

PhD Theses

Orsolya Horváth

The Phenomenology of 'Selbstbesinnung'

The concept of phenomenological reduction in Husserl's late philosophy

The basic aim of the dissertation is to provide a *goal-oriented reconstruction* of Edmund Husserl's late philosophy, and this goal is set by the concept of *phenomenological reduction*. This work is based on the recognition that we can distinguish a narrower and a broader meaning of phenomenological reduction. *The narrower meaning* refers to nothing more than a transition or a turn between the natural, everyday attitude (*Einstellung*) and the transcendental attitude, and in this sense it is analogous with the transcendental change of attitude (*Einstellungsänderung*) or epoché. In contrast, *the broader meaning* does not include this decisive act only, but the whole process during which a person living within an everyday attitude arrives at the threshold of change of attitude, performs the turn, is absorbed in the transcendental and after this – or rather, parallel with this – he goes on living a life on the natural ground. The dissertation focusses on this latter, broader concept of phenomenological reduction, thus referring to the journey during which the natural person performs 'Selbstbesinnung' in the most radical, transcendental sense.

In its final form, Husserlian transcendental phenomenology acts as a *scientific* philosophy whose goal is a *transformation of humanity* in Europe and based on this, that of humanity as a whole. To reach this goal, it has to direct a person's whole life. As the Husserlian concept knows of a single way of real 'Selbstbesinnung' – that of transcendental phenomenology –, it has to aid natural man through the whole troublesome road of transcendental 'Selbstbesinnung'. The dissertation takes the position that *Husserlian transcendental phenomenology is motivated right from the start by everyday experience and practice, in other words, it has epistemological and ethical determination going hand in hand.*

But what does the expression „transcendental” mean? What should be meant by the concept of transcendental attitude (*Einstellung*) and the transcendental ego? This question is not dealt with in the initial analysis of the present dissertation – instead, it *assumes* on the basis of Husserlian descriptions that there exists a transcendental ground which – as Husserl states

several times – is available for all natural humans. As the mind is the structurform of transcendental subjectivity, this is where the final answer is given to questions posed by everyday practice, and this is how this practice can undergo a gradual transformation. Based on this assumption, the analysis is like – to use the image so often used by Husserl – a *diary of a journey*. He accompanies man living in everyday naivety to a discovery of transcendental ego and further into the transcendental, then, in a certain sense, back to the natural ground.

The analysis unfolds the following scheme of 'Selbstbesinnung':

Human subjectivity		Transcendental subjectivity		Transcendental primal subjectivity (Ur-Subjektivität)
Natural reflection (naive reflection, <first> self-reflection, critical reflection)	<i>Psychological reflection</i>	Transcendental reflection I.	<i>Transcendental reflection II.</i>	<i>Transcendental reflection III.</i>
-	Psychological reduction	Transcendental reduction I.	-	Transcendental reduction II.
Natural, naive ego	Natural, psychological ego	Transcendental, constituting ego	Transcendental, ,phänomenologisierendes Ich'	Transcendental primal ego (Ur-Ich)

The two basic areas referred to above are those of natural and transcendental attitudes. The triad of 'reflection-reduction-ego' signifies that these elements are built on each other. Reflection is – as Husserl himself puts it – means that one's eyes are turned into a new direction, by which the acts of the ego hitherto invisible become visible. Reduction in the narrower sense, which in the Husserlian terminology is basically the same as epoché, or bracketing signifies the deconstruction of natural givenness that become visible through reflection. The Husserlian descriptions suggest that all reduction has to be necessarily preceded by a reflection, by which all givenness become visible that are to be invalidated by reduction. However, not all reflection is necessarily followed by reduction. The ego always denotes the aspect of self-identical man which comes to light as a result of reflection or reduction. The Husserlian wording in the course of description of the process of 'Selbstbesinnung' and the analysis of change of attitude is extremely complex and the expressions used are not always consistent. The reflections that have been italicised in the above scheme – the psychological, the second and the third transcendental reflection – do not

appear explicitly in the Husserlian descriptions, yet it seems that their inclusion in the scheme is not foreign from Husserl's intentions, as apparent from his analyses.

The dissertation intends to take account of the *difficulties of the systematisation of Husserlian analyses*. Namely, as soon as we attempt to grasp Husserlian thoughts in a scheme similar to the above, there is always the danger that we get far from Husserl's original intentions, and try to squeeze in the Husserlian thoughts in an image created by ourselves. This would result in deconstruction instead of reconstruction. The analyses try to reconstruct an aspect of Husserl's late philosophy in its entire richness and dynamism, which is not free from tensions. For this reason, it is necessary to keep in mind in connection with the current scheme that the individual acts and phases do not constitute a rigid pattern, but are the closely connected elements of a unified, many-coloured, dynamic process.

Our goal-oriented analyses directed at the reconstruction of Husserl's late philosophy, however, pose a delicate problem. Namely, the analyses are not concerned with mere reconstruction of this philosophy, but parallel with this, also *attempt to confront it with a factual experience of life and the world*. The study is not concerned with the question whether a confrontation of any philosophical tradition with facticity should form a part of the working up this tradition. At the same time, the analyses point out the very fact that without this confrontation, the discussion of philosophical tradition loses its ground. Moreover, by undertaking this task here and there, the study ventures on dangerous ground. This confrontation is, namely, entirely subjective, and ambiguous. It goes beyond the framework set by Husserl's philosophy. We can rightly pose the question: to what extent can this form part of the predetermined thematic of the analysis.

The dissertation is divided into five main chapters, which roughly correspond to the individual phases of 'Selbstbesinnung' outlined in the above scheme. Initially, the focus is on the naive everyday being – naive, that is, from a transcendental point of view –, highlighting the problem of *beginning* and *motivation*. The first chapter focusses on the question of why a person in natural attitude should venture towards the transcendental, how could he be motivated to shed his naivety and undergo a process of 'Selbstbesinnung'. The dissertation approaches this problem from the point of view of three attitude types, taking into account the central question of how the process of 'Selbstbesinnung' finds the natural man. The three types are *the everyday*, *the aesthetic* and *theoretical attitude*. An analysis of Husserl's description leads one to the conclusion that although Husserlian phenomenology lists several *possible* types of motivation, none of these proves to be so *compelling* as to lead one to shed one's natural naivety. The study points out, moreover, *the prominence of the theoretical*

attitude, and argues that in the Husserlian concept, it is only from the theoretical attitude that one can take the path towards the transcendental.

The next main section, leaving the ground of naivity for a while, and assuming that there is some compelling motivation, focusses on the transition from the natural to the transcendental. In doing this, detailed attention is given to the three principal methodological ways distinguished by Husserl-research: *the 'Cartesian', the 'ontological' and the 'psychological'*, respectively. The analysis attempts to open the way for an interpretation assuming that these methods are not mutually exclusive methodological approaches within Husserl's work, but *different aspects of a unified process of 'Selbstbesinnung'*. At the end of the investigation on the natural, Husserl's idea of man is also examined, during which the three basic Husserlian assumptions are discussed in the light of factual experience – namely, *the impulse to go beyond finiteness or ambiguity, the freedom to decide and to act and the acceptance of the assumption of the transcendental*. The discussion will bring out the fact that the two latter assumptions have an inadequate foundation. If these assumptions are necessary for the man of natural naivity to walk the path of 'Selbstbesinnung', then – as has been seen with the problem of initial motivation – the feasibility of the Husserlian objective to reform human life and society becomes questionable.

As a next step, the dissertation is concerned with the transcendental attitude. First of all, it analyses the concept of turn itself, during which man leaves the natural and enters the transcendental. These investigations attempt to support the recognition that the transcendental change of attitude is *not just an epistemological act*, which can be performed by anybody with the help of some intellectual effort, *but is a radical, all-pervading, existential turn* which raises fundamental difficulties with regard to *scientific description and execution*, precisely because of its radical character. The present study argues that Husserl himself could not grasp the precise act of turn, and this alone poses fundamental difficulties when it comes to execution.

The field of the transcendental attitude is also revealed by following the process of 'Selbstbesinnung'. At first, it examines the *split life* – as Husserl puts it – of the researcher involved in the transcendental attitude. Following this, the focus is on the transcendental reflection and *iteration* in connection with the *'phänomenologisierendes Ich'*. Finally, the final point of transcendental 'Selbstbesinnung' is realised in the form of the *transcendental primal ego (Ur-Ich)*. During the separation of these transcendental layers, an insurmountable problem is posed first of all by the *identity and mutual relationship of the transcendental egos* distinguished by Husserl. The dissertation furthermore also deals with the difficulty of critical

dialogue with the Husserlian phenomenology, which, as it argues, is the consequence of a peculiar *Husserlian shift of viewpoint*: namely, any researcher can exercise any criticism with regard to the transcendental only if he himself has already performed the turn. At the same time, the dissertation intends to show that if one has already performed this turn, then one will certainly not criticise it. The analysis of the deepest layer of the transcendental reveals that even if Husserl points out the roots of an all-pervading teleology in this layer, this still does not answer the difficult question of the beginning, what it only does is to articulate this in a new way: *How can the teleology rooted in transcendental subjectivity penetrate the natural?* The study shows that Husserl himself did not regard the question of the beginning of the process of 'Selbstbesinnung' by creating the thesis of all-pervading teleology.

The next main chapter focusses on the last and decisive point of 'Selbstbesinnung', which is the return of the researcher following the transcendental attitude to the natural and leading his life there. The present study makes it clear that the Husserlian analyses do not speak about the researcher's leaving the natural while involved with the transcendental attitude, but these two lives are led in a *parallel* way. This chapter of the dissertation focusses on the question of how this happens, and in doing this, it attempts to reveal that the life of the student involved in the transcendental attitude necessarily changes on the natural ground, but *on an opposite note* compared to what the Husserlian thoughts suggest. The concept of *the strangeness of the phenomenologist* on the natural ground is introduced, and the changed attitude to those not involved with the transcendental attitude. From this point of view, the possibility of address (Anrede), which could mean a resolution of the initial motivation, appears in an entirely different light than it is seen by Husserl. The present study, moreover, raises the possibility that in the researcher involved with the transcendental, there is a desire for *the immediacy of his previous life* as a consequence of his continued life on the natural ground. In the light of this, it becomes obvious that for the student who has once entered into the transcendental attitude, *there is no return to naivety*.

In connection with the problem of the absolute, the dissertation intends to show the place of the concept of God in the process of 'Selbstbesinnung'. This is done partly from the viewpoint of teleology as already discussed, and partly from the relationship between the natural religious attitude and the theoretical-transcendental attitude, which has also been introduced earlier. In this process, it becomes obvious that *the Husserlian concept of the absolute cannot be equated with the personal God of religions*.

The starting point of the discussion the dissertation is the assumption that the discovery of the transcendental field, that is to say, of the transcendental ego is possible.

During the analyses, prominence is given to the standpoint of everyday being, and they accompany the natural man, as it were, on the path to radical 'Selbstbesinnung'. The goal of the present study is also – while performing an obviously subjective reconstruction of the Husserlian process of reduction – to bring to light the *internal tensions* of transcendental phenomenology. The tensions stem principally from the fact that *Husserlian scientific philosophy places such demands on itself which it cannot meet*. Husserl, being a consistent thinker, did not chose the easiest solution, by renouncing – even if only partially – the demands he made with regard to his phenomenology, or by ignoring the seemingly insoluble difficulties that appeared as a result. It is precisely because of this that the process of Husserlian 'Selbstbesinnung' which – as the present study intends to clear – is the key point of transcendental phenomenology, is loaded with *insoluble paradoxes*. By following the above scheme as a guide, these tensions are revealed one by one, mostly at three points. First of all, it is at the level of natural attitude that the question of *beginning* and of *motivation* proves to be problematic, then *the execution of change of attitude* poses difficulties, which appear insoluble, and finally, at the return, in connection with the task of *address (Anrede)*. At the same time, the problem of motivation proves to be the central one, as this is posed in all phases of 'Selbstbesinnung', even if it becomes a dominant question in the naturality. At the same time, the problem of address (Anrede) is also an articulation at a different level of the initial motivation. The dissertation concludes that the above paradoxes all become subordinated to a decisive paradox – in terms of the whole of Husserlian philosophy –, and this is the understanding of phenomenology as a *scientific theory and practice*. These paradoxes are of course not resolved, only revealed. The sense of this is, moreover, in the fact that – as the present study concludes – *the Husserlian task of transcendental 'Selbstbesinnung' cannot be executed – not because of a rejection of the transcendental as a principle, but due to the internal tensions. In other words, it is not possible to reform the natural man and on a final note, society and humanity as a whole using the methods laid down by Husserl. All-pervading rationalisation and radical self-understanding in itself does not solve the questions posed by everyday practice.*