



Revista de Estudos das Origens da Filosofia Contemporânea
Journal of Studies on the Origins of Contemporary Philosophy

Geltung, vol. 3, n. 2, 2024, p. 1-34 | e70235

ISSN: 2764-0892



<https://doi.org/10.23925/2764-0892.2024.v3.n2.e70235>

ON A BLIND SPOT IN THE HUSSERLIAN READING OF DESCARTES, AND ON THE UNSEEN ULTIMATE HORIZON OF BOTH

PEDRO M. S. ALVES

Centre of Philosophy of the University of Lisbon / HPhil Group

psalves2@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

In this paper, I assess Husserl's reading of Descartes. I argue that Husserl's relationship with Descartes was a crucial element in the development of his own idea of transcendental phenomenology. I try to show that Husserl was not sensitive to the Cartesian questioning about the being of the *ego sum* and, from there, I argue that the ontological drift contained in Descartes does not give in to the Husserlian criticisms of "transcendental realism" and of being the precursor of "psychologism." I characterize this limitation of the Husserlian reading as the blind spot of his appraisal of Descartes. Next, I try to show how there is an ontological horizon that Descartes only foresees and that Husserl does not see at all, locking himself into his doctrines of the temporal self-constitution of transcendental subjectivity and the ego as "absolute fact." Finally, I argue that the horizon of being and its expression as a "there is" and not an "I am" remains irreducible to both Cartesian doubt and Husserlian *epoche*. I draw from this situation some theses about the space of a fundamental ontology above the regional ontic spheres of Husserl's system of *a priori*, eidetic knowledge.

KEYWORDS

DESCARTES. HUSSERL. SUBJECTIVISM. FUNDAMENTAL ONTOLOGY.
PHENOMENOLOGY.

RESUMO

Neste artigo, avalio a leitura de Descartes feita por Husserl. Argumento que a relação de Husserl com Descartes foi um elemento crucial no desenvolvimento de sua própria ideia de fenomenologia transcendental. Tento mostrar que Husserl não foi sensível ao questionamento cartesiano sobre o ser do *ego sum* e, a partir disso, sustento que a deriva ontológica contida em Descartes não cede às críticas husserlianas ao "realismo transcendental" e à acusação de ser o precursor do "psicologismo". Caracterizo essa limitação da leitura husserliana como o ponto cego de sua avaliação de Descartes. Em seguida, procuro demonstrar como há um horizonte ontológico que Descartes apenas antecipa e que Husserl não percebe de modo algum, fechando-se em suas doutrinas sobre a autoconstituição temporal da subjetividade transcendental e sobre o ego como "fato absoluto". Por fim, argumento que o horizonte do ser e sua expressão como um "há" e não como um "eu sou" permanecem irreduzíveis tanto à dúvida cartesiana quanto à *epoché* husserliana. Dessa situação, extraio algumas teses sobre o espaço de uma ontologia fundamental que se sobrepõe às esferas ônticas regionais do sistema husserliano de conhecimento eidético *a priori*.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

DESCARTES. HUSSERL. SUBJETIVISMO. ONTOLOGIA FUNDAMENTAL.
FENOMENOLOGIA.

1. HUSSERL'S CARTESIANISM

The Husserlian interpretation of Descartes is well known.

However, it does not have a minor or merely extrinsic significance for Husserlian phenomenology to the point that the latter would remain unchanged even if Husserl's reading of Descartes were another. As Husserl himself emphasized, Descartes' thought had a decisive impact on an already developing phenomenology and enabled it to reach the mature form of *transcendental* phenomenology.

Indeed, the important point in Husserl's reading is that Descartes is not simply an author among others that he interprets – like Plato, Locke, or Berkeley, for instance – but rather an author whose doctrine and starting point have had an intimate internal relationship with phenomenology. As Husserl put it in his famous lectures at the Sorbonne, phenomenology could be presented as “a Cartesianism of the 20th century” and therefore, Descartes as the “patriarch” (*Erzvater*) of phenomenology. This statement is not a retrospective act of identification with an author from the past but rather the recognition that such an author has deeply influenced the internal evolution of phenomenology itself.¹

Of course, there is always a way of diminishing Descartes' significance for the development of transcendental phenomenology. It consists of shifting the issue to the theme of the paths (*Wege*) to phenomenological reduction and locating Descartes as the inspirer of one and only one of them, precisely the so-called “Cartesian path.” Indeed, the Cartesian path is just one of the ways of accessing transcendental subjectivity alongside the path through the ontology

¹ Here Husserl's words at the very beginning of the first Paris Conference: „Kein Philosoph der Vergangenheit hat auf den Sinn der Phänomenologie so entscheidend gewirkt wie Frankreichs größter Denker, René Descartes. *Ihn muß sie als ihren eigentlichen Erzvater verehren. Ganz direkt, ausdrücklich sei es gesagt, hat das Studium der Cartesianischen Meditationen in die neue Gestaltung der werdenden Phänomenologie eingegriffen und ihr diejenige Sinnesform gegeben, die sie jetzt hat und die es fast gestattet, sie einen neuen Cartesianismus zu nennen, einen Cartesianismus vom 20. Jahrhundert.*” (Husserl, 1973c, p. 3, emphases added)

All translations of Latin, French, and German texts are my own.

of life world, psychology, or logic. Some authors even considered the supposed “disintegration” of the Cartesian path in Husserl’s lessons on First Philosophy as a kind of “farewell” by Husserl to Cartesianism, as Ludwig Landgrebe put it (Landgrebe, 1962; see also Boehm, 1959).

However, Descartes’ impact on Husserl is far more profound than the question of the different paths. Simply put, this impact transformed the Husserlian variant of *descriptive psychology* into *transcendental philosophy*: “The seeds of transcendental philosophy can be found historically in Descartes,”² Husserl (1996, p. 4) remarks. Indeed, the suspension of the world thesis, which opens the domain of transcendental experience, although its title of “transcendental” comes from Kant, has as its true discoverer precisely Descartes – “Kant never delved into the colossal depths of the fundamental Cartesian meditation,” Husserl wrote in the 27th paragraph of the *Crisis* book (Husserl, 1976, p. 102).³ Elsewhere, still in texts relating to such a late work as *The Crisis*, he was adamant in highlighting this deep connection. Indeed, he remarked:

The case is quite different with Kant: In his work, there is no trace of this radicalism of philosophical self-responsibility. [...] Accordingly, it is clear that a critique of Kant's principles, which is supposed to prove the lack of radicalism in his method, his Copernican revolution, according to the general style of a “teleological” historical self-reflection, contains a kind of return from Kant to, or measurement of Kant against, Descartes – *horribile dictu*, as I must add, in view of the now fashionable interpretation and contemptuous devaluation of Descartes (Husserl, 1976, p. 432; p. 437).⁴

Actually, the fundamental Cartesian consideration (the *dubitatio de omnia*) has a strong kinship with the “fundamental phenomenological consideration,” as everyone can see in *The Idea of Phenomenology*, *Five Lessons*, *Ideas I*, and, lastly,

² „Die Keime der Transzendente Philosophie finden wir historisch bei Descartes.“

³ „In die ungeheuren Tiefen der Cartesianischen Fundamentalbetrachtung hat Kant sich nie eingelassen.“

⁴ „Ganze anders liegt die Sache bei Kant: bei ihm ist von diesem Radikalismus der philosophischen Selbstverantwortung nicht zu finden. [...] Danach ist es schon klar, dass eine prinzipielle Kritik Kants, die den Mangel an Radikalismus seine Methode, seine kopernikanische Wendung erweisen soll, dem gesamten Stil einer “teleologisch”-historischen Selbstbesinnung gemäß, eine Art Rückleitung von Kant auf bzw. Messung von Kant an Descartes in sich schließt – *horribile dictu*, wie ich beifügen muss, angesichts der jetzt modisch gewordenen Interpretation und verächtlichen Abwertung des Descartes.“

in *Cartesian Meditations*.⁵ Even though the sense-description of the “world of the natural attitude,” which prepares transcendental reduction in *Ideas I* and in the course from 1910/11, stems from Avenarius’ project of a description of the “natural world concept” before any theorizing about it, as sketched in the latter’s book *Der menschliche Weltbegriff*,⁶ Husserl’s phenomenology reached the level of a transcendental philosophy through a kind of “radicalization” and “purification” of Descartes’ theoretical program and stance. In this framework, Klaus Held spoke of Husserl’s “Cartesian self-interpretation” (Held, 1981). However, I suppose that it is not just a matter of self-interpretation. On the contrary, I believe that the Cartesian impact on phenomenology led Husserl to discover the – paradoxically non-Cartesian – -transcendental realm, determined as a domain of apodictic self-experience.⁷ As a result, this double aspect – radicalizing, purifying – conducted Husserl to a complex position vis a vis Descartes in which he almost made the Cartesian program of a *prima philosophia*

⁵ Besides the central reference to Descartes’ *Meditationen* in the three books referred to, and as recorded in Schuhmann’s *Husserls-Chronik*, Descartes was present very early on in Husserl’s philosophical development. Up until the publication of *Ideas I* in 1913, the following facts in Husserl’s relationship with Descartes are recorded: in 1878, his interest in Descartes was born through Kronecker; in 1892, he attended a seminar on the *Meditationes de prima philosophia*; in 1896/97, he gave a seminar for beginners on the *Meditationes*; in 1905, he gave a lesson on the Cartesian doctrine of knowledge; in 1913/14, he gave a seminar based partly on Descartes and partly on Locke (see Schuhmann, 1977).

⁶ Husserl’s descriptive concept of what is “found in advance” (*vorgefunden*) in the analyses of the natural concept of the world also steams from Avenarius. Avenarius’ project is quite clearly presented in the opening pages of his book. For instance: „Was am Anfang meiner „geistigen“ Entwicklung war, darüber sucht die Philosophie mir vermitteltst spezieller Theorien Belehrung zu verschaffen; was aber am Anfang meines Philosophierens war, darüber kann ich selbst unmittelbare Auskunft geben. Wenn ich abziehe, was zufällige und wechselnde Einflüsse des Lebens und der Schule von aufsen vorübergehend hinzutragen, so war es das Folgende: Ich mit all meinen Gedanken und Gefühlen fand inmitten einer Umgebung. Diese Umgebung war aus mannigfaltigen Bestandteilen zusammengesetzt, welche untereinander in mannigfaltigen Verhältnissen der Abhängigkeit standen. Der Umgebung gehörten auch Mitmenschen an mit mannigfaltigen Aussagen; und was sie sagten, stand zumeist wieder in einem Abhängigkeitsverhältnis zur Umgebung.“ (Avenarius, 1905, p. 4, my emphases). For a discussion of Avenarius’ project, see Husserl’s appraisal of it in the 1910/11 course *Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie* (Husserl, 1973^a p. 122-137).

⁷ In fact, this statement is not contrary to Held’s thesis. According to him, Husserl discovered the original dimension of the manifold of modes of appearance and, by interpreting it Cartesianly, was led to the opposition between the sphere of immanence and the transcendence of the world. In my view, it was Descartes’ impact on Husserl that determined the subjectivist understanding of a more original sphere which, as I will try to show below, was both discovered and concealed by this Cartesian move.

his, while, for deepening Descartes' stance, he rejected its explicit doctrinal content.

To get to the important points of this close affinity as well as divergence, I will say that they boil down to the following:

1. The *pathos* of the beginning. Philosophy does not start with the possession of a truth known in advance or with the interpretative movement of reception of a pre-given tradition; rather, it must produce its very beginning from a methodically acquired position of lack of knowledge (*ignorantia, nescientia*) or absence of presuppositions (*Voraussetzungslosigkeit*). Therefore, its fundamental concern is cognitive: the quest for a first principle of *science*.
2. On a *gnoseological* basis, Descartes and Husserl construed the first truth as the reflective self-position of the *sum cogitans*, either as firm certainty (*certitudo inconcussa*) or as *apodictic evidence* (*apodiktische Evidenz*), which remains unshaken both in the universal doubt concerning the existence of the world and in the suspension of the natural attitude thesis.
3. However, Descartes overdetermined the *gnoseological* primacy of the *cogito* by *ontologically* questioning the being of the "*sum*." In contrast, Husserl cut this drift short through the theory of temporal self-constitution and the *Ich bin* as "absolute fact" (*absolutes Faktum*).
4. In my sense, though, Husserl overlooked that the ontological dimension is inserted as a precondition for the reflective certainty of the very "I am" and that, if it should not, as in Descartes, be developed in the form of an inquiry into the "cause" of its existence as "finite substance" (*substantia finita*), it is nevertheless unavoidable, as the ultimate horizon from which the *Ich bin* comes to the evident possession of itself. Taking the incisive words remembered by Quentin Lauer, it is as if, for reasons that Descartes did not fully understand, but even so perceived, the *cogito* would be, in its core, a *respondeo, ergo sum* (Lauer, 1959, p. 171).

5. Thus, what is deeply common between Husserl and Descartes is that, at the gnoseological level, they interpreted the first principle not as an ontological “there is” (*es gibt*), but as the self-reflected knowledge *that* “I am,” or, to put it simply, both construed the meaning of the “there is” as the evidence of my proper being, extended by Descartes to the further question of the “why” of its existence, which led him to the *substantia infinita*. In so doing, they proceeded as if the “I” did not come to itself from an original dimension of encounter expressed by a singular “there is being,” a “*il y a*,” in light of which the “I” appears to itself as an addressee and not as a subject reflectively closed in on its *cogitationes* or in its “sphere of immanence” (*Sphäre der Immanenz*, both *reell* and *intentional*). All the disagreements Husserl had with Descartes took place within this fundamental affinity.

The last two points are, respectively, what I call the “blind spot” of the Husserlian reading of Descartes and the “unseen ultimate horizon” of both. Regarding the first, if Husserl had seen it in Descartes and reinterpreted phenomenologically the demand of an ontology linked to the evidence of the “I am,” his phenomenology would perhaps have been something other than a theory of transcendental subjectivity as an “absolute,” self-contained domain of being. In what concerns the second, I am convinced that Husserl’s late analyses of the deepest stratum of subjectivity, the flowing-standing present (*strömend-stehende Gegenwart*), particularly what he names the “proto-modal present” (*urmodales Gegenwart*) or simply the *nunc stans*,⁸ provide conceptual tools, *pace* Husserl himself, for restoring the primacy of the ontological dimension and subordinating to it the reflective certainty of the “I am.” This would be

⁸ The text in which the Latin expression appears is the following one: „Ihr Grundwesen ist, sich als das *nunc stans* eines einheitlichen Strömens durch eine anonyme Kontinuität von intentionalen Modifikationen eines Urmodus zu konstituieren, die ihrerseits nicht starrseiende, sondern selbst strömende ist. In diesem Strömen ist ein stehendes und bleibendes Ur-Jetzt als starre Form für einen durchströmenden Gehalt konstituiert und als Urquellpunkt aller konstituierten Modifikationen.“ (Husserl, 2006, p. 8). As it is well known, Klaus Held uses profusely the pair of expressions *nunc stans*, *nunc fluens* for the standing and the flowing now in his book on Husserl’s doctrine of the *lebendige Gegenwart* (see Held, 1966, *passim*).

tantamount to overcoming *subjectivism*, already unwittingly done by Descartes in an unacceptable metaphysical way as a query for the “cause” of its existence, and opening the door to an effective, strictly phenomenological, *fundamental ontology*.

I will develop these two points in what follows.

2. ON THE BLIND SPOT OF HUSSERL’S ASSESSMENT OF DESCARTES

For Husserl, Descartes “[...] quietly touches the wonder of all wonders, consciousness” (Husserl, 1956, p. 337).⁹ Yet, touching a wonder is only the beginning of a scientific endeavor to account for it fully. However, Husserl maintains that Descartes moved around this wonder in such a manner that eventually made him miss the opportunity to develop a science of transcendental subjectivity, falling into “objectivism” and the concepts and problems of the old dogmatic and metaphysical tradition. Accordingly, for Husserl, Descartes is the “Christopher Columbus” of transcendental philosophy, so to speak: He discovered a new continent, believing that he had reached already-known lands by another sea.¹⁰

As a result, Descartes, the incipient discoverer of “transcendental subjectivism,” ended up being, in effect, the father of “transcendental realism” and, what was even worse, also the father of “psychologism,” which took shape in English empiricism, starting with Locke, by the conversion of the Cartesian *ego* into the program of an “analysis of the human mind.” As Husserl remarks,

⁹ „Er [Descartes] rührt ganz leise an das Wunder aller Wunder, das Bewußtsein.“

¹⁰ „Es ging Descartes wie Columbus, der den neuen Kontinent entdeckte, aber davon nichts wußte und bloß einen neuen Seeweg nach dem alten Indien entdeckt zu haben meinte.“ (Husserl, 1956, p. 63-64). The metaphor of a Moses of transcendental philosophy is also well-suited. Husserl writes in another place, „Descartes ist vor der von ihm eröffneten Pforte der transzendentalen Philosophie, der allein wahrhaft radikalen Philosophie, stehen geblieben; den Gang in das nie betretene aber sehr wohl zu betretende „Reich der Mütter“ hat er nicht angetreten. Sein philosophischer Radikalismus versagte.“ (Husserl, 1956, p. 73) The reference to a *Reich der Mütter* is probably an allusion to a well-known scene of the Second Part of Goethe’s *Faust*.

He is the forefather of psychologism, which permeates the entire modern transcendental philosophy and which it was never able to overcome in principle; it is already there through the fateful turn from *ego* to *mens*, which, with the absurd metaphysical dualism, made Lockean epistemology possible in the first place. On the other hand, he is also the father of all genuine transcendental philosophy, in so far as the demand for a return of all objectivity and all science determining it in the logical forms of theory to the cognizing subjectivity was from now on felt and had to be felt as a necessity, however much all attempts to fulfill it in scientifically compelling clarity and consistency failed (Husserl, 1956, p. 338).¹¹

This is the very core of the Husserlian reading of Descartes, which can be summarized in the following three points:

1. The *dubitatio de omnia* entails a methodical procedure of inhibition or suspension of all beliefs (*assensionis cohibere*), which is the Cartesian form of the phenomenological *epoche*: “The method of the *epoche* [is] the Cartesian method *purified*.” (Husserl, 1976, p. 409).¹²
2. The second meditation inaugurates the celebrated “return” to the pure ego, which would be the place to develop a science of the constitution of all objectivity in the transcendental subjectivity’s performances.
3. However, with his interpretation of the ego as *substantia cogitans*, the third meditation conceals the auspicious path the first and second meditations have opened.

This last point is summarized in the starting paragraphs of the *Cartesian Meditations*, where Husserl writes that,

Unfortunately, this is how it is with Descartes, with the inconspicuous but fateful turn that makes the *ego* into the *substantia cogitans*, into the separated human *mens sive animus*, and into the starting point for inferences

¹¹ „Er ist der Urvater des Psychologismus, der die ganze neuzeitliche Transzendentalphilosophie durchsetzt und den sie nie im Prinzip zu überwinden vermochte; er ist es schon durch die verhängnisvolle Wendung vom *ego* zur *mens*, der, mit dem widersinnigen metaphysischen Dualismus in eins, die Locke’sche Erkenntnistheorie erst möglich gemacht hat. Andererseits ist er doch auch der Vater aller echten Transzendentalphilosophie, insofern als die Forderung einer Rückbeziehung aller Objektivität und aller sie in den logischen Formen der Theorie bestimmenden Wissenschaft auf die erkennende Subjektivität von nun ab als eine Notwendigkeit empfunden wurde und empfunden werden mußte, wie sehr auch alle Versuche, sie in wissenschaftlich zwingender Klarheit und Widerspruchslosigkeit zu erfüllen, fehl-schlagen.“

¹² „Die Methode der Epoche [ist] der *gereinigten* Cartesianischen Methode“

according to the principle of causality, in short, the turn that made him the father of the (as not yet visible here) absurd transcendental realism. All this remains far from us if we remain faithful to the radicalism of self-reflection and thus to the principle of pure intuition or evidence, i.e., if we accept nothing here as what we have given on the field of the *ego cogito* that has been opened up to us by the ἐποχή in a real and immediately direct way, i.e., if we do not express anything that we do not see ourselves. (Husserl, 1973c, p. 63-64)¹³

Thus, according to Husserl, it all boils down to Descartes' supposedly faulty interpretation of the *sum*, which introduces determinations constructed by inference and not given in authentic self-evidence. In a nutshell, the two paths open to Descartes were either fidelity to the realm of transcendental experience, in strict respect to the originally giving *Evidenz*, as the ultimate source of all self-knowledge and of the world, or, on the other hand, the reifying interpretation of the *ego cogito*, its determination as substance or mind, paving the way for psychological objectivism, treating it as a thing in the world in a network of causal connections with realities external to it. However, this diagnostic only becomes obvious in the framework of a retroactive, ultimately anachronistic projection of Husserl's actuality – namely, his position in the *Psychologismusstreit* – to Descartes' inquiry and train of thought.

Indeed, what is there in the Cartesian way of determining the *sum* of the ego? What are the hot-pressing questions in the light of which the inquiry is developed?

After the certainty of the *ego sum*, *ego existo* was obtained at the very beginning of the second meditation, two successive questions directed the inquiry. The first asked: *What* am I, I, myself, who knows that I am? The second, however, went a step further and inquired: *Why* am I, or *from whom* do I exist?

¹³ „Leider geht es so bei Descartes, mit der unscheinbaren, aber verhängnisvollen Wendung, die das *ego* zur *substantia cogitans*, zur abgetrennten menschlichen *mens sive animus* macht und zum Ausgangsglied für Schlüsse nach dem Kausalprinzip, kurzum der Wendung, durch die er zum Vater des (wie hier noch nicht sichtlich werden kann) widersinnigen transzendentalen Realismus geworden ist. All das bleibt uns fern, wenn wir dem Radikalismus der Selbstbesinnung und somit dem Prinzip reiner Intuition oder Evidenz getreu bleiben, also hier nichts gelten lassen, als was wir auf dem uns durch die ἐποχή eröffneten Felde des *ego cogito* wirklich und zunächst ganz unmittelbar gegeben haben, also nichts zur Aussage bringen, was wir nicht selbst sehen.“

These are the questions about the *quid* and the *a quo* of the *sum*. In Descartes' own words: "*Sed quid igitur sum?*" ("But what then am I?"; Descartes, 1904, p. 28), and then "*Nempe a quo essem?*" ("Namely, from whom am I?"; Descartes, 1904, p. 48).

The second meditation gave a minimalist answer to the first query without any ontological commitment. It simply said: I am a thinking "thing" or "entity" (*res*), or I am "something" (*aliquid*) who thinks. However, this answer was clearly insufficient. It lived in the dark *what kind of "thing"* the ego was. In effect, the assertion of the existence of a *cogitatio* is simply the position of a punctual existence that lasts as long as that *cogitatio* lasts: "Here I find: *cogitatio* is. [...] But how long? Namely, as long as I think; for perhaps it could also happen that, if I were to cease from all *cogitatione*, I might also cease to be" (Descartes, 1904, p. 27).¹⁴

However, according to Descartes, the *cogitatio* entails more than itself. Indeed, it involves the existence of a simultaneous *consciousness* of the *cogitare*. This consciousness is not a *cogito me cogitare*, i.e., something like an *I think my thinking*, or a co-representing or "introducing" (*mitvorstellen*) of the I in each representation, as Heidegger interpretatively attributed it to Descartes (Heidegger, 1997, p. 153). Instead, in Descartes' own words, it is characterized as follows: "By the name *cogitationis*, I encompass everything that is within us in such a way that *we are immediately conscious of it*" (Descartes, 1904, p. 160, my emphasis).¹⁵ Being conscious is neither a second act of thinking about the first *cogitatio* (a *cogito de cogitationibus*, i.e., some reflective intentionality, in the Husserlian jargon) nor a co-presentation of the I in each *cogitatio*. Rather, it is a consciousness of the very existence not only of the actual, punctual *cogitatio*, along with its stretching over a time span (*duratio*), but also that the *cogitatio* is *mine*. What is, thus, the "I," insofar as it differs from the *cogitatio* as the one to

¹⁴ "Hic invenio: cogitatio est. [...] Quandiu autem? Nempe quandiu cogito; nam forte etiam fieri posset, si cessarem ab omni cogitatione, ut illico totus esse definirem."

¹⁵ "*Cogitationis* nomine complector illud omne quod sic in nobis est, ut ejus immediate conscii simus."

which it “belongs”? Drawing on the analysis of the piece of wax at the end of the second meditation and applying it to the case of the thinking “thing,” it is the consciousness of *remaining* (*remanere*) the same along the time-flow of the *cogitationes*. While these latter only exist *in* the subject, the “I,” as the expression of a consciousness of *remanere* through the changeable *modi* in time (the *cogitationes*), is that thing which, by itself, is immediately *able* to exist if it truly exists. The classic name chosen by Descartes for this is precisely “substance.” Hence, the third meditation goes beyond the ontological indigence of the second and expressly states: “*Me esse substantiam,*” “*Ego autem substantia [sum],*” “*Substantia cui inest immediate cogitatio vocatur Mens*” (Descartes, 1904, p. 44-45; p. 161). Far from simply reifying the ego as a *mens sive animus sive intellectus*, as Husserl claims, the Cartesian determination of the ego's “substantiality” is deeper than that: It highlights the temporal form of its existence by the *consciousness of a persistence* along the *cogitationes*’ stream.

So characterized as what remains the same (*remanere*) under the variation of its mutable “modes,” and, thus, as the capability to exist in itself and not in another,¹⁶ if it is truly the case that it exists, the issue of the temporal-substantial being of the ego clashes head-on with two more profound issues. Firstly, where does this power to persist over time come from? Secondly, why does a thinking substance exist at all instead of nothing? These second-order questions concern the “why,” the “reason,” or “sense” of the ego’s existence. As Descartes simply puts it, “*A quo essem?*” – “*From whom am I?*” In taking this step and raising the *a quo* query, Descartes moves from the first, classical, Aristotelian concept of “substance” exposed in the *Categories* – being *in* itself and not in another¹⁷ – which was used for answering the question of the *quid*, to his most proper concept of substance: Existing *from* one’s power (*vis*) and not from another’s:

¹⁶ “[...] *cùm cogito [...] esse substantiam, [cogito] esse rem quae per se apta est existere.*” (Descartes, 1904, p. 44)

¹⁷ “Substance in the truest and strictest, the primary sense of that term, is that which is neither asserted of nor can be found in a subject. We take as examples a particular man or a horse.” (Aristotle, 1962, p. 18; *Categories*, V, 2a 11)

“By substance, we can understand nothing else than a thing which exists in such a way that it needs no other thing to exist” (Descartes, 1905, p. 24)¹⁸

As is well known, this is one of the occasions on which Descartes attempts to prove the existence of God. This falls entirely under Husserl's criticism: It is a question of treating the ego as a thing in the world in order to, based on it and through a chain of inferences, conclude its dependency on an “infinite substance.” In this precise place in his *Meditationes*, however, Descartes escapes this criticism for two main reasons. Firstly, it makes perfect sense, even from a transcendental stance, to ask Cartesianily why I exist or, phenomenologically, why there is such a thing as transcendental life. The question is directed at the *factum* of my self-given existence, no matter whether it is raised on a mundane or transcendental level. Secondly, in this passage, Descartes does not proceed argumentatively but rather through an immanent analysis of what is given in the ego's self-consciousness, contrary to Husserl's criticism in the *Cartesian Meditations* I quoted earlier. In a good phenomenological discipline, this is a piece of true *inspectio sui*.

Indeed, exploring the sense of his existence, Descartes asks: can I emerge out of nothing, *ex nihilo emergere*? (Descartes, 1904, p. 48). Further, can the fact that I exist now be the reason for my future (and past, I might add) existence? And even if I had always existed as a temporal flow of *cogitationes* (or lived-experiences, *Erlebnisse*), would there be no room to ask why I, as a matter of fact, always existed?

Answering these questions, the crucial passage goes like this:

Therefore, *I must now ask myself* whether I have any power [*vis*] by which I can make myself what I already am, and also what I will be a little later: for since I am nothing else than a thinking thing, or at least since I am now dealing precisely with that part of myself which is a thinking thing, if any such power were in me, *I would undoubtedly be conscious of it*; but I also experience [*experior*] that there is none, and from this very fact, I know most

¹⁸ “Per substantiam nihil aliud intelligere possumus, quàm rem quae ita existit, ut nullâ aliâ re indigeat ad existendum.”

*clearly [evidentissime] that I depend on some being different from myself (Descartes, 1904, p. 48, my emphases).*¹⁹

Being an explanation of the sense of his existence, perhaps it would be better to write in the last sentence *agnosco* (I realize, acknowledge) instead of *cognosco* (I know). Certainly, Descartes is looking for a cause for his existence here, determining the *sum* as *substantia finita*, i.e., as a thing that cannot exist by its power, an inquiry that goes beyond transcendental philosophy and should, therefore, be ruled out. However, the fundamental issue remains alive. It is about the *sense* of the *facticity* of the “I am.” It is also about the internal sense of the fact that this subjectivity appears to itself in the form of a temporal flow. These facts do not require a “cause” in the Cartesian manner. Instead, on a transcendental level, they require an *explanation of their meaning*. The self-explanation of the transcendental ego's way of being (*Seinsweise*) must reach this extreme point to be radical. Only this way will it get to the bottom of the “enigma” (*Rätsel*) or wonder of all wonders (*Wunder aller Wunder*), as Husserl put it about Descartes’ great discovery: *Consciousness*, now both in its constitutive performances, in the temporal form of its being and, most of all, in the lack of a back-reference to its very origin, which is one of the deepest issues contained in the concept of “facticity.”

Everyone familiar with Husserlian phenomenology would say something like the following: The Cartesian question is still naive because it places subjectivity *in* objective time instead of considering it as constitutive of its internal time and, from there, worldly time, too. Indeed, Husserl's magnificent analysis of the internal consciousness of time shows how consciousness constitutes the objective positions of immanent temporality based on the modification of the original impression into retention and retention of retention (the *Soeben-Gewesene*). From this, a linear time and the

¹⁹ “Itaque *debeo nunc interrogare me ipsum, an habeam aliquam vim per quam possim effcere ut ego ille qui jam sum, paulo post etiam sim futurus: nam cum nihil aliud sim quam res cogitans, vel saltem cum de ea tantum mei parte praecise nunc agam quae est res cogitans, si quae talis vis in me esset, ejus procul dubio conscius essem; sed et nullam esse experior, et ex hoc ipso evidentissime cognosco me ab aliquo ente a me diverso pendere.*”

temporal fixed location of the *Erlebnisse* emerge. It is the fluxional way in which consciousness appears to itself. In a sense, this is almost self-construction. Husserl himself ends up confessing it in a passage from the C-Manuscripts. He writes, "The proto-phenomenon of flow is the phenomenon of all phenomena," then he states, "The proto-modification [constitutive of the flow] is, in absolute terms, in no time, which firstly arises from it," for then concluding in Manuscript 9 that "The constituting [of immanent temporal data by the proto-modification] is, in a sense, a *building of oneself*." (Husserl, 2008, p. 1; p. 12; p. 29, my emphasis)²⁰

In this context, the audacious direction of Husserl's analysis seems to unravel the enigma underlying the Cartesian interrogation. It is not a question of a *continua creatio* of the "I" in time but of a subjective life that constitutes itself (or "builds" itself) as temporal by the processes the late Husserl names *Urstrom*, *Zeitigung*, and *Ontifikation*. Thus, about the "I am," it is not a question of the apprehension of a being that already existed beforehand but of describing the very temporal genesis of this being. Such a life would bring everything out of itself, and quite rightly, as Husserl in *Ideas I* had already done, it could claim for itself the Cartesian characterization of the infinite substance: "*nulla 're' indigeat ad existendum*." (Husserl, 1976, p. 104)²¹

However, a deep issue remains. All subjective life takes place in a standing still "now," which Husserl refers to in various ways, such as "proto-modal present" (*Urmodale Gegenwart* or *nunc stans*). Yet, in it, there is a proto-modification (*Urwandlung*) that brings about an impression and retention of that impression in a "just now past," i.e., the transitory now and the passage of time. What is, thus, the root of the unity between the *nunc stans* and the *nunc fluens*? This is a limit question for phenomenology. Husserl treats this

²⁰ „Das „Urphänomen“ des Strömens ist das Phänomen aller Phänomene.“ „Die Urwandlung ist, absolut gesprochen, in keiner Zeit, die allererst in ihr entspringt.“ „Das Konstituieren ist gewissermaßen ein *Sich-selbst-Aufbauen*.“

²¹ „Das immanente Sein ist also zweifellos in dem Sinne absolutes Sein, daß es prinzipiell *nulla "re" indiget ad existendum*.“ (Husserl, 1976, p. 104)

modification, which gives rise to fluency, as the fundamental passivity of subjective life. Now, passivity requires a *being-affected* of the “I.” What affects here, though? What “moves” the temporalizing process that constitutes internal time and then the time of the world? Husserl sometimes alludes to a pulse of life (*Puls des Lebens*).²² Does not this go in the opposite direction to the idea of an original passivity at the ultimate basis of temporalization? Here, phenomenology enters a shadow zone. Ontological questions concerning the I’s mode of being, the beginning and end of its temporal, awaked life, would once again be relevant, questions that go beyond the path of the natural attitude to transcendental subjectivity through the *epoche* and, thus, beyond the purely epistemic reasons for presenting it as an “absolute.”

Against this backdrop, where something as Cartesian-rooted but no longer Cartesian concept of *finitude* is implied, it does not come as a surprise to see Husserl asking questions like the following:

Implicit in this order is the universal reality – but also the universal of possibilities; implicit is the structure that makes possible, passing through all conceivable possibilities (conceivability is entailment), and *implicit is facticity itself in the facticity of my streaming monadic present*. Does my sleep also entail, in my now waking streaming existence, *my earlier unawakeness of being and my birth, as well as my death, as the future of the waking future?* (Husserl, 2008, p. 22).²³

The most profound issue concerning the Cartesian *a quo*, however, concerns the sense of the ego’s facticity. If I exist as a fact, my existence is a temporal self-constitution and a self-appearance in immanent time. However, that does not answer the ultimate Cartesian question – why do I exist, or from

²² V.g., „Aber was für mich ist, ist als Einheit im urphänomenalen Strom meines fungierenden Lebens; und jeden Puls dieses Lebens, sowie ich diesen als seiend im „Gegenüber“ habe (darauf gerichtet bin), finde ich selbst wieder als Einheit, als im Strömen Verharrendes und verharrend, während seine Erscheinungsweisen, seine subjektiven Modi, in denen es sich mir darstellt, bzw. erscheint, sich abwandeln.“ (Husserl, 2008, p. 3)

²³ „Impliziert ist in dieser Ordnung die universale Wirklichkeit – aber auch das Universale der Möglichkeiten, impliziert ist die Struktur, die möglich macht, durch alle erdenklichen Möglichkeiten (Erdenklichkeit ist Implikation) hindurchgeht, und *impliziert ist die Faktizität selbst in der Faktizität meiner strömenden monadischen Gegenwart*. Impliziert auch mein Schlaf, in meinem jetzt wachen strömenden Sein *meine frühere Unwachheit des Seins und meine Geburt, wie als Zukunft der wachen Zukunft meinen Tod?*“

“where” do I come from? In straightforward words, *why* do I exist instead of nothing? There is no necessity for it. On the other hand, it does not match the opposite concept of contingency. At this extreme point, Husserl’s answer does not clarify the internal sense of the I’s being but only describes the enigma around that “absolute fact,” as he names it in a text from 1934:

The absolute itself is this universal, primordial present in which all time and world “lie” in every sense. [...] “Absolute fact” – the word fact [*Faktum*] is used in the inverted sense here, as is “state of affairs” [*Tatsache*]. There is no doer here. It is just the absolute, which cannot be described as “necessary” either, which is the underlying basis of all possibilities, all relativities, all conditionalities, giving them meaning and being. [...] This absolute carries within itself [...] the absolute as “unreason,” as system of reasonless absolute being, without which the rational “is impossible” (Husserl, 1973b, p. 668-669).²⁴

“Absolute fact” – neither necessary nor contingent, without author or doer. Just something beyond which the regressive question (*Rückfrage*) can no longer go back. The I stand as a fact before itself because it lacks a back reference to its “origin,” as Kant has also recognized, and *pace* Fichte’s speculative construction of a self-position by the *Tathandlung*.

Though, a fact is recognizable within a specific horizon. For instance, a positive fact is verifiable within the horizon of empirical experience. On which horizon does the “I am” appear as a fact? Descartes had detected it in the onto-theological horizon of metaphysics. It was a question of returning from his finite existence to the creative power of the infinite substance. The “fact” of the “*sum*” could be recognized precisely on this horizon. Here, Descartes’ lesson was that the “I am” contains a reference to a higher entity that gives it both being and meaning. However, this horizon does not have to be metaphysically determined as a hidden relationship of causal dependence between “sub-

²⁴ „Das Absolute selbst ist diese universale, urtümliche Gegenwart, in ihr „liegt“ alle Zeit und Welt in jedem Sinn. [...] „Absolutes Faktum“ – das Wort Faktum ist seinem Sinn nach verkehrt hier angewendet, ebenso „Tatsache“, hier ist kein Täter. Es ist eben das Absolute, das auch nicht als „notwendig“ bezeichnet werden kann, das allen Möglichkeiten, allen Relativitäten, alle Bedingtheiten zugrunde liegend, ihnen Sinn und Sein gebend ist. [...] Dieses Absolute trägt in sich [...] das Absolute als „Unvernunft“, als System des vernunftlosen absoluten Seins, ohne das Vernünftige „unmöglich ist“.“

stances.” If one erases the metaphysical concepts of creative causality and dependence between finite and infinite substances, the Cartesian hidden but deep lesson appears in a new light: The fact “*I am*” contains, at its root, the sense of a forward reference to a transcending “otherness;” This otherness is not something from which the I is “dependent,” but instead it is the very horizon from which it can recognize itself as something that exists. In a nutshell, it is against *this ultimate and transcendent horizon* that the “I” can apprehend itself *as a being* and, further, as a being whose *sense* is eccentrically referred to it.

Husserl did not see this ontological drift at the very root of the *ego sum*. Let me call it the “eccentricity” of the *I am*. Instead, he dismissed it as Descartes's “falling” into argumentative inferences that “misrepresented” his “great discovery” of transcendental subjectivity. As a result, he was trapped in the ego of the living present (together with the “all of the monads” – *Monadenall*) as a base without a base, an “unreason” that “lies behind” the rational and makes it possible. The word “fact” and its construing as “absolute” left, thus, unanswered the question about the very sense of the *sum*. This is the *blind spot* of his reading of Descartes. Without it, perhaps his phenomenology would take a third way between the theory of transcendental subjectivity and Heidegger's hermeneutics of finite existence.

3. ON THE (ALMOST) UNSEEN ULTIMATE HORIZON OF DESCARTES AND HUSSERL

What if, as I suggested right now, stating “I am” as a “fact” presupposed a *horizon of meaning* against which the conceptualization of this self-evidence would be possible? In that case, the opening of the latter would be the first givenness, and the ego, if it says “I” to itself, would already say it within that encompassing horizon of sense. This horizon would always be *for* the ego, of course. However, it would be the original opening of a dimension of encounter, within which the ego would come to itself not as the first certainty closed in on

itself but instead recognizing that this horizon of sense is *for himself* (*für mich*), without being “*from himself*” (*von mir aus*), i.e., as a product of its constitutive activity.

What I am suggesting can be expressed in a simple but long sentence: The ego cannot conceptualize the pre-reflective, immediate feeling of its existence and state *that* “I am” without previous understanding of what it means “to be;” this latter understanding is expressed in the sentence “there is Being,” and this “there is,” taken in its priority, transcends the ego and allows it to recognize itself as *one being*: not as *the* Being, which is not a thing at all, but as *one entity* given in the light of that first patency of being.

What is this horizon of sense, then? To put it in Parmenides's inaugural words, it is the *difference* between τὸ ὄν, being, and its opposite, τὸ μὴ ὄν, not-being, where the latter is a path forever closed to thinking. Thinking is to come in the realm of being, which, in Husserl's tardive words, would be tantamount to opposing awake life (*waches Leben*) and the undifferentiated “night” of dull life (*dumpfes Leben*), where nothing is for the ego, and nothing happens in the ego. Now, in my sense, being does not yet refer to the several entities, τὰ ὄντα, that can be encountered in its light, *maxime*, to the “supreme” entity (God), or the “first” entity that can be posited in the “order of knowledge” (the “I”). Rather, it designates what can metaphorically be called the “light” through which beings can be found and recognized as such. Indeed, without this patency of a primal “there is,” the ego would stay “in the dark” and could never *catch itself* as an entity, i.e., as *some existing thing*, namely, the “first” thing given in the realm of *knowledge*. Therefore, this horizon of meaning is not a knowledge of *something*; it cannot be represented (*vorgestellt*) as an object but only described in its sense content – here is the place of a *fundamental ontology*, above the system of formal and regional ontologies. Indeed, it is based on it that all representation and knowledge of the *entia* becomes possible, even the eidetic system of the “ontic” formal and material a priori, precisely *sub ratione essendi*.

As surprising as it may seem, Descartes had a glimpse of this ultimate horizon in his *Meditationes*. It was dressed in metaphysical language and was, therefore, directed to the relationship between the ego, as *substantia finita*, and God, as *infinita substantia*. The important point here, however, is that Descartes subordinates the gnoseological primacy of the ego to an ontological primacy whose content he can only express through his metaphysical concepts. Nonetheless, his thesis leaves no room for doubt: The perception of the “infinite,” i.e., of the unconditioned actuality of Being (which must not be thought of as an *ens*, as he did), *precedes* the perception of oneself, and the latter only occurs within the horizon of the former. He writes:

Nor should I think that I do not perceive the infinite through a true idea but only through the negation of the finite, as I perceive rest and darkness through the negation of motion and light; for on the contrary, I clearly understand that there is more reality in an infinite substance than in a finite one, and consequently that *in a certain way the perception of the infinite precedes that of the finite, that is, of God, than of myself*. For, by what reason would I understand that I doubt, that I desire, that is, that I lack something, and that I am not altogether perfect, if there were no idea in me of a more perfect being, by comparison with which I would recognize my defects? (Descartes: 1904, p. 45-46, my emphasis).²⁵

The same doctrine is repeated in a letter to an unknown addressee:

Even by dwelling long enough on this meditation, one gradually acquires a very clear, and if I may so speak, intuitive knowledge of intellectual nature in general, *the idea of which, being considered without limitation, is that which represents God to us, and limited is that of an angel or a human soul* (Descartes, 1897, p. 353, my emphasis).²⁶

²⁵ “Nec putare debeo me non percipere infinitum per veram ideam, sed tantum per negationem finiti, ut percipio quietem, et tenebras per negationem motus, et lucis; nam contra manifeste intelligo plus realitatis esse in substantia infinita, quam in finita, *ac proinde priorem quodammodo in me esse perceptionem infiniti quam finiti, hoc est Dei, quam mei ipsius*: qua enim ratione intelligerem me dubitare, me cupere, hoc est aliquid mihi deesse, et me non esse omnino perfectum, si nulla idea entis perfectioris in me esset, ex cujus comparatione defectus meos agnoscerem?”

²⁶ « Mefme en s'areftant affez longtems fur cette méditation, on acquiert peu à peu vne connoiffance tres-claire, & fi i'ofe ainfi parler intuitiue, de la | nature intellectuelle en gênerai, l'idée de laquelle, eftant confiderée fans limitation, eft celle qui nous reprefente Dieu, & limitée, eft celle d'un ange ou d'une ame humaine. »

For being clearly stated in a letter to Clerselier, where Descartes densifies the principle of *being* (*esse*, not yet of an *ens*, even though Descartes superposes one on the other) *a contratio sensu* of what he said elsewhere (also to Clerselier²⁷) about the sterility of the “*notions communes*” as principles of knowledge:

Now I say that the notion I have of the infinite is in me as well as that of the finite, for the reason that, from this alone, *when I conceive of being or what is, without thinking whether it is finite or infinite, it is the infinite being that I conceive*; but, in order for me to be able to conceive of a finite being, *I must subtract something from this general notion of being, which must therefore precede* (Descartes, 1903, p. 356, my emphases).²⁸

Here is the place where there is an actual parting of the ways. We already know Husserl's reasons: Descartes' “wavering” in the third meditation made him the “father” of both psychologism and transcendental realism. Thought, for having so hastily turned his back on Descartes' move, Husserl lost the last horizon he had envisioned in his doctrine of the precedence of the common notion of “being as such,” or *simpliciter*, over the ego. Thus, the only path left to him was a kind of “archaeological” dig of the multiple layers of the “I am.” This movement led him from the phenomenological-transcendental reduction, where the ego appears for itself already as a temporal flow of *Erlebnis*, to a “radicalized reduction” to the *living-streaming present*, which aims to capture the very core of adequacy and apodicticity of the *ego sum*.

Indeed, as Husserl pointed out, “No temporal being is cognizable in apodicticity” (Husserl, 1996, p. 398).²⁹ Consequently, the “first absolute” obtained by the *epoche*, as a life stream, is not the last because it is already the

²⁷ « L'adioute feulement que le mot de principe se peut prendre en diuers sens, & que c'est autre chose de chercher vne notion commune, qui soit si claire & si générale qu'elle puisse servir de principe pour prouver l'existence de tous les Etres, les *Entia*, qu'on connoitra par après ; & autre chose de chercher vn Etre, l'existence duquel nous soit plus connue que celle d'aucuns autres, en sorte qu'elle nous puisse servir de principe pour les connoître. » (Descartes, 1904, p. 444)

²⁸ « Or ie dis que la notion que i'ay de l'infini est en moy auant que celle du fini, pource que, de cela seul que ie conçois l'etre ou ce qui est, sans penser s'il est fini ou infini, c'est l'etre infini que ie conçois; mais, afin que ie puisse concevoir vn etre fini, il faut que ie retranche quelque chose de cette notion générale de l'etre, laquelle par consequent doit précéder. »

²⁹ „Kein zeitliches Sein ist in Apodiktizität erkennbar.“

result of a (self-)constitutive performance. This doctrine was exposed as early as in *Ideas I*, where he wrote that,

The transcendental “absolute” that we have prepared for ourselves through the reductions [*viz.*, eidetic and phenomenological] is, in truth, not the last; it is something that constitutes itself in a certain deep and altogether peculiar sense and has its original source in a last and truly Absolute (Husserl, 1976, p. 198).³⁰

Husserl tentatively returned to this issue in the late 1920s and early 1930s, stressing the necessity of a second, radicalized phenomenological reduction over and above the first one, which had uncovered the non-natural realm of transcendental subjectivity as a sphere of “individual” being. He states:

[...] I do not have to conclude the phenomenological reduction by bracketing the world and therein my real spatiotemporal human being in the world [...]. Still, rather, reflecting on myself as a transcendental I and transcendental performance, and thus reflecting on my transcendental life, *I have to practice transcendental reduction on myself*, namely bracketing all my naively imposed apperceptions, which are themselves already founded accomplishments (*the naively acquired transcendental I must itself be subjected to a transcendental reduction again*). However, the universal life of consciousness or consciousness-I, which, through a transcendental-immanent time, extends as a “stream of consciousness,” *is a founded intentional accomplishment* (Ms. C 2I, p. 11, *apud* Held, 1966, p. 66, my emphases)³¹

Now, the radical core of the ego’s life, obtained by a reduction to the living present over the first reduction to the stream of consciousness, intends to

³⁰ „Das transzendente "Absolute", das wir uns durch die Reduktionen herauspräpariert haben, ist in Wahrheit nicht das Letzte, es ist etwas, das sich selbst in einem gewissen tiefliegenden und völlig eigenartigen Sinne konstituiert und seine Urquelle in einem letzten und wahrhaft absoluten hat.“

³¹ „[...] Ich muss die phänomenologische Reduktion nicht abschließen damit, dass Ich die Welt einklammere und darin mein raumzeitliches reales Menschsein in der Welt [...], sondern, auf mich als transzendentes Ich und transzendentes Leisten, also transzendentes Leben zurückgeworfen, *muss ich an diesem selbst transzendentes Reduktion üben*, nämlich alle meine mir naiv auferlegten Apperzeptionen einklammern, die selbst schon fundierte Leistungen sind (*das naiv gewonnene transzendentes Ich muss selbst wieder einer transzendentalen Reduktion unterworfen werden*). Eine fundierte intentionale Leistung ist aber das universale Bewusstseinsleben bzw. Bewusstseins-Ich, das durch eine transzendental-immanente Zeit sich als "Bewusstseinsstrom" hindurchzieht.“

return to the I's performances before its self-constitution as something *existing* in immanent time. Husserl goes to the point of calling this "I," or *Ur-Ich*, before the process of (self-) "ontification," an "*inexistence*":

However, through renewed thematic reflection, I gain the concrete subjectivity that constitutes my existence [*Dasein*] in phenomenological reduction. *I experience myself as the subjectivity that exists in flowing life and constitutes itself in this life in the first temporality.* My immanent-temporal being in the first sense indicated is then constituted in the being of the reflectively higher layer of being, in which I, *as a living being in the flowing present and in it through the manifold modes of appearance that essentially belong to it, constitute myself in immanent-temporal being as a synthetic unity.* In other words, *I go back to my more radical subjective being, which is not superimposed in the proper sense of the word (which is removed from the spatiotemporal sphere of being) over the immanent temporal being in the first sense but carries it within itself as something that is constituted. This inexistence must be understood and seen in its peculiarity* (Husserl, 2008, p. 32-33, my emphases).³²

Indeed, the radicalized reduction attempts to fulfill completely the demand for apodicticity. Subjective life presents itself in immanent time as a stream of experiences (*Erlebnisse*). The past life is accessed by a remembering presentification (*Vergenwärtigung*), just as the future is anticipated through a presentification of expectation. Presentification is, however, a modification of the original presentation (*Gegenwärtigung*). Not only is the presentified object not given in the original form of the "here in one's person" (*leibhaft da*), which entails that the previous evidence is present in an already derived (reproduced) form, but what is given can be otherwise, because one can always deceive oneself when remembering or when creating expectations, so that the demand

³² „Aber die konkrete Subjektivität, die mein Dasein in der phänomenologischen Reduktion ausmacht, gewinne ich durch erneute thematische Reflexion. *Ich erfahre mich als die im strömenden Leben seiende und in diesem Leben mich in der ersten Zeitlichkeit konstituierende Subjektivität.* Mein immanent-zeitliches Sein im angegebenen ersten Sinne ist dann Konstituiertes in dem Sein der reflektiv höheren Seinsschicht, in derjenigen, *in welcher ich als in strömender Gegenwart Lebendes und in ihr durch die mannigfaltigen, ihr wesensmäßig zugehörigen Erscheinungsweisen mich im immanent zeitlichen Sein als synthetische Einheit konstituiere.* Ich gehe, mit anderen Worten, zurück auf mein radikaleres subjektives Sein, das nicht überlagert ist in einem eigentlichen Wortsinn (der abgenommen ist der raum-zeitlichen Seinssphäre) über das immanent-zeitliche Sein im ersten Sinn, sondern es als „Konstituiertes“ in sich trägt. Diese *Inexistenz* muss in ihrer Eigenartigkeit verstanden, gesehen werden.“

“this cannot be otherwise” (*dieses kann nicht anders sein*), that is, the demand for apodicticity, is also not fulfilled. Thus, the fulfillment of adequacy and apodicticity presupposes an *epoche* of the stream of consciousness, where they no longer occur, and a reduction to the actuality of the present of subjective life. Indeed, the consideration of the stream of consciousness as a sphere of “absolute being” remains a naive attitude within phenomenology. The stream of consciousness is already a constituted stratum whose constitutive process must be made explicit and brought to full light. Accordingly, Husserl speaks of a first transcendence of the stream of consciousness that expands in immanent time and then, through it, of the second transcendence of the objective time in the encompassing framework of a world experience (Husserl, 2002, p. 171). It is necessary, then, according to him, to reduce the two transcendences (of the world and the consciousness stream) to the irreducible point of the standing and flowing present.

This new question opened by the last movement of the *Rückfrage* entails a double sense of the “present” (*Gegenwart*). Indeed, the “radical restriction” (*radikale Einschränkung*) to the living present is not a restriction to the momentary now. The punctual now fades and modifies itself into a recent past (*Soeben*), then into a recent past of the past, and so on, while a new now always enters the point of actuality. This amounts to constituting the flow of consciousness and an order of fixed positions that go back more and more into the past. This present is a *nunc fluens*, a flowing now, through which immanent time is constituted. However, this flow is visible (i.e., constituted) because each fluent “now” is constantly retained in its receding further and further back. The now that recedes is a past now, but the retention of this past now *is not* past. On the contrary, it remains actual and is never modified into something past but into a retention of retention, and so on, which is always actual and operative. In fact, this dynamic modification of retention into retention of retention, etc., cannot be considered a retreat into the past. What retreats is not the phase of retention but the temporal object, the *Erlebnis*, constituted by this process as

something located at a fixed point of immanent time. The same is true for the now next to come. The triad retention-impression-protention is, therefore, the stationary and “immobile” structure of consciousness by which the flow of immanent time is constituted. It is precisely Husserl's living and flowing present, a present that is not modified as future or past but is the source point where an ever-new fluent now appears. It is a question here, as Husserl says, of an “*Urmodal*” present, i.e., of a present that has no temporal declension but which is always in the form of a still-standing present. Therefore, above any temporal modification, it is an always actual now, which, as stressed, Husserl sometimes calls *nunc stans*, the stationary now of the all-embracing actuality of conscious life.

In fact, it must be strongly emphasized that the life of *awake* consciousness is, from one extreme to the other, a life always unfolding in the perpetual form of the *Present*. Indeed, subjective life can intentionally refer to its past or future, but these references are always in the non-modal form of the Present. Husserl calls this the awake life (*waches Leben*), contrary to the “dull” life, where nothing happens. This Present or stationary now is both a standing point of actuality and something that (pre-temporally) flows (in the quasi-flux of retentional modification). It is to this primitive “quasi-flow” of the ever-present Now, which is both pre-temporal (*vorzeitlich*) and temporalizing (*zeitigend*), that the radicalized reduction points as the most profound dimension of subjective life. There, the ultimate core of the “I am” apodicticity should be uncovered.

However, is this primordial dimension and the ego's mode of being (*Seinsweise*) accessible by a reflective presentation? Is there a perceptive self-consciousness of the *nunc stans* and the ego in its anonymous functioning? Is there really apodictic evidence of this ultimate core of subjective life before it appears to itself as a temporal flow? That would be tantamount to catching the proto-ego (*Ur-Ich*) before self-appearance and the pre-temporalization (*Vorzeitigung*) before the constitution of immanent time. “The pre-temporalizing life is,

according to the regressive question, life in pre-time [*Vorzeit*], which in turn constitutes world and self and worldly life, the life that is in every level," Husserl (2002, p. 184) writes.³³

Though, at this critical point, the *Rückfrage* enters a true labyrinth. Reflection captures the ego as the functioning center for any experience. Yet, it catches the ego and the *Erlebnisse* as already temporalized and "ontified" in immanent time, not in its pre-being (*Vorsein*) with its corresponding proto-ego (*Ur-Ich*) and proto-temporalization (*Vorzeitigung*). Reflection entails a temporalization (*Zeitigung*) so that the living present is only grasped as temporalized (by an iterated reflection), and the ego in its primordial functioning remains, therefore, anonymous as a pre-reflexive (non-reflected) ego. This is tantamount to placing a definitive opacity at the very core of subjective life.

Husserl's first move out of the difficulty was to introduce a passive, pre-reflective temporalization into the stream of the living present so that there would be a presence of the ego to itself in a non-thematic self-consciousness. However, by 1932, he drastically revised his first orientation, affirming that true temporalization comes only from the phenomenologizing ego, that is, from the transcendental spectator who makes the thematic phenomenological reflection. He writes symptomatically in a *Zusatz*:

1932: The solution to this difficulty lies in the fact that I, the phenomenologizing transcendental I, thematizing the streaming continuous life, *thereby actively carry out an actual temporalization, identifying, by not only living the retentional transformation but by exercising it in my grasping and retaining in the sense of the I*, and from there carry out the apperceptions as being, repeatably identifiable, etc. In subsequent reflective activity, again objectifying, I see and say: To the essence of the stream of experience, which does not actually carry out any temporalization in itself and is not a corresponding performance of consciousness, belongs my constant possibility of *instilling intentionality into it*, so to speak. *But the*

³³ „Das vorzeitigende Leben ist nach der Rückfrage Leben in der Vorzeit, das seinerseits in sich Welt und Ich und weltliches Leben, in jeder Stufe seiendes Leben konstituiert.“

*actual temporalization is not that of the stream as a stream, but mine, that of the transcendental-phenomenological I (Husserl, 2002, p. 184).*³⁴

And then he concludes,

After the later clarifications, I have come to the conviction that there are not two kinds of intentionality in the actual sense and, thus, in the actual sense, no pre-temporalization. *The real temporalisation*, which is presupposed and carried out in the evident temporal givenness of the stream of experiences [Eerlebnisse], is that of the transcendently phenomenologising ego. By originally doing it, it has the evidence of experience temporality [Erlebniszeitlichkeit], and so this is apodictic truth. Temporality is in every way a performance of the I, original or acquired (Ms. C 17, p. 5, *apud* Held: 1966, p. 101, my emphases).³⁵

Definitively, the living, flowing, present, in its lived (*erlebt*) primordially, is a kind of *punctum caecum* for phenomenological reflection, and the impossibility of reflectively reaching it truly jeopardizes the very demand for apodicticity that triggered the radicalized reduction. Thus, as Held pointed out,

[...] In the freedom of its thinking, the ego makes the last attempt to leap over the shadow of its constant outflow and thus anonymous existence and, in spontaneous anticipation, to lay its hand on the anonymous and constant functioning present. However, even in this way, the enigmatic 'I function' of the all-time *nunc stans*, as which it is now encountered, only deepens the impression that the living present in its proto-passivity, pre-

³⁴ „1932: Die Lösung dieser Schwierigkeit besteht wohl darin, dass ich, das phänomenologisierende transzendente Ich, das strömende ständige Leben thematisierend, eben damit aktiv eine eigentliche Verzeitigung vollziehe, identifizierend, indem ich die retentionale Wandlung nicht nur erlebe, sondern in ihr Erfassen und Behalten im ichlichen Sinn übe und von da aus die Apperzeptionen als Seiendes, wiederholbar Identifizierbares etc. vollziehe. In nachkommender reflektiver Aktivität, wieder vergegenständlichender, sehe ich und sage ich: Zum Wesen des Erlebnisstromes, der in sich keine eigentliche Zeitigung vollzieht und keine entsprechende Bewusstseinsleistung ist, gehört meine ständige Vermöglichkeit, ihm Intentionalität sozusagen einzuflößen. Aber die wirkliche Zeitigung ist nun nicht die des Stromes als Stromes, sondern meine, des transzendental-phänomenologischen Ich.“

³⁵ „Nach den späteren Klärungen [1932] bin ich zu Überzeugung gekommen, dass es nicht zweierlei Intentionalität im eigentlichen Sinn gibt und somit in eigentlichen Sinn keine Vorzeitigung. Die wirkliche Zeitigung, die in der evidenten zeitlichen Gegebenheitsweise des Stromes der Erlebnisse vorausgesetzt und getätigt ist, ist die des transzendental-phänomenologisierenden Ich. Indem es sie ursprünglich tätigt, hat es die Evidenz der Erlebniszeitlichkeit und so ist das apodiktische Wahrheit. Zeitlichkeit ist eben in jeder Weise Ichleistung, ursprüngliche oder erworbene.“

reflexivity, and pre-temporality is a 'nothing' for the phenomenological experience (Held, 1966, p. 133).³⁶

All in all, Descartes de-centered the ego through a "precedence" of the "infinite substance." He stated: When I think of being, it is the infinite being that I think of, and I only obtain the idea of my existence by subtracting something from that first notion, which, therefore, must precede. On the other hand, Husserl dug the ego, in the supposed "absolute fact" of its existence, down to a core of apodicticity, which, however, reflection led by the regressive questioning does not seem to be able to exhibit. One cannot live and step back to "see" one's living.

So, where do we stand now between Descartes and Husserl?

4. SOME GLIMPSES BEYOND HUSSERL AND DESCARTES, BY WAY OF A CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, by trying to take a step forward, I will suggest interpreting the whole question in a radically new direction.

The main direction of analysis amounts to interpreting the living present as the ultimate way of being of the I, pre-given by a kind of pre-reflective self-consciousness, a type of "incipient refexion" (*Refexion im Ansatz*), as Gerd Brand has put it (Brand, 1955). As a philosopher who got to the bottom of the Cartesian experience of subjectivity, this is, indeed, the guiding line of Husserl's approach.

However, this opening of a perpetual and unalterable Now must have its *direct* intentionality. I mean that this intentionality of the functioning and anonymous ego must be, so to speak, "turned outwards." In a word, during

³⁶ „[...] Macht das Ich in der Freiheit seines Denkens den letzten Versuch, gleichsam über den Schatten seines ständigen Entströmes und damit anonym-Bleibens zu springen und in spontanem Vorgriff seine Hand doch noch auf die anonyme und ständige Funktionsgegenwart zu legen. Jedoch auch auf diese Weise wird das rätselhafte "Ich fungiere" allzeitlichen nunc stans, als welches es nunmehr begegnet, vertieft nur den Eindruck, dass die lebendige Gegenwart in ihrer Urpassivität, Praereflivität und Vorzeitlichkeit für die phänomenologische Erfahrung ein "Nichts" ist.“

awakened subjective life, a permanent now stands out, *not as the mode of being of that very life, but as the horizon to which it is always open*. To use Husserl's concepts, the proto-passivity constitutive of the joined pair *nunc stans et fluens* must have something as an "intentional correlate." In fact, in strict Husserlian doctrine, the *now* is not a *noetic* determination but a determination of what intentionally shows itself to consciousness. In Husserl's technical language, "now" is always the determination of the intentional "temporal object," and the corresponding noetic determination (the corresponding "acts' phase") is not the "now" itself but what he calls proto-impression (*Urimpression*). The Now, as a standing-still present (as well as the "now" that flows), will not be, then, a subjective determination of the ego's *Seinsweise*, but rather the proper mode of the givenness of its "correlates": A world of temporal objects and events (the *nunc fluens*), which appear and pass, taking place on the horizon of a standing and non-modifiable now, which is always present and never passes. In a word, the connection between *nunc fluens* and *nunc stans* would be *the very structure of the world that is experienced and not so much the mode of being of the life that experiences it*. Indeed, for the latter, the descriptive concepts are those of the net of proto-impressional, retentional, and protentional act-phases, which give rise to the most fundamental mode of being of the objects experienced and of the World as such, in whose all-encompassing horizon they can be encountered.

One has a tricky situation here. Subjective life constitutes the objects with their present, past, and future temporal determinations. Phenomenological reduction or simply intentional analysis shows the correlation with the noetic side, displaying the impressional, retentional, and protentional structure. This structure is something permanent and, because of that, the objective flowing now, in its declension into the past, takes place in the "interior," so to speak, or "within the framework" of the perpetual form of the standing, non-modifiable "now." However, when radicalized reflection objectifies this noetic structure, it is it that becomes the object of analysis and no longer the temporal objects constituted through it. Thus, since it is the object of phenomenological

reflection, this basic structure of passive consciousness is described with objective predicates, in other words, as a stationary now, in which there is a permanent succession of a punctual, flowing now. This is why the temporal predicates and the stationary now (which Husserl describes as “pre-temporal,” *vorzeitlich*, or “non-temporal,” *unzeitlich*) become determinations of consciousness itself and no longer of the world and the worldly objects that it constitutes in its most fundamental mode of being: *the relationship to time*. It is, therefore, a dislocation and a kind of *subreptionis* induced by the movement of radicalized reduction itself, in which the theme is no more the experience of temporal objects, but the very consciousness of fluency and steadiness taken now as an object.

Yet, originally, this “standing present,” as the framework of the transient present, is *not* the I. It is *for* the I, as its first and most fundamental passive givenness. What, then, is shown or given under the “standing present” heading? The answer I shall tentatively give runs as follows: “Standing present” is the name for the constant patency of Being – it is the very first passive givenness in which a horizon is opened, whose sense can only be expressed by the statement: “There is.” Within the framework of this most fundamental givenness, temporal beings can be found (constituted) and recognized as such. Indeed, if this first givenness of a “There is” had not occurred, the space of experience of a world of temporal (real) and all-temporal (ideal) objects could not have taken place. Everything would close in on an undifferentiated “night” where nothing would exist, not even the “I.”

Therefore, this last horizon of a “There is” is unattainable either by doubt or phenomenological-transcendental reduction. Certainly, the *entities* one finds in the world can be considered false within Cartesian doubt's framework. In the same vein, the thesis of the world can be suspended within the reductive framework. This is, to paraphrase Aristotle,³⁷ the experience of τὰ ὄντα ὡς ψεῦδος (the entities as falsehood). However, if one tried to transform the

³⁷ See *Metaphysics*, 1026a 34.

experience of τὸ ὄν ὡς ἀληθές (being as truth) into the experience of τὸ ὄν ὡς ψεῦδος (being as false), one would get a *contradictio in adjecto* and an impossibility since this would be tantamount to taking τὸ ὄν (being) for τὸ μὴ ὄν (non-being). Indeed, one can only consider τὸ μὴ ὄν ὡς τὸ ψεῦδος (non-being as the false) so that the “way of being” is the one open because it is the “way” of truth as Parmenides had put it. Actually, it is nonsense and an impossibility to consider being as false. Returning now to the crucial point, it is clear that the horizon of being is beyond the possibility of either doubt or transcendental reduction. The proof is precisely that, in both reduction and doubt, *the intention is to look for a being* that shows itself as an incontestable certainty or a sphere of apodictic experience. This is a quest *only possible* on the horizon of the fundamental givenness “there is.” If this latter were suppressed, nothing would remain, neither the things of the world nor the ego in its presence to itself and in its self-position as the “first” being in the order of knowledge. Indeed, all the Cartesian and Husserlian endeavors are done in the search for *a being*, a search that can only be pursued on the open horizon of Being. This ultimate horizon is beyond *epoche* and doubt – it is unattainable by them because it is their very condition of possibility.

This is where a genuinely phenomenological *fundamental ontology* should start, a step beyond the subjectivisms in which it has been covered.

My final theses are, thus, as follows, not really *in between* Descartes and Husserl, but rather searching for a space somewhat beyond both:

1. The consciousness of a standing present does not unfold with the sense of an I am, but with the sense of an original “There is” or of Leibniz's “il y a quelque chose plutôt que rien.”
2. This “There is” cannot be suppressed; indeed, to suppress it would be tantamount to the path, which no one can tread, of “that which is not and must not be,” the path of μὴ ὄν, of which Parmenides spoke in his *Poem* to drive it away.

3. The “There is” can be accounted for in the sense of a fundamental phenomenological ontology, i.e., not to suspend or alter it but to describe it in its proper sense content.
4. Configuring itself in the most primitive form of the passive synthesis – that of the consciousness of time – the “There is” has the sense of what is always already given beforehand to the subject, of what is always experienced as already there, as a correlate of what Husserl calls awakened life (*waches Leben*).
5. Insofar as encountered by and in the awake life, it is not a *positum* of the subject; on the contrary, the subject understands itself as arising *for* this “There is” that, according to its meaning, always precedes and surpasses its active, awaked life. Rather than being the certainty of an “I am,” it is what makes it possible.
6. In its difference to the manifold of *entities* that are or can be, the “There is” has the “parmenidean” predicates of immobility, non-generativity, and perpetual presence; as such, it is signaled as an immobile, ingenerate, and perpetual Presence that is not thing or entity, but the original opening of a space of encounter, in a sense close to that of the ontic-ontological difference between *Sein* and *Seiendes*, of which Heidegger has spoken.
7. Just as Husserl's *nunc stans* and *nunc fluens* are two dependent parts of the same whole, so too “There is” (which in itself is ontically nothing) is linked to the *happening* of the world in time fluency; however, it is in the light of the former that what appears is taken as appearance (of something real) and not simply as delusion, i.e., *sub ratione entis*, as Thomas Aquinas says, or in the sense in which Kant spoke in his Aesthetics of the beforehand established difference between *Erscheinung* and *Schein*.
8. In general, modern philosophies of subjectivity have interpreted the original “There is” as an “I am,” as apodictic certainty of the self; at the

bottom, however, it is not a question of ἀπόδειξις or *certitudo* of the *sum*, but instead of αὐτοδείξις (showing itself from itself) of Being and *responsio* to it, as the ego's most primitive sense and way of being.

REFERENCES

- ARISTOTLE. *The Categories, On Interpretation*. London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1962.
- AVENARIUS, Richard. *Der menschliche Weltbegriff*. Leipzig: O. R. Reisland, 1905.
- BOEHM, Rudolf. „Einleitung des Herausgebers“. In Edmund Husserl, *Erste Philosophie (1923/24). Zweiter Teil. Theorie der phänomenologischen Reduktion*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, pp. XI-XLIII, 1959.
- BRAND, Gerd. *Welt, Ich und Zeit. Nach unveröffentlichten Manuskripten Edmund Husserls*. Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1995.
- DESCARTES, René. *Œuvres de Descartes. Principia philosophiae*. Vol. VIII. Paris: Leopold Cerf, 1905.
- DESCARTES, René. *Œuvres de Descartes. Meditationes de prima philosophia*. Vol. VII. Paris: Leopold Cerf, 1904.
- DESCARTES, René. *Œuvres de Descartes. Correspondence*. Vol. V. Paris: Leopold Cerf, 1903.
- DESCARTES, René. *Œuvres de Descartes. Correspondence*. Vol. IV. Paris: Leopold Cerf, 1901.
- DESCARTES, René. *Œuvres de Descartes. Correspondence*. Vol. I. Paris: Leopold Cerf, 1897.
- HEIDEGGER, Martin. *Nietzsche. Zweiter Band*. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1997.
- HELD, Klaus. *Lebendige Gegenwart. Die Frage nach der Seinsweise des Transzendentalen Ich bei Edmund Husserl, entwickelt am Leitfaden der Zeitproblematik*. Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966.
- HELD, Klaus. „Phänomenologie der Zeit nach Husserl“. *Perspektiven der Philosophie*. Volume 7, 1981, pp. 185-221.
- HUSSERL, Edmund. *Späte Texte über Zeitkonstitution (1929-1934). Die C-Manuskripte*. Dordrecht: Springer, 2008.

- HUSSERL, Edmund. *Zur phänomenologischen Reduktion. Texte aus dem Nachlass (1926-1935)*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002.
- HUSSERL, Edmund. *Erste Philosophie (1923-24). Zweiter Teil*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996.
- HUSSERL, Edmund. *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie*. Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976.
- HUSSERL, Edmund. *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Texte aus dem Nachlass. Erster Teil: 1905-1920*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973a.
- HUSSERL, Edmund. *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Texte aus dem Nachlass. Dritter Teil: 1929-1935*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973b.
- HUSSERL, Edmund. *Cartesianische Meditationen und Pariser Vorträge*. Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973c.
- HUSSERL, Edmund. *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie. Eine Einleitung in die Phänomenologische Philosophie*. Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976.
- HUSSERL, Edmund. *Erste Philosophie (1923-24). Erster Teil*. Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1956.
- LANDGREBE, Ludwig. „Husserls Abschied vom Cartesianismus“. *Philosophische Rundschau*. Vol. 9, No. 2/3, 1961, pp. 133-177.
- LAUER, Quentin. – “Subjectivity and Objectivity.” *Edmund Husserl (1859/1959). Recueil commémoratif publié à l’occasion du centenaire du philosophe*. La Haye: Martinus Nijhoff, 1859/1959.
- SCHUHMAN, Karl. *Husserls-Chronik. Denk- und Lebensweg Edmund Husserls*. Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977.

[Received: January 20th 2025. Editorial decision: February 05th 2025]