

LEVELS AND FIGURES IN PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT: Along with a static and genetic egological inquiry, Husserl offers a non-egological analysis that advances through different levels or stages of history. Basic phenomenological themes—subjectivity, temporality, intersubjectivity, and worldliness—appear in varying figures with the progressive bringing-into-play of levels that concern conditions of possibility, actual development, and rational goals. In addition, post-Husserlian phenomenology discloses a surplus that brings us to a level outside the reach of history. This scheme confronts us both with the enduring issue of the stratification of reality and with Maurice Merleau-Ponty's contention that philosophical problems are concentric. In order to shed light on these levels and figures, and thus to set in order the main themes of human experience, an attempt might be made to clarify the relationship between them in terms of the determinateness and indeterminateness of horizontality. As for every such level, there emerges a varying stage of rational legitimation; new advances could also be made with regard to the perennial problem of the unity of reason in the midst of its diversity.

A scheme of levels and stages of history advanced by Edmund Husserl outlines for phenomenological analysis some major tasks that have not yet been elaborated at length. Basic phenomenological themes such as subjectivity, temporality, intersubjectivity, and worldliness reveal a distinctive figure according to each level in a “progressive bringing-into-play (*Ins-Spiel-setzen*)” that has its reverse in a “regressive destratification (*Abschichtung*)” (*HuaM VIII*, 187).¹ The passage from static to genetic analysis has taken place first in the

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¹ Edmund Husserl, *Späte Texte über die Zeitkonstitution (1929–1934). Die C-Manuskripte, Husserliana-Materialien VIII* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), hereafter, ‘*HuaM VIII*’, followed by page number. All translations are my own.

framework of an egological analysis in which the former approach is modified in order to take into account both the sedimentation of past life and the depth strata of the ego. As is well known, in the first level of static analysis, Husserlian phenomenology describes subjectivity as a pole of irradiation for acts and describes the world as their ready-made outcome. The flow of time is envisaged with retentional and protentional horizons, and intersubjectivity is tied to an experience grounded on the presence of the other's body. The second stage is that of genetic analysis in which subjectivity turns out to be the substrate of habitualities and, correlatively, the world develops into a complex of empirical types. In turn, temporality is guided by a prefigured horizon of expectations conditioned by what the ego has acquired as an abiding possession. A further nonegological genetic analysis accomplishes, as we shall see, a deep transformation by overcoming egology and extending transcendental subjectivity into intersubjectivity. This brings forth within genetic analysis three further levels that overlap the examination of stages of history. A new viewpoint emerges in post-Husserlian phenomenology that, by radicalizing the surplus pertaining to horizons, reveals new figures of the basic phenomenological themes within a perspective tied to a metahistory.

The important point is that the analysis of phenomenological themes by bringing into shape the figures they exhibit in different levels may prove fruitful by elaborating to a greater extent what has been a major subject matter for phenomenology since Husserl's studies on the objective regions in the second volume of *Ideas* and Nicolai Hartmann's description of the stratification of reality in the third volume of his *Ontology*, in which previous stages of philosophy are summed up into a whole. Furthermore, inasmuch as rational legitimation takes on distinctive figures in each level, this analysis may also add a fresh approach to the perennial issue of the unity of reason in the midst of its manifold manifestations.

1. PRIMAL HISTORY, FIRST HISTORICITY, SECOND HISTORICITY

A retrospective inquiry of genetic phenomenology leads beyond our acquisitions and reaches back to an instinctive intentionality. This inborn predisposition, which is presupposed by the constitution of the world, encloses a hidden and potential rationality. Reason is given in its most rudimentary form through a movement from empty intention to fulfillment that bears a teleology. A vague, empty horizon of blind intentions strives for gratification, has its outcome in bodily movements, and can be satisfied or disappointed. First tied to nondisclosed goals, the instinctive horizon gradually gains determination. Beyond nonobjectifying desires for certain contents, an objectifying instinct

requires the fusion of hyletic data, whatever their content may be, in a harmony that leads to the prominence of an objective unity. This apprehension of unities that stand out against the multiplicity of varying hyletic affections lays the ground for harmony as a distinctive trait of reason. As the intersubjective orientation of instinct is taken into account, the retrospective inquiry lets us see a primal mode of generativity as the basis that sustains individual life-streams, that is, a primal history (*Urgeschichte*) in which we are the actually living members in a succession of natural descent. In addition to a pre-egoical time grounded on instincts, there emerges a generative time as the outcome of a primary channel of communalization. A surrounding world is built on a common earth that supports as from below all human activity and, being more or less comprehensive, is always referred back to a homeworld as the domain of the family life of generative homecomrades. Children grow within a family tradition and adopt the typical structures of mature human beings, which come to be a means for the transmission of a wider communitarian historical development. They gradually acquire an interest in why things are as they are, and questions about these motives are the originary questions that can be raised with regard to history. It follows that, surrounded by fellow human beings that set ends for themselves, children come to understand purposive activity and what objects of usage are intended to do (see *Hua* XV, 420).² It is also to be noted that rational praxis emerges with the care for self-preservation and the deliberation on the ends and means to attain it. In other words, the self-renewal of life is directed toward coherence first in an instinctive manner and then through the striving for an active coincidence that expresses a decision of the will.

Only after the limited scope of homeworldly aims is understood in the level of primal history can a higher-order spiritual generativity be established. A full-fledged process of institution and reactivation of meaning by bearers of enduring and encompassing ends takes on the protentional thrust pertaining to the universal instinctive intentionality. As the world expands to a wider communitarian ground, the temporal horizons of manifold homeworlds overlap with one another and converge in the unity of a historical time that spans the generations within a lifeworld. This “first historicity” is the field in which “reason in the first sense” (*Hua* XXIX, 40) superimposes on the sheer lapsing of generations a new stage in the fulfillment of empty intentions. This means that in everyday life there is a rationality that is associated with widespread ends and means, generates methods with particular modes of verification, and attains results that can be understood by a relatively large

² Edmund Husserl, *Gesammelte Werke-Husserliana* I-XL (Dordrecht: Springer, 1950–2009), hereafter, ‘*Hua*’, followed by volume and page number.

number of human beings. Practical apperceptions emerge from previous praxis and anticipate possible future action through an analogizing transfer that has a bearing on ends, means, procedures, and so on. With regard to the confirmation and disconfirmation of this anticipation, Husserl speaks of a “practical reason that corroborates itself in general in itself, and also disproves itself in singular items” (*Hua XXXIX*, 418). A coincidence with what is expected amounts to success and discordance amounts to failure in an onward movement that is subject to corrections in the same way that the progress of perception can restore certainty or end in a cancellation.

Husserl calls attention to the relativity pertaining to the alteration of situations. To the open possibility that, in connection with the horizon of extension of experience, the certainty of an object may turn into doubt or negation, is added the relativity associated with a horizon of anticipation of experience, that is, the multifarious situations or surrounding worlds within which our experiences and actions take place. Intuitive truths are relative to everyday life in communities or human activities whose practical projects determine their meaning and the required degree of assurance. Thus, although it remains identical, an object “transforms its being-meaning, the meaning determined by the situation, so that, with the change of the situation, truths become other truths” (*Hua XXXIX*, 192). In this connection it may be well to observe that, when he stresses a condition of equivalence for the horizons of anticipation, Husserl foreshadows many trends in later phenomenology, namely, Bernhard Waldenfels’s view of *doxa* as a mode of *episteme* contained in the different world-orders that exclude each other, Heinrich Rombach’s idea of a multiveracity of reason, and Paul Ricoeur’s notion of practical reason as an acquired wisdom that regulates the interaction between human beings. Further, in the Spanish-speaking world, José Ortega y Gasset characterizes reason as a phenomenon that emerges out of the vicissitudes of life in the task of taking care of oneself in the midst of circumstances. And Luis Villoro, in Latin America, opposes reasonableness to rationality in order to account for the accomplishment of goals in particular situations and cultures. This is the space offered by phenomenology for geographically diverse modes of thought.

In Husserl’s view, a universe of being transcends the relativity of the horizons of anticipation and subsists identically through all situations. In the motivation of this development, a decisive role is played by the awareness of the relativity associated with the differences between traditionally valid truths within various communities. Beyond the differences, a theoretical interest attempts to establish a world-core by making manifest identical characteristics in the midst of changing circumstances. Husserl refers to the displacement of the natural concept of reason: “out of the upright, fair reason of the natural, sound human understanding there comes now into being the scientific, philo-

sophical reason” (*Hua XXIX*, 386). This process is identified with a “second historicity” (41) in which identical nonperishable formations provide the basis for the production of further, higher-level formations in a procedure that, insofar as it is repeated over and over again, can be directed toward infinite poles. Philosophy and science understand the true world in itself as an idea to which the various surrounding worlds, with their world-representations, are nothing but approximations. From this it follows that a universal or rational generativity is set off against the limitations of previous generative chains because it pursues, with different stages of intention and fulfillment, “the infinite movement from latent to manifest reason” (*Hua VI*, 13). Accordingly, there comes forth a new form of communalization in which all human beings may take part in principle. The transition to second historicity is depicted by Ortega as the passage from an absorbed world to an open world, and the Husserlian analysis of the passage from latent to manifest reason invites comparison with his statement that “new modes of reason, sometimes with features opposite to the codified ones, emerged out of its previous figure overflowing and overcoming it.”³

We have moved on from the level of instinctive strivings, through more articulated modes of rationality linked to practical life, into a forceful manifestation in philosophy and science. On this basis, and taking on the primal establishments of philosophical reason, that is, the Greek demand for universal knowledge with its infinite tasks and the Cartesian demand for apodicticity, transcendental phenomenology is called to work out “the total theory of reason,” which through absolute responsibility and full self-justification must “raise us above the level of the naïve reason” (*Hua XXXV*, 42). Husserl refers the “critique of reason” back to “the clarification of evidence and all the pertinent relationships between mere ‘*intention*’ and ‘*fulfillment*’ ” (*Hua XVII*, 170). As we have seen, these relationships already appear in previous stages, but they are now restated in their undisguised truth by shedding light on what is implied in the procedure of verification. It is because actuality confirms itself through harmonious syntheses that rational consciousness bestows legitimacy. Thus, the validity or nonvalidity of its positing is justified by its own means within the self-sufficiency of the correlation between the world and world-consciousness.

2. METAHISTORY AND THE TRIPPLICITY OF ITS MOMENTS

Whereas Husserl advances progressively through the three main stages of history, a further development brings us to a level outside its reach. Trends in

³ José Ortega y Gasset, *Sobre la razón histórica* (Madrid: Alianza, 1980), 230.

post-Husserlian phenomenology attempt to disclose a surplus, a “more,” by which history is referred to a dimension that extends beyond record in a time before time. Worldliness, intersubjectivity, subjectivity, and temporality do not show themselves exhaustively and without reserve in their historical manifestations but, rather, point back to a metahistorical level in the sense of, as Emmanuel Levinas puts it, “*a previousness previous to any representable previousness: immemorial.*”⁴

Merleau-Ponty highlights the preexistence of nature as the spring and germ of human activity. Under cultural processes and objectivations, the “matrixes of history” lie in a dimension that is beyond the reach of our recollections as the past of all pasts, that is, as the “implication of the immemorial in the present.”⁵ The building up of all modes of temporality grows out of “an eternity of nature (the eternal return)”⁶ as a previous stage that cannot be superseded. Inasmuch as nature not only appears to us but also supports us, it has attributes that Husserl associates with the earth as the absolute ground for all relative histories. Merleau-Ponty also has very much in mind Husserl’s pre-Being (*Vor- Sein*), that is, a level of undifferentiated experience that is conditioned by instinct and prior to the subject–object distinction (*HuaM VIII*, 342). In sum, an immemorial nature makes us belong to a “primal history” in the sense that any historical action takes on, in a different architecture, the elements offered by a “*logos* of the natural world.”⁷ It is important to observe that Merleau-Ponty does not separate this problem from other issues. The analysis of nature is considered as a propaedeutic: “The theme of nature,” he writes, “is not a numerically distinct theme. There is a unique theme in philosophy: the *nexus*, the *vinculum* ‘Nature’-‘Human being’-‘God’. Nature as a layer of Being, and the problems of philosophy as concentric.”⁸ I shall attempt to carry this task a little further by focusing on the immemorial level that has a worldly side and so can be seen as a common center for the analysis of nature, intersubjectivity, and subjectivity.

According to Levinas, responsibility for the Other is the primary and essential structure of subjectivity by which we are coordinated with fellow human beings before a beginning in time. Responsibility is not tied to an actual present and hence to a synchronization by virtue of which the past is a retained, recollected, or historically constructed present and where the future is a present-to-come. The ethical relationship with the Other intro-

⁴ Emmanuel Levinas, *Autrement qu’être ou au-delà de l’essence* (La Haye: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 157.

⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *La nature* (Paris: Seuil, 1995), 282, 356.

⁶ Merleau-Ponty, *La nature*, 20.

⁷ Merleau-Ponty, *La nature*, 282. See also Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), 227.

⁸ Merleau-Ponty, *La nature*, 265; see also 267, 277.

duces a diachronic time in which the significance of past and future is not connected with the present. Responsibility is assigned to us out of an irretrievable past that is incommensurable with the present. As Levinas puts it: “Immemorial past, signified without ever having been present, signified out of a responsibility ‘for the Other’, and wherein obedience is the proper mode of listening to the commandment.”⁹ The infinite obligation of a responsibility that compels us beyond death means that the future of diachronic time cannot be met by coming events. In connection with diachronic time, Levinas inquires into the consistency of the dispersed fragments that make up the Old Testament in spite of their separation in the history of Israel. He argues that the fragmentation is overcome by their fidelity toward the very source of an ethics grounded on responsibility: “There would then be another history.”¹⁰ Thus, decisions about state affairs should raise the question not only whether they harmonize with world history but also whether they can be brought into agreement with this sacred history as a further dimension of meaning.

Michel Henry contends that our vital condition has two characteristics. On the one hand, what we bring forth is the outcome of an “I can,” that is, subjective potentialities that we take possession of through inward self-affection in a self-attestation that is intrinsic to life. On the other hand, a lack of power is intrinsic to each one of these potentialities because I am given to myself without being the origin of such givenness. This means that the powers of the “I can” are nothing but the manifestation of an originary and gratuitous gift. Individual life depends on Absolute Life as a source and ground whose past extends beyond memory because it is not an elapsed moment but, rather, a presupposition that we cannot recall. Henry refers to “the Immemorial, the archantique that withdraws itself from our thoughts.”¹¹ Thus, the autonomy of such notions as society and history breaks down because there is no self-attestation of actual life beyond the living individual. As the condition of possibility for history, life “must be understood as metahistorical. . . , as metaphysical.”¹²

A different view on reason is also implied. In a reference to “the living reason (*la raison vivante*),” which is more fundamental than objective thought, Merleau-Ponty holds that “the vigor of reason is tied to the rebirth of a philosophical sense which, certainly, justifies the scientific expression of the world, but in its order, in its place in the whole of the human world.”¹³ In turn, Levinas holds that “reason, always led back to the search of repose, of

⁹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre nous* (Paris: Grasset, 1991), 191.

¹⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, *Les imprévus de l'histoire* (Cognac: Fata Morgana, 1994), 153.

¹¹ Michel Henry, *C'est moi la vérité* (Paris: Seuil, 1996), 190.

¹² Michel Henry, *Marx I. Une philosophie de la réalité* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 195.

¹³ Merleau-Ponty, *Signes*, 249.

appeasement, of conciliation, which imply the ultimate status or priority of the Same, withdraws from living reason.”¹⁴ Again, Henry claims that reason has its ground in life and highlights, in contrast to the *logos* of the world, an archintelligibility pertaining to the “*Logos of Life*.”¹⁵ This subject is approached by pointing to horizons that are very far away, have been ignored, and remain alien to fulfillment in a moment of synchronic time.¹⁶

3. HORIZONTALITY AND THE INTERPLAY OF DETERMINATENESS AND INDETERMINATENESS

With regard to the concentric character of philosophical problems, I would like to stress three major aspects where phenomenological research needs to be carried out further and suggest the direction in which analysis might move. An adequate discussion of these aspects should rework the laws of categorial stratification and the laws of categorial coherence in a stratum as put forward by Nicolai Hartmann.¹⁷ The new approach should be grounded not so much on a categorial analysis as on the possibilities of foundation and connection afforded by the structure of horizon-consciousness. This also implies, as we have seen, an examination of the modifications that reason undergoes as it operates in each level, keeping a nucleus of unity that revolves around the relationships between intention and fulfillment.

The first aspect corresponds to the encasement between the figures that appear within a theme. The characteristic features of the particular figures, which subjectivity, temporality, intersubjectivity, and worldliness take on as they develop through the levels of analysis, deserve careful study. Thus, as regards the scope and limits of the figures of each theme, there is a need for descriptions that would profit from Hartmann’s laws of return, variation, novelty, and distance between strata. Subjectivity is first the pole for acts and then the substrate of habitualities tied to an individual history, instinct, communitarian life, and the community of reason. Its experience of time opens up to a historical temporality that goes through several stages. Correlatively the individual world, the homeworld of family life, the more extended lifeworld of a community, and the world-in-itself worked out by theory make up a hierarchical structure. In this encasement of one-within-the-other of figures, the interplay of determinateness and indeterminateness

¹⁴ Emmanuel Levinas, *L’au-delà du verset* (Paris: Minuit, 1982), 180.

¹⁵ Michel Henry, *Phénoménologie de la vie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2003–2004), IV, 129; see also I, 56.

¹⁶ See Merleau-Ponty, *La nature*, 364, and Levinas, *Autrement qu’être*, 178, 230–31.

¹⁷ See Nicolai Hartmann, *Der Aufbau der realen Welt* (Meisenheim am Glan: Anton Hain, 1949), 412–616.

within the structure of horizontality is of paramount importance because determinableness in a lower level turns into determinateness in a higher level. In a progressive bringing-into-play, even if they cannot by themselves account for what supervenes and they do not remain unaffected, figures of the lower levels contribute their own peculiar intrinsic characters to those of the higher level, that is, preceding features are incorporated into subsequent ones without losing their validity. New figures rest on the anticipatory pre-delineation of the previous ones, encompass them in a more complex configuration, and nevertheless remain concentric with them by virtue of their foundation. Each theme evinces the unhindered continuation of a common center from one figure into another, so that horizontality turns around this focus in order to provide more or less determination. Husserl explicitly makes the point that the foundation-sequence by which we advance from instinctive roots, through life in society, to a rational community, is not a movement of sheer substitution of one figure by another: “all geneses of all strata operate together in the immanence of time, they are coexisting geneses” (*HuaM VIII*, 394).

Along with the encasement of their figures, there is also an overlapping or interpenetration of the themes because they cease to go on externally to one another as they move forward through levels that are higher in determinateness. Each figure not only rests on a ground but also has a context that permeates it and from which it cannot be cut off. As each figure represents the theme with a relative degree of determinateness, it betrays its dependence on other figures of the level. This second aspect raises the question about the central or unifying motif that provides the basis for the overlapping of figures. Here the common center is both the inheritance of a horizon of a past defined by acquisitions and the projection of a horizon of a future outlined by goals. Once again, the structure of horizontality plays a decisive role. It is because the determinateness of habitualities and ends towers over the course of history that subjectivity, temporality, intersubjectivity, and worldliness become intricately connected and can be examined in terms of Hartmann’s laws of solidarity, unity, totality, and implication of the moments of a substratum. This is Husserl’s meaning when he speaks of the articulation of the total horizon as the “subject matter of difficult structural intentional analyses” (*Hua XV*, 408).

A third major aspect is still associated with the concentric character of philosophical problems. Side by side with bringing into view the interplay of indetermination and determination, and the purposive efficacy tied to determinateness, we may delve deeper into the indeterminateness or openness of horizontality and uncover a surplus that leads to a level other than history. This excess means that we cannot consider ourselves owners of history either

because we depend on a previous natural *logos*, or because the face of the Other compels us to an unchosen responsibility, or because the source of our actions is to be found in the “I can” that is given to us as a power of creation. The central or unifying motif is now an immemorial dimension, and the triplicity of its moments show overlapping novel figures of the basic phenomenological themes. This convergence merits further consideration as well as that of modes of reason that are not weighed down by the limitations of objectivity and in which fulfillment in time plays no part.