenology wants to overcome the tensional relation between subject and object, and professes to have succeeded in this. Overcoming would here mean that Husserl brings the old problematic to a close, and so his work must naturally be placed within the traditional discourse. Overcoming may however also mean that the traditional problem-sphere is inhibited, eliminated, in such a way that the Husserlian analyses move at another level of discourse. In this case then, transcendental phenomenology would probably be called idealist in an analogical sense, and the relationship of transcendental phenomenology to epistemology would remain problematic.

A further, albeit still provisional, indication of similarities and differences can be found in the manner of explanation of the meaning and being of the subject and object in their mutual relationship. Seen from a particular perspective, the exposition of the meaning and being of that which exists is a central problem for all philosophy. Aristotelian philosophy attempted to explain the meaning of an existent and Aquinas attempted to explain the being of an existent by means of an objectivistic reduction to an Absolute that would form the Ground of this meaning and being. The Cartesian method of explanation then analyses not the object as such, i.e. not the concrete object of

pre-theoretical experience, but a rational image of that object which is dismantled and built up again from its elements. If it then later seems that the construction coincides with the given, then it is valid for him that the given is understood. Here, a subjectivistic reduction may indeed be spoken of. The Cartesian method here forms, as it were, a bridge between the traditional frames of reference and that of Husserl.

The “basic error” of the subjectivistic and objectivistic reductions as methods of explanation is, according to Husserl, that the possibility of the claim of subject and object on meaning and being is not investigated, but rather naively accepted. Descartes’ universal doubt remains, for example, a naïve belief to the extent that it does not make into a theme of investigation the structures of consciousness that first make possible the claim that a phenomenon has on meaning and being. As a result, the constitution of objects is, for Descartes, nothing other than a natural reconstruction in a psychologically real consciousness.

It is this “error” that Husserl wishes to rectify in a corrected subjectivistic reduction. Transcendental phenomenology wants to illuminate the meaning and being of that which exists from out of an analytic description of constitutive-intentional acts, that is, from out of the structures of consciousness in which a phenomenon itself, in its way of being, shows itself -- and what first makes it possible for the phenomenon to show itself – this all naturally after an inhibition of the simplistic acceptance of the meaning and being of phenomena, i.e., after the elimination of what Husserl calls positional consciousness. As small as this difference between phenomenology and the more traditional areas of debate seems at first glance, it has, nonetheless, enriching results for the interpretation of Husserl’s concept of constitution and the results of his analyses in general.

The claim, for example, that the meaning and being of objects is accomplished actively and passively by specific acts of consciousness, is necessarily valid for analyses within this transcendental reduction; but the meaning of the words that are used in this description shift as a result of the reduction. So, for example, the words “active” and “passive”, “accomplish” and so on,

may not be seen as real relationships between a real consciousness and real objects. The result of the transcendental reduction is in fact that the object such as I am aware of it, and not the real object, can be made a theme of a specific sort of investigation – naturally with the understanding that it is valid for both my being conscious of the object, as well as for the ego that is conscious of the object. So the formula “Ego cogito cogitatum” is also necessarily valid within the transcendental reduction as the grounding structure of consciousness, but that does not mean that it is also the grounding structure of real consciousness. At the same time, the claim holds that the meaning and being of an existent must be sought through an analysis of this grounding structure, necessarily as a result of this reduction, but surely not simply universally. Seen in this way, the reduction is characteristic of both the scope of phenomenology as well as its limitations. In a free adaptation of Husserl’s words, it can then be said: the inhibition of each positional consciousness brings a subjectivity to the fore as the only theme of investigation, an Ego as a totality of that which counts as actual, habitual and potential for it, i.e., the universum of that which, in a certain sense, has being for an Ego. It also holds just as necessarily, however, that only a worldview-like¹ interpretation of the reduction could pose this theme as the only theme of philosophy in general.

This then, is the background of the concept of constitution in Husserl’s work. The term must now be more closely determined, and because it also falls within the transcendental reduction, this must take place from out of the named “grounding structure” of consciousness, intentionality.

2. Two Fundamentally Different Meanings of the Term “Constitution”

The ego-cogito-cogitatum is the grounding structure of consciousness in the transcendental reduction in a dual sense. Two different meanings of the term “constitution” correspond to this dual sense.

¹ Translator’s Note: I have translated this term to echo the German “Weltanschauliche” as closely as possible, even though there is no standard equivalent in English.

If the ego-cogito-cogitatum-structure is highlighted in terms of the consciousness of objects, then the question arises of how it is possible that this or that *cogitatum* gives itself to consciousness, and can give itself as it does. For Husserl, the cause of this functional issue was a question that phenomenology and traditional epistemology had in common, namely, how it is possible that I am conscious, or can be conscious, of a *cogitatum* that presents itself as an *an sich*, as an object with a trans-conscious existence. As *an sich*, the object is outside of a relation to the cogito in which an “I” is aware of it; at the same time, the cogito forms a relation to the *an sich* through which the consciousness-transcending object seems to be immanently placed in the stream of consciousness. The importance of the transcendental reduction is now that phenomenology does not attempt to answer this question by examining the relationship of an actual object to an actual consciousness of the object; phenomenology does not make the object’s actual consciousness-transcendence a theme of investigation. Phenomenological questioning departs from the possibility of the consciousness of a *cogitatum* that presents itself as transcending consciousness, even if this cogitatum is feigned, a *tokkelossie*², a ghost or whatever. In other words, phenomenology here wants to investigate *those* structures of consciousness that offer the possibility for the cogito of a cogitatum as possessing meaning and being. This is what Husserl then calls the problem of the constitution of the cogitatum. Constitution seen as an act provisionally thus means here nothing other than those specific acts of consciousness on the basis of which the meaning and being of a cogitatum, as cogitatum, is made possible.

These acts of consciousness themselves are, however, not real, psychological acts for the phenomenological reflection that is directed towards them – the constitutive problematic within the transcendental reduction is here again the decisive difference between a psychological and a transcendental-phenomenological indication of consciousness. In this constitutive question, the consciousness of the object, the ego-cogito, becomes the theme of investigation rather than the

² Translator’s Note: In Zulu mythology, a tokkelossie is a small, mischievous evil spirit. The word is sometimes translated as “gremlin” in English, but since this word does not in my view adequately capture the meaning of the term, I have left it untranslated.

object or cogitatum of which I am aware. So here, for example, those structures of consciousness can be questioned that make it possible that an Ego can re-find himself as the same Ego in different acts, or make it possible that the individual intentional acts can mutually exhibit an intentional development. This idea is also posed in the statement that intentionality is the grounding structure of consciousness.

The two constitutive aspects that correspond with this double meaning of intentionality are thus, on the one hand, the constitution of the meaning and being of objects, and on the other hand, the constitution of the intentional development of consciousness itself. As a result of the wide scope of this issue, I will limit myself to the primordial constitution, of which I mention only a few main instances.

3. The Intentional Constitution of Objects

Firstly then, in connection with the constitution of objects: Husserl's analysis of the intentional act as an answer to this question is so well known that I wish to remind the reader of only a few aspects thereof. According to him, consciousness is a Heraclitean stream of phenomena that, from an actual consciousness thereof, recede into oblivion. This actual consciousness is nonetheless given in a distinct act. Each act displays three aspects, a hyle or content (firstly) that is taken up through a noesis [secondly] as a noema (thirdly). The analysis of the simple act of perception shows that the hyle or noesis are indeed real moments of an act, and that the noema, however, is not. The noema is here merely the intentional correlate of the act. It holds across the board that the relationship between noesis and hyle on the one hand, and noema on the other hand, is such that every noematic character still indicates a noetic-hyletic moment and vice versa. Methodologically it thus holds that the eidetic intuition, when it is focused upon the transcendently reduced object, brings to the fore specific essential characteristics that serve as a clue for the analysis of the noetic activity.

What is of importance for our purposes in this analysis is the constitutive activity of the noesis on

this level, i.e. the meaning-giving activity of the noesis in the animation of the hyle and the status of the noematic correlates of this animation. As is well-known, two moments in this noetic activity can be distinguished, namely, the meaning-determinative and the thetical act-characters through which the intension of an act is formulated in the various modalities of its being-such and being-there. I will briefly use one aspect of the meaning determinations of the noetic constitution as an example of this meaning-giving activity as a whole, namely, the establishment of the various synthetic units.

In the so-called *continuous synthesis*, then, the identity of an object is established in the following manner. I again use the course of events in the simple act of observation as example. The various acts in which an object adumbrates itself have different noemata as correlates. In the continuous synthesis, this course of acts is brought to a synthetic unity without the acts first being divorced into discrete units and then brought into relation with one another, i.e. without this higher synthetic unity being established through a specific act that is directed towards the simple acts. In contradistinction to this is the *discrete synthesis* that establishes such a unity by means of an act of a higher form that is directed towards the specific acts and that as such transforms polythetic acts into monothetic acts. Here the collatory act could be named as an example. Two discrete objects are brought to a new synthetic unity by means of simple conjunction – so, for example, “John” here and “Peter” there to “John and Peter together”.

According to the general rule, no noesis without noema, it also holds that this noetic constitutive activity is mirrored in the noemata. Where the noetic field is that of constitutional multiplicities, the noematic field is one of unities, and a noematic meaning corresponds with the various meaning-giving activities of the noesis. With the noetic synthesis corresponds a noematic core of meaning, an x , in which the object as object appears, whilst this core of meaning is encompassed by a horizon of predicates that places the object in the “how of its determinations”. The full noematic meaning is then encompassed through various modalities of thetic characters that correspond with the thetic act-characters. Insofar it relates to the constitutive problem within the

transcendental reduction, both “meaning” and “being” are thus the result of a passive or active constitution of a pre-given hyle on the grounds of a specific structuring of consciousness.

Again, this statement must be well-understood so that this first level of the constitutive analysis is not over-hastily labelled as “idealism”. Indeed, the attempt to place “meaning” and “being” as immanent to the function of knowing is a well-known form of idealism. The Husserlian noema, as was already mentioned, is however not a real part of the act of knowing, is not a content, but an intention, and does not stand in an immanent relation to an Ego. But this statement must also be qualified. Indeed, the distinction real and non-real is used in the transcendental reduction in so far as noesis and hyle, as real moments of an act, are demarcated against the non-real noema. If “meaning” and “being” are thus described by Husserl as the non-real correlates of an act, this consciousness-correlativity cannot be equated out of hand with the reduction of reality to the knowledge function outside of the reduction.

4. The Regional and Formal Constitution of Objects

But back to the constitution of objects. The moments of the constitution of the intentional object that were mentioned above only partially illuminate the constitution of the “meaning” and “being” of objects. This deeper issue can be made clearer by considering the further course of the constitution of being-such or meaning.

In the animation of a hyle, the noetic functions are guided by a specific “Leitbegriff”. A stone, for example, is taken up “as” a lifeless object, a mouse “as” an animal. This “Leitbegriff” that is expressed in the words, “taken up as a particular type of object”, is complex in nature in the sense that it lies on various intentional-constitutive levels, all higher than the levels that have already been discussed. Coupled with this is a deepening in the meaning of the concept “constitution”.

So far, we have used the word constitution in accordance with the definition that Husserl

gives to it in *Ideen I*, as equivalent to the concept of “original experience”, i.e., an experience in which an object is given as itself. Yet, it seems that “constitution”, while it still means “original experience”, also goes beyond the original experience, insofar the intention of the constitutive act also involves taking over (owning, “*sich zu übereignen*”), essentially and in various ways, the meaning and being of the object, as constitutive element. In the first instance, it happens in so far as constitution terminates in acts in which objects are made known, i.e. as objects that can be realised under certain circumstances; in the second instance, by means of an aperceptive transfer from known objects of perception to unknown objects of the same form, i.e. in the constitution of the invariant form; thirdly, the constitutive act exceeds simple givenness in the direction of the habitual “I” and constitutive subjectivity. This last-mentioned form is actually the fundamental meaning of constitution, of which all the aspects mentioned thus far are only instances. This can all be brought together in the definition of the issue of constitution that Husserl provides in the “*Pariser Vorträge*”. There, he says that constitution is a reflection on the universality of an ego from the point of view of the identity of an object in an attempt to analyse the systematic whole of real and possible conscious experiences, in so far as these experiences are prescribed in the ego according to the fixed rules of the various possible syntheses.³

In this discussion of the constitution of objects, I wish to deal only briefly with the constitution of the invariant form. It brings us, in the first place, to the so-called regional constitution, or the constitution of the regional “*Leitbegriff*” as an invariant form. The state of affairs here is analogous to the synthetic formation of a unity that has already been discussed - “analogous” because the constitution of the regional form is not passive, in contradistinction to the continuous synthesis. This constitution is, namely, a subdivision of *the* constitution of ideal forms that do not take place in acts of perception, but rather in the eidetic intuition.

Now, the eidetic intuition takes place in various stages. The eidos of an individual object is

³ E. Husserl, *Pariser Vorträge*, Husserliana I, p. 24.

obtained in an imagined set of variations of which the object is an example. Through this set of variations, there emerges a unity that is, on the one hand, active as theme, namely, in so far as it stamps the *differentia* as *differentia*, yet is, on the other hand, passive in so far as it is not consciously taken as a unity. This unity is only consciously taken as a unity in contrast to the differences in an active synthesis, namely that of the eidetic constitution. Such ideal, invariant forms can then serve as variants for an eidetic constitution on a higher level, but not *ad infinitum*. The generalisation has its limits. The most common form into which the ongoing ideation can issue, without revealing the ideal forms of all content, forms a regional “*Leitbegriff*” for the constitution of objects at the lower intentional levels – for example the typical-regional entities like “thing”, “animal”, etc.

If the typical-regional eidos still serves as a variant for an eidetic constitution of ideal forms, that are this time stripped of all content, we get the constitution of the completely empty form, “object-in-general”. To delve into this will, however, require too much time. I wish only to mention in passing that this “*Leitbegriff*”, as the product of formal constitution, exhibits a horizontal character like any other object; when further analysed, this horizontal character leads to the constitution of the formal a priori of the encompassing form of the world, i.e. for Husserl, the object-in-general is also a priori “in-the-world”.

With this, however, it has not yet become clear in what sense the regional and formal constitution transcends the eidetic constitution – that must here be seen as an act of original experience. Naturally, the answer is that in these acts it must additionally hold that the universality of the ego from the point of view of the identity of the invariant form must be examined; i.e. the illumination of the meaning and being of the invariant form must be further analysed as a self-interpretation, a concretising of the stable Ego of my habitudes and convictions. This, however, brings me to the second main section of the constitutive problematic, namely, the intentional constitution of the non-object-ive.

5. The Non-objective Intentional Constitution

The point of departure for Husserl's constitutive analyses was, as we have seen, the ego-cogito-cogitatum-structure of consciousness. In the preceding we were engaged only with those synthetic forms of consciousness that polarised the cogitative multiplicities to the side of the identical cogitatum. In this polarisation, the ego was naturally implicitly present in so far each of the streaming cogitationes carries an intentional reference to an Ego: the cogito is indeed the ego's ray of consciousness on the cogito.

Yet now it seems that the ego is aware of itself in those acts not only as a field of streaming cogitationes, but also as a stable ego that can return to the same cogitationes. In each act, there is a simultaneous, double intentionality, a consciousness of the unity of the object as a consciousness of the unity of that consciousness. With this, a second form of polarisation comes to the fore that is not covered by the named synthesis forms, namely, the polarisation of the cogitationes in the direction of the identical subject. This must be understood well. The constitutive aspects of the polarisation of the subject must be distinguished from those variants of the constitution of objects in which one or another form of empirical ego is effected for a consciousness. Indeed, here an intentional act of a higher form is not directed towards the object-constituting cogito to take it as an object. What does, however, take place here is that in each act, two essentially differing forms of constitution can be found – that of the pure ego and that of objects.

This second form of the constitutive problematic, the transcendental genesis, can as a result be described as the examination of the universality of the ego from the point of view of the unity of consciousness. The course of this process can perhaps be briefly summarised as follows: The first stage here corresponds with the understanding of the Ego in *Ideen I*. The "I-like" ray of directedness that is present in every cogito is, in passive genesis, "taken" as derivative from an empty pole that remains numerically identical and undivided in the variance of acts.

The second and third stage is achieved in the concretising of the empty I-pole that now becomes a substrate of habitudes – approximately the understanding of the ego in *Ideen II* and the *Cartesian Meditations*. This still takes place within the transcendental genesis, as follows. Specifically because the pure ego is constituted as an abstract empty focus out of which intentional directedness streams, it is also already a unity relative to the streaming cogitationes. Through this, this stream is qualified as that of an ego, and thus also as a subsisting stream in so far as the ego can return to acts that belong to his stream of consciousness by means of memory. There thus already lies a form of consequentiality for the I in this cogitative subsistence, a commencing concretisation of the empty I-pole. This subsistence of acts does, however, go deeper, and co-relative with it, the consistency of the ego undergoes a further concretisation. This emerges especially from out of those acts of original experience in which a new object-ive meaning is effected for an ego.

To consider an example. If, in an act of judgement, I deliberate over the meaning and being of an object for the first time, then this act, like any other one, sinks quickly back into the streaming consciousness. But the ego is qualified by that act as the ego that decided such and such, as an ego that holds this or that conviction on it. The ego can, namely, hold to an inner stand and by repetition, recognise it as his. Such a stand then institutes a “commonness” that remains a necessary moment in the chain of acts of memory until other motives lead to a revision or rejection thereof. This habitual consistency more concretely places the ego as a substrate of transcendental-historical predicates, just as the noematic core of meaning is that of other predicates. What subsists in the habitus is not the identical content of a habit of thinking, a habit of feeling, etc., but rather the content as it is identical for a subject – i.e. as something that an Ego obtains in previous acts and which belongs to him despite the fleeting nature of the acts in which it is constituted.

The ego, as a substrate of habits, in turn refers, as constitutive product of passive genesis, beyond himself to a deeper-seated subjectivity, and so is thus not equated out of hand with the subject pole than stands in opposition to the object pole. This implicit intentionality indicates a third

stage in the passive genetic constitution that can be understood from out of the relationship of activity within transcendental consciousness. Each act is, on the one hand, an activity that transforms a pre-given passivity into a specific noema, while, on the other hand, there also lies in this a passive genesis, in so far as the non-objective ego is constituted therein. But also in a more specific sense, if the intentional references of the pre-given passivity of an act are reviewed, then according to Husserl, we touch upon an inclusive constitution by means of a passive genesis. What is pre-given for an act, for example, as the ready-made thing-schema that is taken up as this or that object by the noesis, is already the product of such a passive constitution. In every phenomenon, so to speak, there are latent references to the transcendental history of that phenomenon to be found. Every phenomenon refers beyond itself to a comprehensive passive genesis that, firstly, precedes all noetic activities, and secondly, in so far as these acts (in which an ego and objects are constituted), is itself constituted by such a passive genesis. The comprehensive passive genesis thus refers to transcendental subjectivity that is the constitutive ground for the activity of the ego and the passivity of the hyle. In so far as passive genesis is, however, the ground for noetic activity and hyletic passivity, it can only be named as passive in the analogical sense.

The fourth stage in the genetic constitution refers now to the concretisation of this transcendental subjectivity that is, for Husserl, the deepest sense of consciousness and thus that which forms the concept of constitution. I will again try to sketch the state of affairs very briefly – firstly with regards to the concept of consciousness in transcendental subjectivity and secondly with regards to the concept of constitution itself. Both aspects refer to a transference of the intentional structure of an individual act or acts on transcendental subjectivity as such.

In so far as intentional acts and the ego as a substrate for habits are the result of the comprehensive genetic constitution, the stream of consciousness is also more than a linear movement in time that constitutes itself from out of the actual “*Jetzt*” of acts. The orderly construction and foundation of acts refers to an *Ur-intentionality* of this stream of consciousness as

comprehensive passive genesis. Just as the constituting object is the telos of the acts in which it is constituted, intentional experiences are here also the actualisation of an ideal telos through which the transcendental stream of consciousness obtains the character of a transcendental historicity. Just as the individual act still carries a reference to an ego, this transcendental stream of consciousness carries a reference to an absolute subjectivity, a *Nunc Stans*, from out of which all time is first constituted. In this “argontic” I, there is consequently also no further mention of a passive given, but only of an ur-activity that is the same time an ur-passivity in which everything that is active or passive for us in a secondary sense must first be accomplished.

How a deepened understanding of “constitution” is obtained in these circumstances issues from out of the transfer of the “*Vernunft*”- or rational character of the individual act on the comprehensive consciousness. The relationship of rationality to the concept of constitution on the level of the act is as follows for Husserl. The noesis is in a certain sense the “*Vernunft*” or ratio of an act that forms the telos from which it takes its bearings. The ratio of an act finds its fulfilment thus in the constitution of the intentum in so far as constitution here indicates the original experience of an object and on the a priori structures of consciousness that create the possibility of the experience of an object. In this sense, constitution may perhaps be called the actualisation of *Vernunft*.

In any case, by means of the transfer of this act-intentional *Vernunft* on the comprehensive consciousness, constitution becomes a name for, *and* setting out and actualisation of, an Absolute *Vernunft*, that is apprehended as a universal, a priori, essential structure of consciousness in which all object-ive and non-object-ive meaning and being first comes about. The constitutive issue within this comprehensive teleological structure is, in other words, that of an analysis of the way in which the Ratio, that is initially only given as Idea, actualises itself in the history of humankind – a transcendental process in which all irrationality is seen as instances of reason. Seen in this way, the constitutive analyses are, according to Husserl, the path from human being to God in so far as they are a reflection of the way from God to human being, a profane, non-confessional theology that is

made possible by a rebirth that is situated in the execution of the transcendental reduction.

6. Transition to the Issue of Relativisation

I trust that these indications could provide an indication of the foundation of Husserl's constitutive problematic in epistemology and the gradual transition therein to an absolutized metaphysics – and this in spite of gaps in the exposition, as well as the presentation of Husserl's development as progress without revision. It is, nonetheless, from the heights of this profane Pisgah that the way back must be sought. I wish to pose only one or two considerations regarding these critical problems. The first relates to the question of whether this idealistic metaphysics is implied within the transcendental phenomenological method, and whether it is possible to relativize within this method itself. The direction in which my remarks will tend is that Husserl's path to the Absolute is not the result of the transcendental reductions, nor of the constitutive issue, but rather of the failure to appreciate specific intentional modifications within the reductions, i.e. that this absolutisation does NOT essentially belong to the phenomenological method. The question then naturally remains as to the relationship of the so-called transcendental idealism to the epistemological idealism. Here I wish to show that results obtained by means of an intentional-constitutive analysis do indeed display an analogy with idealistic epistemology, but that this, strictly speaking, does not result in a problem, i.e. that a metabasis of a field of dialogue remains between an idealist metaphysics and phenomenology.

7. Relativisation of Husserlian Absolutizing Idealism

Husserl contends that access to the comprehensive Consciousness with its absolute Nunc Stans is to be found in the intentional character of horizon. According to him, every object has, for example, the Idea of the world as well as a reference to a comprehensive consciousness in which this Idea as well as every object is first constituted. The main question for the problem of relativism is here the

nature of the meaning and being of the world as constituted and the comprehensive consciousness as constituting in these latent references. I wish now to discuss this briefly.

In transcendental phenomenology, “horizon” is merely a name for specific noetic-noematic potentialities that are latently given in the intention of an act. These potentialities can be expressed through continued acts of reflection that are directed towards that act. Now, from an indeterminate continuation of such explicating acts, the Idea of the horizon has, as noematic correlate, the Idea of the horizon as an orderly totality of latent act characters -- i.e. in so far as it concerns the object noema, there is the Idea of an eventual substrate of all possible predicates and the inclusion of all possible relations between noemata – in short, the Idea of a world. Seen in this way, every noema already implies the world, and co-relatively, an object can only “be” as an object-in-the-world.

These claims must be carefully distinguished from F. H. Bradley’s metaphysical theory of internal relations. In the first place, it should be remembered that these claims hold as results of transcendental-phenomenological analyses. In the pre-phenomenological attitude, we are not normally aware of an act in which an object is given, but rather only of the object, and indeed in such a manner that it fits into the frame of reference of an immediate goal. I am not aware of a spade as such, but rather as “that with which I remove weeds,” “that with which I can kill the snake,” etc. It may be true that the “spade as such,” “the weeds as such” are latently given in this act, but then only for acts of reflection that are directed at the act within the theoretical attitude, but not for the act itself; in other words, I am not sure if the idea of a world will be attained if I keep digging; the idea of continued acts of reflection on this act would, however, lead to this, specifically because, as limit, it is part of the frame of reference of theoretical explication. The Idea of the world is thus a horizon for every act only in the sense that it is the correlate of the modifications that come into play whenever I become aware of a possibly indefinite continuation of reflective acts that are focused upon other acts. Here it must also be emphasized that the Idea of the world is a limit, as “as-if” that has no further positive content except as a correlate of such an indefinite continuation of

explicatory acts.

If these qualifications are taken into account, the idea that the world is a constitutive product of specific acts is, to my mind, not the metaphysical theory of the real world as a product of a creating subjectivity. Does the use of the words “constitutive product” not already imply an idealistic metaphysics? That it comes to this for Husserl stands firm! To my mind, this does not follow from the transcendental-phenomenological use of the concept of constitution. This can be shown by pursuing the horizon of acts in another direction, that of the so-called “I-pole.” For transcendental-phenomenological reflection, every act is a directedness of an ego towards a cogitatum in such a manner that the activity of this ego is potentially or actually reflected in the noema. In the explication of this activity, it seems that the Ego is not empty, but rather is a substrate of habitudes. In short, this means that an Ego, when it is confronted by unfamiliar phenomena, will try to “form” those phenomena by virtue of specific structures of consciousness so that they can enduringly fit into the field of already known objects. The ego tries to hold phenomena in its “power.” It is this act, in which the ego tries “sich zu übereignen” an object, that Husserl calls the constitutive act -- an act that thus extends beyond the mere determination of a specific hyle by a noema, but that, in my view, is still analytic-descriptive with regards to an act within the transcendental-phenomenological sphere. This thus also holds for the claim that the world is a constitutive product of specific acts.

Husserl’s metabasis for metaphysical idealism first comes to the fore, in my view, in his conception of the Idea of a comprehensive consciousness, and with that, the co-relative understanding of an Absolute Subjectivity as a *Nunc Stans*. In so far as the habits of an Ego are historical, and thus indicate a horizon of intentional references in the direction of a comprehensive passive genesis for acts of reflection, it can also principally be analysed by continued intentional-constitutive reflection. The Idea of a comprehensive, unitary stream of consciousness is, then, like the Idea of the World, not immediately given, but is rather a correlate of an undetermined

continuation of explicatory acts in the direction of the subject pole. In an attempt to make this idea conscious, Husserl provides a metabasis for the metaphysical.⁴ Naturally, the Idea of a comprehensive consciousness here indicates a program and not a “being”; thus, making this idea conscious had to consist in the continuation of explicatory acts towards an asymptotic approach of the limit that is expressed by the Idea, and not in the actualisation of a metaphysical ground. To use Kant’s expression, this Idea is thus regulative and not constitutive for the progressive explication.

In so far as Husserl ascribes a character of intentionality to this comprehensive stream of consciousness, this stream is then a metaphysical entity that can only be called intentional in an analogical sense. Indeed, the symbol through which a metaphysical entity can be described has this unusual character in that it still lays claim to representing the symbolised, but in such a manner that it is not capable of it. “Since no phrase you can use about the Supreme is adequate to the Reality, all you can do is to throw out your phrase at It and then deny that the phrase is true”, claims Bevan⁵ in his Gifford-lectures. For Husserl, his description is however not mere or speculative symbolism, but a strictly scientific, unambiguous exposition of specific experiences; the global “revealing” of which Mannheim speaks, that is for him on the same level of discourse as any other transcendental experience. In this, Husserl reveals a naivety in so far he does not analyse the world-viewlike, a-presentative pairing of intentionality with the Idea of a comprehensive consciousness.

8. Relativising Husserl’s Epistemological Idealism

My second claim is actually already touched upon by this, namely that the constitutive problematic in the transcendental reduction does show an analogy with idealistic epistemology, but that it does not really coalesce into this issue. Here, everything depends upon the frame of reference of the phenomenological analyses as they are posed by the transcendental reduction and the context of

⁴ Translator’s Note: The meaning of this sentence is unclear in the original Afrikaans. The word “begaan” is usually only used when someone commits an error, but its usage here does not here directly indicate this. As such, I use the English “provides”.

⁵ Bevan, *Symbolism and Belief*, p. 19. Beacon Press, Boston, 1957.

method. In an exposition of the relationship of his phenomenological idealism to the criticism of Kant, Husserl⁶ summarises his contribution to epistemological idealism as follows: the transcendental-phenomenological method is the only strictly scientific approach to the problem of the relationship of knowledge to the object of knowledge because in this approach, the possibility of metaphysical interpretations is eliminated. As a result of the transcendental reductions, phenomenology does not presuppose the reality of the known, nor that of the knower, and thus does not attempt to escape the contradictions that lie in these presuppositions by means of a spiritualistic or materialistic interpretation of one of the presupposed realities. Phenomenology simply analyses the phenomenon of knowledge as it is presented to consciousness. In this framework, the phenomenon is then an index for the investigation of the transcendental origin of the known object in its claim on more-than-phenomenality, i.e. of the intentional constitutive action of consciousness. In the course of this investigation it seems that, according to Husserl, the existence of a consciousness-transcending object is a meaningless contradiction, i.e. that transcendental phenomenology is as such also transcendental idealism.

In my view, Husserl can claim this for his philosophy only after a neglect of the intentional modifications that are brought into play by the transcendental reduction.

The noematic correlate of this operation of consciousness is, as is well known, the neutrality of consciousness, in which allthetic characters remain *in suspensa*. With this it becomes possible to analyse the qualitative wealth of the phenomena of consciousness, also with reference to the phenomenon of knowledge, to draw up an inventory of conscious life under the main denominator of intentionality. But also nothing more than this. The neutrality modification indeed fixes the framework of these analyses, in which the assumption of a consciousness-transcendent object is unnecessary, specifically because it is not relevant within this framework. Said otherwise, the neutrality modification remains a modification and can only become key to field of *Ur-*

⁶ Husserl, *Erste Philosophie*, Husserliana VII, p. 381.

interpretation through a metaphysical interpretation. Indeed, in this metaphysical interpretation, the transcendental reduction is regarded as a Rubicon in which the bridges are not connected, but have so thoroughly disappeared that there is no suspicion that they ever existed.

I thus contend that the transcendental reductions, the constitutive problematic, and the transcendental genesis belong essentially to the phenomenological method, but that this method neither essentially allows any idealising absolutisation nor justifies epistemological idealism.

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